

# RISING FROM ASHES

A film by  
T.C. Johnstone

80 minutes, documentary, English, 2013  
DCP & BLU-RAY, 16:9, Color, Dolby Digital 5.1



FIRST RUN FEATURES  
The Film Center Building | 630 Ninth Ave. #1213 | New York, NY 10036  
(212) 243-0600 | Fax (212) 989-7649 | [www.firstrunfeatures.com](http://www.firstrunfeatures.com)  
[info@firstrunfeatures.com](mailto:info@firstrunfeatures.com)

[www.firstrunfeatures.com/risingfromashes](http://www.firstrunfeatures.com/risingfromashes)

## Synopsis

Two worlds collide when cycling legend Jock Boyer moves to Rwanda to help the first Rwandan National Cycling Team in their six year journey to compete in the Olympic Games in London. Setting out against impossible odds both Jock and the team find new purpose as they rise from the ashes of their past.

Executive produced and narrated by Forest Whitaker, this stunningly shot film follows Jock (the first American to compete in the Tour de France) and his Rwandan riders as they slowly but steadily learn what it means to be a professional cyclist - how to train, how to compete, how to live the life of a top level athlete. As they get better and better, the riders of Team Rwanda give their countrymen a vision of something greater than themselves and their history: hope for a future.



## Rwanda

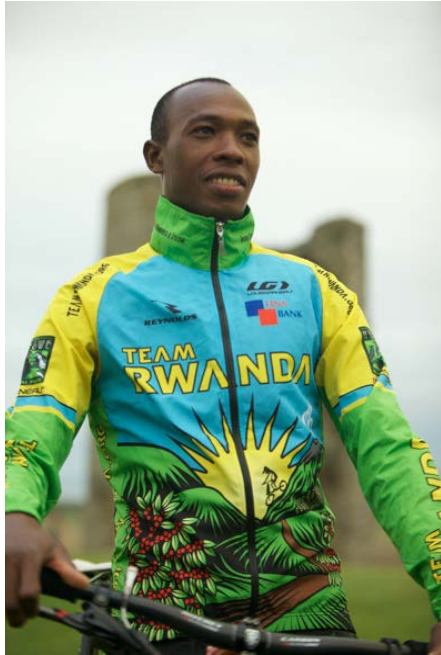
In Rwanda, 'The Land of a Thousand Hills', the bicycle is essential to life. It is how you move. It is how you work. And during the Genocide, it is how you survived. Stand on any corner of any village throughout the country, and farmers will scream down hillsides barefoot on 25 year old bikes loaded with 100 pounds of potatoes, taxi drivers peddle diligently with a mother and daughter in tow, and a child amuses himself for hours guiding a bent wheel down alleyways. It seems natural, maybe destined, that bike racing has a rich history in Rwanda. For decades the country has participated in the sport, hosting local races for bragging rights, riding barefoot, many times without brakes or gears.

During 100 days in 1994, as five and a half lives were systematically murdered per minute, thousands of Rwandans escaped certain death on their bikes. When the dust settled and the perpetrators were subdued, the country mourned the death of nearly one million of their countrymen. Amidst the heartache and trauma, a committed group of young cyclists began importing racing bikes into the country with the hopes of resurrecting the sport. In 2005, legendary bike builder Tom Ritchey explored the country on his bike, and upon meeting a group of cyclists who called themselves Team Rwanda, left with the vision there was potential for a National Team, and a question. What if they could make it to the Olympics?



### Jock

Jock Boyer is one of America's most fabled cyclists. He grew up battling Tom Ritchey in Northern California's competitive cycling leagues, out of this rivalry a mutual admiration and friendship was born. At the age of 17, Jock left the U.S. to compete professionally against the World's elite in France, and in 1983 he made history as the First American to ever ride in the Tour de France. Upon his return to the United States, after a prolific racing career, he would lose it all. He soon found himself in jail for inappropriate behavior with a female minor. In this period of darkness Tom reconnected with his long lost friend with an unlikely proposition, an offer to become the Coach of Rwanda's first National Cycling Team.



## Adrien

Adrien Niyonshuti lost 60 of his family in the Genocide. Six. Zero. Sixty. Six of his brothers, his mother's entire line of heritage. Maybe because he sought purpose behind his pain, maybe because it was the only way to stop his overpowering headaches, maybe he just had a gift, but Adrien started cycling in 2003. His family couldn't understand his dream, but Adrien felt it inside. Three months later, Adrien's father passed away. Tragedy seemed to follow him. In 2006, Adrien rode a Mountain Bike for the first time catching Jock and winning a local race, forging the beginning of a relationship between two broken men. In 2011, Adrien qualified for the Olympic Games, a bold achievement that would send shockwaves throughout Rwanda and the World, a living example that the ghosts and demons of our past have no power over our future.

## Filmmaker Bios

### **T.C. Johnstone | Director / Producer / Editor**

T.C. Johnstone began making films in Steamboat Springs over 10 years ago. After producing his first feature he moved to Santa Monica, California and began working as a DP and documentary director on a wide variety of projects ranging from national television (ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, Discovery) to independent films. He currently focuses on independent documentary feature films.

### **Greg Kwedar | Producer**

From narrative films, music videos, and documentaries to nationally televised commercials, Greg has created stories that are designed to capture honest human emotion. His work has been viewed in over 180 countries, screened in festivals both domestic and abroad, garnering awards and starting conversations. Greg is currently developing multiple feature film projects.

### **Peb Jackson / Dan Cooper | Associate Producers**

Peb Jackson lives in Colorado Springs with his wife of 40 years, Sharon. Has been an executive with Saddleback Church/Purpose Driven, Generous Giving, Young Life, Focus on the Family, Azusa Pacific University and Spartan Oil. Active in global issues and solutions including Africa. Currently Principle of Jackson Consulting Group.

Dan Cooper co-founded Team Rwanda with Tom Ritchey and Jonathan Boyer. He has played a critical role in gaining support for the documentary film through the Friends of Rwanda network that he has grown over the last six years.

## Filmmaker Statement

The documentary feature film *Rising From Ashes* was created with a common goal: to tell a story of redemption hope and second chances. It was not about the bike, however the bicycle became a tool that has changed a nation.

