

Media Kit

INDIRECT ACTIONS



Director: Maranatha Hay

Release Date: January 2020 | Website: www.indirectactions.com

Genre: Immersive Documentary Feature/Virtual Reality Film | Language: English

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Someday, in the not too distant future you'll be able to go to a movie and the movie will be all around you.

The movie will be over your head, it will be 360 degrees around you.”

- Steven Spielberg | TIME Magazine, 2006

A documentary filmmaker on a mission for justice follows social media-driven outrage to the icy prairie of North Dakota at Standing Rock only to discover the dangers of a single-minded perspective and the surprising unintended consequences of Internet activism.



It's November 2016 in sunny California and Maranatha is grappling with a new reality: Donald Trump was just elected president. It's a time of civil unrest, and protests are breaking out across the nation. Suddenly, images of Native Americans under attack begin to flood Maranatha's social media feed. She scrolls through photo after photo in horror- Native Americans are getting shot at with rubber bullets, tear gas, water cannons, and arrested for protesting an oil pipeline that threatens their sacred lands and drinking water. In a last ditch effort to stop the pipeline, the tribe has sent out a call for help, and thousands of people across the world are answering, to stand in solidarity.

One group responding is a group of ex-military called 'Veterans Stand' and they have a major event planned: in less than a week, US military Veterans are going to North Dakota, to use their bodies as human shields to protect the protesters from the police. At the same time, in Maranatha's own social media network, a team of immersive filmmakers are assembling to document the Veterans March and when they invite her to join them, she immediately agrees.

In a matter of hours, the team is on their way to North Dakota but the knowledge they will soon gain will force them to come face-to-face with a shocking reality: they came to Standing Rock to do the right thing, but now they were destroying the very thing they came to save.

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As soon as they arrive at the protest camp, the team begins to film. They interview Laurie Runninghawk, a Standing Rock Sioux tribe member who explains to them the historical significance of the Veterans returning. Two hundred years ago, the US military and Native Americans were fighting to the death on these same lands and now they've returned. This time, not to fight against the Native Americans, but to fight for the Native Americans. Laurie is happy that they are here but warns Maranatha that the actions of those coming to the camp represent her.

The team continues to document the conflict, between the local community of Bismarck and the tribe. Contrary to popular belief online, many in the local community appreciate the tribe's concern for the Missouri River and support their right to protest. But further investigation reveals that the DAPL pipeline has uprooted centuries of tragedy. The pipeline is so polarizing that it is tearing the local community apart, and now the thousands of enraged protesters from out-of-town are unwittingly destroying the thin peace that the two distinct cultures have struggled to maintain.

The team returns to camp and the Veterans are ready to march, wearing gas masks and body armor in the anticipation of violence. The march begins but the team has no idea what will happen, who the Veterans truly are, or what the outcome will be. They realize that they too are playing a role in the epic saga of the Great Plains but it's not the one they thought. The knowledge they've gained is forcing them to come face-to-face with a shocking reality: they came to Standing Rock to do the right thing, but now they were destroying the very thing they came to save.



In December of 2016, I traveled to Standing Rock to document and preserve a monumental moment in history: where over 300 indigenous tribes stood together in solidarity against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

I come from a long tradition of documentary film and activism. For the entirety of my professional career, I've produced media for nonprofits around the world with the primary purpose of creating visibility for those without a voice, media that promised the potential to bear witness to injustice. If there were a church of documentary film to create social change, I would be its most zealous member. But never once did I have the awareness to ask myself if it was possible for the media I produced to simultaneously and perversely reinforce the power structures that created those same injustices.

