

05/04/2006

Sunnyside actress debuts on screen in 'United 93'

By Nathan Duke

For Sunnyside's Jodie Lynne McClintock, the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 - especially the fate of the passengers aboard hijacked United Flight 93, which crashed near Shanksville, Pa. - hit close to home. Not only were two of her husband's closest friends aboard the Newark-based flight, but the 51-year-old Queens actress can now be seen portraying passenger Marion Britton in the film "United 93," which was released in theaters Friday.

McClintock, who was born in Pittsburgh and worked as a stage actress for 30 years, said taking part in the first theatrical feature to tackle the events of 9/11 has been both cathartic and an invigorating experience as an actor.

"It changed me artistically forever," she said. "I've always been a classically-trained character actress, so this took me to new emotional levels. I'm used to doing Shakespeare."

United Flight 93 was the last of four planes hijacked on Sept. 11 to crash. The film, which chronicles the events leading up to the crash, is based on the widely held belief that the passengers fought back against their hijackers and caused the plane to miss its target, based on phone calls from the aircraft to the victims' loved ones.

McClintock said the events of 9/11 and the fate of United Flight 93 were life-changing for her and her husband, Arthur Pearson, an executive committee member of the Sunnyside Gardens Preservation Alliance, who was close to United 93 passengers Joseph De Luca and Linda Gronlund. In Paul Greengrass' film, De Luca and Gronlund are portrayed calling family members to say goodbye and giving them the code to their safety deposit box.

"It is amazing how they could be in that state of mind in that situation," she said. "As a couple, 9/11 was a very defining moment for him and I and Flight 93 became a huge part of our lives."

In the film, McClintock portrays Marion Ruth Britton, the 53-year-old assistant regional director of the U.S. Census Bureau in New York City. Britton, who was born and raised in Ozone Park, is depicted in "United 93" as a kind woman who lets a younger passenger use her phone to say goodbye to family members.

McClintock said she and other cast members portraying the passengers of United 93 were put in touch with the families of the victims. She said she spoke with Rev. Paul Britton - Marion's brother, who lives in Long Island - and was able to flesh out Marion's character based on their conversations.

McClintock said she has now seen the tense film three times - at a private screening, at the opening night of the Tribeca Film Festival with the families of United 93 victims and with an audience on opening weekend - and that the experience of the production has provided some closure to the tragedies of 9/11 for her.

In response to some moviegoers' recent comments that it is "too soon" for a film chronicling the crash of United Flight 93, McClintock said the production received the most important blessing it could receive - from the families of the flight's passengers.

"I believe the only people who could say it is too soon to be made are the families, but they were 100 percent behind it," she said. "If they say it is time, it is time."

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