

THE San Damiano FOUNDATION



A FRANCISCAN MINISTRY
PUTTING THE POWER OF FILM
AT THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

SPRING 2009

Hidden and Waiting

*A thick blanket of fog
is hiding the sun
and covering Assisi.*

*The innermost essence of God
is hidden from us,
totally separated from the created world.*

*We can see only hints of God's love,
which is enduring
and incomprehensible.
God is utterly transcendent
and lovingly immanent.*

*The call to holiness is an invitation
to enter fully into
a committed relationship with God.*

*As we respond,
God graciously nurtures growth
in the relationship,
by using events,
circumstances and people
in our lives as instruments
to hasten a contemplative
outlook on life.*

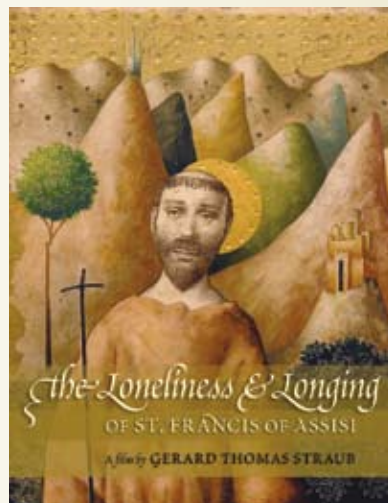
*Prayer becomes a vital part of our day;
and, in prayer,
we encounter more fully
the Author of our life.*

*This personal encounter
with the Creator
slowly transforms us into
a Divine likeness,
as it gently erases
all traces
of the un-God-like substance
within us.*

*In prayer, we unlock
the vault to our deepest self
and allow light to shine on God
who is already abiding
at the very core of our being,
hidden from us
yet patiently waiting for us.*



As you read this newsletter we (Gerry and Jeremy) are back in Assisi, Italy, gathering more footage and photography to finish our film on St. Francis, *The Loneliness and Longing of St. Francis of Assisi*. "Hidden and Waiting" comes from the script of the film and reminds us of the importance of basing our lives and our work on a foundation of prayer.



We still need sponsors to complete this film, so please contact us today about joining with us in our "Producer's Circle" and being thanked in the end credits of the film.

At top: The Eremo delle Carceri, tucked away on the slopes of Mt. Subiaso about 4km outside Assisi. A place of silence and solitude for St. Francis.

Laurie Kroll & Village2Village

Dear Gerry and members of the Board,

Please accept my thanks for your support of Village2Village Project in Uganda. The impact of the film *The Fragrant Spirit of Life* continues to be felt throughout our ministry. There was a time that I knew everyone who sent a donation...it was a friend or family member. Later, it was a member of a church I had personally visited, or a close friend of a friend.

Since the release of the film, and even before that, through the release of the Sam and Esther clip on YouTube and its distribution through Facebook, we have had donations from as far as Abu Dhabi, the Bahamas and

Gerry's speaking engagements contact us asking to sponsor children . . . the most recent being two families who attended the Hunger conference in Raleigh who have both sponsored little sisters who are HIV+. Our current volunteer, a young woman from Wisconsin right now helping with Sam and Esther, is a friend of a friend of a friend of SDF! James showed her the film in Uganda, as orientation to V2V.

During this last trip to Uganda a month ago, I got to see our children's center in action. Electricity has been installed through a volunteer, the desks are in place and our kids had their first

Sam, Esther and Jane are now together again...this time in Kampala in our "House of Love" under the supervision of a loving woman who has a special needs son of her own. James is there about one week out of four, loving on Sam and Esther and checking Jane's homework. I got to wait for the school bus with her on her first day of school. There are lots of challenges with serving special needs children in Uganda, but even the attempt witnesses to those around us that Sam and Esther are valuable to God and to us regardless of their abilities.

Thank you for your generosity to those of us who are daily on the line with those in poverty. I breathe so much easier when I can say "yes" than when always having to say "no"! I am on vacation now in Florida with my family and thinking and praying for you all and your part God has given YOU in this ministry. I am grateful that you are, as they say in Uganda, "standing with us".