Rising From Ashes has been produced by two partnering non-profit's, Gratis 7 Media Group and Project Rwanda. Many have believed in the project over the past 6 years and have generously provided over \$800,000 in funding. The film has been completely donor funded and we currently have no debt on the motion picture. **Unlike many films 100% of the back end proceeds will go directly to Team Rwanda to continue to build the next phase of the project.**

Team Rwanda started out as a cycling organization however they quickly learned they had to care for the greater needs of each athlete. Many of the riders could not read or write, lived in homes without fresh drinking water, were malnourished, and had never received healthcare. But there was still a greater issue, the issues of the heart. These riders were all recovering from the traumatic psychological effects of the 1994 genocide. Team Rwanda had to look deeper.

Team Rwanda has not solved all of these problems but it is making a difference.

- Riders are provided a modest salary to help provide for themselves and their families.
- Riders are given English lessons and taught how to read and write.
- Health care is provided for the ongoing issues of malaria and water-borne diseases.
- When funds are available, the riders are given regular health checks and dental care.

While the team has taken care of the physical and mental issues it has provided something greater: Hope.

Rwanda is a country recovering from one of the world's most devastating genocides and they have longed for heroes. The riders of Team Rwanda have become more than just a cycling team; they have become ambassadors of hope and men to look up to. They have given the country a vision of something greater than themselves and a renewed sense of purpose.

*Rising From Ashes* is more than a movie, it's a story tool that relates to each and every one of us. It's a gateway of hope. But this is just the beginning. Since 2005 Team Rwanda has developed a model for caring for passionate athletes and it's about to expand the vision. In 2012 Team Rwanda will begin the next phase, the development of Africa's first all-black, all African team to attempt the greatest cycling event in the world, The Tour de France.

## **Credits**

### **Narrated by**

Forest Whitaker

### **Interviews/Appearances with:**

Team Rwanda:

Adrien Niyonshuti - Rwanda's first Olympic Cyclist

Rafiki Uwimana

Nathan Byukusenge

Abraham Ruhumuriza

Jock Boyer - Coach and the First American to Ride in the Tour de France

Tom Ritchey - Founder of Team Rwanda and the Inventor of the Mountain Bike

### **Production**

Forest Whitaker - Executive Producer

Jon Halbert - Executive Producer

T.C. Johnstone - Producer / Director / Editor

Greg Kwedar - Producer

Peb Jackson / Dan Cooper - Executive Producers

Elisa Bonora - Editor

Joshua Myers - Composer

David Eggerichs / Ryan Scheer / Jeremy Rodgers / Jeffrey Waldron – Cinematographers

## **Awards and Recognition:**

**WINNER** Hamptons International Film Festival: *Best Film on Conflict and Resolution*

**WINNER** Heartland Film Festival: *Grand Prize Best Documentary*

**WINNER** Heartland Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Aspen Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Austin Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Starz Denver Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Napa Valley Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Bahamas International Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Boulder International Film Festival: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** San Luis Obispo International Film Festival: *Special Jury Prize: Best Sports Documentary*

**WINNER** River Run International Film Festival: *Audience Award*

**WINNER** Attic Film Festival: *Best Documentary*

**WINNER** Attic Film Festival: *Best Cinematography*

**WINNER** Albuquerque Media and Film Experience: *Audience Choice Award*

**WINNER** Mountainfilm in Telluride: *Special Jury Prize*

[http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/sportingscene/2012/07/from-rwanda-to-london-with-a-bicycle.html?mbid=gne&google\\_editors\\_picks=true](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/sportingscene/2012/07/from-rwanda-to-london-with-a-bicycle.html?mbid=gne&google_editors_picks=true)

# THE NEW YORKER

## FROM RWANDA TO LONDON, WITH A BICYCLE

POSTED BY PHILIP GOUREVITCH

You can't drive to the Gasthaus Spinas, a Swiss alpine lodge that sits about sixty-five hundred feet above sea level in the mountains above St. Moritz. Guests generally arrive by horse-drawn cart, or on foot. When Adrien Niyonshuti moved into the Gasthaus, a few weeks ago, he pedaled there on his mountain bike. Niyonshuti comes from Rwanda, and he was on his way to London, and it's only a slight metaphorical stretch to say that he was making the entire journey by bike.

Ten years ago, when he was fifteen, he entered a single-speed bike race in his hometown of Rwamagana, and won. His trophy was a radio, but his real prize was the discovery of an all-consuming passion for cycling, and five years ago, when the American cyclist Jock Boyer came to Rwanda to train a bike team, Adrien was in the first draft. In 2009, he moved to South Africa as the first Rwandan ever to be signed on by an international professional cycling team: MTN Qhubeka. The next year, when the African Continental Championship races were held in Rwanda, I was there, writing about Team Rwanda for the magazine. The winners of the race would qualify for the Olympics—this was Adrien's dream—but as he stood up from his saddle to make an attack in the final laps of the race, his chain broke, and the minutes that cost him were unrecoverable. At lunch, a few hours later, he was in surprisingly good spirits. "I have one more chance," he said. That chance was a mountain-bike race in South Africa in 2011. To qualify as an Olympian, Adrien had to come in fourth place, and he did. Yesterday he flew from Switzerland, where he has been training, to London, where he will carry the Rwandan flag into the Olympic stadium at tonight's opening ceremony.

From his base in Switzerland, where he made the Gasthaus Spinas his training camp, Adrien has been racing in recent weeks with the top mountain bikers in the world, and holding his own. One day, between official races, his coach and mentor, Jock, offered to take him on. Adrien tried to laugh him off, but Jock persisted. Years ago, Jock was the first American to ride in the Tour de France, and although he spends more time on a motorbike these days (he recently rode alone from Khartoum to Kigali, by way of Addis Ababa, a trip of more than four thousand kilometres, in nine days) he can still—in his mid-fifties—hammer the pedals with impressive power. But, to be sporting, Adrien gave Jock a ten-minute head start, a substantial advantage in a roughly ninety-minute race. Then Adrien set out after him, and finished five minutes ahead of him.

