FREEMEN
A film by Anne-Frédérique Widmann
Documentary film - 90 minutes

Intermezzo Films presents

Official selection
Geneva International film festival and forum on human rights
YOU CAN SLOW ME DOWN, BUT YOU CAN’T STOP ME.

SYNOPSIS

Sentenced to death, Kenneth has survived decades of imprisonment in complete isolation. Love and art have freed him from his chains. He found a purpose in life, when all signs of hope seemed lost.

In solitary confinement for the last 25 years, Kenneth has pushed back the walls of his cell to become a painter, a poet, the founder of a non-profit, and an art event organizer – while fighting at the same time for justice. At age 18, Kenneth Reams was convicted for capital murder without firing a bullet. He became the youngest inmate on Arkansas death row.

Alongside art, the film shows how love can cross barbed wire and the length of an ocean in Kenneth’s love for Isabelle, a French artist who wants to become his wife.

While Arkansas rushes to execute ten inmates in ten days – an absolute American record - the film captures Kenneth’s struggle, with unprecedented access to his daily battle, and raises universal questions - How can we fight injustice? How can we continue to move forward and find a sense of purpose in life?

FREE MEN is a film for all those who have thought, one day, of giving up.
In 2015, I ended up on the phone with Kenneth Reams. He’d heard about the project I was organizing with The New York Times editorial cartoonist Chappatte, *Windows on Death Row*, an exhibition of paintings by inmates on death row.

“Your idea is interesting. My organization has just recently put up an exhibition in Little Rock, Arkansas. But to change the American people’s opinion, you have to take it a step further. We have to create a national museum to tell the history of capital punishment. That’s my goal. Perhaps we can work together on this?”. His voice is upbeat. Kenneth tells me about the non-profit organization he founded and its website: it is called *Who Decides*.

On the other end of the line, he sounds like an anti-death penalty activist, sitting behind his computer. It turns out, Kenneth Reams is talking to me from his prison cell. “Think about it and we’ll be in touch”, he says before hanging up.

Is this real? I rush to my computer, find his organization, his committee of directors, the museum project and even a video of one of his openings, posted on YouTube. Kenneth is not bluffing. How has he managed to orchestrate all this, from the confines of his tiny prison cell?

In the following weeks, I met Ndume Olatushani who spent 28 years in prison, 20 of which on death row before being freed in 2012. Art and love has kept him standing along all those years.

This film in a sense came looking for me. Kenneth and Ndume, two charismatic and extraordinary characters who have drawn upon unusual, inner resources, giving them the strength to survive a life of imprisonment and a destiny cut short. Their stories are filled with hope. From the very depths of death row, they give us a valuable life lesson. Their fight and determination to remain free men at all costs is at the heart of this film.

Do we all possess such strength, somewhere deep inside us?

**DIRECTOR STATEMENT**
NOTES ON THE FILM

A story told through a prisoner’s voice.

Kenneth is a storyteller, a speaker like no other. It is through his voice only, that we follow his story. Kenneth’s voice was recorded over a period of two years in a range of situations.

In this point of view, FREE MEN is a unique film. It portrays a prisoner’s daily struggle and endless energy, without a shot inside the prison.

Kenneth is present with his family, with his friends, he shares moments with them on the phone. We read on their faces how they feel about his detention: tenderness, despair, sadness. It is not until the end that we see Kenneth’s face.
ANNE-FRÉDÉRIQUE WIDMANN
DIRECTOR, WRITER
Anne-Frédérique Widmann is a Swiss investigative reporter and documentary filmmaker.

Formerly, she was U.S. correspondent for European media, co-editor-in-chief, anchor of the current affairs documentary program Temps Présent and head of the investigative team of the French Swiss National Television and Radio RTS.

With New-York Times editorial cartoonist Chappatte, she co-founded the art & documentation project Windows on Death Row.

www.windowsondeathrow.com

FILMOGRAPHY

FONDS JUIFS, LES VICTIMES ATTENDENT TOUJOURS
(Jewish Funds, The Victims Still Await)
with Jean-Bernard Menoud, Temps Présent, RTS, 2004, 52’

L’ANTICHAMBRE DU RENVOI
(The Antechamber of Dismissal)
with Marcel Schüpbach, Temps Présent, RTS, 2004, 26’
Immerson at the Frambois detention centre in Geneva.

SOHA, RETOUR AU PAYS DU HEZBOLLAH
(Soha, Return to the Land of Hezbollah)
with Jean-Bernard Menoud, RTS, 2006, 45’.
A report in the South of Lebanon the day after the war between Israel and the Lebanese Hezbollah.

INFRMIEURES BULGARES: LE GRAND MARCHANDAGE
(Bulgarian Nurses: The Great Negotiation)
with Marie-Laure Widmer Baggiolini, Temps Présent, RTS, 2007, 52’.
Investigation into the release of ten Bulgarian nurses detained for the duration of ten years in Libya.
Projection of documentary at closing night of FIGRA 2007.

DIPLOMATES SUISSES DANS LE PIEGE COLOMBIEN
(Swiss Diplomats in the Colombian Trap)
with Marie-Laure Widmer Baggiolini, Temps Présent, RTS, 2009, 52’.
The story of Jeanne-Pierre Gontard, the mediator of the DFAE (Swiss Embassy) in Colombia.
Selected at FIGRA. 1st prize Nicolas Bouvier 2009

ŒIL POUR ŒIL: LA VENGEANCE DE KHADAFI
(Eye For An Eye: Khadafi’s Vengeance)
The secret story behind the release of two Swiss hostages in Libya.

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by Anne-Frédérique Widmann
Documentary film - 90 minutes - DCP 5.1
OV English-French / English, French, German subtitles

Director, writer Anne-Frédérique Widmann
Director of photography Karim Amin
Sound recordist Nicolas Binggeli
Editor Ana Acosta
Composer Costanza Francavilla
Sound editing Carlos Ibanez Diaz
Sound mix Martin Stricker
Additional Sound Mix Fabrizio Bacherini
Coloring Boris Rabusseau

CAST
Kenneth Reams
Ndume Olatushani
Isabelle Watson Reams
George Kendall
Beatrice Whiteside
Amelia Akins
Megan Ford
Donna Parks

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Pour-cent culturel Migros : Postproduction
Freestudios
Amnesty International

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Irène Challand
Gaspard Lamunière
Globe Cartoon
Patrick Chappatte

CREW
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teaser: www.vimeo.com/258238813
www.freemen.ch
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www.intermezzofilms.ch