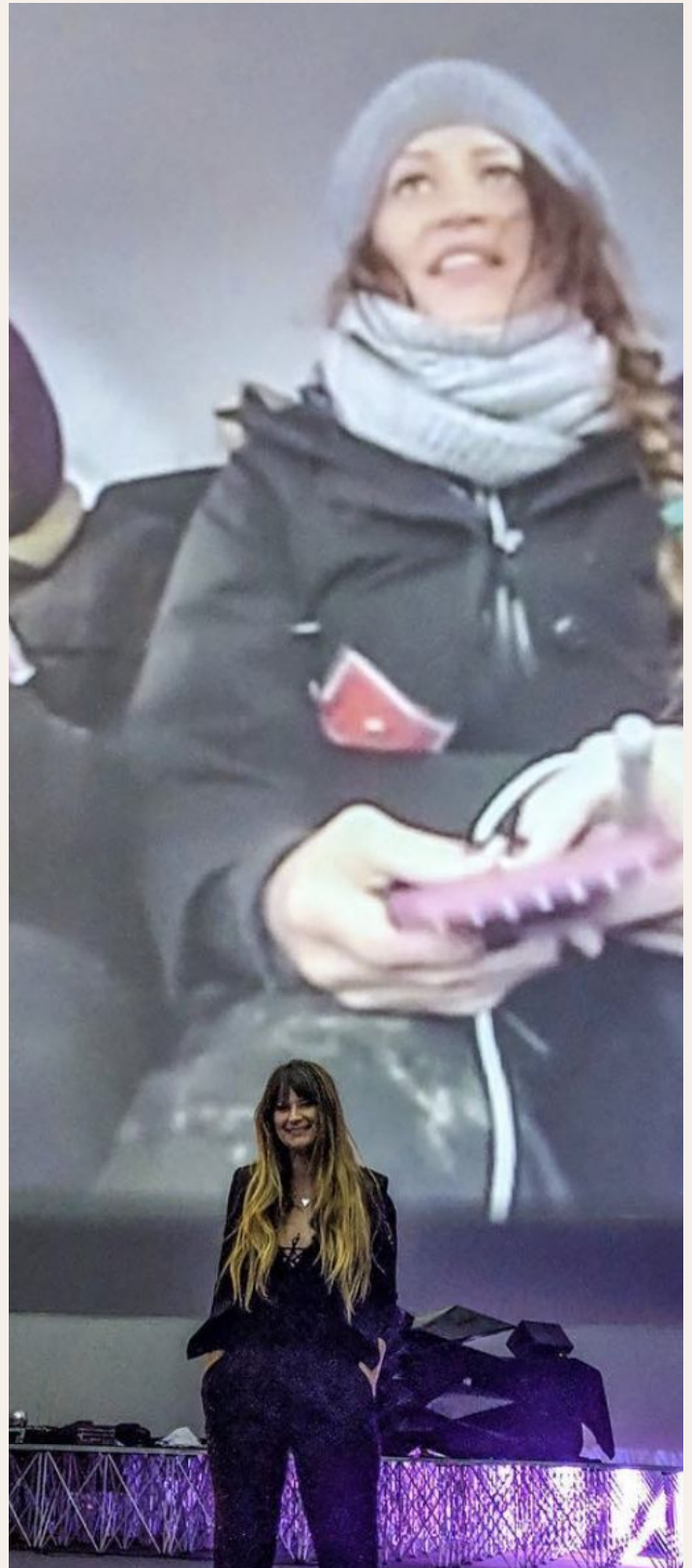
Throughout the production of this film, there were many moments where the potential for lack of transparency in traditional HD documentary filmmaking was made very apparent to me. In this new medium, transparency was inescapable and this was something I actively struggled with. I had to work within the constraints of the story that unfolded directly in front of me, therefore this film is a classic example of starting a project, and then having it take on a life of its own.

As a director of HD documentary film, I always had the fail-safe of knowing I was fully in control of every detail of each story. At the end of the day, I was going to tell the story exactly the way I saw it. I could easily erase myself and my identity from the story completely, characterize my interview subjects, edit what they had to say into what I already believed, and use b-roll to propel the story forward if I needed to.

But with this new medium, taking place at an event that was happening in real-time, controlling the narrative was impossible to do. Immersive documentary film is extremely challenging to direct for this reason. As the director, you are at the mercy of the story as it unfolds, not the other way around. Also, for the first time in my life I was unable to hide behind the camera. Who I was and how I interpreted the story in front of me was directly connected to my identity, a detail that was glaringly obvious to me due to the fact that we were filming a story that took place at a Native American protest. In the following years it became clear to me that in order to complete the post-production process, I would have to understand the effect that my presence and identity had on my work. Accepting this was the key to finding this story, which is why I believe this is the most honest piece of art I have created.

“ *As the director, you are at the mercy of the story as it unfolds, not the other way around.* ”

The dome is a powerful medium for first-person storytelling, as audience members live in the consciousness of the storyteller's memory and the dome becomes a sanctuary for this. Rather than digesting this media isolated in a VR headset, viewers can experience the immersion together. As a female director, I am proud to pioneer the power and potential of this new technology.



It was only a few days after the 2016 presidential election and documentary filmmaker Maranatha Hay was addicted to social media. Every five minutes she vigilantly scanned her feeds, desperately trying to make sense of the political upset. In her eyes, it was a time of civil unrest.

“The worst case scenario had just come true. People close to me were concerned for their safety and we were all bracing ourselves for what was going to happen next,” says Hay.

It didn’t take long for her fears to realize. Days later, Hay was shocked to find images of Native Americans getting shot at with rubber bullets, tear gas, and arrested for protesting an oil pipeline that threatened the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe’s drinking water and sacred lands. In one Democracy Now! video, dogs lunged at protesters who threw themselves in front of bulldozers until armed security tackled them to the ground.

