

Writer/Producer/Director
Deiren Masterson

Masterworks Productions
Toronto, Canada
E: deiren@deiren.com
W: www.deiren.com

Independent Films Put Success into Perspective.

By Jim Coyle (*The Toronto Star* 09/10/02)

FOR ALL THE preening, posing and air-kissing by all the hip haircuts at the

Toronto International Film Festival, it's entirely possible that many on hand would be hard-pressed to match the credits modestly compiled over the past five years by Deiren Masterson. You might even call it lifetime achievement in half a decade.

A little more than five years ago, Masterson was, at 24, a young man typical of his age and times: a little aimless, a little beat up by false career starts. Then one day, from the coffee table of his parents' Scarborough home, he picked up a copy of *Images of Love, Words of Hope*, the transcript of an interview with Jean Vanier, the Canadian founder of the worldwide community of L'Arche. Masterson took the book with him on a trip to Vancouver while visiting friends, "trying to make my way."

"But I was carrying that around. It connected with me, basically. And it eventually led me to Daybreak."

On his return to Ontario, he went to live with the developmentally disabled at L'Arche Daybreak in Richmond Hill. And he knew at once he was home. "It was an instant fit," he was saying yesterday. "There was just this naturalness that I guess I was looking for." His first night there, he met Roy Turkel, an unruly, unabashed 69-year-old who'd spent half a century in institutions before moving to L'Arche. The two became fast friends.

For a time, Masterson was happy just to be absorbed in daily life there. But over the past couple of years, he has wanted to tell the stories of the special people with whom he lived and from whom he learned.

Director chronicles lives rarely celebrated.

Last year, over one weekend and working with a rented camera, he made a biographical video of a 52-year-old dynamo named John Smeltzer, a L'Arche resident with Down Syndrome who became something of a local institution at the Richmond Hill businesses he would visit on a Saturday and for the spoons he would play with the band at a local Irish pub. The video to be shown on Vision-TV, has been shown in a number of local schools, an antidote to the endless messages children receive equating success with physical prettiness and material comfort.

This summer, Masterson produced *In God's Hands*, the story of Michael Barrett, a 33-year-old man who suffers from cerebral palsy, yet who was a member of a dance troupe that performed for Pope John Paul II during his visit to Toronto in July. There was a man, "born into a body of pain and limitations, spinning in his wheelchair, dancing for the Pope," Masterson recalls.

"John and Michael are people with a purpose. They both have particular gifts to help point us back to the heart of things: To love and be loved."

In some ways, the chronicling of lives rarely celebrated, or even recognized, is Masterson's farewell gift to L'Arche. Now 30, he is readying to leave the community. He is to be married this spring to an associate he met there. Financial realities mean "it just doesn't work for two people here."

His years at L'Arche have taught him more than he thought possible about relationships, he says, about how to understand others, how to work through difficulties, how to stick with people.

"This place is definitely a school, a relationship school of life. It's not like I'm walking around like I have all the answers and everything's perfect, but inside I definitely feel a lot more able to deal with life."

As it happens, a friend was saying the other day that as his own life goes on, he finds himself bothered as much by his sins of omission as his sins of commission, is troubled as much by the decencies he failed to perform as by small wrongs done. That doesn't sound like a regret Deiren Masterson will have.



Deiren Masterson is a filmmaker living in Toronto, Canada.

Michael Barrett