

# PacificSun

## Film: The cure

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**Nicole Boxer documentary explores theater as healing**



**A shot from Nicole Boxer's documentary 'How I Got Over,' which will screen in June at the [REEL Recovery Film Festival](#).**

*by Mal Karman*

Can spilling one's guts to thousands of people about one's own horror stories of sexual child abuse, drug addiction and a hopeless existence on the street change the lives of those who lived it? Not only does Marin native Nicole Boxer's documentary *How I Got Over* lend proof to that, it might even change your life as well.

This is the story of 15 formerly homeless women—recently released from prison into the addiction recovery center, N Street Village in Washington, D.C. With no experience in the arts or the art of expression, the women commit to writing, acting and directing a theatrical piece about their personal traumas in front of a packed house at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.



train wreck. At the dress rehearsal, no one could remember a line. But once the lights went down and there was a packed house, something magical happened and there were these incredible moments. When they forgot lines, they covered for each other. People were clapping and crying. They all stepped up. You could see on stage how they elevated themselves!”

As a result of what they felt that night, some feeling valued perhaps for the first time in their lives, the women—and splintered families—began to heal. And while the success rate is extraordinary—seven or eight even sing together in a church affiliated with N Street Village—not all of them make it.

Boxer laments, “I [had seen] one of the women not far from my house. She was clearly living in the streets and back to using [drugs]. I would love to get her into the program again, would love to help her if I can, but I’ve been advised not to. Another was attacked and stabbed and horribly disfigured, and her arm is now paralyzed.”

But for those who came out on the other side, it’s the start of a new life. They are not just poor women with pasts as abuse victims, trauma victims, teenage moms, homeless dealers, helpless addicts. Some are disarmingly bright; some surprisingly gifted.

“It’s hard to come out of that past and have any future and any hope,” the filmmaker says soberly. “How do you help a person whose first memory is sex abuse or torture? How do you give them a sense of themselves? Where are the opportunities for them?”

Boxer says that working on the film changed her—not just from a producer to a director, but in a much deeper sense. “As the women began to feel a new confidence, I felt new confidence,” she explains. “I learned who I want to be, and what I want to say. Coming home every night from N Street Village, I learned the value of what I have and felt gratitude for what others bring. It was important for me to go into that world, to leave my bubble. The women in my film are so intelligent, their style of passion and beauty so special. It really [is about] what it means to be a woman.

“Inside this project, there’s homelessness, poverty, mental illness, addiction, housing, recovery and the art. And what I truly think the message is, [is that] art can cure you.”

*Ask Mal what he liked best about the film at [letters@pacificsun.com](mailto:letters@pacificsun.com).*

**COMING SOON: *How I Got Over***, part of the [REEL Recovery Film Festival & Symposium](#) in San Francisco (June 11 to 14) will be shown on June 13 at the Smith Rafael Film Center, 1118 Fourth St., San Rafael. The screening will be followed by Q&A with Nicole Boxer and Dr. Sushma D. Taylor, CEO, Center Point, Inc. The film festival is being produced by Alcohol Justice and Writers In Treatment, for more information or to purchase tickets, visit [www.FilmFestSFBay.org](http://www.FilmFestSFBay.org), and for more information about the film go to: [www.higodoc.com](http://www.higodoc.com)