



## TOWER

**A documentary by Keith Maitland**

Grand Jury Award Winner, SXSW  
Official Selection, HotDocs  
Official Selection, AFI Docs

2016 / USA / 82 min. / Live Action & Rotoscopic Animation / In English

[www.towerdocumentary.com](http://www.towerdocumentary.com)

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**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 Synopsis:**

August 1st 1966 was the day our innocence was shattered. A sniper rode the elevator to the top floor of the iconic University of Texas Tower and opened fire, holding the campus hostage for 96 minutes in what was a previously unimaginable event. TOWER combines archival footage with rotoscopic animation of the dramatic day, based entirely on first person testimonies from witnesses, heroes and survivors, in a seamless and suspenseful retelling of the unfolding tragedy. The film highlights the fear, confusion, and visceral realities that changed the lives of those present, and the rest of us, forever - a day when the worst in one man brought out the best in so many others.

**Long 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 Festival and the Boston International Film Festival and is currently on a university screening tour.

**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*.

**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.

**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 an such an impact on Amy that she offered her and Meredith's support for the film.

**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.

### Links:

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<http://www.facebook.com/towerdocumentary>



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# Cast & Credits

## TOWER

Directed by Keith Maitland

Produced by  
Keith Maitland  
Susan Thomson  
Megan Gilbride

Edited by  
Austin Reedy

Animation by Minnow Mountain  
Director Of Animation Craig Staggs  
Animation Producer Steph Swope

Coordinating Producer  
Hillary Pierce

Directors of Photography  
Keith Maitland  
Sarah Wilson

Original Music  
Osei Essed

Visual Effects  
Gary Walker

Executive Producers  
Steve Eckelman  
Luke Wilson

Card: Executive Producers  
Sally Jo Fifer  
Lois Vossen

Executive Producers  
Meredith Vieira  
Amy Rapp

Executive Producer  
Pamela Colloff



based in-part on her Texas Monthly article “96 Minutes”

**Featuring (In Order of Appearance)**

Neal Spelce	played by Monty Muir
Claire Wilson James	played by Violet Beane
Tom Eckman	played by Cole Bee Wilson
Aleck Hernandez Jr.	played by Aldo Ordoñez
Houston McCoy	played by Blair Jackson
Brenda Bell	played by Vicky Illk
Allen Crum	played by Chris Doubek
John "Artly Snuff" Fox	played by Séamus Bolivar-Ochoa
Ramiro “Ray” Martinez	played by Louie Arnette
Rita Starpattern	played by Josephine McAdam

And

Lee “Junior” Zamora	played by Anthony Martinez
Kent Kirkley	played by Timothy Lucas
Margaret C. Berry	played by Karen Davidson
Jerry Day	played by Jeremy Brown
James Love	played by Cole Bresnehen
Billy Speed	played by John Fitch
Monika McCoy	
Sirak James	

Supervising Producer  
Amy Shatsky

Co-Producers  
Minnow Mountain  
Texas Archive of the Moving Image

In Association With  
Meredith Vieira Productions

Associate Producers  
Tim Taliaferro  
Melina McKinnon  
Michael Cain  
Mary Beth Minnis  
Matt Nordgren

Consulting Producers	Paul Stekler
	Courtney Spence

**Advisors:**

Adam Butler  
Anne Stodghill  
Catherine Robb  
Jason Archer  
Larry Waks  
Louis Black  
Dr. Margaret C. Berry  
Steve Stodghill  
Tim McClure

**Also Featuring:**

Adam Butler  
Alexi Y. Hernández  
Amira Jensen  
Arturo Ordoñez  
Briana Garcia  
Carrie Bresnehen  
Chance St. George  
Chris Wilson  
Chrystal Webb  
Chuy Vallejo  
David Kimbriel  
Dawn Cramer  
Elena Johnson  
Emily Ash  
Erica Robert Pallo  
George Sledge  
Hillary Pierce  
Jason Reyes  
Kate Dannenmaier  
Kevin Lindsay  
Kevin McAfee  
Kim Terrazas  
Logan Martin  
Magui Ordoñez  
Mary Kuse  
Mary Ochoa  
Nadia McNeeley  
Osei Essed  
Patrick Floyd  
Rebecca Beegle  
Reece Ryan

