

# TOWER

A DOCUMENTARY FILM BY KEITH MAITLAND



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## **RUNNING TIME**

82 minutes

## **TRAILER**

<https://vimeo.com/153727380>

## **TAGLINE**

When the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

## **LOGLINE**

An animated and action-packed look at America's first mass school shooting, when the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

## **SHORT SUMMARY**

On August 1st, 1966, a sniper rode the elevator to the top floor of the University of Texas Tower and opened fire, holding the campus hostage for 96 minutes. When the gunshots were finally silenced, the toll included 16 dead, three dozen wounded, and a shaken nation left trying to understand. Combining archival footage with rotoscopic animation in a dynamic, never-before-seen way, TOWER reveals the action-packed untold stories of the witnesses, heroes and survivors of America's first mass school shooting, when the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

## **SYNOPSIS**

On August 1st, 1966, a sniper rode the elevator to the top floor of the University of Texas Tower and opened fire, holding the campus hostage for 96 minutes. When the gunshots were finally silenced, the toll included 16 dead, three dozen wounded, and a shaken nation left trying to understand. Combining archival footage with rotoscopic animation in a dynamic, never-before-seen way, TOWER reveals the action-packed untold stories of the witnesses, heroes and survivors of America's first mass school shooting, when the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

TOWER explores this untold history through the first-person stories of seven specific characters: two students who were shot that day, the two police officers who ended the siege, two civilians who inserted themselves into the story to provide aid to victims and police, and the radio reporter who broadcast live from the scene for more than an hour

and a half, and whose broadcast was picked up nationally, bringing the events in Austin to listeners around the nation.

Pregnant 18-year-old freshman, **Claire Wilson** is the first person shot from the Tower. "All of a sudden I felt like I'd stepped on a live wire, like I'd been electrocuted." Her boyfriend Tom reaches down to help her and he is struck down as well. For over an hour of the siege, Claire remains exposed to the shooter, conscious and steadily losing blood. Claire knows that her boyfriend has been killed and that she's lost her baby too. "After some time, a really lovely young woman with red hair ran up to me and said, "Please, let me help you." I told her to get down so she wouldn't attract attention, and she lay down next to me. She stayed with me for at least an hour. It was a beautiful, selfless act."

Paperboy **Aleck Hernandez** is finishing up his summer paper route when he is shot off his bike. "I looked down and saw all this blood and I thought, I didn't get a chance to say goodbye to my mom and dad - or anything."

Patrolman **Houston McCoy** is a rookie with the Austin Police Department -- he's the first officer to get the call to head over to the campus. "Y'know, I thought it was already over with? Lawmen get there and it's usually over with, y'know? Then I finally got it figured out that something was happening, that I ain't never seen before. It was bigger'n me"

Off-duty officer **Ramiro Martinez** sees the report on the noontime news and rushes toward the campus to help. One of the last to arrive on the scene, he is the first police officer to make it to the top of the Tower. "I was taught to ask the good Lord for forgiveness if I thought my life might be in danger. I decided to say an Act of Contrition, and then I pulled out my .38 and pointed at the elevator doors. I didn't know what I was going to find when I got to the top of that Tower..."

University bookstore manager **Allen Crum** leaves the safety of his store when he sees a paperboy get shot off his bicycle across the street. He immediately jumps into action, to try and stop the bleeding – saving the boy's life. "Somebody yelled, "He's up in the tower." Crum zigzags through the gunfire to get closer where he joins up with officer Martinez. He is deputized moments before storming the Tower's observation deck with Martinez and McCoy to end the attack.

Hearing the news of the shooting over the police scanner, young news director **Neal Spelce** leaves the newsroom and jumps into Red Rover, a station wagon equipped with an FM transmitter, and speeds to the University to report on the unfolding action. His radio broadcast is carried nationwide and listeners across Austin and the country hang on his every description and interview throughout the 96-minute siege.

17-year-old incoming freshman **John Fox** mistakes the rampage for fun and games but is immediately overcome with fear and dread when he realizes the enormity of the situation on campus. He spends an hour of the attack inching closer to the center of campus, observing the siege. After nearly 90 minutes of watching helplessly, John is overcome with a sense of duty. He rushes into the line of fire and pulls Claire to safety, risking his life in the process. "It was we, the civilians were the only people that were there, and something had to be done. There was no choice. There was no choice but to go out and get them and carry them out... And that's when I decided to go out there."

