

INTERVIEW: ERNIE & JOE With Director Jenifer McShane

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

Screening tonight at 8:30 at the Landmark E Street, the film chronicles two unconventional police officers who are part of the San Antonio PDâ??s Mental Health Unit, founded to confront the fact that one in four people killed by police is mentally ill.

Ernie Stevens and Joe Smarro are not typical police officers. Dressed in polo shirts and slacks, guns out of view, the two approach each emergency call with the intent of defusing situations without force and helping those in need. They are part of the San Antonio Police Departmentâ??s Mental Health Unit, founded to confront the fact that one in four people killed by police is mentally ill. A rare 360-degree portrait of police officers, ERNIE & JOE gives no easy answers but reveals a path forward that could lead to transformative change nationwide. AFI spoke with director Jenifer McShane about her new work.

ERNIE & JOE plays as part of the Truth & Justice Program at AFI DOCS at the Landmark E Street Cinema in Washington DC on Friday, June 21 and at the AFI Silver Theatre in Silver Spring, MD on Saturday, June 22. Buy tickets to the screening here.

AFI: What led you to pursue documentary filmmaking?

I love telling stories that might make a difference.

AFI: How did you become involved and what led you to start telling this story?

While researching and making my last documentary, MOTHERS OF BEDFORD, I became acutely aware of the number of mentally ill people sitting behind bars in this country. The work being done by Ernie, Joe and their peers addressed issues I care about and dovetails with my work making MOTHERS OF BEDFORD.

AFI: How did you find and connect with Ernie and Joe to be the subjects of your film?

An article written by a friend about the mental health work being done in San Antonio sparked my initial interest. This prompted me to go out and spend time with the mental health unit without a camera. I realized fairly quickly that Ernie and Joe would be excellent characters to help tell this complicated story.



AFI: What was a particular struggle you faced while making your film?

Much of the film takes place inside a police car. My fear was that so much time in the car would be claustrophobic for the viewer, but it actually presented an opportunity to look at the bond that develops when you spend countless hours together in stressful situations.

AFI: What do you want audiences to take away from seeing your film?

On the face of it, this film is about mental health and policing, but I also believe that at its core it is about human connection. I would like the film to inspire people to look at their own communities and see how they can strengthen the bonds of human connection and improve our response to those in crisis.

AFI: Why is Washington, DC a crucial location to screen ERNIE & JOE?

DC is the policy capital of the world. I hope to catch the attention of those who might affect change.

AFI: Why are documentary films so important today?

Documentary films are vital. They provide a unique lens for learning and broadening our experience. I particularly appreciate when we can do this in unexpected ways. We are becoming a more and more polarized society, and documentaries can take an audience on meaningful journeys that can illuminate topics and expand our thinking and sometimes our hearts.

Buy tickets to ERNIE & JOE here.



(Sourced from: AFI.com blog)

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hollywoodglee