Filmmaker Su Friedrich documents 'The Odds of Recovery'

BY KIM MCNABB
Staff writer

Filmmaker Su Friedrich has had six surgeries for a variety of health problems and suffered from a chronic hormonal imbalance that kept her "essentially 10 years in a post-partum condition." In a new film, "The Odds of Recovery," screening March 15 at the Women in the Director's Chair Film Festival, Friedrich chronicles her longtime physical challenges, the resulting emotional struggles and her efforts to heal.

Most of Friedrich's 13 films are inspired by her personal experiences: her complicated relationship with her father in "Sink or Swim," childhood sexuality in "Hide and Seek" and a break-up in "Rules of the Road." In "The Odds of Recovery" Friedrich again looks at her own life. She provides information about her medical conditions, takes us with her into doctors' offices, shows us her scars, ponders all of this while gardening in her urban oasis and tries to heal with tai chi and embroidery. And also like her previous films, Friedrich constructs "The Odds of Recovery" with a blend of experimental, documentary and narrative techniques, including voice-overs, interwoven storylines and intertitles of text that give voice to her thoughts and fears.

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I had a feeling other women had the same problem.

Filmmography

HIGHLIGHTS

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There's a double standard and I definitely experienced that."

Watching Friedrich's journey through the medical industry is nerve-wracking. You share her frustration and anxiety as a patient, especially after a doctor she's been seeing for awhile, while examining Friedrich's breasts and saying she feels a cyst, seems surprised to learn that Friedrich has an ongoing prolactin level problem. And in another instance, the pre-surgical nurse is working from the wrong medical chart and doesn't realize it until Friedrich insists they should already have all the information about her medical history.

Fortunately, with the help of some decent doctors, the right drug and tai chi, Friedrich's hormone level stabilizes and she begins to heal and deal with "the sex thing."

"When the prolactin got under control, well, I barely cried anymore," Friedrich says. "The difference was striking. I had been ruled by my hormones."

You can't watch "The Odds of Recovery" without noticing that Friedrich smokes, though she doesn't spend much time discussing it. "I've come to an uneasy peace with the fact that I know I'm killing myself, that I should quit," she says. "I did quit once. I can imagine that I will quit for good some day, but not yet. But it would have been wrong to pretend in the movie that I didn't smoke."

"Someone at a screening asked me why I think it's so hard for people to deal with their * health issues," Friedrich says. "It's a good question. It seems to be a widespread problem. You try to ignore it or do the minimum. Part of what I've learned in all this is that it's hard for people to do everything that's right. Part of this film is about making all these efforts and not being able to do everything all at once."

As Friedrich learned throughout her ordeal, you do what you can.

"I don't think our illnesses are psychosomatic," she says. "Though I do think one's attitude either contributes to or is detrimental to one's healing. They are connected."