

# Stories from the brainreels podcast transcript

August 9, 2016

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## Introduction

CHERYL: Welcome to Stories from the brainreels monthly podcast about brain injury and disability with a focus on art, culture, and disability pride.

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This month's episode is with some of the creative team from local short film "Angela's Sacred Heart": Gigi Williams, Ashley Nichole Williams, and Dori Lyon. Be advised that, because this film centers on the experiences of a young woman who is raped, our conversation goes into rape, violence, and abuse. We don't give any graphic details of incidents. We do also talk a lot about empowerment and connecting to resources. If you need resources for support around domestic violence or sexual assault, I've posted a list of Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, and national websites and numbers in the blog.

"Angela's Sacred Heart" follows a character named Angela through the traumatizing events a rape. The film is based on Gigi Williams' real-life experiences as a young woman, and she co-wrote, executive produced, and co-directed the film. In a fascinating creative move, Gigi cast her own daughter, actress Ashley Williams, in the lead role of Angela. I had the enormous pleasure of sitting down to talk with Gigi and Ashley as well as Portland-area counselor Dori Lyon. Dori was instrumental in providing support and encouraging self-care for both Gigi and Ashley through the filming process. I can't say enough about how excited I am to support a Black, female filmmaker in getting more attention for her film. We all know the industry is famous for giving the most attention and most funds to artists firmly rooted in the white patriarchy. On top of that, as we talked, it became clear that a whole new way of working in film is really possible. I've certainly never talked to someone who provided emotional support for story creators and the people portraying extreme trauma for the camera. But why not? What better way to nurture people's souls and their ongoing creativity? And oh my gosh, it's just so damn non-patriarchal that I can't help but love it so much. I talk endlessly about how we need to have the process of filmmaking be accessible from a disability perspective, and this fits in perfectly. In the end, access is access, whether it's about accommodating for disability, for economics, trauma, or any part of someone's identity or experience that otherwise they'd be marginalized for. Thank you to the whole creative team that made the film possible. And thank you to Gigi, Ashley, and Dori from that team, for meeting with me. I can't wait for the public release of "Angela's Sacred Heart."

You can subscribe to this podcast on iTunes, Stitcher Radio, and SoundCloud. More details about guests and links are at the blog at [whoamitostopit.com](http://whoamitostopit.com), and screen-reader accessible podcast transcripts are there too. Don't forget some great neurodiversity pride swag at [cafepress.com/whoamitostopit](http://cafepress.com/whoamitostopit). All proceeds go toward the documentary "Who Am I To Stop It" about artists with traumatic brain injury. Today's music is from Violeta Päivänkakkara.

[music break]

## The Interview

ASHLEY: Hello, my name is Ashley Nicole Williams. I am an actress starring in it and producer on the project of "Angela's Sacred Heart."

DORI: Hello, I'm Dori Lyon. I was a production assistant support for the Director, Gigi Williams, on "Angela's Sacred Heart."

GIGI: Hello, my name is Gigi Williams. I am the Writer, Co-Director, and Executive Producer of "Angela's Sacred Heart."

CHERYL: Awesome. And I have weird connections to you two but not to you, Dori. But maybe we'll uncover one. So Ashley, I was a videographer for a project that were an actor on how many years ago? Three, four?

ASHLEY: Two?

CHERYL: Two?

ASHLEY: I don't know! It was a few years back now, when I think about it. It's so funny how that happens.

CHERYL: It is a small world. And then Gigi, you were so generous to just show up from heaven, out of the blue, and do camera work for a show that I produced at Portland Community Media. So I love that. And of course, I knew you two separately and didn't know you were related.

ASHLEY: I know! Weird!

GIGI: It is funny.

CHERYL: Yeah. So the goal of today's conversation is to uncover the secret connection that we have.

ALL: [laugh]

GIGI: With Dori? Finding Dori!

ASHLEY: Finding Dori!

GIGI: [laughs]

DORI: I've been waiting to hear that.

ASHLEY: You've been waiting for somebody to say that?

GIGI: I've been waiting to say it!!

DORI: It's one of those moments, yes. A time when I wish my name is different.

ASHLEY: Gigi's been waiting for ever to say that: "Finding Dori!"

DORI: Get your life together, OK.

CHERYL: Well, in the meantime, we can talk about the movie a little bit too.

CHERYL: "Angela's Sacred Heart." So you raised funds a while back [on Indiegogo](#). I'm so grateful that you made this movie.

