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Film Review: "Vessel"

Jun 18th 2014



Vessel (<http://vesselthefilm.com/>) follows Rebecca Gomperts, a doctor from the Netherlands, who forms Women on Waves (<http://www.womenonwaves.org/>) (and their counterpart Women on Web (<https://www.womenonweb.org/>)), an organization offering safe abortions to women where access is restricted or non-existent. Bypassing international law, she's allowed to take women aboard her vessel and into international waters for an abortion.

Over the course of the film, Women on Waves grows and starts training women to train others in abortions via Misoprostol. In fact, the film serves as almost a Misoprostol training in itself, as the steps for taking the drug are repeated throughout. Another aspect repeated over and over is the aggressive reception Women on Waves receives at each of their stops, including Morocco and Poland. At one point, Women on Waves is even blocked from entering national waters by a Portuguese warship.

But the crew keeps on. "The fear of backlash is the same as self censorship," Gomperts says. She believes women have the right to an abortion and "You can not stop women from accessing something they have the right to."

Women who actually have an abortion with Women on Waves are justifiably anonymous, but the viewer is with the crew as they receive thousands of emails and voice mails from women who were raped and/or fearful or unable to give birth. We also learn some shocking statistics. Among them: 47,000 women per year die from unsafe abortions.

Whitten says she learned about Women on Waves in 2006, while she was a graduate student. She never had any doubt following Gomperts would lead to a film, no matter how the story progressed. It's one that shows a big idea can become something even bigger.

Unfortunately, Whitten also had to rely on a lot of footage she wasn't there to shoot. Luckily, it's edited into the film pretty well. The film doesn't have much in the way of opposing views, aside from reactionary activists on the ground at Women on Waves' stops or Politicianese. But no matter what side you're on, Vessel is worth 88 minutes of your time.

Utah Film Center screened Vessel, a documentary by Diana Whitten, at The City Library on June 17. Vessel won the Audience Award at 2014 SXSW Film Festival and was an official selection at the 2014 Hot Docs Canadian Documentary Film Festival and the 2014 Sarasota Film Festival.

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|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| 29 | 30 | 31 | | | | |

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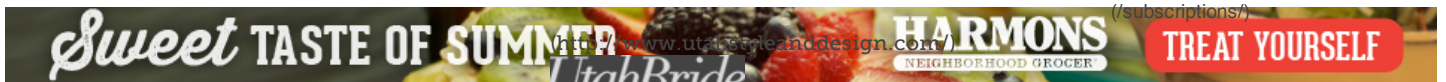
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