

• P R E S S K I T •

STORM LAKE

A NEWSPAPER. A FAMILY. A COMMUNITY.



DIRECTED BY JERRY RISIUS AND BETH LEVISON

With an original score by Andrew Bird and Alan Hampton



World Premiere – 24th Annual Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

Press Contact: Adam J. Segal of The 2050 Group - Publicity
212-642-4317 • adam@the2050group.com

For sales & bookings: Beth Levison • bethlevison@me.com
www.stormlakemovie.com



LOGLINE

Pulitzer prize-winning journalist Art Cullen and his family fight to unite and inform their rural lowan farming community through their biweekly newspaper, *The Storm Lake Times*—even as the paper hangs on by a thread. Twice a week, they work as civic watchdogs to protect their hometown and the legacy of credible journalism, at large—come hell or pandemic.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Dark clouds hang over the cornfields of Storm Lake, Iowa, which has seen its fair share of change in the 40 years since Big Agriculture came to town. Farmers blow their life savings on new equipment they hope will keep their livelihoods intact. Migrant workers flock here—welcome and not—for their slice of the American Dream. The people of Storm Lake confront a changing community as global forces threaten their precarious existence.

Enter: 63-year-old Pulitzer-prize winner Art Cullen and his family-run newspaper, *The Storm Lake Times*. Day-in and day-out, the Cullens deliver local news and biting editorials on a shoestring budget for their 3,000 readers. Come hell or pandemic, they'll fight to preserve this town they call home. There's simply too much at stake.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Dark clouds hang over the vast cornfields of Storm Lake, Iowa, which has seen its fair share of change in the 40 years since Big Agriculture came to town. Farmers blow their life savings on new equipment they hope will keep their livelihoods intact. Migrant workers flock here from all over the world, welcome and not, for their slice of the American Dream. The people of Storm Lake confront challenging circumstances as corporate, political and environmental forces—and even a global pandemic—threaten to overwhelm their already precarious existence.

Enter: 63-year-old Art Cullen, an old-school journalist who has dedicated his life to his family's biweekly newspaper *The Storm Lake Times*. In 2017, Art unearthed a conspiracy between Big Agriculture and local county officials that won him a Pulitzer. Now, his liberal voice reverberates in this conservative district in a critical swing state. While he has the power to change minds and rally votes, his pugnacious voice makes waves; disgruntled residents don't always agree with his point of view and have been known to write him and his paper off, completely.

As nearly 2000 local papers have shuttered in the last 20 years—a crisis accelerated by COVID-19—the stakes have been especially high for the Cullens, who comprise half *The Times'* 10-person team. Art's 27-year-old son Tom is lead reporter, his wife Dolores the photographer and culture reporter, his older brother John the publisher, and John's wife Mary the food columnist. Against tight deadlines and slimmer margins, the Cullens doggedly report on their town, and wonder how the paper will survive as readers—with a preference for their social media feeds—cease to support journalism like they used to.

STORM LAKE opens in March 2019 as Art steps on stage to moderate the year's first multi-candidate Democratic event alongside such contenders as Elizabeth Warren, Amy Klobuchar and Julián Castro. Art then returns to his cramped newsroom to rally the team for their next issue. "Most people in Storm Lake care a lot more whether garbage is getting picked up than whether Elizabeth Warren's in town," Art says. "In fact," he continues, "If it didn't happen in Buena Vista County, it didn't happen. That's our motto."

Over the course of 2019, we witness three weighty concerns that this agricultural community faces and the Cullens cover: the Sisyphean efforts of farmers to earn a living wage, the struggle of immigrants to make this community home, and the willingness of local politicians to justly serve their citizens. Last summer, Art visited with "Big John" Snyder, a second-generation farmer who had his single-worst corn crop in 25 years. Since 2018, Tom has followed the systemic neglect of a hardscrabble trailer park; by October, one 30-year resident had become so exasperated by its inevitable decline that he ran for city council—and won.

All the while, Dolores' crafts one profile of a hard-working Tyson Foods factory worker from Mexico who makes the third round of a Spanish-language "American Idol," and another about the Iowa Pork Producers "Pork Queen," who brings a baby pig to a second grade class and tells the students, "It's really important for us to make sure that [pigs] have everything that they need so they can grow fastly and efficiently—that's what the pork industry is all about." These scenes paint an intimate portrait of a surprising and diverse community largely oriented around production agriculture or "BigAg."

