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Filmtipp: Excerpt from review: *The Final Gift offers valuable insights into one victim's feelings and her family and is for anyone in the field of restorative justice works, a remarkable film.* Valerie French, TOA Magazine

Wir stellen vor: Introducing Therese Bartholomew (Q & A)

How would you briefly introduce yourself? I am an inspirational speaker, restorative justice educator, writer and filmmaker who draws upon personal experience to connect with audiences and create workshops for victims, offenders, and communities. I feel the most “in my skin” speaking and advocating for justice and inviting audiences to reconsider how we “do” justice in our country and around the world. I strongly believe that one person - one story - can genuinely affect change.

What was it like to make the film? Making the film was without question the most challenging thing I have ever done. Frankly, had I known the barriers I would face – financial, political, personal - I likely would not have pursued the path. It was my naiveté that drove the film – my belief that yes, we will find the money to make this happen; yes, my brother’s killer will be open to meeting me; yes, the prison will let me in for the meeting; yes, the prison will allow cameras, and on and on. The most challenging part of making the film was that there was no escape from it – I was the film and the film was me. There was no

separation, no setting it down, and no walking away. So many times my husband and I both thought, “this story might destroy us.” It was a hard road for a marriage and for friendships. Ultimately, I felt moved, called to tell a story, and although there were many “I quit” moments in the seven year journey to complete the project, faith and perseverance, along with a supportive and encouraging family, crew, and group of friends, helped see the film to fruition.



What is it like knowing that the audience sees intimate details of your life? It was, and still is, really quite awful to allow an audience to see the intimate details of my life. One thing I knew from the initial “I’ll make a film” was that I would have to be 100% real, vulnerable, and raw in every moment of the project. I think that vulnerability shows in the finished product and in reality I think it is the key ingredient. If we do allow our guard to come down, there is no opportunity for genuine connections to others. I wanted to connect. I wanted audience members to see themselves in me and in my family members. That “seeing” would be impossible without the willingness to open myself up and say, “Here I am world. Here is how broken, how grieved, how lost I am, and here is the path I am willing to walk to somehow recreate self.” I believe in the power of personal stories, but we take risks sharing; we risk being criticized; we risk feeling self-involved. Any artist can relate to this – the fear – how will people “see” me, accept or reject me; what will they (the audience) perceive as my motivation? Unfortunately, that fear doesn’t end because the story or the art continues to live on in the world. It is scary, scary stuff, but at the end of the day all any of us can do is be true to ourselves, to our calls and our causes, and then pray for the best.

Has there been a change in your own self evaluation through the film work? Interestingly, I look back over the years of the film project (more than 7 years total), and during that time so many things of life happened – grief filled our house; my husband’s job relocated him while I stayed to go to graduate school; I wrote a book; we got custody of my husband’s four

children, and so on. So, I look back and think, “wow, who was that woman, and how in the world did she balance all of that and not go crazy?!” I guess the crazy part might still be questionable. But truly, more than anything, what I realize is that I am capable of unconditional forgiveness. I am capable of sincere compassion even for someone who damaged my family and me so terribly. I am capable of managing all of “stuff” of life in the midst. My belief, though is that this is the point of the film and of the path I’ve travelled since my brother’s death – WE are ALL capable. We are ALL capable of great damage and great repair; we are capable of unconditional forgiveness or holding anger bitterly for years; we are capable of seeing the humanity in others IF we are willing to acknowledge our own broken humanity.

Would you unconditionally recommend a VOM to anyone involved in a serious criminal offence? Absolutely not. There are many things to consider and questions to be asked prior to VOM/VOD (dialogue). VOM/VOD is a process and should be respected as such; if the process is done correctly, there will be meetings that simply do not occur – for good reason, VOM/VOD may not be for every situation. First, VOM/VOD is a victim-driven/victim-centered process, so considering the needs of the victim is critical. Questions might include: What does the victim need and can those needs be met by participating in this process? What are the victim’s goals for the meeting and can those goals be met? Does the victim have a support system in place? Then, will the offender be willing to address those needs and attempt to meet the goals. The offender must first accept responsibility for what he or she has done. Safe guards must be in place to protect the victim from revictimization and yes, even to protect the offender. It is critical that both parties have a full understanding of why he/she want to participate and be at a place to accept what the meeting brings.

I believe VOD’s offer a much needed space for victims to come to a place of healing and for offenders to have an opportunity for personal accountability. It allows for both parties to see the “other” and come to a great understanding of “self.” VOD’s should be offered readily but not initiated without great care for both parties – victim and offender.

What will you be doing in ten years?

Best case scenario: Traveling internationally to speak about faith, forgiveness, and the role of restorative justice in my life - and seeing a real impact.

Worst case scenario: I can’t really imagine a worst case scenario. I believe in the best.

Name three things that you believe others appreciate in you.

1. My ability to empathize and willingness to be involved in the lives of people no matter where they are in life.
2. My passion and effort for real and sustainable societal change.
3. My understanding and vision of an intimately connected humanity – we are all responsible for the welfare of one another – we are a true brother/sisterhood; regardless of race/ethnicity, religion affiliation, political perspective there is no “other.”

With which famous person would you like to go out for a meal with and why? There are many historical figures long gone that I would love to share a meal with – Ghandi, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa – but I’ll go with a real possibility – President Obama. I would love the opportunity to talk one-on-one with the President regarding the issues that plague our current justice system. For such an “advanced” country, we lag behind so many others in how we “do” justice in this country. We have a serious incarceration problem, which I believe to be in most cases routed in other systematic problems that somehow we have chosen to ignore. We have issues of literacy, substance abuse, mental illness, childhood & domestic abuse, chronic homelessness, and extreme racial and socio-economic disparities feeding our corrections system. We, as Americans, on many levels choose to ignore this growing problem unless we are somehow directly impacted. I would love to be a part of an impact awareness campaign in the US. I think our president is the key to opening this important dialogue – a dialogue that would lead us to direct action and much needed reform.

What is the most important item in your office? A photo of my brother and me at my college graduation reminds me that he is always present and that achieving is possible no matter the obstacles faced.

What does your perfect day begin with? A really good cup of coffee and a gratitude list (even on days when I’m not feeling particularly grateful!).

What is your personal motto in life?

Do not judge others; you do not know what life they have lived to become who they are.