

ULTRAVISION films

Ultravision Films

Presents

AN ULTRAVISION FILMS RELEASE

DESTINY'S BRIDGE

After making several short films about housing issues in third world countries, filmmaker Jack Ballo, joined documentary producer Bill Jersey (two time Peabody Award winner with two Academy Award nominations) in bringing to light the story of a homeless man's battle for affordable housing in the United States.

A documentary by Jack Ballo

Executive Producer Bill Jersey

67 minutes

**Ultravision Films
PO Box 535
South River, NJ 08882
(732) 387-8230**

Contact: Jack Ballo jack@UltravisionFilms.com

www.UltravisionFilms.com

www.DestinysBridge.com

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A homeless minister stands up to a New Jersey town that is evicting him, along with 80 other people living in the woods. Police raids and arrests bring uncertainty to the off-the-grid residents that are staking claim to the unused public land that they have been living on for eight years. With the town closing in and eviction on their doorstep, the innovative homesteaders set out to create their own self-sustained tiny house community called Destiny's Bridge.

LONG SYNOPSIS

A homeless minister leads a community living in the woods who are demanding fair housing from Lakewood Township, a New Jersey town that filed a lawsuit to evict them. When the judge rules in favor of the homeless, the temporary court ordered stay gives the visionary preacher time to present his ideas on a homeless shelter that instills respect and dignity to the poor as they try to put their lives back together. Dynamics shift when police raid the wooded area known as Tent City and take the camp's leader out in handcuffs. After posting bail, the minister claims harassment against the township, suggesting the false charges are related to the eviction lawsuit the town has filed against him and the other 80 residents of Tent City. With their future in question, homeless residents, who at one time held respectable jobs, find contentment in creating innovative living conditions in their own makeshift community while waiting for the court's final decision.

DESTINY'S BRIDGE was filmed in a raw cinema verite style bringing viewers up close to the homeless camp. This is not a traditional documentary that has narration and is packed with interviews about homeless issues. Everything the viewer learns in the film is from actual experiences that unfold in real time. It doesn't go into hard luck stories and harp on the how's and why's people become homeless; what the film does do is humanize them and search for answers to the homeless crisis. Filmed over the course of two years, personal journeys of camp residents are highlighted along with the main storyline of one man's quest to change the way we house homeless people in this country.

The main character in the film is Minister Steve. He is a 52 year old ordained minister who founded the Tent City homeless camp eight years ago and is also a resident himself. He believes that our current housing system is broken and that we need affordable housing for people who work for minimum wage. His vision for Destiny's Bridge is to build homeless communities consisting of affordable tiny houses throughout the country.

"Destiny's Bridge" is a new concept for housing the homeless. There are three components to Minister Steve's vision for a Destiny's Bridge homeless community. The first phase would ensure that the homeless person receives shelter, clothing and food. The second phase would be counseling and job training followed by the third phase would provide small affordable houses. Minister Steve describes today's homeless shelters as disgraceful. He believes that this concept would save tax payers millions of dollars a year. His dream, as we see in the film, is to change homeless shelters as we know them to a place where people can get the support they need and live a simple, self-sustainable life in a community that is environmentally friendly.

FILMMAKER'S STATEMENT - JACK BALLO

I became interested in making this documentary after returning from the Dominican Republic, where I made several films about poverty and homelessness in a third world country. One of the films, Elio, is about a man who built over a thousand tiny homes for poor families living in shacks. On my first visit to Tent City, located in Lakewood, NJ, I met with Minister Steve. I was impressed to find out that he was not only the founder of Tent City, but he was also a resident. We talked about his vision for Tent City as well as my experience filming housing issues in the Dominican Republic. After telling him about the tiny house villages that Elio was building in the DR, he went into his tent and came out with construction plans for building a tiny house. He went on to explain his ideas for Destiny's Bridge and his vision to build a self-sustained tiny house community for the homeless.

