

## **SEVEN DUMPSTERS AND A CORPSE: Director's Statement**

*By Thomas Haemmerli*

I was preparing a big party for my fortieth birthday when I got the news of my mother's death. We hadn't been in close touch in recent years, and when I saw her apartment I was shocked. It was utter chaos. Because her corpse had been lying on the heated floor, the stench of putrefaction filled the air. During my very first visit to the apartment, I had already begun to use my camera. I am a journalist by profession and react automatically when I find anything unusual. This professional approach helped me maintain my distance.

My brother and I had suspected the apartment would be in disorder. But what we found exceeded our worst expectations. Like most "Messies" (see fact sheet below) my mother would do anything to make sure no one ever saw the inside of her home.

It took us an entire month to clean out the apartment, and we had to work our way through mountains of things. We unearthed a lot of documents about our family history, including photos going back to the 1880s, film footage from the 30s and 40s, and all the home movies my mother shot from the 1960s onward. This precious material – roughly seventy years of an unusual family history – became the first impulse for making a film. And the possibility of filming in the apartment, without interference from relatives.

My starting point was the unpleasant obligation of spending a month of my life cleaning out the squalid apartment. That is why the story is told from my point of view. While sorting through everything, I looked for clues to what might have gone wrong in my mother's life. And I limited myself to what we found in the apartment

Two opposing storylines developed out of this material. On the one hand, there is the struggle against chaos, during which the apartment becomes increasingly empty and clean. On the other hand, there is the story of our family, which becomes increasingly confusing.

I detest films conceived as therapy for their maker. I believe films should be made to tell a story, not as self-help for the filmmaker. Over time, our difficult experiences in the apartment and in Greece had generated a series of anecdotes which I enjoyed telling friends at late-night parties. I believe that these are the kinds of stories that should be shared with wider audiences.

That is one reason why the film uses humour. For me, humour, irony and ridicule are crucial in coming to terms with life's challenges. I can't function without humour, and that has shaped my film.

Stylistically the film also reflects the role played by my editor, Daniel Cherbuin. We have worked together for many years and share a predilection for fast, often intuitive story-telling as well as a conviction to never be boring. While we were editing Cherbuin encouraged me to tell the whole family story and not to sweep anything under the rug. Not only because honesty would make the film more interesting – but because I was convinced that radical openness is sometimes necessary when attempting to tackle the big topics such as death, the parent-child relationship, or the question of how we should live and what will remain after we are gone.