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## Documentary Focuses on Those Who Swindle Seniors

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Glastonbury-based film production company Starjack Entertainment earlier this year released a critically-acclaimed documentary, “Last Will and Embezzlement”, which focuses on the financial exploitation of the elderly.

The movie features “disturbing, first-hand accounts from real-life victims, including Hollywood icon Mickey Rooney; as well as in-depth interviews with experts who discuss such key issues as victim profiles, the perpetrators’ modus operandi, reasons for vulnerability, as well as potential solutions to this ever increasing worldwide problem,” notes the film’s website.

A personal experience highlighted in the film — finding out her parents, who moved to Florida after retiring, had “six figures” worth of life savings embezzled by a friend — propelled co-writer, co-producer and local resident Pamela S.K. Glasner to make the film. Her partner in Starjack is Deborah Louise Robinson, who directed, co-wrote and co-produced the film.

“I thought, ‘We have to do something about it to make people feel, No. 1, they aren’t alone; No.2, they’re not crazy; and No.3, the movie needs to be geared towards: what can you do to protect yourself? Because you cannot count on being in an area where you have an enlightened police department,” stated Glasner.

Filmed over several months in 2011, the documentary was shot in a variety of locations including London (Robinson lives in England), Sarasota, FL and California, where Rooney — who filed a lawsuit against his stepson in 2011, accusing him of tricking the star out of millions of dollars — lives.

“He is funny; he was a real gem,” recalled Glasner of Rooney. “He was very guarded the first time he spoke with us because his case hadn’t actually gone to court, but he was absolutely wonderful.”

The film had a theatrical premiere in Manhattan in April and played in both New York and Los Angeles for a week. Currently, a 23 minute “scholastic edition” and 82-minute “feature-length scholastic edition” are available to purchase at the film’s website, [www.lastwillandembezzlement.com](http://www.lastwillandembezzlement.com)

“[The film] is being purchased by municipalities, senior centers, chambers of commerce, houses of worship, senior service providers, law schools, attorneys, accountants, law enforcement — anyone with a vested interest in getting the word out and protecting the elderly,” observed Glasner. “If someone is interested in having their organization purchase a DVD for an event — and if I’m available, I might also be able to attend and answer questions. Please [visit the website].”

So what does Glasner recommend seniors do to ensure they aren’t a victim of exploitation?

“One of the most important things I say to people is find an attorney; an elder law attorney,” she said. “You want an attorney who is well-versed in this and then check him out ... Google ‘versus’ and their name and you can find out about them.

“Then talk to people and tell them, these are my concerns: [for example] Aunt Tilly is getting old and I’m nervous about her and I’m her primary caregiver — what can I do to protect her? The people who know how the perpetrators get away with the crimes are great people to tell you what you want to watch out for, how do you protect yourself.”

Glasner also encourages individuals to “put what you want on a video,” she noted, “so later on a perpetrator can’t step in and have a judge overturn it by convincing the judge, ‘This isn’t really what they meant, I think they were being coerced.’ [With a video recording] the judge looks at your face and you say, ‘I’m of sound mind and I want this, this and this.’”

In the video recording, Glasner said people should name the individuals they want responsible for their decisions should they become unable to make them for themselves.

And pay attention to any new people in your parents’ or other elderly relatives’ lives. “Sometimes it’s necessary to ask those questions — has anybody come into this person’s life, particularly someone of a different generation? This doesn’t have to be the case but usually the perps are not seniors; they can be, but most are not,” she said. “So when somebody younger comes into their life — be on the lookout. It could be a warning signal.”

As far as her own experience goes, Glasner came to the shocking realization in 2011 after her mom passed away that a man who befriended her parents at their local synagogue in Florida had swindled them out of their life savings. (Her father, who had Alzheimer’s and had been living in a Florida nursing home, passed away earlier this year).

The man, in his 60s, even crafted a will that allowed him to make all of Glasner’s parents’ decisions regarding their finances. Glasner said she was unsure of just how long the man had been stealing from her parents, but she believes it was over a period of at least a couple of years.

“I don’t know. I can only surmise. My parents stopped having me claim them on my taxes a couple of years before my mom passed away. That was most likely at the perp’s encouragement, because this way I would not have regular access to their financial info, so I would not be aware of what was going on. But that’s only a guess because I did not know what was happening at the time, [so] I can only guess at what he did.”

She continued, “What I know for certain is that my dad was in a nursing home full time for a few years, so they bought nothing expensive (no cars, no jewelry, no vacations, no furniture — nothing at all), so they never had any reason to invade the principal in their savings and investment accounts. And yet there was no money left after Mom died.”

After the shocking discovery, Glasner did her homework in terms of Florida state statutes and approached the local police down there. “I handed this detective the entire case on a silver platter — chapter and verse in the Florida statutes about power of attorney, about wills. And she [the officer] sent me back an e-mail saying that she spoke to him, and he ‘seems like a really nice man,’ and he ‘seems to have your parents’ best interests at heart,’ therefore there’s no intent, therefore there’s no crime, therefore the Castleberry Police Department will not pursue this,” recalled Glasner. “It was absolutely *not* for lack of evidence.”

Her parents' lost funds were never recovered and the suspect was never charged with a crime.

What most Americans are unaware of are the "threshold policies" throughout the United States, noted Glasner. With resources stretched so thin these days, each state establishes its own 'off the books' policy regarding how much money needs to be involved before officials make an effort to prosecute.

"In other words, if they don't think it's worth it, the authorities will simply refuse to do anything about it," said Glasner. "Of course, they will never state it that way, but that's what happens."

Because of these thresholds, Glasner said most embezzlers will never face charges. "The effect of these thresholds, outside of saving the state loads of money (in prosecution costs), is that the lion's share of perpetrators will never be prosecuted and they know it," she said. "And the effect of that is it actually encourages repeat offenders, because it creates safety zones in which these predators may operate with impunity. And since my family was not wealthy, we were doomed from the start."

The experience left her feeling helpless and angry. "Everything is gone; everything," she stated. "My father defended this country in Normandy ... this man took my father's medals from the war; those are gone and they should have gone to my son."

Authorities in Florida told Glasner that they "hear about this kind of thing all the time." She was told the same thing by several other organizations associated with the elderly.

"I started contacting organizations like the Alzheimer's Association and area agencies on aging, the AARP — people who aren't in law enforcement but who might have come across this," she said. "And they were all very nice to me and they all sympathized and said the same thing — 'we hear about this all the time' and I would get told other horror stories."

According to Glasner, \$3 billion a year is swindled from the elderly, but she noted, "there's no way to *really* know that because there are a lot of people who don't report."

For more information on the film, please visit [www.lastwillandembezzlement.com](http://www.lastwillandembezzlement.com)