I soon started thinking that maybe the answer to the housing crisis in the United States may be no different than it is in the poorest areas around the world where tiny houses are being built. Maybe this country needs to provide the opportunity for the poor to live a simple life with basic necessities in small houses. The biggest problem with this idea is that our society has become accustomed to creating laws and regulations that forbid people from living in small affordable houses. The fact is that people in the United States are not allowed to build small houses that they can afford on minimum wage, even if it's on their own property and they comply with all the building codes. Most zoning laws throughout the country make it illegal to build a small, affordable, energy efficient house that is eco-friendly.

I will never forget my first day in Tent City. It was liberating to see so many people living in a community without using any government housing assistance. There were about 80 people living in the Lakewood homeless encampment at that time. If you do the math it would cost a million dollars a year to house them through government agencies. When you think about the six years this camp has been housing the homeless, under the direction of a full time unpaid coordinator, you soon realize that Tent City has saved taxpayers millions of dollars. There is a lot we can learn from Tent City and the concept of low cost housing for people who want to be close to nature and live without the luxuries that most people depend on. Something is very natural about the whole idea of not being sucked into the nonessentials of life that we learn to depend on at an early age and spend our entire lives paying for.

During my two years filming at Tent City, I got to experience charity like I've never seen before. Nothing moved me in Tent City like the site of strangers from surrounding towns visiting Tent City because they felt a need to do something. It seems like it is all part of a natural ecosystem that gives people the opportunity to bring food, clothing and items from around their house that they no longer need and give it to someone who does need it. I believe that most people want to help others; we just don't always know how or where to go to get involved in helping less fortunate people. So, instead, we throw away good food and fill our landfills with items that are still usable.

Tent City was a humane homeless shelter that focused on a sense of self-worth. The belief of the camp's founder, Minister Steve Brigham, is that the emotional needs of a homeless person are as important as food, clothing and shelter. Unlike the way traditional shelters force the homeless out every morning to roam the streets with all their belongings, he believes that community and

ownership are the first step to re-entering a homeless person back into society. Minister Steve hopes to one day build a homeless shelter called Destiny's Bridge. His plans consist of a self-sustainable encampment in a remote area where residents receive counseling, treatment and job training in preparation to return to society. Destiny's Bridge will be made up of tiny houses that are affordable to someone working for minimum wage. The concept is worth talking about. I hope this film, Destiny's Bridge, will start conversations about new ideas for housing the homeless and open the door for zoning law changes in this country.

PRODUCTION

Filmmaker, Jack Ballo, has used his 30 years of experience in video production to make his first long form feature documentary. After two years of working on the film project, veteran documentary filmmaker, Bill Jersey came on to put his professional touch on the editing. Jersey, the executive Producer of Destiny's Bridge is also credited as Editorial Consultant. Ballo credits Jersey for taking his original rough cut of the film and turning it into a much more dynamic story.

Ballo believes the open and honest access he had with the film's characters was due to the fact that he didn't have a film crew at Tent City. There was never a producer standing around, a second camera shooting or a sound person holding a boom mic over everyone's head throughout the filming. "Two things have to happen to get an authentic film that tells the truth," Ballo said. "The first thing is that people have to trust you and the next thing is they have to forget they are being filmed." This is what makes this documentary unique. The viewer feels like they are part of the experience from observing instead of watching a polished edited film with a scripted narration, staged interviews and mood music dubbed in the background. One viewer at a test screening said "I had to keep reminding myself that they were not actors; it doesn't feel like I'm watching a documentary." Ballo started shooting on May 4, 2012 and completed all the camera work in July of 2014. He edited the film while he was shooting it and then started screening the early version.

At a rough cut screening in Lambertville, NJ, Ballo was approached by legendary documentary filmmaker and cinema verite pioneer, Bill Jersey. Jersey has two Academy award nominations, two Peabody awards and two Emmy awards earned for a lifetime of documentaries that he produced for all the networks including PBS. After Jersey showed interest in the cinema verite film that Ballo had just screened, Jersey invited Ballo to call him and talk about a few things that Jersey thought could improve the film. One thing lead to another and Ballo asked Jersey to come on to the film as the Executive Producer and as an Editorial Consultant. A year and a half later, Ballo and Jersey are releasing Destiny's Bridge as a 2016 documentary.

