

The story of Baby Doe – Noelle Rose Andressen

By Her Story | September 3, 2018

"In the darkness, a silent frightened cry is heard, it is that of an infant struggling to stay alive in the surroundings of refuse, a mother has just abandoned her baby in a trash bin..."

Those were the opening words of an Emmy nominated film my husband and I created from scratch with no budget, an ounce of hope and a dash of dreams. It was our very first production as film school graduates. While the end result is amazing, the journey to that place was heartbreaking and challenging. I love the arts and creating, I just wished that it didn't hurt so much to bring the vision to fruition. If you want to do good in this world there's always a price to pay.

So how did we get from here to there or from there to here? I often wonder that myself as I look back and reflect. Let me share my story of how my husband and I fought the odds and made a miracle film happen.

It was 2001 and I had been watching the evening news broadcast one night. The news anchor on screen had a feature story in which they shared how a mother dumped her baby in a trash can. The baby was found alive, thankfully, but I just couldn't bare to hear one more story. "Baby Dumping" had become an epidemic at that time in Vegas and quite possibly our nation. It seemed at least once a month someone found a baby dumped behind a casino alley, or a sewer pipe, or some other hideous place that was not meant for babies.

Instead of weep and complain about it, my husband and I decided to do something positive about it. We decided to make a docu-drama TV film that was presented as part documentary part narrative film. It was a very effective vehicle and technique to bring our message to an audience but it had a high cost in many ways.

When we first ventured on this path we already had experience as writers, performers, and were known in our professions. We just had to figure out how we were going to produce a film about a then very controversial subject. We "pitched" our idea to various producers, production companies, and networks. Each one passing on it for a myriad of reasons, of course none to our satisfaction. We believed that we had an incredible idea and knew the world needed to hear it. I personally am one to herald for causes I believe in, this was one of them. Being a passionate compassionate causes me to speak up loudly. This outspokenness of mine has gotten me into some jams, but they always turned out well in the end.

With much contemplation, we decided to self-produce this film under Encopa Productions. We were not used to going it alone, but we wanted to be a part of change, save baby's lives, and help mothers make healthier decisions.

This was not about the abortion issue, this was about taking a live, fully born and healthy infant and tossing it away as if it had no value. The ultimate form of dehumanizing a human is to devalue it. It was hard for us to understand the resistance and controversy.

We used a portion of the equity in our home to finance some of the film. We wanted to be wise and not jeopardize our home so we decided what was a safe amount. As we laid out our budget we saw that we couldn't use a video camera for the entire shoot. We chose to do the interviews on video and the narrative with actors on film since we had access to a free 16mm camera and the film we needed we were given at a fraction of the price. This would create an editing nightmare, but we had no other choice.

Two months into our planning our film, we found a great line up of high profile people to interview from politicians to a famous attorney and the then District Attorney. Things were falling into place but then we kept hitting snags in our plans. The first one was interviewing the mother who had abandoned her baby. This was the one I heard on the news. We developed a "pen-pal" type relationship as she was serving time in jail for her "crime" and she had agreed to do an off-camera interview with us. Then she agreed to on-camera interviews but then backed out. It was very frustrating because she had such an interesting story. Not that we sided with her decisions but we wanted to capture what and why she chose in the heat of the moment. We believed it would shed light on the issue and help other women choose wisely and not make the same mistake she had made. We gave up on that notion and just let the film be what it was going to be without her.

During mid-production one of our actors backed out for "family emergency" reasons and I ended up portraying this particular role. It was the role of a pregnant woman in distress who didn't know what to do with her baby. It was an emotional role to portray and I love acting, but I didn't necessarily want to do this part and neither did many other women at that time. Nowadays, this wouldn't be an issue but then it was.

The subject was so new. So there I was wearing a pregnant belly and going through all these emotions I didn't want to be experiencing; I had to, the role called for it. When we got the "dailies" back (the developed film), I disliked how the fake pregnant belly looked. Here we were claiming to present a truthful and factual story on film and the shots with my belly weren't working. We re-shot all of it except this time I drank 16 ounces of water that had two tablespoons Epsom salts in it. It bloated my belly and I looked around 4 months pregnant. (Please don't do this without your doctor's consent, my doctor assisted us with this portion and carefully watched my health carefully.) Of course, there was a price to pay for this, I'm sure you could imagine. Epsom salts are used when one is constipated. Let's leave it at that.

Many other obstacles presented themselves from running out of funds for editing, locations canceling, damaged film negatives, and lots of renegotiating licensing contracts. It was a challenging process especially when we interviewed the Clark County Coroner. We were in the morgue as that's where our team had decided to shoot.

It was a great interview but the smell of formaldehyde made me dizzy and the knowledge that the deceased were on the other side of a "certain", ominous, freezer door. Death unsettles me. It seems wrong and backward.

A sensitive chord in me was plucked when we asked the Coroner if in his career he ever had to ever identify the body of a baby. He said yes and that he very much disliked having to collect the body of a baby doe. That's when I realized that this subject matter was getting the better of me.

