Fork Films and Engel Entertainment present
A Co-Production with ITVS

A documentary by Lisa Molomot and Jeff Bemiss

Key Images

Website: missinginbrookscounty.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/MissingInBrooksCounty
Twitter: www.twitter.com/MissingInBrooks
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81 minutes, 2020, USA

For screening requests and other questions
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Michelle Chinos and Omar Roman looking for Omar’s brother

Dr. Kate Spadley, Forensic Anthropologist  Eddie Canales, South Texas Human Rights Center

One of the best films I’ve seen in years.
– Suzan Beraza, Mountainfilm Festival Director

Logline: Two families search for their loved ones who went missing in the fields of Brooks County, Texas, and find a haunted landscape filled with more questions than answers.

Synopsis: 70 miles north of the Mexican-US border lies Brooks County, Texas - a haunted, inhospitable place where thousands of immigrants have gone missing or died over the past decade. Missing in Brooks County follows the journey of two families who arrive in Brooks County to look for their loved ones, only to find a mystery that deepens at every turn. Stuck between the jurisdiction of border agents, local law enforcement, and cartels, the county is a barren landscape designed as a deterrent to illegal crossings. Despite this tactical designation, the municipality has never been provided the resources to process the remains of the hundreds of undocumented immigrants who succumb to dehydration and exposure each year. Missing in Brooks County is a potent reminder that these deaths are more than a statistic—each represents a living human being, loved by their family, now lost.
Awards and Official Selections:
Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, October 2020, AWARD WINNER
Ashland Independent Film Festival, April 2021, AWARD WINNER
Thin Line Film Festival, March 2021, AWARD WINNER
San Luis Obispo Film Festival, March 2021, AWARD WINNER
Fargo Film Festival, March 2021, AWARD WINNER
Lost River Film Festival, October 2020, AWARD WINNER
L-Dub Film Festival, October 2020, AWARD WINNER
DOC NYC, November 2020
Cine Las Americas, June 2021
Greater Farmington Film Festival, June 2021
MountainFilm, May 2021
Northwest Fest, May 2021
RiverRun Film Festival, May 2021
Cleveland Film Festival, April 2021
Annapolis Film Festival, April 2021
Arizona International Film Festival, April 2021
Beverly Hill Film Festival, April 2021
Sarasota Film Festival, April 2021
Xicanindie Film Festival, April 2021
Female Eye Film Festival, April 2021
Intercultural & Anti-Racism Festival, April 2021
San Diego Latino Film Festival, March 2021
ACT Human Rights Film Festival, March 2021
Sonoma International Film Festival, March 2021
Salem Film Festival, March 2021
Cinequest Film Festival, March 2021
Omaha Film Festival, March 2021
Red Dirt Film Festival, March 2021
Human Rights Watch Film Festival, February 2021
Cinematters: NY Social Justice Film Festival, January 2021
Global Health Film Festival, December 2020
NHDocs, November 2020
Rocky Mountain Women’s Film Festival, November 2020
Double Exposure Investigative Film Festival and Symposium, October 2020
United Nations Association Film Festival, October 2020
Dallas DocuFest, October 2020
Filmmakers’ Statement: MISSING IN BROOKS COUNTY began as the story of one forensic scientist trying to identify migrants buried anonymously in Brooks County, Texas. But each time we returned to film in South Texas the story got bigger, as we realized the complexity and severity of the situation. We met migrants, sheriffs and activists. Ranchers, rangers and vigilantes. Consuls, judges, and undertakers. If we held stereotypical beliefs about Border Patrol agents, law enforcement and Texas ranchers, they have been obliterated by our experiences making this film. Our goal became to convey the complexity of the situation we encountered.

Border Patrol is given the job of operating a massive immigration checkpoint situated in the middle of a treacherous desert, and also of saving the lives of migrants who attempt to circumvent it. Local ranchers are divided over what to do about the situation. Migrants themselves often have no idea of the true dangers of the journey they have chosen to undertake, and are at the mercy of coyotes (human smugglers) who will leave them to die if they cannot keep up over the three-to-four day trek.

In order to build a portrait of everyday life in Falfurrias, TX, vérité footage is the foundation of MISSING IN BROOKS COUNTY. We have been present at many moments of discovery and revelation, documenting the missing as they were reported, rescued, recovered or exhumed. We rode with Sheriff’s deputies and Border Patrol, with ranchers and vigilantes. We filmed men and women wading across the Rio Grande at night, and we filmed men and women as they surrendered to Brooks County law enforcement, dehydrated and exhausted. We filmed the emotional testimony of a border crosser, his face shielded, as he described the moment he realized the teenage boy he was carrying—one of the missing individuals portrayed in the film—was no longer alive. Most importantly, we met the families of the missing, who became the emotional center of the film.

