

# 'Dear Zachary'

A film about the lives of Andrew Bagby and Zachary Turner is almost done; if the response to its trailer is any indication, the documentary may help achieve what the filmmaker seeks — system reform

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The Telegram

Kurt Kuenne often has to remind himself Andrew Bagby is dead.

Since Christmas, he has spent every waking hour working on a film about Bagby, a boyhood friend found shot to death in November 2001 in Pennsylvania.

"In a way, editing this movie has kind of been like working with him every day," says Kuenne, who is based in Burbank, Calif.

"It kind of kept him alive in a strange sort of way for me. It's kind of a shock to remember, 'Oh yeah, he's not living anymore,' because I've been looking at him every day."

That has meant no shortage of emotions.

"Almost no day goes by in the editing of it where I don't tear up at least once."

The hard work, which included sifting through 300 hours of film and 2,000 pictures, is almost done though.

The award-winning filmmaker is ready to enter a draft of the documentary — titled "Dear Zachary, a letter to a son about his father" — in various film festivals.

He'll likely try to cut out seven minutes to make it two hours even, but the only things left to tackle are sound and music.

Kuenne started the documentary to honour Bagby.

When he learned of Zachary, his late friend's son, he decided to make the film for the child.

But then, in August 2003, Zachary's mother, Shirley Turner, took the 13-month-old boy's life as well as her own in a murder-suicide in the waters of Conception Bay South.

The boy's death changed the film's focus again.

Through honouring Andrew and Zachary, Kuenne hopes the movie prompts bail reform.

When she killed herself and her son, Turner was out on bail and faced extradition to the U.S. to stand trial for Bagby's murder.

"I think (bail reform) would be wonderful," Kuenne says. "I hope it will save more lives in the future, to prevent what happened to Zachary from happening again."

Bagby's parents, David and Kate, have also been pushing for system reform. David recently released a book, "Dance with the Devil," which pulls no punches in questioning why Turner was allowed custody of Zachary.

It appears a lot of people support the movie's mandate and want the story told. Kuenne's film has been funded through donations.

A big reason for the backing is a powerful 10-minute trailer (see below).

The promo has been viewed by tens of thousands online and was recently rated by a reviewer as one of the Top 10 films on YouTube.

Kuenne says the strategy behind the trailer was to give people, especially those considering a donation, a taste of the movie.

The response has been overwhelming.

"More sort of impassioned and emotional than anything I've ever been involved in."

Still, he feels the finished film is "20 times" more powerful than the trailer.

"There's some pretty tough stuff that I decided not to put in the trailer, but I decided to put in the film. I'm interested to see how people react. There are some points when I'm like, 'I hope people don't have to leave the theatre.'

"But the stuff that happened is pretty bad. In order to cover it honestly, you put it in there."

Kuenne hopes to raise more funds to help with things like marketing and DVD runs.

In the coming weeks, he will enter "Dear Zachary" in various festivals around the world, including Sundance and Toronto.

He hopes the latter picks it up, since much of the story "went down" in Canada. The ultimate goal is to have a distributor circulate it widely. Any proceeds will go to scholarships at the Memorial University Medical School, where Bagby studied, and Latrobe Hospital in Pennsylvania, where he practised.

Whether or not a distributor takes it, Kuenne expects "Dear Zachary" will show in this province within a year.

"I hope it will get seen a lot in Newfoundland, actually."

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