GIGI: Oh, thank you.

CHERYL: I would love to hear what it is and how it was created. Or where the story came from.

GIGI: It's based on my own life experience. So it takes a lot of courage to step forward and tell that story cuz it had a tremendous traumatizing impact on my life. And it continues to affect me in other ways. This is why I decided to wanna tell the story so that it could help other people and raise awareness about the traumatizing impact that it can have on you, and long-term as well. I don't think enough is being done about this. I don't think enough is being talked about this and probably because of the shame and the guilt and all the feelings you have around it and being blamed for it. Like somehow it's your fault, and you caused it because you shouldn't have had too much to drink, and you shouldn't have been wearing that outfit, and it was just inviting trouble. It puts the woman in responsibility, and it takes two people. The man is also responsible, and that really does get overlooked a lot. I wanted to share that. Even though it's not a easy subject to talk about, and even during the filming it was very difficult for me, especially during the rape scene because it brought back a lot of painful, traumatizing memories. And then watching my daughter going through it, it was just overwhelming. So I just need to make sure that I kinda go slow and take care of myself while I'm sharing the story.

CHERYL: I mean, thank you. Having been perpetrated against myself too, I can say that I have some experiences around the stigma and shame and keep quiet and don't tell anybody, it musta been my fault kind of thing. Until we raise more awareness, we're not gonna be able to get to that next step of what you said about you don't just wake up the next day, and you're better! The trauma can stay in your forever, and it can color everything. Without hearing that from you, people don't realize that. So I appreciate you saying that part. Well, I appreciate all of it that you're doing and saying.

GIGI: [chuckles] Thank you.

### **Self-care and support on set**

CHERYL: Yeah. Dori, you played a role in what Gigi's saying around taking it slow and taking care, right?

DORI: Right. I think just being on the set, we identified that watching it, obviously, it was almost like a residual trauma watching it again, and then having your daughter be you at that age. I think we even questioned whether we wanted that scene or if it was even needed. Sometimes you don't need to see it for it to be a good film. I mean, cuz I've also heard that there's this residual where some can watch that and actually get aroused from it, in watching it. So I know that was hard. I think we weren't even in that room when they did that exact scene. We had to leave.

GIGI: Right.

DORI: Remember that? Yeah. We just spent a lot of time just processing her emotions and what she was going through.

CHERYL: Yeah. Out of respect for the fact that this is real, and thinking of trauma is actually trauma.

ASHLEY: Oh yeah.

GIGI: Yeah.

DORI: Right.

CHERYL: So do you wanna talk about, are you comfortable talking about, what it was like for you to play kind of the character of your mom?

ASHLEY: It was really surreal. I felt like I had a lot of outer body experiences where I don't feel like, I just felt like there was, I don't know. Like I wasn't...[sigh]. It was really hard. Dori was very supportive, actually. Cuz you work with patients that have experienced trauma in their lives.

Yes, so from hearing the experience from when I was younger, from my mom telling me her story, and then us doing the film later, years, like a decade later, deciding to do the film, hearing what happened, I empathized with her so much that I felt like it was necessary to tell the story. Then, when we were actually doing it, I felt really odd. I just felt really like it just wasn't like a normal movie that I was doing or working on. Since it was my mother, and it's something that happened to her, and then also my other friends that I've spoken to have had these experiences as well. I just felt very responsible for making sure the story was done right and that people felt like they were validated for the feelings they had and the experience they had. It was such a odd feeling on the set. It was like the second day we were shooting, and it was the hospital scene and stuff. It was just such a odd, like even the feeling in the room, everybody knew something really traumatic was about to happen. Or they just understood the gravity of the situation. So everybody was very, I don't know, heavy. I felt a heaviness in the room.

DORI: I think that's important too. When filming issues that have so much trauma, that everyone on set--I think it was very good. Everyone was good--creating spaces for you, as an actress, to kind of go off and reconnect to yourself.

ASHLEY: Oh, that was so hard.

GIGI: Yeah.

DORI: And get through all the emotions that came up for you as well.

ASHLEY: Well, I think we were talking outside before we started the scene, and she was like, "How are you feeling? Are you OK?" And I was like, "I think I'm fine. It's OK." And then I started bawling and crying, and she pulled me into the room and was like, "It's OK! It's OK!" I was like, "I just! I don't know. I'm just really upset right now." I can't remember what I was saying. Do you? I don't remember what I was saying.

DORI: You were just hurting.