As rendered through the stories of Homero Roman and Juan Maceda, our vision for MISSING IN BROOKS COUNTY is an immersive experience of an American town that has been caught in the middle of the life and death situation created by the militarization of the U.S./Mexico border. And just as we have learned so much while making this film, we hope viewers will look at immigration in a new way and begin to include the deceased and the missing in the national debate.

- Lisa Molomot and Jeff Bemiss
Filmmaker Bios:

Lisa Molomot, Producer/Co-Director/Cinematographer, has directed and edited documentaries about the American Southwest in recent years including THE CLEANERS, and SOLEDAD. She has also focused on stories about education. Her award-winning film SCHOOL'S OUT has been an integral part of the movement for providing outdoor education for young children, and her recent short film TEACHING IN ARIZONA is an inside look at the teaching crisis in that state. A recent Fulbright Scholar, she teaches a course at the James E. Rogers School of Law at the University of Arizona where she has worked with the Immigration Law Clinic for the past four years, has taught in the UA Human Rights Practice Graduate Program and is part of a network of human rights faculty.

Jeff Bemiss, Producer/Co-Director/Cinematographer, is an award-winning writer/director who has worked in shorts, features and documentaries, Jeff’s work has aired on network television and PBS. He is a graduate of the University of Southern California film school and the L.A. Sanford Meisner Academy. Originally trained in scripted filmmaking, Jeff’s film THE BOOK AND THE ROSE was a semi-finalist for the Academy Award for best short film. Jeff shot and directed the award-winning short documentary COACHING COLBURN about a young man with Fragile-X Syndrome, which premiered at the prestigious Big Sky Documentary Film Festival. Jeff is a Connecticut Artist Fellow and a Film Independent Fast Track Fellow. He freelances for disability and social activist clients and teaches film at Trinity College in Hartford, CT.

Jacob Bricca, Producer/Editor has edited over a dozen feature documentaries including the 2016 Sundance Special Jury Prize winner THE BAD KIDS and the international theatrical hit LOST IN LA MANCHA. Fluent in Spanish, Jacob also brings experience editing multi-cultural stories, such as PRECIOUS KNOWLEDGE, about Arizona’s epic battle to ban ethnic studies in public schools, and BEYOND THE BORDER (MA S ALLA DE LA FRONTERA), about four sons from a Mexican family struggling to overcome class barriers in Kentucky. Jacob has produced two feature length documentaries, is an Associate Professor at the University of Arizona’s School of Theatre, Film & Television, and is the author of the definitive volume on documentary editing, Documentary Editing: Principles and Practice (Routledge, 2018).

Abigail Disney and Gini Reticker, Executive Producers, have been involved with some of the most notable social issue documentaries of the past decade, including PRAY THE DEVIL BACK TO HELL, THE TRIALS OF SPRING, THE ARMOR OF LIGHT, and the five-part PBS series WOMEN, WAR & PEACE. Most recently Disney executive produced the Academy Award winning Kirby Dick film THE INVISIBLE WAR, the award-winning CAMERAPERSON, and the important 2014 documentary HOT GIRLS WANTED. Since 2007, Fork Films has supported films that promote peace, human rights, and social justice.

Molly O’Brien, Consulting Producer, has over two decades of experience as a documentary producer and has worked to build content for Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, and The Los Angeles Philharmonic. Her recent producing credits include CESAR’S LAST FAST and THE BAD KIDS.

Sarah Feuquay, Consulting Producer, leads operations functions and strategies at Fork Films. She has over ten years of production experience working across a diversity of projects, from indie narrative features to primetime ABC News specials, functioning in multiple roles including production coordinating, logistics, research, licensing, post-production, distribution, development and grant writing. In addition, Sarah has worked both front- and back-of-house positions at film festivals, including the
Diane Quon, Consulting Producer, is an Academy Award-nominated producer who worked as a marketing executive for 17 years at NBC and at Paramount Pictures before moving back to her hometown of Chicago. Diane is producing Kartemquin Films documentaries including the Oscar and Emmy nominated, Peabody and Sundance award-winning film, Minding the Gap directed by Bing Liu; For the Left Hand along with Chicago Tribune arts critic Howard Reich, and co-directed by Leslie Simmer and Gordon Quinn; and The Dilemma of Desire with Peabody Award-winning director Maria Finitzo (SXSW 2020). She is also producing the documentary, Untitled Sam Project, directed by Nadav Kurtz (Paraiso) and executive produced by Public Record. A 2020 recipient of the Cinereach Producer Award, Diane is a 2019 Sundance Creative Producing Fellow, a 2019 IFP Cannes Producer Fellow and a a 2017/2018 Film Independent Fellows. She is also developing a fiction film based on the New York Times best-selling book, Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet.

