

Articles

Visiting Shanksville in the Rain: A Review

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September 28, 2010

In the modern age of "flashiness" "sleekness," this documentary was not.



Subtitles and transitions were simplistic. But that was the beauty of it. It added character to the film – it added intimateness to it.

Think of documentaries from ten years ago. They had a grainy texture, transparent transitions, and boxy subtitles. There were no "flashy transitions, colors, format, etc." The film focused solely on the content.

Think of the smart-phones of today. They can browse the web, play music, GPS, etc. Yet, its main purpose is to call, and many actually have problems with it – i.e. dropped calls. Well think of the film as a "regular, old phone." It promises to call and does just that, nothing more.

Visiting Shanksville in the Rain promised to showcase its members "in a way that brings out at the best in them" (as Dr. Mussari would say). And guess what, it did just that. All the distracting bells and whistles were removed. After all it's documentary not meant to make your jaw drop because it is "pretty" but because it shows the everyday individuals like our cheerleaders doing their part to insure the legacy and memories of loved ones live on – I wouldn't be surprised if a tear or two were shed.

The rain and grainy texture of the film intertwined together so both visual and audio aspects were present. Combined with music that beautifully matched the scenes, it added to the overall experience.

What I loved was that it did not look like a simple drag and drop theme from Sony Vegas, iMovie, etc. It kept a more classical approach, thus so, it radiated that it took great effort to produce – adding even more definition on how important the documentary was. That itself showed one of the traits of "America on its best days": hard work and determination.

Yet, the real beauty of *Visiting Shanksville in the Rain* is what occurred behind the camera. For example, Dr. Mussari, his wife, and fellow friends put in an unbelievable effort. Like the great George Parks said, "It's about us, not just you or me."

So much work went on to share the story of the everyday heroes of America. Dr. Mussari and his comrades had little "movie time." All I could think is the correlation to "America on its best day." There are the all-stars and CEO's of this nation, but none of it could be possible without the other folk. They are equally as important, in which they do the jobs that those at the top do not do. Unfortunately, they often do not receive credit. But in the Shanksville documentary, the people behind the curtains did.

Dr. Mussari's film is the epitome of how "America is on its best days." It's a film that gives credit where it's due – in which the all-stars and the folks behind the curtain are on equal ground, sharing the limelight together. Because America would not be possible without those working behind the curtains and doing the tasks that many often do not want to do.

It is extremely hard to pinhole *Visiting Shanksville in the Rain*. If it were to be done ... it would be "WOW."

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Couple praised for Sept. 11 films

The Times Leader

October 17, 2010

Tony and Kitch Mussari should be lauded for their role in keeping the spirit of Shanksville Flight 93 alive for the past nine years since the Sept. 11 tragedy.

Without any remuneration they have completed a documentary each year utilizing students, veterans and others to instill a spirit of patriotism and remembrance. The documentaries are nearly an hour long, and a considerable amount of time is involved to create a work of professional quality.

I have participated the past two years, and it has truly evoked some thought-provoking questions. One of the most outstanding is how we would have reacted if we were on that ill-fated United Airlines Flight 93.

They are now undertaking the arduous task of visiting the 50 states, filming ordinary people and interviewing them for "The Face of America" project, honoring the lives of those killed on Sept. 11. The dedication of this couple is tireless. My only wish would be for them to slow down a little bit, and Godspeed.

Clarence J. Michael
Dallas, PA

Windsor Park Stories History that was Straight from the Heart

Written by William C. Kashatus
Sunday, 15 February 2009, The Sunday Citizens' Voice



“The courage to teach is the courage to keep one’s heart open in those very moments when the heart is asked to hold more than it is able,” writes Parker J. Palmer in his inspirational book, *Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life*. “Only then can teacher and students and subject be woven into the fabric of community in a way that enables us to truly understand ourselves as individuals and as a society.”

Anthony Mussari, co-producer of “Windsor Park Stories” with his wife Kathleen, is one of the most courageous teachers I know. Not only does he have vision, but the determination to realize his dream despite the critics who would have him fail. In the process, he created an inspirational television series that taught our community how to connect with the heart – the place where intellect, emotion and spirit converge to define humanness.

Sadly, Tony and Kathleen wrapped up their final production of Windsor Park Stories and aired it last month on WBRE-TV. February, designated as “Heart Month” by the American Heart Association, offers a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the twelve-year television series – a gift that came straight from the hearts of its producers.

Tony Mussari, an emeritus history and communications professor at King’s College, broadened his classroom in 1997 to northeastern Pennsylvania. His objective was to “give service to the community.

Together with his wife, Mussari began producing a remarkable television series called “Windsor Park Stories.” Their inspiration was a garbage dump that the couple transformed into a stunning, four-tiered garden nestled into the Back Mountain adjacent to their Windsor Drive home.

They believed that the beauty and serenity of the garden would serve as an ideal setting for a television series focusing on “the extraordinary experiences of people not so different from ourselves.”



“We intended to invite people who had personal stories of hope, inspiration, and service to share their stories on camera,” explained King’s College professor. “Our dream was that these stories would resonate with viewers who were dealing with crises in their own lives.”

When Mussari floated the idea with film producers in New York City where he was free-lancing, they told him it would never work, and suggested other, more profitable venues.

Instead, he defied the nay sayers. He raised enough money to pay for production costs and secured an agreement from WVIA-TV to air the program free of cost. A similar agreement was reached with WBRE-TV when Windsor Park Stories changed stations in 2006.