ASHLEY: I was just really--

DORI: And you were empathizing for your mom's story.

ASHLEY: I was just really feeling it, and I was so, so sad!

DORI: It seemed like it. And it's OK, though. You know?

ASHLEY: So Dori was a big help, and so was my mom too. Everyone was very supportive of the whole situation.

GIGI: We tried to protect her and not have too many people in the room at the time cuz Dori was saying, "We don't need all these camera people in there. We don't need all these onlookers. Just get everybody out who doesn't have to be there." That was really good advice.

ASHLEY: That was helpful.

GIGI: That was helpful, too.

DORI: Yeah.

GIGI: We just wanted to communicate--and I think Ashley did a very good job of that--the emotions, the feelings, the heaviness, the sadness, the fear, the overwhelm. You know, how one night can change your whole life. That's what we hope the audience will grasp when they watch this because I don't think people take it seriously enough. They don't understand the traumatizing effects it has on the victim. That's what I wanna try to use film to do, is to communicate. Roger Ebert said that movies is "a machine that generates empathy." I think that's what we need in this world. I think that's what we need in this country. I think that's why there's so much violence and so much going on right now, because we just don't have enough empathy for one another.

DORI: And it's really missed in some films. It's about action, adventure. To move through the empathy, which you felt, which I think created another layer for you as an actress, right?

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: So here you are acting, but then you have this other layer that felt real.

ASHLEY: Yeah.

DORI: Cuz in acting, does it feel real? There's two layers going on for you.

ASHLEY: It felt really. When we were getting ready to do the film, before we were actually able to go into production for it, I had so many of my friends--male and female--talking to me about their experiences with sexual assault. I was just like, this is so important for us to tell this story. So when we were doing the hospital scene is when I really started to feel it. It became real, cuz I was imagining what that was like for people, for a woman having to deal with that: Have to go to the doctor, and you're alone, and you're not talking to anybody about this experience. I just thought of all the people, all the women who've had to go through this. It just made me so sad.

DORI: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: It's interesting what you said about the media and empathy because we have tons of media addressing this, but we don't have the empathy yet. I think what's missing is more people with the direct lived experience being in control of which stories are told and how they're told.

ASHLEY: Yes. Mmhmm.

DORI: And how they're edited, yeah.

GIGI: That's really a great idea. You're right about that.

CHERYL: Well, I got that because you made the movie.

ALL: [laugh]

CHERYL: It was your idea. I was just reflecting.

GIGI: OK. Thanks, Cheryl.

CHERYL: But it's what you're talking about is this topic exists in the movies, but it's not working to help end it.

GIGI: It's not working. It's not.

CHERYL: You look at the way it's framed--especially when you break things down by gender and when you break things down by race and ethnicity --and how we talk about perpetrators and how we talk about victims and who gets re-victimized in the media.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

### **Trauma, media representation, and control**

CHERYL: So having you in control of your own story, that's what we need more of.

GIGI: It was a traumatizing experience. I don't know how it is today, but especially when I was younger and I was coming up, I couldn't talk to anyone about it. There's a stigma attached to it that actually changed the whole course of my life. I wanted to go to college; I had all these dreams that I wanted to fulfill for myself and my life, and I got totally sidelined by it. My relatives and my family, my parents, my cousins and aunts and uncles, they totally ostracized me from the rest of the family.

CHERYL: Because they knew it had happened to you?

GIGI: They knew that it had happened to me, yes. And they knew that I was pregnant. But I was a bad girl. That was another label that was stuck onto me that added more shame.

DORI: Mmhmm.

GIGI: It is really hard to try to dig yourself up out of those type of holes.

DORI: Right.

CHERYL: Alone too!

GIGI: Alone. By yourself and being traumatized at the same time.

DORI: Trauma changes our brain chemistry. It lowers our serotonin, which is directly linked to depression.

ASHLEY: Oh!

DORI: So it makes sense that after trauma, it's hard to-- Right? It took years for you.

ASHLEY: Mm.

GIGI: Oh, I was depressed for a long, long time and in and out of abusive relationships because I felt worthless. I was unworthy. I felt like these things happened to me because I was unworthy. And my family was ostracizing me because I was bad, and I was unworthy. Because I had grown up with that good and bad, right and wrong, you know?

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: It also was a time--if I remember correctly--remember how they were blaming the victims that their skirts were too short? It was kinda like in the late '80s, early '90s. There was always this blame, even in the news, towards the women that were raped.

