

Flying: Confessions Of A Free Woman 2-Disc Edition DVD Review

By Prairie Miller

With its deceptive title and self-awareness deprived combo filmmaker/protagonist Jennifer Fox, *Flying: Confessions Of A Free Woman* is anything but. This six hour introspective globe trotting documentary filmed over four years and cruising sometimes aimlessly in an emotional frenzy in and out of seventeen countries, is less about flight as a liberating feminist construct, than a compulsive escapist regimen with its psychological implications of denial. And flying, as in scattered in disarray as opposed to firmly navigated female sensibility.

Fox, a seasoned yet seemingly immature fortysomething documentary filmmaker (we hear little about her professional fulfillment or activity), has always been both proud and possessive of her independent and apparently father rather than mother-identified persona and lifestyle. Up until now, she's resisted relationship commitment or marriage, opting instead for a series of lovers, married and otherwise, and often several at the same time. As a kind of surrogate substitute for any actual family of her own. Fox has studiously acquired a vast network of lifelong friends here and around the globe, most of them female.

But the still youthful and perpetually pouting Fox has reached a crossroads in her life, where she's no longer so confident in the choices that she's made. A frustrating secret married lover in South Africa (filmed as select body parts to conceal his identity) only pays intermittent attention to her. And a more avid Swiss suitor that she met at Sundance, does not arouse the same passion in her as her forbidden relationship.

At the same time. Fox's friends are getting older too, and in many cases dealing with life threatening illnesses, or forming families and having children of their own. And whenever she tests the waters of potential maternity herself as her biological clock is running down, the inevitable result is miscarriages. Goodbye rebellious lifestyle, hello conventional midlife crisis.

Confessions Of A Free Woman is far too long. After an hour or so, we understand well enough how painful and self-destructive an affair with a married man can be. And as her griping about her unsatisfying life drones on, we begin to feel like we're wallowing in Fox's endless whining and self-pity party, along with her. Fox indeed shamelessly and self-indulgently corners anyone who is polite enough to listen, including the literally captive audience hotel staff that shows up to clean her room.

And she films them for eventual public display for viewers at the same time, including prying personal questions to embarrassed women in the Third World. Where, it so happens, a woman can be beaten to death just for exposing a little bit of knee. For instance, do they masturbate. Several very traditional Indian women claim they have no

idea what she's talking about. And in any case, they explain the word masturbation doesn't exist in their language.

What is made strangely manifest in the filmmaker's interaction with this cross-section of women, a number of them social activists and women's rights advocates, is Fox's seeming failure to see beyond her own small world and personal predicaments to the healing power of collective struggle and solidarity that many of them share. Could she and other women, including her own thwarted brilliant and talented depressed mother whom she grew up not respecting, have had it all, including both career and children, if universal and free community child care were an aspiration turned reality.

And what about the destructive institution of marriage in Western society as well, imprisoning women and children in unhealthy property-based relationships out of economic necessity, because of an absence of societal protections for fractured families. For all her probing investigative ventures across the globe, Fox never seems to see beyond the individual, namely herself.

Eventually the filmmaker's international quest for a multitude of shoulders to cry on, begins to make sense and even take on a far greater significance, though perhaps by accident. As Fox's journey takes her deeper into the Third World and the women who routinely suffer horribly there in myriad ways, her romantic woes pale ludicrously in comparison. What is the aggravation of a married lover who fails to give you the undivided attention you crave, compared to the centuries long traditions of forced child marriages and female castration, institutionalized domestic violence, child sexual abuse, and your potential murder at the hands of your own family if you're suspected of premarital sex or you've 'shamed' them by being raped.

The audience, if not necessarily Fox, has been humbled by this cross-cultural experience. As for Fox, she needs to get a life, and seems to finally have a good chance of doing so.

Alive Mind and Zoe Films
Running time: 351 minutes
Unrated
1 1/2 stars

DVD Features: Interview With Director Jennifer Fox; Theatrical Trailer.

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