“To be honest with you, I really didn’t care about the money,” admitted Mussari. “Kathleen and I have always lived by a philosophy that you’re only worth what you give away. We wanted to do something that would better our community.



“We also believed there was an audience for our show that appreciated gentility and a good story,” added Kathleen. “Windsor Park Stories was designed for people who like stories that inspire, people who want to broaden their horizons, people who are looking for a peaceful way to live.”

When Windsor Park Stories debuted in 1998, it featured a series of episodes that chronicled the individual’s triumph over adversity. There was a veteran soldier’s struggle with depression; a married couple battling cancer; a young man who was coping with the death of his mother; and a World War II veteran who helped to liberate a Nazi death camp during World War II. All the subjects were local residents who shared their personal challenges, fears and triumphs. But the stories also offered viewers an historical perspective, whether in the context of family or a national crisis like World War II. In each case, the viewer was able to relate to the subject’s experience emotionally and/or historically.

After the September 11, 2001 Terrorist attacks, Windsor Park Stories expanded beyond the local region to address issues that affected us all as Americans.

Tony and Kathleen produced a series titled “What Is America,” which was filmed on location at Ground Zero in New York City and in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the hijacked aircraft Flight 93 crashed.

Other episodes included a retrospective of the 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey Team, which captured a Gold Medal at Lake Placid, New York; biographical vignettes of Federal Justice Max Rosenn and United States Congressman Daniel J. Flood; a ten-part series on the United States Military Academy at West Point,



New York; and lighter subjects such as Victorian Cape May, New Jersey.

The genius of these episodes was that each one combined national history with current events and in the context of a personal perspective that appealed to the heart as well as to the intellect. In most cases, the episodes also contained a local link, usually a person who was born and raised in northeastern Pennsylvania.

One reviewer recently referred to “Windsor Park Stories” as “masterpieces.” I consider the television series one of the most creative expressions of social history that I’ve come across in my thirty-plus years as a historian.



What’s more, Mussari, true to his commitment as an educator, invited his students to share many of these experiences. As a result, he created an “open-air” classroom that not only taught the craft of documentary filmmaking, but also touched the hearts of his students. It was teaching at its finest.

As the television series grew, so did Windsor Park. “It started with one garden at street level, then it became the four levels,” said the Wilkes-Barre native. “Then we expanded to include a greenhouse and a hydrangea garden. Eventually it grew into the Angel garden, which we dedicated to the passengers of Flight 93. We completed the park last year with a small water garden called the “Children’s Garden,” which is dedicated to our grandchildren.”

One garden that has a special significance for Mussari is the “Garden of Life,” which he and Kathleen created around the time he began to experience heart difficulties.

In May 2007, Tony suffered two cardiac events within 10 hours. The following month he underwent quadruple bypass surgery. The experience inspired the production of 21 episodes titled the “Heart Scene: A Journey of Discovery and Recovery,” which chronicles the journey of a cardiac patient from diagnosis through recovery. It is the most comprehensive documentary of its kind ever produced.

The couple began producing the series just two months after Tony’s surgery. “I thought that it was pretty soon to start production,” admitted Kathleen. “But you have to strike while the iron is hot, too. You can’t go back two years later when nobody remembers you. Nor would you have the experience as fresh in your mind, so you wouldn’t be able to produce a quality piece of work.”



Mussari also wrote a book about his odyssey titled, “Step Into My Heart: Heart Disease and Open Heart Surgery My New Best Friends.” The

book examines heart disease, the bypass surgery process, and the physical recovery process as well as provides deeper insight into the emotional and psychological aspects of confronting heart disease.

“We produced the ‘Heart Series’ as an act of gratitude to the doctors, nurses, and technicians who were a part of my surgery team,” admitted Tony. “But we also felt obligated to produce the series as a genuine public service. We saw this as an opportunity to save lives and help people who were hurting.”

Unfortunately, the current economic crisis as well as Mussari’s health took their toll on the couple’s ability to continue Windsor Park Stories. With the all-consuming demands of scriptwriting, interviews, filming, production and editing, it took about eight months to produce a season’s worth of programming.

Since the program was done as a community service, Tony and Kathleen made no income from it. Instead, they used their personal savings or revenues produced from free lance work to pay an estimated \$2,000 per episode in fixed costs, video tape, transportation, housing, insurances, and set expenses. The couple did this for twelve years and without the assistance of any staff.

“Last summer we lost one of our underwriting sponsors because of the negative economic climate,” explained Tony. “Two of our other sponsors reduced their contributions, and another is still waiting for its annual allocation from Harrisburg to fund its obligations.

“The harsh reality is that I am a 67 year-old man with heart disease, and I am in no position to go further into debt to save the series. Two bank loans enabled us to pay our production expenses. With some belt tightening, we will meet our obligations to our creditors. We will do it the old fashioned way by cutting back and going without some things.”

Another harsh reality is that today’s commercial television is a business dependent upon revenues. Public service programs, no matter how well produced or how interesting or educational, are an endangered species.

Unless the filmmaker is willing to produce programming that focuses on physical violence, sexual promiscuity, or outrageousness masquerading as “reality TV,” there is no place for the product. That’s a shame.

Mussari and his wife will continue to produce their annual “Changed Forever” episode for screening in Shanksville in September. They will also continue to cover a select group of community events, write articles for the Windsor Park Theater, produce shows for broadcast on the Web, and write and distribute their weekly newsletter. But it won’t be the same.

Sometimes we don’t appreciate what we have until it’s gone. In “Windsor Park Stories,” northeast Pennsylvania had something pretty special.

Thanks, Tony and Kathleen, for putting viewers in touch with their hearts.

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