

Turning your TV Time into Quality Time

July 4, 2006 – Issue #7

Dear Friends,

Have you ever gone to a film you thought would be all right, only to leave the theater in a daze because the film was incredibly powerful? A month later, you're still thinking about it and realize that it has changed the way you view life. This happened to me after viewing the KIDS FIRST! festival title, *Purgatory House* (www.purgatoryhouse.com). I viewed it in preparation for the article below, and highly recommend it for parents to watch with their teens. It's a bit controversial, but very thought-provoking, and opens wide doors for discussion.

Purgatory House by **Christine L. Pollock**



Celeste Davis and Cindy Baer

I don't know which impressed me most – the thought-provoking content of *Purgatory House*, one of the KIDS FIRST! film festival titles, or the fact that the film was written by a fourteen-year-old. Either way, the movie has a powerful message, which has the potential of saving lives. *Purgatory House* begins where most stories end, chronicling the afterlife journey of a lonely teenage girl who has committed suicide, abandoning her life of turmoil and drug addiction in search of unconditional love. Told in nonlinear fashion, this stylistic dark-comedy/fantasy offers a quirky, uncensored glimpse into the mind of today's American youth.

Cindy Baer, producer/director of *Purgatory House*, met Celeste Davis, screenwriter and lead actor, through a Big Sister program when Davis was 11 years old. Around the time Davis turned 12, she had lost interest in school and was struggling with her home life and friendships. Davis began writing as an outlet to express herself. She began to write a story called *Purgatory House*, which paralleled her own life in certain ways: her search to fit in, her efforts to deal with the teen drug culture surrounding her, to find meaning for her life, and to connect with a Higher Power. When she turned 13, and landed herself in a teen shelter, Baer felt scared for her. She told Davis they'd make her story into a 5-minute short film that she could star in. Baer believes that acting saved her own life as a child, and knowing that Davis had written a piece about suicide, Baer was hoping to give Davis something exciting to turn her feelings of despair into something positive. After Baer typed what Davis had written, and read it, she realized that it was almost feature length, and that Davis's insightful story had to be told in its entirety.

Davis made her screen debut as Silver Strand, a character she based on her own life. Baer found visual effects artists and sound design team on the Internet. Famous actors and musicians such as Jim Hanks, Johnny Pacer, John Devin Witt, Natalie Merchant, Eric Bazilian, and Larisa Stow joined the low-budget team because they believed in the film's message. Their participation, as well as others, taught Baer that when you do good in the world, people rush to support you.

According to Baer, this is such an exciting time to be alive if you are an aspiring filmmaker. 3-chip digital video cameras (like the Canon XL2) are professional quality and yet priced at a consumer level. You can even edit your movie on your home computer with simple-to-use software programs. She just completed a short film called *Morbid Curiosity*, and the total cost to make it was about \$300! Many high schools and even churches or recreation centers have cameras that they make available to young people.

Baer gives some great advice: Tell a compelling story. Watch movies. Study the classics. Take your time. Learn about movies. Create quality. Turn your angst into something creative. Art is about honesty. Dare to dream, and work hard to make your dreams into reality.

Davis continues to have all kinds of ideas, and Baer looks forward to seeing what her creative mind will come up with next. Baer hopes that Davis' movie can be an inspiration to other young writers. In addition to winning many awards (see website for details), *Purgatory House* has been picked up for DVD distribution by Image Entertainment. Through the KIDS FIRST! film festival and in schools or at home, Baer hopes that kids and parents all across the country will watch this movie together, and have some important conversations about spirituality, and positive ways to cope with the challenges of life. **Christine Pollock, Newsletter Editor**

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"To me, the great hope is that now, with these ... video recorders and stuff coming out, that ... some little girl from Ohio will ... make a beautiful movie ... and for once the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed forever and it will really become an art form." - **Francis Ford Coppola**