Blessings,
Laurie

Sam and Esther on YouTube.com

The 9-minute clip "Sam and Esther" from our film *The Fragrant Spirit of Life* has been viewed 46,000 times on our YouTube channel, San Damiano Films. Because of this amazing dissemination of the heartbreaking, yet hopeful, story of Sam and Esther and their sister, Jane, Village2Village has received donations internationally, including a new van which they were in desperate need of. We have also posted the rest of their story in



even within Uganda itself. I noticed yesterday that more than 37,500 people have viewed that clip (now over 48,000!). Some of your friends have been very, very generous with us . . . others are new and connect directly with us after seeing the clip.

We have had several participants in

computer class during the two months off between Christmas and February . . . an opportunity not offered to most of the adults that teach them in that district. They have gotten used to the two meals a day we have served for the past year...enjoying a cooked breakfast daily now that we are on our land.

a clip called “Sam and Esther Follow Up.” We encourage you to watch these clips, spread the word, and order the film today.

FREE AT LAST Update

We sent out a letter in July of 2008 about the important work of Fr. Peter Young and the film *Free at Last*. The response to this letter was a beautiful outpouring of donations and prayers and encouragement. With the help of editor Bill Reilly, we made a 25-minute piece for Fr. Young to use for training and fundraising. And as a result of our efforts, The Elfenworks Foundation learned of Fr. Young’s tireless work among the addicted of Albany and created a new website for him with clips from the piece we made: www.pyhit.com.

All of this was a great encouragement to Fr. Young and his work, and although we have yet to overcome the legal hurdles of making a full-length film, this was a significant step forward. Fr. Young has been meeting with key people who control the rights to the original footage, but the outcome is still unknown. Please continue to pray with us that the doors would be opened, so that we can make a film worthy of the life and work of Fr. Peter Young. If a full-length film isn’t to be, we know that many wonderful things have already happened from the shorter version and his new website. Thank you all for answering the call to help us put the power of film at the service of the poor.

A Distressing Disguise

Snapshots from “Rescue Me”

A Note from the Director

In 2003, I spent six months on the mean streets of Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles, a nightmarish 50-block area where about 11,000 homeless people and drug addicts live in cardboard boxes, tents and overcrowded missions. Most of my time in Skid Row was spent at the Union Rescue Mission, an interdenomi-

national Christian organization dedicated to serving the homeless of Skid Row. During those transformational months for me, I made a film entitled *Rescue Me*.

Rescue Me is an epic film, running 3 hours and 20 minutes in length. While the film is essentially about the Union Rescue Mission, a little less than a third of the film contains my personal impressions of and reflections on Skid Row, in sections I called “Snapshots from the Streets.” These “snapshots” are often very



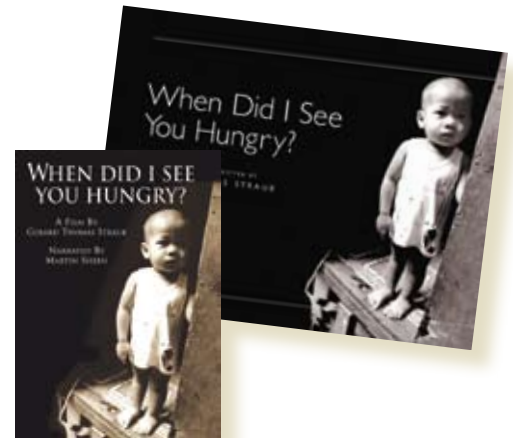
theological in nature; and, for me, they were the heart and soul of the film.

While *Rescue Me* stands near the top of my personal favorites of the thirteen films produced to date by The San Damiano Foundation, I realize that its length was an obstacle for many people, and so I have long wanted to produce a highly condensed version of the film that would essentially consist of my personal reflections and some of the many memorable “street people” I came to love.

It is my hope that *A Distressing Disguise* will give people a more accessible look into the tortured world of the homeless in America.

We can no longer ignore the homeless. We need to rescue them . . . and in doing

so we will also rescue ourselves from our prisons of selfishness and indifference.



When Did I See You Hungry?

St. Anthony Messenger Press has generously given us a crate-load of Gerry’s powerful and meditative photography book, which we are using to help raise much-needed funds to keep San Damiano afloat in these rough economic times. For a donation of \$50, you will receive a signed copy of the book *When Did I See You Hungry?*, along with a copy of the film narrated by Martin Sheen. This film is being used throughout the country to awaken people to the conditions of the poor in our world and our calling to works of mercy and solidarity. This gripping book and film normally cost \$30 each, so for a limited time you can save \$10 on both and, at the same time, help us raise funds to continue putting the power of film at the service of the poor. Visit our website www.sandamianofoundation.org or call us today at **(818) 563-1947**.