After beginning his professional career with Braxton while a student at Wesleyan University, Ted Reichman, Composer, moved to New York City where he worked with a panoply of musical greats in styles ranging from improvised music and jazz to rock and roll and various forms of Jewish music. In addition to his work with Braxton, which includes the first recordings and performances of “Ghost Trance Music,” he is best known for his ten-year-plus tenure with John Hollenbeck’s Claudia Quintet. He also founded the music series at alt.coffee which would evolve into Tonic, one of the world’s most crucial venues for avant-garde music. He has been on the faculty of the New England Conservatory for over ten years and spent four years as an Assistant Professor of Film Scoring at Berklee. He currently records, produces and mixes records and composes music for films.

Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, Consultant, is a recognized authority on immigration rights, women’s rights, and the history of Mexicans and Chicanas. An adjunct lecturer in the Mexican American Studies program at the University of Arizona and a teacher at Pima Community College since 1969, Rubio-Goldsmith completed undergraduate and graduate degrees in Law and Philosophy at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She has presented papers on Mexican women on the U.S.-Mexico border at international conferences, and her research is widely published. As a member of several community boards and as a public speaker she constantly presents a Chicana perspective, and students and colleagues know her as a community activist devoted to immigration rights, women’s rights, and civil rights in general. Rubio-Goldsmith is currently researching for a book on women who fled the Mexican Revolution to take refuge in Southeastern Arizona.

Dr. Sofia Gomez, Consultant, served as Executive Director of Humane Borders, a human rights organization addressing the deaths along the U.S./Mexico border. In addition to her work with Humane Borders, she served as Research Associate with the University of Arizona’s Binational Migration Institute (BMI). Dr. Gomez was part of the research team that investigated the deaths along the U.S./Mexico border (AZ, TX, CA). Her work contributed to BMI’s publication of the best practice manual, “Protocol Development for the Standardization of Identification and postmortem Examinations of UBC Bodies along the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Best Practices Manual.” Dr. Gomez obtained her doctorate in public health at the University of Arizona’s Mel & Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health.
Documentary Participants:

Eduardo Canales is a retired union organizer who came out of retirement to open the modest South Texas Human Rights Center to deal with the missing migrant crisis. Canales is the only humanitarian help available in Brooks County, and his phone never stops ringing with families desperate to find their missing loved ones.

Omar Roman & Michelle Roman have returned to Brooks County to find out what happened to Omar’s brother, who went missing after fleeing from Border Patrol.

Moises Zavala has come to Brooks County to search for his missing cousin Juan who made the dangerous crossing from Mexico and was last seen at a local ranch. Moises won’t leave Brooks County until he finds his young cousin.

Dr. Kate Spradley is a biological anthropologist at Texas State University. With her team of graduate students and colleague Krista Latham, Kate is trying to process the scores of bodies which were recently found buried in mass graves in Brooks County.

Dr. Mike Vickers is a respected veterinarian and avid hunter who tracks and detains migrant trespassers on his land. He and his wife founded a paramilitary group that patrols ranches in South Texas.

Tech Specs: 1920X1080, HD, color, English/Spanish with English subtitles

Main Credits:
Directed, Filmed and Produced by Lisa Molomot and Jeff Bemiss
Produced and Edited by Jacob Bricca, A.C.E.
Music by Ted Reichman
Executive Producers: Abigail Disney, Gini Reticker, Steven Engel, Heidi Reavis, Stephanie Angelides, Jenna Helwig, Sally Jo Fifer
Supervising Producer: Shana Swanson
Consulting Producers: Molly O’Brien, Sarah Feuquay, Diane Quon

Consultants:
Dr. Sofia Gomez, Mexican-American Studies Ph.D., University of Arizona
Raquel Rubio-Goldsmith, Mexican-American Studies Faculty, University of Arizona
John Valadez, Filmmaker

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ZACHARIAH SUTO

Additional Sound
ALEJANDRO I. HERNANDEZ

Interpreters
CHANTAL BERTHET
DR. JAIME LOPEZ
Intern
SAVANNAH HERNANDEZ

Subtitles
JOSHUA FORTUNE WESSON

Story Consultant
KEITH FULTON

Musicians
JASON CRIGLER - ELECTRIC GUITAR
TANYA KALMANOVITCH - VIOLA
DINA MACCABEE - VIOLIN
DYLAN McKINSTRY - ELECTRIC GUITAR
MATTHEW OKUN - ELECTRIC GUITAR
TED REICHMAN - ACCORDION, GUITARS, ELECTRONICS, PERCUSSION

Music Recording and Mix
SUBTEXT SOUND SYSTEM

Post Production Sound
IMRSV SOUND & BERKELEY SOUND ARTISTS

Rerecording Mixers
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GREG FRANCIS

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BIJAN SHARIFI

Sound Effects Editor
WILLIAM SAMMONS

Sound Supervisor
JACOB BLOOMFIELD-MISRACH

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