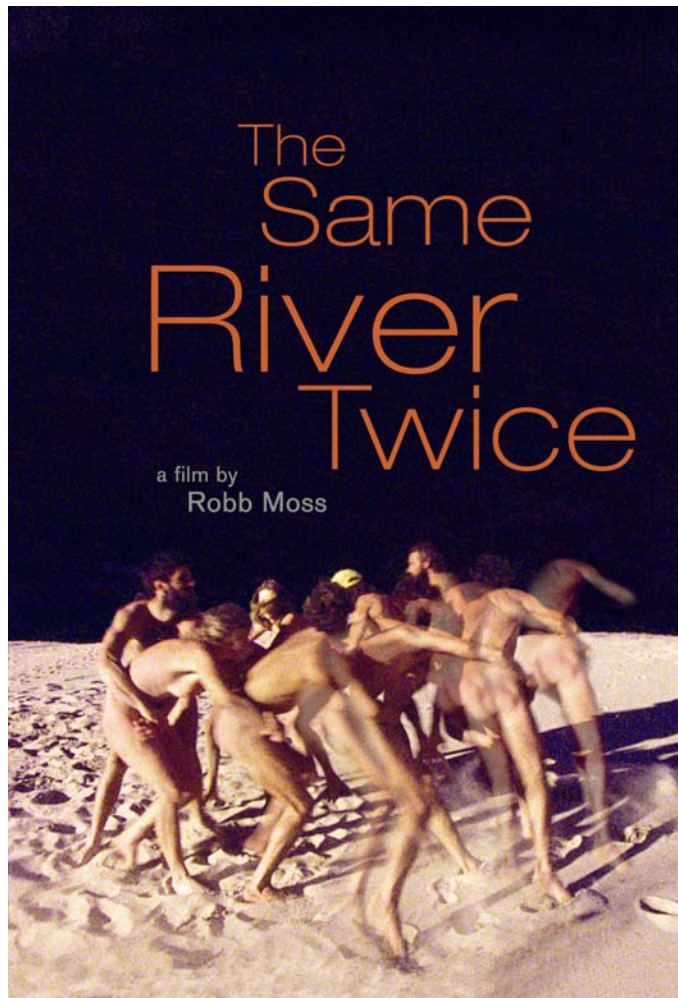


# BALCONY RELEASING

PRESENTS



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A Film by Robb Moss

THE SAME RIVER TWICE is 78 minutes and is not rated.  
Slides and digital images available, or photos can be downloaded.  
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**Next Life Films**

37 Greenough Avenue  
Boston, Ma. 02130  
Phone: 617-495-4456  
Fax: 617-495-8197  
[robbmoss@samerivertwice.com](mailto:robbmoss@samerivertwice.com)  
[www.samerivertwice.com](http://www.samerivertwice.com)

Publicity Contact  
Jeff Reichert  
Phone: (617) 354-4606  
[jreichert@magpictures.com](mailto:jreichert@magpictures.com)

## SYNOPSIS

If you could look your future in the eye, would it recognize you?

In 1978, on a breath-taking trip in the Grand Canyon, filmmaker Robb Moss and a group of free-spirited friends and lovers took a month-long trip down the Colorado River. Cutting between footage of their youthful, often naked, unscheduled lives and the complex realities of their adulthood today, the film creates a compelling portrait of cultural metamorphosis. From running rapids to running for mayor, *The Same River Twice* is a story of change, choices, and of finding one's place in the world.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT



I became a white water river guide after graduating from the University of California at Berkeley in 1972. Having spent my college years resisting the cultural and political momentum of a middle class upbringing, working for a rafting company, living in teepees and tree houses, and spending large amounts of time outdoors seemed to follow seamlessly from campus life. A community grew up around our love of rivers, and when we weren't working, we organized our own river trips.

