The Telegram

MSNBC picks up Bagby film

Filmmaker says he wants to draw attention to Canada's bail system

Movies · Entertainment

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MSNBC will launch a new films division with "Dear Zachary," a documentary about Dr. Andrew Bagby and his infant son — their lives and deaths.

The U.S.-based cable news giant is starting MSNBC Films to support films during festival runs and theatrical releases before airing them on TV.

Kurt Kuenne, the California-based filmmaker who made "Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son About His Father," was thrilled the network chose his documentary to kick off the initiative.
It buoyed him that the work will now be seen by so many.

"I'm very, very happy," he told The Telegram from California Wednesday afternoon.

"Dear Zachary" will air on MSNBC later this fall following its theatrical release, which is still being negotiated, but will include week-long runs in New York and Los Angeles.

Kuenne started making the documentary after Bagby, a close childhood friend and a Memorial University med school graduate, was found shot to death in a Pennsylvania park in November 2001.
As he put the film together, Shirley Turner, the Newfoundland woman accused of the murder, announced she was carrying Bagby's baby.
Kuenne then decided to dedicate the documentary to the child, Zachary.

But in August 2003, Turner took the then 13month-old's life as well as her own in the waters off Conception Bay South.
At the time, she was out on bail and faced extradition to the United States to stand trial for Babgy's murder.

"Dear Zachary" details the lives and murders of both Bagby and his son.

It also shows the efforts of Bagby's parents to improve a system they feel facilitated their grandson's murder.

The documentary premiered this past January at Slamdance, a prestigious alternative film festival in Park City, Utah, and negotiations with MSNBC have been ongoing since then.

The film has also played at a number of festivals following Slamdance, garnering numerous awards and receiving a rousing response.

At Hot Docs in Toronto, for example, audiences chose it as the third favourite out of the festival's 172 documentaries.

"It has literally gotten standing ovations at pretty much every screening that we've had," said Kuenne, "particularly when Kate and David Bagby (Andrew's parents) are present, it goes on a little bit longer."
A goal in making the documentary was to help improve Canada's bail laws.

To help achieve that, before "Dear Zachary" screened at Hot Docs in April, Kuenne wrote members of Parliament and asked to show them the movie.
Kuenne has received a positive response from some MPs and now hopes to screen it when the House of Commons reconvenes this fall.
He thinks the MSNBC deal can only help in his quest to change this country's parole system.

"I think it's the best situation that could happen to the movie because it is going to enable it to get seen by the kind of people who, if they are as upset as I am about the events depicted in the movie, that they'll actually speak out and write their members of Parliament and demand change."
Kuenne noted that proceeds from MSNBC contract — as with all money the movie makes — will go the Dr. Andrew Bagby and son Zachary Bursary at Memorial University and Dr. Bagby Scholarship at Latrobe Hospital in Pennsylvania.

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