

# Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His Father (2008)

reviewed by  
Steve Rhodes

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DEAR ZACHARY: A LETTER TO A SON ABOUT HIS FATHER  
A film review by Steve Rhodes  
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RATING (0 TO \*\*\*\*): \*\*\*\*

Sometimes the justice system goes insane, sometimes it just is insane and sometimes it's both, as it is shown here. In the documentary DEAR ZACHARY: A LETTER TO A SON ABOUT HIS FATHER, we witness the Canadian judicial system as it utterly fails past and future victims of crimes. With liberal judges and laws, the system bends over backwards to protect the rights of the criminals, while ignoring the rights of the victims of violent crimes, as well as the rights of the children under the law's protection and. Yes, this is the same legal system whose virtues Michael Moore extolled in BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE.

But, as you watch the system grind on, you may be thinking of another story, that of Charles Dickens' BLEAK HOUSE and the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case in it that appeared as if it would literally never end, as the judges would only meet to decide to meet again another time. Things weren't decided, they were just continually postponed ad infinitum.

DEAR ZACHARY: A LETTER TO A SON ABOUT HIS FATHER follows the horrible death of Dr. Andrew Bagby and the equally terrible events that followed. A wonderfully gregarious guy who looked and acted a bit like Jack Black, Andrew left behind a very long list of friends who miss him dearly.

Andrew was killed by his ex-girlfriend, Dr. Shirley Turner, a psychotic stalker who refused to go away. Much older than Andrew, forty vs. twenty-eight, and never having landed a practicing position as a doctor, Shirley is a quintessential whack job, whom we see and hear in numerous clips and audio transcripts. Since Andrew is found dead shortly after reluctantly meeting Shirley in a remote Pennsylvania park and since the gun and bullets used are the exact same types as Shirley's, there is never any real doubt that she is the killer.

But, as she drives all over the U.S., leaving voice messages on Andrew's answering machine, as a way of appearing innocent, she is not arrested, so she flees to Canada, where she used to live.

The film is by the phenomenal writer, director and composer Kurt Kuenne. I've fallen in love for many of his films, including the wonderfully entertaining DRIVE-IN MOVIE MEMORIES. Kurt was a lifelong friend of Andrew, whom he met in the first grade at St. Andrews School in

Saratoga, California. The title of the picture refers to one of many shocks that occur after Andrew's death. Shirley announces that she is pregnant with Andrew's baby, whom she names Zachary. Kurt then quite literally travels the world interviewing Andrew's relatives and friends, so that Kurt can give Zachary memories of his father, whom his mother has killed. This whole part of the film is a real labor of love but goes on just a bit too long. The film is at its best when it follows the horribly out of control case.

When we meet Zachary, we see that he is the spitting image of his father. He even acts like his dad, with his father's warm and generous gestures. Andrew's parents, David and Kathleen, sell their house and liquidate their assets so that they can move to Canada in order to be near Zachary and to see that Shirley is brought to justice. Shirley shot five slugs into Andrew, but the Canadian justice system is almost as bad as she in the way they coddle Shirley and ignore her threat to Zachary's safety.

Although the evidence is significant and compelling, the extradition hearings drag on forever. Typical is the week in which they meet, argue for a little while as to whether the French translation is correct (everyone in the case speaks only English, so far as we know) and then decide to set a date a few weeks later to meet again. And, to add insult to injury, when Shirley is out of money for lawyers, she writes to the judge, asking to be released on bail. The judge tells her exactly what to write to him to get released. She does this and is freed without having to put up any money.

When Andrew's parents argue that Shirley is a real danger to a Zachary, the prosecution says that leaving Shirley out on bail is fine with them and even makes sense. The reason? They believe that Shirley was dangerous to only one person (Andrew), and, since she has already murdered him, she poses no threat to anyone else. Not only is this argument obviously specious, but, if the prosecution had bothered to do any checking, they would have found out that Shirley had a history of violent threats and of stalking others. One of Shirley's judges even goes so far as to apologize to her in front of Andrew's parents, saying quite seriously that he is sorry that the Canadian justice system is inconveniencing her.

And it gets worse.

Bring lots of Kleenex and prepare to be equally angry and emotionally drained as you watch real, so-called justice in action. This film will be one of the best you're likely to see this year.

DEAR ZACHARY: A LETTER TO A SON ABOUT HIS FATHER runs 1:35.

The film is being shown as part of San Jose's Cinequest Film Festival ([www.Cinequest.org](http://www.Cinequest.org)), which runs February 27-March 9, 2008.

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