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Still Mine a quiet gem about unbreakable devotion: review

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Genevieve Bujold and James Cromwell portray a relationship that's powerfully tested in *Still Mine*, based on a true story.

By: [Peter Howell](#) Movie Critic, Published on Thu May 02 2013

Still Mine

Starring James Cromwell, Geneviève Bujold and Campbell Scott. Written and directed by Michael McGowan. 103 minutes. At Varsity, Sheppard Grande, Queensway and SilverCity Mississauga theatres. **PG**

The true measure of love is not counted in lines of poetry or bouquets of roses, as wonderful as these things are.

It's expressed in simple devotion, the determination to assist and remain with a loved one, no matter what.

This, I think, is the message of *Still Mine*, a small marvel of a film by Toronto writer/director Michael McGowan (*One Week*, *St. Ralph*) that quietly observes a love tested by infirmity and bureaucracy, becoming all the stronger for it.

Pairing James Cromwell and Geneviève Bujold in memorable roles, it was called *Still* when it premiered at TIFF last fall, later being named by a TIFF panel as one of [Canada's Top 10](#) films of 2012. Cromwell won Best Actor at the inaugural [Canadian Screen Awards](#) in March; Bujold should have won similar honours.

Still Mine is essentially a two-hander, gorgeously filmed in New Brunswick (and also Northern Ontario), and steeped in a sense of time and place for a true story set in the Maritimes but universal in appeal.

Cromwell plays 89-year-old Craig Morrison, a real Maritimes farmer and carpenter, recently deceased. Morrison ran afoul of government scolds after he decided to build a new home on his majestic Bay of Fundy property to better suit his wife Irene (Bujold), who was suffering from Alzheimer disease.

When we first meet Craig and Irene, they're still as fiercely independent as they've always been. Together they raised seven children by dint of hard work through cattle ranching, strawberry growing and whatever else was required to keep the home fires burning.

They're still fit (neither of them wears glasses) and frisky (the bed still bounces). But time is taking its toll. Craig reluctantly determines that ranching is no longer profitable (he sells his herd) and strawberries are no longer possible (he can't afford the refrigeration required by a new law).

He's not one to brood, however, even when circumstances dramatically worsen: Irene is becoming alarmingly forgetful and clumsy, and her condition is accelerating downwards. She can no longer negotiate stairs.

Craig decides to build her a single-level home, looking out over the bay, to ease her life for as long as she has left. He sets to the task with the skill and zeal of the master carpenter he's long been, schooled in the trade by his late father.

It's full steam ahead until the arrival one day of a righteous building inspector (Jonathan Potts), who tells Craig he's in violation of several laws regarding unapproved structures. The house faces demolition and Craig faces incarceration unless expensive and complicated red tape is attended to.

"Why would I need a permit?" Craig says, digging in his heels. "This is my home."

The irony is that Craig is building the house with an attention to detail that far exceeds National Building Code requirements. But bureaucracy doesn't heed logic, bureaucrats live to fuss, and Craig is the proverbial immovable object meeting an unstoppable force.

Two of his children (Julie Stewart and Rick Roberts), his lawyer (Campbell Scott, nicely underplaying) and a nosy pal (George R. Robertson) try to get Craig to ease up, but he's having none of it.

Therein lie the narrative basics of *Still Mine*, which is often funny and heartfelt at the same moment, as when Craig uses a cherished baseball, signed by Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, to make a point to a bemused judge.

But the movie is at its core a simple love story. It will likely make you think of [Amour](#) Michael Haneke's *Amour*, the recent Palme d'Or and Oscar winner starring Jean-Louis Trintignant and Emmanuelle Riva.

The two films beat as one heart in their expression of late-life devotion, but *Still Mine* has a luminosity all its own.

Correction - May 3, 2013: This article was edited from a previous version that misstated the given name of actor George R. Robertson.