

The Best Thing You Can Do with Your Life

When my brother joined the Legionaries of Christ after finishing school, he disappeared from our lives. We can only visit him once a year. His superiors are even allowed to read the letters we send him. I hate them. When we were kids, we went to the summer camps of the order. It was the best week of the year. But the Legionaries were strange, almost like a sect. Why did my brother choose them to be his new family? Eight years pass by before I visit him in his monastery in Connecticut. And suddenly, I am there, surrounded by 80 men in strange clothing. I see how they live — how they pray, eat, pray, go to class, pray. And I get my brother back — finally.

DOP

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Director/Editor/Script

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Production

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Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Documentary Films – Competition

Directors Statement

I think everybody has someone in their lives with whom they fight and aren't talking to anymore. Somebody that one actually really likes. For some reason one or the other, or both, feel so hurt that there is no more communication. My brother Laszlo suddenly disappeared from one moment to the other to join the order of the Legionaries of Christ and to become a Roman Catholic priest.

It is strange how something like this can be left unsolved for such a long time. The Legionaries became like a black bundle which I hated unconditionally without even really knowing them.



The estrangement with my brother pursued me constantly. During daytime I managed not to think about all that, but it followed me into my dreams. I dreamt of having a normal brother with whom I could brag at parties. But the reality was: A lot of people didn't even know I had a brother.

When we were kids László went to the camps of the Legionaries, and I went to the camp of the Consagradas who are the female counterpart of the Legionaries. The camps were so much fun, but we found the atmosphere in the order very strange, almost sect-like. How could he leave us and make them his new family?

László told me about his decision by phone. The next time I saw him was one year later at the first allowed visit. We could visit him only once a year, call three times a year and they could read the letters we wrote him. My brother disappeared and I felt betrayed. As if he wouldn't love me anymore. How could he disappear like this? But instead of fighting for him to come back I got angry. For eight years I felt offended and angry. Until I decided to visit him in his monastery and to confront him.



Parallel to being a personal story the film is a window into a very closed world that usually doesn't allow any insights: a window into the monastery of the very secretive Legionaries of Christ. Who are these people, how does this order work? Were there actual changes after the big scandal of the founder?

Trough our conversations and the reunion with my brother a heavy burden falls from our chests. Our story is a very personal story. But it's not so important that it is us. We could be anybody. There was a fight, a long silence. And then – after a really long time – a rapprochement.

Synopsis

'The Best Thing You Can Do with Your Life' is a film about two people who love each other, but haven't been in contact for a long time. Eight years ago my brother surprisingly joined the order of the Legionaries of Christ to become a priest. As kids we were sent to the summer camps of the Legionaries. It was the best time of the year, but at the same time the order was kind of strange. Almost like a sect. We knew: they would never get us!



When my brother joins the order, it happens very sudden and unexpected. From one day to another. He informs me about his decision per phone and disappears shortly after. I can't say farewell. At this moment communication is cut. We can visit him once a year and phone three times a year. His superiors can even read the letters we write to him. The Legionaries caught my brother. And what is even worse: my brother let them catch him.

I am very angry, and this huge anger gives me the energy to go to my brother's monastery. Together with a cameraman I travel to Cheshire in Connecticut. What is this place? I arrive in a big rage and I am confronted by an incredible friendliness. The sister of brother László is here. I want to get to know the new brothers of my brother, I want to understand this place.



What keeps my brother here? I find a life full of routines but not boring. Every half hour to full hour a bell rings, meaning that the next activity starts. Classes, mass, prayer and lunch and more prayer. They even do the household themselves. In the laundry room I meet three brothers and start a conversation with them. They are shy but willing to chat. They are allowed to watch films about saints. Sometimes. The films they watch are eight hours long and they watch them in blocks. One of them has a brother, who is a Legionary as well. And no, they are not allowed to talk to the older brothers. So they can strengthen the family spirit in their level of formation. At this point the film tries to be observational. The viewer should form his own opinion. Here again there are essayistic moments of memories. I remember the summer camps, and that my brother isn't the only one whom they try to recruit. It is not until now that the film faces the confrontation with my brother. I ask him all the questions I should have asked eight years ago. Why did he suddenly disappear? Why did he only say goodbye by phone? Why the Legionaries? Didn't it bother him that they could read his letters? And: What made him decide to join them? I dive into our past. As we were kids, moving all the time: Namibia, Pakistan, India, Indonesia and Germany. The only safe space is the family. The family is and will be always there. Does my brother have real friends? Somebody he can talk to, somebody he can trust?



