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Gilbert woman's film a meditation on grief

BY ANNELISE MAKIN
GSN Contributor

Nobody knows when their time is up. Neither did Livi DarConte nor her grandmother, who was diagnosed with terminal cancer.

Following an intuition, film student Livi went to work with camera and actors at the home of her grandmother, Carol Ann DarConte Kaider, who was receiving hospice care.

Over film, the two women bonded a last time and Carol became Livi's most important film critic before passing away last May.

Livi's short film, "Mourning Glory," won "Best of Drama" at the Phoenix A Night of Misfits Films Film Festival for its lyrical portrayal of the five stages of

mourning.

During a screening at Jarrod's Coffee House in Mesa, no eye stayed dry. Livi's mom, Marietta Hauser, was shaken at each viewing of her mother's life.

"My family has always been super great about supporting my passion projects," Livi said.

The 22-year-old filmmaker, born in Mesa, lives in Gilbert with parents Marietta Ann Hauser and Robert Gerhard Hauser and twin brother Robert Gerhard II. Each has helped her haul equipment, provide props, and perform other tasks.

Since early childhood, Livi has

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Not long before Carol DarConte, right, passed away, she got to see scenes from the movie her granddaughter, Gilbert filmmaker Livi DarConte, made about her imminent death. (Courtesy of Livi DarConte.)

Foundation offers women a fresh start

BY SAMANTHA REA
GSN Staff Writer

For Valley women looking for new education and employment training opportunities, the Fresh Start Women's Foundation is leading the way.

Founded in 1992, Fresh Start Women's Foundation works across five key areas that also include family stability, health and wellness, financial management, and careers – all geared to helping women build a pathway to self-sufficiency.

In the 2025 fiscal year, the organization served over 5,400 women across its programs, with participants accessing over 15,300 services.

Fresh Start partners with organizations such as the East Valley Institute of Technology, Maricopa Community Colleges, and Arizona State University's AZNEXT to provide a wide array of education and training opportunities.

"Education and career training are key drivers of long-term self-sufficiency," said Adriana Arroyo, director of career, education and financial management.

"By gaining in-demand skills aligned with Arizona's fastest-growing industries ... women can earn wages that allow them to support themselves and their children.

"When combined with coaching and wraparound support, education becomes a pathway to sustained economic independence rather than short-term employment," Adriano said.

Women can access Fresh Start's education and workforce training programs individually, though Arroyo noted that participants often succeed even more when they engage with additional support areas like family stability, health, and financial management.

For women building a pathway to self-sufficiency, gaining skills and training is a crucial step. The Foundation offers workshops, workforce

training opportunities, scholarships and funding opportunities, social work support and success coaching. They also are connected to the Paradise Valley Community College Small Business Start-up Program.

Workshops focus on personal development and accessing resources available through Fresh Start. Topics include funding opportunities, scholarship applications, succeeding as an adult learner, and developing your inner leader.

Fresh Start holds a workshop on career training and job search support once a week that provides an overview of all Fresh Start education, career training, and workforce opportunities. It helps women understand the range of programs available to determine which path best aligns with their goals.

There are also information sessions on the Helping Hands for Single Moms Scholarship held regularly throughout



Through employer and education partnerships, Fresh Start Women's Foundation connects women with career and training opportunities like the Women in Finance Program, which prepares women to enter banking roles in just eight weeks. (Courtesy of the Fresh Start Women's Foundation)

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been involved with film. Early on, her mother signed the twins up with a talent agency for acting jobs.

"I did that until I was 12 years old," Livi said. "Then I realized I wanted to be a director instead."

When it came to finishing her associate's degree at the Scottsdale School of Film and Theater, Livi needed a capstone project. At about the same time, in April 2024, her grandmother learned her cancer had spread to her brain.

"She had never seen me at work unlike my other family members, who helped out on set," Livi recalled. "It was one of her final wishes to see me direct a film in person."

However, Carol was already in hospice care and could not leave house.

"So, a lightbulb went off that I should make a film for her that immortalizes her," Livi said. "I brought the idea to her that we could shoot a film in her living room."

