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## **Vito After (DVD)**

Maria Pusateri, DreamSlate Production, 2006, 48 minutes, ISBN 978-0615139968, \$21.95.

*Vito After*, the story of Vito Friscia, a Brooklyn homicide detective in the aftermath of 9/11, could have easily been schmaltzy and sanctimonious in the hands of a lesser-skilled filmmaker. To the contrary, in this subtle and provocative character study, award-winning director and producer, Maria Pusateri, gives us a poignant and intimate portrait of Detective Friscia's battle with the emotional and physical toll the events of 9/11 have taken on him, his family, his squad, and really, all of us. Using Vito as her vehicle (who happens to be her brother-in-law) Pusateri has captured in vivid detail the lingering scars that have affected our people, many of which have continued to impact profoundly some of us more than most of us realize. As one of Vito's colleagues pointedly remarks, since that fateful day, nothing is routine anymore. Everything has changed.

At Ground Zero on September 11, Vito was not only a first-responder, but subsequently was among the 7,000 NYPD detectives assigned to sift through the toxic rubble searching for the identities of 9/11 victims. Since then, Vito and many other rescue workers have suffered a number of respiratory and heart ailments as a result of burned lungs and breathing in soot, and sifting through mountains of carcinogens and chemicals including lead, mercury, asbestos, PCBs, benzene, hydrocarbons, and who knows what else. Of the more than 25,000 9/11 rescue workers tested, two-thirds have been diagnosed with some type of respiratory or gastro-intestinal ailment.

Heart disease and brain cancer are rising at an alarming rate among this group, and no one really knows how these diseases will develop in the future. If that weren't bad enough, consider the emotional toll of searching for victims twelve hours or more every day, seven days a week, for nearly a year with almost no break. Almost half of 9/11 first responders and rescue workers have since been identified as suffering from some type of psychological distress, including grief, anxiety, and depression.

Pusateri presents us with a remarkable story of courage and sacrifice. But perhaps even more profoundly, through Vito, Pusateri quietly reminds us that police officers are human beings. The firefighters and police officers who ran into the Towers to help the victims engaged in a heroic act certainly, but if they are heroes, it is as much because of their sense of duty, and their fortitude and determination in which they humbly endure the day-in and day-out drudgery and unpleasantness their line of work frequently entails. Surely Vito is a tough guy, reluctant to display weakness, subsuming his fear and emotion so that he can do his job. But he is also an individual and a man acutely affected by the things he experiences at work—the unending cruelty, violence, and heartache that most of us don't ever witness. He is indeed representative of the overwhelming majority of cops in this country: a dedicated and hardworking professional and family man who is deeply concerned about his community. It is a story whose lessons the rest of us too often forget or ignore, brilliantly told, and that every American should experience.

*Vincent P. Tinerella*

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