The stories of this seven character ensemble unfold in a moment-by-moment re-telling of the events of the day, that seamlessly slips from character to character, intermingling actual archival footage from the day and re-created animated sequences that highlight the fear, confusion, and visceral realities of the shooting rampage. After the gunfire subsides, the story shifts to examine the immediate aftermath for these individuals and for society.

In the final act of the film, we seamlessly step out of the shadow of history, revealing our subjects as they are in the present day. In verite scenes and formal interviews we look at the issue of school shootings today and the legacy of the Tower shooting through the eyes of the survivors.

**Claire Wilson** gave up her political activism after the shootings in 1966, but today she has reignited her activist spirit by speaking out and testifying at the state level. We spend time with Claire as she prepares to take the stand at the Texas Capitol, testifying against a proposed "Campus Carry" bill. Her testimony is contrasted with vignettes of her personal life –her tender and loving relationship with her adopted son Sirack, reconnecting with the student who carried her to safety, and memorializing the event with current students on campus.

Exploring the ways in which this unprecedented tragedy affected our characters over a lifetime offers a window into the wide spectrum of human response and recovery. The importance of sharing one's experience openly and creating community with fellow victims and witnesses is illustrated through the regrets and revelations of our characters over the course of fifty years.

The story of loss, fear and confusion is bolstered and countered by stories of the generous and heroic spirit of some that day – hoping the lessons of their experiences may shape the future safety of students to come.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

It's impossible to separate the University of Texas tower shootings, America's first mass school shooting, from the current spate of school shootings that seem to happen now with increasing regularity. With the 50th anniversary of America's first school shooting approaching, I realized that the time to explore this untold history was now - and that through a creative approach, aimed at young audiences we could aim to explore themes of mental health, guns, public policy and media response to public tragedies all through the nuanced and personal lens of first hand accounts.

Growing up in Texas, I've had curiosity about the Tower shootings since my 7th grade Texas history teacher recounted her experiences as a student on campus that terrible day. Her firsthand visceral account stuck with me for over 35 years and it is still the direct inspiration for my approach. I realized that through the visually exciting medium of rotoscopic animation, there was a dynamic opportunity to turn this history on its head. By focusing solely on witness accounts, we could seamlessly weave re-created animated memories of those who were there with the ample archival footage from the day to create an action-packed telling that was both immediate and emotionally charged.

Our approach is unique for a documentary, as is the structure of TOWER. The first hour of the film is set entirely in 1966, the action performed by a cast of young actors, based on the actual interviews of living survivors - these actions and interviews are then animated. It is late in the telling when one by one, the actual survivors are revealed in vibrant moments that expose the breadth of their humanity through the 50-year window of history. It's a creative opportunity that keeps the audience guessing about who survived and who did not. Through this approach, we can engage millennials in in this relevant, untold history, at a time when active shooters on school campuses and other public places has become almost commonplace. Working with the survivors of this terrible day and reframing this history has been my greatest professional privilege.

## FILMMAKING TEAM



**Keith Maitland** (DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/EDITOR) is the Emmy-nominated Director of *THE EYES OF ME*, a year-in-the-life of four blind teens, which broadcast on PBS's Independent Lens and received a Barbara Jordan Media Award. Director of documentary features, commercials, and TV series, his credits also include 7-seasons with NBC's *LAW & ORDER* as an AD. Keith is currently developing narrative and documentary projects, and leading filmmaking workshops for incarcerated teens. He is a graduate of The University of Texas.



**Susan Thomson** (PRODUCER) co-founded and co-produces FilmMatters, a dialogue that focuses on the use of film to encourage social change. She spent over 12 years as media consultant in Dallas, Los Angeles and London, with roles in strategy, operations and distribution at Warner Bros., Sony Pictures, Andrew Lloyd Webber's "Really Useful Group, and the BBC. Susan Thomson graduated from the Business Honors Program at the University of Texas.



