

THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY

A film by
Daniel Junge

94 minutes, color, 2008



FIRST RUN FEATURES
The Film Center Building
630 Ninth Ave. #1213
New York, NY 10036
(212) 243-0600 / Fax (212) 989-7649
www.firstrunfeatures.com
www.theykilledsisterdorothy.com

SYNOPSIS

At the mouth of the Amazon River in Belem, Brazil, a murder trial is taking place. The victim was Sister Dorothy Stang, a 73-year-old Catholic nun from Dayton, Ohio who was shot six times at point blank range. The events that led to her death and the trials that follow reveal a larger battle currently being fought for the future of the rainforest.

Just Media and HBO present **THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY**, a gripping documentary and real-life courtroom drama that reveals the true story behind the scenes of this incredible story.

For 30 years, Sister Dorothy Stang, a Catholic nun from Dayton, Ohio, worked in the Brazilian Amazon, trying to improve the lives of the region's huge underclass. But in the final years of her life, her attention turned to the rampant destruction of the Amazon, a fifth of which is already destroyed. Her answer to the problems of deforestation and poverty was the Sustainable Development Project, or PDS, in which landless workers could farm sustainably while keeping the rainforest intact. But the program received violent opposition from the region's powerful loggers and ranchers, resulting in numerous death threats. Were they responsible for her murder?

Within days of her brutal murder, Dorothy's younger brother David Stang (a former missionary himself) flew to the Brazilian Amazon to learn the truth behind her murder. The filmmakers of **THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY** traveled with him, discovering an incredible cast of characters and a chain of events that would be unbelievable if it weren't all true.

Three pistoleros were quickly arrested and admitted to the murder. But soon the accused gunmen reveal information which leads to the arrest of a powerful rancher and wealthy landowner. Meanwhile, Dorothy's fellow nuns and the farmers of PDS continue to struggle to carry out Dorothy's mission. Justice in Dorothy's case will help ensure their survival, but the region's justice system has a history of impunity – will that change in this high-profile case?

With unprecedented access to both sides of the conflict and to the courtroom, **THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY** follows the dramatic twists and turns of the murder case, while exploring the complex factors which led to this violent confrontation in the Amazon. The result is not only a poignant investigation of one of the planet's critical environmental problems and its innovative potential answer, but a dramatic story worthy of Hollywood blockbusters.

THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY is produced by Academy Award winner Nigel Nobel and narrated by Martin Sheen. Producer Henry Ansbacher and director Daniel Junge also have a number of awards to their credit. The crew also includes a contingent of talented Brazilian filmmakers. **THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY** features a new original song, "Forever," by Grammy-nominated Brazilian singer/songwriter Bebel Gilberto.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I first read about the murder of Sister Dorothy Stang in the days following her death, I thought, what a fantastic idea for a movie. And I mean “movie” in the big-screen with popcorn, Hollywood sense. Here was a 73-year old Catholic nun murdered on a muddy road deep in the Brazilian rainforest. Here was an amazing cast of characters, including gunmen and loggers on one side, nuns and farmers trying to save the rainforest on the other. Here was an intricate plot of untangling the past and with an inevitable trial with a verdict that would shape the future. This is the stuff of great movies.

On the flip side, there was a wealth of themes that themselves would make poignant, informative documentaries – rainforest destruction and preservation, agrarian land reform, missionaries in developing countries, the Brazilian justice system – each subject worthy of earnest, thoughtful investigation, but on a smaller palette for a niche audience.

The question was which film to make? Was it possible to incorporate all these subjects and tight-knit plot into one seamless film?

When we went to Brazil with Dorothy's brother David days after her death, we discovered elements that even exceeded my initial expectations of what this story could hold, with revelations that could possibly affect Dorothy's legacy and work. Our challenge as filmmakers was to relay the film's critical issues but with the kind of cinematic treatment and drama the story deserves. Hopefully we have succeeded not merely in bringing audiences to a deeper understanding of what's happening in the Amazon and why this woman was killed, but also in delivering the message in the most captivating possible way.