Also available directly from

St. Anthony Messenger’s Press

is the updated paperback of the award-winning book *Sun and Moon Over Assisi*, and from Orbis books *Thoughts of a Blind Beggar*.

GERRY'S SPEAKING EVENTS

The beginning of 2009 has been packed with events all over the country, including the prestigious Maryknoll Speakers Series and the Hunger Conference in Raleigh, NC.

Speaking Events so far this year:

Holy Name of Jesus Church

San Bernardino, CA — 2/22/09

Alvernia College

Reading, PA — 2/25/09 - 2/26/09

Hunger Conference

Raleigh, NC — 2/27/09 - 2/28/09

The University at Padre Serra Church,

Camarillo, CA — 3/3/09

Maryknoll, Ossining, NY — 3/8/09

Mary Immaculate Church

Bellport, Long, Island, NY — 3/14/09

Good Shepherd Church

Holbrook, Long Island, NY — 3/15/09

Religious Youth Ministry Program

New Rochelle, NY — 3/16/09

Gonzaga University

Spokane, WA — 3/22/09 - 3/23/09

Our Lady Counsel Church

Plymouth, MI — 3/25/09

Father Gabriel Richard High School,

Ann Arbor, MI - 3/26/09

Umbria Institute

Perugia, Italy — 4/3/09

Loyola Marymount University

Los Angeles, CA — 4/20/09

St. Anthony Church

Casper, WY — 4/25/09

Chestnut Hill College

Philadelphia, PA — 5/9/09

*Gerry will be receiving an

Honorary Doctorate Degree of Laws

UPCOMING EVENTS

Our Lady of Gethsemene

Monastery, Louisville, KY —

5/29/09-5/30/09

JustFaith Presentation at

St. Martha's Church & Grade School,

St. Agnus Grade School, and

St. Williams Church

Louisville, KY — 5/31/09

St. Thomas More Church

Narragansett, RI — 6/18/09 - 6/20/09

St. Mark's Church

Jamestown, RI — 6/19/09

While in Reading, PA, the school arranged for a breakfast gathering of people who work in various organizations that help the poor. Even the mayor attended. I gave a brief presentation and showed some clips from *Room at the Inn*. At least half the people at breakfast attended the public event the night before at Alvernia University.

Here is an e-mail from a guy who was at the breakfast:

Hi Gerry —

I just wanted to say thank you again for your inspirational presentation last night and breakfast talk today. It was an honor meeting you and learning about your story. I walked away from a \$1 billion investment firm I co-founded six years ago to help serve my community (timing is everything!), but too often get lost in the politics and bureaucracy of running a non-profit agency. Your message helped remind me of why I do what I do, and how urgent the need is here, there, and everywhere.

So thank you for sharing your story and for all you do.

Thank you,

Scott L. Rehr

An email from Deacon Don Leach regarding my talk at a high school in Ann Arbor, Michigan that Don arranged:

I was just told Fr Gabriel Richard High School raised \$1,450 for Village2Village after your talk. They have worked it out with Laurie to have that money buy uniforms and sweaters for the kids in Uganda.

Deacon Donald Leach

Pastoral Associate,

Our Lady of Good Counsel



Fr. André Cirino, OFM, Gerry Straub and Fr. John Dear, SJ

On April 18th we had our annual meeting of the Board of Directors at the Villa Scalabrini Seminary in Sun Valley, CA, just a few miles from our offices in Burbank. We had the privilege of having André Cirino, OFM spend the day with us and speak to the Board about the overwhelming goodness of God as envisioned by Franciscan theologians Saint Bonaventure and the blessed John Duns Scotus. We were also happy to have Fr. John Dear, SJ with us who is featured in our film *The Narrow Path* and always adds good humor and uncompromising vision to the SDF mission.

We would also like to introduce two new members of the Board: Abbot Francis Benedict, O.S.B. and Peter Poppleton. Each of these men bring special gifts, insights, and experience to help further the ministry of SDF, and we are grateful to have them with us.



Abbot Francis with Peter Poppleton