GIGI: Well, the media, like we said, always slants it against the victim. They're not requiring the perpetrator to take responsibility for his actions. And I remember as a young woman, after this attack, like I said, I ended up getting involved in many relationships, difficult, challenging, abusive-type relationships, and I couldn't understand how to break the pattern. So that has been my journey in life, determined to break the pattern, not only for myself but for my children and for our future generations in our family. I think we've done a pretty good job. My daughter is a very big success in her own right and going off to Rutgers University.

ASHLEY: [chuckles]

GIGI: I have another daughter who's happily married with three small children. I have a new grandbaby. We have a wonderful life, you know? But I had to work really hard to try to break that cycle and try to share that knowledge and wisdom with my kids, to give them some self value. And I did not want to expose them to that kind of major dysfunctional type of relationship that I grew up with. I remember when, in my first relationship after the rape, it was really kind of ingrained in me, or it made a powerful impression because I was determined I was not gonna live the same life that my parents had. I did not wanna repeat that pattern. I did not wanna repeat those mistakes. You always wanna create a better life for yourself, and you want your kids to even have an even better life, right? Everybody does! So I remember this first relationship. It started off really nice. The guy was charming and sweet and everything, and then he flipped on me. It was just part of the pattern, and I started seeing that pattern. But I'd call the police, and they wouldn't do anything. I would call the police, and they told me that I should leave the house. He was not arrested; he was not handcuffed. He was just like, "You need to calm down. Maybe you should leave the house until he calms down." So I was told that many, many times that it was my responsibility. Then, after Nicole Brown Simpson, how she had gotten slain and beaten, and she'd been calling the police. They simply ignored her. They'd come out to the house. Sometimes, they wouldn't even bother to come out because it was OJ Simpson. So those kinda things, just really, I felt it, how we need to make some changes in this culture, in our culture.

DORI: Yeah. And to not be taken serious, right? Which is another wound.

GIGI: Yeah, to not be taken seriously. Yeah, was another wound. And here's more men coming in and saying, "We don't take you seriously. We're not gonna protect you." I basically felt like I was on my own. It's heavy, I know. But I think the story, like you said, needs to be told because if it happened to me, that means it's happening all over.

CHERYL: You talked about the pattern. You had patterns in your family, but this incident started another pattern where you were in multiple abusive relationships.

GIGI: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: Then you were describing this pattern that our entire society seems to be trapped in or trapping ourselves in. And to continue to put it on the victim and excuse the perpetrator, so we're all--like as a greater society--we're in this dysfunctional pattern of continuing to excuse it: Boys will be boys. No. These narratives.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

GIGI: Yes.

DORI: The narratives are what is harming, and that is where change is, is changing the narrative and the labels and not having labels, actually. Like with the police system, I think there needs to be more funding for after trauma care, that they go to the scene of this rape or what have you, and then they just write a report--if they do--and leave. And then they're left in this impossible place.

ASHLEY: What does the person do?

DORI: Yeah. I think we need more funding for mental health supports because right now we just have fringe supports. It appears we have these mental health supports, but they're not going to what they need to go to. Or to the women who need the support. And the counseling for the men, with the toxic masculinity that's out there.

## **Reactions to the film**

CHERYL: So you put this screenplay and this film together decades after your assault. If you're willing to, if you could imagine back to one year after the incident, what do you think that Gigi would think about the film that came out this year?

GIGI: [sigh] Wow. That brings tears to my eyes.

DORI: Mmhmm.

GIGI: Cuz I think that it would've made a difference. I think it would've made a big difference. And it's a miracle. I mean, when I look at my life today, I can see that it's been a long journey, and I've come through a lot. I have accomplished a lot. Under the circumstances, I think I've done quite well for myself. And that's basically the reason why I wanted to do this film is to be an inspiration, not only for other young women out there to know that they're not alone, and there's help out there available for them. And if I can do it, then they can make it through too, somehow. I think somebody needs to just be the light keeper, the lighthouse, or something and say, "Come this way. We're OK. I got your back. Come this way. This is a safe path to take, and you're not the only one out there."

CHERYL: Right. And when I think of the word "inspiration," I know a lotta people say, "Oh! That was so inspiring," and they go back to their life exactly how it was before whatever that thing was.