Most of Adrien's family was killed in the Rwandan genocide, in 1994, and he told me cycling helps him keep traumatic memories at bay—that he rides to forget. At the same time, his perseverance reflects an absolute refusal to identify as a victim. "On the mountain bike," he told me, "I can show myself really." Still, nobody expects him to win when he races in London, on August 12th. His triumph is to be there. "He's in a really good place right now," Jock told me over the phone from London this morning. "He's laughing a lot. There's quite a lot of media and press surrounding him at all times. He's going through this epic moment in his life, and he's still just incredulous, just shaking his head, very quiet, but with real sparkle and laughter in his eyes." He is already thinking about fulfilling his next dream: to ride in the Tour of France. And Jock said, "He's here in London thinking about what he represents to the kids of Rwanda—as that figure, that image, that they can see and say, Yeah, if he can do that I do it, too, whatever it is. It's not about getting a medal, it's about being that person."



# ALJAZEERA

## Pedal power to the rescue of Rwanda survivors

Documentary tells incredible story of professional cycling team seeking to change image of country tainted by genocide.

Simon Hooper: 14 May 2013

London, United Kingdom - Adrien Niyonshuti is quietly spoken, naturally unassuming, and not a man to seek the spotlight - which only makes the circumstances of his past two visits to London all the more remarkable.

Last year Niyonshuti carried the flag for Rwanda at the opening ceremony of the 2012 Olympics, in recognition of his becoming the first cyclist from the African nation to qualify for the Games.

And on Thursday night, a London crowd gave him a standing ovation once again, this time inside a Leicester Square cinema at the European premiere of *Rising From Ashes*, a feature-length documentary that tells the extraordinary story of Team Rwanda, a professional cycling team that is challenging preconceptions of a country still traumatized by the genocide of 1994.

Then aged seven, Niyonshuti lost six brothers and 60 members of his extended family in the ethnic slaughter, when approximately 800,000 people - mostly of the country's Tutsi minority - were killed by Hutu gangs, within just 100 days.

"After the genocide, cycling helped me to keep looking forward, and it took a weight off my mind for all the bad things that had happened," he told Al Jazeera.

The film touches lightly on the events of 1994 and the riders' memories and experiences, focusing instead on the team as a microcosm of a country finding hope, purpose and unity in the prospect a brighter future, rather than being trapped by its history.

Niyonshuti has walked out of interviews when asked about the genocide, preferring to see his achievements on a bike as a means to escape the past, rather than to be constantly dragged back to it.

"Everybody knows Rwanda's bad history, but that happened 20 years ago and now we are together," he said. "We are fighting and working so hard to beat our history and build something new."

Niyonshuti's determination to look forward is echoed by Robert Bayigamba, the president of the Rwandan National Olympic Committee, who flew to London for Thursday's screening.

"Sincerely speaking, I watched this film for the first time and I was amazed," Bayigamba told Al Jazeera. "It rebrands the country. As Rwandans, we want to show the world that, yes, we went through genocide, but we can also stand up and be a country in the world right now in many different fields, including sports."

Bayigamba believes sport can continue to play a crucial role in the country's recovery by bringing people together, regardless of ethnicity: "One of the things that sport brings to reconciliation is unity, because when you play it is just about your capacity, not about your ethnicity or origins."

### **Pedaling redemption**

Filming Team Rwanda over six years, director TC Johnstone stumbled on their story in 2005, after a fortuitous meeting in Kigali with Tom Ritchey, a famed US mountain bike racer and builder.

"They had been riding mountain bikes with a few riders who called themselves the national team, though they didn't have any equipment," Greg Kwedar, the film's producer, told Al Jazeera.

"And over dinner that night, they were saying: 'What about if these riders had actual resources? How far would they go?' And somebody joked: 'What if one of them made it to the Olympics?' And somebody else said: 'And what if we made a movie about it?'"

Yet, just as central to the redemptive theme of the film as the riders' stories, is that of their coach, Jock Boyer, who in 1981 was the first US cyclist to ride in the Tour de France. Boyer had fallen on hard times, even serving a prison sentence for lewd behaviour, when he accepted an invitation in 2006 to put the novice riders through their paces.

In one of the most gripping scenes of the film, Boyer movingly describes his realisation that he could not abandon the young hopefuls as his own father had once abandoned him.

"That story, for me, really unlocks the heart of this movie," said Kwedar. "He had this gap without a father figure, and when he met those riders, he was able to become that for this fatherless generation."

Having intended to stay for a few months, Boyer now calls Rwanda home. As the next step in Team Rwanda's development, he is currently looking to establish similar projects in other conflict-scarred regions, with the eventual goal of leading an all-African team to the Tour de France.

### **Stepping up a gear**

Perhaps grand predictions of African sporting glory should be treated with caution. The continent, after all, is yet to send a football team beyond the last eight of a World Cup, some 45 years after Pele predicted that an African nation would win the tournament before the end of the 20th century.

But Niyonshuti has no doubt there is raw talent out there, just waiting to be clipped into a pair of pedals and pointed towards the nearest mountain. Later this month he will return home to launch his own cycling academy for boys and girls up to the age of 16, though he said encouraging them to study would be as important as teaching them to handle a bike.

"I don't know how long it will take and it's not easy because cycling has been a white sport for 100 years," he said. "But if you take runners, all the best runners are from Africa. So why shouldn't Eritrea, Kenya or Rwanda produce cyclists as well?"

The dream of an all-African team may not become a reality in time to serve Niyonshuti's career.

Currently riding with the South African MTN-Qhubeka team in the second tier of professional cycling, he already holds the distinction of being the first black African to ride in a major European road race at the 2009 Tour of Ireland, and has a three-year plan to ride the world's most famous race.

Though set to miss the entire current season as a consequence of deep vein thrombosis suffered on a flight in January, Niyonshuti has moved to Italy as the team targets elite-level events in Europe, with the hope of earning entry to one of the sport's grand tours.

"Road biking is much more technical than mountain biking, and more tactical as well, and I am still learning," he said.

"But we are looking to do some big races in 2014 - and if it's possible to do the Giro d'Italia or the Tour de France in 2015, I hope we can be there. After that, if I can stay in good condition, I am sure I can be competitive for the 2016 Tour de France."

The makers of *Rising From Ashes*, meanwhile, have a different kind of grand tour in mind for the next chapter of the film's story. "We want to create an opportunity so that any Rwandan who wants to see this film is going to be able to do so," said Kwedar. "We are looking at technologies that would mean we could have a self-contained screening system that we could operate off a Land Cruiser and take it around the country. It's our responsibility to do that." A cinema in the back of a truck touring the vertiginous cloud forests of the Virunga massif? It sounds like an excellent idea for a documentary.

