

Love Lived on Death Row

Documentary • 84 minutes

Produced, Directed & Edited by Linda Booker



"The best part of *Love Lived on Death Row* is Booker's ability to capture a depth of human love and forgiveness that leaves the viewer both teary-eyed and joyfully hopeful about the human potential to do good."

Patrick O'Neill, The Independent Weekly

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Synopsis: *Love Lived on Death Row* tells the story of the four Syriani siblings whose father was sentenced to die for the murder of their mother in 1990 and Meg Eggleston, who became their father's friend and spiritual advisor through letters to him in prison. Orphaned and estranged, the Syriani children raised themselves while they lived with hate, anger and confusion as the man they could only refer to as 'Him Him' lived on death row. But in 2004 they collectively decided to visit him in prison, seeking answers so they could move on with their adult lives. What transpired that day was a miracle of forgiveness followed by a journey of healing, restoring family memories and then a battle for his clemency that led to an appearance on the Larry King Show and a personal plea to the governor that would decide their father's fate.

Background: Rose, Sarah, John & Janet Syriani were only children when their father Elias Syriani was sentenced to death for the 1990 murder of their mother Teresa in Charlotte, North Carolina. Although their lives were shattered by tragic domestic violence and loss, they formed a strong bond, raised themselves and became strong individuals despite the odds. But after living with confusion and hate for their father for over a decade, they decided to visit and confront the man they had cut out of their lives. The unbelievable outcome of that visit to Raleigh's Central Prison is told through their interviews and it would be the beginning of a miraculous restoration of a family and their memories. As the primary victims of the crime, and the family of the man being executed, their story received national press and appearances on Good Morning America and the Larry King Show. Their battle for their father's life culminated in a face-to-face appeal to North Carolina Governor Easley.

The Syriani's attribute the friendship and spiritual guidance that Meg Eggleston, an outgoing grandmother of six, gave to their father as an important part of the reconciliation and forgiveness process. Inspired by Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking*, Meg began writing letters to Elias Syriani five years ago and as friends they shared letters and stories about their faith, families and lives. The true test of their friendship came when Elias asked Meg if she would witness and support him the night of his execution.

Love Lived on Death Row is much more than an incredible story of how violence tore a family apart and then their amazing reconciliation. It is a story of surviving tragic loss, transformation, friendship, family bonds, faith and how capital punishment affects family members of death row inmates.

The Making of *Love Lived on Death Row*: I became interested in the Syriani's unique and moving story in July 2005 after seeing a story about them on a local TV news website. As a supporter and volunteer for domestic violence causes I found the circumstance of the Syriani sibling's father on death row for the murder of their mother compelling. But what truly interested me further was their amazing experience of forgiveness and reconciliation after years of estrangement from him and the healing process that resulted being threatened by an impending execution.

Filming for the documentary began in October 2005 when the Syriani's returned to North Carolina to continue their campaign for their father's clemency. The film contains interviews with the four Syriani siblings, Meg Eggleston (who shared letters and friendship with Elias Syriani), the Syriani's attorney Russ Sizemore, Deborah Weissman, Professor of Law and former chair of the NC Commission on Domestic Violence, Elias Syriani's attorney Henderson Hill and Sister Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* that was adapted into an Academy award-winning film.

The documentary also contains excerpts from local news station coverage and their appearance on the Larry King Show, Good Morning America, home movies and photos provided by the Syriani's and location footage shot in Raleigh, Greensboro, Charlotte, California and Chicago.

Although the Syriani siblings have endured some very difficult pain in their lives, their bond, their beliefs and their hearts are amazing. Their story will move some to tears, but in the end I want people to feel inspired by the courage and attitudes the kids have, the beauty of the love that was shared between all the people in the story and to be motivated to think more about the difficult social issues addressed in the film.