“It looked like that video was pulled straight out of history, and as soon as I clicked on it, I immediately saw red. I felt like I was watching this happen to someone I knew personally,” says Hay.

Born and raised in rural Western Washington just a few miles away from the Quinault Indian Nation, like many in the surrounding local community, Hay was painfully aware of colonialism’s legacy and the generational trauma it had wrought upon Indigenous communities.

“It’s extremely important for Native American stories to be told, from a Native American point of view,” says Hay.

Just a few years ago, she filmed a reparation ceremony between the sailors of a tall ship and the Chinook Indian Nation. In the months following, she also documented the Canoe Journey, ‘Paddle to Quinault’, a traditional and spiritual journey on the ancestral waters of the First People of the Northwest Coast. And so, when she saw what was happening at Standing Rock, she immediately took notice.

“I was furious this happening but what bothered me the most was feeling like local people in the North Dakota area were standing on the sidelines and allowing this to happen,” says Hay.

With winter approaching, the Standing Rock Sioux tribe sent out a call for help online, and thousands of people across the world were answering, to stand in solidarity. One organization, Veteran’s Stand, had raised 1.2 million dollars on GoFundMe and had a major event planned. In less than a week, US military Veterans were going to North Dakota, to use their bodies as human shields to protect the protesters from the police.

Also in Southern California, Ryan Moore, the owner of a small VR media company was organizing a team of immersive filmmakers to document the Veteran’s march. Through social media, Moore reached out to Hay to see if she would direct the documentary.

“I had never directed a piece of immersive content in my life, and I wasn’t sure if I’d be able to pull it off,” says Hay. “I was concerned about handling the learning curve of the technology in such a challenging environment.”

But then she read another article. Amy Goodman, a fellow journalist, had been arrested and was facing jail time for covering the #NODAPL story. That pushed her over the edge.

“Everything about this story felt so close to home, and before I knew it I was throwing clothes into a duffle bag,” says Hay.

Within forty eight hours the four person crew (Jake Ingraham, Dan Argo, Eric Fisher and Hay) were driving toward the icy plains of North Dakota and Camp Oceti Sakowin. One more crew member, Michael Cimpher would join them later. On the drive up, the team researched the story further and prepared themselves for what they might find. On the surface of social media, the story seemed straightforward: Native Americans were getting attacked, a pipeline was being built on the tribe’s reservation, and local people were standing on the sidelines.

As soon as they arrived at Camp Oceti Sakowin, lead cinematographer Jake Ingraham taught Hay how to operate their 360 cameras so the team could split up to cover more ground. The camp’s numbers were growing by the thousands, and although over 300 indigenous tribes were represented and united to stand in solidarity, many inside the camp were not Native American. They also discovered that many Native Americans were hesitant to talk to media. After she traded a necklace given to her by the Chinook tribe during a reparation ceremony, Hay was able to find a member from the Standing Rock Sioux tribe who was willing to go on the record. After hearing Laurie Runninghawk’s story, it was easy to see why she was so passionate about clean water.

The team continued interviewing protesters who came to stand in solidarity, but the more information they gathered, the more it seemed to paint a different picture.

“We kept interviewing people who weren’t Native American, because we wanted to know why they had come, but they kept saying the same thing: the history was tragic, the role their ancestors may have played gave them a sense of responsibility, and now they were here ‘to do what was right for the Native American’. All of this sounded great on the surface, until you realized that every single person was going to have a different answer and interpretation of what the right thing was,” says Hay. “To me, that line of thinking felt dangerously utilitarian.”

Further investigation revealed daily Direct Action events, organized to provoke the police. That night, field producer Dan Argo also shared the existence of another pipeline, on the exact same piece of land that was being protested. This implied that the sacred lands in question could have been dug up several decades ago. Also, after taking a closer look at several maps, the team realized that the camp was not on Reservation lands. The story was far more complicated than what they originally thought, and now they were curious to see if there was more to the story.

“In a matter of hours, I realized that the story I thought I was going to tell, might not be the story I walked away with. My mind was full of questions and if I was going to find answers, we had to go further afield,” says Hay. “I wanted to understand how something so tragic could be happening in modern day America and I wasn’t going to come back until I had an answer.”

Hay proposed taking the production further afield, taking their search for answers outside of the protest camp. The team updated producer Ryan Moore who had stayed behind in Los Angeles and despite his initial surprise at the new developments, he encouraged the team to move forward.

