



THE SOUTH COAST BEACON

February 12, 2004 • Writing Worth Reading • www.scbeacon.com



Aphrodite: Art imitates life

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Something magical happens when you tune your mind to its creative side. This was the lesson learned when eight local cancer survivors ventured into *The Aphrodite Project*. Now the rest of us can tune into that wake-up call, thanks to Santa Barbara filmmakers Jennifer A. Reinish and Justin Thomas Rowe's documentary, which premiered at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival last week.

The project was the brainchild of social worker Jo-Anne Blatter, who has worked with people with life-changing illnesses for 27 years. She named the endeavor after the Greek goddess Aphrodite because both were meant to inspire growth, passion and wholeness, by pairing people with cancer ("creators") with professional artists to create collaborative pieces of artwork.

"A cancer diagnosis is not a death sentence; it's an order ... to live every moment," said Aaron, one of the survivors, who worked with Visual Artist Jill Katz to create a collage out of his medical records and photos of his surgery scarred body.

"Getting close to someone that has the

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For more information visit www.theaphroditeproject.com or call Blatter at 682.7313.

"The Aphrodite Project" will air on Channel 17 at 5 p.m. today, at 11 a.m. Saturday and at 9 p.m. Sunday. For additional show times, visit www.sbchannels.tv.

potential of dying on you is pretty heavy," Katz said. Indeed, watching the growth of the bond between Katz and Aaron, like that of the others, was the icing on an already irresistible cake.

"The focus was not on outcome or product, but rather on the process; on the experience of playing with art and music as a means to heal, and to uncover the mysterious messages that life-changing events tend to urge us to search for," said Blatter.

Not only did the creators bond with their

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artistic collaborators, they also bonded with one another, a journey documented by the film.

"There was an immediate feeling of camaraderie. We knew what the other people had gone through without having to talk about it," said Randi, who created "before" and "after" masks with paper mache artist Ginny Valdez.

"I felt like I was reconstructing my life by tearing up pieces of paper (to create the mask)."

The film travels from the group's first meeting in January 2003 to the sharing of their art at a showing in June.

"The gallery opening was a really nice finale," said Ann, who created and recorded a song with help of musicians Dan Zimmerman, Jay Ferguson and Sharon "Muffy" Hendrix Roach.

"I'm in the midst of looking for a home for the project," said Blatter, who did not have any outside funding.

"We're going to see what the universe brings."