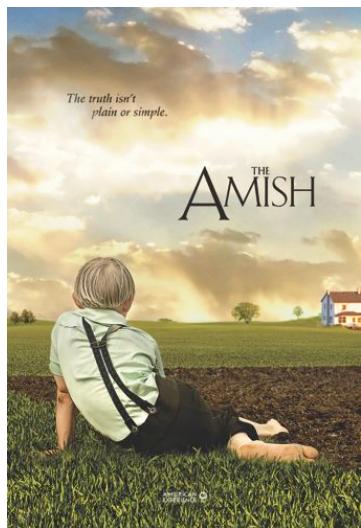


AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presents *The Amish*

Premieres Tuesday, February 28, 2012
8:00 p.m. - 10:00 p.m. ET on PBS



On October 2, 2006, a 32-year-old milk truck driver named Charles Roberts entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and shot 10 young girls, killing five, before committing suicide as police officers stormed the school. Just hours after the shooting, Amish community members visited the gunman's family to offer forgiveness. The events at Nickel Mines horrified the nation for the senseless brutality of the shootings and left many questioning and haunted by the victims' startling response.

Filmed over the course of a year, *The Amish* answers many questions Americans have about this insular religious community. Their intense faith and strict adherence to 300-year-old traditions have by turn captivated and repelled, awed and irritated, inspired and confused America for more than a century. An extraordinarily intimate portrait of contemporary Amish faith and life, the film questions why and how the Amish, an insistently closed and

communal culture, have thrived within one of the most open, individualistic societies on earth; explores how, despite their ingrained submissiveness, the Amish have successfully asserted themselves in resisting the encroachments of modern society and government; asks what our fascination with the Amish says about deep American values; and looks at what the future holds for a community whose existence is so rooted in the past.

With unprecedented access to the Amish built on patience and hard-won trust, the film is the first to deeply penetrate and explore this profoundly attention-averse group and includes the voices of those close to the murdered schoolgirls. Written and directed by David Belton and produced by Callie T. Wiser, *The Amish* premieres on AMERICAN EXPERIENCE on Tuesday, February 28, 2012 at 8:00 p.m. ET on PBS (check local listings).

"In our 23 years, with almost 300 films completed, this was the most difficult that we've ever made," said Mark Samels, Executive Producer of AMERICAN EXPERIENCE. "We had a subject that was by its very nature against the idea of us getting close to them and making a film about them. But we cautiously and slowly built bonds of trust within the community. We had some key advisors who had worked with the

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Amish for decades whom they trusted; they reassured them that we were not going to do a superficial drive-by, ‘gotcha,’ program. We said, ‘We really want to understand who you are. And we want *your* voice to be in this film.’”

An offshoot of Anabaptist Christians, the Amish Church began more than 300 years ago in Europe. Anabaptists believed that one should join the church out of free will and be baptized – not as an infant – but as an adult. Adult baptism, however, was a capital offense at the time and thousands died as martyrs.

“That has really stayed in the DNA of Amish culture and Amish history,” says Donald B. Kraybill, author of several books on the Amish. “It’s not unlike slavery for African Americans. It’s not unlike the Holocaust for Jews. So there’s this sense of being a separated people, of being a minority people, of being cautious about what the outside world might do to you again.”

The first large group of Amish settled in Pennsylvania in the 1730s. While the greatest concentration of Amish can be found in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana, they have since settled in 28 states as well as Canada. Through the 18th and 19th centuries, the Amish flourished in the U.S., and much like their neighbors, the Pennsylvania Dutch and Pennsylvania Germans, lived on farms and traveled by horse and buggy.

But the Industrial Revolution brought the rise of the machine; rural people began to leave home and the farm to pursue factory work. Self-achievement and rugged individualism triumphed over cooperation and the needs of the community. America marveled at new technology and heralded the telephone as a miraculous invention – but not the Amish. If you could talk to your neighbor on the phone, why would you visit them? While everyone else embraced the future, the Amish held fast to life as it had been.

It wasn’t until the 1930s that Amish determination to remain apart from the rest of America provoked conflict with the state. New laws that extended the age for compulsory school attendance provoked outright rejection from many Amish. Schooling, they argued, was important as long as it was practical and applicable to life on the farm. Reading, writing and arithmetic were necessary but everything else was deemed superfluous. Amish parents worried that more education would make their children too individualistic, lose their values and want to move away. In the 1950s, they began to keep their children home after eighth grade. Court appearances and jail terms quickly followed for hundreds of recalcitrant Amish.

