

'Heaven's Rain' producer talks about forgiveness on NBC

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NEW YORK (ABP) — A former Oklahoma state senator turned Hollywood filmmaker who plays his father in a new movie said a scene re-enacting his parents' murder 31 years ago was harder than he expected but worth it.

Even though he co-wrote the screenplay, "Heaven's Rain" Producer Brooks Douglass said it wasn't until after discussion about him playing the part had already begun that it dawned on him it would include reliving the horror of the night that altered the course of his life.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done," Douglass said Jan. 7 in a Today show interview promoting an [episode](#) that evening telling the story in more detail on NBC Dateline.



Brooks Douglass, left, confers with Mike Vogel, the actor who plays him in the movie, on the set of "Heaven's Rain."

Douglass and his sister, Leslie, were both seriously wounded in home-

invasion shootings Oct. 15, 1979, that killed their parents. Richard Douglass and his wife, Marilyn, were Southern Baptist missionaries to Brazil but at the time were living in Oklahoma where he was pastor of a prominent Baptist church.

As the four family members lay bound and bleeding on the floor of their home, Douglass, then 16, watched his mother die. He told his father, "Mom's dead," and Richard Douglass never spoke. Brooks and his 12-year-old sister managed to untie each other and he drove them to get medical help.

"Most things in life that we dread are never quite as bad as we think they are going to be, and that was one thing I've done that was much worse," Douglass told NBC's Meredith Viera about making the scene. "It was much harder than I thought."

Douglass said people have approached him in the past about turning the tragedy into a movie, but they always wanted to tell it as a crime story. After leaving politics he decided to do it himself, he said, because he wanted it to be a story about family, a tribute to his parents and, ultimately, about forgiveness.

Douglass described the power of forgiveness on his own life.

As a state senator, he pulled strings to arrange a meeting with triggerman Glen Ake, at the Oklahoma prison where Ake is serving a life sentence for the murders.

"It did not go at all the way I expected it to," he said.

Douglass said lessons from his parents and his faith taught him one way to handle such a situation, but he went in planning the opposite. He remembered telling Ake, "For 15 years I've wanted nothing more than to see you dead."

By the time the hour-and-a-half conversation ended, however, "I wound up forgiving him," Douglass said, "and it changed my life."

"I didn't realize how much we carry inside," he explained. As a senator, Douglass said he thought of himself as someone who was fun-loving, likable and not an angry person.

"It wasn't until I got in that meeting that I realized how angry I had been and how much I carried all that around with me and how it was destroying my own life," he said. "Even though on the outside everything looked great, behind the scenes nothing was right."

Douglass said that is one reason he decided to make the film.

"To me a lot of the story is how those things tear your life apart, and you think that you're doing well, the world thinks you're doing well, but you know you're not," he said. "It's not until we deal with those things that we can really begin to move on."

Despite the difficulty of reliving parts of the story, Douglass said overall making the film was "a really positive experience."

"It is a movie that I think is very uplifting to people and I think will show them how good we can be," he said.

Even after all the years, Douglass said a day rarely passes that he doesn't think about his parents. "Especially now that we're working on the movie that's how it is, but I'm not sure there has ever been a day that something didn't remind me — even if it's thinking about what my mom or my dad would have told me to do or what their advice would be."

That is particularly true at holidays. "I was 16 when it happened, and still every holiday seems hollow without them," he said.

-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.