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

## A Long, Amazing Ride to the Olympics

JASON GAY      Updated August 12, 2012

He wanted sleep, because Sunday was going to hurt. Adrien Niyonshuti had traveled so far. Rwanda was thousands of miles away, but this wasn't a matter of distance. Six years ago, he had won a mountain bike race on a borrowed bike. Now there was a shiny new one, fitted to his body. The first time Adrien flew overseas, he carried his possessions in a grocery bag. Now there was luggage with rollers.

Inside was a spotless uniform in the blue, green and yellow of the Rwandan flag.

He was not going to win. This he knew. Sunday's men's mountain bike race would be 34 grueling kilometers, up and down and up again, threading over steep gravel and minefields of rock. He'd be among the best riders in the world. Adrien was one of 50 to qualify, and he had a modest goal.

He wanted to finish.

Still, there was weight upon Adrien's lean shoulders. On his bike, he carried his home. He'd emerged from a nation torn by genocide, and his personal anguish had been unimaginable. Six of his siblings had been killed, and dozens more of his family members. As Niyonshuti began winning races, he'd been elevated as a symbol of a country trying to claw itself back. He'd visited the U.S. as part of Team Rwanda, a fledgling race team sponsored by benefactors including mountain bike pioneer Tom Ritchey. Adrien and his teammates were featured in magazines. They became the stars of a new documentary, called "Rising From Ashes."

The Friday before his Olympic bike race, Adrien appeared on a stage in London alongside the actor Clive Owen. It was the first time I'd seen him in five years. The last time I saw him was in Butare, Rwanda, where he won a local road race, blasting away from the peloton with his teammates down a hectic highway from the capital of Kigali. He was clearly gifted, and a little shy.

Now Adrien was sitting there onstage in his running shoes, long black pants and his Rwanda cycling vest, a movie star hanging on his every word. Owen asked him about his training and racing career. Adrien told Owen about the wooden bikes they used to ride in Rwanda—giant lumber vessels, more like scooters, used to carry goods and scream down hillsides. He outlined his humble objectives for Sunday.

"My goal for these Olympics, to be honest, is to finish the race," Adrien said.

Owen looked spellbound. "Everything you've been through, everything you've achieved, you're an absolute inspiration to us all," he said.

This was part of Adrien's job. The other job was the bike. He wanted to race well here. Before the Olympics he spent weeks under the eye of Thomas Frischknecht, the Swiss mountain bike legend. Among his training companions was Switzerland's Nino Schurter, a former world champion.

Frischknecht had met Adrien more than a half decade ago at the Cape Epic bike race, in South Africa. That was the first time Adrien had seen the ocean. Frischknecht said the difference between Adrien then and now was "night and day."

"Not just as a bike racer," Frischknecht said. "He also developed as a great personality. At the beginning he didn't speak a word of English, and he didn't know why all this was happening around him. He sees his responsibility, why this all came together, why he's so important for Rwanda."

On Saturday night, Adrien telephoned his coach in Rwanda, Jock Boyer, who'd discovered him, nurtured him, watched him win that mountain bike race six years ago. They spoke about some of the old races, the time he nearly qualified for 2008 Olympics. They laughed a little.

Boyer said he told Adrien that no matter what happened, he had changed his nation.

Sunday afternoon, they called him to the line. No. 44, the first man from "the land of a thousand hills" to ever race a mountain bike in the Olympics. He would start the race deep in the back, never ideal.

He did not win. But he stayed in, and finished, as he hoped, crossing the line in 39th place, more than 13 minutes behind winner Jaroslav Kulhavy of the Czech Republic. Adrien's training partner, Schurter, narrowly missed a sprint for gold.

Reporters gathered around Niyonshuti, wanting to hear his story, interpret what it meant. "I think it's a good experience for me, and very good for my country," Adrien said.

He looked exhausted. "It was really hard," he confessed. "I feel, like, broken."

Not far from the finish line, a handful of Adrien's friends began to make their way off the course. T.C. Johnstone, the filmmaker behind "Rising From Ashes," recalled how Adrien and his teammates used to shave the bottoms off soccer cleats to make their own bike shoes.

Kimberly Coats, who left a life in Las Vegas to work with Team Rwanda, struggled to find the words to describe the significance of Adrien had done here.

"To me it's not about him riding a bike," she said. "It's about him changing the perception of his country."

Adrien planned to fly to Rwanda on Monday, to his mother, to his teammates, to the recovering place where children shout his name.

"Now I am going to pack," he said.

He began pedaling away from the finish line, up a small hill behind the medal ceremony stage. As he passed, an Olympic official reached over to give him a little push, but Adrien Niyonshuti didn't need a push. He could climb any hill.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-rising-ashes-movie-review-20130802,0,6970509.story>

# Los Angeles Times

## Review: Layers of suffering and joy mingle in 'Rising From Ashes'

*The improbable story of a Rwandan national cycling team formed after the '94 genocide delivers more than expected in 'Rising From Ashes.'*

By Kenneth Turan, Times Film Critic      August 1, 2013

"Rising From Ashes" gives you more than you expect. Its story line is as positive and affirmative as the title indicates, but it turns out there are dramas going on in this documentary that you wouldn't initially suspect.

Directed by T.C. Johnston and filmed over more than six years, "Ashes" tells the wildly improbable story of the Rwandan National Cycling Team, a.k.a. Team Rwanda, and a devoted American coach who says "they're terrified of me, and I wouldn't have it any other way."

The ashes of the title refers to the 1994 genocide in this African country, when Rwandans murdered one another at a horrific rate: As many as 1 million were killed over a roughly three-month period, which worked out to one person killed every 10 seconds for 100 days.

Cycling had always been a popular activity in a country known as "the land of a thousand hills," and when American mountain bike pioneer Tom Ritchey toured Rwanda in 2005, he saw enough passion among its citizens that he decided to explore the question of whether a national team that could be competitive on the international stage was feasible.

To help find the answer, Ritchey persuaded his old cycling buddy, Jonathan "Jock" Boyer, to come to Rwanda to check out the local talent.

