

## TEARS, LAUGHTER

Touching film tells story of mother's life - and death. **MONTANA**

COMING SUNDAY

## EGGSQUISITE

Chef at The Shack is a wiz at breakfast. **TERRITORY, MISSOULIAN.COM**



## SENTINEL TO STATE

Spartan girls earn trip to State AA tourney with win over Kalispell Glacier. **SPORTS**

**SATURDAY**

March 1, 2008

# Missoulian

75 CENTS  
www.missoulian.com  
Copyright 2008

# TRIBUTE FROM A DAUGHTER



LINDA THOMPSON/Missoulian

**Katy-Robin Garton holds** one of her mother's unique handmade purses. Her mother continued creating art up until she died, "She couldn't work or ski or be active," says Katy-Robin. "Art was one of the only things she could do."



LINDA THOMPSON/Missoulian

**Filmmaker Katy-Robin Garton** sits in her office surrounded by the artwork of her late mother. Garton is nominated for a Student Emmy Award for her film titled "Little Mom Full of Color," which documents the end of her mother's life.

## Missoula filmmaker's 'Little Mom Full of Color' nominated for national Student Emmy Award

### On Missoulian.com

To watch a clip from the film, go to this story on Missoulian.com.



### Online

To read more about Katy-Robin Garton and her film "Little Mom Full of Color," visit [www.littlemomfullofcolor.com](http://www.littlemomfullofcolor.com).

By JAMIE KELLY  
of the Missoulian

**I**n the end, when the color drains from Susan Garton's life, there is nothing on the screen but blackness and a voice screaming for help. "My mom's real sick, and she just fell and I don't know if she's alive," says a frantic

voice. It is a 9-1-1 call to Salt Lake City dispatchers on Sept. 26, 2006, the day Susan Garton collapsed and died.

And the voice is that of Susan's daughter, Katy-Robin Garton, who found her emaciated mother on the floor that day, dead not of the terminal melanoma with which she was diagnosed the previous year, but of a heart

attack. Susan's heart, fighting through the debilitating effects of the hellish and ugly cancer, had simply given out.

The call comes on minute 56 of Katy-Robin's film, "Little Mom Full of Color," a documentary about Susan Garton's last year on earth, a video diary that the daughter

See **TRIBUTE**, Page B2

## Inside

Community Calendar . . . . .B3  
Obituaries . . . . .B3

# Montana

B

Saturday,  
March 1, 2008

## Tribute

### Continued

turned into an award-winning film.

"Little Mom Full of Color" is one of three films in the United States up for a Student Emmy Award for best documentary. The Missoula filmmaker was informed two weeks ago that her painful tribute to her mother's life was chosen for the honor. She will find out on March 15, when she attends the awards ceremony in Los Angeles, whether her film gets first, second or third place.

And yet no award will mean as much as the film does to Katy-Robin personally, and to the memories of her "Little Mom," an artist and mother of three, who died at the age of 51.

"I think what I've done honors her," said Katy-Robin, who will shed her maiden name next weekend when the 28-year-old gets married. "I feel like I've done more for her than I have hurt our family by sharing it."

Shot as a master's degree project for Montana State University's Science and Natural History Documentary Filmmaking program, "Little Mom Full of Color" debuted last month at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival.

It is difficult to watch, and nobody feels that more than the Garton family, who appear in the film throughout.

That was one of Katy-Robin's biggest fears surrounding her decision to make the film, a project she at

*'We can find out the amazing things that happen when we transition. There are so many things, but we truly have a hard time accepting it. It's a chance to say your goodbyes, to heal relationships, for parents to pass on lessons to their children.'*

**Katy-Robin Garton, student filmmaker**

first only considered a video diary of her mother's last days.

"I told my family, 'You tell me anything you don't want in there,'" she explained. "They were incredible. They told me not to change a thing."

It was not so much a leap of faith that Katy-Robin took in making the film but a leap of emotion. As she continued to film her mother, she found a broad and critical message in her struggles, her colorful mosaic art and her sense of humor. And that message is the way our culture deals with death - shaming it, hiding it, avoiding its questions and consequences.

But, she said, "We can find out the amazing things that happen when we transition. There are so many things, but we truly have a hard time accepting it. It's a chance to say your goodbyes, to heal relationships, for parents to pass on lessons to their children."

So Katy-Robin, then a master's student in filmmaking at MSU, approached film professor Ronald Tobias about turning

the diary into a film for her master's thesis.

"I had a little bit of reservation," said Tobias, Katy-Robin's adviser. "I had trouble understanding how a personal journal of her mother's death would fit the requirements for a degree."

The degree, after all, stresses scientific filmmaking. Indeed, Katy-Robin's last film for the program explored microbial life in Yellowstone National Park's thermals.

But Tobias also saw the film's potential to be more than just an emotional journey.

"I thought if she made the film in such a way that it helped people understand the processes of what's going on, and how people relate to death and the medical establishment, then it would fit," he said.

She succeeded brilliantly,

Tobias said, and it was no shock to him that she is up for a Student Emmy Award.

"Katy is a mature filmmaker already," he said. "She has an unerring sense of where to go. She's a great filmmaker, one of the best we've ever had."

Both in its candor and emotional content, "Little Mom Full of Color" is masterful filmmaking, he said, because Katy-Robin was able to do what few filmmakers her age could: remain objective while dealing with something so deeply personal.

"She was able to be fully involved emotionally, and yet she maintains the distance required of filmmakers," said Tobias. "It's just an astounding work. She keeps a kind of observational distance that allows people to understand what's going on."

As the filming unfolded, Tobias could see the emotional toll it was taking on his protégé.

"That film probably took 10 years out of her life," he said. "She would hit these incredible low spots and say, 'I can't go on, it's taking too much out of me.' And two weeks later, she'd bounce

back."

And she did. The film squeezed laughter and tears out of the audience at the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, as it did with her own family, who viewed it in its completion exactly one year after "Little Mom" passed away.

"I told them that it is very hard to watch, because you see all her struggles, but you get to laugh with her too," said Katy-Robin. "And they had to decide if they wanted to watch it."

"They laughed harder than anyone, and they cried harder than anyone, because they knew her."

Reporter Jamie Kelly can be reached at 523-5254 or at [jkelly@missoulian.com](mailto:jkelly@missoulian.com).

## Internet

Unlimited Hours. No Contracts!

### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY

The University of Montana is seeking men and women with disabilities and chronic health conditions for the following study:

#### THE CRIME REPORTING STUDY

The Research Study invites women and men with disabilities and/or chronic health conditions who have experienced physical, sexual, and/or other types of interpersonal abuse to participate

**Nobody**  
**rushed a**  
**the comfort**

**GRIZZ** Thursday, F  
MONTANA BASKETBALL

Grizzlies vs. No

KROY BIERN

UM's defensive end  
be recognized at h  
Buchanan Award. T  
Kroy as the top defe  
in the FCS! Autogra  
posters will be given

Saturday, March 1st -