HOLLYWOODGLEE, LLC
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The AFI DOCS Interview: #NEWTOWN Director Kim A. Snyder

Description

June 1, 2016

On December 14, 2012, a 20-year-old gunman forced his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut, and murdered 20 schoolchildren and six educators. In the aftermath of the killings, filmmaker Kim Snyder traveled to Newtown and trained her lens on a grieving community, following several families who came face to face with tragedy. NEWTOWN reveals both the indelible scars gun violence leaves behind and the resilience of people who come together to heal.



AFI spoke to director Snyder ahead of the filmâ??s AFI DOCS premiere.

What led you to documentary filmmaking?

I was working on the production side of narrative filmmaking when a turn in my personal life compelled me to direct my first documentary. I have been doing it ever since.

What inspired you to tell this story?

I was drawn to the profound effects of collective trauma and the need for many people in Newtown to be heard on their own terms in an effort to make meaning out of the unthinkable. I wanted to pierce through a growing desensitization to these escalating incidents of mass gun violence through creating an emotional experience that humanizes the issue in a universal way.

How did your subjects?

It was like peeling an onion. In that first year, I did not feel comfortable penetrating the privacy of those most affected. My first connections were with the Interfaith community, which informed an intimacy and framing that was at once philosophic, existential and spiritual to some extent; it lent a holistic approach to a community wrestling with the darkest of journeys. Friar Bob, the priest who buried eight of the 20 children, was among those severely affected in terms of trauma. As I organically developed relationships with others through careful trust building, I began to develop a story of a town through a number of prisms, including that of parents of loss, educators, first responders, neighbors, youth â?? faces that render a portrait of any town and one that would redefine what it means to be a victim, while exploring the profound effects of survivor guilt and the resilience required to repair the social fabric of the entire community in the wake of the tragedy.

What was a particular obstacle you faced while making the film?

I faced a profound sense of responsibility in not wanting the process of the film to add to the ongoing trauma of those who participated, and in keeping my own psychological and emotion reactions to the material in check.

What do you want audiences to walk away with?

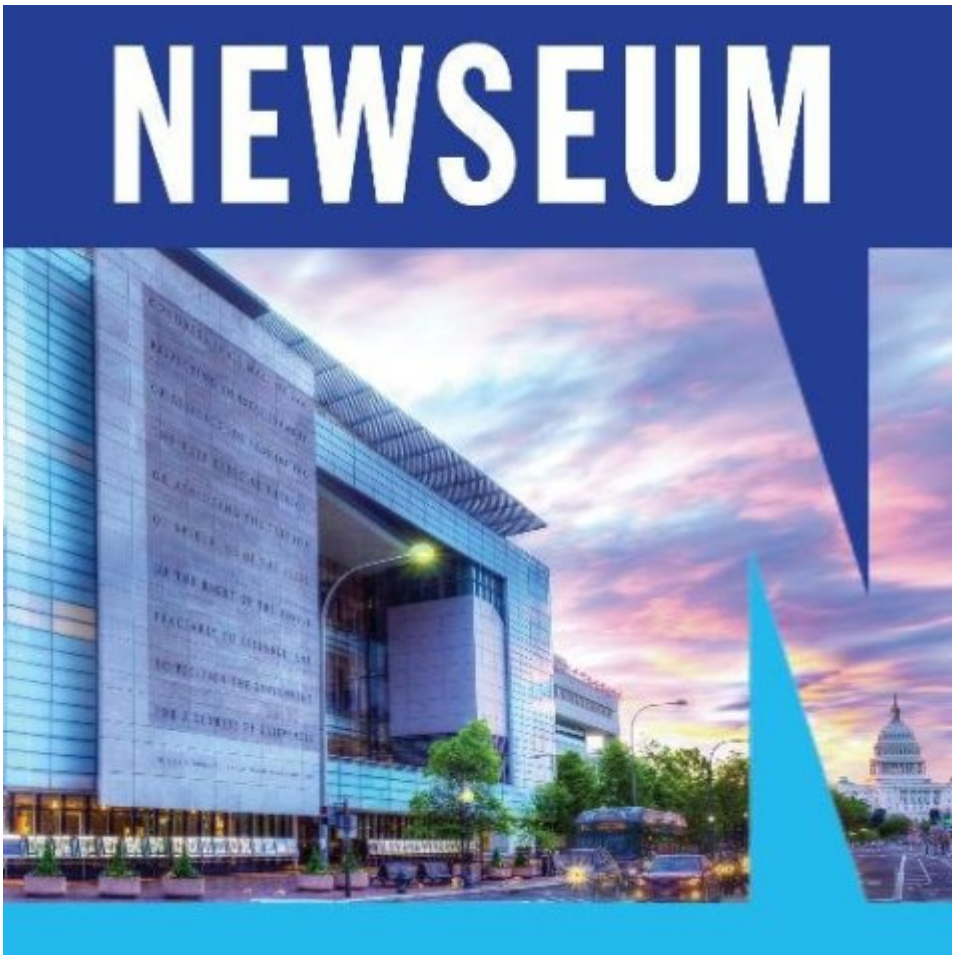
I want them to take away a profoundly emotional but rewarding journey to experience in their own community. I want them to experience perspective, anger and uplift from a community that offers profound truth and life perspective. Most importantly, I want them to leave with the conviction to participate in effecting change.

Why is Washington, DC, a valuable location to screen your film?

It is perhaps the most essential place for us to screen. Presenting an intimate exploration of the aftermath of the deadliest mass shooting of schoolchildren in American history in the seat of government and policymaking will be extremely powerful. We hope to maximize this potential.

NEWTOWN plays AFI DOCS on Thursday, June 23 at 5:45. Buy tickets here.

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[Source: American Film Magazine (blog)]

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