An enormously gifted rider who in 1981 was the first American to ride in the Tour de France, Boyer also had, in Ritchey's words, "a self-destructive streak." He was just coming off of time in jail for sexual acts with an underage girl and was, in a sense, looking to restart his life.

Candid, skeptical and analytical, the articulate Boyer is one of this film's secret weapons, and his no-nonsense appraisals of Team Rwanda's situation are always on the money. He also is something of a sports philosopher who believes that "cycling is about suffering. You can't be a cyclist without going through incredible amounts of pain. Nobody escapes it."

Suffering of a personal sort is something all the members of Team Rwanda know intimately. Though quite young at the time of their country's agonies, they all lost close family members to the killings and are well aware of how much a successful Team Rwanda would mean for themselves personally as well as for the nation as a whole.

Despite the pain in their backgrounds, one pleasure of "Rising From Ashes" is experiencing the wonderful good spirits of the riders, spending time with them as they find their way in the strange new world of competitive cycling.

Boyer initially picks five riders for Team Rwanda, and from the get-go, first among equals is Adrien Niyonshuti, a sweet-natured but determined rider who lost 60 family members, including six brothers and everyone on his mother's side of the family, in the genocide.

Coach and rider form an immediate bond, but one of "Rising's" unexpected story lines is the question of how long Boyer will remain committed to the team. Because Rwandans know well that most Western nongovernmental organizations leave the country after a year or two, Adrien is fearful that his coach will do the same. Also an unforeseen problem for the riders is that once they become celebrities in their country, they become targets for local criminal elements.

Boyer, for his part, has to teach his charges all kinds of things he's taken for granted, like being able to eat and drink while their bikes are moving as well as getting them used to riding bikes new enough to actually stop when the riders hit the brakes.

Director Johnston stayed with Team Rwanda from its beginnings in 2006 right up through their potential participation in the 2012 London Olympics. As a filmmaker, he doesn't always trust his audience as much as he should, opting for overly insistent music and voice-over and withholding information in key areas. But he knew a good story when he saw one, and we can all be grateful for that.

[http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content\\_display/reviews/specialty-releases/e3ia78b1bf0528fcd95b8d323da07612f60](http://www.filmjournal.com/filmjournal/content_display/reviews/specialty-releases/e3ia78b1bf0528fcd95b8d323da07612f60)



Film Review: Rising From Ashes

Moving documentary about bicyclists who train for a Rwandan team that competes in the 2012 Olympics.

July 31, 2013 -By Daniel Eagan

Filmed over a seven-year stretch, *Rising from Ashes* follows Team Rwanda, formed in 2005 to promote competitive biking in a country still recovering from genocide and civil war. By turns uplifting and sobering, the documentary shows the positive results that can arise from simple means.

Narrator Forest Whitaker notes that in 1994, when genocide claimed a million Rwandan lives, a bicycle could mean the difference between life and death. In 2005, Tom Ritchey, a professional racer and one of the early designers of mountain bikes, joined "Project Rwanda," a volunteer effort to develop a national racing team.

Ritchey recruits Jock Boyer, who competes in the first annual Rwandan Wooden Bike Classic in 2006. Boyer loses to Adrien Niyonshuti, a Rwandan native who was racing on a mountain bike for the first time. The race convinces Boyer to continue working for Project Rwanda.

Boyer picks five bicyclists for the first Team Rwanda, including Adrien and Abraham Ruhumuriza. In interviews, Boyer admits that he didn't know much about the genocide in 1994. Two of his racers lost their fathers and brothers. Adrien reveals that he lost at least 60 family members.

Boyer, the first American to compete in the Tour de France, must cope with outdated equipment, persuade his team members to suffer through grueling workouts, and plot a realistic path for the team's future. They compete in the Cape Epic, an eight-day race in South Africa that attracts a thousand of the world's top riders. The team does poorly, but Boyer uses their losses to spur the racers on to better results.

In 2007, Team Rwanda tours the United States, undergoing state-of-the-art testing in Monterey labs, and competing in races in Oregon and New Mexico. Boyer and other volunteers help form a new training center in north Rwanda, expanding the team from the original five racers. In addition to training, members receive room and board, medical care, new equipment and English lessons.

As Boyer points out, his job is to become involved with the lives of the team racers, not just to coach. Project Rwanda helps the bicyclists cope with money problems, celebrity issues, and demands from family members.



Rising From Ashes presents a beguiling portrait of the Rwandan countryside, and its brief interviews with team members range from playful to devastating. Boyer has his own story to tell, and confronts his past in an honest, dignified manner.

Director T.C. Johnstone takes a conventional approach to the material, which wouldn't seem out of place on ESPN. Coverage of some of the races is skimpy, and the movie fails to flesh out details at times. But the story behind Rising from Ashes is so moving and compelling that the documentary's shortcomings seem inconsequential. Viewers can learn a lot about courage and perseverance from the Team Rwanda members.

<http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/tv-movies/comedy-school-europa-report-cockneys-zombies-artist-model-movie-reviews-article-1.1414085?pgno=1>



'When Comedy Went to School,' 'Europa Report,' 'Cockneys Vs. Zombies,' 'The Artist and the Model,' 'Rising From Ashes': Movie reviews

**RISING FROM ASHES — 3 stars**

A wonderfully inspiring documentary, narrated by Forest Whitaker, about the foundation of a bicycling team in Rwanda, made up of men whose lives and families were destroyed by the 1994 genocide and the nation's continued strife.

The movie begins simply. Bikes were used by many to escape the devastation of ethnic cleaning. With competitive cycling a proud tradition in the region, many young men ride wooden bikes. In the early 2000s, when mountain-bike designer Tom Ritchie hears of the need and wants to help, he brings in Tour de France winner Jonathan "Jock" Boyer. He's a man in need of redemption himself — and a team is forged. The ultimate goal: The Olympics.

Filmed over six years, "Ashes" is joyous and uplifting, full of spirit, memorable athletes (including Olympian Adrien Niyonshuti) and remarkable achievements, both big and small.

