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WOOF

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“WOOF”

by Joseph Darius Jaafari

LOGLINE:

A group of nine men in San Francisco who also identify as pups within the city's fetish world redefine what it means to be in a polyamorous family and what rights they have if something were to happen to one of them.

SYNOPSIS:

About 10 percent of Americans identify as polyamorous, defined as having multiple love affairs within a single relationship. Those relationships are as diverse as they are complicated with some ranging from having multiple people within a relationship to a couple having outside individual relationships.

Within the gay world, polyamory and open relationships has become a norm, and within the gay fetish scene it's almost a requirement.

But polyamory has its own set of complications legally. Because in America we have a system where only one person can receive benefits (be it through marriage or blood), there are complications if, say, a three-person relationship loses a partner in death. What then happens to the two partners? Is there a system in place?

My film follows a group of nine men within the fetish scene who all consider each other family — stronger than a bond of blood, they grew their family through their fetish. They are self-identified pups, and they consider their group to be a pack. Within that pack there is structure and hierarchy, just as you'd find in any family. And just like in any family you'd also see their bonds are built through kinship, tradition and passing down values.

But there is nothing in place that legally recognizes their family. I follow the leader of the pack, who was deeply affected by a passing of one of his pups, and realized that if something were to happen to him, none of his pack would be protected.

STRUCTURE:

The film is a narrative in three acts with myself as the narrator for the introduction, but then launches off into the pups taking the story. There are scenes that were filmed by myself with members of the pack celebrating anniversaries, going on trips together, in bed together and discussing their fears.

To act as explainers in the beginning, there will only be a few talking heads within the fetish community who will speak on what it is being a pup, the fetish mindset and defining polyamory and polyamory within the gay community.

TREATMENT:

ACT I

The film opens up with me at the Leather Mans store in New York, trying on leather gear. As the sales clerk helps me try on a few harnesses, he offers me a pup mask. And with that, we launch into what a pup is.

A pup is a type of fetish within the Bondage Domination and Sadomasochism, or BDSM, world. In the 70's, when slaves or submissives were punished, they'd be treated like dogs — the lowest of the low. They'd be required to eat from dog dishes, caged, forced to go to the bathroom outside.

“But some kinky fuckers were into it!” said Pat Machate, a dominatrix based out of Baltimore, Maryland.

Until recently, pups have been primarily a small part of the fetish scene. But over the past few years, pups have now become one of the biggest entryways for gay men to be introduced to the gay fetish scene — and that's partially because the fetish itself has changed.

“There's the old pup where you'd get treated poorly, and now there's this new pup,” said Machate. “Now, you get belly rubs and treats and play time with other pups.”

I've always found the seedier parts of the gay world fascinating. And kink has always been a part of gay culture since I can remember. You go around to really any gay bar and there's bound to be someone, somewhere in leather gear.

And there are so many nuances with being involved in the leather scene, especially as a pup. There's symbolism in what you wear, how you wear it and even where you place it on your body.

For example, a collar for some may show off their identity as a pup, but a lock on that collar means that they are owned by someone — essentially the same as a biological dog having an owner.

The masks pups wear — such as the one that was given to me in the beginning of the film — are also symbols of their personalities. You put on the mask and take on the role as a beagle, a pug or a Labrador.

But being involved with the gay fetish scene is also an introduction into the world of polyamory and non-traditional relationships.

“There's no entrenched mysogyny, no gender roles. For gay men, non-monogamous relationships have just always made sense,” said Race Bannon, a San Francisco-based author and kink activist who is also in a three-person relationship, also called a triad.

To understand what being polyamorous meant, I went to San Francisco to meet with the pups of the Fog City Pup Pack who identified as polyamorous. But they were polyamorous in a different way. They weren't in a relationship with one another, they viewed each other as a family. Their love for each other was more than sexual — it came from a place of kinship.

ACT II

There are nine members of the Fog City pack: Midnight, Jumper, Amp, Arco, Atlas, Fawks, Bullet, Shadow and Turbo.

Turbo is the guy who started the pack with Atlas and Fawks as the two original family members.

“We just grew this family, and it came so organically,” said Turbo.

Within a few months, Turbo had collared more pups and brought them into the fold. The latest addition, Arco, was added only a few months ago.

“People ask how to I become part of the pack? And I have to tell them that it’s not a club, it’s just like with any other family. If your brother has a partner, that partner then becomes family,” said Bullet.