While I want “They Killed Sister Dorothy” to engage audiences and elicit change, I feel it's necessary to avoid a propagandistic treatment and to ask deeper questions. We all know that cutting down the rainforest is bad...but why is saving the rainforest (in this case, a mere 100-square mile parcel) so difficult? We all know that the murder of a 73-year old nun is reprehensible...but what conditions and complications lead to such an act? It is through our behind-the-scenes revelations and through our dramatic presentation, rather than through basic information or through jingoisms, by which I want to address these deeper questions and to engage a mainstream audience. Hopefully that will help achieve the changes in the Amazon for which Dorothy fought and died.

– Daniel Junge

BIOS

Daniel Junge (*Director*) Daneil Junge's first feature-length film, CHIEFS, on the Wyoming Indian High School basketball team, won best documentary at the 2002 Tribeca Film Festival and broadcast nationally on PBS. Since that time, he has directed a number of films, including the regional Emmy-winner BIG BLUE BEAR, the PBS-broadcast READING YOUR RIGHTS, and the 6-part series COMMON GOOD, recipient of four regional Emmys. Most recently, Junge's award-winning feature documentary IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA, on Africa's first elected female president, premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and has aired on over 50 broadcasters worldwide, including the BBC and PBS, and won two awards at the Banff Television Festival.

Nigel Noble (*Producer*) Mr. Noble has earned many awards as a director and producer for documentaries, television specials and series, music videos, industrial films and television commercials, including an Oscar® for CLOSE HARMONY, an Oscar® nomination for A STITCH IN TIME, two Emmy Awards, two ACE's, five CINE Golden Eagles, and two NATPE Iris Awards among others.

Recently Noble produced the documentary, THE BEAUTY ACADEMY OF KABUL, which premiered at The Tribeca Film Festival, May 2004 and was distributed by Shadow Releasing in Spring 2006. In 2002, he completed two one-hour specials for television: PORTRAITS OF GRIEF, and GANGS- ESCAPING THE LIFE. His film VOICE OF SARAFINA! produced in association with Lincoln Center Theater was invited to The Cannes Film Festival, "Un Certain Regard" and won several awards including the Prix Amnesty Award, and is in the permanent collection of the Museum of Broadcasting.

Other directing credits include: OS CARVOEIROS: THE CHARCOAL PEOPLE OF BRAZIL, PORGY & BESS: AN AMERICAN VOICE, TRAUMA: LIFE IN THE ER, A STITCH IN TIME, BIG APPLE CIRCUS, A LITTLE CURIOUS, THE MAN WHO LOVES SHARKS, COWBOYS OF THE PANTENAL. His work has appeared on PBS, HBO, Lifetime, NBC, Discovery Channel, CBS, The Learning Channel, National Geographic, and Nickelodeon; it has been released theatrically and showcased at film festivals around the world. (A full filmography is attached).

Henry Ansbacher, (*Producer*) Henry Ansbacher founded Just Media, a Colorado-based non-profit production company dedicated to innovative media projects on issues of social justice, the environment, and education. As Just Media's executive director, Ansbacher has produced all of director Daniel Junge's films, including CHIEFS, IRON LADIES OF LIBERIA, and THEY KILLED SISTER DOROTHY, as well as over 40 short films for various non-profit organizations. His work with non-profits led to his conception and production of *Common Good*, a six part series for Comcast Cable about social entrepreneurs, which won 4 Regional Emmys in 2005.

Ansbacher served as executive producer on the theatrically-released OCCUPATION: DREAMLAND and the soon-to-be released WESLEY WILLIS'S JOYRIDES, in addition to directing the documentary WITNESS: FROM A DEEP PLACE, which screened in festivals in the US and Europe.

Marcela Bourseau, (Co-Producer, Camera) Marcela Bourseau began her work in the photography and film industries at 16-years-old in Brazil and Italy. Bourseau has also worked as a camera assistant and additional cameraperson on a number of major international productions in Brazil, including the US film ANACONDA, and, most recently, the Italian film GARIBALDI.

Bourseau has worked extensively as a cameraperson with José Padilha of Zazen Productions on films including OS CARVOEIROS: THE CHARCOAL PEOPLE OF BRAZIL (official selection of Sundance 2000), BUS 174, which won over 11 festival awards, and FOME. cinematographer on *Facing the Jaguar*, a co-production of Zazen Productions and National Geographic. Additionally, she worked as assistant director under Victor Lopes on films such as SERRA PELADA, a documentary exploring the history of gold mining in an Amazonian town, and PARCEIROS DO BRASIL – SEBRAE.