[http://www.villagevoice.com/2013-07-31/film/rising-from-ashes/?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+most%2Fcurrent+%28Village+Voice+-+Current+Issue%29](http://www.villagevoice.com/2013-07-31/film/rising-from-ashes/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+most%2Fcurrent+%28Village+Voice+-+Current+Issue%29)



## *Rising from Ashes* Is More Than Just a Remarkable Doc About Cycling

By Daphne Howland Wednesday, Jul 31 2013

Since familiar metaphors and tales of inspiration are typical building blocks of the sports story, it's a little mysterious that director T.C. Johnstone didn't invoke "breaking away" or some other cycling term in the title of his remarkable documentary about Team Rwanda. Perhaps it's because *Rising from Ashes* is not just about a cycling team; it's a testament to what happens when human beings care for one another. The young men, who hardly dare to think about riding professionally, are the survivors of a brutal genocide that took away their families, their childhood, and their peace of mind, and left them with little pride in their country. Their coach, Jock Boyer, the first American to ride the Tour de France (in 1981), is an emotionally closed and reluctant leader who has done time for committing deplorable crimes. Johnstone puts six years of work on this film to good use. The work has as little fat as his stars, yet his footage is rich, and his story is layered. He unspools details and developments with a patience that never tries ours. Johnstone has confidence in all elements of filmmaking—images, interviews, narration (by actor and co-producer Forest Whitaker, used sparingly), sound, and a fantastic soundtrack—and uses each to vivid and captivating effect.



# Rising From Ashes: Film Review

7/31/2013 by Frank Scheck

## The Bottom Line

*This feel-good sports doc brings a little-known story to compelling life.*

**T.C. Johnstone's uplifting documentary chronicles the creation of Rwanda's first Olympic cycling team.**

Rising From Ashes, the title of T.C. Johnstone's uplifting documentary about the creation of the first Rwandan National Cycling Team, has a double meaning. It refers not only to the tremendous spirit displayed by the athletes as they struggle to overcome the horrific legacy of the genocide that occurred a generation earlier, but also the personal redemption of the famed American cyclist who led them.

Opening for a limited theatrical release, the film should garner appreciate audiences upon its inevitable home video and broadcast exposure.

Bicycles assume a prominent role in Rwanda, known as "The Land of a Thousand Hills." It is a primary means of transportation for the largely impoverished population, although the bikes are usually years old and decrepit. Indeed, one of the cyclists interviewed marvels at the fact that the new bike he's been given is the first one he's ridden that was outfitted with brakes.

Famed American bike builder Tom Ritchey explored the country on his mountain bike in 2005 and met a group of cyclists who called themselves Team Rwanda. Inspired by their dedication, Ritchey enlisted his friend and former rival Jock Boyer, who in 1981 made history as the first American to participate in the Tour de France, to become their coach. His championship racing career had been derailed in 2002 when he was convicted of lewd behavior with a minor and sent to jail for a year.

"I overstepped my boundaries with a minor, a girl," is all the clearly haunted Boyer says in the film about the incident.

The film details his subsequent years-long efforts to whip the Rwandan team into enough shape to qualify for the Olympics. Among his star players was Adrien Niyonshuti, who lost 60 members of his family, including six brothers, in the 1994 genocide. He eventually became the nation's flag bearer at the opening ceremony of 2012's London Olympics, and the segment in which his fellow countrymen gaze at this spectacle with tremendous pride is among the film's most moving.

Narrated in unobtrusive fashion by Forest Whitaker and featuring a jaunty Afropop soundtrack, the film is crisp and economical, with the filmmaker carefully avoiding extraneous melodramatics. They are, after all, hardly necessary in a tale that already contains such inherently powerful drama.

## *Bike Racing Documentary Chronicles Rise Of Rwanda Cycling Team*

***Rising From Ashes***  
**First Run Features**  
Unrated

Over the course of a hundred days in 1994, the East African nation of Rwanda experienced an ethnic cleansing which consumed the lives of nearly a fifth of the population. The mass slaughter came as a consequence of a revolt by the majority tribe, the Hutus, against the Tutsis, a minority which, with the help of the country's European colonizers, had enjoyed a higher social and economic status for centuries.

A few years after the cessation of the civil war, American bike racing legend Jock Boyer was looking for a chance at redemption in the wake of being paroled after serving time in prison for lewd behavior. He found that opportunity he needed upon moving to Rwanda at the suggestion of a friend.

There, he took on the unenviable challenge of coaching the national cycling team. And over the next six years he trained them while teaching them how to compete on the level of world-class athletes with the hope of one day qualifying for the Olympics.

That seemingly impossible quest is the



subject of *Rising From Ashes*, an uplifting, overcoming-the-odds documentary directed by T.C. Johnstone. Narrated by Forest Whitaker, the film introduces us to the ragtag crew of raw

recruits, including prima donna Abraham, mischievous Nathan and strongman Nyandwi, that Jock had to try to whip into fighting shape.

But besides athleticism, the intrepid coach had to worry about his young protégés' equipment, since they were riding on quarter century-old, brakeless, wooden bikes ordinarily employed as taxis or to deliver huge sacks of produce. An even bigger hurdle had to do with the fact that each was also still suffering from deep, psychological turmoil caused by the mass slaughter they'd witnessed of a million fellow citizens.

For instance, the team's star, Adrien, had lost 60 members of his family, including six brothers and everyone on his mother's side of the clan. For that reason, besides salaries, health care and education, some of the squad's funds were devoted to addressing daunting mental health issues.

An inspirational illustration of how the Olympics came to serve as a unifying step in terms of exorcising the demons ever haunting Rwanda's grisly killing fields.

Very Good (3 stars)

In English and Kinyarwanda with subtitles  
Running time: 80 minutes

# Christianity Today

## Briefly: Rising From Ashes

A quick look at a new documentary that's rooted in risk and delight.

**Carol Anne Ausband** posted 8/8/2013

The documentary is one of the trickiest mediums for storytelling.

First of all, you don't have control of the story—you can't make it fit the story you want to tell. You have to follow what you find. Documentaries can uncover stories that the public may have missed and put them together creatively.

However, moviegoers often view the form skeptically, because it's difficult to do it well. Even a good documentary can seem unpolished or unfinished.

Rising from Ashes is a welcome exception to this.

The bicycle is a primary form of transportation in Rwanda. It was also a means for survival during the genocide. The country has made great strides towards healing the deep wounds left by the horrific events of 1994, but the work is still far from finished. So when legendary bike builder Tom Ritchie hears that a few young Rwandans have formed a cycling team, the story begins.

