

It Took A Decade To Make This Film

Jim McQuaid / Filmmaker / Durham, NC

I've been making short films since 1999. With all the normal distractions of life and commerce, I produce roughly one such film every year. The stories that I have found the most engaging are stories which deal with the passage of time, the significance of memory and the ways in which love survives and moderates these changes.

So, in hindsight, it is no surprise that I made *Sisters*. But it was the resulting of vision and good fortune.

Good fortune begins with a film I finished in 2013 called *Endings*. *Endings* dealt with a dying Mother and her two adult daughters. In that film, there are two endings, both, alas, sad. The ending that resonates strongly for me was the ending in which Mother lives into her eighties, but has dementia in her last years (as my own Mother did). Dementia puts a strain on a family and the two sisters have very different reactions. "Sherri" who lives near Mother's nursing home in Durham, ends up doing a lot of the legwork of managing her care. "Connie" her sister, lives in Charlotte and has married a rich lawyer. Connie can't bear the reality of dementia but pays for all of the care. Sherri retains as much of a relationship with Mother as circumstances allow, but it takes a toll on her.

The vision was to imagine how these sisters related or failed to relate after the death of their Mother. Sherri had just had a first child, a new baby. Connie's daughter was 12 and her son was 15, empty nest years not that far away. It felt like there was a true, fraught story in how life separated and changed these two sisters.

Then another bit of good fortune arose. I had the concept of continuing the story that opens with my film *Endings*. But then I began to realize that most of the original cast were still in the area, still working at their craft.

So, I decided that I would write and create the film about how the sisters estrangement grew over the ten years after their Mother's death, if I could use the same cast, who were, of course, all now ten years older than in that first film.

Endings starred Naomi Eckhaus as the elder Mother of two adult sisters, played by Tracey Reynolds (SHERRI) and Susannah Hough (CONNIE). Connie has two kids (a 12-year-old daughter and a 15-year-old son); Mom thinks Sherri ought to have kids. Sherri takes care of all of Mom's need when she's in the nursing home with dementia while Connie and her rich husband pay for it but tend to stay in Charlotte instead of visiting much. While Sherri suffers depression and exhaustion from the situation, Connie suffers guilt but refuses to get drawn in.



Endings concludes when Sherri has a baby girl. Mom was too demented to understand that Sherri was finally pregnant and didn't live to see the baby. But the family gets together to meet the baby. Connie's daughter, ELLIE, gets to hold the infant while her Mother and Aunt look on.

So, in the Spring of 2022, I need to confirm with the members of the *Endings* cast that they can be available for the "ten years later" part of the story.

I know that Susannah Hough is still very active in local theater; I've been a supporter in the last few years of Honest Pint Theater Company which she co-founded.

And J Chachula (CONNIE'S husband JACK) is still teaching Meissner and using his acting skills to facilitate business meetings.

And Eric Morales (SHERRI'S husband MATT) is still around, not doing as much theater as he used to, but game to plunge into this project.

Tracey Reynolds is doing a lot of fun stuff in theater and is the host of "Noir at the Bar" once a month. And she's fascinated by the prospect.



It was pretty easy to track down the actor who played MAX, Connie's son when he was fifteen because Riley Hough actually is Susannah's son. And now he's starting to make his way as an actor, based in Atlanta. It's only one day of shooting for him and that's not going to be hard.

Bailey Rose played Connie's daughter ELLIE when she was twelve. Bailey's mother, Sherrie Rose had acted in several of my films. But Bailey had not pursued acting seriously and had just graduated from college in the Charlotte area. However, she was willing to commute for a couple shoots and ended up being a natural.

And Addy Dean, who at the age of a month or two appeared as Sherri's new baby, is now a ten-year-old with an interest in acting and soccer. She will play that baby, ten years later.

At this point, with those actors available, I begin to write the script.

But more amazing "ten years later" things continue to happen for this project. The composer, originally in Chapel Hill, had moved to China where his wife taught English as a second language. But they were moving back in mid-2023.

We shot scenes in Al Julian's home as Sherri and Matt's home and Al has become a friend and an active filmmaker and writer and was happy to host us again in the same rooms seen in the earlier film.

We shot the scenes at the sisters' Mother's place at a friend's townhome and she was happy to host us again for the scene where the sisters fight over who gets the good china.

And finally, the backyard pool seen in Endings was still owned by the same couple and they graciously allowed us to come and shoot a key scene at the pool, yet another bit of continuity across a decade.

Shooting spread over eight months and post-production over another eight months brings the film to life, ready to tell the tale of the sisters' estrangement and how their lives changed and then intersected. The first third of the film is footage from the original film ten years ago, then the story continues to the present day.

The film is called *Sisters*.