KEY FILM PARTICIPANTS

Sister Dorothy Stang – *The Victim*

Sister Dorothy Stang was born on June 7, 1931 in Dayton Ohio, the fourth of nine children. She joined the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur at the age of 17, and in 1966 she moved to Brazil, where she lived and worked with farm settlers for three decades until her death. In the last decade of her life, she turned her attention to rainforest destruction, and spearheaded the country's first sustainable development project. This particular project created dangerous enemies for Sister Dorothy. On February 12th, 2005, she was shot to death execution style in the rainforest.

David Stang – *The Brother*

The youngest (along with his twin brother, Tom) of nine Stang children, David left Ohio as a Maryknoll missionary priest. He spent ten years in Tanzania and Kenya before returning to the US. Upon his return, he left the priesthood to work in healthcare administration, married and had three kids. Recently he put aside his retirement to travel to Brazil to find out the truth behind her death, ensure justice in her death and secure the future of her work.

Sister Becky Spires – *The Best Friend*

Sister Roberta Lee (Becky) Spires joined the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur in Ohio and became a protégé and best friend of Dorothy Stang. Becky joined Dorothy in Brazil in 1970, and they worked together with impoverished rural farmers. While Dorothy's work focused more and more on environmental concerns, Becky's work concentrated more on the rights of indigenous people. Becky has now become outspoken in seeking justice for her friend, as well as continuing the mission of the Sisters of Notre Dame in Brazil.

Felicio Pontes – *The Federal Prosecutor*

In the last 10 years, Federal Prosecutor Felicio Pontes has become a key figure in the fight to conserve the Amazon rainforest and protect the rights of indigenous populations. He has been at the forefront of the region's most heated political debates, including his work with Sister Dorothy and the PDS. He is continuing her fight for land reform, and seeking justice for his friend, although the case remains in the hands of the state prosecutors.

Claudia Cavalcante – *The Protégé*

Claudia Cavalcante's parents were among the first pioneers to settle along the Tranzamazon highway. She grew up attending the schools created through Sister Dorothy's work. Dorothy sent Claudia to an out of state university to study agronomy. After graduating as an agricultural technician, Cavalcante returned to her hometown to work by Sister Dorothy's side in implementing the Sustainable Development projects. Today she continues the Sister's work by teaching sustainable farming techniques to farm workers.

Rayfran das Neves Sales – *Accused Killer #1*

Rayfran das Neves Sales was born in the state of Goiano in 1976, and began farm work at the age of eight. Prior to his involvement in Sister Dorothy's murder, Rayfran had no criminal record. He has admitted to being the triggerman in the murder.

Clodoaldo Carlos Batista – *Accused Killer #2*

Clodoaldo Carlos Batista was born in 1974 and moved to Para in 2004 to work with Tato Amair Feijoli da Cunha. Batista's home state of Espirito Santo is notorious for organized crime and violence and Batista's childhood was darkened by the murder of his father. He is accused of being Rayfran's accomplice in the murder.

Amair Feijoli da Cunha/"Tato" – *The Middle Man*

Known as "Tato", he sold his coffee plantation in 2004 to start a life in Para with his wife and three children. Feijoli bought a small parcel of land from Bida on the contested Lot 55, beginning a series of confrontations with Dorothy and her people. He is accused of arranging Sister Dorothy's murder as the middleman to the ranchers who allegedly paid for it.

Vitalmiro Bastos de Moura – *The Rancher*

Moura's cattle ranch property and lands border the lands claimed by the PDS. He was previously cited for forcing 20 rural workers into slave labor conditions on his ranch, and has been a suspect in various violent crimes in the region. After being fingered by the gunmen, Bida was on the run for weeks before turning himself in and hiring high-powered lawyer Americo Leal to defend him.

Regivaldo Pereira Galvao — *The Boss*

Regivaldo Pereira Galvao, known as Taradao, or "Sleazy," is one of the wealthiest businessmen in the Anapu region. Galvao built his fortune on the ownership of vast amounts of property used for logging and cattle ranching, and from running a notorious money-lending business. Regivaldo has denied any involvement in the murder and applied to Brazil's supreme court to be released.