In 1972, after two decades of prosecution by the court, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the rights of Amish parents to remove their children from public school after the eighth grade. The verdict came at a time when more and more Americans romanticized the one-room schoolhouse and public sentiment had swung to support the parents. No other group in America has achieved such an exemption.

The Amish have fought other legal battles in order to retain their way of life. In northern New York State, conservative Amish are currently fighting against such things as building codes that require the installation of smoke detectors. To the Amish, relying on manmade technology is not putting your faith in God. “If, heaven forbid, a fire comes, sweeps through the house and something terrible happens, the child will be in a better place, the people will be in a better place, they’ll be with God,” says Karen Johnson-Weiner, author of *Train Up a Child: Old Order and Mennonite Schools*. “Theirs is not an intellectual faith; it’s a lived faith

in a very real way. Everything they do is guided by their *Ordnung*, by their beliefs. In a way, they're always in church."

While the Amish have been praised for their ability to forgive, they can be unforgiving to some of their own. Shunning, the practice of which split the church hundreds of years ago, is still practiced today and requires the Amish to turn their backs on their own children if they leave the church after being baptized.

Saloma Furlong, 20 years old when she left home, has experienced it. "I knew, sooner or later, Mom would call. And she did. She called one night to say, 'We're on our way to come and get you.' She started speaking in the Amish language. She knew what she was doing. She was pulling me right back into the world I'd left. Something changed in me, where I couldn't say no. The Amish life is not about saying no. It's about going along." As Saloma recounts in the film, she returned home but eventually left again and married the man she loved. Although she invited her family and friends from back home to the wedding, not one of them attended.

"If you decide to leave after joining and getting married, you will likely leave with your wife or husband and have a bit of support there," said producer Callie Wiser. "But as a teenager who hasn't joined church yet, you are on your own. Your family will likely not want you to come visit because you might be a bad influence on other siblings. There's a lot of sadness in the kids who decide not to join the church. Some know their parents love them deep down, but there's also a profound sense of rejection."

In the course of the film, a number of Amish teens talk about the special rite of passage known as *Rumspringa*. For the first time in their lives, 16-year-olds are allowed to leave their families and hang out with their friends on the weekend. Betwixt and between parental authority and adulthood, previously plainly dressed look-alike teens begin to explore their identity within the tribe. Some teens leave for the wider world but others choose to remain, the bonds of family having been knit into their bones.

Today, there is tremendous pressure on the Amish culture as the outside world continues to encroach on their communities. And they have to find new ways to live with that outside world – or go elsewhere to escape it.

Fifty years ago, nearly all Amish relied on farming for a living. Today, most Amish support themselves by working in Amish-owned small businesses or non-Amish shops and factories. Others have left their homes to pursue wide-open spaces – and cheaper land – out West.

One Amish worker in an RV factory in northern Indiana wonders what effect working in an 'English' factory will have on his community's future. "We're just doing things that we didn't do 25-30 years ago," he says. "And when that happens, you tend to panic a little bit. You have to wonder: Where are we going? What's this going to lead to? Is this what we really want?"

Will the Amish continue to survive despite the pressures they face today?

"I don't know," says one Amish man. "I just don't go there. We're just pilgrims and foreigners, just passing through. This life is just a speck in the sand, compared to eternity."

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The Participants, in alphabetical order

Amish, men and women, young and old, who lent their voices to this film but who wish to remain anonymous.

Steven Ballan, Assistant Public Defender, St. Lawrence County, New York.

Janice Ballenger is a former Assistant Coroner for Lancaster County, Pennsylvania.

Saloma Furlong is a former member of the Amish church.

Gertrude E. Huntington is an anthropologist.

Karen M. Johnson-Weiner is a Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York, Potsdam. She is the author of *Train Up a Child: Old Order and Mennonite Schools* and *New York Amish: Life in the Plain Communities of the Empire State*.

Donald B. Kraybill is Senior Fellow of the Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College, and author of several books on the Amish, including *Concise Encyclopedia of Amish, Brethren, Hutterites, and Mennonites* (2010).

