

# VINEYARD GAZETTE

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## For Three Days, Chilmark Joins Sundance, Cannes and Tribeca

By SOFI THANHAUSER

Why do we tell stories?

Under the blanket of interminable Vineyard winter, the answer that jumps to mind most readily is claustrophobia; the need to leave our own the immediate situation and rediscover vastness; to escape ourselves for long enough to see our own contours a little bit more clearly.

And nothing does this like cinema. The ninth annual Martha's Vineyard Film Festival, which opens next week and runs from March 13 to 15, not only offers the opportunity for escapism of the best kind, it also showcases several films that take a self-reflexive turn and shed light on what that act of storytelling is really all about.

In *Read After My Death*, director Morgan Dews presents a disturbing picture of 1960s American suburbia, charting one family's descent into a mournful chaos of institutionalization and mutual recrimination. As in any family drama, the story totally shifts depending on who is telling it, a point Mr. Dews exploits brilliantly.

The film is entirely composed of audio, film and photo archives that the filmmaker's grandmother stored in her house in Maine, where she lived alone from the time of her husband's death until her own death in 2001. Sorting through all the materials, which included a pack of private audio diaries, marked "read after my death," made Dews feel "kind of like a detective with all this evidence,"

## Children's Festival Guide

### SATURDAY

**1:30 p.m.** Different Drummers Short film program for ages 5 to 8 (70 minutes); Zoologic (4 min.); Through the Lens (2 min.); The Cardhouse Builder and the Little Dog (8 min.); Collectibles (12 min.); Papiroflexia (3 min.); The Bear is Coming (16 min.); The Tree Elves (7 min.); Butterflies (16 min.)

**3 p.m.** *Stella and the Star of the Orient* (90 min.) (German with subtitles)

**5 p.m.** *Spirit of the Forest*

he said. Once he had some grasp of what had unfolded, he set about the task of compiling the footage into a coherent story.

Another portrait of white America in the sixties is presented in *Harvard Beats Yale, 29-29*, directed by Kevin Rafferty.

In 1968, a year in which two political assassinations and a series of riots rocked the nation, the Harvard football team scored a major upset against Yale.

The director, who had been tear gassed along with his Bolex at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago that August, watched the game from the Harvard stands. His father who, like his grandfather had played football for Yale, responded to Mr. Rafferty's announcement that he would be matriculating at Harvard with a deadpan "Did you say Hartford?" Watching the game from the Yale stands that day, Mr. Rafferty's father would call the game "The worst day of my life." (Note that he was a World War II veteran whose own brother was shot down by the Nazis.)

Evidently emotions ran high that day. *Harvard Beats Yale 22-22* begins with a long string of gape-jawed gray-haired men trying not to sound religious (and failing miserably) as they struggle to describe that last surreal minute of the game. Rafferty puts it nicely when he says, "There was a sense of destiny, of Greek theatre, where the players know the ending but they are helpless to stop it."

The documentary, though certain to mean more to football fans, nonetheless has something to offer to the uninitiated. Its cast of characters includes Tommy Lee Jones, (a Harvard lineman who roomed with Al Gore), a young Meryl Streep, who took the train from Vassar to visit her boyfriend at Yale, and, of course, an inebriated George W. Bush engaging in some predictable acts of low-level vandalism.

There is also a certain before-the-fall nostalgia to the story, at least on the Yale side. While SDS was in full swing at Harvard, the Yale players seemed to have glided through 1968 without much noticing the culture war. "That football team was the last hurrah of the F. Scott Fitzgerald days," Mr. Rafferty said. "Reality arrived in New Haven very soon after."

(75 min.) for ages 4 to 6

## SUNDAY

**12:30 p.m.** *Different Drummers* Short film program for ages 5 to 8 ( *see Saturday 1:30 p.m. listing* )

**2:15 p.m.** *Reel Discoveries...Look Inside!* Short film program for ages 8 to 10 (81 minutes); *The Weatherman* (3 min.); *Because You're Gorgeous* (5 min.); *His Good Will* (11 min.); *Titiriwe — El Canto de la Noche* (10 min.); *Elephants* (13 min.); *The New Species* (9 min.); *Plain And Simple* (30 min.)

**4 p.m.** *The Three Investigators — The Secret of Skeleton Island* (88 min.), for ages 10 to 12.

Reporter, a documentary directed by Eric Metzgar, tracks reporter Nicholas Kristof on a trip to the Congo, where he is in search of a story sad enough to snap America out of its hopeless apathy and mobilize public opinion to the cause.

A student of the “psychology of compassion,” Kristof has determined that the human mind is ill-equipped to feel sympathy for statistics, and he is searching for the one individual with a story that will bring home the reality of the tribal warfare that is devastating the civilian population there.

The director admits that when he looked at the itinerary for his trip with Kristoff — which included entries like “spend night in the bush with rebel warlord,” he was daunted. And the experience of watching Kristof go in “like a surgeon,” listening to heart-wrenching stories of rape and murder with relative cool, was “tricky at first.”

Mr. Metzgar, who arrived in the Congo without Kristof’s emotional armor, says, “Reporter was the kind of film where something breaks in you that will probably never be fixed.”

He said his other film in the festival, *Life. Support. Music.*, was also difficult to film. The subject is a friend of his, a guitarist who suffered a stroke while playing a gig in Soho.

Film festival organizer and founder Thomas Bena of Chilmark says this kind of homage to emotional endurance forms one of the through-lines of this year’s festival. “We’re not shying away from heaviness,” he said.

Mr. Bena and his festival partner Brad Westcott agree that the documentaries they have chosen this year demonstrate a level of sophistication. “[They make the] heavy-hitting, social issues documentaries of the first few years seem dated,” Mr. Bena said. He continued:

“We’re trying to use film as a catalyst for social change.”

He has set up the festival to facilitate this. *Food, Inc.*, an alarming vision of the American food industry, will be followed by a presentation by the Island Grown Initiative.

New this year at the film festival is an original children’s series, programmed by Nicole Dreiske, who also runs the children’s film festival at BAMKIDS.

Kids films will screen at the Chilmark Library on Saturday and Sunday afternoon. Admission and popcorn are free.

The series will include 19 films from 11 different countries.

Ms. Drieske uses her film screenings as mini-forums for discussing media with her young audiences. “There’s 1,400 hours a year going into them with no reflection, no processing,” she said. “Parents only come up with two options: either turning it all off or watching everything with their children.”

With films as intense and probing as Reporter, and as hilarious as The Complete History of My Sexual Failures (a documentary made by a man who finds all his old girlfriends to find out why they left him), Mr. Bena described this year’s festival as a journey.

“We intend to make it so you’ll want to stay,” he said.

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