NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Sundance is full of inspirational films and people

Sr. Rose Pacatte | Jan. 23, 2013 NCR Today
Sundance Film Festival 2013

Editor's note: Sr. Rose Pacatte is at the Sundance Film Festival, which runs through Sunday. This entry chronicles her experiences Jan. 20. Read all of Sr. Rose's Sundance entries here[1].

As the films continue to premiere and the voting for audience awards moves forward, it occurs to me that Sundance is a place you don't want to come unless you are willing to have your worldview questioned. Some will argue that Sundance has a reputation for a liberal agenda, and this is somewhat true if your lens is fixed on the political. But if your lens is made up of human stories about people's ethical and moral choices as well as the subtle religious and overtly spiritual themes, there is much to like about Sundance. Throw in some other films that are just "out there," such as Michael Winterbottom's "The Look of Love" [2] about Paul Raymond, the Hugh Hefner of the UK, and you will have a positive Sundance experience.

It's not easy to navigate the terrain in Park City, Utah. Sidewalks and roads have slush and ice, and there are long distances between venues that discourage walking except for the most sure-footed among us. Did I mention that this city sits at 8,000 feet above sea level, give or take? Lots of water, hand and face lotion, and sunglasses are a must. To offset any discomfort, are the more than 1,300 volunteers who take tickets, lead people from the white waiting tents into theaters, answer questions, and get you on the right bus. I can say this because I dress down for film festivals, so people don't know I'm a nun; these volunteers and bus drivers are helpful and gracious to everyone. The buses kneel down and though I might have to remind the driver in case he or she doesn't see my cane (I have multiple sclerosis), they lower the front step willingly. Sundance is notorious for the long lines, even for people with tickets, and sometimes you have to wait and snake through the queues. Yet if you ask for a chair, the volunteers do everything they can to find one, then let you take a short cut and use the elevator if one is available.

After Sunday Mass today at the beautiful St. Mary of the Assumption Church in Park City, I needed to go to The Temple Theater (a synagogue has converted space) across a very large street. I asked a woman in the vestibule taking care of coffee and donuts if she could speed me across in her SUV (everyone has a large vehicle here, it seems), and she graciously agreed. After, it was getting late to arrive at another venue, and a volunteer at the bus stop offered to drive me in his car. He told me that all the volunteers, who come from near and far to work at the festival, want to make Sundance a good experience for everyone. I made it.

On the bus this afternoon, someone started talking about the excellent and moving documentary "Which Way Is the Front Line from Here? [3]" about the life and death of photojournalist Tim Hetherington (1970-2011), and random folks started commenting. A young woman near me asked why I was at the festival, and it turned out she was Catholic and a filmmaker, Theresa Loong from New York. Her Taiwan-born father served in the U.S. military during World War II and was a prisoner of war in Japan. Her film documented his wartime experiences and memories, so Tim Hetherington's story resonated with her. I am typing this at the house she and several other filmmakers and journalists have rented until it is time for the next film in three hours. These young people are mostly Asian and are making dumplings for an early celebration for Chinese New Year, and they invited me

to partake. Yum.

Here are more reviews of Sundance films:

Which Way Is the Frontline From Here? The Life and Time of Tim Hetherington **[3]**
Documentary directed by Sebastian Junger
80 minutes
(The documentary premieres April 14 on HBO.)

Hetherington was a British photojournalist who documented the faces of war. It was not the battle that attracted him; it was the people. Most people will know Tim from the 2010 Oscar-nominated documentary he made with Sebastian Junger, "Restrepo," about their year filming one U.S. Army unit in Afghanistan. Sadly, Hetherington was killed with his colleague Chris Hondros in a battle in Libya during the Arab spring movement in April 2011. He wasn't going to go back to war zones after Afghanistan, but found he could not stay away.

This film is no ordinary tribute to Tim from his friends and colleagues headed by Sebastian Junger ("The Perfect Storm"); it is a celebration of his life that examines Tim's interest in the people in conflict areas; the theater of war as evidenced by rebels and soldiers in Liberia; on why he did what he did and why he kept going back into danger zones.

