



BLINK

Directed by Edmund Stenson and Daniel Roher



84 mins. | PG | Canada-USA | 2024 | Documentary
Languages: English, Québécois French, Spanish, Achuar-Shiwiar

PHOTOS | [Available here](#)

KEY ART | [Available here](#)

TRAILER | [Available here](#)

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LOGLINE

After three of their children are diagnosed with an incurable eye condition, one family embarks on an epic journey to show them the beauty of the world before it vanishes for good.

SYNOPSIS

When three of their four children are diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa, a rare and incurable disease that leads to severe visual impairment, the Pelletier family's world changes forever. In the face of this life-altering news, Edith Lemay, Sébastien Pelletier and their children set out on a journey around the world to experience all its beauty while they still can. As they fill their memories with breathtaking destinations and once-in-a-lifetime encounters, the family's love, resilience and unshakeable sense of wonder ensure that their uncertain future does not define their present.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It was MRC who brought the Lemay-Pelletier's story to us, even though it had been on the periphery of our news feeds for a while. As Canadians, we were immediately intrigued. But it wasn't until we got to know the family via many Zoom exchanges that we realized how much we wanted to tell this story with our producing partners at Fishbowl Films. The challenge was clear: how could we make a cinematic film and not a travelogue? Put differently: what was the story's deeper emotional core?

For us, it was the parents' journey with and through grief. By balancing this with a more innocent and joyous tale of childlike wonder and discovery, we felt we could go beyond a mere catalog of locations and capture something universal. Keeping our camera at kid-height and intimately close to the family, we aimed to immerse the audience in the observational realities of their daily life, as well as the subtle

relationships between each of them. This is a film built on looks, gestures and tiny details—the very fabric of our relationships with one another.

As the shoot progressed, it became clear how early Edith and Séb were in their journey of self-discovery and how much of a medical model of blindness they—and, by extension, many of us—have inherited. In other words, blindness is often understood as an objective loss or a diminishment of life. Using the film’s natural landscapes as the *mise-en-scène*—the physical and challenging terrain of the Annapurna mountain range in Nepal, the spiritual landscape of the Egyptian white desert, and the psychic interior world of the Amazon rainforest—we thus wanted to chart both the parents’ and our own transition from grief at what was lost to acceptance of and curiosity about the beautiful future which lies ahead. We learned this precisely by observing their endlessly resilient children. We live in a world that gives privilege to vision, but Mia, Léo, Colin and Laurent have the tools to lead rich, meaningful, yet crucially different lives *because* and not in spite of their condition.

Ultimately, we wanted to make a documentary that was more universal than one family’s diagnosis. Yes, retinitis pigmentosa was the catalyst, but every parent and every child must say goodbye to those whom they love; every one of us must accept what we cannot control. Every one of us must choose how we want to face the onrushing future because what it will entail and demand of us is an unknown quantity with which we must all learn to live.

- Edmund Stenson and Daniel Roher

THE FAMILY’S TRAVELS

Edith Lemay and Sébastien Pelletier first noticed their daughter, Mia, was having vision problems when she was 3 years old. The diagnosis took years to pinpoint but, by the time Mia was 7, they had identified it as retinitis pigmentosa, a rare genetic condition that causes a loss or decline in vision over time. It skipped their second child, Léo, but both their younger sons, Colin and Laurent, received the same diagnosis. “We don’t know how fast it’s going to go, but we expect them to be completely blind by mid-life,” said the parents. The school’s vision impairment advisor suggested they fill Mia’s visual memory looking at pictures in books. “I thought, ‘I’m not going to show her an elephant in a book; I’m going to take her to see a real elephant,’” Edith explains. “And I’m going to fill her visual memory with the best, most beautiful images I can.”

