

Beauty and Tragedy captures life in Newburgh

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An older British man makes the drive to Newburgh from Garrison, NY. He looks around in awe of all the beautiful people surrounding him. He gets out of the car armed with his camera ready to capture people walking through the streets. The first person he talks to is a black shirtless male, who denies the photo and bluntly tells him to go back to where he came from.

If Dmitri Kasterine listened to this young man, the wall outside Safe Harbors on the corner of Broadway and Liberty would have remained plain brick, no faces showing the city of Newburgh. The voices in his documentary "Beauty and Tragedy" would stay a whisper on the streets.

"This man was the first and last person to say no to a photograph," said Kasterine. "I started coming on odd days of the week just milling around and taking photographs. I had two things going for me, I talked funny and I was old. I just wanted to record their lives and the difficulties, just the general hardships of living in the city."

Kasterine started taking pictures in Newburgh in 1996. He spent the past 22 years visiting the city capturing pictures and then videos of the people and architecture.

Kasterine worked on the documentary for five years, three years shooting and two years editing. He had two Kickstarter campaigns and an anonymous donation through Hudson Valley Community Foundation to fund the project.

His intentions were based entirely on the look of the people, he wanted to captivate the stories of people that caught his eye. People who in his opinion seemed forgotten by the authorities.

"I'm a photographer, I'm driven by the looks of people," said Kasterine. "They appeal to me, therefore this is very one sided, because I didn't want anything to do with authorities. I couldn't help but notice the lack of care and concern for the black community."

The film depicts the grim realities of living in Newburgh



A lone diner at a soup kitchen



Photos by Dmitri Kasterine

A young girl holding a baby.

at the time it was filmed. Kasterine interviewed single parents, a young kid living out of his car, a group of homeless people living on the streets, to tell their individual stories and opinions on the City of Newburgh. He is merely a microphone for members of the struggling impoverished community.

"It's not necessarily the person's circumstances in life, who they are what they do that makes me want to photograph them," said Kasterine in the opening of his film. "In Newburgh though I couldn't help but notice people's circumstance. I couldn't help wondering what stories the men and women of Newburgh had to tell and what was happening to the beautiful houses all around them."

The screening for the documentary took place in a big open space at Atlas Studios, the space was packed from wall to wall with people from all diverse parts of the city sitting side by side. The audience sat captivated by the scenes of life in the black community of Newburgh.

The portrayal of the city is a grim one, with a focus on the tragedy Kasterine saw as he filmed two years ago. Members of the crowd were quick to make it clear there has been a change in the city from what is portrayed in the film.

"The tide is changing here in Newburgh," said Travis Smith, one of Kasterine's interviewees. "It takes all of us like-minded people to build what we want in this city."

It is clear people in the crowd are ready for a change, they used the question and answers portion of the night to voice the need and desire for a change in the city.

"Let's put our money where our mouth is," said Gabrielle Burton Hill. "We've got to get behind these young people, we have to stop talking and start volunteering. We need to work so we can see more beauty and less tragedy."



Homeless people.



Man feeding a baby.