

Social Justice Initiative part of the big picture at 14th San Diego Film Festival

BY JEANNE FERRIS

It's not just about glitz and glamour on the Red Carpet at the San Diego Film Festival, (in itself a rising star nurtured from obscurity) which opens officially this Sept. 30.

SDFF is also about screening transformational stories that hopefully create positive change in our immediate world. This ideal has been furthered by partnering with Academy Award winner Susan Sarandon and filmmaker Thomas Morgan ("Waiting for Mamu") of Re-framed Pictures to form the Social Justice Initiative — a platform for documentaries with lasting social impact.

In addition, as part of SDFF's ongoing educational outreach efforts, films secured under these initiatives are screened to public schools to foster awareness and dialogue.

Films such as "Storyed Streets," profiles homelessness from different walks of life.

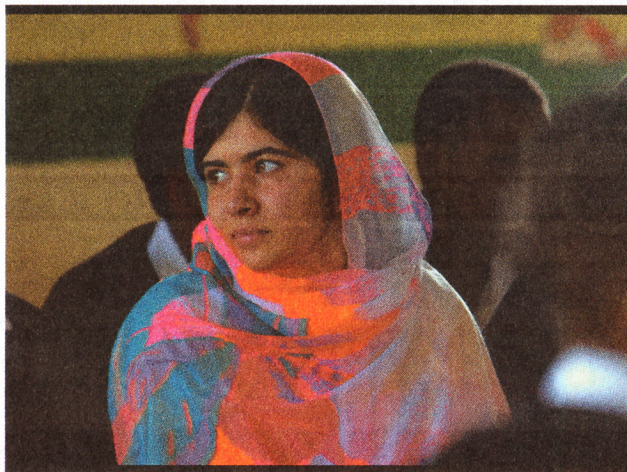
"One 16-year-old was attending high school and no one knew he was sleeping under the bleachers," said Tonya Mantooth, an 11-time Emmy award-winning producer and director of programming at SDFF. "Another was a former soldier suffering from PTSD. These are stories about real people who through one misfortune or another, became homeless and survived."

Sarandon helmed this feature as executive producer as well as on "Deep Run," a candid look at transgender life in the conservative Bible Belt of America, which she handles with sensitive perception.

Another well-crafted film with the evocative title of "Kidnap Capital" is premiering in San Diego (with filmmakers attending) and is based on real events, where undocumented migrants were held captive and tortured inside a Phoenix "drop house" after crossing the U.S. border.

Equally powerful is "India's Daughter," about the brutal gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old medical student that caused unprecedented riots throughout India.

"He Named Me Malala" (the only studio picture in the Social Justice lineup from Fox



"He Named Me Malala" features Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, who at age 15, was wounded by the Taliban and subsequently became an advocate for educating girls. Courtesy photo

Searchlight Pictures) features Malala Yousafzai, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate recipient; who at age 15, was severely wounded after becoming a Taliban target and subsequently became an advocate for educating girls.

The underlying thread in all these stories is that despite adversity or a seemingly dead end to a situation, survival with a social impact and an elevated consciousness to help others overcome challenges becomes not The End, but the next step to continued growth for everyone, including the audience.

Sweet inspiration can come from the most unexpected places — and this festival can be one of them. Part of the big picture at the nonprofit SDFF is preserving the golden spirit of free press and allowing independent films with meaningful, maybe even controversial content to be created outside the confines of the box.

See? It's not just about glitz and glamour. Tickets can be purchased at sdfilmfest.com.