As the Canadian-based family began making plans to spend a year traveling around the globe, they canvassed the children’s opinions on what they wanted to do. Four-year-old Laurent said he wanted to drink juice on a camel. “We never found out where this crazy idea came from, but it was very dear to him and made us all laugh,” his mother said. Nothing was off limits. That bucket list became their North Star:

- Swimming with dolphins (Mia)
- Hot-air ballooning in Cappadocia (Edith)

- Sleeping on a train (Colin)
- See elephants (Léo)
- Hiking for days (Sébastien)
- Horseback riding in Mongolia (Mia)
- Try surfing (Mia)
- See a sunrise on a mountain (Edith)
- See Pokémons (Léo)
- Visit the historic site of Angkor Wat (Sébastien)
- Eat ice cream (Colin)

Initially delayed by the global pandemic, the family revised their plans countless times before setting out from Montreal in March 2022. “We actually left without an itinerary,” said Edith. “We had ideas of where we wanted to go, but we plan as we go. Maybe a month ahead.” Sébastien was in charge of logistics, spending hundreds of hours scouring blogs, reviews and travel sites. Even on the road, he’d hunch over his phone late into the night in darkened hotel rooms so as not to wake the kids or wait hours on board a bus for a few bars of cellular service.

They planned to take ground transportation and avoid flying as much as possible to limit their footprint on the climate. One of their goals was also to meet people by staying in guest houses and homestays rather than hotels wherever possible.

They began their trip in Namibia before heading to Zambia and taking the 1,100-mile train line to Tanzania, where they saw big-game animals most children only read about in books and got up close to elephants, zebras and giraffes. “We were focusing on sights,” explains Pelletier. “We were also focusing a lot on fauna and flora. We’ve seen incredible animals in Africa but also elsewhere. So we were really trying to make them see things that they wouldn’t have seen at home and have the most incredible experiences.”

“There are beautiful places everywhere in the world, so it doesn’t really matter where we go,” Edith explains. Although traveling as a family was testing—the couple also homeschooled their children on the road—Lemay and Pelletier say one of the highlights was witnessing the bond between the kids strengthening. The grandparents joined the family in Bali, giving them a chance to swap school books for news from home. It was a special moment for the family to gather in person rather than through a screen. “You’re never better than with your family,” as Sébastien put it.

Many soccer balls were left behind throughout their travels. A common cultural touchstone, they transcended language barriers and helped the children meet the local kids. The games were special moments that often erupted in bursts of laughter and high fives, even when the darkness prevented the boys from seeing the field clearly.

Nepal was a “coup de cœur” for all family members. It was added on a whim at the last minute. They got there without too much preparation or expectations. Beyond the extraordinary landscapes, it was, above

all, the contact with the people that charmed everyone. In the course of the trek, they encountered Bella, a female dog who immediately became the children's most beloved pet. Sadly, they couldn't bring her for the rest of the trip and leaving her in the end was a heart-breaking moment.

In Mongolia, they hired a driver and a guide to help them cross the country. "Mongolia is probably the country that tested us the most, both in terms of comfort and food. Our semi-vegetarian family had to adapt to a diet consisting almost exclusively of boiled mutton. But the contact with the people made up for any inconvenience," explained Edith.

This was just one of the challenges they encountered along the way. There were some destinations they had to miss due to pandemic restrictions, like the Trans-Siberian Railroad. But in Quito, Ecuador, the family had their worst moment. They got stuck for the better part of a day and night in a cable car when the system went down. After three hours, they called Ed to discuss filming the scene. While Edith shot the emotional ups and downs on her camera in the cabin, the film team scrambled to find a local cameraman who agreed to climb the mountain with the rescue team to film the incident. The scene became an emotional turning point in the film.

From the frozen fields of Nunavik to Egypt's haunting White Desert and beyond, the film team spent 76 days with the family and created lasting bonds. "It was as if we had known each other for a long time," said Edith. In addition to these new ties, the Pelletiers took as many pictures as possible to ensure that even when their children have lost most of their sight, they will still have something to look back on. "Maybe they'll be able to look at the photographs and the pictures and they will bring back those stories, those memories, of the family together."

