



WFF Review :

**Dear Zachary : A Letter to a Son about His
Father** Posted by Simon Laperriere at 12:43pm.

It is impossible not to be moved by *Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son about His Father*. Director Kurt Kuenne delivers a personal and intimate documentary about a lost friend, a cinematographic diary about a family tormented by a devastating tragedy. The film is also a fantastic achievement on a technical point of view with its fantastic use of stock footages that explores a heavy past, searching answers that could explain the nature of an unthinkable crime.

Ladies and gentlemen, what we have here is called a masterpiece.

After learning his childhood buddy Andrew Bagby has been murdered by his ex-girlfriend, Kurt Kuenne decides to do a commemorative film on the victim. He gathers all the movies they made together when they were young and records interviews with the many people Andrew met in his life. Kuenne's initial goal is to discover everything he didn't know about his pal, but his plans change when he learns the murderer is pregnant from his friend. The project suddenly becomes a letter to a child about the father he'll never meet. The documentary also follows David and Kathleen, the kid's grand-parents, as they struggle to get the baby away from his dangerous mother. The courageous couple is ready to do anything to give their grandson a happy childhood, even if it means raising him with Andrew's assassin.

What makes this film so fascinating is how the events happened while Kuenne was shooting. With its clever editing, the director travels constantly through past and present, between archival footages coming from various sources and new images. Those alternations are brilliant. Anytime one of Andrew's traits is described, Kuenne will find a

clip showing it to us. Also, with all the events going on, some seemingly happy footages suddenly unveil a terrifying new face when placed in a new context. There is no sense of objectivity on the way events are presented to us because we're always kept aware of the filmmaker's presence either by his voice-over or choice of clips. The doc could be considered manipulative, but it serves an important cause with such good intentions it becomes hard to dismiss it.

But beyond its *mise en scène*, *Dear Zachary* succeeds as a universal story on the power of love, friendship and family. David and Kathleen are example of perseverance as they stand in front of any atrocities they have to fear. They never ruminate on their sad situation and prefer to take action. Taking care of Zachary with his mother is a splendid act of courage few people would be ready to do. Kuenne's deeply personal approach to his subject gives the audience a emotive portrait of an extraordinary everyday man. In only 90 minutes, we get to meet Andrew through recollections, making us realized how much he affected the lives of everyone around him, up to a point where the loss of someone we never actually met becomes unbearable. You will have tears in your eyes during the film's entire length.

David and Kathleen were at the screening I attended and explained that their quest for justice is far from over. Hopefully, this documentary will give them the mediatic exposure needed and will force more people to reconsider the judicial system. If cinema can really change someone's life, Kurt Kuenne did just that.