They quickly put together a plan for the next day. Eric Fisher and Jake Ingraham would locate the pre-existing pipeline and find out if it was real or not, Dan Argo and Michael Cimpher would interview the Veterans as they arrived at Fort Yates. Hay would head into town and hear what the local people in Bismarck had to say.

The next day, the team left the hotel at dawn. Taking a camera with her and shooting solo for the first time, Hay went to a diner at a popular truck stop in Bismarck and interviewed a pipeline worker. To her surprise, he was quick to acknowledge the possibility of a pipeline leaking. He also did not have a problem with protesting, but was frustrated by the methods and tactics the protesters were using. Further interviews with other diners revealed a similar perspective. Highway 1806, a major transportation artery in the rural area had shut down after protesters set fire to a bridge. For those in the town, they found it difficult to feel sympathy toward a cause that added 45 minutes to their daily commute and to make matters worse, thousands of enraged protesters were flooding into their town, judging them.

Miles away, Fisher and Ingraham followed the coordinates to the pump station for the natural gas pipeline they discovered the night before. It was true. The piece of land at the heart of the DAPL protest had a natural gas pipeline running through it already. Continuing to search the area, they also found the Dakota Access Pipeline. The ground was still fresh. Flying the drone overhead they could see it stretch on and on, as far as the eye could see.

“Seeing it was sobering. It really made you wonder how it was possible to stop it,” says Fisher.

At Fort Yates, Michael and Dan interviewed Veterans as they arrived. A Veteran himself, Dan had read the operations order for Veterans Stand, a document that was distributed on social media to the Veterans. In it, activist Michael Woods Jr., and Wesley Clark Jr., the son of a decorated four-star army general and presidential candidate, listed their goals of moving past the blockade, to the drill pad on the other side. They anticipated violence. “Most likely course of action, we will likely be gassed, pepper sprayed, shot with rubber bullets, hit with batons and briefly arrested. Most dangerous course of action, live fire with lethal rounds.”

The Veterans would use their bodies as human shields to protect the Native Americans and the direct action would happen the following day.

Unlike the Veterans who were arriving by the thousands, Dan had no vested interest in the outcome of the protest and had declared this position to the rest of the team in the car on the drive up. He also voiced his concern. Knowing what the Veterans wanted to do, and the unyielding position the police were taking, he anticipated a fight.

“The only reason the United States has a standing military is to get into fights. That’s what they train us to do,” says Dan.

Like Wesley Clark Jr., who had stated their purpose was to be “the conscience of a nation,” many Veterans stated they were there to right an egregious wrong, and the solution varied from person to person, as did their politics. For some, their purpose was to correct an environmental injustice. For others, it was governmental overreach, or Native American land-grabbing. Unlike civilian protesters, many Veterans were battle tested, and in training they had been hit by rubber bullets and sprayed with tear gas. Many had brought body armor and gas masks. They seemed fairly unconcerned about tomorrow’s direct action as it was time to “stand for our own, on our own soil”.

“There was a certain unpredictability about the situation that made me nervous. It was impossible to know for certain who everyone was, why they had come, and whether or not they would listen to the Veteran’s Stand leadership or even the Native American leadership. Also, everyone was really pissed. We’d all seen images of Native Americans getting the shit kicked out of them and now they were going to do something about that,” says Dan.

With the camp numbers growing to 10,000 people it was shaping up to be a big fight. But then, in a surprising turn of events, the US Army Corps of Engineers stepped in and denied Energy Transfer Partner’s easement crossing the river.

The company would not have access to the final piece of land it needed to complete the Dakota Access pipeline and without that easement, the company would be subject to heavy fines if construction continued.

It seemed like a victory on the surface and many national news stories were celebrating this outcome, but the team wasn’t so sure. In less than two months, the Trump Administration would take office and his position on energy was clear.

Back at camp, Hay witnessed protesters joining hands in celebration of the announcement. From the outside, it looked like the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe had won and the protest was over. But she wasn’t so sure.

“I was getting all of these congratulatory text messages from friends, who were seeing the national coverage on the news and was so strange because it wasn’t a victory at all. They really believed the tribe had won, but if anything the final decision was kicked down the road to the next presidential administration. If anything, it completely diffused the situation so the national conversation could move forward. It really took the power right out of the Veteran’s march.”

To confirm her suspicion, Energy Transfer partners immediately released a statement saying that the company vowed to complete construction of the pipeline as planned without any additional rerouting. They saw this new development as nothing but a ‘purely political action’, and that their crews were ready to work on pipeline no matter what.

Perhaps Hay's story would end there. Unsure of what to do next, she headed to the camp cafeteria.

Outside, Hay ran into John Hanson, a local rancher who was donating a side of beef. Remembering what protesters had said about the surrounding local community, she asked Hanson why his neighbors were not getting involved, and he hinted that there was more to this story.

