

# MEDIA TRANSCRIPTS, INC.

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## **HBO**

When did you become interested in this subject?

## **KIRBY DICK**

Actually, I've been interested in the subject for a while and had been closely following the *Boston Globe* coverage of the church scandal in Boston several years ago. But I hadn't considered making a film on the subject until (HBO's) Sheila Nevins suggested it to me.

I've made a number of films for HBO before, and all have dealt with difficult and controversial subject matter. In some ways, however, this film looks deeper into the human soul than any other film I've made. As I began researching the subject, I was struck not only by the incredibly high numbers of people who had been abused by Catholic clergy (in the tens of thousands if not more) and but also how horrible their experiences were. But rather than report these incidents

that had already been covered, I decided I wanted to focus on telling the story of one survivor in the most intimate and powerful way I could.

And so, working with my producer Eddie Schmidt, we contacted the organization known as SNAP (Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests). Then, through them, we contacted dozens of local SNAP chapters around the country, in search of the one person who could be the subject for our film.

After a couple of months, we received a call from Claudia Vercelotti, the leader of SNAP in Toledo, Ohio, informing us about a Toledo fireman who was abused as an adolescent and had filed a lawsuit against the Toledo diocese as a John Doe (in other words, his name was kept secret). But this man, Tony Comes, had recently decided to put his name on the lawsuit and go public. He was going to meet with the local paper in a couple of days and break his story to the press.

We flew out to Toledo immediately and met with Tony and his Wendy the morning before his interview. It was a very emotional meeting, and went it on for several hours. He asked a lot of questions and then finally said, yes, he'd like to go ahead and make the film. And we were so impressed by his openness, his charisma, and how articulate he was, and also the fact that he came across very much like an average American, or like a neighbor. He was very accessible. And so we started filming that evening.

**HBO**

They're like your average family next door.

**KIRBY DICK**

Exactly. And you realize that if this could happen to Tony, it could happen to anyone.

**HBO**

What was it like following Tony throughout this journey?

**KIRBY DICK**

Well, I always shoot my documentaries over a long period of time. For *Twist of Faith*, I think

we were in production for more than a year and a half. Even though Tony was very open, and very willing to make the film, it's hard for anyone to open up to a film crew, day in and day out. So one of the ways we decided to overcome this difficulty was to fly into Toledo every six weeks or so, and film him intensely for a week.

Every time we came in it was a very emotional experience for him. He was giving so much, and re-experiencing so much. He was providing us great footage, but it also a real struggle for him to go through. And so after a week of filming we would leave, to give him time to decompress, if you will, for a while. But before we returned to Los Angeles, we left a home video camera with him, and asked him to shoot the experiences that he was going through while we were gone. It's something that we've done in previous films, giving cameras to subjects and allowing them to film their lives - it allows us to get very intimate footage. But of all the subjects we've

ever given a camera to, I think Tony took to it most passionately. Not only did he have a wonderful eye, but also he was willing to shoot at times when he was going through intense emotional struggles.

One of the things that you hear from many survivors is that during the day they can be completely fine, the memories of their abuse don't rise up to haunt them. Then they go to sleep at night and have a nightmare about being abused by a priest. They wake up terrified, and cannot go back to sleep. So they stay up for hours, racked by their horrible memories, reliving an experience that happened twenty or thirty years ago almost as if it were yesterday.

It was at that point that Tony would take his camera and begin videotaping himself. He would talk about how difficult it was to still be haunted by these memories. And that's the kind of footage you cannot get with a film crew. It's so intimate, so of the moment. I

think that his willingness to shoot those moments really added a great deal of power to Twist of Faith.

**HBO**

What surprised you most in making the film?

**KIRBY DICK**

Well, one of the things that moved me very profoundly was the depth of trauma that these survivors have gone through. In the course of making the film, we interviewed dozens of survivors and each time we began speaking with them, you could see the pain well up in their eyes as the memories of their experiences overcame them. These are memories they have tried to bury for years, but the moment we would begin speaking about it, everything would come rushing back. I've made a lot of films about people having very difficult experiences but I've never encountered trauma quite like this.

