Perseverence: Name of the game in at least two films

By Diane Eagle
Mammoth Times Editor

A rollercoaster of a film, “9000 Needles” takes us on a journey right along with Devin Dearth from the time of his stroke, through ICU, rehab, the nightmare of American insurance, and to China for a stay in a Chinese hospital. Acupuncture and other Chinese Medicine applications bring Dearth back to his feet. There is no voiceover; his brothers Doug and Dave talk, his wife Stacey talks, in a very personal story, that might not have had a positive outcome. Nonetheless, this tight-knit family persevered calmly, with certainty.

Doug researched acupuncture and found a woman who had had the same kind of stroke, who went through the program in China and fully recovered. He was surprised that the family accepted the alternative treatment readily, except older brother Dave, who was hesitant. China? he asked, China?

All three brothers are body builders, all three have won middleweight awards, so it came as a huge surprise when this robust, strong and fit man of about 40, was felled by a brain-stem stroke.

The film is a testament to the will, spirit and determination of this man. After two weeks in ICU, Devin is moved to a rehab hospital, where his program of rigorous treatment and physical therapy is tightly regulated by insurance. Nothing in the program is individualized; it’s cookie-cutter insurance, says one of the family members. When insurance runs out, the patient is out the door, sent home, no more coverage for nurse or physical therapy. Care costs something like $150,000 a month.

Throughout, his family – wife, three children, parents, brothers – is at his side, taking turns staying with him in China.

The documentary doesn’t allow for wallowing in anything, not in grief, not in feeling sorry for themselves, so there is time to get angry about the state of American insurance, because we’re moving along with Devin, who surely must have his frustrated and low moments, but who, according to brother Doug, has infinite patience and the will to make progress every single day. In China, the difference in just one day is heartwarming.

When he returns home from China, he walks into the church in their small town in Kentucky to a standing ovation. As Devin says at the end of the film. I’m so much better today than I was yesterday...and that’s all I can do.

Doug Dearth, brother, producer and director of the film, says they’ll go back to China next year for follow up care.

On so many levels this is an inspiring film: It opens eyes even wider to the desperate condition of insurance coverage in this country; it squeezes the heart to see how he and his family rally with determination and belief; and it brings up thoughts as to this could happen to anyone and change lives forever.

The Making of the Nutcracker

“The mirror is not you. The mirror is you looking at yourself.” – George Balanchine

These were the words that came up onto the screen in the Redfir screening room at the Westin Sunday afternoon. It became clear as the movie rolled on, that that was a prescient comment by the famous ballet choreographer.

Another intimate documentary, “The Making of the Nutcracker” brought us up close and personal with the dancers and their personalities.

Mark Erickson runs a ballet studio in Temecula. Each Christmas he stages a production of the Nutcracker. His documentary strikes a chord in anyone who has ever seen the Nutcracker – whether a local production or one by the New York City Ballet.

A young filmmaker, Inda Reid, followed Erickson, his dancers, dance students, and helpers around from October-December as they prepared for the 2007 production.

We see young girls with braces on their teeth, hair pulled back in ballerina buns, practicing, rehearsing, commiserating and commenting on the ballet.

The documentary came together as Reid shot and edited, knitting a simple chronicle of a dance into a compelling look behind the scenes at what it takes to stage a ballet, small town and big company productions.

Reid is intrigued by relationships, she told the audience at the end of the screening. This was her first documentary.