

Film review by Leta Rector

The Spirit of Annie Mae

This documentary about the murder of American Indian Movement leader Annie Mae Pictou is everything you hope a life story would be. The film makes the viewer feel that every person interviewed is their own personal close friend, and Annie Mae is a person everyone who knew her must have loved.

Fearless, truthful, diligent, giving, relentless is how Annie Mae comes across in this film. The film opens focused on a beautiful, sweet, endearing Indian girl whose smile could win over the hardest hearts. "It was right along this road that I stole my first kiss," says Annie Mae's first husband, driving his pickup, as he laughs toward the camera.

And I finally have an answer to the age-old question that has tormented me: What is her name, really? People have talked to me for years about "Anna Mae." What is it? The answer is a definitive: Both. The film shows letters signed in her own handwriting "Annie Mae," meanwhile her younger daughter Debby introduced the film at the San Francisco festival and referred to her Mom as "Anna Mae." To further entangle matters, the documentary is entitled *Annie Mae* and the website is <www.annamaejustice.com>. I hope that settles it.(?)

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Annie Mae was a pretty 19-year-old reservation girl from Nova Scotia who, like so many from her home moved to Boston to try to find work and a way to support their families. She was a young bride "madly in love" with her husband, says one of her friends. And when her two baby girls were born, Denise and Debby, Annie Mae was a model, doting, adoring mother.

Annie Mae's marriage fell apart, she moved to South Dakota and became involved in the American Indian Movement and had found a cause through which to fight for her people. But something else fell apart in Annie Mae and she ceased to be the amazing mother her daughters had grown up with.

There are many stories of her new husband Nogeeshik Aquash beating, punching and physically abusing her. Her ex-husband came to take the girls and Annie Mae agreed that he was better able to care for them. "She was not the same Annie Mae," her ex says.

In 1970, when Debby was 10 years old, her father came and told her and her older sister their mother was gone from this world at the young age of 30. Debby said she didn't know very much about the murder, but col-

laborating on this documentary with director Catherine Anne Martin has helped to get to know her as the person Anna Mae was. "She was just Mama to me," Debby said.

Annie Mae's sisters, daughters, life-long friends and AIM co-workers all tell a story of a driven, loving woman who knew something was terribly wrong and had a sense of impending danger. Songwriter/singer/musician and friend Buffy Sainte Marie tells the camera, "She had a feeling someone was after her. She thought it was the FBI."

Indian investigative journalist and friend Minnie Two Shoes tells the camera, "The body was found in May. I knew a few months later AIM did it."

For me, one of the quotes that most typifies Annie Mae was when she was called in for questioning by the FBI after the shootout which left one Indian boy and two FBI agents dead. Questioning her, the FBI said to her, "There were two people killed that day." Honoring the memory of the slain Indian, Annie Mae's response was, "There were three people killed."

The one act that typifies this brave-hearted woman was her decision when being accused of being an informant for the FBI. She was back for a visit in Nova Scotia.



Annie Mae Aquash, April 16, 1973. AP/ICC file photo

When most people would have stayed safely at home within the protection of her family and thousands of miles distance, Annie could not do that. She felt she had to go back to South Dakota and tell the truth.

The Spirit of Annie Mae is truly inspiring. It is well-paced, engaging and intimate. At the daughters' request, the director decided to interview only people who were their mother's friends. The film registers 9 quakes on the Rector Scale.

The Spirit of Annie Mae is available through NFB, 350 5th Avenue, Suite 4820 New York, NY 10118. The phone in the USA is (800) 542-2164 and in Canada (800) 267-7710. Order no. C 9201 070.