Another thing that surprised me was the recalcitrance of the Toledo diocese to try to reach out to the survivors and help them.

The story broke in Toledo shortly before we began filming, with allegations that quite a few priests were involved. In some ways, Toledo has been described as a mini Boston. I had expected the Toledo diocese, with all the news coming out, to begin to shift their position, to be less aggressive toward the survivors and more apologetic. And they have, to some degree. But I was surprised at how slowly and really how little they have shifted their position. I really expected at some point that they would really reach out in a more positive way.

I was also surprised at how important the Catholic Church is to Tony, to his family, and to the entire community. I was struck by how the Catholic Church played such an important role in the fabric in the community, and how actively they worked to help the needy, and people who are oppressed. Not having grown up Catholic, that was kind of revelatory to me. This is one of the tragedies of this scandal, that the church that has been

so helpful to communities is these ways has also been so destructive in the way it has responded to this crisis. I think that's unfortunate.

**HBO**

I'm sure that presented obstacles as you were shooting.

**KIRBY DICK**

Well, Toledo is a very Catholic community, and the Toledo diocese is very powerful. They are represented by the most powerful law firm in the city, there was a certainly a good deal of fear of them in the community. There were a fair number of people who were hesitant, or unwilling, to cooperate with us because of fear of repercussion.

Fortunately, Tony wasn't one of those people He had decided that once he went public he was going to tell his story regardless of the consequences. He had decided that it was important for him to stand up, to tell his experience, so that others who were suffering in silence would have someone to look to.



And hopefully they, too, could come forward and tell their experiences and begin their path toward justice and reconciliation. This courage is one of the things that made Tony a great subject, and makes the film so powerful.

Even now, Tony continues to work to help survivors working with SNAP to get the laws changed in Ohio so it is easier for survivors of child sex abuse crimes to get justice.

**HBO**

Do you feel that Tony got closure, and justice in terms of what he went through?

**KIRBY DICK**

In terms of the courts, no. The laws are still too stacked against survivors in Ohio for them to build very strong cases. But it was important for Tony to settle, to move on with his life, to gain some closure. Tony did get a very small settlement, but he didn't sue the church out of a desire for money. It was really out of a desire to bring the issue into the open.

But in terms of the film, I think he did get a kind of justice – he has been able to present his case to the world. He’s very proud of the film, and very supportive of it, and has spoken about the film and his experiences after many screenings.

When *Twist of Faith* premiered at Sundance, there were more three hundred people in the audience. After the film was over, no one left the theater. I’ve never seen that before – I’ve been to hundreds screenings at film festivals and I’ve never seen every single person in the audience stay in the room stay for the Q&A. Then, when Tony and Wendy came forward (they are still together, by the way), they were given a long, standing ovation. And Tony was so moving and articulate as he answered questions. I could see quite a few people in the audience crying as he spoke. And every time after he finished speaking he was applauded again. So, yes, I think that he does feel like the film has fulfilled him in that regard – and given him a sense of justice and

closure

**HBO**

What do you hope the audience will take away from the film?

**KIRBY DICK**

When I first started researching the subject, I would ask the question: why are survivors still struggling to get over something that happened twenty, thirty, or forty years ago? Why can't they put it into the past? But, of course, once I started making the film, and meeting survivors, and I understood this is a trauma that they really never gets over.

So I think that the one of the most important things the film does is to help explain why the experience of child abuse is something you never get over, that you have to live with every day for the rest of your life. So the best way for the Catholic Church to deal with this is to reach out, to apologize, and to accept responsibility. And in terms of the legal system, they should interact with these survivors in a fair way, not in an aggressive

way.

By doing that, the church will contribute to the healing process, which will help to put the issue behind us, not only for the church, but also for the individuals who've suffered through all this. There's something very urgent here that needs to be addressed and healed, and I hope that this film can in some way contribute to that healing.