In the fall of 1978, seventeen of us took a thirty-five day river trip down the Colorado through the Grand Canyon. During this trip I shot one of my first films, *Riverdogs*. Six years ago, I began shooting five of the characters from the original film. Built from pictures of their lives today mixed with images from *Riverdogs*, *The Same River Twice* attempts a collective, temporal mosaic of their life choices, an intimate depiction of those baby-boomers who took the sixties seriously, and then grew up.

*Riverdogs* depicted the live-in-the-moment, physically exhilarating existence of a close-knit group of river guides. It showed them risking life and limb kayaking, climbing, and, in general, expressing what remained of their extended adolescence. The film rendered a kind of utopia in which the grandness of the group's surroundings magnifies their intentions to live by a code of simplicity, rigor, and community. Since then, for almost a generation, these dogs have worked at establishing families, making money, and re-orienting their values to the requirements of grown-up life. Several dogs have become mayors of their small towns, another became a radio talk show host, another an aerobics instructor. One dog, except for a brief period when he tried to become a dentist, is still a river guide.

In the twenty odd years since *Riverdogs*, our response to media and genre has also undergone radical change. In the realm of non-fiction, for example, the jackhammer of post-modernism continues to rattle non-fiction away from its traditional ties to realism. And, as video and other electronic media supplant film's authority to represent reality with authority, the world seems quite different today than thirty-five years ago, when Jean-Luc Godard famously declared that cinema was truth, 24 times a second.

As a cultural/pharmacological time-line *The Same River Twice* travels a road from peyote to Prozac. Even the editing in *Riverdogs* was more peyote than Prozac. Languid, fluid, interested more in evocation than exposition, the film possessed a true believer's sense of the power of cinema to communicate through images and sounds. While *Riverdogs* was filmed in 16mm, the contemporary material from *The Same River Twice* is shot in digital video.

My hope is that the visual qualities of the two media, as well as the editing choices employed by each might elicit some of the differences between the then and the now. The film-past, for example, rendered pastoral and lush, and the video-present crowded and utilitarian, the past imagistic and wordless, the present rushed and talky. Certainly these differences mirror my experience of being young then and over fifty now.

One of the especially riveting features of the *Riverdogs* material is that the characters are often in various states of undress. As the years go by their nakedness is startling. "Why are they naked?" While the current day characters address this question as they watch *Riverdogs* on their VCR's at home--the film's only formal interview strategy--their nakedness serves the film in other ways. The sheer exuberance of the human body naked re-exposes the characters to the glare of their youth. In showing their bodies--as yet unmarked by the lives they will lead--their nakedness reflects their young adulthood, a time before worldly ambition, marriages maintained or lost, children, and illness escorted them to middle age.

## PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

**Danny:** Married and the mother of two (had her first child at 41) is a former genetics counselor, recently started her own aerobics business, lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

**Jeff:** Father of two, divorced from Cathy, works as a writer ("Forest Blood") and radio talk show host in Ashland, Oregon.

**Cathy:** Mother of two, divorced from Jeff, is the mayor (now former mayor) of Ashland Oregon. She remarries a guy named Rick towards the end of the film.

**Barry:** Father of three, the director of a small town psychiatric hospital, mayor (who loses his re-election bid) of Placerville, California, gets and is treated for testicular cancer. Turns fifty.

**Jim:** No children, still a river guide. (except for a brief period when he considered becoming a dentist.) He works on the Colorado River, lives his winters near a trailer in Coloma, California. Takes the length of the film to pour the slab for his "gardener's cottage." Danny was his summer girlfriend in the 70's.