ASHLEY: [chuckles]

CHERYL: So when I think of inspiration, I think of taking action of some sort. And whether that action is that you change your mindset, or you go do something. And you talked about coming down that path. This is podcasting; nobody can see. You had your arms extended, and you were waving to all these current and future generations of people. That's real inspiration, and that's what I hope will come from you being so vulnerable, all of you, in bringing this story out, is that it's gonna change things. It's gonna change how people act and react.

GIGI: Ashley was saying that when we were sharing this story with people, we were talking about making the film, we were surprised by the reaction, powerful reaction. I think Ashley mentioned something about that earlier that so many people that we talked to said, "This is very important. You need to do this. I'm so glad you're doing this. It happened to me," or they knew someone who it had happened to: their sister, their mother. It's becoming like a normal thing! Just like young men being profiled by the police. I mean, it should be the exception to the rule, not the norm. These were some of the social issues that I'm very concerned about because I have little grandchildren, and I have nieces and cousins and stuff like that who are growing up in this world, and they don't have the kinda support that they need to make it through this life, and I wanna try to give them that.

DORI: And you are.

GIGI: Thank you.

DORI: You're giving them that, and you're a leader in this.

CHERYL: And it takes the personal narrative. You cannot move past the trauma until you even can name the trauma.

ASHLEY: Yes.

DORI: Right. The only way out is through, according to Alanis Morissette.

GIGI: I'm getting goose bumps. That's true.

[music break]

ASHLEY: When we premiered it at The Hollywood Theatre, we were sold out. Everybody was there, and after the film aired, we had so many different women coming up to us. One lady was crying in my arms. Another lady's crying in my mom's arms, talking about how this happened to me. Another lady's like, "This happened to my mom, and I can't believe this was her experience!" And it was just such an....I think there's something in not being able to ignore it anymore. And then, when you realize this is something that has happened to other people; I'm not the only one. Then it gives you that energy to wanna help others too. Cuz I've had a lot of emails being sent to me. It's my mom's story, but they're like, "Oh my gosh! Did this happen to you?" I'm like, "It did not happen to me, fortunately." But I feel they feel identified with me because I'm in the film. So they send me all these emails and messages and stuff saying, "This happened to me, and what can I do to help? Can I help?" Or "Do you know if there's anything?" I'm like, "You should probably get into counseling or something. If you haven't really worked through this, you should talk to someone. So that you can be help of someone else."

DORI: Exactly. And it starts education in high school, you know teaching our young adults healthy sexual health, discussing and not just focusing on standardized testing scores.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: It's about socializing, it's about boundaries, teaching them all of these life skills that they're really not--I don't feel--are learning necessarily in the high school settings because it's such a perfectionistic system. They're missing just the basics of how to respect another person and their boundaries and that humanity and dignity part of connection. So when they go to college, their images are Jersey Shore and all of these other things from MTV or what have you that have influenced them. They think this is party, and this is how it goes. I just think they're kinda lost, or some of our young adults are just very lost. They don't have the best role models for that. And then, I think the school systems are failing us too.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: That's my two cents on that.

ALL: [chuckle]

GIGI: And the media as well. You just mentioned how they get a lot of powerful messages from the media.

DORI: You bet. Exactly.

CHERYL: So you've mentioned that you hear a lot of, "This happened to me, this happened to me, this happened to my mother." Are you getting any response from the other side, from someone who has either perpetrated or witnessed or could potentially be a perpetrator and is understanding that and wanting to not perpetrate?

GIGI: I haven't heard that. I haven't heard that part of it. Was it you, Ashley? Someone at the premiere, a gentleman in the talk-back.

ASHLEY: That's who I'm thinking of too. I think we're talking about the same guy. We're thinking about the same person.

GIGI: He stood up and raised his hand, and he said that he was a man. And after watching this film, he feels ashamed to be a part of the male sex, he said, because he knows these things do happen.

CHERYL: Yeah. Did he take it a next step of, "I'm gonna join a men's empowerment group. I'm gonna join a men's against violence group,"? Maybe he doesn't even know those exist.

GIGI: Maybe he doesn't know.

DORI: Right.

GIGI: Yeah. We try to provide information in the film, in the credits, about where you can go, where women can go for resources and phone numbers they can contact if they need help or if they have been sexually assaulted, to get the help that they need and the support that they need. But it's a good idea to try to provide some information for the men as well. Cuz they don't know where to go. It probably would be a difficult thing for a man to stand up to and admit. And where does he go to get support for that?

DORI: Exactly.

CHERYL: Oh yeah. Of course I'm glad men aren't coming up to you and saying, "Aw, I've raped a girl once." I don't expect them to.