But by 2020, things start to take a dire turn. While the paper made a \$2900 profit in 2019—the first in over ten years—January’s 24% hike in health insurance premiums canceled it out. Then, the Iowa Caucuses debacle unfolded on the Cullen’s watch with grave consequences for the state, the nation and the newspaper. Finally, in March, the Cullens and The Times were struck once more—by COVID-19 and its tightening grip on the community. By late May, Storm Lake—home to a major Tysons meat packing plant—became the COVID-19 epicenter in the state. By mid-June, Storm Lake was one of the fastest areas of COVID-19 growth in the nation. Ultimately, the public health catastrophe posed an existential crisis for not only for the people of Storm Lake—many of them immigrant meatpackers— but also The Times as ad revenue and newspaper sales also suffered a serious blow.

And yet, the need for The Times is more vital than ever—credible journalism is under siege. Our democracy hangs on by a thread. Racism fuels inequality and puts lives at risk. But despite the setbacks, the financial losses, and even quarantine, the Cullens continue to deliver their best for their neighbors. They may not have much to say in Tallahassee or Toledo, but the paper means a fighting chance for their beloved hometown, and by hook, crook—or this summer’s GoFundMe campaign—they’ll make the most of it. There’s simply too much at stake.



IMPACT

STORM LAKE's impact and community screenings campaign will help to help secure the future of credible local news and newspapers in towns, suburbs and cities nationwide—toward the survival of equitable and sustainable communities, an informed electorate, and a functioning democracy. To meet our impact goals, we are partnering with newsrooms, publishers, professional associations, advocacy and education organizations, PBS stations and other stakeholders nationwide.

PARTNERS TO DATE

American Journalism Project
America's Newspapers
National Newspaper Association
The News Media Alliance
Solutions Journalism

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

I was drawn to this story as soon as I started reading about a fellow North Iowan—Art Cullen—who had been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Writing in 2017. I grew up about an hour from Storm Lake on a hog farm in Buffalo Center, a small town of 1,000 people set amidst the vast Midwest prairie with cornfields stretching as far as the eye can see. If Art’s writing had earned him a Pulitzer, he must have something important to say. I started reading his paper and immediately felt in sync with its Iowan voice; this at a time when local perspectives are seldom heard. Once I started to spend time with Art, I came to appreciate not only his own challenges as a newspaperman, but those of his tight-knit family.

Unfortunately, my local newspaper, *The Buffalo Center Tribune*, went the way of many independent papers like it—once run by an enterprising local and a few staff writers, it’s now owned and operated by a large corporate consortium. The stories that make the fabric of the town are largely gone. It’s been a loss for me, my parents who still live there, and the Buffalo Center community. Thankfully, the people of Storm Lake are more fortunate than so many communities around the country. Despite their struggles, they are connected by their biweekly paper, in part because hometown journalism is nothing short of a mission for all the Cullens - Art, Dolores, John, Tom and Mary. In production, when Beth Levison joined me as my directing partner, we both found ourselves inspired by the Cullens’ love for their town, and their commitment to keeping it alive while making it a more sustainable and inclusive place. And, we cannot help but think that if a local newspaper can rally a town as diverse as Storm Lake around hard facts and the common good, there may be hope for all of us. We hope this film will help to ensure the survival of *The Times*, and local papers like it across the country that serve communities with their own challenges, achievements and concerns.

-- Jerry Risius

As soon as Jerry shared his scout footage with me, I was completely drawn to Art's passion for his work, and his commitment to telling stories that make the world a more just and sustainable place. Art's professional *raison d'être* resonates with my own. My whole career has been built on ensuring that stories of inequality and human struggle are told, that unique voices are heard. Once I heard Art's, I knew that there was no turning back, and I am thrilled to return to directing.

-- Beth Levison, Director



CONFIRMED SPRING/SUMMER 2021 FESTIVALS



Full Frame
World Premiere



Provincetown International
Film Festival



AFI DOCS



DOC Edge



Woods Hole Film Festival



Middlebury New Filmmakers
Festival



Duluth Superior

PRESS QUOTES

“Storm Lake is an elegiac heartland portrait...colored by the hope of endurance, both for the newspaper and the community it represents.”

- David Rooney, *The Hollywood Reporter*

“Here’s a paean to journalism, old style. It’s also a near obituary for shoe leather journalism as it was practiced, especially in America’s small towns. It is also a chronicle of a close-knit family, the Cullens, who don’t want their decades-long work to die along with America’s small newspapers. Told in the no-nonsense tones of the laconic Midwest, *Storm Lake* mixes a bit of *Lake Woebegone* with *All the President’s Men*.”

- Mike Canning, *Hill Rag*

“Storm Lake reminds us that we cannot be complacent. We cannot take democracy for granted. And local reporting is a mainstay of an informed citizenry and therefore democracy.

