

'By the Grace of God' – a powerful and impactful movie



Image provided

By Sophie Braccini

The newest presentation of the International Film Showcase in Orinda, "By the Grace

of God," is not an easy movie on any count. The topic is tough: it shows the fight to bring to justice a priest and Scout master who used his position and charisma to mo-

lest hundreds of very young boys. The way the director, François Ozon, decided to narrate the story is almost that of a documentary, the names are real (for the priest and hierarchy, not the victims) and the facts have been checked. This lack of embellishment or voyeurism makes the raw reality of political cynicism sink in with great power.

The movie starts with Alexandre Guérin, a devoted Catholic man and father of five who continues to put his faith in the church. He learns one day by chance that the priest who abused him as a child is still in charge of a parish and teaches young children. He decides it has to stop and chooses to go the regular route of appealing to the priest's hierarchy and Cardinal Barbarin to have him removed from his parish and defrocked.

As the priest's story of abuse surfaces, other former victims decide to join the fight. The film in turn examines the different ways that abuse has marked these men's lives and how they have affected relationships with their family and others. François Debord, an atheist, at first

does not want to get involved in the fight to try to remove the priest, but when he finally gets in touch with his long-buried emotions, he decides to do all he can to alert the media.

These men, whose case has legally expired because of the statute of limitations, look for people who can still press charges. Emmanuel Thomassin is one of them. A young man who never really got his balance back, he is a dropout, full of anger and violence. He agrees to join the fight and the three men start an association to free the expression of the victims. Thomassin presses charges, is confronted with the priest, and the French judicial system starts to move forward slowly.

What is thrilling in the film is the cynicism of the Catholic hierarchy that does not appear to be concerned at all with the suffering of the children. Ozon exposes the veil of silence that covered the priest's acts for years, coming from the church, but also from some parents who decided to either not see or minimize what was happening.

The actors are incredibly simple and believable, includ-

ing Bernard Verley who plays the priest and François Marthouret, who plays Barbarin.

The way the movie gets its name is chilling and revealing. Moviegoers will discover it by themselves toward the end of the film.

The film is over two hours long, so it might take some stamina to stay until the end, although it is totally worth it. The movie opens Jan. 24 for one week at the Orinda Theatre.

Coincidentally, Bernard Preynat's trial opened in Lyon, France on Jan. 14. Preynat pleaded guilty and confessed to having molested four or five children each week in the Scout camps, and one or two every weekend in his parish, over a period of at least 20 years. He added that his hierarchy knew of his tendencies since his preparation to the seminary when he was 16 years old.

The Office of the Public Prosecutor requested eight years in prison for child molestation; the final verdict is expected in the spring.

For information, visit www.orindamovies.com/

Lafayette native helps in Australia firefight



Photos provided

Forestry staffer Martha Morse with a ringtail possum she and her crew saved at the North Black Range Palerang Fire.

By Jennifer Wake

With bushfires continuing to rage across the country, Australia is not a destination most Americans are choosing

in their travel plans. Unless, of course, you're a firefighter.

Lafayette resident Mike Morse has been in touch almost daily with his daughter, Martha, since she left Oct. 26 to help battle the Australian blazes as part of a private firefighting company crew on a six-month contract. With only two U.S. fire seasons under her belt, the 21-year-old firefighter, who attended Springhill Elementary, Acalanes High School and Tilden Prep, and played LMYA soccer and basketball with St. Perpetua CYO, says she's never experienced anything like this. "The fires we are witnessing today in Australia are like no other," Morse wrote in a Jan. 10 Australian newspaper article. "The impact alone is devastating."

The Australia fires, which began in September, are responsible for killing at least 24 people, millions of wildlife, and destroying over 2,000 homes in the 32,000 square miles that have burned since the blazes began. The devastated area is over 80 times larger than the total area burned in the California wildfires, according to an NBC News report.

Morse has been fighting seasonal wildfires with contract crews based out of Oregon for the past two years. "She typically works at a ski resort in winter, fights fires and raft guides in the summer," her father said. This month, the crew was averaging 12-16 hour shifts, working about six days straight before having a day off.

Martha has been impressed with the volunteer firefighters in Australia, saying how incredible it has been to see people actively saving homes in their community. One of her crew members commented in a recent news article how Aus-

tralia's situation would be completely different without the rural volunteer firefighting group.

As for his daughter's safety, Mike Morse says her crew and company take safety very seriously and she is learning a lot. "I'm happy that she has found a job that challenges her and fits her outdoor lifestyle and orientation." He keeps in touch with his daughter through WhatsApp, getting photos and texts.

While wet weather helped some of the fires dissipate, it caused other issues such as flooding and landslides. And, unfortunately, it wasn't enough to extinguish all of the flames. As of Jan. 16 more than 80 fires continued to burn, with 30 yet to be contained.



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