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**PARENTHOOD PLUS**

**BY ANDREW MALEKOFF, [amalekoff@northshorechildguidance.org](mailto:amalekoff@northshorechildguidance.org)**

**Executive Director of the North Shore Child and Family Guidance Center**

## **REBIRTH**

**Andrew Malekoff**

I was privileged to be at a pre-release screening of the extraordinary feature-length documentary film called Rebirth at Hofstra University in June. In just a few days, you can see it too.

Rebirth's theatrical premiere will be held on August 31, at the IFC Center in New York City and on SHOWTIME on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of September 11, 2001.

Rebirth follows the transformation of five people, over the last 10 years, whose lives were forever altered on that day. Aside from some brief footage depicting the day that the towers fell, to set the stage, the focus of the film is almost exclusively on the life trajectory of these five people.

The film-makers, led by director Jim Whitaker, introduce us to Tanya, a young woman who lost her fiancé; Nick, a teenaged boy who lost his mother; Tim, a firefighter who lost all of his friends; Brian, a construction

worker who lost his brother; and Ling, a woman who was badly burned in the attack on the Twin Towers.

At the emotional core of the film is Tanya, a young woman who lost her fiancé, Sergio, a New York City firefighter. Tanya bares her grief with such authenticity that viewers are riveted to her every word and expression.

Nick was 15-years old when his mother died. A few years after the tragedy he became estranged from his father, who remarried, adding a complication to Nick's grief. The openness with which Nick expresses his sadness and anger, offers us a rare window into an adolescent boy's grieving.

Tim and Brian, offer the perspective of two men who lost, respectively, a best friend and a brother. Complicating Tim's grief is his forthright feelings of survivor's guilt, reminiscent of a soldier at war struggling with the loss of his fallen comrades. Brian offers another angle, with his touching reflection on how heartbreaking it is for him when he sees other brothers doing simple things together, like shopping at Home Depot.

Last but not least is Ling, who experienced a different kind of loss. She was badly burned over her right arm and the right side of her face and

endured 40 surgeries over the intervening years. Ling offers us a multi-layered perspective of her pain, despair, resignation, hope and resilience. I found Ling to be a heroic figure who handled herself with grace, dignity and humor throughout her ordeal.

The sixth “character” in the film is Ground Zero itself. The film-makers, via multi-camera time-lapse photography, artfully tracked the evolution of the space where the Twin Towers once stood over lower Manhattan. Film-goers will be treated to this visual marvel and signs of rebirth and growth in segments that are interspersed throughout the interviews.

Rebirth is not a political movie, although some reviewers criticized the absence of a political voice in the film. I strongly disagree. The film was made to tell the story of loss, healing, hope, growth and resiliency in the context of one of the most horrifying chapters in American history. The film does that and much more. The lessons about complicated grief presented to us by Tim, Tanya, Brian, Ling and Nick transcend 9/11.

The film has an afterlife – it stays with you for weeks and you want to talk about it. Rebirth is a film best viewed with others. I would not recommend it for children under 13 years of age. If you have older adolescents in your life, watch it together and talk about it with them.

See Rebirth! You won't regret it and you won't forget it.