ASHLEY: I don't know how I would respond to that!

CHERYL: And you wouldn't actually want to be the ones to hear that.

ASHLEY: No, I don't think so.

DORI: I think that is important. We don't wanna silence the men, and they need a space to get the help too.

GIGI: Yeah.

CHERYL: Yeah, to....They need to get the help to stop doing this. Cuz....I don't know. You don't have to sexually assault people. I know that in some ways, it can be about sex, and in some ways it's not even about sex.

GIGI: [It's about power.](#)

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: It's control.

GIGI: And control.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DORI: It's control and power, often.

CHERYL: Someone said, "toxic masculinity."

DORI: Yeah, exactly.

CHERYL: Which people need to unlearn that. The other thing is, it's not just men assaulting women. It crosses genders. Obviously, men assaulting women would be the most common, but all of it is toxic.

DORI: Right.

ASHLEY: Ugh.

## **Resources and empowerment**

GIGI: One of the tools and the resources that I picked up to help me process a lot of the trauma that I have experienced in my life, I've gotten into spiritual programs, a lot of spirituality, 12-step programs, counseling, therapy. It takes a lot sometimes, but you have to have that determined spirit and the willingness to wanna grow, the willingness to wanna heal. The willingness and the love for yourself that you deserve to heal, that you deserve to live a happy life, you deserve to be loved and respected and honored and treated well. I want my children to feel that way too. So what I've learned is that you get into a spiritual program, and it helps you to understand a lot of things beyond what the obvious. Yeah, the obvious is this needs to change, right? And that's why I made the film. Cuz we can start to create some positive social change. I also believe that the reason it's coming up, from a spiritual point of view,

is because it's time to stop. I believe that when things start coming up consistently, it's a red flag. It's like, "Pay attention to this. Pay attention, everybody. Listen to this. Watch what's happening." This has to stop. We can't continue like this anymore. That's what happened in Nazi Germany. So many people died until finally, people started to pay attention.

CHERYL: Mmhmm. It is everyone's responsibility to participate, whether it's telling your story, whether it's reaching out and getting help.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

CHERYL: What would you say to someone who reached out and said, "I know I need a counselor. I don't even know where to go or how to get one or find somebody who looks like me or knows how to talk to me?"

DORI: Yeah, and I would say that's another failure of our system is one, access to healthcare. It's a confusing system.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

DORI: That's a whole nother talk show. And one, it would start with the Portland Women's Crisis Line. I highly recommend that. It's volunteer. Most of the women, they've been victims and what have you and are advocates. So the [Portland Women's Crisis Line](#) would be a start. The [Multnomah County Crisis Line](#), just to call the 211 warmline to get started. And also, if you're lucky to have insurance, that. But really, that's a whole nother system that needs to be easier to access for people. Then of course, [Psychology Today](#), you can be real specific with what you're looking for in a counselor. So that's a nice website or resource to start to find the therapists, what their specialties are. But I also think it's grassroots, creating places within communities, even using the churches more as spaces. You could have a woman's advocate group. You could just call it Survivors of Sexual Assault. It's at our local church down the street. Getting back to the old-fashioned way of connecting in our little niche communities. I don't think it needs to be so complex, but yet it is, to get the help. But it would be nice if our communities started doing more grassroots.

GIGI: Don't they have other programs too, like [Bradley Angle House](#)?

DORI: Right. There's several others.

GIGI: [Junior League of Portland](#), the women's group. [The YWCA](#). A lot of them have--

DORI: Right. And Jean's House and a few others.

ASHLEY: I think those are great tools, and I think that's good for the Portland area. But we did give, I can't remember the name of the national crisis line. Which one was the one you said?

DORI: There's Multnomah County Crisis Line, but there's national crisis lines.

ASHLEY: Then also, I don't have really great insurance or anything like that. I'm on, right now, the Oregon Health Plan, OHP. I do qualify for free mental health care. So I am able to go to get therapy and work on things, which I have done. The process was a little difficult, but my mom gave me, "Hey, call these people! I think they'll be able to use your insurance." And I said, "OK!" And I called them, and then they gave me this long list of things to figure out what exactly I need and what is it I'm trying to focus on.

So I think if I was a victim of sexual assault, I think that through the OHP, I could've gotten assistance with my mental health and my trauma for that, and it could of paid for it.

DORI: And the Emergency Room, of course. If you've been assaulted, right away, go to the Emergency Room. The Social Workers are wonderful, and the nursing staff at most emergencies.