Ballo not only edited the documentary, he also did all the color grading as well as a 5.1 sound mix himself. Most filmmakers bring a crew with them when filming and hire a post-production staff. "It's always helpful to have a producer and a sound person when filming as well as an editor and audio mixer in post, but there are huge benefits to working alone," Ballo said. "My vision was always intact. I didn't have to communicate it to a film crew or production staff. It also allowed me to get close to the subjects in the film and to gain their trust."

After studying cinema verite documentaries for years, including “A Time For Burning” by Bill Jersey, Ballo realized that this was the style of filming that he would like to start doing. There are certain principles you must follow when filming in a true verite style. The major points of cinema verite are avoiding any type of narration, not using formal interviews, not having any background music dubbed in that enhance emotions and never using a tripod or artificial lighting. It must be completely natural and uncontrolled. The advantage of this type of filming is that when a person is watching a raw verite documentary they become closer to the subjects and feel the authenticity. “I want the camera work to emulate the viewer as if they were there and the editing has to allow for this natural type of cinematography.” Ballo said.

Ballo believes that high production values in a documentary separates the viewer from reality. Many documentaries are over produced with multi-cameras, narration, formal interviews, perfect lighting, lower thirds and the use of tripods that can distance the viewer from the characters in the film. Instead of pulling a viewer into a story, a polished documentary can turn the viewer into a student of the filmmaker’s views.

Unlike most documentaries, *Destiny’s Bridge*, allows the viewer to come up with their own viewpoint by observing an unfolding story in either real time or from scenes and events that are completely natural and uncontrolled.

Ballo attended The Maysles Institute in Harlem, NY in 2011 where he geared his craft to the verite style of filming that brought success to another legendary filmmaker, Albert Maysles (*Gimme Shelter*, *Grey Gardens* and *Salesman*, to name a few). After viewing a preview of the film, Maysles gave Ballo high remarks on *DESTINY’S BRIDGE* and the filming style. He was especially impressed with the way the film captures the natural feel of the residents at the camp.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

JACK BALLO, Producer / Director / Camera / Editor

Jack Ballo launched his production company, Ultravision, in 1985 where he worked on hundreds of projects behind the camera, editing, producing and writing. Over the last 8 years, Ballo has been making humanitarian films and documentaries that bring awareness to social issues. His first documentary, *Wrong Turn*, was filmed in the Dominican Republic (2008). In 2010, Ballo went back to the Dominican Republic and made an award-winning short film called *Elio* (2010). In his next documentary, *Before You Leave* (2012), singer songwriter, Mary Gauthier, searches for the truth about her adoption after realizing that her deepest wounds stem from abandonment. *Before You Leave* won Best Short Documentary at its premiere. *Destiny’s Bridge* (2016) is his latest feature film which will be released this year. The film is a documentary about a homeless minister who leads a community living in the woods while facing eviction. Ballo has also completed his first screenplay. *The Doo Dah Man* was made into an award-winning independent feature film. The movie is about a young hitchhiker who is picked up in a stolen car by a con artist who had just escaped from a prison in Texas. The film was released in 2015 by Flatiron Pictures.

BILL JERSEY, Executive Producer / Editorial Consultant

Bill Jersey has been producing documentaries for broadcast television for over fifty years. In the early 60's he established his reputation as one of the pioneers of the cinema-verité movement. Since then he has produced documentaries for all of the major networks and in association with PBS, WNET New York, KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston, and others. His most recent film - Co-Produced with Jason Cohn EAMES: The Architect and the Painter, garnered Jersey his second Peabody award. Jersey's body of work includes two Academy Award nominees: A Time for Burning, on race relations in America, and Superchief, on the life and legacy Chief Justice Earl Warren. Other award winning productions include The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow series (George Foster Peabody Award), Children of Violence (Emmy), Renaissance (Emmy nomination), Faces of the Enemy (Emmy nomination), Loyalty and Betrayal (Emmy), Hunting the Hidden Dimension (Pierre Gilles deGennes Award) and The Making of Amadeus.