## PRINCIPAL CREW

**PRODUCER\* DIRECTOR\* DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY, Robb Moss**

**EDITOR, Karen Schmeer** began her editing career as the co-editor of Errol Morris' *"Fast, Cheap & Out of Control"* and then edited his documentary feature *"Mr. Death"* Schmeer edited Michael Camerini and Shari Robertson's *"Well Founded Fear"* and Martha Swetsoff's *"Theme: Murder."* She edited the PBS's American Experience entitled *"A Brilliant Madness"* and Lucia Small's *"My Father, The Genius."* Most recently, she was co-editor of Errol Morris' feature documentary on Robert McNamara, *"Fog of War."*

**ASSOCIATE PRODUCER, Linda Morgenstern's** feature credits include Ross McElwee's *Bright Leaves*, Robb Moss' *The Same River Twice* and Lucia Small's *My Father, The Genius*. Ms. Morgenstern was a vice president of television production at Ogilvy & Mather Advertising in New York and has worked on numerous documentary productions nationally broadcast on PBS and HBO.

## DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY



Robb Moss is an independent documentary filmmaker whose most recent film *The Same River Twice* premiered at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival. Since then, it has shown at more than twenty-five festivals worldwide, including San Francisco, Munich, AFI and Rio Di Janeiro. *The Same River Twice* is a 2004 Nominee for the IFP Independent Spirit Award: DIRECTV / IFC “Truer Than Fiction Award” and has won awards at festivals in Chicago, Nashville, Birmingham, and New England.

Robb Moss' other films have shown in venues around the world including *The Tourist* which premiered at the 1991 Telluride Film Festival and was screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. As a cinematographer, Moss has shot films in Ethiopia, Liberia, Greece, Mexico, Hungary, Japan, Turkey, Nicaragua and the Gambia. Many of these films - on such subjects as famine, genocide and the large-scale structure of the universe – were broadcast nationally on Public Television. Robb Moss is the past board chair and president of the Association of Independent Video and Filmmakers (AIVF), and has taught filmmaking at Harvard University for the past seventeen years.

## INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR ROBB MOSS

*Q: "The Same River Twice" interweaves footage from an earlier Moss film made in 1978, called "Riverdogs" with contemporary scenes of the same people; could you explain some of the background of these two films?*

A: After graduating college in 1972, I spent the next five years not paying rent. Sleeping on couches, endlessly traveling, owning very little, I was very good at not paying rent. During this time I studied Spanish in Mexico, crossed the Sahara desert, traveled with Africans around America, and lived outdoors for months at a stretch while working for a rafting company and playing as a river guide. As that life ran out of steam, and my new life as a filmmaker began, I went back to the river in 1978 to make "Riverdogs" which I imagined to be a sort of cave painting or mural meant simply to evoke the experience of being on the river.

For the next fifteen years I worked at becoming a grown-up and in the early 90s, took another river trip. Near the end of that trip while looking down on the Salmon River, I was forcibly struck by how much had changed in our lives over those fifteen years. At that moment I wondered if that movement--from gaudy youth to the enactment of our various adulthoods--could be the subject of a film...

For some reason, I don't shed friendships and have stayed friends with many of the people with whom I grew up. Many of us went on to run rivers together. In choosing which five people I would film for "The Same River Twice" (from the seventeen people who were on the Riverdogs trip,) I chose those with whom I was close and about whose lives intimate portraits might be drawn.

*Q: The early footage from 1978 shows a bunch of young adults white water river rafting on the Colorado River in various states of undress. Not only are they naked river-guides, but they are also seen climbing in the Grand Canyon naked, eating and doing chores naked. Can you explain how this group nakedness came to be?*

A: Somehow not wearing clothes seemed a way to enhance the sensuality of being outdoors. It was also more comfortable to be naked than stuck in wet clothes. (This was the moment before outdoor-wear had made its appearance in our culture. Our choices then were wet cotton or wet wool.) As our sense of modesty eroded, then what we wore became more a question of utility rather than, say, fashion, shyness, or status. Within our mini-society, not needing to wear clothes became normalized. Besides there being naked people in the old footage, we see people dressed only in shirts, or only in shoes, or only in shirts and shoes. In many ways we dressed like we later dressed our own toddlers...

