

THE WITNESS

A Tribe of Heart Documentary

30-word Synopsis

Transformed by the love of a kitten, a tough NYC construction contractor is inspired to rescue abandoned animals, become a vegetarian, and take his message of compassion to the streets.

Full Synopsis

A construction contractor who grew up on the mean streets of Brooklyn, Eddie Lama is probably the last person you'd figure to be an animal activist. Indeed, Eddie was raised with a deeply ingrained aversion to animals, as he explains in the award-winning documentary "The Witness." But when a pretty woman asks him to take care of her kitten, he finds himself reluctantly agreeing as a ploy to get a date, not knowing that his life is about to change forever. In the end, it is the kitten who captures his heart, opening his eyes to the wonder of other living creatures and awakening him to the richness of the human-animal bond.

One epiphany leads to another, as Eddie begins to notice abandoned cats at his construction sites and decides to rescue and rehabilitate them in his office. Surrounded by animals for the first time in his life, he experiences these cats as a child would, marveling at them and coming to the uncomfortable realization that the animals he so lovingly nurtures are not so different from the animals he eats. Making this connection inspires him to become a vegetarian.

A creature of Manhattan, Eddie is exposed to the fashion industry's hard-sell of fur as a luxury item, and it troubles him. "I fell in love with a fur bearer," he reasons, "and I didn't see any difference between my little fur bearer and another fur bearer traveling the forest." And so he embarks on a fact-finding mission to learn more about what happens to animals used for fur. Gaining access to undercover footage, Eddie witnesses firsthand what happens to these animals far from the public eye. What he sees both shocks and horrifies him, his despair and frustration only deepened by the knowledge that these animals suffer in silence. "I had to figure out a way to bring this information to the people," Eddie recalls, "to bring it to the streets." And so, an idea is hatched.

Eddie converts one of his work vans into a mobile audio-visual system, an invention he calls "FaunaVision." When his construction office closes down for the night, he takes to the streets in his van and delivers images of animals on fur farms and trap lines—right to the heart of the city, where the furs are bought and sold. As he pulls over to the curb, crowds gather, people stare. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of holiday shopping, busy people take a moment to try to comprehend what they are seeing. Eddie gets out and explains what's happening in each of the images. One by one, they get it, they understand. They make the connection between the animal and the coat.

"A miracle is a change in perception," says Eddie. And each day, he proves that miracles can indeed happen.

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