**Megan Gilbride** (PRODUCER) is an Emmy-winning and Independent Spirit Award nominated producer of narrative and documentary films. She produced *LOVERS OF HATE*, a Sundance US Dramatic Competition premiere, released by IFC and nominated for a FIND Spirit Award. She produced the PBS-broadcast documentary *SUNSHINE* and coproduced *WHERE SOLDIERS COME FROM* which won the Truer Than Fiction FIND Spirit Award, aired on POV and won a 2012 News and Documentary Emmy.



**Hillary Pierce** (COORDINATING PRODUCER) After several years working in the film and television industry in her native North Carolina, Hillary began her documentary career in NYC at Maysles Films under the tutelage of Direct Cinema pioneer Albert Maysles. She produced and directed *THE ONE WHO BUILDS*, a documentary about refugee resettlement in the American South. The film won Best Short Documentary awards at both Kansas City Film Fest and Boston International Film Festival and is currently on a university screening tour.



**Austin Reedy** (EDITOR) is an Austin, TX based editor, who has worked on several independent films and television series that have shown on PBS, A&E, Discover, History and TLC. In addition to *TOWER*, he is editing *A SONG FOR YOU: THE AUSTIN CITY LIMITS STORY*, also directed by Keith Maitland.



**Luke Wilson** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) Luke Wilson has written, directed, and starred in numerous films since his breakout role in Wes Anderson's BOTTLE ROCKET and is best known for THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS, THE FAMILY STONE, and LEGALLY BLONDE. A native Texan, Luke Wilson is excited about telling the important Texas story of TOWER.



**Meredith Vieira** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is founder and CEO of Meredith Vieira Productions and is host and executive producer of her own nationally syndicated daytime show, "The Meredith Vieira Show," produced and distributed by NBCUniversal. Previously, the 14-time Emmy winner was co-anchor of NBC's "Today," host of "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire," and moderator of ABC's "The View." Meredith has said that one of her toughest assignments ever was covering the shootings at Virginia Tech. She feels a personal connection to the student survivors as both a reporter and a mom. She is excited to help share the story of TOWER.



**Pamela Colloff** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) Pamela Colloff is an executive editor at Texas Monthly and has written for the magazine since 1997. Her work has also appeared in the New Yorker and has been anthologized in Best American Magazine Writing, Best American Crime Reporting, Best American Non-Required Reading, and Next Wave: America's New Generation of Great Literary Journalists. TOWER is based in-part on Pamela's oral history "96 Minutes," which ran in Texas Monthly in 2006.



**Adrienne Becker** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) CEO, Killer Content, Inc. Adrienne Becker is currently producing properties for film, television, digital and live entertainment. Formerly, Adrienne was an entrepreneur-in-residence at Creative Artists Agency, partner at The Media Farm, and CEO of DailyCandy, Inc. She has also served as Senior Vice President at The Nielsen Company and InterActive Corp. Adrienne got her start on an airport tarmac in Philadelphia, where she held her first critically important position holding a rope line for then Governor Bill Clinton. She then went on to hold positions at the Department of Labor and as a Press Secretary on the '96 campaign. She holds an M.A. in Communications from the Annenberg School, University of Pennsylvania, and a B.A. with Honors in Political Science from Washington University in St. Louis. Adrienne writes for The Huffington Post and sits on the Boards of the Made In New York Media Center, Youth+Tech+Health, the Story Pirates and the B-Stem Project with Women In Technology.



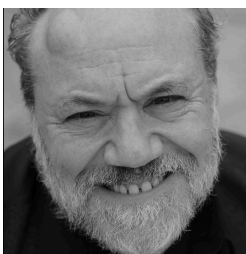
**Rachel Gould** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is Co-Founder of Killer Impact, Inc., a Killer Content company, a financing and co-producing partner to Killer Films and third-party producers. It is Killer Impact's mission to provoke open dialogue, ignite awareness and encourage advocacy of socially relevant issues by producing engaging, artful, content. Killer Impact supports under-represented voices in storytelling, providing a means of creative and financial participation in projects that challenge convention and advance diversity. Rachel is currently developing and producing various properties for film and television, such as Only Ever Yours, The Displaced and Enemies Within.