GIGI: And they'll probably have referrals for them at that time.

DORI: Exactly, get them connected, yeah.

A: Yeah.

CHERYL: What about the stigma that some people feel? Do you come across people saying, "I don't need help"?

ASHLEY: Yes [chuckles].

DORI: I think that's where we need to change. Even the word "mental illness" has a pretty harsh tone to it. Yes, we need that word to get more funding and for us to take it serious. But I also think it pulls people away from getting help. They don't wanna be considered mentally ill. So maybe changing the language around it, similar to addiction. It's not, "I'm an alcoholic." It's, "OK, I'm in over my head with drug and alcohol use right now. Maybe I'm self-medicating with drugs and alcohol right now. It doesn't mean I'm this terrible, wretched person, alcoholic." I just think changing the language would start that, just where we can start to look at it differently with that negative label that goes with it.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DORI: Cuz they're afraid to get help. They don't wanna be considered crazy or this or that.

CHERYL: Or weak, can't pull yourself up.

DORI: Yeah, weak.

[music break]

### **Now that the film is out, how do you feel, and what's next?**

DORI: And how do you feel right now, now that it's there, and it's out for the world? What's that feel like? How is it resting for you?

GIGI: I'm very hopeful, but I'm also realistic. I don't know if that's the good word for it. I wanna start trying to break through to try to bridge and create some sort of ability to empathize and understand what happens from the victim's point of view. However, change takes place slowly. I don't think things change overnight. It may be just a little, small pebble, yet that starts a ripple effect. So that's trying to be realistic about where we are today in our society and in our culture and respecting and accepting of all people. So I'm waiting to see what happens, but I'm hopefully optimistic. I was talking to my daughter about this the other day, and I said we just need more people to be courageous and more people to come forward and more people to support this work. That's why I have the website that I just created, Angela's Sacred Heart, where we're gonna continue to do more type of films and more work like this to just keep that going. We don't want people to forget. We don't want them to go back into their complacency again.

CHERYL: I'm like, all these things you've talked about are huge accomplishments on their own. But then all together, when you look at the decades of how far you've come, and then you made this film--which is courageous--are you proud of what you've accomplished with this? Cuz you should be!

DORY, GIGI: [giggle]

GIGI: Yeah, I am. When you put it that way, of course. I don't ever even think about that.

ASHLEY: [laughs]

GIGI: I just feel like, what's the next thing? What's the next thing I need to do? I'm just wanting to be of service. It's my offering. I feel like I have so much that I can give now. I'm very excited about that if I can make a difference and change one person's life, then I think it's been a great success for me.

CHERYL: Yeah. You have a very generous attitude in wanting to be of service and wanting to use this to be of service. What about you? Now that it's out in the world, or getting out in the world, how do you feel about it?

ASHLEY: I feel really relieved and very, just excited. It's nice to share it with people cuz I've been working on this for years and trying to get it done. So it's just really, really exciting. It's very cool. I'm very hopeful, and it's nice to have that conversation with people if they see a trailer or they saw it on the news or something, they read about it. They're like, "Oh my gosh! That's you!" I'm like, "Yeah! Let's talk about what it is. What is it about, and how do you feel about that?" I'm just very excited.

CHERYL: You've got the website, you've got the Facebook page. What's next, or how do people see it?

ASHLEY: Right now, we're submitting it to film festivals. So it's kind of private, so we can't just make it public for anybody to see. But I think once, after--

GIGI: September, October, when we're finished the whole film festival circuit.

ASHLEY: Then we can figure out a way to make it possible for people to watch it.

CHERYL: Great.

GIGI: Online possibly.

DORI: Maybe in the schools as well.

GIGI: I definitely want to create a connection to schools and to get the message out to young people. I think that's gonna be key in creating change in this culture, is you've gotta start young and dig it out at the root. I'm currently involved with the Junior League of Portland, which dedicates itself to helping women and girls, and I'm gonna be on a team there to help people who are victims of domestic violence. I'll also be studying to become a youth advocate for the YWCA, Young Women's Christian Association. And I believe that by creating these type of partnerships and these type of relationships, it will enable me to make more contacts and be able to get this film into schools, where it can really do some good, I hope. And maybe do some lecturing and create some PowerPoint type things. I think this is where it's a good place to start, a good beginning.

ASHLEY: It's a beginning. It's a good beginning.

GIGI: I'm just kinda playing it by ear, and the universe just seems to give me what I need.