Americo Leal – *The Defense Lawyer*

Defense lawyer Americo Leal has run an independent law firm in Belem, Para for over 30 years. He is well known for defending wealthy ranchers and loggers, and working pro bono for disadvantaged clients. His reputation was solidified in 1996 when he successfully defended the state police in the most famous court case in Para's history, Eldorado dos Carajás, where 19 land rights demonstrators were killed. He and his team announced they would represent not only Bida, but also the gunmen involved in the crime.

Bottom Line: A straight-ahead docu about an activist's murder benefits from remarkable courtroom footage.

By John DeFore
Mar 27, 2008



"Sister Dorothy" investigates the murder of American-born nun Dorothy Stang.

AUSTIN -- Winner of both the grand jury and audience favorite documentary feature awards at this year's South by Southwest film festival, "They Killed Sister Dorothy" begins modestly, with a TV-friendly presentation of a politically motivated murder. But the familiar feel (which likely limits commercial prospects to the small screen) eventually gives way to a chunk of footage in the second half that is so captivating it's almost hard to believe.

Narrated by Martin Sheen, "Sister Dorothy" investigates the murder of an American nun and environmentalist who had spent so long in the Brazilian rain forest that she became a citizen of the country. Working for three decades with poverty-level farmers, Dorothy Stang made it her life's work to push forward a governmental initiative aimed at helping Brazilians make a living from small, dedicated plots of forest while sustaining the woodland's overall growth. This happens in an area where even bureaucrats often have no way of knowing whose property claims are legitimate, and the approach to law enforcement is frequently compared to the Wild West. Stang's mission was bound to provoke powerful ranchers whose wealth depended on exploiting vast swaths of land.

Filmmaker Daniel Junge follows Stang's brother David (a missionary himself) as he comes to Brazil to investigate her murder: Men have been charged in what's being described as a spontaneous act of violence, but Dorothy's friends are certain the killers actually were hired by a shadowy network of businessmen who had been trying to intimidate her. Only with great effort is David able to find prosecutors willing to pursue this claim, and even then the outlook is bleak: The ranchers are well connected with local judges and lawyers who erect seemingly impossible barriers to prosecution.

If this story line is blood-boiling, it also resembles many stories of outrage and denied justice -- until we begin to spend time with the lawyers on the other side of the case. Men of such extravagant sliminess that they seem like fictional characters, they have an open contempt for the idea that law should be about justice. It's hard to believe they were so overconfident that they allowed outsiders to film many of their private negotiations.

Getting into the lawyers' office was a coup, but being able to follow them into court -- where the trial is shot with what appears to be a remarkable freedom of access -- is what makes the film worthwhile. There, the defense team engages in tactics so over the top that you wouldn't believe them in a Hollywood drama: They go so far as to paint the victim as a murderous ganglord and try to associate her with Bush administration policies in Iraq and Guantanamo that she had in fact protested. It's riveting stuff, painting a vivid picture of just what kind of corrupt system Dorothy Stang lost her life opposing.



Daniel Junge's "They Killed Sister Dorothy" impresses and enthralls, balancing moral outrage and courtroom melodrama.

Daniel Junge's "They Killed Sister Dorothy" impresses and enthralls, balancing moral outrage and courtroom melodrama in a documentary filled with the sort of colorful characters one usually encounters only in fictional crime stories. Winner of the jury and audience awards at the SXSW Film Festival, pic could elicit the sort of money notices necessary to lure venturesome ticketbuyers to commercial and nonprofit venues. Also, advocacy groups may use it for fund- and consciousness-raising prior to cable and pubcast exposure.

Title refers to the execution-style slaying of Sister Dorothy Stang, a 73-year-old Ohio-born missionary who, at the time of her death, was at the forefront of a sustainable-development project in the Brazilian rainforest. Stang aided peasant settlers in their efforts to claim acres of land coveted and sometimes illegally exploited by loggers and ranchers. Not surprisingly, she upset a lot of people who had a lot to lose if her efforts succeeded.

Pic shows how, very quickly, a trigger man and two associates were arrested and charged with the murder. But several people involved in the case -- including David Stang, the victim's visiting brother, and Felicio Pontes, a dedicated federal prosecutor -- strongly suspected that higher-ups gave the orders to kill.