He persuades his old racing rival, the eccentric Jock Boyer (first American to compete in the Tour de France), to come with him to Rwanda and be a part of hosting a race they called "The Wooden Bike Classic." There they meet Adrien Niyonshuti, a strong-spirited young Rwandan with an incredible aptitude for the sport. Not only did the Rwandan riders exhibit a real talent, but they had a reason to ride. After Adrien won the Classic, he was asked what he hoped for next. He responded that he hoped that these white folk would keep racing with them: "I think it would bring hope to our lives and our country."

To make a long story short, Jock moves to Rwanda and begins coaching the beginnings of a national team. Their story is truly remarkable as they embark on a journey to compete in the London Olympic Games.

But really, there are two stories going on here. One is the story of a country still recovering from a brutal history and the unity and hope that a national sports team inspires. The other is the story of Jock and the team, particularly Adrien. Jock's troubled past (which includes some jail time) and his own journey to healing uniquely equipped him to relate to the boys. In many ways, Jock sees himself in Adrien.

At one point in the documentary, Jock looks at the camera, tells us exactly why he served time, and takes full responsibility for his actions. His honesty is surprisingly refreshing. It's this willingness to name the evil that is necessary to healing Rwanda as well. Adrien lost about 60 family members in the

genocide. He knows what it is to lose, but he also knows the importance of forgiveness. Adrien and Jock inspire one another.

What's great about *Rising from Ashes* is that you kind of forget it's a documentary. The cinematography is excellent throughout and even stunning at parts, particularly in its portrayal of the races. Many times documentary filmmakers have to reenact scenes or find some other way of portraying the events they are telling, because, well, they've already happened. And they can't go back and film them.

But this project has been over six years in the making. The filmmakers took a real risk and began documenting the story before they knew if it would have a happy ending. The races they filmed could have ended differently. The team could have broken up, or given up.

Robert Frost says the following about the artistic process in his essay "The Figure a Poem Makes":

It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and it ends in a clarification of life... a momentary stay against confusion.

That is exactly the approach that was taken with this film. It began in delight—particularly the delight of Tom Ritchie, Jock Boyer, and director T.C. Johnstone, as they saw something hopeful and possible in a recovering nation. They had a hunch about a story that hadn't happened yet, and they inclined to the impulse.

The result is a beautiful and truly inspiring piece of cinema that serves as "a momentary stay against confusion." In the midst of this reckless and often violent world we live in, *Rising from Ashes* is a reminder of redemption.

<http://variety.com/2013/tv/reviews/rising-from-ashes-1117949185/>

# VARIETY

## Review: "Rising From Ashes"

Shot over the course of six years, the stirring "Rising From Ashes" charts the growth of the Rwanda national cycling team from inception to the Olympics, a success story badly needed by a nation still reeling from the mass genocide of a generation earlier. Engaging personalities and lively, good-looking assembly make T.C. Johnstone's inspirational sports docu a crowdpleaser that should appeal to broadcast programmers and home-format distribs, with niche theatrical possible.

The story is told primarily via cycling legend Jock Boyer, the first American to compete in the Tour de France. But by 2005, he'd hit dark times; the pic provides little detail beyond noting his conviction for lewd conduct with a minor. Released from jail in his 50s, he found the beginnings of his own path to redemption when longtime cycling friend Tom Ritchey suggested he assemble and coach a racing team in Rwanda. Initially reluctant, Boyer was taken in by the raw talent at hand, particularly gifted amateur Adrien Niyonshuti, who'd lost 60 relatives in the 1994 bloodbath. The path from early training to international competitions is engaging, abetted by colorful lensing and an Afropop soundtrack.

<http://documentaries.about.com/od/events/a/Documentaries-Watch-August-1-9-2013.htm>



**Rising From Ashes** - Directed by T.C. Johnstone - Narrated by Forrest Whitaker, this wonderfully inspiring sports documentary tracks the development of a talented and morale building cycling team in post-genocide Rwanda. Trained by American champion cyclists Tom Ritchey and Jock Boyer, Team Rwanda's young, talented and charismatic riders excel in the sport, and the sport helps them to overcome the extreme trauma of their childhood experiences during the genocide in their country. In on camera interviews, the team members reveal their past experiences, and talk about what cycling means to them and what it means to their country -- and to recovery. Jock Boyer, who has had some hard times himself, shows tremendous empathy for the Rwandans. The team members are completely dedicated, appreciative of their opportunities and they are amazingly generous towards each other. During one race, for example, one of the cyclists sees that his team leader has a flat tire, and without hesitating gives his bike to his colleague, thereby giving the team leader a chance to win a spot in a more important race, while relinquishing his own chance for a slot in that important race. We can all learn a thing or two from this team's behavior. Actually, after getting to know them thought seeing this film, it's impossible to not root for Team Rwanda, and for happy, successful lives for the Team Rwanda members. This is a film about hope. It highlights the positive qualities of humanity. It's a must see. Opening theatrically in New York and Los Angeles.



## Rising from Ashes

*Bike Racing Documentary Chronicles Rise of Rwanda Cycling Team*

Film Review by Kam Williams **Very Good (3 stars)**

Over the course of a hundred days in 1994, the East African nation of Rwanda experienced an ethnic cleansing which consumed the lives of nearly a fifth of the population. The mass slaughter came as a consequence of a revolt by the majority tribe, the Hutus, against the Tutsis, a minority which, with the help of the country's European colonizers, had enjoyed a higher social and economic status for centuries.

A few years after the cessation of the civil war, American bike racing legend Jock Boyer was looking for a chance at redemption in the wake of being paroled after serving time in prison for lewd behavior. He found that opportunity he needed upon moving to Rwanda at the suggestion of a friend.

There, he took on the unenviable challenge of coaching the national cycling team. And over the next six years he trained them while teaching them how to compete on the level of World-Class athletes with the hope of one day qualifying for the Olympics.

That seemingly impossible quest is the subject of *Rising from Ashes*, an uplifting, overcoming-the-odds documentary directed by T.C. Johnstone. Narrated by Forest Whitaker, the film introduces us to the ragtag crew of raw recruits, including prima donna Abraham, mischievous Nathan and strongman Nyandwi, that Jock had to try to whip into fighting shape.

