



## AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein  
October 12, 2007

***“This year, after once again viewing hundreds of films...we discovered a distinct pattern: a compelling theme of courage and morality ...It gives me hope that they are indeed trying to change the world through their films.”***

-Mark Fishkin, Mill Valley  
Film Festival Founder-  
Director, 2007

On October 4 I attended the opening night of the Mill Valley Film Festival. This was my first experience with the festival and I wasn't sure what to expect when I arrived at the Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center to see Ang Lee's new movie, *Lust, Caution*. Lee, who has directed and written many films - including *The Ice Storm* and *Brokeback Mountain* - gave an emotional and, as he put it, jet-lagged, introduction. It was very moving to make this movie, he told us, "like spilling my guts out for some reason."

Tang Wei, the female lead, also spoke briefly, telling us the movie is about change and that it had changed her, too. "I used to be a tomboy," she smilingly told us, as she gestured toward her fuchsia form-fitting dress and high heels.

The film itself was intense and well deserving of its NC-17 rating. It is based on a short story by Chinese novelist Eileen Chang and is about the dangers of love and the

brutality of those who seek to control. The beautiful and vivid cinematography will stay with me for a long time.

After the film there was a gala that included food, wine, music and what seemed like thousands of people mingling and talking inside the tent set up at the downtown Mill Valley plaza. There I spent some time chatting with Judith Mayer, who is the director of business development for the festival.

We started out by talking about independent films and what they are. As Mayer described it, an independent film is "a film that makes you think, a film that has something to say...a film that reflects what's happening in the world." And, she pointed out, it gives the audience a chance to come to their own conclusions. I knew instantly what she meant, as I thought of all those full page advertisements, with glowing quotes and numerous exclamation points.

I was reminded, too, of the bestsellers we get at the

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library, with jacket covers full of the same kind of language and brief descriptions of the plot running down the inside. It is rare to have an opportunity to simply choose a book and read it without knowing anything about it except for the title and the author. I like that idea, just as I like the idea of going to a festival and being able to make up my own mind about a movie. It made me think the word “independent” could be applied to the audience as well as the filmmakers.

Besides being my first film festival, this was the first time I have sat with an audience that included the director. On a few occasions I have been to the symphony when the composer was present, most recently a John Thow piece at the San Francisco Symphony, and I have been to many, many plays where the director was there, but I have never done this with a professionally made movie.

I realized as I sat in the dark that it was a different experience. It made me conscious of any kind of criticisms I might voice and I felt a responsibility to truly pay attention. To craft any work of art, like film or writing, is to take a risk. Just as it is important for us to come to our own conclusions, it is equally important to honor those who are creating works that, in Fishkin’s words, “resonate both personally and universally.”