- Julie Gammack, *Des Moines Register*

“Storm Lake provides a penetrating, insider look at the struggle of a family-owned-and-operated newspaper trying to remain relevant, survive, and thrive in the age of journalism-by-the-algorithms, Trumpism, and COVID-19.”

- Ed Rampell, *The Progressive*

“Gorgeous establishing shots, great music, and fantastic narration, all of which blend together, allowing Beth Levison and Jerry Risius to tell the true tale of Storm Lake, Iowa.”

- Liam Trump, *Film Threat*

“CAPTIVATING.”

- *Documentary Magazine*

“By the end, we have come not only to love the real-life characters at *The Storm Lake Times*, but everyone we meet, including Lorena Lopez of the Spanish-language paper, *La Prensa*, who wants to combine resources with Cullen so they can double their reach in two languages. So many people appear to care about news that matters, and that’s a heartening site. Perhaps the apocalypse is not quite nigh. Read on!”

- Christopher Llewellyn Reed, *Hammer to Nail*

THE TEAM



JERRY RISIUS | DIRECTOR + DP

With over 25 years experience as DP on such projects as *The Kingmaker* (Toronto Int'l Film Festival 2019), *Generation Wealth* (Sundance 2018), *Seeing Allred* (Sundance 2018/Netflix), *Brave New Voices* (HBO 2009), *The Devil Came on Horseback* (Sundance 2007), and more recently, as a Field Producer/DP on *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* and *Parts Unknown* series, Brooklyn-based Jerry Risius grew up on a hog farm about an hour from Storm Lake and brings a depth of filmmaking experience along with a local perspective that very few can.



BETH LEVISON | DIRECTOR + PRODUCER

Beth Levison is an Emmy and Peabody-winning producer/director based in NYC. Her most recent producing efforts include *Women in Blue* (Tribeca Film Festival 2020/Independent Lens) and Emmy-nominated *Made in Boise* (AFI DOCS 2019/Independent Lens). Previous producing credits include *32 Pills: My Sister's Suicide* (HBO 2017), Emmy-nominated *Personal Statement* (PBS 2018), and her independent directorial/producing debut, *Lemon* (PBS 2011). Beth is the founder of Hazel Pictures, a co-founder of the Documentary Producers Alliance (DPA), producing faculty with the School of Visual Arts (SVA), and a member of AMPAS.



RACHEL SHUMAN | EDITOR

Rachel Shuman is a documentary editor and director based in New York. Select recent film editing credits include *True Believer* (Ashland 2019), *Five Seasons: The Gardens of Piet Oudolf* (DOC NYC 2017), and *One October* (Full Frame 2017). Rachel has also worked as an editor on promos and nonfiction programming for A&E, History, and MTV, and is a board member of the Karen Schmeer Film Editing Fellowship. She received a BFA from the California College of the Arts in San Francisco and an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in NYC.



ANDREW BIRD | COMPOSER

Andrew Bird is an internationally acclaimed musician, songwriter and composer who has released fifteen records to date. Recording and touring extensively, Bird has performed around the world at festivals and renowned institutions including Carnegie Hall, Sydney Opera House and Walt Disney Concert Hall. A TED Talks presenter, a New Yorker Festival guest, and an op-ed contributor for the New York Times, Bird debuted on the cast of Fargo's most recent installment, premiering fall 2020 on FX. Bird's latest album, My Finest Work Yet, was nominated for "Best Folk Album" at the 2020 Grammy Awards.



ALAN HAMPTON | COMPOSER

Alan Hampton is a singer/songwriter/bassist who's toured, written, and recorded with several leading artists in a variety of genres, such as multi Grammy Award winner Robert Glasper, Andrew Bird, Chris Thile, Sufjan Stevens, Gretchen Parlato, and Meshell Ndegeocello. In addition to writing and contributing dozens of songs for other artists, he's also produced several records, two of which are his own: The Moving Sidewalk, and Origami For the Fire, which received critical acclaim from Ben Ratliff of the New York Times.



WORK ORDER | DESIGN STUDIO

Work-Order is a design studio in New York City that develops identity systems rooted in motion based solutions. They've created branding for Kodak, The New York Times, NowThis and Sundance and titles for Robert Altman, Sofia Coppola, Sam Green, Kirsten Johnson, Oren Moverman, Ry Russo-Young and James Schamus.