Fashioning a fascinating narrative from TV news footage, courtroom hearings and sometimes shockingly candid interviews, Junge provides multiple points of view as the legal proceedings grind away over three years. (Even the titular victim, viewed on videotape, gets an opportunity to testify.) The overall tone is one of earnest seriousness, but some stranger-than-fiction elements border on black comedy.

One of the landowners accused of plotting the murder is widely known by a nickname, Taradao, which translates as "sleazy." And his defense attorney, Americo Leal, is jaw-droppingly shameless in his ranting attempt to convince the jury that the supposedly saintly sister really was a U.S.-backed provocateur cut from the same cloth as the torturers at Abu Ghraib.

In a quieter moment, Leal blandly explains that Stang wasn't murdered as the result of a conspiracy. Rather, she died simply because she "irritated" the men who killed her. "It's very hard to survive," he says with a shrug, "when you irritate people in that region."

Standout production values include Martin Sheen's understated narration and Pedro Bromfman's evocative score.



SXSW Film
Daily reviews and interviews
By Marc Savlov

Sister Christian: 'They Killed Sister Dorothy'

There's a dramatic courtroom turnabout in *They Killed Sister Dorothy* that blows everything that's come before out of the water – and this is a film with more than its share of grandiose, truth-is-stranger-than-fiction legal strategizing.

It arrives, unheralded, from theatrically inclined defense attorney Américo Leal, who argues that the 2005 murder of 73-year-old U.S. missionary and Amazonian environmental activist Dorothy Mae Stang was not arranged by a shadowy consortium of rancheros, federales, and good old-fashioned fall guys in the rain-forested Brazilian frontier village of Anapu but instead was the direct result of Sister Dorothy's gun-running, CIA-planted, "wild" life.

"Who was Dorothy Stang? And who are these North American people?" ponders the confabulation-inclined attorney. "If your excellencies were to draw a map, wherever they've been there's a trail of violence, a trail of blood, a trail of disgrace. They said that Saddam Hussein had chemical weapons; they invaded [Iraq] and killed over a million people. This is the DNA that created Dorothy: the DNA of violence."

It's a crazy argument, a bold-faced example of legal misdirection, but what's far crazier, as director Daniel Junge points out, "is that with our country's activities in the world right now, that argument does hold water. He's going off, but there's an element of truth to what he's saying, and it's just reprehensible that even when we're doing the most benevolent things that that accusation holds water."

They Killed Sister Dorothy is a riveting courtroom drama set against the combustible backdrop of the decimated rain forest, with a poor, indigenous population on one side and a wealthy spectrum of landowners desperate to keep the status quo on the other; in the middle is the ghost of elderly, apple-cheeked Sister Dorothy, fiercely insistent on denying the ambiguity of amorality even to the point of death and beyond.

"We've showed the film to [Sister Dorothy's] family and to the nuns," adds Junge, "but ... our hope is to build a little momentum here before we show it in Brazil, because we think that it's going to ruffle some feather down there. We hope this film motivates some change and disrupts that status quo in the Amazon."

They Killed Sister Dorothy won both the Grand Jury Award and the Audience Award for Documentary Features

Festival Appearances to Date:

April 2008

SXSW South by Southwest Film Festival (World Premiere)

Winner -- Grand Jury Prize, Best Documentary

Winner -- Audience Award, Best Documentary

June 2008

Seattle International Film Festival

Named in top ten Audience Favorites

July 2008

Woods Hole Film Festival

Winner -- Jury Prize, Best Documentary

Winner -- Audience Award, Best of the Fest

October 2008

Chicago International Film Festival

Winner-- DocuFest Silver Hugo

November 2008

Brasilia Film Festival

Winner – Special Juried Award

CREDITS

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| Narrator | Martin Sheen |
| Director | Daniel Junge |
| Producers | Henry Ansbacher Nigel Noble |
| Co-Producer | Marcela Bourseau |
| Associate Producers | Annie Eastman Gustavo Gelmini |
| Editor | Davis Coombe |
| Cinematographers | Daniel Junge Marcela Bourseau |
| Composer | Pedro Bromfman |
| Original Song (“Forever”) | Bebel Gilberto |