Hanson invited Dan Argo and Hay back to his ranch and it was dark by the time they arrived. Before dinner, they fed livestock and hauled wood into the woodshop to feed the furnace that warmed the building just enough to keep the farm cats alive. Their first interview was inside a farm truck.

"John was North Dakotan through and through. We had steak for dinner with the beef coming from his own herd. The guy barbequed in -17 degree weather," says Hay.

John Hanson shared with Argo and Hay that his great grandparents were the original colonizers of Westward expansion in the 1800s, making his ranch one of the oldest in the region.

"As soon as I heard that, I realized that the stereotypical colonial bad guy in the Western I had created in my mind, the person I was supposed to hate the most in this story, was right in front of me," says Hay. "I expected him to bleed oil."

But Hay had met Hanson while volunteering at the camp, and yet that wasn't Hanson's first time volunteering there. Knowing that it would be cold and seeing the tents inside the camp, several weeks ago Hanson hauled a semi-load of firewood to Oceti Sakowin.

Hanson was quick to admit that the issue was tied to centuries of bloody history, and it was a history that he was painfully aware of.

John Hanson:

This was land that was their stomping grounds. My predecessors stomped on them to get it for themselves. That's the one thing I don't have much pride in at all. I can't change history. There's very little I could do without sacrificing myself on some altar of vain humility.

Maranatha:

Vain humility, sure. It wasn't you.

John Hanson:

No

Maranatha:

I mean you didn't do that, no not at all.

John Hanson:

No. But I'm still the inheritor of it.

Hanson was aware of the cultural impact this pipeline had on the tribe and local community and he believed it to be extremely negative. In his lifetime, Hanson had seen the cultural relationship between the tribe and local community improve, but now he felt that progress was about to be lost.

Hanson stated that everyone had been mislabeled, whether they were members of the tribe or the surrounding community and the cultural damage would likely last several generations. He was also extremely concerned about what would happen as soon as the pipeline decision was finalized. No matter what, it was going to divide the state.

“What happens if the decision is made to cross the river there, in spite of the protest? What are the Native people going to think then? And depending on their reaction, what will the people think that forced it down their throats?”

“Leaving John’s ranch I finally understood why local people in the surrounding area were hesitant to put their open support behind the tribe. Allying yourself with one neighbor meant you were inadvertently choosing to be against another. It made sense why so many people stood by, or as John did, support the protest quietly.”

The next day was December 5th, 2016, the day of the Veteran’s march. It would be the biggest direct action yet Veterans were milling around all over the camp, as no one had heard anything from Wesley Clark Jr. They were still planning to march to the bridge but no one knew what would happen once they got there.

“We stayed through the rest of the muster, but nothing I was hearing was answering the questions I still had,” says Hay.

So Dan Argo and Hay went to the Morton County Sheriff’s Office to interview Sheriff Kyle Kirchmaier. Before the interview, an officer named Jon took them on a ride-along as he patrolled the camp.

“Until that point, I saw the protest as being peaceful and prayerful but he had a completely different perspective,” says Hay.

Deputy Jon Moll:

We’ve had feces thrown at us in bags, bags of urine, logs thrown at us, flaming logs thrown at us. I got hit in the leg with a log. One of my colleagues got hit in the back of the head with a flaming log. And not just little stuff, heavy stuff. They’ve got some good throwers over there!

There was evidence proving the account Jon was sharing. Police officers, emergency personnel, North Dakota politicians, and private citizens had been doxxed, where their private address and phone numbers had been posted online publicly. There were even examples of multiple death threats to law enforcement and threats to rape family members. The police force, along with many in the city of Bismarck, had been declared racists. A severed pig head had been put on display in a neighboring town and any requests made by police were met with strong opposition.

Back at the police station, Hay sat down with Sheriff Kyle Kirchmaier.

Sheriff:

The camp itself shouldn't be there. The camp has been illegal since day one. And that has been my beef with the Federal Government on this. It's Federal Corps of Engineer land, it's a pipeline that goes through multiple states, and it's a federal issue of corps land on the easement. And they're standing on the sidelines.

With the Obama Administration standing by, it was up to Sheriff Kyle Kirchmaier and a small county police force to respond. Sheriff Kirchmaier had avoided clearing the camp, hoping to de-escalate the situation but the protest was growing. So far, over 500 arrests had been made. Ninety four percent of those arrests were people from out of state.

Sheriff:

When this is over, we still need to have a relationship, that means Morton county, gov, ND, with Standing Rock and tribe. We still need to live and work together. And that is very important to me once this is over that is to be maintained.