During the question-and-answer portion, the producer, Tim's friend and colleague James Brabazon, said Tim's photo and video work was a way to witness to the human cost and experience of war. Then Brabazon testified to Tim's honesty and utter integrity as a man. I asked if Tim was religious, and Brabazon said he was Catholic, though he never spoke about his religion. I ran into Tim's father, William, afterward and told him I had asked the question about religion and that I was a Catholic sister. He smiled broadly and said, "He went to all Jesuit schools." When you watch the film, you realize that Tim's worldview and vision about humanity did not come from nothing, but from a warm family life and excellent education.

This is a film that will move and inspire. I especially appreciated Tim's words on his art and how he integrated this into his view of humanity. He was a man who cared, who questioned violence and the male soldier's psychology of war and bonding. Be sure to catch the premiere of this film April 17 on HBO.

Ain't Them Bodies Saints? **[4]**
Feature directed by David Lowery, starring Rooney Mara and Casey Affleck
90 min.

Ruth Guthrie (Mara) walks quickly down a Texas country road, followed by Bob Guthrie (Affleck), who sweet-talks her into returning to the broken-down farmhouse shack they call home. She refuses at first, then when Bob promises her a better life, she tells him she is with child. Bob is thrilled.

To get that better life, Bob, Ruth and the son of a man named Skerritt (Keith Carradine), are outlaws. When the police catch up with them, there is a shootout at the farmhouse. Their partner is killed, and Ruth shoots deputy Patrick Wheeler (Ben Foster). Bob and Ruth are arrested, and their false confession gets Ruth acquitted. Skerritt wants to protect Ruth and her little girl and provides a home for her. Skerritt is an interesting character who seems to have fostered the criminal careers of Bob and his own son.

Four years later, Bob escapes from prison and makes his way back to Ruth and the child he has never seen. This is when we find out the extent of his network and realize something he never does: He has a maladaptive personality disorder that is dangerous and threatening. Ruth is conflicted about the news of Bob's escape. Someone will have to die; make that other outlaws who come after Bob for the way he treated them.

This is a beautifully rendered film that takes place in the early 1960s, if you go by the make of the cop cars. Its vision, from writer/director David Lowery, is narrow and fine, but ultimately it is a vehicle for these four key performances, especially Affleck, who plays menacing very well. I liked Mara, too; she is vulnerable and strong and never overdoes her role of an uneducated woman with a conscience she cannot quite embrace.

The only meaning I discerned was great sadness for possibilities denied, harmful parenting that indulged rather than guided, and unrelenting consequences for choices that were never going to lead to freedom in the first place. Then, of course, the film shows that Lowery is not only a capable storyteller, but also gifted.

The Square (Al Midan) [5]
U.S./Egyptian documentary directed by Jehane Noujaim
90 minutes

This startling documentary came to life because one woman (Noujaim) was in the right place at the right time with a video camera. It was soon confiscated as the movement to oust President Hosni Mubarak grew and the military response escalated during the people's revolution of January 2011 in Tehrir Square, Cairo. Noujaim found a smaller digital camera, identified leaders among the people and with her small crew, followed them for two years as the revolution spiraled, cycled and began anew. The crew only completed editing the film a couple of days before this morning's premiere, which received a warm response from the audience. I took this video clip during the Q&A that followed:

One of the core problems for secular Egyptians is that they do not have an organized party to represent them in the Egyptian political process, such as it is. "The Square" is the place where Egyptians meet, where views are debated and sides are taken. It is also the place of martyrs. The film documents the military's move on the people, torture, and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood through the experience and activities of five people. From the film we see there is hope, but the revolution will not be done until justice is established and people have enough food and jobs, and women have rights.

Coming Up: more reviews and The Windrider Forum at Sundance

Source URL (retrieved on *04/16/2014 - 14:22*): http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/sundance-full-inspirational-films-and-people

Links:
[1] http://ncronline.org/feature-series/sundance-film-festival-2013
[2] http://filmguide.sundance.org/film/13011/the_look_of_love
[3] http://filmguide.sundance.org/film/13020/which_way_is_the_front_line_from_here_the_life_and_time_of_tim_hetherin
[4] http://filmguide.sundance.org/film/13119/aint_them_bodies_saints
[5] http://filmguide.sundance.org/film/13052/the_square_al_midan