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Procedure 769

((DUTCH))

A Jura Film production, with the participation of NCRV Television, the Dutch Cultural Broadcasting Promotion Fund, Dutch Film Fund and CoBo. (International sales: Films Transit, Montreal.) Produced by Jan Heijs, Ruud Monster. Directed by Jaap Van Hoewijk. Screenplay, Van Hoewijk, Rikkert Boonstra. Camera (color), Peter Brugman; editor, Leo de Boer; music, Joke Geraets; sound, Tom d'Angremond. Reviewed at Toronto Film Festival, Sept. 9, 1995. (Also in Rotterdam, San Jose fests.) Running time: 85 MIN.

By **BRENDAN KELLY**

(English soundtrack)

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"**Procedure 769**" is a Dutch-produced, English-lingo feature-length documentary about the execution of convicted murderer Robert Harris, who died in the San Quentin gas chamber in 1992. But rather than focusing on Harris, first-time helmer Jaap Van Hoewijk has taken the unusual route of concentrating on the witnesses to the execution and their different interpretations of the event. Well-made docu will likely find a home on pubcasters and specialty cable slots around the globe.

The topic is anything but viewer-friendly, yet the pic is never less than fascinating, mainly thanks to a series of often astonishing interviews with the people who saw Harris die that April morning in San Quentin.

Harris, who was the first prisoner to be executed in California in 25 years, was convicted for the murder of two 16-year-old boys in San Diego in 1978 and spent 14

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years behind bars before the state ended his life on April 21, 1992. His last words, widely reported in the media at the time, were: "You can be a king or a street sweeper, but everybody dances with the Grim Reaper."

There were 49 witnesses to Harris' execution, including his relatives and friends, relatives of the victims, journalists and a few "VIP" witnesses, well-connected Californians who asked to be present for the grisly event. Docu includes extensive interviews with several of the witnesses, notably the condemned man's brother Randall Harris, psychologist/friend Michael Kroll, San Quentin warden Daniel Vasquez, reporter Wade Douglas and members of the two victims' families.

All have radically differing takes, ranging from the journalist who thought it was simply a great story, to Linda Herring, the sister of one of the victims, who felt Harris didn't suffer enough when he was killed with cyanide gas. Most are quite emotional by the end.

Van Hoewijk intercuts the "talking-head" sections with clips from the live TV coverage of the event, including footage of protesters and supporters of the execution demonstrating outside the prison. There is also voiceover narration describing in detail how the gas chamber works.

Helmer does a good job of balancing the interviews with newly shot and archival footage and, though clearly sympathetic to the anti-capital-punishment cause, he resists bludgeoning the viewer with any political message. All tech credits are fine.

Title refers to the document that explains how a prisoner is to be executed.

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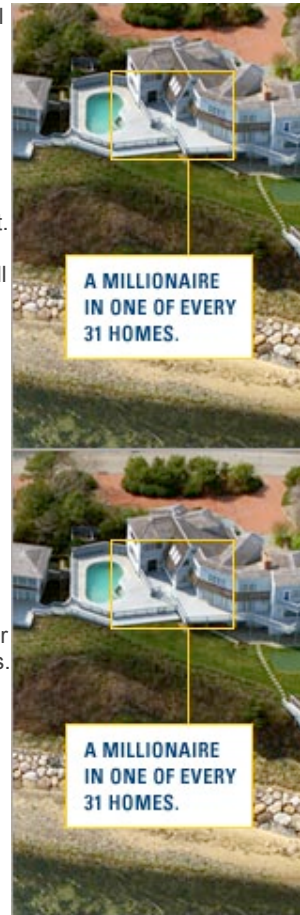
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2 Wallace & Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit	\$11.7\$11.7	7 Two for the Money	\$4.6\$4.6
3 Elizabethtown	\$11.0\$11.0	8 A History of Violence	\$3.6\$3.6
4 Flightplan	\$6.5\$6.5	9 Tim Burton's Corpse Bride	\$3.5\$3.5
5 In Her Shoes	\$6.1\$6.1	10 Waiting ...	\$2.9\$2.9

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