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

Distributor Contact:

Kino Lorber
333 W. 39th Street
New York, NY 10018
(212) 629-6880 x16

Publicity Contact: Brigade Marketing

Nathaniel Baruch, Nathaniel@BrigadeMarketing.com
Shipra Gupta, Shipra@BrigadeMarketing.com
Adam Kersh, Adam@BrigadeMarketing.com
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 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 form 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.


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 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:**

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

http://www.facebook.com/towerdocumentary

@TOWERfilm

[http://www.instagram.com/towerfilm](http://www.instagram.com/towerfilm)
Cast & Credits

TOWER

Directed by Keith Maitland

Produced by
Keith Maitland
Susan Thomson
Megan Gilbridge

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 Violett 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 Ilk
- 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
Crystall 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 McNeely
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
Art Director
Wardrobe & Props
Art Dept. Assistant
Additional Camera
Stunts
Music Supervisor
Visual Effects Editor
Assistant Editor
Still Photography
Development Coordinators
Crowdfunding Social Media
Transmedia Producer
Transmedia Project Manager
Outreach Coordinator

Vicky Boone
Keith Maitland
Caroline Karlen
Hillary Pierce
Monty Muir
Chance St. George
Ben Powell
Andrew Miller
Erica Robert Pallo
Todd Savage
Mirna Hariz
Austin Reedy
Chance St. George
Sarah Wilson
Kara Moody
Sarah Kuck
Margaret Heidrick
Hillary Pierce
Andy Sarjahani
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

Bookkeeper         Dan Boone

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

Post-Production Facility

STUCK ON ON
Austin, TX

Post Producer
DI Editor
Colorist
Supervising Sound Editor
Sound Designer
Foley Artist
Foley Editor
Foley Mixer
Dialogue Editor
Re-recording Mixer

Allison Turrell
Parke Gregg
Parke Gregg
Lyman Hardy
Lyman Hardy
Susan Fitz-Simon
Susan Fitz-Simon
Glenn Eanes
Miles Foster-Greenwood
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
All Rights Administered by BMG US
Used by permission of Alley Music Corporation c/o Carlin America, Inc.
Courtesy of Buddah Records, a unit of Sony Music Entertainment
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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 McNerney, 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

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