

# Review 'I Am Cait' engenders genuine illumination and thought

---



**Mary McNamara**

LOS ANGELES TIMES

*mary.mcnamara@latimes.com*

---

JULY 24, 2015, 11:30 AM

**I**n one of my more twisted yet comforting interpretations of the universe, President Nixon flagrantly violated our Constitution so Gerald Ford could become president, bringing with him his amazing wife, Betty, who, by going public with her breast cancer and alcoholism, helped save millions of lives and irrevocably improved the world.

Similarly, I now believe the reason "Keeping Up With the Kardashians," "The Real Housewives," "19 Kids and Counting" and all the other reality programs that celebrate voyeurism, sanctimony, schadenfreude and general pettiness existed to create a platform for E!'s "I Am Cait."

Just as Lifetime's deep, dark reality satire "UnReal" seemed set to rule the summer, "I Am Cait," which premieres on E! channel Sunday, arrives to transcend its own genre in another way: genuine illumination.

The series opens with an episode so nuanced and thoughtful, so quietly moving and genuine, it's almost impossible to believe it is made by many of the same people who helped build a family empire off the infamy of a young woman's sex tape.

Caitlyn Jenner sets the tone, and articulates her intentions, right away. As if in answer to the high-glam, meticulously groomed imagery of a recent Vanity Fair cover story, she enters tousled and pale, blinking into the relentless light of early morning after a night made sleepless by the pressure of what she is about to do.

"Am I going to project the right image," she says. "I hope I get it right. I just hope I get it right."

Jenner says she has never been more excited about her life, and it shows. She often appears giddy

with relief and deeply determined to give voice to those who don't have one. She can't speak for them, she quickly adds, determined to get it right, "but I am an expert on my own life."

Giddiness and deep determination can sometimes get in each other's way — the premiere ends with Jenner visiting the parents of a transgender teen who has committed suicide, an event that, given the celebratory nature of the previous minutes, might have been reserved for another episode.

But Jenner is eager for audiences to understand how important acceptance is, particularly for teens. And if certain moments seem more carefully crafted and less "spontaneous" than the genre normally demands, that's the point. After floundering personally and professionally, after being pursued by rumor and paparazzi, Jenner wants to prove that a person can take control of her own life under the most potentially fraught circumstances.

The pilot is anchored by a visit from Jenner's mother, Esther, and her two sisters, who come to meet Caitlyn for the first time. Everyone is appropriately nervous and anxiously reassuring, with hugs, compliments and a few choked back tears. There's an encounter with a therapist, ostensibly to help Jenner's family.

The therapist's only real contribution is that, at one point, she fumbles her pronouns, using "he" instead of "she," to which Jenner replies "that's quite all right," making everyone feel a bit better — see? Even a therapeutic expert in transgender issues fumbles the pronouns!

Not that Esther is quite ready for a pronoun switch. Like a mother who has been told repeatedly that Kimberly now goes by Solange, Esther continues to refer to Jenner as Bruce.

"It's going to take some getting used to," she says several times.

A surprise visit by Jenner's daughter, Kylie, and a less-surprising drop-in by step-daughter Kim with husband Kanye West, will no doubt be the most talked about of scenes. Not surprisingly, Kim, refusing to take her coat off because she's "huge" with child, momentarily steals the show.

She sweeps in to inspect Jenner's new clothes — Kim has been "secretly dying" over earlier fashion choices — and, oh, the hilarity when it is discovered that Jenner and her ex-wife, Kris, have the same Tom Ford dress.

It's a regrettable moment, and the only time "I Am Cait" feels cheap — let's see who wears it better? hahaha — which is worrisome as one assumes the Kardashians will be making their presence more deeply felt as the eight episodes roll out.

Much better television could be found in the scenes between Jenner and her sister, Pam, a woman so lovely and sensible that on meeting Kanye asks, "So what's with the untied shoelaces?" It makes

you want to kiss her.

Jenner and Pam play tennis together and box up Jenner's remaining men's clothing.

With Pam, Jenner seems more at ease, less stressed about talking points and the desire to be perfect. She tells Pam that this was the first time Kylie had met Caitlyn, and that her daughter Kendall still hasn't come over. For all the public support, many family members seem to be staying away, she adds.

Jenner worries that people will say one thing to her face, and the cameras, but then feel another way after they've gone. Pam nods and murmurs, finds the hangers and folds the clothes.

For a long wonderful moment, they are just two sisters standing together, and they could be talking about anything.

-----

'I Am Cait'

Where: E!

When: 8 p.m. Sunday

Rating: TV-14-DL (may be unsuitable for children under the age of 14 with advisories for suggestive dialogue and coarse language)

**SIGN UP FOR OUR ENTERTAINMENT NEWSLETTERS:**

**Indie Focus: Your field guide to only good movies**

**Classic Hollywood: A weekly email celebrating the Golden Age of Hollywood**

**Essential Arts & Culture: A curated look at SoCal's wonderfully vast and complex arts world**

Copyright © 2015, Los Angeles Times