

“THE MAKING OF THE DOCUMENTARY
“AMERICA SPEAKS”

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Edited Journal Kept While Making the Documentary “America Speaks”

All my life I have done what everyone said I couldn't, not because they were right, but because I wanted to prove them wrong. By demonstrating that heart can overcome fear, that guts and determination can make dreams come true, and by fighting for the rights of others, we can protect the possibility for justice for us all. It is easy to sit by and complain with what is wrong with the world, and society, but it is something else, to take action, to change it. So instead of complaining about the government and its outright defiance of our voices (along with their total disregard for our best interest, and in direct conflict of the constitution of the United States) I chose to do something about it. And in doing so, it is my wish that my fellow citizens will realize that we have the ability and power to bring about change in our country. It is not only our right, but our duty to protect the Constitution of the United States upon which America was founded.

What in the world was I thinking? I had never held a video camera before, had only driven about 100 miles from my home, had a fear of talking to people, and knew absolutely nothing about making a documentary. Had I lost my mind? There were those that thought, maybe I had.

Despite all the reservations, I negated my apartment lease, put everything I owned in storage and hit the road. I drove across 48 states, coved 13,100 miles in 2 months through cities, towns, and rural areas surveying Americans of all ages, genders and races by asking them 5 questions: What is your biggest concern regarding the environment, education, economy, healthcare and the War in Iraq.

I left for my trip on 7-29-07 and arrived back in Houston on 9-30-07. Here are a few excerpts from my journal:

Woke up Monday (8/6/07) morning in a good mood and left the motel on my way to Walmart to get surveys. Worked less than an hour and had double digit surveys which has never happened before. I really have my approach, the survey questions, and my video camera techniques down , which makes it so much easier.

The one thing I am shown over and over again, is that everyone I encountered along this journey has a story to tell, whether it is about loss or grief, or other things, they need and want to be heard more than anything else.

I have already learned so much from this trip about myself and about becoming a better human being. I have gained the desire to be more patient, forgiving, accepting, loving and understanding of others and what binds us together as one: our hearts and souls. We aren't so different after all, when it is said and done.

Today is Tuesday, and I leave Mammoth Lake, California and head for Yosemite National Park. I can't imagine anything prettier than Big Pine, Bishop or Mammoth Lake, but I can be surprised and surprised I was. Yosemite had the most spectacular scenery in the U.S. beside Alaska. Breath-takingly gorgeous with mountain passes up 9,900 ft dotted with blue lakes, and tall, green pine trees, it is a reminder of the majestic beauty only God can create.

During a long day of surveys, I encountered a very articulate, distinguished, older gentlemen, who told me he thought I was a hero for doing what I was doing. His comment made me feel uncomfortable, because to me, heroes lay down their lives for their country, or for their fellow man, and I have done neither. All I am trying to do, is give a voice to those who have none, and deliver those opinions to the powers that be. That doesn't make me a hero, but if anything, an activist. This title I will accept with pride. There is power in numbers, and we, the people, need to stand up, and not only be counted, but be heard. It was nice to have the encouragement, which is rare here out on the streets. It's also inspirational. Yesterday, while in Redding, a lady shared her lunch, a bottle of water and offered me a cup of coffee to help me along with my trip. It is inspiring that a total stranger not only acknowledged my efforts, but appreciates them.

I am spending the night in Eugene, Oregon, and have plans to get surveys at the college campus tomorrow, so I can get the opinions of our youth.

Today is Wednesday and I spoke to my friend, Mateo, whom I met at the college in Bozeman, MT. He offered his talents, free of charge, to give me a website, because he supports what I am trying to do.

This trip has given me a new purpose and inspiration in life... I feel excited, hopeful, and full of anticipation to experience whatever the future has to offer. One of my hopes for this project is that it becomes a grass roots effort to get the youth involved in having their voices heard, standing up for their beliefs, and fighting for their rights and future. History has shown us that it only takes one person that refuses to sit at the back of the bus, to change the mindset of a nation, and the admiration of the world.

