

SYNOPSIS

WHY CAN'T WE BE A FAMILY AGAIN is a cinema verite portrait of the bond that develops between two brothers who long to be reunited with their mother. The film chronicles their mother's agonizing battle with crack addiction and their grandmother's struggle to keep the family together.

Kitten Jacob has been struggling with a drug addiction for most of her adult life. As the film opens, fourteen year old Danny and eleven year old Raymond Jacob still hold on to the hope that their mother will kick her drug habit so that the family can be reunited. Over the past ten years the brothers have had to rely on their grandmother, Erslena, for guidance and love. They also have been able to turn to a unique family support organization called the Center for Family Life. Danny's jobs as a counselor at the Center's after-school and summer camp programs helped build his confidence and gave him the chance to be a role model to younger kids, including his brother, Raymond. The Center became one of the strongest forces in the boys' lives, keeping them grounded despite the turmoil at home.

In one particularly poignant scene Danny reveals to his supervisor at the Center how he and his brother ended up in the custody of their grandmother. He describes how his mother left them to fend for themselves in their apartment for an entire week. When the food ran out, 5-year-old Danny and 1 year old Raymond made a harrowing journey on buses and on foot to their great-grandmother's house. The courts declared Kitten an unfit mother and gave temporary custody of the boys to their grandmother.

The child welfare authorities warn Kitten that she had one last chance to complete a drug treatment program or they will take away her parental rights. She enrolls in a residential treatment center in upstate New York and appears to be making great progress. However, after four months, Kitten drops out of the program and resumes her drug use. Kitten also falls into a deep depression and worries that she will never overcome her addiction. Danny and Raymond are devastated about losing the opportunity "to be a family again." After allowing the boys to remain in the limbo of kinship foster care for nearly a decade, the Family Court initiates legal procedures to terminate Kitten's parental rights.

Recognizing the added stress these developments were placing on both Erslena and the boys, one of the directors of the Center for Family Life's after-school program begins counseling the family at home. Erslena is happy to get this added support as she struggles with her daughter's losing battle with addiction and the challenge of raising her grandsons.

After failing to appear in Family Court, Kitten is given 90 days to re-enter a drug treatment program and take responsibility for her children. Once again, Kitten tries but fails to complete a drug rehabilitation program. Danny loses hope of ever having a real relationship with his mother, feeling she will always be addicted to drugs. Raymond, younger and more optimistic, says he will never give up on his mother.

The film ends on the day the Family Court is scheduled to decide the fate of Danny and Raymond. Ultimately, the judge decides to respect Danny and Raymond's wishes and does not terminate Kitten's parental rights. The boys remain in the custody of their grandmother.

Shot over a three year period, this emotionally wrenching story reveals how two brothers who were devastated by their mother's addiction and neglect found a way to thrive and redefine what it means to be a family.

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