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From the Selected Works of Steve Brantley

2004

Review of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: Facing Death, a film by Stefan Haupt

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AIDS BOOK REVIEW JOURNAL

University of Illinois at Chicago

H. Robert Malinowsky

Editor

ISSN 1068-4174

Number 73, January, February, March, April, May, June, 2004

1223. *Elisabeth Kübler-Ross: Facing Death*, a film by Stefan Haupt. 2002. First Run/Icarus Films, 32 Court St., 21st Fl, Brooklyn, NY 11201. 98 minutes, color. (Descriptors: Death)

This informative biographic video of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross surveys the scholar's life and career in the study of death from the curious perspective near the end of Kübler-Ross' own life. Born in 1926 as a two-pound triplet, Kübler-Ross spent her childhood as a small, frail and sickly child. Always bright and inquisitive it was clear she would follow a scholarly path from early in her life. An accomplished and gifted physician, she is best known for the masterwork, **On Death and Dying** published in 1969. Her study of dying adults and children practically inaugurated a new field of medical inquiry. In it, Kübler-Ross is able to meld the precise mind of a scientist with the sensitivity and compassion of a good therapist. We are frequently reminded of the good and loving work with children Kübler-Ross performed, which was enhanced by the success of her book. Unfortunately the video Haupt directs is broad and unwieldy documenting much irrelevant biographical information and occasionally interviews with family and associates of Kübler-Ross that offer little insight. It is not that there is a lack of interesting information presented, but that there is simply too much and much of it is unfocused. The director was unable to get any interviews with Kübler-Ross' children, a problem which seriously detracts from the story of an extremely driven professional who left her family to pursue her life's work.

In the 1970s, as a result of her fame, Kübler-Ross was contacted and worked with a bogus group who claimed to make communication with the departed. Despite much dissuading from her friends and colleagues, Kübler-Ross pursued this relationship and established therapy and seminars within the new age compound. Kübler-Ross moved to Virginia in 1984 and built a home and working farm to continue her studies. As AIDS began to make its tragic impact in the United States, Kübler-Ross proposed to build a hospice for babies with AIDS. The local rural Virginian population did not take kindly to this idea at all, and the plans were dropped after much fighting. In 1994, arsonists burned her home, possibly as a reaction to AIDS hospice plans. She wanted to rebuild immediately, but on the insistence of her son, Kübler-Ross relocated to a secluded ranch outside Phoenix. She is still there and lives in seclusion and disability following a series of strokes. **Facing Death** attempts to portray her struggle to deal with the issues and difficulties of dying. It is an intriguing subject for a documentary, but Haupt's treatment relies more on the life and work of Kübler-Ross than with the complicated matters suggested in the title. Near the end of this 98-minute film we get a glimpse of the realities and daily struggles of Kübler-Ross, but there is not enough to sustain a feature length documentary.

The production values of this video are high. The color and lighting are adequate and the reproduction of black and white photographs are clear. The original musical score is clear and voice

over narration is distinct and understandable. Many of the interviews are in German and subtitled in English. The white subtitles are occasionally difficult to read. This video would be useful for community colleges with curriculum in death and dying studies, or women's studies. The content is much more biographical than it is scholarly. (Reviewed by Stephen Brantley, Assistant Reference Librarian, University of Illinois at Chicago Daley Library)