

nature, nurture, blood and family

KIMBERLY REED'S
PRODIGAL SONS

Marc has had a rough life. Adopted as an infant, he was held back in kindergarten. He never finished high school, was in prison by the time he was 19, and suffered a head injury at 21.

Then he discovered he is the grandson of Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth. But the most important person in Marc's life is still Paul, his younger brother who wasn't adopted, and for whom everything seemed to come easily. Paul was high school valedictorian, class president and captain of the football team, and when Marc was held back it put him in the same grade as his golden-boy younger brother. It was a perfect storm of sibling rivalry.

Fast-forward 20 years. Marc and Paul have been estranged for two reasons: 1) their rivalry, and 2) Paul is now a woman, named Kimberly. In *Prodigal Sons*, directed by Kimberly Reed, the two of them confront their relationship head-on. Reed's documentary premieres at Telluride. She spoke to David Thomson about her brother, Marc, Marc's grandfather, Orson Welles, and some of her own discoveries.

INTERVIEW BY DAVID THOMSON

David Thomson: I found the film deeply disturbing, and I mean that as a compliment. It's a tribute to the great skill with which you put the story across. Now, can you tell me when Marc decided to find out who his parents and grandparents were?

Kimberly Reed: He had been toying around with the researching his past for several years. We had a cousin who was adopted as well. She discovered who her birth mother was and it was a rewarding experience, even without any earth-shattering revelations. She had a part in encouraging Marc in go-

David Thomson's books include The New Biographical Dictionary of Film, Rosebud: The Story of Orson Welles, The Whole Equation and Beneath Mulholland. He was Telluride's Special Medallion recipient in 2006.

ing on that quest, but it was initiated by him. He contacted the adoption agency in Tacoma and got the news.

Thompson: Is there any reason to think Orson Welles knew anything about Marc?

Reed: I believe he did not know. Orson had always wanted male offspring, and he would have been interested to know about Marc. [Welles's girlfriend] Oja Kodar didn't know about Marc. If she had known, Orson would have, too.

Thomson: You say that Marc knew he was adopted. How did that weigh upon him?

Reed: As we grew up, our talents diverged and our differences became more apparent. I was better in school, for example. Everyone in my family is quite tall, 6 feet, 6 inches and over. That became a big issue for Marc. He felt small.

Thomson: And he isn't unusually short, is he?

Reed: No, just everyone else is enormous.

Thomson: It wasn't entirely clear from the film what his accident was and what it had done to him.

Reed: It was a car crash. He was driving in a Blazer with some friends, living in southern Utah at the time. They went to Vegas for his 21st birthday and on the way home, someone fell asleep at the wheel. He was airlifted to the hospital, where he was in a coma for several days. Afterwards, it seemed everything would be fine, then four or so years later, he had a grand mal seizure. That was the beginning of a long struggle.

Thomson: Did he have troubles before that?

Reed: As you can tell from the film, he was a party animal, wild and crazy. Things were never utterly smooth and perfect. By high school, more resentment built up, I think, about being adopted. He felt like he got cheated, being in a family where everything came easily to everyone. From my point of



view, high school was rough for him, and then I went my separate way.

Thomson: It seems like, with the huge change you've been through and the enormous difficulties he's faced, maybe Marc would say, "Oh, I can see you've had a hard time, too." But he seems quite disapproving of you.

Reed: Well, [changing gender] is a big thing to wrap your head around. There's a line in the film that I say: "He would have given anything to be the man I would have given anything not to be." I essentially turned my back on all of the stuff he has been yearning for, for so long.

Thomson: Gosh, it is a complicated relationship. When Marc found out about his grandparents, what sort of immediate effect did it have on him?

Reed: The way it appealed to Marc was different than the way it appealed to everyone else. The first Christmas after he found out, everyone sent him DVDs and

books about Welles and Hayworth. Everyone did research. Marc didn't know who they were, which is not uncommon for people our age. As a filmmaker, I worshipped Orson Welles, so I and those a generation older were thrilled. But what was satisfying for Marc was a moment when ... [Welles's girlfriend Oja Kodar] looked at his feet and said, "Oh, you've got varicose veins just like Orson." [Marc] always hated his varicose veins, but now he could see them as a connection to his past.

Thomson: He wasn't opened up to the greatness of the Welles films?

Reed: No. When he saw Orson, he saw someone who looked like him, and that was incredibly satisfying. *Citizen Kane* might be baffling to him, but finding a scene where he looks like Orson, that's very satisfying.

Thomson: Thank you very much for talking to me. It's a remarkable film and I think people will be very moved.

details

PRODIGAL SONS
U.S., 2008, 60m

Director: Kimberly Reed

BACKLOT/Fri. 3:00 p.m. • BACKLOT/Sat. 6:00 p.m.
BACKLOT/Sun. 11:30 a.m.

**4 ADDED
SOLD-OUT
SCREENINGS!**