Tom Hanks Reflects on 25th Anniversary of AIDS Film “Philadelphia” [VIDEO]

In the short film “The Last Mile,” the cast looks at the progress we’ve made against the epidemic—and the efforts that continue.

November 6, 2018 By Trent Straube

In December 1993, Tom Hanks, Mary Steenburgen and Denzel Washington starred in Philadelphia, the first mainstream movie to address the AIDS epidemic. At the time, fear of the virus—and people living with it—was rampant, and effective treatment didn’t exist. Fast-forward 25 years: Much progress has been made, but much work remains.

That’s the subject of the new documentary film The Last Mile, in which Philadelphia’s three stars and screenwriter Ron Nyswaner reflect on the early years of the public health crisis and highlight some of the efforts taking place right now to meet today’s challenges.

Watch the trailer for The Last Mile above, and for Philadelphia below.

“Going in and out of New York City, you ended up seeing it all over the place. Men were pushing other men around in wheelchairs,” Hanks recalls in the trailer for the documentary. “Jonathan [Demme, who directed the 1993 hit]—and I think Philadelphia—said, ‘What are we going to do about this? How are we going to take care of each other?’”

“It’s hard for people now to realize how intense that moment in time was,” Steenburgen says. “There was tremendous amount of fear and a lack of knowledge.”

Created by Coca-Cola and (Product) RED, the documentary is being released in advance of World AIDS Day, marked each December 1. You can watch a trailer above or at RED.org/cocacola. You can also donate directly to RED on the site. Coca-Cola will match all donations (up to $2 million).

The full documentary will be posted Thursday, November 15, on RED.org/cocacola.

Hanks won an Academy Award for Philadelphia. You can watch his 1994 Oscar acceptance speech

above. As POZ previously noted, Demme cast more than 50 people living with HIV/AIDS in the movie. A lawsuit settlement reached years later acknowledged that parts of the film were based on the life of Geoffrey Bowers, a lawyer who died of AIDS-related illness in 1987.

In fact, the filmmakers studied several legal cases, notably that of attorney Clarence Cain, who headed the Philadelphia branch of Hyatt Legal Services Inc, one of the largest law firms in the country at the time. Hyatt illegally removed Cain after learning he had AIDS and was gay. Cain sued and, in 1990, won the case, though he died shortly after.

(Product) RED was launched nearly 12 years ago by rock star Bono and activist Bobby Shriver. By partnering with numerous brands—spanning everything from clothing to cell phones—(Product) RED has raised over half a billion dollars to fight the global HIV epidemic. For more, visit RED.org.

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