



ENTERTAINMENT



Forbes Magazine spotlights Lynn Dow's short film 'Compassionate Release'



Twin sisters, Jassy and Janet, played by real life twins Sasha and Sable Boykin, from the movie *Compassionate Release* share a tender moment. (Photo courtesy of Up the Road Films)

By Ernest McBride
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Director Lynn Dow's short film *Compassionate Release* is a plea for mercy for seriously ill inmates first brought to the screen less than a year before the ravages of COVID-19 raised the public concern that many older and disabled inmates might die as result of the virus.

Screened at the 2020 Pan African Film Festival in February in Los Angeles, the heart-wrenching story of a hardworking widowed mother facing the demise of one of her twin daughters in the late stages of kidney infection in a New York prison has received growing attention with the advent of the coronavirus.

Forbes Magazine featured a review by former Wall Street lawyer Walter Pavlo in its May 8 edition, saying, "*Compassionate Release* was supposed to be showing at film festivals across the country, but a pandemic got in the way."

"Families have fought for decades for the dignity of allowing their incarcerated loved ones to be released so that they could live the short remainder of their life at home," Pavlo said.

Real life twins Sable and Sasha Boykin play the roles of Jasmine or Jassy, and Janet, at one time a loving, inseparable pair, who now as adolescents are on divergent tracts. Jasmine has taken the rap for possession of an illegal amount of marijuana to keep her boyfriend from going back to prison. The other twin, Janet, is unforgiving and thinks primarily of the "good life" she imagines she will have after getting her degree from Harvard.

Actress Stephanie Pope plays the lead role of Carol, mother of the twins, who demonstrates a true nobility of character and purpose as she faces the task of rescuing her beloved daughter from an early death in prison.

Director Dow knew from personal experience what it meant to have a seriously ill relative locked away in a New

York prison. During her childhood in Harlem, one of her uncles had been arrested for possession of marijuana and her grandmother took her to visit him. Her uncle had organ failure and was given early release and died shortly after returning home.

"My uncle went to prison in New York on marijuana charges," Dow said. "He had advanced liver disease and we were able to bring him home. He died a month after being released."

Dow studied film at Columbia U. and went to work on Wall Street before devoting herself full time to cinema. She wrote and directed three of the five short films she has been involved with. *Compassionate Release* is her most recent film.

"She had planned to traverse the country taking part in film festivals," Pavlo said. "While many of the festivals have been postponed, watching this powerful film is a must... Her awards include Best Short Script in the Story Mode International Script Awards, placed in the American Gem Literary Festival, a screenplay winner in the Colorado International Film Festival, and numerous festival official selections around the country."

Mississippi inmates have suffered many dangers and threats to their lives in the last two years. Their plight gained worldwide exposure following a number of rallies and calls for the release of inmates serving time for nonviolent crimes. The compassionate release provision is a part of Mississippi's penal system as it is in most other states. But as the onset of COVID-19 kept advancing, Governor Tate Reeves emphasized that he would not consider it, no matter what toll the virus might take on the prison population.

"Unlike many other states, I do not believe we ought to use the excuse of a pandemic to change our sentencing structure in our criminal justice system," Reeves said in a May 4 press conference.



Meridian Mayor Percy Bland meets the Season 18 winner of 'The Voice'! Todd Tilghman is a Mississippi pastor, also from Meridian, who landed himself on Blake Shelton's team, helping the acclaimed country singer to gain his seventh win as a coach. Tilghman was known for his high spirits and charismatic presence on the show. At age 42, he is also the oldest winner of the show. Tilghman is the pastor of Cornerstone Church in Meridian. He is married to his high school sweetheart, Brooke, and they have eight children.

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