Carol agreed and while she had never been in front of the camera, she be-



Marietta Hauser and filmmaker Livi DarConte with a photo of their mother and grandmother Carol DarConte, who died from cancer last May. (Courtesy of Livi DarConte.)

came a top consultant on the visuals for her granddaughter.

"She was totally down for it," Livi continued. "I became very close to my grandmother."

Livi brought in her friend Anna Taylor Lovve as actress and Emmanuel Villa as set photographer. Her team set up studio in Carol's living room.

The movie – created with the help of

Casey Fehr from Fehr Films, cinematographer Trini Guevara, and other staff – was basically shot in one day except for a scene at the Queen Creek Olive Mill.

"Postproduction took a couple of months, but we finally got to where it needed to be," Livi said. "And grandma did see the final product and loved it."

"We sat down one night, and I was showing my grandmother one of the final cuts," Livi said.

"I had approached the film as being about my feelings towards her experience of going through cancer...And we finished it together, and she turns to me and tells me that's exactly how she was feeling."

The prologue deals with conflicting chatter in the brain. Denial shows the main character losing her faith. The anger phase features a desperate angel tearing out its feathers. The bargaining happens with a gas-masked girl and a lot of smoking. In the depression segment, the actress changes her masks to put on a brave face while

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acceptance leads through an olive garden to death.

"When I saw this film, it really hit me in a way I didn't expect," Livi's mom said. "And it's really helping me deal with this. If we could help just one person deal with the tragedy of what cancer is, and death imminently coming for most with that diagnosis, this movie transcends a power that I can't even begin to explain."

"The overlapping voices in the doctor's office, when she got the news, is a powerful start," Marietta described. "But the most gut-wrenching for me happens in the anger scene. A fallen angel, so pure, so good, seeing all innocence destroyed, is ripping his wings apart, till blood spills. In life death is inevitable, but to see it like that is a powerful piece of art."

Carol in the end accepted reality, keeping her composure.

"And that takes such strength and grit," Marietta said. "For that, I admire my mother profusely because she did it with grace."

Carol felt the film "nailed it," according to Livi, who recalled:

"It was done when she approved it. In the end we were both crying."

Carol finally surfaces on screen in the post-credits roll. And that picture

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the year.

Beyond providing workshops on training and scholarship opportunities, Fresh Start also helps women access funding through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Education advisors guide eligible participants through enrolling in this federal workforce development program, which helps job-seekers gain the education and skills they need to secure employment.

WIOA participants can receive funding for things like tuition, career training, books, equipment, and support services such as childcare or transportation.

In addition to funding support, Fresh Start offers 12 free hands-on training programs, including options in banking, semiconductor manufacturing, computer technology, and automotive and diesel.

has a special story.

"While I was showing my grandmother a scene on the monitor, my videographer Emmanuel shot a candid reel of her," Livi said. "I chose that one for the post-credits scene because it shows her liveliness."

"She always told me not to worry, that everything will work out. She was right about that. I was stressing a little bit too much."

"I haven't had a film yet reach community recognition like this one has," Livi continued. "I didn't expect it, because it's such a personal film to myself and my family. And being able to share that with so many people and deliver those same emotions feels very special."

Shortly after her grandmother died May 6, Livi won the Valkyrie Award for Best Experimental Short in New York City. She also placed as finalist in two California film festivals.

"I didn't expect this film to find this wide echo," the filmmaker said. "I didn't have the intention to touch people like that. I told myself, if my grandma likes it and I'm happy with it, everything's fine."

"Mourning Glory" was screened on Carol DarConte's birthday last June 19. It can be viewed on YouTube (Livi DarConte, "Mourning Glory") at [youtube.com/watch?v=9fsFzZi3t0o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9fsFzZi3t0o). **GSM**

While in a career training program, participants receive personalized career support, direct connections with hiring employers, a network of other motivated women, and access to all other Fresh Start offerings across the five focus areas.

"Completing a program often marks a major turning point," Arroyo said. "Women gain credentials, industry-recognized skills, and increased confidence that position them for higher-wage, more stable careers."

"Many Fresh Start women transition directly into employment or apprenticeships with employer partners, gaining not just a paycheck but access to career growth and long-term opportunity," she added.

Fresh Start's career advisors play a vital role, providing resume writing support, mock interviews, job search guid-

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