But besides athleticism, the intrepid coach had to worry about his young protégés equipment, since they were riding on quarter century-old, brakeless, wooden bikes ordinarily employed as taxis or to deliver huge sacks of produce. An even bigger hurdle had to do with the fact that each was also still suffering from deep, psychological turmoil caused by the mass slaughter they'd witnessed of a million fellow citizens.

For instance, the team's star, Adrien, had lost sixty members of his family, including six brothers and everyone on his mother's side of the clan. For that reason, besides salaries, health care and education, some of the squad's funds were devoted to addressing daunting mental health issues.

An inspirational illustration of how the Olympics came to serve as a unifying step in terms of exorcising the demons ever haunting Rwanda's grisly killing fields.



## SBCC Film Reviews

### **Rising From Ashes (T.C. Johnstone): USA**

Reviewed by Jacob Dekker. Viewed at the Santa Barbara Film Festival 2013.

Rising from Ashes tells a true and triumphant story.

On paper, T.C. Johnstone's *Rising from Ashes* is one of those films that could either be really dull or really interesting. Narrated by Forrest Whitaker, cycling legend Jock Boyer moves to Rwanda to start a cycling team. After reading the synopsis of this film I figured it would only capture the interest of cyclists, unless it had a good narrative and strong characters. And after six years of production I assumed that *Rising from Ashes* is one of those films that can either be made or broken in the editing room.

Luckily this film is packed with strong characters, a gripping plot, and fantastic cinematography. The film is shot and edited like an action movie which keeps things interesting. The camera moves and cuts slower during dramatic moments, and speeds up during intense race scenes. The film documents Boyer's journey throughout Rwanda as he searches the country for cycling talent and builds a team to put Rwanda on the map once again. When it comes down to it this film is about trust, fatherhood, and redemption. Boyer becomes a father figure to his racers, and the racers learn to trust him and each other. As you'd expect the team has some challenges they are faced with, and a war-torn past to overcome.

For being a film about cycling, something that I have very little interest in, I found this film to be very exciting. At times I even forgot I was watching a documentary. Some of the cinematography, editing, and mise-en-scene was so rich it felt like I was watching a feature film. The film is masterfully paced. Some of the scenes felt like they had been recreated for dramatic purposes, but for the most part the performances were very authentic, as one should expect in a documentary.

One of the only gripes with the film is that it does not really have much of an ending. The ending is more of a cliffhanger, rather than a resolution. It felt like the last twenty minutes were rushed. It would have been nice if there was a bit more information about the riders on the team, but I am guessing after six years of production the producers thought it was time to finish up. While this did not really feel like it hurt the film that much it definitely felt like a missed opportunity. If there was a bit more closure this would have easily been one of the best (if not the best) films I saw at the film festival.

Whether you are into cycling or not, this tale of redemption and fatherhood is not one you should miss.



## Rising from Ashes 7 / 10

Preview by Brian Orndorf, August 22, 2013

It's a given that "Rising from Ashes" succeeds at selling its inspirational tale. After all, the story includes genocide survival, an underdog saga, and a soulful rebirth in the form of unexpected companionship, making the feature easy to fall for. It's slight work, without much in the way of a beginning and ending, but as a documentary it scores with a heartfelt study of perseverance, watching those who struggle every single day to contain their lives build confidence and develop an alien sense of joy, with that purity of spirit contributing to a sporting odyssey that's more about human details than physical achievement.

After the brutality and widespread death of the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, the country was left with a shell-shocked population, with children in particular witnessing atrocities that would go on to define their scattered personalities as they developed into adulthood. In 2005, Tom Ritchey, the inventor of the mountain bike, discovered an appreciation for the sport in Rwanda, finding eager participants looking to experience the challenge of competition through the country's vast network of hills and roads, with some, including Adrien, hoping to use the sport as a means to focus on his gifts of endurance. Calling in friend and racing champion Jock Boyer to coach a few of the more dedicated cyclists, a Rwandan team was soon born, leaving the American to help mold these easily distracted men into biking machines. Offering purpose to locals trying to retain individuality, Boyer soon found himself with an efficient team of trained riders looking forward to the test of world competition.

Narrated by Forest Whitaker and directed by T.C. Johnstone, "Rising from Ashes" offers a unique look at life in Rwanda. With the country rebuilding itself in the shadow of unspeakable violence, the next generation has matured into leaders and fathers, with these men hoping to distinguish themselves after lives pummeled by nightmares and personal loss. The production provides a history lesson on the history of the Hutu and Tutsi conflict, helping to establish the private pain shared by the cyclists, but the majority of the documentary clings to positivity and a sense of national pride, detailing the aspirations of a Rwandan cyclist such as Adrien, who finds himself with renewed function and drive, blossoming under Boyer's tough-but-fair leadership as he transforms a hobby into a lifestyle.

"Rising from Ashes" primarily concentrates on 2007, where the Rwandan team was thoroughly challenged with races in South Africa and America, allowing the men to step outside the country and experience the world for the first time. Hoping to prove themselves as contenders, Johnstone highlights the tenacity of the squad, facing strange climates and difficult terrain as they pedal to potential victory. We also observe Boyer's efforts to train and test the Rwandans using advanced technology, hoping to learn which cyclist has the sport buried in their DNA. It's appealing to watch the team come together as a biking unit, with the picture stressing the family aspect of the bond. Also compelling are the races, which hit all the required beats of sporting suspense.

Perhaps most curious is the treatment of Boyer, who's handed the broadest arc of redemption, taking some of the spotlight off the Rwandans. An unsettled man with abandonment issues, Boyer is also a convicted sex offender who's served his sentence, tarnishing his cycling legacy. Johnstone doesn't labor on the specifics of the crime (Boyer admitted to sexual relations with a teenage girl), though such a troubling topic seems directly connected to the man's need for a fresh start in a new country. Boyer's a fascinating personality with hints of darkness that are unexplored, edited into a fatherly role that's satisfying but unenlightening in the long run, reducing his participation to that of the average screen coach -- all tough love and teary recollections of cycling spirit.

There's something of a Big Game finale to "Rising from Ashes," watching Johnston single out Adrien as he makes a play for Olympic glory, exceeding his wildest cycling dreams. It's a jubilant conclusion, but a little light on details. However, a few gaps in the narrative do little to tarnish the impact of this stirring tale, which offers big heart and quick feet to those in the mood for a story that reinforces the power of the human spirit.