Dwight Lefever, Pastor to the Roberts Family.

Jeffrey Miller is former commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police.

Steven M. Nolt is a Professor of History at Goshen College and author of several books on the Amish, including, most recently, *The Amish Way: Patient Faith in a Perilous World*, with Donald B. Kraybill and David Weaver-Zercher (2010).

Gertrude Schlabach is a former member of the Amish church.

Levi Shetler was born into an Amish family but chose not to join the church.

David Weaver-Zercher is a Professor of American Religious History at Messiah College and the author of numerous publications on the Amish, including *The Amish and the Media* (co-edited with Diane Zimmerman Umble), *The Amish in the American Imagination*, and *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy* (with co-authors Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt).

About the Filmmakers

Written and Directed by	David Belton
Produced by	Callie T. Wiser
Cinematography by	Tim Cragg
Edited by	Chyld King
Original Music by	Saunder Jurriaans and Daniel Bensi
Associate Producer	Elizabeth Shea
Senior Producer	Sarah Colt

DAVID BELTON (Writer/Director) has worked in both narrative and documentary film and television as a producer, writer and director. His news and documentary work includes stints as a producer at the BAFTA Award-winning nightly news program *Newsnight* and at BBC Current Affairs. At BBC Documentaries he directed the observational series, *Soldiers to Be*; a documentary on the disgraced Olympic athlete, Ben Johnson; and *Volcano Hell*, a co-production with PBS's NOVA about the science of predicting volcanic eruptions.

Belton made the BBC/WNET drama-documentary on Vincent Van Gogh for the acclaimed series *Power of Art* (2006) which won the British Academy Award (BAFTA) for Best Factual Photography. He was Writer and Series Director for the joint FRONTLINE/AMERICAN EXPERIENCE PBS series, *God in America*, directing the first two episodes, starring Michael Emerson ("Lost") and Toby Jones ("Frost/Nixon").

His narrative work includes directing the BBC drama series, *Ten Days to War* (2008), starring Kenneth Branagh and Stephen Rea, nominated for Best Drama-Documentary at the Grierson Awards. In 2002 he co-wrote and produced the feature film, *Shooting Dogs*, starring John Hurt and Hugh Dancy, which was theatrically released in the U.S. as *Beyond the Gates*. Belton was nominated for the Carl Foreman Award at the 2007 British Academy Film Awards.

His first book, *Beyond All That*, will be published in late 2012 by Doubleday and Black Swan.

CALLIE TAINTOR WISER (Producer) began her career in documentary journalism nine years ago working on a number of films for the PBS series FRONTLINE before embarking on a freelance career. Most recently, she co-produced the first two episodes of the six-hour series *God in America*, a co-production of AMERICAN EXPERIENCE and FRONTLINE. Prior to that she produced a three-and-a-half hour *George H.W. Bush* for the AMERICAN EXPERIENCE Presidents series. She also co-produced the feature-length FRONTLINE film *Storm Over Everest*, based on survivors' memories of the 1996 tragedy on Mount Everest. Wiser has worked on numerous projects as a producer and writer of web content for both AMERICAN EXPERIENCE and FRONTLINE. She is a native of Tennessee and graduated from the University of North Carolina where she was a Morehead Scholar.

MARK SAMELS (Executive Producer) Under Samels' leadership, the series has been honored with nearly every industry award, including the Peabody, Primetime Emmys, the duPont-Columbia Journalism Award, Writers Guild Awards, Oscar nominations, and Sundance Film Festival Audience and Grand Jury Awards. Samels also serves on the Board of Governors at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. Prior to joining WGBH, Samels worked as an independent documentary filmmaker, an executive producer for several U.S. public television stations and as a producer for the first co-production between Japanese and American television. A native of Wisconsin, he is a graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

About AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television's most-watched history series, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE has been hailed as "peerless" (*Wall Street Journal*), "the most consistently enriching program on television" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a beacon of intelligence and purpose" (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America's past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including 14 George Foster Peabody Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and 30 Emmy Awards, including, most recently, *Exceptional Merit in Nonfiction Filmmaking* for *Freedom Riders*.

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AMERICAN EXPERIENCE: THE AMISH will be available on DVD and Blu-ray on February 28, 2012 at www.shoppbs.org.

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