



WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA PREVIEW

Your Fat Friend

Your Fat Friend

Director: Jeanie Finlay

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a Glimmer Films production

Made with the support of:

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Executive Producers: Charlotte Cook,

Sandra Whiphram

Producer: Jeanie Finlay

Accountant: Norman Thomas

Consulting Producer: Suzanne Alizart

With Writing by: Aubrey Gordon

Director of Photography: Stewart Skylar Copeland

Cinematography: Jeanie Finlay, Michael Palmieri,

Donal Mosher, Lindsay Trapnell, Aubrey Gordon,

Mark Bushnell

Editor: Alice Powell

Colourist: Vicki Matich

Composer: Tara Crème

Music Supervisor: Graham Langley

Re-recording Mixer: Pip Norton

Sound Editor: Anna Sulley

With:

Aubrey Gordon

USA-UK 2023

94 mins

Digital

Courtesy of Glimmer Films and Tull Stories

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+ Q&A with director Jeanie Finlay and Aubrey Gordon

Award-winning documentary filmmaker Jeanie Finlay (*Seahorse*, *Sound It Out*) follows the journey of writer and activist Aubrey Gordon, who went from being an anonymous blogger, sharing her honest experiences of navigating life as a fat person, to a *New York Times*-bestselling author and podcast host. Finlay presents a wonderful and frank portrait of the inspiring and very funny Gordon, but also an essential, empathetic call for us to rethink our relationships and attitudes to the word 'fat', and our own bodies.

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A little known 1960s girl group called The Fabulettes once sang that if you want to lose weight, all you gotta do is 'Fall in love with a man that you can't trust / One who won't treat you right/ And while he's out messin' 'round / Worry 'bout him every night.' Those are real lyrics, from a real song called 'Try the Worryin' Way' that plays from the phone of documentary subject Aubrey Gordon, the Portland, Oregon, author and pod-caster who found a global audience writing about anti-fat bias under the pseudonym YrFatFriend. Gordon, as we'll see throughout Jeanie Finlay's documentary, has an endearing way of skewering diet-culture absurdities while revealing the harm they cause. The Fabulettes' lyrics are no more ridiculous than the messaging we see in Gordon's collection of retro diet books, which Finlay flashes on the screen in a montage reminiscent of *Listen Up Philip* (2014). One memorable 1980s cover – Help Lord... The Devil Wants Me Fat!, featuring a cherry-topped ice-cream sundae photographed as if it were under police interrogation – inspired the poster for this film.

We can laugh it off as archaic, but little has changed. Gordon points out that many of the books are just the shoulder-pad era versions of keto or paleo diets, selling ideas that are repackaged and peddled each decade, even though, she says, more than 90 per cent of diets fail to lead to weight-loss in the long term. Contemporary attitudes towards fatness – and by extension fat people – remain hostile. Gordon's eloquent essays, from which Finlay extracts lines that pulse across the screen, speak of a world full of 'physical spaces that never anticipated your size' – unusable theatre seats and refunded plane journeys. Even among friends, there is an accidental cruelty to be found in conversations where they ridicule their own bodies, discussing, as Gordon puts it, 'how to avoid the horrible fate of looking like me'.

Finlay's docs often deal in hidden identities – the Scottish rappers Silibil N' Brains who swindled the music industry in *The Great Hip Hop Hoax* (2013), the masked singer Jimmy Ellis in *Orion: The Man Who Would Be King* (2015). *Your Fat Friend* was intended as a story of Gordon revealing her identity to the public, but the pandemic shifted the timeline, giving more space for Finlay to explore Gordon's relationship with her parents – her mother Pam, maker of vibrant Paul Klee-ish paintings, and father Rusty, a laconic but loving pilot who left when Gordon was a teen, emerge as key characters. Finlay takes her time teasing out of them conversations that lead to quiet revelations. When told that Aubrey felt watched while eating growing up, Rusty responds – 'I know she did, because I was the one watching her.'

IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Shooting the Past 25th Anniversary + Q&A with writer-director Stephen Poliakoff and actors Lindsay Duncan and Timothy Spall
Sun 28 Jan 15:00

Jonathan Glazer in Conversation
Thu 1 Feb 18:30

Peep Show – 20th Anniversary + Q&A with actors David Mitchell, Robert Webb and writers Sam Bain, Jesse Armstrong

Thu 1 Feb 20:30

Preview: American Fiction + Q&A with director Cord Jefferson and actor Sterling K. Brown
Sat 3 Feb 20:50

Doctor Who Preview: Darkness & Light – The Life of Graham Williams + intro by director Chris Chapman

Sun 4 Feb 09:30

Doctor Who: Horror of Fang Rock + Q&A with Louise Jameson

Sun 4 Feb 12:00

TV Preview: The Way + Q&A with Michael Sheen, James Graham, Adam Curtis and cast members Steffan Rhodri, Mali Harries, Callum Scott Howells, Maja Laskowska

Mon 5 Feb 18:15

The Scent of Green Papaya Mùi dứa dứa xanh
Thu 8 Feb 18:20; Wed 28 Feb 20:40

Preview: The Iron Claw

Thu 8 Feb 20:35

Paolo Taviani in Conversation

Sun 11 Feb 18:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 12 Feb 18:30

Preview: Getting It Back: The Story of Cymande + Q&A with Tim Mackenzie-Smith and Cymande, plus afterparty

Tue 13 Feb 18:30

Christopher Nolan in Conversation

Thu 15 Feb 18:30

Tenet + intro by director Christopher Nolan

Thu 15 Feb 20:15 BFI IMAX

Preview: Evil Does Not Exist Aku wa sonzai shinai

Sat 17 Feb 18:00

TV Preview: This Town + Q&A with Steven Knight, cast members Michelle Dockery, Jordan Bolger, Ben Rose and Levi Brown, director Paul Whittington and executive producer Karen Wilson

Mon 26 Feb 18:15

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Finlay approaches the material much as Gordon does her friends and family's relationship with anti-fatness – soft, generous, questioning, and filled with empathy. At a Thanksgiving dinner, which is of course being filmed because of Gordon's work debunking diet myths, a guest is heard talking about food regret before the plates have been cleared. Gordon gives a tight smile, clearly frustrated but patient. Like most of us, she picks her moments to challenge such cognitive dissonance in loved ones.

These casual, at-home scenarios make up much of the film, Finlay more an unseen guest at the table than fly-on-the-wall. But there is the occasional flourish.

Serene moments of Gordon floating, star-fished, in a lake break up the less intriguing shots of web pages and supportive celebrity tweets (James Corden, Monica Lewinsky) that communicate the virality of Gordon's writing. With that virality comes the backlash – vicious responses to her work are projected onto Gordon's wall as she stares at a screen. It's a familiar technique, but one that hits on the tension inherent in advocating for change using individual experience. Personal stories can change minds – but sharing them opens the door to personal abuse: 'It's like giving people a road map for how to hurt me,' Gordon says.

But she pushes on, secures a book deal, launches the podcast Maintenance Phase, which brings her activism to an even wider audience (its episode on the junk-science behind BMI, which we see being recorded here, is worth a listen).

Pam observes her daughter's ascent with pride, but tells Finlay that memories are starting to bubble up. She shares her regret at bringing Gordon to Weight Watchers as a teen, and gets to the core of what TikTok loves to call a 'generational curse': 'You do the best you can with what you've got at the moment,' she says. Which begs the question – what will we do now, with what we've got?

Katie McCabe, *Sight and Sound*, March 2024