

SEVEN DUMPSTERS AND A CORPSE: Producer's Statement

By *Mirjam von Arx*

Thomas Haemmerli always had his camera on him, back in 1994 when we first met as reporters for Swiss TV's newsmagazine "10 vor 10". Whenever a discussion, an image or a scene caught his interest, he would pull the camera out of his pocket. On March 8, 2004, when he received the ominous phone call from Zurich's criminal police department which launched one of the most harrowing weeks of his life, Haemmerli reacted the same way. He took out his camera and started shooting.

I still had vivid memories of his often experimental and sometimes idiosyncratic TV reports. During a brainstorming session to discuss potential joint projects in the summer of 2005, he happened to mention his mother's death – as well as the 30 hours of DV footage sitting unseen on his shelf since the nightmare of emptying her apartment had ended. The story affected me profoundly and has not let go of me ever since.

It is not the story itself which is unusual, but the fact that it has been documented: that Haemmerli continued shooting in situations where we would all prefer to keep our eyes closed – especially when our own family is concerned. As a result, he forces us to confront one of our society's last taboos: death.

Initially Haemmerli thought his footage could be turned into a short film – "which we might be able to show our friends." But it soon became clear that the film had the potential to interest wider audiences. The reaction from television broadcasters and film funds was almost universally positive: I had never been able to put together a film's financing so quickly. But what encouraged me the most were the personal reactions from our partners, co-producers and funders. After each pitch – and I made lots of pitches – there would be a long discussion which often turned into a revealing talk about personal experiences and private fears.

This long-lasting aftereffect is the most exceptional thing about the film, and its greatest accomplishment. Because the Haemmerli brothers were able to talk about what happened to them with honesty and humour, and without hypocrisy or inhibitions, they open up a space in which sensitive topics to do with home and family may be discussed.

Seven Dumpsters and a Corpse is a film which dares to tackle big questions – about life and death, the relationship between parents and children, and the danger of today's consumer society – without being sentimental or moralistic. Haemmerli steers clear of embarrassing pop-psychology exercises. Instead, he has succeeded in creating an intelligent, innovative and thought-provoking film for viewers prepared to confront life's biggest questions.