LEAH BOATRIGHT | CO-EDITOR

Leah Boatright is a New York-based editor. Her latest film credits include *Exposure*, by filmmaker Holly Morris (*The Babushkas of Chernobyl*), the pilot for Benny and Josh Safdie's (*Uncut Gems*) soon to be released episodic project, *Chillin Island*, and *Maggie*, which premiered at Sundance in 2018 and won Best Pilot at SXSW. When she's not in front of a computer, she's diving deep into some ocean trench.



EVAN NEFF | ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Evan Neff supports emerging storytellers as an independent producer and industry advocate with organizations like Tribeca Film Festival, Independent Filmmaker Project, SFFILM, and UnionDocs. He produced Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Sam Green's short, *Don't Call Me Gay Zelig* (Whitney Biennial 2019), and associate produced *A Thousand Thoughts* (Sundance 2018). Evan champions bold, underrepresented voices that have the power to create new ways of seeing.



LAUREN EVANGELISTA | ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Lauren Evangelista has built her career working in post production for episodic television. She story produced short-form documentaries and specials for HBO, notably covering juvenile incarceration with Michael K. Williams and education with Wyatt Cenac. She received the New York Press Club Award for Business Reporting for VICE News Tonight's *The Paradise Papers*, which followed investigative journalists at The New York Times and ICIJ. Lauren is thrilled to once again work on a film highlighting the importance of journalism.

CREDITS

Directed by

Jerry Risius and Beth Levison

Produced by

Beth Levison

Edited by

Rachel Shuman

Music by

Andrew Bird with Alan Hampton

Director of Photography

Jerry Risius

Title Design and Motion Graphics by

Work-Order

In Association With

Catapult Film Fund
JustFilms | Ford Foundation
Park Pictures

Executive Producers

Katy Drake Bettner
Sam Bisbee
Pamela Tanner Boll
Sally Jo Fifer
Megan Gelstein
Lois Vossen
Jamie Wolf

Co-Executive Producers

Tegan Acton and Emma Pompetti

Associate Producers

Evan Neff
Lauren Evangelista
Jessica Birmingham

Featuring

Art Cullen
Dolores Cullen
John Cullen
Mary Cullen
Tom Cullen
Peach the Newshound

Also Featuring

Abby Bean
Dr. Jill Biden
Pete Buttigieg
Julián Castro
Jim Cullen
Deb Godfredson
Brian Gomez
Sen. Chuck Grassley
Trent Hatlen
Melissa Iehl
Adrien Jaulmes
Sen. Amy Klobuchar
Jamie Knapp
Tom Lane
Barb Lange
Byron Lopez
Lorena Lopez
Matthew Marroquin
Alondra Melendez
Gigi Nelson
Jennifer Newton
Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez
Jen Olson
Carol Peterson
Maria Ramos
Jon Robinson
Whitney Robinson
Yoanna Rosas
Sen. Bernie Sanders
"Big John" Snyder
Linda Torres
Emmanuel Trujillo
Brent Ulrich
Sen. Elizabeth Warren
Hubert Wetzell
Andrew Yang

Supervising Producer for ITVS

Michael Kinomoto

Co-Editor

Leah Boatright

Additional Cinematography

Michael Potter
Joshua Fisch
John Richard
Clare Cullen

Location Sound

Judy Karp
Kent Abbott
Michael Jones

Drone Operators

Joshua Fisch
Michael Potter

Consulting Editor

Toby Shimin

Consulting Producer

Harlene Freezer

Assistant Editor

Caroline Berler

Management for Andrew Bird

Ekonomisk Mgmt
Andrea Troolin
Victoria Roe

Bookkeeper

Samantha Garland

Production Coordinator for Park Pictures

Danielle Massie

Production Assistant

Claire Zhang

Post Production Assistant

Nako Narter

Post Production Services

Final Frame

Digital Intermediate Colorist

Will Cox

Digital Intermediate Online Editor

Ben Kiviati

Digital Intermediate Manager

Drew Kilgore

Digital Intermediate Technical Supervisor

Sandy Patch

Digital Intermediate Producer and Audio Producer

Kate C Albers

Supervising Sound Editor and Re-Recording Mixer

Annie Medlin

Sound Effects Editor

Alex Loew

Legal Counsel

Donaldson + Califf
Chris Perez, Esq.
Kanani Datan, Esq.
Matthew Marentis

Insurance

Taylor & Taylor

Fundraising Reel Editor

Jay Keuper

Advisor

Penelope Muse Abernathy

This Film Was Made Possible with The Support of

ITVS
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
JustFilms | Ford Foundation
Catapult Film Fund
Park Pictures
Good Gravy Films
The Rogovy Foundation

The New York Community Trust-Nola Safro Fund
Waterman II Fund of The Philadelphia Foundation
The Fledgling Fund
IDA Enterprise Documentary Fund
The Moving Image Trust