Rob Hernandez Jr.  
Rob Lau  
Robert Melton  
Ron Pippin  
Samantha Martinez  
Sarah Fella-Reedy  
Sarah Kuck  
Scot Maitland-Brownell  
Steve Eckelman  
Tami Ryan  
Tammy Markham  
Theo Earl Maitland  
Thomas Berezoski  
Todd Savage  
Ulysses G. Turner  
Vanessa Gill  
Will Joseph  
William Herbst  
& Harry  
& Frances

Casting	Vicky Boone
Art Director	Keith Maitland
Wardrobe & Props	Caroline Karlen Hillary Pierce
Art Dept. Assistant	Monty Muir
Additional Camera	Chance St. George Ben Powell Andrew Miller
Stunts	Erica Robert Pallo Todd Savage
Music Supervisor	Mirna Hariz
Visual Effects Editor	Austin Reedy
Assistant Editor	Chance St. George
Still Photography	Sarah Wilson
Development Coordinators	Kara Moody Sarah Kuck
Crowdfunding Social Media	Margaret Heidrick
Transmedia Producer	Hillary Pierce
Transmedia Project Manager	Andy Sarjahani
Outreach Coordinator	Todd Savage

## Minnow Mountain

Lead Animator	Aaron Sacco
Animator	Dean Hsieh
Animator	Fernando Guardiola
Animator	John Paul
Animator	Katie Parker
Animator	Paul Beck
Animator	Zach Hall
Animator	Logan Ganshirt
3D Animation Supervisor	Rafael Ruiz
3D Animator	Matthew Young
Assistant Animator	Marcel Bialik
Assistant Animator	Chimi Paek
Assistant Animator	Chrystal Webb
Assistant Colorist	Nathan Bayless
Production Assistant	Letty Evans
Production Assistant	Rachel Dendy
Animation Intern	Lauren Willoughby

## The Texas Archive of the Moving Image

Executive Director	Caroline Frick
Managing Director	Madeline Moya
Administrative Coordinator	Susan Dirks
Technical Director	Afsheen Nomai

### Interns

Amira Jensen, Andy Sarjahani, Anisha Srivastava, Ashwin Ramakrishnan, Carlos Ramirez, Courtney Wiese, Daisy Gonzalez, Hannah Whisenant, Helen Fon-Yi Tau, Issa Ramos, Jessica Griffin, Jesús Gerdel, Kate Dannenmaier, Maryosha Eggleston, Montana Blair, Remi Vitales, Rob Lau, Sandrín Molina, Sarah Kuck, Sean McGuire, Tianzi Liu, Toni Petrikowski, Tyler Mager, William Herbst

Bookkeeper	Dan Boone
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Distribution Advisory Services	Cinetic Media
Production Counsel	Steven Beer
Fair Use Counsel	Marc Simon
Legal Consultation	Michael Cihock
Publicist	Nathaniel Baruch - Brigade Marketing
Social Media	Annie Bush - Production For Use
Insurance Services	Linda Bartle - Ascension Insurance Agency

Production Consultant	Production For Use
Louis Black	
Joe Dishner	

Annie Bush

Production Consultant      Ashland Viscosi

Post-Production Facility  
**STUCK ON ON**  
Austin, TX

Post Producer	Allison Turrell
DI Editor	Parke Gregg
Colorist	Parke Gregg
Supervising Sound Editor	Lyman Hardy
Sound Designer	Lyman Hardy
Foley Artist	Susan Fitz-Simon
Foley Editor	Susan Fitz-Simon
Foley Mixer	Glenn Eanes
Dialogue Editor	Miles Foster-Greenwood
Re-recording Mixer	Lyman Hardy

Main and End Title Design  
Gary Walker

Original music performed by  
Osei Essed  
with

Violin Heather Cole  
piano Will Orzo  
percussion Saul Simon MacWilliams  
pedal steel and percussion Philip Sterk