And just like a regular family, there are those who are apart of the extended family — cousins, if you will. And just like cousins, those bonds are created through a kinship and tradition. And also just like a regular family, when someone dies, the whole family is effected.

Bullet is part of a triad, himself, with two people who are not part of the Fog City pack. On the day of their anniversary, they talk to me about what it means to be in a poly relationship and what fears they have if one of them died.

Such was the case with one of Turbo’s pup cousins, Shawn. After moving to San Francisco and making friends with the members of the pack — and especially with Turbo — Shawn died from autoerotic asphyxiation.

Turbo tells the story of how he found out about Shawn, listening over the phone as his ex boyfriend described climbing a fire escape only to see Shawn’s lifeless body lying in his bedroom, a belt wrapped around his neck.

The pack rallied around Turbo immediately after Shawn’s death.

“We were there for him in any way we could be,” said Jumper.

After the shock settled, Turbo began organizing Shawn’s needs. There was talk of a will, but no one could find it. Shawn’s family also was for the most part out of the picture — they didn’t agree with Shawn being gay, and he had only met his mother three times in his whole life; He called her “the woman who gave birth to me.” Raised by his grandparents, the two gave Turbo the legal permissions to take care of Shawn’s affairs.

But while organizing a funeral for Shawn, the mother showed up. The legal privileges Shawn’s grandparents handed over weren’t valid — Shawn was never officially adopted by his grandparents and the mother became next of kin.

Eventually, the mother left with a few valuables, never to be seen again.

The event sparked a worry for Turbo. What would happen to his pups if something happened to him. At 40 years old, he now started to think about his own mortality.

Turbo began thinking about wills and how to protect his family — the ones that he considers to be the most valuable in his life.

He brings up the idea to the pack, and they all agree. But then events fall through where he can't get the whole pack to get their own affairs in order. Nonetheless, he's determined to continue and write his own will. If no one else will do it, at least he'll have his own.

The pack are having a family retreat coming up, and Turbo is ready to tell the group about his will. He confides in his pup Arco while in bed that he's going to have Bullet be the executor of the will.

On the day of the retreat, Turbo is packing everything up with Arco and Amp. Turbo is visibly nervous and excited for the trip, and he's ready to tell Bullet.

ACT III

The pack are all in their cabin in Guerneville. Turbo pulls Bullet aside and asks him to be his executor. Bullet says "of course," and gets some scratches under his chin.

At the end, I drive back from Guerneville and realize that family isn't something so strictly defined as blood. If we can have marriage define family, why can't we have fetishes define families. The love that these pups have for one another is no different than what I may have with one of my partners.

Credits roll.

ACCESS:

I have full access to the members of this pup pack and I have gained the trust of others within the fetish community to gain more access if need be.

AUDIENCE OUTREACH:

The biggest obstacle for this documentary will be audience engagement. Not only is this documentary about a very niche portion of society, it's also about a subject that many people will not be aware of.

There is talks of me being involved in a Tedx Talk in March at Yale, where one of the subjects I filmed is a professor. I also have been invited to speak at UC Santa Cruz on the subject of fetishes and polyamory. Through those initial appearances, I expect that the film will get some talk.

I plan on working with one of the pups I filmed in New Orleans who has a large puppy network across the nation. There are also leather events around the nation in June and July that this film could be promoted. All of those events have puppies that would find a documentary about their lifestyles interesting.

Outside of the leather community, the academic community looking at polyamorous relationships would find this documentary fascinating. Not only does the film show a very base idea of polyamory through triads, but it also shows that polyamory can mean more — it can also mean a chosen family where there is no sexual component. I will reach out to sexologists and couples therapists.

I also am in the works of writing a long-form piece for The Atlantic, VICE or BuzzFeed on this subject, where the trailer for the documentary could be placed. That would gain immediate viewership since that audience is exactly who I'm aiming to grab.

PROJECT STATUS:

BEGINNING OF NOV 2016 - Finish filming, starting post production

END OF NOVEMBER 2016 - Finish edits

DEC 2016 - Final touches, animation, graphics

JANUARY 2017 - begin submissions for festivals

FEBRUARY 2017 - Long-form article published

MARCH 2017 - Tedx Talk in Connecticut

APRIL 2017- Speaking at UC Santa Cruz