

JONATHAN

A documentary film
by
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A thesis submitted to the Honors College
In partial fulfillment of a Bachelors of Fine Arts Degree in
Film Production
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“Jonathan” is a film shot on location in Ecuador over the fall semester.

Jonathan Bastidas is a twelve year old boy who works full time and goes to school full time. The documentary is framed as a day in the life; 16 hours squeezed into 8 minutes.

Every morning Jonathan wakes up at 3:15, to go to sell produce in the giant local market with his mom and his sister. He and his 13 year old sister help their mom on one hand because she is single, with gastritis and ovarian cancer. On the other hand, they help because she’s their mom, plain and simple. They work until noon, walking the market trying to solicit sales. You see, they have no post, they’re illegally there at the market. The extremely rough economic reality of southern Quito, Ecuador is the backdrop of this long, although oftentimes strikingly intense and exciting day in Jonathan’s life.

I became interested in documentary film from a young age, as I shot music videos and skateboard videos, often with a documentary feel to them. Director Steve James (“Hoop Dreams”) lived in my neighborhood of Oak Park, IL, and I went to school with his daughter. I knew firsthand that documentary was a viable and valuable form of cinema. Acceptance into the BFA program, thus, was a super exciting opportunity for me. I had never been very active in shooting or directing narrative films, which is a large focus of the 3 year program, so I had to really find my niche in the documentary classes that we took. However, as the years progressed, I started to really enjoy all aspects of filmmaking, and my narrative voice became more developed and experiential. Thus came the difficult senior year decision. Do I stick around Tucson and shoot a fiction film for my closing project,

my magnum opus, if you will? Or do I follow the ambition I'd always had to go abroad, which was unfortunately curtailed by this rigorous BFA program. No studying abroad, they told me! Only over the summer, they told me! So I studied in Mexico for a summer, but that only whet my appetite.

By the end of junior year, it was clear that I needed to at least make a push to get out of the country for the next fall semester. I figured that I'd had a good enough repore with all of my BFA faculty to request to leave the country to shoot my thesis film. Nobody (as far as the teachers were concerned, in the history of the program) had left the country for their film, and it was an opportunity that I couldn't afford to waste. But what exactly was the opportunity, you ask? A friend of mine had put me in touch with a professor in Ecuador. I had gotten in touch with him, inquiring whether he knew of any organizations that would exchange video services for room and board. I intended to shoot promos. I'd trade the film skills that I'd developed over the past couple years (as well as all the equipment I'd accumulated) for a place to stay and some rice and beans to eat. Wondrously, Fabricio informed me that he was in charge of a cooperative house, where travellers came and lived, volunteered and worked. Bottom line, the deal was on.

In efforts of moving this narrative along a little bit, I'll cut to the chase. My teachers were very into the idea, providing that I skype into class periods twice a week. I was going to have to tailor all of the assignments to fit a documentary/not-attending-class type of schedule, but otherwise, the film was mine to go make. But what was the film to be?

I knew going in, that documentaries are a very malleable type of film. I could go into the adventure with one plan, one topic, and leave with a completely different story (but a story nonetheless). That's exactly what happened. I entered Ecuador knowing relatively little, but what I did know, was that there is a huge oil crisis. I intended to find myself an environmental advocacy organization to whom I'd volunteer some services and hope for some access to a closer to home story. I had heard that families, houses were being uprooted by oil companies, that in some small villages children had to dodge ponds of oil on their way to school. But these were just stories. I needed to make some connections and work for as many people and organizations as I could, to get a better sense of what exactly I wanted my film to be about.

Fast forward 2 months. I woke up at 3:15 with Jonathan and his family, whom I had met at a visit to "Mercado Mayorista", the largest market in Quito. I was there helping an Ecuadorian friend with his own documentary, and had finally met my subject. Jonathan, his Mom and his sister were amazingly friendly, welcoming, and cooked great pork. Marta, his mother, agreed without hesitation to let me hang out with the family for three days of documenting their daily routine. I had known all along that I wanted the film to concern itself with children, to examine some aspect of Ecuadorian youth that was and is completely foreign to us as Americans. Jonathan was a perfect and enthusiastic subject, and I have been realizing this more and more, every day since then.

Every day since my return from Ecuador on December 28 has brought with it memories of the travels, especially the Bastidas family. On one hand, it's hard not to

think about them if I'm editing the film every single day for four months straight, but moreso the simple return to American culture brings constant reminders of life in Ecuador. Hopefully this observational peek into the day in the life of a twelve year old with more spirit and work ethic than most college students, let alone American youth will provide some of the same perspective that I cultivated whilst I was abroad. I'm not saying I'm a newly cultivated, refined individual. I'm not saying we all don't work hard, even our youth. But we work with a different barometer, one that Jonathan might never get the luxury of operating.