BIOGRAPHIES

The Pelletier family

Based in Montreal, French Canadian couple Edith Lemay and Sébastien Pelletier are parents to Mia, Léo, Colin and Laurent. Mia was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at age 7, as were her younger brothers, Colin and Laurent. While spending a year traveling the world together, the family received extensive media attention, including from The New York Times, "Good Morning America," BBC, CNN and The Guardian.

Edith

In her professional life, Edith specializes in continuous improvement and business intelligence. As a former resort activity coordinator, she has no shortage of ideas to entertain her little troupe. She is passionate about sunsets and water sports, particularly scuba diving. During the trip, Edith was responsible for the luggage, schooling, meals, and social media. She is rarely seen in photos because she is always behind the camera and will publish a forthcoming book in French about their adventure.

Sébastien

An accountant by training, Sébastien now works in finance. He has a unique talent for making their children laugh. Very athletic and a bit of a daredevil, Sébastien needs to stay active, with his favorite activities being soccer, hockey, mountain biking, hiking and snowboarding. He was responsible for the trip budget and logistical planning, including transportation, accommodations and activities.

Mia (currently 13 years old)

The family's second mom, funny and generous, Mia loves taking charge of her little brothers and organizing activities. Always brimming with ideas and projects, she's a true leader. An avid reader, Mia has a passion for dance and the performing arts.

Léo (currently 11 years old)

A little tropical storm—either it's sunny skies or a hurricane—Léo is energetic, wildly imaginative and drawn to fantasy worlds, Legos and books. Recently, he's developed a passion for "Dungeons & Dragons." Generous and empathetic, he makes friends wherever he goes.

Colin (currently 9 years old)

Half athlete, half Brainy Smurf, Colin loves soccer, cats and trains. He is hardworking and helpful, and he loves counting money. Though more reserved than the others, Colin doesn't let anyone push him around.

Laurent (currently 7 years old)

The family clown and the youngest of the bunch, Laurent knows just how to melt everyone's hearts. His curiosity is boundless, and with him, one question quickly follows another. Always dreaming up new ideas and future plans, Laurent never has a moment to be bored. He loves tickling and is a huge "Star Wars" fan.

Daniel Roher, Director

Daniel Roher is a filmmaker from Toronto, Canada. His first film, "Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson and the Band," was a music documentary executive produced by Martin Scorsese. His follow-up, "Navalny," won Sundance's 2022 Festival Favorite Award, the BAFTA Award for Best Documentary, as well as the Academy Award® for Best Documentary Feature. His latest project, "BLINK," will premiere at the 2024 Telluride Film Festival and will be released by National Geographic Documentary Films in the late fall. In addition to his work in film, he is an accomplished visual artist whose work has been exhibited in galleries around the world. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, son, and dog, Moose.

Edmund Stenson, Director

Edmund Stenson's work as director, producer and editor spans both documentary and fiction and focuses on social issues, loners and nomads. He recently directed "BLINK," a National Geographic feature about the Lemay-Pelletier family, who dropped everything and traveled the world after learning three of their four children were losing their vision. Before that, he was an associate editor on BAFTA- and Oscar®-winner "Navalny" (2022), a documentary-thriller about the Russian dissident's poisoning.

In 2018, he directed the award-winning “Finding Fukue,” the viral CBC success that has amassed over 14.5 million views online. He has also cut award-winning documentary features, shorts and television series in English, French and Japanese: most notably, Canadian Screen Award winner “Being Black in Toronto” (2020), “Ciao Plastique” (2020), “Ghosts of Our Forest” (2017), “Ma vie Made in Canada” (2017), “Sourtoe: The Story of the Sorry Cannibal” and “Retour aux sources” aka “The Roots Remain” (2015).

Stenson is also somewhat obsessed with the Chilean filmmaker and magician Raúl Ruiz, as well as another kind of magician: Leicester City striker Jamie Vardy.

