

NINA MOINI: For most Minnesotans, Jacob Wetterling's case is closed. Then, there are those closest to the 1989 kidnapping and murder of the 11-year-old boy in Stearns County. For them, this is never really over. It took 27 years for the case to be solved. A new documentary sticks with Jacob's family for years after his killer confessed and went to prison. Here's Jacob's mother, Patty Wetterling, in a clip from the documentary.

[AUDIO PLAYBACK]

PATTY WETTERLING: For 27 years, I was a searching parent. I am no longer a searching parent. So who are you now? How people perceive me and what I do for life work? A lot of things have changed. It's kind of trying to crawl my way back into a new existence. For law enforcement, they closed the book. It was finished. But for us, closures is not a word that really victims of any type of crime like. It doesn't fit.

[END PLAYBACK]

NINA MOINI: That documentary is called *Echoes in the Night-- The Search for Jacob Wetterling*. And it premieres Saturday at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival. Director Chris Newberry joins me in studio now to talk about it. Welcome, Chris.

CHRIS Thanks for having me.

NEWBERRY:

NINA MOINI: Yeah, so you've been working on this film for more than a decade. How does it feel, of course, to release it now out into the world?

CHRIS Well, it's a big relief because of all the hard work by so many people over the years. But yeah, it's really great.

NEWBERRY: And I'm so thrilled that Patty and Jerry Wetterling and some other folks that feature prominently in the film have embraced the finishing of the film and its release. So yeah, it's a great moment.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, what drew you to Jacob's story originally?

CHRIS Well, I grew up here in the Twin Cities. And so I was 15 years old when Jacob was taken. Jacob was 11. So in a lot of ways, I could relate to Jacob's life, riding my bike up to the convenience store. And that's what he was doing when he was abducted. So it really touched me like it touched so many Minnesotans watching the story unfold in the early days and stuck with me. And there was an opportunity for me to approach the family many years later. And I thought, well, this would be a really meaningful next project for me.

NINA MOINI: Did you reach out to them before or after things started to heat up? So, I mean, there was, I know, kind of renewed attention around the 25th anniversary of Jacob's disappearance.

CHRIS Yeah, there was some renewed attention, a public awareness campaign. And what I didn't know was that, behind the scenes, there was some also things happening in the investigation at that point. And that is-- and it was seeing the billboards and hearing about the public awareness campaign that sort of sparked my renewed interest in it. And so it was, at that point, that I did approach the family.

NINA MOINI: OK. So you were just starting to do some filming when Danny Heinrich was arrested on those child pornography charges, as that investigation did, find things. And then, he, of course, later confessed to Jacob's murder as part of a plea deal and was sentenced to 20 years in prison. I'm wondering how that rapid, dramatic development changed your approach to the documentary.

CHRIS NEWBERRY: Yeah, it changed it a lot. I mean, it's 10 years later now. I realize how much the story changed. But just-- yeah, in the mode in which the crew and I how we had to operate, we thought we were going to be doing something reflective with a lot of interviews and archival material. Yeah, a look back and saying, well, where is Jacob? And so as soon as it started to become a breaking news story. And we were having to be on our toes, running to catch things as they occurred. So that was one of the big changes right away.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, I mean, in some ways, you almost were like a TV news crew because it was all happening. You're not just filming a documentary about the past and reflections where you can take the time. It was all happening right then.

CHRIS NEWBERRY: Yeah, I was right there in the media scrum with all the TV news cameras and the radio people with their microphones.

NINA MOINI: Everybody, yeah. How did your understanding of the impact of this crime change over the many years that you were working on it?

CHRIS NEWBERRY: Yeah, well, I mean, the impact was really big right away, as I was kind of referring to my formative years. But yeah, things have definitely evolved. The public has one way of looking at things, law enforcement, judicial system. And they of got a version of resolution. But yeah, when you're talking about the folks who it really, truly impacted, something, an unthinkable crime, how it can have an impact on those people's lives, yeah, it's very complicated. And I didn't fully appreciate it until I got to see it up close and help tell their story.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, in fact, people, like you said, I mean, around your age, I very distinctly remember the disappearance. So people who've been in Minnesota during this whole time are familiar kind of with the basics of the story. What sides are you now hoping to show that people might not have seen before or thought about?

CHRIS NEWBERRY: Well, I mean, that's part of it is just I think that it's easy to think, well, oh, the family finally got answers. Or this other assault survivor finally got answers. And that was really important. And they'll tell you that. But it's just seeing how hard it is to-- it's impossible to unravel everything tied up in that for those people. And yeah, and there's some figures that are not the Wetterlings. The Wetterlings feature prominently in the film. But there are a few other people who this crime and the investigation, all the spotlight on it. It had an impact on a few other individuals that I think their stories have been touched on but not really delved into the way that we did the depth.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, like other people who were close to Jacob or to the crime. Do you want to tell us about--

CHRIS NEWBERRY: Sure, sure. Well, Jared Scheierl is a big one. He features prominently in the film. He was a survivor of a very similar crime by the same assailant 10 months prior to Jacob's. And so he-- and his journey has been really complicated.

NINA MOINI: And also important to the solving of this case.

CHRIS Yeah, instrumental, instrumental. The case would not have been solved without Jared's-- and Jared was very
NEWBERRY: brave going public with his story, having been a victim of a crime like that in his childhood. And then, there's the person who was a person of interest for several years in the middle of the investigation, Dan Rassier, who is a neighbor of the Wetterlings, and his story is featured in the documentary as well. And he was very much impacted by how the investigation was approached and, yeah, really sympathetic figure in a lot of ways. And I think we share some of the story, some of his story that maybe people haven't quite heard yet before.

NINA MOINI: Have any of these people gotten to see the film yet?

CHRIS Yes, they've all had opportunities to see a version just shy of final. We did a few more little nips and cuts after
NEWBERRY: but-- nips and tucks. And we-- yeah, so they've seen it. But this will be the first time anybody sees it all polished up and ready for a movie theater.

NINA MOINI: So as I mentioned, the premiere is this weekend. Can people still get tickets?

CHRIS It's been selling out fast. They have just added a new showing, the film festival on Wednesday the 22nd, so next
NEWBERRY: Wednesday. And there should be tickets for that if folks are interested. You can try for the weekend shows. Those will be a lot of fun because there'll be a lot of special guests there. But yeah.

NINA MOINI: Some of the people in the film maybe?

CHRIS Yes.
NEWBERRY:

NINA MOINI: OK.

CHRIS Yeah, it's no secret.
NEWBERRY:

NINA MOINI: No secret. It's not going to be a big surprise. All right. Well, thanks for joining us today, Chris.

CHRIS Thanks for having me.
NEWBERRY:

NINA MOINI: Yeah, Chris Newberry's film, *Echoes in the Night-- The Search for Jacob Wetterling* will be showing this weekend at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival. And as you mentioned, tickets are still available for a showing next Wednesday, the 22nd. You can look for them online.