From the tips of my fingers to the bottom of my toes I ache with each mile I drive and there is nothing I can do about it. Due to a financial, as well as a weather schedule, I have no choice but to keep a fast pace.

While traveling across the United States I have been asked several times why I was doing this documentary. For me, it is personal and there are many reasons why. One reason was to set an unobtainable goal, and see if I could fulfill a dream everyone thought was impossible. Second was to give a voice to the American people. Third was to have those voices heard by the “powers that be”. We pay their salaries and it is their sworn oath to represent and protect us, the people. Last, but not least, is that the American people need to be interested enough to get involved, to take control of their lives and those of their children’s and the generations to come. By embracing the ideas of our fore fathers, we show that we care; their deaths weren’t in vain and therefore preserve the Constitution of the United States, a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

It's Tuesday Morning, 9/11/07, and I am off to shoot footage and capture pictures around the Capital of Washington D.C. I took the bus that stopped at the Union Station, the U.S. Capitol, the Supreme Court and the Library of Congress, the Jefferson Memorial, the FDR Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, the Washington Monument, the White House, and the National Archives (where the Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and Constitution are housed).

At the end of the day, I was overwhelmed with the sense of honor, tradition and patriotism that this city symbolizes and embraces. It is inconceivable to me that anyone who walks past these historical sites could forget what our forefathers stood for, believed in, fought and died for. With this kind of history, our representatives should never forget what their purpose is to honorably respect the best interests of their constituents; the American citizens.

As of today I have been through 40 states and have done the following while on this trip:

I have taken surveys from people across the country regarding the 5 questions, and have done the following interviews: a judge about jail diversion, an assemblyman with his concerns about the country, the president of The Church of Scientology, the Vice President of the Coal Miners Union, a group of Muslims discussing the judicial system, anti-war activists from Moveon.org and Grannies for Peace, sat in on the discussion about electric voting machines for New York, court injustices, domestic violence and child custody issues, bio diesel plants and alternative fuel, community gardens/farmer’s market, Lyme disease, land trusts, welfare issues, gay couples, and disabilities, and many others.

Cities with the most expensive hotels: Long Island, New York, Washington, D.C., Sonoma wine country in California, and Nashville, Tennessee.

Different food I tried: Buffalo hamburger in South Dakota, Chicago dog in Chicago, deep dish pizza in New York City, lobster in Maine, clam chowder in

New England, fish in Massachusetts, Philly Cheese Steak in Pennsylvania, gumbo in Mississippi, boudan in Louisiana, and fried catfish in Arkansas.

Some of my favorite places: The state of Colorado, Sedona, Arizona, Bishop, California, Yosemite, CA, Mt. Shasta, CA, Mt. Rainer in Washington, Bozeman, Montana, Teton Mountains in Wyoming, the state of West Virginia, Bennington, Vermont, Cambridge, and Albany, and New York City in New York, Washington, D.C., the Amish country in South Pennsylvania, Nashville, and the Smokey Mountains, in Tennessee, and Hot Springs, Arkansas.

National Parks I liked:

Zion National Park, Yosemite National Park, Smokey Mountains National Park, Yellowstone National Park, Grand Canyon, and Hot Springs National Park.

Places I have done surveys:

Wal-Mart, K-Mart, Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Costco, Sam's, universities, community colleges, a fair and rodeo, downtown businesses, grocery stores, coffee shops, parks, strip centers, American Legion Hall, malls, open air market, bar, all kinds of shops and businesses, and many more.

Places where I was asked to leave: Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Lowe's, Target, Costco, K-Mart, and Sam's to name a few.

Today is Thursday, September 27th and the road to Missouri was hilly, winding and difficult to drive, especially for 4 1/2 hours. It was the most challenging drive yet, but at least its beauty along with the national forest is worth it.

I DID IT! I DID IT! I DID IT! I DID IT! I DID IT! I DID IT!