This film was fiscally sponsored by IFP & FilmScene

Archival Materials

The Cullen Family
The Storm Lake Times
Mark Brown
Rebecca Colden
Dan Evans
Alan Fischer
A.J. Flick
Carol Frazier
Michael Gallegos
Iowa Public Radio
Frank Keegan
Marcie Klomp
Andy Schotz
Storm Lake Historical Society
Tag Team Productions

Iowa Production Assistants

Cooper Maahs
EJ Philby

Interns

Blair Clayton
Ashley Giles
Kobi Kihara
Autumn McClain
TJ Nitti
Sam Shinn

Tape Transfers

DijiFi

Remote Collaboration Platform

Evercast

Very Special Thanks

The Staff of The Storm Lake Times

Special Thanks (2-3 columns)

Beth Aala
Elizabeth Adams and Alex Sierck
Karen Arikian
Megan Blackburn
Samuel Bockoven
Henry Bornstein
Tara Jo Brown
Douglas Burns
Dr. Stacey Cole
Laura Coxson
Mike DeAngel
Audrey Delgado and Isabella Risius
Kelly Duane de la Vega
Lisa Durden
Austin Frerick
Father Tim Friedrichsen
Lainie Frost
Alexis Galfas
Butch Geisenger
Liz Gilman
Anita Glest
Katie Gunkelman
Rose Vincelli Gustine
Tommy Haines
Frank Harkins
Carmen Herrera
Travis Hoepfner
Jon Hutchins
Jerry Johnson
Nat Livingston Johnson
Caroline Kaye
Nykia Kelley
King's Pointe Resort
Mark Kuca
Jake Kurtz
Joe Langford
Maria Marrison
Topiz Martinez
Vic Massara
Jack McDonald
David Moore
Steve Morawiec
Silvino Morelos
Deana Morenoff
Kathy Mummert
Keri Navratil
Steve Niles

Tom Patterson
Beth Pogue
Rachel Pontbriand
Ann Porter
Heidi Reinberg
Jovani Remior
Miguel Rosales
Mike Rust
David Sampliner
Ben Schekirke
Andrew Sherburne
Henry, Ben and Gabe Sidel
Erik Spink
Kate Stryker
Ian Tan
Tyler Trons
Sarah Voyles
Jeff Wagner
Chris White

Music

The Canyon Wants to Hear C Sharp
Written and Performed by Andrew Bird
(C) & (P) Muffet Music Co. (ASCAP), administered by Wixen Music Publishing
Courtesy of Wegawam Music Co.

Ellipses
Written and Performed by Andrew Bird
(C) & (P) Muffet Music Co. (ASCAP), administered by Wixen Music Publishing
Courtesy of Wegawam Music Co.

Hail, Alma Mater
Written by Paul Yoder
Used by permission of Edwin H. Morris & Company, a division of MPL Music Publishing, Inc.
Performed by the Storm Lake High School Marching Band

Scotch & Milk
Written and Performed by Andrew Bird
(C) & (P) Wegawam Music Co. (ASCAP), administered by Wixen Music Publishing
Courtesy of Wegawam Music Co.

Something Biblical
Written and Performed by Andrew Bird
(C) & (P) Wegawam Music Co. (ASCAP), administered by Wixen Music Publishing
Courtesy of Wegawam Music Co.

Independent Lens
ITVS
Corporation for Public Broadcasting
Ford Foundation
Catapult Film Fund
Park Pictures
Foothills Productions
Rogovy Foundation
Fledgling Fund
IDA Enterprise Documentary Film Fund
Good Gravy Films
Whole Hog Films
Hazel Pictures, LLC
SVA Soc. Doc. Program
IFP
Film Scene
Final Frame

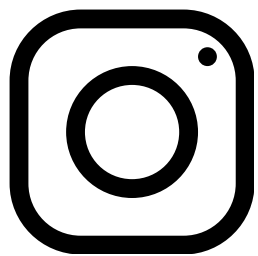
STORM LAKE is a co-production of WHOLE HOG FILMS, LLC and ITVS, with funding provided by the CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING (CPB).

This film was produced by Whole Hog Films, LLC which is solely responsible for its content. Ownership of this motion picture is protected by copyright and other applicable laws, and any unauthorized duplication, distribution or exhibition of this motion picture could result in criminal prosecution as well as civil liability.

Copyright ©2021 Whole Hog Films, LLC
All Rights Reserved

www.StormLakeMovie.com

FOLLOW ALONG
HERE:



@stormlakemovie



@stormlakemovie



@stormlakemovie