

# The Tree Interview

Laura Kirk (actress), Paul Fellers (actor), and Stephen & Mary Pruitt (writers/directors)

## Could you describe the characters you played in the movie? How did your character align or not align with your personal ideas about aging?

*The dynamic is almost exactly like the way we are and I do tend to worry more and so I was really interested and I would agree with everything she said*

- Laura

*I am much more comfortable with watching things unfold, and I believe that people will make their own decisions*

- Paul

## What did you learn from your role or character in this movie?

*To be involved in something that has affected people so deeply I don't always get to say that, it's one of the first films my parents have truly loved. In theater you get that immediate response you know exactly how you're affecting the audience. When you act in a film you go away it becomes edited, you have no idea how your performance went. I had no idea that we would be.*

*The movie and my exposure, frankly to your organization, has changed my way of thinking. I was a different person thinking very differently about all of this before I worked on this and met with all of you.*

- Laura

*I read the script I thought it was a beautiful story and I think it unfolded beautiful as well to the credit of people of age and dealing with a father who had been in the hospital for a couple of months.*

- Paul

## In movie the main character Dorothy was able to make many independent choices about her life and her care, do you believe that other adults like Dorothy are able to make these same independent choices?

*You know your perspective changes as you get older but that doesn't mean that you can't make your own decisions.*

- Paul

**At KABC we empower aging adults to the make the decisions that would support their independence. Often times, we witness loved ones who prioritize a safety ideal over the independence of the aging adult. Based on the roles you played in *The Tree*, how should this tension between two ideals be confronted?**

*Conversation is great and that's what we go for and then of course in the end there has to be decision.*

*- Paul*

*I know in my family it was having these conversations at moments of crisis and so having those conversations ahead of time is important. Why is it so difficult? Why don't people talk about it ahead of time? That's why I love the film, it seems to be a catalyst for people to talk about these things. The daughter Meredith didn't have the chance to be a part of Dorothy's decision because they hadn't talked so I think that was what interests me is, do we have a chance to be a part of it? I think ultimately it is their decision and I do agree with that but I think it's also nice to have the chance as a family member to be part of the decision.*

*-Laura*

*When making decisions not everybody will be on the same page so you know those who have seen the film have seen this unfold and I think if they have older people in their lives whether its neighbors or a family member it's important to talk to them about what they want.*

*- Paul*

*I'm from a farm background so my grandfather died in a field and some people might have thought you shouldn't have been working in the field at a certain point but that's what he wanted.*

*-Laura*

*When there are medical reasons where their perception differs from actual reality, you do the best you can based upon who they were prior to the impairment. Steve and I cared for both of our parents before they died, and the one thing that I kept thinking in retrospect when making this movie is that maybe we're making decisions for her physical best interest, but why didn't we just make them for her mental interest? We do have a tendency to jump in and try and make sure you make proactive decisions that are really more reactive and less in the interest of the older adult.*

*-Mary*

**Movies don't often feature aging adults as the main character, so what inspired you to write a story like Dorothy's?**

*We were actually casting, we were writing a different film at the time and it wasn't coming together and it was actually going to star like a 20 or 22-year-old but we'd*

*always laughed about making a movie for Joicie. She's been in our second film which we shot in 2010 and she did so good in the role that we wanted a roll starring an 80 something year old woman and then one day it was like it came to me. I was sobbing in the bathtub, it really came to me in the tub, and it was just like okay this is a movie about you know Mom and her best friend Pat and we knew right away that this was a vehicle for Joycie and so we called her to make sure she wants to do that and frankly we couldn't get a hold of her for a couple of weeks. We're holding off writing it and I thought well maybe something happen to her and so we called the theater where she runs the theater group. There I thought I would have heard some terrible news, like "oh she has passed away," but to my surprise the theater told us she was on vacation in Mexico and I just thought wow, this is the epitome of the liveliness of an older adult we want to portray in the film.*

*- Stephen*

**We noticed in the beginning of the movie when Dorothy is at the doctor's office she is told she will take a new medication and to consider assisted living, and at home she is told by her daughter not to drive, yet no one asked what it is that Dorothy wanted. What is the reasoning behind these scenes and what is it that you hope viewers take away from that?**

*The idea that she wanted to return to the best that she ever lived before she died and I think we all have that, which makes the story so real. There are different organizations coming at the aging process and one of the organization's that viewed the film, not to mention by name, but they have a tendency to want to push back on what they see is a stereotype for aging adults. They were like, you know all old people are not this way, and I said yes I know that, but this is what reality is for the majority of older people these days, these are their circumstances and these are their conflicts that is what she's going to overcome, but we hope the happy circumstances and experiences you want to portray becomes more the rule.*

*-Stephen*

**If you'd like to share, how did this movie resonate with your personal experiences with those in your life who are aging?**

*I wrote this story about my mother and her childhood best friend Pat, and although my mother did not get to have this end of life experience, I wrote the film to reflect the end of life story my mother would have wanted and what I wanted for her.*

*- Stephen*

*That's really what makes this movie so special, the impact is the fact that people are actually thinking about it and that they talked about it for hours afterwards and there's a lot of it we put into it that only we really know about, but so many people can connect to the story.*

*- Mary*

*There was this really fun strange case in which two senior adult ministers came to watch The Tree and said nothing whatsoever about, I was surprised to talk to them later and them still say nothing again. I finally asked them about it and then they said, by the way how deeply we were moved by this movie, and it was just like they couldn't even bring themselves to think of it much because it was just like wow then and then later said it but at the time they thought really it was almost too close to home.*

*- Stephen*

*I know when my mother was in a nursing home she wanted to go get some ice cream one day and you know it was winter and so I was worried she might get the flu and not be able to recover and I'm telling Steve all this and he says you know what, if she gets a cold she gets a cold. We knew she wanted to be at home and I'd really wanted to get the phone call from my sister someday that Mom you know she came home and she's on the couch watching TV and she's fine, but we all knew this was not going to happen. Steve helped me loosen up and finally I said mom, if you want to do it let's do it.*

*- Mary*

### **What do you hope people take away from this movie?**

*When Dorothy is in the doctor's office and he goes you won't have to do your laundry anymore or cook for yourself she gets this look on her, you know it's like, I can't believe I'm hearing this. This is what I want and you're telling me I can't have that. When she is waiting for her prescription to be filled she is looking at the assisted living brochure and so having just been at the doctor she has a flashback to her deceased friend Frank in a facility and she is sitting there thinking about getting this new prescription and she's just like viewing it as, is this the life I want prescriptions and nursing homes like Frank, you know, or maybe I can write myself a different ending and you know let nature take its course and let God decide you know and that's what she doing, what it is she wants to decide.*

*- Stephen*

*I want the people who watch it, especially the older adults who watch it, to know that their story is important. In the movie you can see the large impact that the main character Dorothy has on the community around her just by being her, and I want viewers to know that they do the same, that they impact the community in which they live just by being themselves.*

*-Mary*