48 STATES, 2 MONTHS AND 13,000+ MILES

This stage of the documentary is completed, and I am so overwhelmed by the magnitude of what I have accomplished, that I just sat down and cried. There is no band, music, party, confetti or anyone to celebrate with. But more important is the knowledge that I accomplished what most people wouldn't have dreamed of trying, or had the courage and determination to make a reality. This is for all the people who think "big" dreams are impossible. They are not. This is for Mike, who died before he could make this trip with me. This is for me... as a reminder that I can do anything I set my mind and heart to. This is for the American people. Your voice will be heard!!!! I did it!!!!

Thinking back on my trip... the mountains in Colorado, the rock formations in Arizona, the wine country in California, the big sky in Montana, the open plains in Ohio, the energy of New York, the fall in Vermont, the lighthouses in Maine, the Amish in Pennsylvania, the beauty of West Virginia, the music and the Smokey Mountains of Tennessee, and the hot springs in Arkansas.

The experiences I have had, the people I have met, the stories I have shared, and the beauty I have seen traveling across this county, has changed me forever. IT was a once-in-a-life time opportunity that has changed me to the depths of my soul, only a gift God could give.

It has been almost a week since I got back from my trip. It feels strange not to have a home or a place to call my own. Everything I have is in storage, and it is stacked to the ceiling which means I can't find anything and only have the clothes I took on the trip, and nothing else.

It took me months to edit 20 hours of tape down to 1 hour. While still preserving the integrity of the people's opinions, as well as incorporating the responses of all ages, races and genders. I wanted this documentary to honestly represent the people I surveyed. What you see on screen represents the majority of the opinions of the people surveyed regarding every question. I used my own time and money to produce this documentary. I wasn't paid or affiliated with any group or person.

The work was especially difficult because I had no knowledge on how to produce a documentary. Lack of this information, equipment, help or money made completing this project nothing short of a miracle. Working 14-16 hour days with a VCR in a small, dark, noisy, apartment was challenging at best and impossible at worst. I have never encountered so many problems trying to accomplish a project in my entire career. Anything and everything that could go wrong did, but despite all the setbacks, challenges, and brick walls placed in my way, I was never deterred, and did whatever it took to keep my promise to myself, and to the people.

By the middle of January 2008, the documentary "America Speaks" was completed, and was sent to the President, every member of congress, the governors, and the top presidential candidates. So that they would know how some of the people they represent feel about these important issues that affect their lives on a daily basis and that of their children and their grandchildren.

Two weeks later, a press release and copy of the documentary was sent to over 50 members of the press: local and national TV. stations and newspapers. As of today's date, 9-29-08, none of the press has chosen to pick up the story, and I have only received 15 responses out of nearly 672 mail outs. They were 7 from governors, 4 from Senators, 2 from the House of Representatives and 2 from presidential candidates (John Edwards and Hillary Clinton). This seems to be irrefutable proof that our government couldn't care less about us, our lives, our future, or those of our children's. Remember actions speak louder than words.

I have spent a year of my life, and tens of thousands of dollars to make "America Speaks". Whatever happens, I know I have stayed true to myself, and kept my

promise to the people. I gave all I had and did so with a pure heart, for the right reasons, and I have peace in my soul, leaving the outcome up to God.

Always remember to dream big, and know in your heart, that there is nothing you can't do, be, or accomplish, if you believe and never give up. Keep in mind that with any dream there will be challenges, and obstacles to overcome, moments of joy combined with heart breaking disappointments. The main factor of whether your dream becomes reality or remains just a dream is determined by what you are willing to do in order to achieve it, in the face of overwhelming odds against it. This project has tested me in ways, I never thought possible. My resolve, faith, determination, and perseverance taught me that me that an ordinary person can do extraordinary things.

This book is dedicated to Mike Darnell who died before this vision was realized, and to the American people who gave me their trust to have their voices heard. I want to give a special thank you to Joel Santos, Jr., and Diana Thomas, for without their love, help, support and belief in me, this dream would have remained just that - only a dream.