DORI: The only other thing I would add, if you wanted to, was--I don't wanna be too lecture-y, but--I definitely think in education, we wanna bring in the component of healthy, responsible drug and alcohol use. Back to the buddy system. If your friend's getting too intoxicated, and he's walking into a room with a gal who's practically fainted, doing role plays where you can teach them what do you do in this scenario? How do you respond?

ASHLEY: Mmhmm, mmhmm.

DORI: Cuz we identify, there was so much going on in party scenes. People that were part of the party that observed some of this, and we if we would've had the ones who would sound the alarm, maybe this could be prevented.

ASHLEY: Could've been prevented.

DORI: We're all in a community. We're all part of this. That it's not just independent: This guy's taking this girl into the bedroom.

ASHLEY: Someone else maybe could've intervened, mmhmm.

DORI: Hey, are you OK with this? Is she clear? Is she coherent? That kind of stuff.

CHERYL: I've been in a role play like that, where it was the guy at the party and the girl, and that crucial moment. Who's gonna speak up or not? Yeah, and it was really powerful to be in that role play. I mean, I was 35 at the time, but it was still really powerful to do it.

ALL: [laugh]

CHERYL: I already finished being a teenager, but nobody else is volunteering to be in the role play. But I scared the guy. Tall guy, and I was snuggling up to him on the couch. And then I just gave him a piece of my mind. He's like, oh! Like yes, girls can do that! We can tell you no!

GIGI: We definitely want to start empowering women more. That's important. And that brings to mind what Dalai Lama had once said or wrote. I know I've seen it on the internet. He said that the Western woman is going to either change the world or save the world. I thought that was an interesting comment for someone like him to make, who's such a spiritual teacher, a spiritual leader to say that; the weight of that is gonna rest on the shoulders of Western women. I read and looked it up a little bit more, and I think he was saying the reason for that is because even though we are oppressed in this country in many ways and victims of sexism, we still have the freedom that we can speak out. We can make films and write books and do things like that to help create the change in the world that we need to make.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

GIGI: So that's my contribution. Because I really believe that. I feel so passionate about it. I feel that because when the Civil Rights Movement was taking place, and everybody was jumping on board with it, and it was just such an exciting time because change was in the air. And these people really were committed to that change and passionate about it. Great leaders were walking out in front and coming forward and stepping out, and people were flying from all over the world to march with Martin Luther

King and people like that, when they could see it on television, the news, what was actually happening. So I think that's where media can have a powerful impact. You start to see these things. You start to recognize that it raises awareness that creates change.

CHERYL: Yeah.

DORI: Women in film, I hope as we continue to support each other so we have our voices heard, similar to your movie.

CHERYL: The voices that you have; the power that you have.

DORI: Yeah.

ASHLEY: Mmhmm.

GIGI: Start where you are and use your voice. Do what you can to contribute to help make a difference, one person at a time.

CHERYL: Well, I really appreciate y'all stepping out as those leaders and doing that. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you wanna talk about around the movie, your experience, something that brings you joy, the awards you're winning?

DORI: [giggles]

GIGI: I'm raising funds right now on the new website to raise money to create the sequel, which is gonna be even more exciting than the original. It's gonna dig even deeper into these issues that we need to talk about.

CHERYL: Yeah. Tell folks how they can find the film and find you online.

ASHLEY: Just go on Facebook, and then type in Angela's Sacred Heart. The website domain name--

GIGI: Is AngelasSacredHeartFilm.com.

CHERYL: And it's two Ss, Angela's Sacred?

GIGI: Yes, two Ss. AngelasSacredHeartFilm.com I just wanna thank you so much for allowing us this opportunity, Cheryl.

ASHLEY: Yeah, thank you.

CHERYL: Oh, absolutely.

DORI: Giving us a voice.

GIGI: For giving us a voice, and that women need to help women.

DORI: Yes! And not block each other.

ASHLEY: Yes! Mmhmm, mmhmm!

GIGI: It's so important. We just can't let all this pettiness get in the way.

ASHLEY: Yes!

GIGI: We can't let all this racism get in the way! We just, women need to help women. Women need to support each other.

ASHLEY: Yes!

GIGI: That's where we're gonna get our power from.

CHERYL: Thanks for joining me for another episode of Stories from the brainreels. Find more handy info on brain injury and disability art and culture on my disability arts blog, [WhoAmIToStopIt.com](http://WhoAmIToStopIt.com).

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