That has been very hard to do at this point when you have numerous individuals, thousands of individuals from outside this area coming in here and causing problems. Because you know who gets blamed for it, Standing Rock gets blamed for it.

Dan Argo and Hay returned to Camp Oceti to join the Veterans in their direct action. The weather had taken a serious turn for the worse with a killer North wind cutting through Camp Oceti. They joined the Veterans at their muster.

"I was reviewing my original understanding of the facts that brought me up here. Much of what I had thought I had known was false. I thought about sharing this information with the people around me, but I didn't think that it would matter to anyone here. Knowing that made me feel alone in this crowd. And what a time to be realizing all of this, as Veterans were putting on protective gear and preparing for something violent and dangerous," says Hay.

With no sign of a leader, the team waited for the Veterans to pass by.

"It was right around that time that we watched a video from Chairman David Archambault of the Standing Rock Sioux tribe," says Eric Fisher. "Asking us all to leave."

The Vets had landed 4,000 plus and camp infrastructure couldn't handle them.

Dan:

After this march, they're being dismissed.

Eric:

So they got here yesterday and they're being asked to leave.

Michael:

Not even 24 hours.

Eric:

No. So there's nothing to lose essentially? For the Vets. Fuck it.

Michael:

Right. Sure. So how far are they going to go?

Eric:

The threat was to go all the way to the pad, where they started the drilling.

Dan:

There's a lot of younger Natives talking about having to destroy the drilling pads. I've heard it 3 or 4 times.

Maranatha:

Guys...

The team used sharpies and wrote producer Ryan Moore's phone number onto their arms in case they were injured or arrested. The weather was deteriorating rapidly and with their last few minutes, they called him to update him on what was happening.

Dan:

Okay are we ready for Ryan?

Eric:

Let's call Ryan.

Ryan:

Dan, dude my man how are you?

Dan:

Good, you've got the whole team here boss.

Ryan:

Team, how are you doing?

Dan:

4500 vets are about to march up to the drilling pad. Dakota Access Pipeline said it would ignore the easement block and drill under the river anyway. If you don't hear from us by 3:00, we're probably arrested.

Ryan:

Don't hear from you by 3:00 then what?

Dan:

Then we've probably been arrested.

Ryan:

Hahaha oh man! Don't say that!

Dan:

Um I'm not even remotely kidding. Not even remotely.

Ryan:

Wow okay. I did not understand. This is incredible. First off, you guys are amazing. All of you guys are amazing. I will definitely be anxiously awaiting for that 3pm call.

Ryan:

I've got chills. I've got chills!

Dan:

Yeah, it's cold here too.

Ryan:

Sorry that was mean. You're all amazing. Thank you, thank you everyone...

Everyone:

Guys, it's starting! It's starting!

Hay rushed to join up with the front of the line as it passed by.

“The weather was insane,” says Hay. “We all looked like phantoms coming out of the whiteout.”

The protesters chanted to keep warm as they made their way towards The Backwater Bridge.

“I realized that we were all out here in this blizzard together, facing each other from opposite sides. Sheriff Kyle Kirchmeier was probably out here, and Deputy John. Laurie Runninghawk was probably out here too. And now we were about to face each other, along with thousands of other military Veterans. None of us had any idea how this would all play out,” says Hay.

Now at the very edge of the Backwater Bridge boundary, the Veterans and Native Americans chanted “Mni Wiconi.” Water is Life.

Hay searched the crowd for a leader, there was no one.

“Then suddenly one appeared, I kid you not, he was a Veteran on horse back in the middle of a blizzard,” says Hay.

He rallied the crowd with a battlecry.

***Veteran Leader:
Welcome my brothers and sisters!
We came here for one reason, and
one reason only. We did not die on
foreign soil for big companies to
collude with the government, to steal
your land!***

Veteran Leader:

***Are we not all human?! We come here for
one reason. WE WANT FREEDOM!***

The Veteran crowd began shouting for freedom in unison.

“It was the most unforgettable moment of my life. I’ll never forget what that sounded like,” says Hay. “I remember thinking that when he turns around, we are all marching forward. Everyone around me was ready.”

But then the blizzard hit in full force and the Veterans scattered. The temperature plummeted, and winds picked up to 50 miles per hour. It was a whiteout.

“I knew in these conditions we had to make it back to the car if we were going to make it out alive. And right as I was thinking that, the storm claimed its first victim: our camera,” says Hay.

It was a grueling five-hour journey back to the team’s hotel and the Veterans sought shelter at the nearby Prairie Knights Casino and many were snowed in for days. The protesters who had come to stand in solidarity had abandoned many of their personal belongings and it had frozen into massive chunks of junk. Many of the Veterans were stranded and reported having no access to the funds they needed to return home and the 1.2 million dollars raised by the Michael Woods and the Veterans for Peace organization was never publicly accounted for.

