

TRANSCENDENT COURAGE AND ENDURANCE ARE SUBJECTS OF "THE WILL TO LIVE," A NEW FILM TO BE INTRODUCED AT UB International documentary will premiere worldwide next year

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Contact: Patricia Donovan, pdonovan@buffalo.edu
Phone: 716-645-5000 ext 1414
Fax: 716-645-3765

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- A new documentary by Danish director and filmmaker Anne-Gyrithe Bonne paints an awe-inspiring portrait of what makes us human.

At once intimate and spontaneous, "The Will to Live: A Notebook on Love, Hate and Reconciliation," examines the lives of three people who have suffered brutal oppression and tragic loss, but who have worked toward reconciliation with their oppressors and have become an inspiration to others.

Although "The Will to Live" will not be distributed worldwide until next year, Bonne will present the film, along with one of its subjects, Cambodian-American writer Chanrithy Him, on Nov. 20 at the University at Buffalo. The screening will take place at 7 p.m. in the Screening Room of the Center for the Arts on the UB North (Amherst) Campus. It will be free and open to the public.

Among the extraordinary lives illuminated by Bonne is that of Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, prominent South African human-rights activist, and Him, author of "When Broken Glass Floats," an award-winning memoir about growing up under the Khmer Rouge.

Of the 12-member Him family, only five children survived the brutal killing fields of Cambodia in the 1970s, deeply traumatized by the terrifying events they had witnessed. One of them was Chanrithy, who says she wrote her book because she was compelled to testify on behalf of the millions who lived and died there -- to tell a story, she says, "worthy of the suffering...I endured as a child."

Him also is a classical Cambodian dancer who received a bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon and later worked as a research assistant on a long-term study on post-traumatic stress disorder among Cambodian refugees in the U.S. She is at work on "Unbroken Spirit," a sequel to her first book.

Mark Ashwill, Ph.D., director of UB's World Languages Program and the U.S.-Indochina Educational Foundation, which he founded in 2000, is a friend of both filmmaker Bonne and Chanrithy Him. The foundation recently established a scholarship in Him's name, which will be awarded to a qualified and deserving woman from Cambodia, Laos or Vietnam "committed in thought, word and deed to social and economic justice in her society."

Bonne's film also examines the life and work of the outstanding and courageous Honduran physician Juan Almendares.

Almendares is an internationally known human-rights activist distinguished for his work in combating alcoholism, tobacco and drug abuse, malnutrition, ecological damage and pesticide poisoning in Honduras, and in reducing the level of violence against women in his country.

His assistance to victims of torture in Honduras -- he himself is a torture victim -- led to his becoming a target of death squads on several occasions.

Almendares is the former president of the University of Honduras and dean of its medical school, the founder of the Honduras Academy of Sciences and an author of books of poetry, short stories and ecological and scientific articles.

Ashwill says that although "The Will to Live" has been in the making for several years, the events of Sept. 11, 2001 impelled Bonne toward a deeper, broader and more emotionally poignant exploration of the themes of reconciliation and redemption.

"In the process," he says, "it became a portrayal of the ability of humiliated individuals to be compassionate toward their tormenters, and a study of the impact that cultural conceptions of 'love,' 'hate' and 'reconciliation' have on humanity as a whole.

"It provokes a roller coaster of emotions -- sadness, joy, outrage, compassion, empathy, inspiration and hope," he says. "It is intensely personal, yet speaks to all of us in profound ways about the human condition and the paths that we as individuals and nations choose."

Numerous UB and Western New York groups are sponsoring the film screening, among them the ASEAN GSA, Asian/American Studies Graduate Student Group, Chinese Students & Scholars Association, Economics GSA, Education International Association GSA, General Education Program of the College of Arts and Sciences, Global Ambassadors Club, International Artistic & Cultural Exchange Program (IACE) of the Department of Theatre & Dance, the Department of Media Study, the Office of International Education, Vietnamese Graduate Student Association and U.S.-Indochina Educational Foundation, Inc.