Diane Becker, Producer

Diane Becker is an Academy Award-winning producer and the co-founder of Fishbowl Films. “Navalny” won both the U.S. Documentary Audience Award and the Festival Favorite Award at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and was awarded a BAFTA, PGA, DuPont and the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Her films have been screened at the most prestigious festivals across the globe, and she has worked with companies like HBO, Showtime, Netflix and PBS. Her credits include “Manhunt,” “The Final Year,” “If I Leave Here Tomorrow,” “Belushi,” “Stutz” and the Emmy®-nominated “Tina.” She has produced docuseries such as “Five Came Back,” “Trial by Media” and “Equal.” Fishbowl Films’ slate has aimed to bring urgent and timely issues into the spotlight. They were a finalist for the 2024 SIMA Awards and awarded a Peabody Award in 2019 for “Inventing Tomorrow” (POV) and received the 2020 Sundance Institute/Amazon Producer’s Award for Nonfiction for “Whirlybird.” “On the Divide” was broadcast on POV just prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade, and “King Coal” was 2024’s POV season premiere and won the ASC Award for Best Cinematography. “The Program: Cons, Cults and Kidnapping” launched with over seven million views in its first week on Netflix, and the show sparked a federal investigation by the Senate Finance Committee. Fishbowl Films’ latest film, “BLINK,” about one family that embarks on an epic adventure after three of their children are diagnosed with an incurable eye condition, will premiere at the 2024 Telluride Film Festival and be released by National Geographic in late 2024. Becker is a recipient of the 2023 Dear Producer Award, a Sundance Documentary Creative Producing Fellow, and a member of the Producers Guild of America (PGA), the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA), the Television Academy and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

Melanie Miller, Producer

Melanie Miller is an Academy Award-winning producer and recipient of the 2020 Sundance Institute | Amazon Studios Nonfiction Producers Award with her producing partner, Diane Becker. Fishbowl Films, which she co-founded in 2009 with Becker, focuses on unique and diverse voices with an uncanny sensibility that shines a spotlight on timely and compelling issues. Most recently, Fishbowl was listed as a production company finalist for the 2024 SIMA Awards. Their documentary films include Sundance alums “Inventing Tomorrow” (POV), which was awarded a Peabody in 2019; “Whirlybird” (Mubi); and “Navalny (CNN Films | HBOMax), which won the U.S. Documentary Audience Award and the Festival Favorite at the 2022 Sundance Film Festival and awarded a DuPont, PGA, BAFTA and the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature. Additionally, their award-winning film “On the Divide” premiered on POV in April 2022, just prior to the overturning of Roe v. Wade. In November 2022, the deeply personal and heartfelt

“Stutz,” by Jonah Hill, launched on Netflix, receiving critical acclaim for an intimate portrait of active therapy surrounding one’s mental health. Recent credits also include the docuseries “Trial by Media” (Netflix), “Equal” (HBOMax) and “Marvel 616” (Disney+). “Maestra” had its world premiere at the 2023 Tribeca Film Festival and will be available on VOD in fall 2024. “The Program: Cons, Cults and Kidnapping” is at 100% on Rotten Tomatoes and has over seven million views in its first week on Netflix. Her latest film, “BLINK,” about a family traveling the world while grappling with the diagnosis that three of their four children have an incurable eye condition, will premiere at the 2024 Telluride Film Festival and be released by National Geographic Documentary Films in late 2024. Miller is a member of the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA), the Producers Guild of America (PGA), the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences (ATAS), and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS).

CREDITS

National Geographic Documentary Films Presents

In Association with MRC

A Fishbowl Films Production

In Association with EYESTEELFILM

BLINK

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DANIEL ROHER

Produced by

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AMAR-KALI

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SÉBASTIEN PELLETIER

MIA PELLETIER

LÉO PELLETIER

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Performed by Edith Lemay, Sébastien Pelletier, Mia Pelletier, Léo Pelletier, Colin Pelletier, Laurent Pelletier

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