The conversations with my brother are finished. We finally managed to really talk to each other again. We have a talk in his room. I am disappointed on how the catholic church treats homosexuality. Maybe it is a cliché, but I feel the urge to talk about it. We have different opinions. Of course. But we talk. We finally talk!

One year later I come back to the monastery. Everything seems the same. But this time I don't want to film. I just take pictures. Because this time the talks belong to my brother and myself. We don't need the camera anymore.

SCRIPT/ DIRECTION/ EDITING/ PRODUCTION: Zita Erffa



Zita Erffa was born in Bangkok in 1986. After finishing school in Jakarta, Indonesia, she studied international development for two years in Vienna and two years of philosophy in Munich. From 2010 until 2018 she studied at the Film School HFF in Munich. 2014/15 she went for an exchange year to the country her mother comes from: Mexico. Here she studied Documentary at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) in Mexico, where she started the Film 'The Best Thing You Can Do with Your Life'.

Filmography

(Selection)

2018: 'The Best Thing You Can Do with Your Life', Script, Director, Editor, Producer. 2013: 'The perfect human', Short film, Director/Producer/Editor

2011: 'In Massmanien leben', Short-Documentary: Script/Camera/Director/Editor

KAMERA: Bruno Santamaría



Bruno Santamaría was born in Mexico-City in 1986. After studying communication studies he studied Film at the Centro de Capacitación Cinematográfica (CCC) in Mexico-City. He works as a cameraman and director and he teaches in different Film Schools. His first film, 'Margarita' documents his friendship with a Lady living on the streets of Mexico City. Currently he is working on his next project 'Cosas que no hacemos' (Things we don't do).

Filmographie

(Selection)

2018: 'The Best Thing You Can Do With Your Life', DOP. Director: Zita Erffa

2018: 'Velvet', DOP. Director: Paula Hopf

2017: 'Cuadros en la oscuridad', DOP, Director: Paula Markovitch

2017: 'Artemio', DOP. Director: Sandra Luz López Barroso

2016: 'Bombay', DOP. Director: Javier Ávila

2016: 'They took them alive', DOP. Director: Emily Pederson

2016: 'Margarita', DOP and Director

2015: 'Ayotzinapa. Crónica de un crimen de Estado', DOP. Director: Xavier Robles 2015: 'La casa de los Lúpulos', DOP, Director: Paula Hopf

2013: 'Negro', DOP. Director: Daniel Castro

2013: 'Bella', DOP. Director: Maricarmen Merino

Festivals and Prizes

World Premiere: 17.02.2018 At the Berlinale in the Section 'Perspektive Deutsches Kino' in Berlin. Nominated Best Documentary for the Glashuette Dokumentarfilm-Preis. This Prize is endowed with 50.000 Euros. 18 Films from all the different Berlinale-Sektions participate in this competition.

International Premiere: 03.03.2018

At FICCI: International Film-Festival in Cartagena de las Indias, Colombia. Competing at the Official Documentary Competition.

National Premiere Mexico: 11.03.2018

At FICG: International Film-Festival Guadalajara, Mexico.

Competing for Premio Mescal and in the Iberoamerican Documentary Competition. Received a mention as 'Best Director' from the Jury of Premio Mescal.

Munich Premiere: 06.05.2018

At the DOK.Fest Munich. Nominated for the FFF-Documentary-Prize

Premiere Ecuador: 13.05.2018

Not a competitive Festival

Karlovy Vary June 2018: In the Official Documentary Competition