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MONTVALE

Homicide documentary premieres 'Harry... A Communication Breakdown' set for January release

BY KIMBERLY REDMOND
Of Community Life

In 1976, the De La Roche's simple red clapboard house on Grand Avenue in Montvale became the center of a homicide investigation. Following an argument with his parents on Thanksgiving weekend, 18-year-old Harry De La

Roche shot his father, mother and two younger brothers while they slept.

More than 30 years later, Jon Doscher, a filmmaker and founder of Starline Films, remains fascinated with the De La Roche case. His desire to know the facts, rather than the myths surrounding the murders, has propelled him to

partake in a journey that includes a documentary and a feature film on the tragic murders.

On Nov. 26, the day before Thanksgiving, Starline Films premiered "Harry... A Communication Breakdown," a documentary following the case of De La Roche.

Doscher first heard the story of the murders in 1985 when he was

a freshman at Pascack Hills High School. Woodcliff Lake Police Det. Tony Jannicelli (now police chief) recounted the story of the homicide to him.

His interest grew when he discovered he lived a few doors down from the De La Roche's house. "I

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STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS PETERS

Pictured from left is Jon Doscher, of Starline Films, and actor Danny Aiello at the Nov. 26 premiere of "Harry... A Communication Breakdown." The documentary, released by Starline, a Saddle River-based film company, follows the case of Harry De La Roche, Jr., a man convicted of killing his father, mother and two younger brothers during Thanksgiving weekend in their Montvale home. Doscher's intrigue of the case, coupled with the locality, led him to the creation of the documentary narrated by Aiello. Next November, Aiello will make his directorial debut with "Anyone's Son", Starline's feature film based upon the De La Roche case.

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lived on the street, so I could identify with the Bogeyman element. The house was all boarded up and kids would run past it," he says. According to Doscher, the incident at the De La Roche house was something neighbors never spoke about, which made it difficult to get the accurate story.

"The myth-mystique element drew me to it," Doscher says of the case he refers to as "the Stephen King movie of Grand Avenue."

The documentary, narrated by actor Danny Aiello, is shot in a "then and now style," says Doscher. It is juxtaposed with footage from Bill Moyer's 1978 documentary on the De La Roche case, which includes interviews with Montvale residents, police, teachers, the case's prosecutor, the

defendant's lawyer and the family's pastor, to name a few.

Doscher picked up where Moyers left off 30 years ago by following up with the individuals originally interviewed in 1978 to discuss their perceptions of the case, as well as their feelings about the impact that the murders had on the community. The piece of resistance of the documentary, according to Doscher, is the only on-camera interview ever conducted with De La Roche, who's been serving out sentences for four counts of first-degree murder in Bridgeton's South Wood State Prison since January 1978.

He also hopes the film will better convey the fragility of De La Roche, who came from a background fraught with abuse. "He was abused - severely abused," says Doscher, "He was also ridiculed in and out of the home."

Doscher speculates the murders,

committed by De La Roche, represent a breakdown in his ability to cope. "Lots of people come close to the point [he] was at that weekend, however few ever act upon it," says the filmmaker.

De La Roche was a student at the Citadel, a military college in Charleston, S.C., best known for its rigorous cadet program that combines academics and physical challenges with military discipline. The first three months at the Citadel proved to be too much for De La Roche, who loathed the strict environment and did not wish to return following the Thanksgiving holiday. This prompted a heated argument between De La Roche and his father, and Harry was charged with shooting all four of his family members while they slept.

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"Breakdown" sets up "Anyone's Son," which enters pre-production in January. The film, which begins shooting in February, marks the directorial debut of Aiello. The film's screenplay, currently being written by Doscher, will be based upon Roberta Roesch's 1979 book of the same name. Roesch, a former professor and author from Westwood, collaborated with De La Roche to pen the book that recounts the murder from his perspective. Following the book's release, several high profile directors contacted Roesch, wanting to buy the story rights. According to Doscher they wanted to "glorify and stray from the original story" which resulted in Roesch denying them the story rights.

In 2005, she cautiously accepted a meeting with Doscher to discuss the possibility of adapting the manuscript for the screen. As soon as the pair sat down at Westwood's Seville Diner, Roesch questioned him as to why he should be granted the rights to "Anyone's Son." "I explained to her that I wanted to condense the book into a film and that I wasn't at all interested in glorifying it," says Doscher.

Subsequently, Roesch consent-

ed to grant the story rights to Starline Films. "It's a true honor for her to trust me to write a screenplay off of this book," says Doscher.

The feature film, "Anyone's Son", slated for a November 2009 release, has been cast with several high profile names. Attached to the project are Val Kilmer, Sharon Stone, Haley Joel Osmert and Michael Madsen. Doscher, who is also trained as an actor, will assume the role of Richard Salkin, the Bergen County Prosecutor in the De La Roche case.

The Nov. 26 screening, at Chakra Restaurant in Paramus, was packed with a mixture of Starline supporters that included friends, family and local celebrities such as actors Terrence Howard, Danny Aiello, Haley Joel Osmert, Steven Van Zandt and former New York Yankee Rick Cerone.

Howard, who is cast in another Starline project entitled "4Chosen", believes the story of Harry De La Roche carries a deeper message. "Anyone's Son' can happen to anyone in here - when you fail to show the right parenting, which is showing love," he says with his arm around his son. "A lot of times we think we need to show our children how to be strong and how to be a man, but the first thing we need to teach our children is how to be human. And, the most overwhelming quality about a human being is his

ability to love."

A portion of premiere's net proceeds will benefit New Jersey Child Abuse Prevention (NJCAP), a statewide prevention program that works to reduce the level of interpersonal violence through assault prevention education. The program, supported by the New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect provides three major programs to schools and communities addressing the topics of bullying, conflict resolution and child assault prevention. For further information on NJCAP visit www.njcap.org.

"I think through the efforts of NJCAP, what happened to the De La Roche family can be prevented," says Francine Ganguzza, co-producer and writer of "Harry... A Communication Breakdown."

Starting in January, "Harry... A Communication Breakdown" will have a limited theatrical release in New York City and Los Angeles. Doscher stated Starline will enter the documentary in several film festivals including Tribeca, Cannes and Toronto. The DVD will be released early next summer.

Additionally, to promote November's scheduled premiere of "Anyone's Son", Starline is working in conjunction with Roesch to re-release her book. The book is slated to release next June, the 30th anniversary of its



STAFF PHOTO BY CHRIS PETERS

In 1979, Westwood resident Roberta Roesch penned "Anyone's Son", a book chronicling the murders of the De La Roche family through Harry's perspective. Roesch collaborated with Harry for the book, which filmmaker John Doscher is using to write the screenplay for the Starline feature film of the same name. Next year the book will be re-released to promote the November premiere of the film version of "Anyone's Son."

1979 release. The new edition will include a foreword by Aiello and a rewritten epilogue by Roesch.

For more information on "Anyone's Son" visit www.anyoneson.com or [www.starline-](http://www.starlinefilms.com)

[films.com](http://www.starlinefilms.com).
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