

The Eight Faces of Jane

THE LIFE AND WORK OF JANE CHAMBERS
A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY ALISON McMAHAN

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[Home](#) > The 8 Faces of Jane - How it Began

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Jane and Beth's house as it looked at the time of Jane's death. In 1981-82 I was a playwriting student at Catholic University in Washington DC. I was looking for plays by women playwrights to read and study, but couldn't find too much out there, apart from Lillian Hellman and Sister Hroswitha. An actress friend of mine introduced me to the works of Jane Chambers. I was completely charmed by Chambers' sense of humor and the warmth in her writing. I was fortunate enough to see a performance of *Quintessential Image* at the Interart in New York City. As a playwright I found her work very inspiring.

Beth at *Bluefish Cove* in 1985 When I went to film school at New York University in 1983 I decided I wanted to make a documentary about Chambers. I contacted her publishers, and Beth Allen, her life partner and manager, wrote back and said that Jane Chambers had just passed away, but that she and Jane's other surviving friends liked the idea of a documentary, they thought that the process of reflection that goes into a film would help them recover from their loss.

Jane Chambers' Tombstone, reading *Warrior at Rest* So I went to Long Island and interviewed Jane's friends and shot footage of Jane's office, her home, and the places that inspired her plays. I was able to film that much at the time because of friends who volunteered as crew and because of borrowed equipment. Once I got that far production ground to a halt because of lack of funds. It was very difficult, in the early 80s, to raise funds for a film about a lesbian playwright from mainstream sources, and it was difficult for a non-lesbian director to get funds from sources that provided for gay productions. I was a very young filmmaker and eventually encountered so many obstacles that I put the project on hold.

Nevertheless, in the intervening twenty years, the project has never disappeared completely from my mind, and now I finally find myself in a position to finish it. It is especially important now to reflect on a pioneer like Jane Chambers because her work has had so much influence. A television series like *The L-Word* would not be possible without plays like *A Late Snow* or *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove*.

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