Clair de Lune  
from "Suite bergamasque" by Claude Debussy  
Performed by Lindsey Reimnitz  
Produced by Stephen Orsak

**MONDAY MONDAY**  
Written by John Phillips  
Performed by The Mamas & The Papas  
Published by Universal Music Corp.  
Courtesy of Geffen Records under license from Universal Music Enterprises

WATERLOO

Written by John D Loudermilk and Marijohn Wilkin

Performed by Stonewall Jackson

Published by Universal - Cedarwood Publishing, Peermusic (UK) Ltd., and Loudermilk Music

Courtesy of Columbia Nashville

By arrangement with Sony Music Licensing

DAYDREAM

Written by John Sebastian

Performed by The Lovin' Spoonful

Published by Trio Music Company

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Used by permission of Alley Music Corporation c/o Carlin America, Inc.

Courtesy of Buddah Records, a unit of Sony Music Entertainment

By arrangement with Sony Music Licensing

WALTZ ACROSS TEXAS

Written by Billy Talmadge Tubb

Performed by Lucky Luke Jacobs

Courtesy of Ernest Tubb Music

THE SNIPER AT THE GATES OF HEAVEN

Written by Stephanie Bailey, Christian Bland, Kyle Hunt, Alex Maas, Jennifer Raines, and Nate Ryan

Performed by The Black Angels

Courtesy of Death Song Publishing and Light in the Attic Records

SHE'S SO SATISFYIN'

Written by Doug Retherford, James Michael McNeerney, and Forrest L Dieckman

Performed by The Apparitions

Courtesy of Ductile Detective Music and Mark Prellberg

COLOURS

Written and Performed by Donovan

Courtesy of Sony

HOLLOW CREEK

Written and Performed by Mathew Morrey

Courtesy of Snowbeard

LOOMINGS

Written and Performed by Mathew Morrey

Courtesy of Snowbeard

FACE IN THE GRASS (TOWER MIX)

Written and performed by Daniel Pruitt, Garrett Hellman, Patrick Patterson, Brockett  
Hamilton, Devin Fry  
Courtesy of Lord Buffalo

SAXIFRAGE (TOWER MIX)

Written and performed by: Daniel Pruitt, Garrett Hellman, Patrick Patterson, Brockett  
Hamilton, Yamal Said  
Courtesy of Lord Buffalo

VALLE DE LA LUNA (TOWER MIX)

Written and performed by: Daniel Pruitt, Garrett Hellman, Patrick Patterson, Brockett  
Hamilton  
Courtesy of Lord Buffalo

FORM OF THE SWORD (TOWER MIX)

Written and performed by: Daniel Pruitt, Garrett Hellman, Patrick Patterson, Brockett  
Hamilton  
Courtesy of Lord Buffalo

SONATA in B-Flat, 333 (315c),  
Andante Cantabile

Written by: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart  
Performed by: Sirak James

SWEETWATER (instrumental)

Written by: Osei Essed  
Performed by: Osei Essed & the Woes  
Courtesy of: Osei Essed

Archival Footage Courtesy of  
**The Texas Archive of the Moving Image**

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Elisabeth Carrell  
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Heather & Matthew Chasen  
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Lionel Swope  
Lisa & Marquez Bela  
Lord Buffalo  
Margaret Brown  
Mark McKinnon  
Marilyn Maitland  
Mary & Gary Pettit  
Mary Ruth El-Hakam  
Melissa & Kenneth Miller  
Melissa Glassman  
Michael Swail  
Michael Toland  
Milton Shoquist  
Milton Tabbot (changed spelling)  
Missy Post Parrish  
Molly Thompson  
Morris Thomson  
Natalie Partington  
Patrick Patterson  
Pam Willeford  
Phillip Conner  
Rebecca Beegle & Robert Melton  
Revolution Spirits  
Robert S. Wilson  
Rosa Eberley  
Scot & Neil Maitland-Brownell  
Stacey Smith  
Students of the World  
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