The team returned to Los Angeles with their story complete. They finally understood how something so tragic had happened in modern day America. Now they had to figure out how to put the pieces together.

Together with Moore, Hay began editing the interviews together, cutting scenes together in the way she knew how.

“I’ve edited documentaries for over a decade and knew how to cut together a scene, but the footage was wonky and I didn’t really understand the material I was working with. I had never made an immersive piece before so it was a lot of trial and error.”

When she was ready to show a scene, producer Ryan Moore would take a look at it. They edited a rough cut of the first episode together and began to test it.

It was January, and Trump had just been sworn into office. That same week, with an executive order he approved the Dakota Access Pipeline and construction under the Missouri began immediately.

Then, in the months following, news reports revealed that there was a new threat to the Missouri River.

Camp Oceti was built on a flood plain and now all of the garbage, trash, and human excrement that had frozen into massive chunks of junk throughout winter was melting. If it wasn’t cleaned up, the toxic waste would leach into the Missouri River and would threaten the tribe’s drinking water.

“It hurt seeing this. We came to protect the water, but despite our very best efforts we wound up threatening it anyway. How could this even happen?” says Hay.

Hay kept tabs on the story as more news reports flooded in. The tribe and local community was clearing up the site together, without any help from the thousands of people who had pledged their support. It didn’t sit well with her.

“We had a lot of bad information, and then, we acted on it. It was a classic example of going into something with good intentions, but because my motivation was so misguided, it blinded me,” says Hay.

With little heart to continue further, the project floundered. Several years passed, but all the while Hay searched to understand where things went wrong.

“Every single day I tried to make sense of this story. The national conversation moved on, and several other events similar to Standing Rock captured national attention. There was sound and fury but then they faded into nothing,” says Hay.

In early 2019 Hay was able to get enough funding for Moore to join the project once again. Together on Hay’s front porch they spent months reworking the story.

“The only way we were going to pull this off was if we told the story the team witnessed firsthand. The footage we had and the lessons we learned throughout the years were profound. As the political culture in the United States kept changing, we believed the story we had was incredibly relevant and that the people in our lives and those we cared about needed to hear it,” says Moore.

The story Hay and the team had captured at Standing Rock was beginning to look like a microcosm of the United States at large.

“No matter who you spoke to at Standing Rock, there was one thing everyone agreed on: the pipeline was tearing their community apart because it was incredibly polarizing. It was eerily similar to what the country seemed to be feeling at large,” says Hay.

Hay read several recent studies that touted virtual reality as an ‘empathy machine’, and lauded its ability to garner empathy for people. She noticed that most of the documentaries she saw took place in other countries. She wanted to know if VR had the same ability to effect change in the United States, on a relevant political issue such as environmental protest.

“I wanted to put this theory to the test. Research suggested that VR generated empathy, but the case studies used were often about people from developing countries. I wanted to know if it also had the power to generate empathy for people I disagreed with ideologically,” says Hay.

Hay and Moore decided to take the risk. In addition to the Native Americans interviewed inside the camp, they decided to include conversations with the heritage rancher, the local police, and the Sheriff ultimately accountable for the police’s response. It had a profound effect.

“With all of these stories together, it became crystal clear how this tragedy happened. It was like seeing the curtain pulled back, and the day we pieced all of the individual episodes together is a day I’ll never forget,” says Hay. “I’ll never look at a news story in the media the same way again.”

It was a comprehensive look into a major protest event, but the story had grown into a whopping 90 minute documentary, an epic saga that took place on the Great Plains and far beyond what had been attempted in virtual reality due to the practical limitations of a headset.

“The longest piece of VR content produced at that point was twenty minutes. Nothing like this had ever been attempted before. But the story we had uncovered was powerful and we wanted people to experience it as a whole,” says Moore.

The only way their audience would be able to experience the story holistically was if they ditched the headset, but billions had been spent by fortune 500 companies to find that very solution.

“I realized that domes were immersive theatres.,” says Moore.

In a dome, audiences could break out of the headset for the first time, and experience the solution to a major problem that has plagued the VR industry for years: The headset.

But not only could the dome solve the issue of viewer comfortability, it could also solve a key issue in the business model of immersive entertainment: VR content goes straight to a viewing platform, shutting distributors out of marketing and financial benefits of theatrical release from the get-go.

In the United States alone, there were 500 domes. Moore realized that every single one of them was a potential immersive theatre. And now he had the first immersive documentary feature.