Linda Booker: *Director/Producer, Editor, and Cinematographer*

A graduate of Florida State University, Linda Booker changed careers from graphic design and art direction to filmmaking in 2003 after finding inspiration at the Full Frame Documentary Film Festival. She completed Duke University’s Certificate in Documentary Studies Program in Spring 2005 and her first short project MILLWORKER THE DOCUMENTARY screened at several film festivals including Indie Memphis. Linda formed By the Brook Production based in Pittsboro, North Carolina and produced LOVE LIVED ON DEATH ROW, her first feature documentary film independently.

*Director/Producer
Linda Booker*

Randolph Benson: *Cinematographer*

Randolph Benson's film MAN AND DOG has appeared in eighteen film festivals in seven countries and has garnered numerous awards, most notably a Gold Medal in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences’ Student Academy Awards. His work has been featured on the Bravo Network, the Independent Film Channel (Split Screen), WTTW-Chicago, UNC-TV (NC Visions), and Telewizja Polska S.A.-Poland, and received an Eastman Kodak Excellence in Filmmaking Award at the Cannes Film Festival. Benson is an instructor at Duke’s Center for Documentary Studies and a graduate of Wake Forest University and of the NC School of the Arts School of Filmmaking.

Hans Stiritz: *Original Music, Post Sound and Edits, Trailer Editor*

Stiritz has composed scores for several independent feature film productions, including CHASING THE WIND (directed by Charles B. Pierce), STAY TUNED FOR MURDER and most recently WHERE’S MY CLOSEUP MR. THORNTON? Which was awarded “Best of Arkansas” at the Little Rock Film Festival. He also scored a short film, SERENDIPITY LANE (starring Wes Bentley of 2000 Oscar winner "American Beauty"), which was a finalist in the 1995 Academy Awards' Student Film Competition. Corporate scoring clients include UNITED AIRLINES, ENTERGY, ALLTEL, MEMOREX/TELEX, TYSON and ALCOA. Stiritz recently formed Evening Films www.eveningfilms.com for producing, editing and directing film/video projects.

Love Lived on Death Row credit list:

Produced & Directed by.....Linda Booker
 Edited byLinda Booker
 Cinematography.....Randolph Benson, Linda Booker
 Featuring.....Rose, Sarah, Janet & John Syriani, Meg Eggleston,
 Henderson Hill, Russell Sizemore, Deborah Weissman,
 Sister Helen Prejean, Mazen Barbari
 Additional Camera.....Mark Barroso, Scott Langley
 Original Music by.....Hans Stiritz
 Sound Post/Additional Editing.....Hans Stiritz
 Title Sequence Design.....Durward Rogers
 Photos Courtesy of.....The Syriani family, Meg Eggleston, Scott Langley
 Archival Material.....ABC News/Good Morning America, Charlotte Coalition for a
 Moratorium Now, The Charlotte Observer, CNN-The Larry King Show, The News & Observer, WTVD ABC-11 Eyewitness
 News, WRAL-TV Capitol Broadcasting Company

Screenings:

Little Rock Film Festival, Little Rock AR – 05/07; Non Violence International Film Festival, Ontario Canada- 06/07; New Orleans Film Festival-10/07; Indie Memphis Film Festival 10/07; Rocky Mountain Women’s Film Festival, Colorado Springs. CO- 11/07, Cucalorus Film Festival Wilmington, NC- 11/07, “Stranger Than Fiction- Documentary Premieres in Chicago” Gene Siskel Film Center–01/08, The Light Factory Museum of Contemporary Photography & Film – 01/08, Carolina Film & Video Festival, Greensboro–02/08; Ybor Festival of the Moving Image, Tampa FL–04/08; EPFC Human Rights Film Festival, Los Angeles –10/08; Through Women’s Eyes International Film Festival, Sarasota FL– 01/09

Love Lived on Death Row is a fiscally sponsored project of the Southern Documentary Fund (SDF) a non-profit organization that encourages the production of documentary projects about the American South and by documentary artists living in the region.