*Q: Although you are not seen in the footage it is clear that you were very much a part of this common culture. Can we infer that all the footage from 1978 was shot by Robb Moss, the naked cinematographer?*

A: One of the thorny issues I faced as a young filmmaker in the old film was how to film the nakedness. I was certainly aware that filming this group naked had its risks. I somehow wanted people to look but not ogle, and I certainly did not know if such a thing were possible. As the cinematographer/ filmmaker what I hoped to do was make images that would promote a certain visual pleasure at their nakedness without inviting an undue sexualizing of the image. I avoided certain camera angles, for example. As much as I could, I wished to naturalize their bodies within the film, without ignoring the sheer beauty of watching them going about their naked lives. In answer to your question, I frequently was shooting not clothed. My girlfriend at the time referred to me as the naked diplomat.

*Q: Have you met any concern from your film subjects about having their lives intimately depicted in this way and made public?*

A: I think all of us connected to this project are, in different ways, concerned about where the line is between the public and the private. Certainly while I was making the film I understood that the film subjects' (my friends') willingness to be in the film was an act of generosity on their part. I think they trusted that I would not harm them by revealing too much or by misrepresenting their lives and this was a responsibility that I took very seriously. Nonetheless, human beings are always more complex than their representations...

*Q: On your earlier films, you were frequently the director, DP, and editor; does the inclusion of another editor on this film signal a change in how you are working? Was there something in the material that you felt would benefit from an outside editor?*

A: After graduate school, I persisted in having this idea that filmmaker's gained authorship over their work by handling as many of the filmmaking chores as possible, that films ought to be made like writers write books, or painters painted paintings. While this idea may still have merit, as a full time teacher and family man, I no longer have the time to do it all myself. And so, for the first time, I worked with an editor, Karen Schmeer. Karen is a wonderful young editor and I depended on her to tell me when I was becoming too infatuated with my middle age. Also, because of the nakedness, I felt the film needed a gender-mixed editing team to help sort out the tricky cultural and aesthetic problems the portrayal of naked people presents. This was the first time I had collaborated with an editor and it was a pleasure. I now think that films have many authors, and certainly Karen shares in authoring "The Same River Twice."

*Q: Despite obvious differences between "The Same River Twice" and Michael Apted's "Seven-Up" serial films, it seems there might be a basis for comparison between these films. How do you respond to this? Is it your intention to continue to document these people's lives?*

A: I admire the "Seven-Up" series. While "The Same River Twice" is also longitudinal, it is not focused on class as its primary area of exploration, and doesn't depend so mightily on the interview as its primary meaning-making strategy. If my friends are still speaking to me (and we am still around) in fifteen years, I would like to make a third installment of the dog series. "The Naked and the Dead," perhaps?

*Q: What kind of camera did you use to shoot the early footage and the contemporary footage, were there any specific challenges in filming under either of these circumstances? What kind of an editing system did you use to edit this film? Do you have a strong personal preference for either film or digital video?*

A: I shot the first film with a CP-16 non-reflex 16mm camera. "Riverdogs" was one of the first films I ever made and I was an inexperienced zealot. I had solar battery chargers built for the project, rigged the film boat keep the film cool and dry for 35 days on the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon, and generally had a miserable time trying to keep the equipment accessible and safe. The contemporary material was shot in mini-DV with Sony VX 1000. The editing was done digitally on a donated Media 100. I love film and shoot video.

*(Q) Lastly, is there anything in particular that you hope audiences can get from this film, something you would like them to take away from the experience of having seen it?*

A: What I hope is that audiences experience the passing of time in the film and think about their own lives in any way they wish.