“We instantly took a giant leap toward theatrical distribution of immersive content,” says Moore.

The team began test screening the film at Vortex, a dome located at Los Angeles Center Studios. They began showing a few clips at a time, using trial and error conversions, graduating to full episodes, until they were ready to screen the film in its entirety.

“The dome solves a massive issue for filmmakers. Until this point, there was no avenue, no way of getting your content seen by an audience in the same way people view film. Film is even better when you enjoy it with others. There’s nothing like gasping together in horror, feeling the tension, or the communal sadness in unison. When you’re isolated in a headset, that just doesn’t happen,” says Hay.

More than a decade ago, Steven Spielberg predicted an evolution of entertainment.

“Someday, in the not too distant future you’ll be able to go to a movie and the movie will be all around you. The movie will be over your head, it will be 360 degrees around you.”

– Steven Spielberg, TIME Magazine in 2006

On October 23rd, the Downtown Los Angeles Film Festival his vision will become a reality when Indirect Actions will premiere opening night at the first immersive dome series in Los Angeles. An entire lineup of films have been converted to dome theatres, boasting the biggest and brightest talent in VR storytelling. Festival audience members will break out of the headset for the first time, and experience the solution to a major problem that has plagued the VR industry for years.

For the VR industry, the dome series could be a game changer in an industry that has declined in recent years partly due to the challenge of bringing immersive content directly to audiences.

“It’s not lost on me what is at stake and when I say that, I’m talking about the survival of the VR community. I’ve been a creator in this industry since it began. I saw the evolution and then the writing on the wall when we couldn’t get past those storytelling barriers. We’ve all been waiting to find that missing link, and what I love about this journey is that the key to all of this turned out to be something as old as time,” says Moore.

Humankind have told stories for millenia and in a few days this tradition will be fully celebrated in a brand new medium.

“I think it’s powerfully ironic that the key to all of this was something other than tech. It was storytelling, vulnerability, and a passion to connect with people who did not think the same as I do. As a female filmmaker it feels incredibly empowering to be a pioneer in this new form of storytelling and I cannot wait to unlock the power immersive filmmaking has to recognize this medium’s true potential,” says Hay.

DIRECTOR

MARANATHA HAY

Maranatha Hay is five-time regional Emmy-award winning Director and Producer. She has directed six documentaries for television that have aired internationally on PBS and the World channel on subjects such as the Ebola crisis in Sierra Leone and Liberia, the Angolan Civil War, and pediatric heart surgery for children in Nicaragua and Egypt.



PRODUCER

RYAN MOORE

Ryan Moore is the founder of Experience 360°, a Burbank-based Virtual Experience Design Studio that has been creating branded and narrative immersive content since 2015. In the spring of 2017, the company produced its first feature *Speed Kills VR* with John Travolta and TopDog VR. Mr. Moore's career within film production experience includes experimental branded content (Disney, Toyota, GoPro), TV commercials (Pepsi, Jack In The Box), music festival coverage (Fuse Media), and Reality TV (Bachelor/Bachelorette).



Director

Maranatha Hay

Executive Producer

Fred Cornforth, Thomas Wentworth

Producer

Ryan Moore

Co-Producer:

Jake Ingraham

Eric Fisher

Dan Argo

Michael Cimpher

Kevin Abrahms

Story By

Maranatha Hay, Ryan Moore

Cinematographer

Jake Ingraham

Staring

Manaratha Hay

Jake Ingraham

Dan Argo

Eric Fisher

Michael Cimpher
Ryan Moore
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Aurelia Soundworks

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JK Imaging / KODAK
GoPro
Nikon
LG
Ricoh
Canon

Post-Production Tools by

Adobe Creative Suite
Mettle

Crowdfunding by

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Anita E Fisher
Dana Mroczek
Daren Smith
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Vincent Randazzo
May Shaktah
Megan Loney
Alissa Aiton
Kevin Conroy
Thomas Baxter
Kris Heyting
Mitchell Deacon

Sally and Paul Newell

Rod Goff

Michael Cimpher

News Footage

KKTV-Colorado Springs

WJLA-Washington DC

ABC30-Fresno

ABC7-Detroit

WIWT-Cincinnati

Newschannel 5 - Nashville

CBS News

KPIX-San Francisco

Special Thanks

Morton County Police Department

Fox Rental Car

Marlin's Diner

Lena Herzog

Janie Fitzgerald

Matthew Celia

Robert Watts

Jessica Watts

Alex Pearce

Chris Pack

Dirk Wallace

Daria Wallace
May Shaktah
Leslie Foster
Tighe Damron
Barrett Kime
Kendis Gibson
Steve Ecclesine
Theo Brown
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