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Cameron Douglas talks drug addiction, Michael Douglas says Bloomberg 'my candidate' at writers fest

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Cameron Douglas, left, and his father Michael Douglas are photographed at the Ranch Mirage Writers Festival at the Rancho Mirage Library in Rancho Mirage, Calif., on Friday, January 31, 2020. Taya Gray/The Desert Sun

Actor Michael Douglas and his son, Cameron Douglas, gave two different presentations at the Rancho Mirage Writers Festival on Friday morning, with the younger calling for prison reform and his dad endorsing Michael Bloomberg for president in 2020.

Cameron Douglas wrote the memoir "Long Way Home," a tell-all about his life and struggles with drugs during his childhood, after completing a seven-year prison sentence for possession of half a pound of methamphetamine in 2016.

Early in the conversation, Rancho Mirage Writers Festival founder and moderator Jamie Kabler asked him about what happened in Spain in 2004, when his dad, Michael Douglas, received a phone call.

"He went to take the call about 100 feet away from where we were having lunch and I'll never forget the sound," Cameron Douglas said. "I didn't know what it was, but I realized it was human and it was my father, who had just gotten the news about my Uncle Eric who had overdosed."

Despite the news, and being told to be careful growing up by his parents with his Uncle Eric as an example, he never thought his life would be similar.

Cameron Douglas described being a talented football player and wrestler attending the Eaglebrook School, a junior boarding and day school in Deerfield, Mass., where he was caught smoking marijuana and kicked out. His father made a deal with the school for him to go back and finish, but he instead quit the football team, moved to Santa Barbara, Calif., and started skateboarding and fighting with local gangs.

"I was scrappy," he said. "Part of coming from my family, I always felt like I had to do something a little bit more than everyone else. If someone else was exhibiting crazy behavior in my peer group, I felt I had to push it further."

'There needs to be a new approach'

In the early days of his incarceration in Lewisburg, Penn., he said that he took advantage of the minimum security prison's lack of fences or walls, and began meeting his girlfriend on the property and continued to use drugs. He was then sent to the maximum security prison on the property. He read classical literature, self-help books and popular literature such as "Game of Thrones" series.

Throughout the session, he was interrupted by Kabler many times. As he began to discuss the experience of being placed in solitary confinement, Kabler cut him off, asking him how one gets food delivered to them in solitary, which upset the audience and one woman shouted, "Quit interrupting him!"



Cameron Douglas speaks at the Ranch Mirage Writers Festival at the Rancho Mirage Library in Rancho Mirage, Calif., on Friday, January 31, 2020. Taya Gray/The Desert Sun



Michael Douglas, left, and moderator Peter Bart give a presentation during the Ranch Mirage Writers Festival at the Rancho Mirage Library in Rancho Mirage, Calif., on Friday, January 31, 2020. Taya Gray/The Desert Sun

When asked what parents and grandparents can do if their loved ones are in the same position he was in with drug addiction, he said they should do everything they can, offer love and support, but there comes a breaking point and a tough reality parents and grandparents have to face.

"Addicts reach a point where they have to find themselves. There comes a point when there's nothing anyone can do for them, and they have to find their way or not," he said.

He also discussed how he had a broken femur for an entire week after being beaten by other inmates before he was given proper medical attention, and had a large blood clot forming in his leg that required emergency surgery. He said a new approach is needed in criminal justice.

"I think initially the structure in our prison system and the way they're run haven't changed in hundreds of years," he said. "There needs to be a new approach, and you see this approach in countries in Europe where criminal justice and incarceration are handled in a different way and the results speak for themselves. Prisons in this country treat the men and women in there like animals and then you start acting like an animal, but 90% of men and women in prison are coming home one day."

Michael says Bloomberg is 'my candidate'

Immediately following his son's session, Michael Douglas appeared with journalist and film producer Peter Bart as moderator to talk about his film career. His role as a producer of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" was a recurring subject after he discussed how he attached himself to the project through his father, Kirk Douglas.

Bart mentioned his mid-career work with actresses such as Demi Moore, Sharon Stone, Kathleen Turner and Jane Fonda in films where he was the victim and women were the aggressors. He noted the 1994 erotic thriller "Disclosure" as an example of a reversal of roles, with Michael as the victim of sexual harassment in the computer industry at the hands of Demi Moore's character.

"In the #MeToo era, could films of that sort be made and would those roles work for you?" Bart asked.

Michael Douglas said he hopes so given the subject matter of smart and successful women, but explained how hard it was to find a woman willing to play the role of Nurse Ratched in "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" in 1975 before Louise Fletcher accepted the role.

"Women didn't want to play the villain," he explained. "Male actors always want to play the villain and it's the best part. When we were casting, all these actresses turned the part down. I remember Anne Bancroft almost killing her husband one day at a party whacking him on the side of the head saying, 'You told me not to do that film!' We had five well-known actresses turn that role down before Louise Fletcher accepted the part and won an Oscar."

"I'm amazed we didn't catch more heat for that reversal of roles of having a woman boss harassing a man," he said.

Michael Douglas declared Michael Bloomberg as his favored presidential candidate when the subject turned to the 1995 film "The American President."

"He's my candidate," he said. "(Bloomberg) is one of the top mayors of New York City after his three terms. He's done amazing work on climate change, gun control, and people complain that he's so rich but he's given so much money to charitable groups. He's an excellent choice."