## **FILM FESTIVALS AND AWARDS**

2004 Nominee for IFP Independent Spirit Award  
DIRECTV / IFC Truer Than Fiction Award  
(Awarded February 2004)

2003 Sundance Film Festival  
Official Selection

2003 AFI Film Festival  
Official Selection

2003 Nashville Independent Film Festival  
Best Documentary Film

2003 Sidewalk Moving Picture Film Festival  
Best Documentary Film

2003 New England Film and Video Festival  
Best Documentary Film

2003 Chicago International Documentary Film Festival  
Audience Award

2003 Denver International Film Festival  
Official Selection

2003 Vancouver International Film Festival  
Official Selection

2003 Calgary International Film Festival  
Official Selection

2003 Atlanta Film Festival. GA  
Official Selection

2003 San Francisco International Film Festival  
Official Selection

# The Boston Globe

## DOUBLE EXPOSURE

### Documentarian and teacher Rob Moss revisits the subjects of a 1978 film in 'River'

By Louise Kennedy, Boston Globe Staff, 10/2/2003

CAMBRIDGE -- A student crouches on bare feet before a random assortment of objects -- twigs, shells, a rubber lamb chop -- laid out on a blank sheet of paper, dragging an ink-dipped feather across another blank page to make a drawing. Across the studio, a student with a camera stands watching the drawing student, preparing to make a videotape of him at work. Next to that student stands Robb Moss, teaching.

"Look through the camera; maybe don't turn it on right away. Take your time," Moss is whispering. "Shoot for about three minutes. Don't zoom. Don't shoot for less than 10 seconds a shot. I want to reinforce the idea that you're making discrete shots. Change the focal length, change the angle, change the distance to subject. . . . Do it any way you want, but I want you to be thinking about taking the scene apart in shots."

Moss has been teaching this art -- the art of taking the world apart in shots and putting it back together in a movie, choosing what to leave out and then what to put in -- for 15 years at Harvard, where he's the Rudolf Arnheim Lecturer on Filmmaking. And he's been making nonfiction movies himself, putting things in and leaving things out, since his student days at Berkeley, from which he graduated in 1972. At 53, he has now revisited one of his earliest films, the 1978 "Riverdogs," by going back to talk with five of the 17 people it shows rafting down the Colorado River about how their lives have changed, and not, since those sunny and expansive days.

The result, "The Same River Twice," has its local theatrical premiere tomorrow at Brookline's Coolidge Corner Theatre. The movie (edited by Karen Schmeer, with Linda Morgenstern as associate producer) has already played, to mostly glowing reviews, at New York's Film Forum and at several film festivals, notably Sundance. (Moss won't attend tomorrow's screening because he's in Rio de Janeiro for another festival.) The movie's commercial success, Moss says in an interview at Harvard's Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, is "surprising and heartening."

"I wasn't thinking about commerce," he says, but he has some thoughts about why "The Same River Twice" has found a broader audience than he expected. "I think it's unusual for a nonfiction film to try to regard a 20-year period," he says, "and it expresses a certain boomer experience. For younger people, it expresses a series of choices they've yet to make. Those are the two constituencies: people who look at it having gone through the cauldron of their life choices, and those who are still facing those choices."

In a sense, those are the two kinds of people we see in the film: young ones with their whole lives opening out before them, shot luminously on film, and older ones (in grittier video) whose paths, by chance and by choice, have narrowed. The twist here is that they're the same people twice.

Another twist, and one that has distracted some viewers from the movie's subtle and touching meditations on youth, age, and the river between them, is that the younger versions of these people are mostly naked. For Moss, the nakedness is important, but it's not central.

"The film wouldn't play in the same way if they weren't naked," he says. "It shouts youth and possibility and vulnerability." Beyond that, he says, "it was not nearly so extravagant as it was practical. This was pre-polypropylene; we had a choice of wet cotton or no clothes."

But the naked bodies aren't what really strike him now. "It's more the psychological nakedness," he says. "I didn't know that at the time. You don't know things while you're doing them."

One of the men we see onscreen, naked and not, would agree. "The nudity is nothing. The exposure is the later material," Barry Wasserman says by phone from California. "The exposure is your self, not your body." What made him and the others willing to expose themselves in that way, he says, is their friendship with Moss and their faith in him.

"Well, you know, Robb is so trustworthy, which is why he got that movie," says one of the women in the film, Danny Silver, on the phone from New Mexico. "Everyone trusted that he wouldn't humiliate us and would be kind, and in the end he was. Of course he was, because that's who he is."

