

# THE FAMILY (DIE FAMILIE )

A documentary film by Stefan Weinert (min. 92:00)

Titel: The Family (Die Familie), Germany 2013  
Director: Stefan Weinert  
Story Families of people murdered along the border of East and West Berlin tell their stories.

The jury of the German Board of Film Recommendation / Deutsche Film- und Medienbewertung (FBW) has given the film its top rating: highly recommended.

In an oppressive, authoritarian state, the bereaved are also the victims. The documentary film THE FAMILY makes that clear very forcefully by allowing family members of those shot along the Berlin Wall to tell their stories. Even now, more than a quarter of a century on, they still suffer the trauma of their loss. This is due to a large extent to the fact that for a long time the exact circumstances surrounding the killings were kept from them – and in some cases remain unknown. This makes it difficult to ever find “closure” and to move on with a certain degree of inner peace. One woman protagonist doesn’t know what happened to her son’s corpse; another still doesn’t know how and why her husband drowned at the former border; a third can’t come to terms with the suspended sentence of her son’s murderers and speaks of her bloody revenge fantasies. Filmmaker Stefan Weinert gives them space to speak in front of the camera; he accompanies the bereaved to the “scenes of the crime”; is with them as they view Stasi (secret police) files and supports their further research efforts. The harrowing effect of the film unfolds as witness evidence is corroborated on various different levels. The statements of those affected often present a stark contrast to the parallel entries in the Stasi files, formulated in a cold, bureaucratic German that is even more unbearable than usual in this context. Weinert’s protagonists allow him to film them in very personally painful situations in which he gives us an intimate insight into their experiences without ever putting the individuals or their emotions on display. In one powerful sequence, for example, we witness the moment when a family member discovers photographs in a case file and is confronted for the first time with images of the dead body of his father. Another is first perplexed then distraught as he searches in vain for the site where his brother was shot - in today’s Berlin, where the Wall and the watchtowers have long vanished.

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The jarring final image is a tribute to Weinert's skill in cinematic composition: a bereaved woman pays her respects at a memorial site located right next to an American fast food outlet.

The addition of a lawyer to explain why legal action against the border marksmen produced such unsatisfactory results broadens the horizon of the film, but the protagonists and their trauma remain its central focus. The film's climax arrives in the form of a meeting between a marksman and the son of his victim. The sequence that immediately follows shows footage of a man unlocking the safety catch on his gun and aiming – the only instance in the film when Weinert abandons his perspective as neutral observer to editorialize. Jury members were divided over whether this pointed value judgment is fitting; some finding it detracts from the overall affect of the film. Opinion was unanimous, however, that with its great impact – politically, morally, and in human terms – this film deserves the highest rating.

Jury members:

Marion Closmann, Andrö Eckardt, Wilfried Hippen, Julia Michel and Josef Wutz