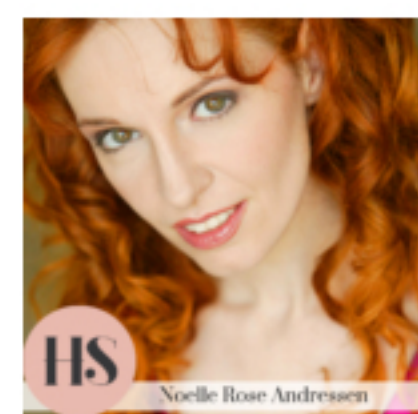
I needed to step away from this film, I stopped thinking about the subject, I stopped writing about the mom who dumped her baby, and I handed it all over to my husband. I just could not continue on this path one moment more. I had now become my own hurdle. I started to wrestle with whether to feel sympathy for the mother because of her circumstances. Our writing to each other helped me understand where she was coming from, but the action of what she did was not okay on any level. I then felt guilty because I began to understand her stance but then my husband said that's just a sign of compassion: caring about the person but not condoning the behavior. This was a tricky balance.

At the end of May, about two years after we began our journey, we had finished the last of our project. Every last frame was edited, all release forms and contracts in alignment, now the time for distribution came. The CAM Group was first to get dibs on our project and aired it nationally. The ratings were solid and we got great feedback on it.

We were called upon to create a series to help disseminate information about the subject matter we covered in our film. "This Is Not A Crib For Your Baby" was a campaign we created via a website, media, and public service announcement series. We were alerting the general public in mass about the options and choices pregnant women had to safely lay their babies. In Nevada it was termed: "Safe Haven Law". Other states used: "Safe Arms Law" or "Safe Baby Law".

It gave women options other than putting a baby after its birth in a trash can or other unfit place. This series won awards and was nominated for several EMA Media Awards. "Baby Doe's Heartbeat" gained much attention at the time. We were nominated for an EMA Media Award and won. NBC News covered our story locally and we were able to give a touchy subject matter a name and a face which is what I set out to do. We also received Emmy nominations for various things. My writing, producing and music arrangement were recognized. My husband's music score and producing were recognized too among others.

While we never were able to replace the equity in our home, and we never interviewed the one mother on camera, we saw our sojourn as a success. We knew we changed the lives of many women for the better and hopefully spared the life of a newborn.



Noelle Rose Andressen is mostly known as a contemporary ballet dancer nominated Performance Artist of the Year. While dance is her first love it is not her only profession. She is also known for her Emmy nominated writing, producing and music arrangement and various guest-star appearances on TV; modeling; singing and acting. Her dance company: Rubans Rouges Dance in which she is Artistic Director and Principal Dancer, celebrates 10 years in 2019. She authors the DanceWarrior™ book series; teaches dance workshops & classes; produces award-winning events such as: "Awakenings & Beginnings Dance Festival™"; Dance Expo; and a myriad of narrative film & TV programs. Much of her time is spent choreographing and performing as well as being an inspirational, public speaker and advocate for women & children's rights. She adores her family and friends and spends her quiet time doing yoga.

Website: <http://www.rubansrougesdance.com/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/noelleandressendancer>
Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/rubans_rouges_dance/
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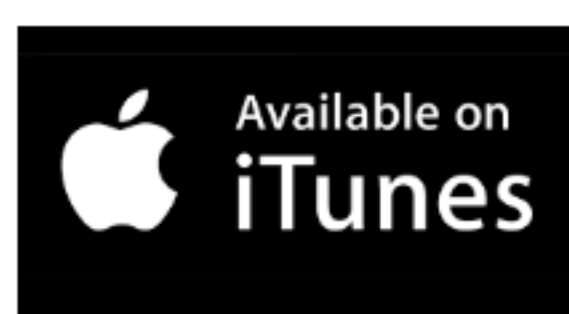
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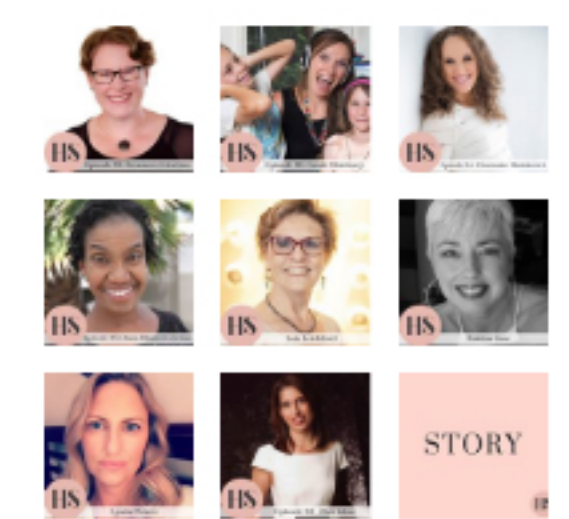
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