



STEPHEN OSMAN Los Angeles Times

**DOCUMENTARY'S MAKER:** Kuenne, above, was a friend of Dr. Andrew Bagby, slain in 2001 in Pennsylvania.

## THE INDIE EYE

# A friend's tribute to a good man

Kurt Kuenne hopes his documentary 'Dear Zachary' can influence Canadian laws on bail and extradition.

SUSAN KING

By all accounts, Dr. Andrew Bagby was a wonderful guy — a young family-practice physician with a terrific personality and loving parents, relatives and friends.

But on Nov. 5, 2001, the 28-year-old Bagby was shot to death in a parking lot at a park in Derry Township, Pa., near the hospital where he worked. He was wounded five times — in the face, the chest, twice in the buttocks and in the back of the head — with a .22-caliber handgun.

The prime suspect was his ex-girlfriend, Dr. Shirley Turner. Possessing a dual passport, she fled to St. John's in Canada's Newfoundland, and soon announced she was pregnant with Bagby's child. She named their son Zachary.

Bagby's oldest friend, filmmaker Kurt Kuenne, initially wanted to make a film to honor his slain buddy that would be for family, friends and the future recipients of the scholarships created in Bagby's name at his workplace in Pennsylvania and his alma mater, the medical school at Memorial University of Newfoundland. But after the birth of Zachary in 2002, Kuenne changed directions and decided the documentary would be a perfect way for the little boy to get to know his father.

As it turned out, "Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His' Father," which opens Friday in New York and Nov. 7 in Los Angeles and Chicago, ended up centering on Bagby's resolute, loving parents, David and Kathleen.

The couple left everything behind in their home in Sunnyvale, Calif., and moved to St. John's after Turner was arrested there but was then released on bail — her psychiatrist partly paid it — and also was given custody of Zachary as she awaited extradition to the U.S.

Fearing for the boy's safety, David and Kathleen Bagby attempted to win custody of him, but they kept running into judicial roadblocks in Canada. While they were trying to persuade the system that Turner was unstable (she had attempted suicide when a previous boyfriend broke up with her), the Bagbys were beset with the other devastating tragedy. This forms yet another major turning point in the film.

Though the movie has been shown at Slamdance in Utah and other festivals in the U.S., the target audience for "Dear Zachary," says Kuenne, is the



File photo

**PAL:** Bagby, above, had known Kuenne since boyhood. Kuenne's film opens Nov. 7 in Los Angeles.

Canadian voting public, which he hopes will change the bail and extradition laws in Canada after seeing the movie.

"We have had a lot of film festival screenings in Canada," he says. "I did a letter-writing campaign to all 400 members of the Parliament when the film had its premiere back in April, inviting them to come to a screening."

A senator from Alberta, he says, recently caught the film in Edmonton. "I haven't talked to him yet, but he spoke to Andrew's father after the screening. The audience gave it two standing ovations."

Kuenne also says he's been receiving a steady stream of e-mails from people who have seen the movie. "I have had several people say it changed their perspective on life and made them avert thoughts of suicide because they saw the impact one person can have like Andrew. They said, 'I feel like I want to go on and be somebody like him.'"

He recalls recently receiving a note from a 21-year-old woman who saw the trailer for the film on YouTube. "She wrote to me and said, 'I am pretty certain I was the last patient of your friend,'" Kuenne says.

"She was suffering from anorexia and depression, and she bounced around between seven and eight different doctors and nobody seemed to care. She kind of lost hope.

"Then your friend walked into the room and the way he looked at me, I suddenly knew this was the person who could heal me," Kuenne says, quoting from the note. "I felt for the first time I was a human being."

The next day, she learned Bagby had been murdered.

"Even meeting him for 15 minutes," Kuenne says, "it devastated her that someone could do that to the person she was certain was her healer."

King is a Times staff writer.  
susan.king@latimes.com