**Amy Rapp** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is a film, television and theatre producer, and runs Meredith Vieira Productions. Her credits include "Return," which premiered at the Cannes Film Festival, the critically-acclaimed, Emmy-nominated feature documentary "The Woman Who Wasn't There," and the national tour of the hit Off-Broadway play "Life in a Marital Institution." The story and style of TOWER had such an impact on Amv that she offered her and Meredith's support for the film.



**Steve Eckelman** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) Steve Eckelman is a producer, writer, and actor. Steve has worked on over 20 feature films, including Rushmore, Wedding Crashers, Cars, Marley & Me, The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, Starsky and Hutch, Shanghai Knights, and the Darjeeling Limited. Steve approached the TOWER team based on his interest in the Texas Monthly article, "96 Minutes" to offer his support and that of his producing partners Owen and Luke Wilson.



**Louis Black** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) is publisher and editor of The Austin Chronicle, a senior director of SXSW, and a partner in Production For Use, all of which he also co-founded. A columnist for over 25 years he has written extensively on film, music and politics. Executive producer of BE HERE TO LOVE ME, A FILM ABOUT TOWNES VAN ZANDT, he was a producer on the Peabody Award Winning THE ORDER OF MYTHS. He has a book and DVD deal with UT Press where he'll be releasing more in the series of Texas Classic Films reissues, which include Eagle Pennell's THE WHOLE SHOOTIN' MATCH, JONATHAN DEMME PRESENTS MADE IN TEXAS, SIX FILMS FROM AUSTIN and Tobe Hooper's EGGSHELLS. RICHARD LINKLATER: DREAM IS DESTINY, a film he co-produced and co-directed premiered at Sundance, has been released theatrically by IFC and will be on PBS' American Masters in 2017.





**Lois Vossen** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) Founding and Executive Producer of *Independent Lens*, a weekly PBS series featuring 22 original documentaries each season. She is responsible for commissioning new films, programming the series, and working with filmmakers on content, editorial, and broadcast issues. *Independent Lens* films have received 12 Emmy Awards, including two Primetime Emmys, 16 George Foster Peabody Awards, five Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Journalism Awards, and seven Academy Award nominations. The series was thrice honored with the 2013, 2014, and 2015 International Documentary Association (IDA) Award for Best Continuing Series. Previously, Vossen was Associate Managing Director of the Sundance Film Festival and Sundance Labs. She has served on the juries at SXSW, DOC New Zealand, Toronto International Film Festival, Palm Spring International Film Festival, New Orleans Film Festival, among others.



**Sally Jo Fifer** (EXECUTIVE PRODUCER) As President and CEO, Sally oversees the funding, production, and public television launch of more than 75 programs each year. During her tenure, ITVS programs have garnered 23 News & Documentary Emmy Awards, nine duPont-Columbia Awards, 26 Peabody Awards, one Golden Globe Award, and 15 Academy Award nominations, among other industry accolades.

Since taking the helm, Sally has piloted ITVS through major programmatic expansion, launching the primetime Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens* and the organization's first international venture, the Global Perspectives Project, which has funded over 140 international independent documentary films for U.S. broadcast and digital distribution, and has distributed American films to over 100 million viewers in two dozen countries. Sally also positioned ITVS as a leader in the digital space, producing the alternate reality game *World Without Oil*, the web series *Futurestates*, and OVEE – a first-to-market social television platform that allows groups large and small to simultaneously watch and interact with video in real time.

## **PRESS**

"A gripping combination of oral history and stylized reenactment"

**-The Hollywood Reporter**

"Immediate, dramatic, and tense; it's scary, visceral filmmaking"

**-Flavorwire**

"No matter where you fall in the debate over gun control, Maitland's approach offers a thrilling entry point."

**-Indiewire**

"Keith Maitland's strikingly original 'TOWER' recreates the drama with a mixture of animation and contemporary interviews, imbuing the catastrophe with renewed immediacy."

**-Indiewire**

"The sort of observation that lets the tragedies of the past resonate with fresh, devastating clarity in the present."

**-Variety**

"A gripping dramatic reconstruction, a tribute to the heroes and the fallen...Keith Maitland's film weaves rotoscopic animation, archival footage and present-day interviews into a uniquely cinematic memorial"

**-Variety**

"Superbly original."

**-Film School Rejects**

## LINKS

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# STILLS