Achieving balance Ask some of Moss's former students to talk about him, and you get an unusually rapid and thorough flurry of return phone calls. "The greatest teacher I ever had," says one. "A huge influence," says another.

"He's very patient; he's articulate and incisive without being overly academic," says Allie Humenuk, a former student who is working on a documentary about the photographer Abelardo Morell. "Unlike some other professors who you feel are unapproachable because they really do know so much, Robb pulls you out. He's not -- he's just very present. You feel like when you're talking he's clicked into what you're saying. And that is amazing, because he's got so much going on."

Humenuk, like several others, admires Moss's ability to balance his teaching with the demands of his own work and family life; he and his wife, Jean Kendall, are raising three daughters in Jamaica Plain.

"I don't know how he's balancing all that," says Julie Mallozzi, a Boston filmmaker who has also taught with Moss. She remembers seeing him teach students at noon, then send them out to shoot -- but not before making an appointment to meet with them again, to view the results, at 2 o'clock. That's 2 a.m.

"I said, 'Wow, you really didn't have to do that,' " Mallozzi recalls. "And he said, 'I'm not going to be the one standing in the way of their progress.' "

It's that seriousness about his students' work, says Moss's friend and Harvard colleague Ross McElwee, that makes his students "adore" him. "I think what they respect so much is that he respects them." Moss combines warmth and rigor, McElwee says, in his teaching as well as in his own work.

"He's a very astute cinematographer and has an eye for what's important as he shoots," McElwee says. "He also has an eye for what's not obvious as he shoots. . . . You're always editing, even as you're shooting, and Robb is always aware of that."

### Exploring lives

Back in the drawing studio, Moss watches his student. His gaze travels from the camera to its subject, the artist rendering a collection of objects chosen and arranged on the floor, and he smiles.

"See, I would love to be an artist like this," he says. "I'd like to have less gear. There is nothing sexier than studios, nothing. The people sprawling around in their bare feet, the smells, the light . . ."

So why make movies instead of drawing or painting? He thinks.

"I love movies. I think I work backwards from that. I like exploring lives. I like the possibility of waking up in the morning and filming in a village in West Africa. I don't do that every day, but there's the possibility. . . . As a way to experience the world, I love movies. The cost, the length of time, the gear . . ." He sighs.

He returns to studying his student, watching the watcher. A minute later, he speaks again.

"There's some way in which -- one of the things about growing up is that you end up not doing all these things. You marry this person and not that person, you do this job and not that one. And you do what you can do. That" -- he gestures to the drawing student -- "was never in the cards. I couldn't do this. I got a D in handwriting in the sixth grade."

But what he can do, and does, is make movies that express his way of seeing the world. One of his hopes for "The Same River Twice" is that it will serve as a corrective to the often cartoonish view of the earlier time it portrays -- and of the people who lived through that time and went on to become grownups. The cartoon, Moss says, is "bad dancing, bad fashion sense, bad drugs -- none of which was my experience." The "hippie" caricature is untrue to his own life, he says, and to the lives he shows. We see people raising children, raising vegetables, trying to make a difference in other people's lives, some by getting involved in local politics. "People's running for mayor of their small town," as two of the movie's characters do, "seems like a natural outgrowth of the values of the '60s," Moss says. "Sometimes I think those things still live; sometimes I think there's just the salad bar."

"The Same River Twice," though not overtly, is about such choices. And right now, Moss is facing another choice: whether to blow the digital movie up to 35mm stock, which would make it more salable to distributors but would cost about \$100,000. "If this were 15 years ago, I think I would just do it," he says. "But I have to think about my family's future in ways I didn't have to before I had children. I'm not willing to mortgage their future for the sake of a few more screenings. And also, when is enough enough?"

In the drawing studio, one of his students poses a similar question: How long do we shoot for? Moss offers a deceptively simple answer.

"I would shoot it," he says, "until you feel like it's done."