

MOVING PICTURES

THE STORIES BEHIND THE MOVIES

Dear Zachary, A Letter to a Son About His Father (documentary)

Reviewed by Elliot V. Kotek

(from the 2008 Cinequest Film Festival)

Director/Writer: Kurt Kuenne

Starring: David Bagby, Kathleen Bagby, Kurt Kuenne

With a movie that moves you long after the end credits and, I hope, moves you to action over depression, director/writer/editor/producer/etc. Kurt Kuenne has crafted a documentary that began as a legacy of a friend in the form of a letter to that friend's child, and that is powerful enough to endure as legend. Of course, the story is not that simple - the friend, Andrew Bagby, was murdered, shot five times by a one-time lover who couldn't accept their break-up, and it wasn't until four months after the murder (in which time the murderer had fled the country) that they found out she was pregnant with the deceased's child.

The filming that follows not only serves to preserve Bagby's memory, but to track the proceedings of Bagby's parents to: a) bring the murderer back to the U.S. to face trial, and b) to try to obtain custody of their grandchild growing up the spitting image of their slain son. And for those who don't know the rest of the story, it's best if I just tell you that you must see this movie. The music and editing styles used by Kuenne to tell his story are abrasive and may leave you angry, but the might of that emotional manipulation on this occasion may well be a good thing - and for sure seems like it's an honest expression of what the filmmaker, himself, must have been feeling throughout his production process. You simply must see this film.

That it will receive a release of sorts later this year is not only deserved, but would have been demanded had it not been forthcoming. Following the film's initial premiere at Slamdance in January, Cinequest Film Festival's programmers have procured what will no doubt be one of the documentaries to be deliberated over when the year's awards season arrives. And, with many in the San Jose audience having met and known the subjects of the film, Cinequest's sold-out screenings of the film will not easily be forgotten. It left me looking for the impossibility of marking the film above the highest grade available on the festival's voting ballot.

Dear Zachary, A Letter to a Son About His Father is the sort of documentary that, in delivering its debilitating news, ensures that every person in the theater leaves their seat with the strongest reminder to continue to cherish those they love, and to reminisce without mercy for those they've loved and lost.

The film has its own website, where you can keep up with screening times and other information - <http://dearzachary.com/> - but I strongly recommend that you avoid reading too much about the film or its facts beforehand to enable Kuenne's work to inform and involve you of this un-believable series of events. Visit Cinequest to find out about immediate screening times in San Jose, CA at <http://www.cinequest.org/>.