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Crossing Arizona turns heads at the San Diego Latino Film Festival

By Luis Alonso Pérez



The screening of the highly acclaimed documentary *Crossing Arizona* was a big success at this year's San Diego Latino Film Festival, with a packed audience who reacted positively to one of the biggest problems in the border region.

"I knew that this audience's reaction was going to be special" said the film's producer Dan DeVivo. "I don't sit through every screening, but it was very important to do so in San Diego

and I was not let down. It seemed the film was edited for this audience, they got every joke and every small thing we tried to slip in. I am glad that two guys from New York are making sense of this issue and in a way that locals can appreciate".

Minutemen founder Chris Simcox patrolling the border.

Crossing Arizona is more than a documentary; it's a one way ticket into the eye of the hurricane of one of the most intense periods in the ever-controversial immigration debate: summer 2005, and puts the audience in the middle of the complicated moral dilemma, examined through the eyes of those affected by the failures of the current Mexico-US border policies, from human rights defenders, border patrol officers, border activists, politicians, minutemen and of course illegal immigrants.

"The whole purpose of making *Crossing Arizona* was to put a human face on the issue of migration across the Mexico-US border" said DeVivo. "The message we get from mainstream media is that we have criminals and drug dealers coming across the border and that they are here to take away jobs from American citizens. But they rarely tell us about the human rights crisis happening across the border, and that since the mid 1990's more than four thousand people have passed away coming here

to find work.”

Even though the border issues are a common topic among border communities like San Diego, for many Americans this is a relatively unknown subject, even to many concerned, well educated citizens like DeVivo, who said he wasn't aware of the human rights crisis going on at the border until they came down to Mexico, and in the first week of shooting they were out in the desert with an activist replenishing water stations when they came across a Mexican guy who've gotten lost, and he started telling them he was trying to cross the border to get a job because back in Hidalgo he had children to support and a wife who needed surgery.

“Those things touch you and as soon as you meet people, start listening to their stories and having these experiences, then you start to feel a responsibility to follow the story and tell it like it is”.

For the filmmakers the most difficult part of making Crossing Arizona was going down to Mexico and talking to the people who were ready to cross the border. “I understand a little bit of Spanish but you don't even need to know the language to pick up on the frustration of these people who are far away from their homes, trying to cross the border without knowing what they are getting into” said DeVivo.

After the screening, the audience had the chance to ask a few questions to the film producer and Enrique Morones from Border Angels, who was invited to provide his input into the border problems in our community.

“The guest worker program that President Bush has proposed is what I call a rented slave program” said Enrique Morones “because they want people to come here for three or six years and then get the hell out. What will happen is that they will mistreat people, they are not going to pay them, and the employers are going to abuse them, we cannot allow that to happen”.

For Morones it's imperative that Congress considers implementing an earned legalization program, because people that come here are contributing to the economy of this country with billions of dollars, they contribute with social security that they will never get back when they pay taxes, when they pay for food or purchase other products. “We don't want another Bracero program” said the activist.

According to Dan DeVivo “We need to cease trade policies that are affecting people south of the border and are causing them to not be able to support their families”.

“It won't get any better if we don't invest in economies south of the border and change the way the American government goes about free trade policies so we don't encourage illegal migration, and the way its happening right now is not necessarily positive” said the film's producer.

When asked about how he managed to get Chris Simcox to participate in the documentary Daniel DeVivo reminded everyone that the smooth talking leader of the Minutemen loves attention. “We let him say what he wanted to say, that was actually our goal. We just gave him enough rope to hang himself in” joked DeVivo. “We are not trying to demonize anyone; the issues are what we where really trying to focus on, allthough we do have concern about growing anti-immigrant sentiment, and the media is certainly not helping”.

Both the filmmaker and Morones agreed that an important step in changing the inhumane border

situation can be achieved if everyday people start speaking out and calling their local representatives, or if they collaborate with local migrant rights organizations by volunteering.

Although Crossing Arizona was a big success in the San Diego Latino Film Festival, the production company has been having a difficult time getting the film distributed because the distributors don't seem to think there is a market for this kind of films.

Now DeVivo and the New York-based Rainlake Productions face an important challenge, they will have a special week-long screening in San Francisco's Roxy theatre beginning April 14. If they get good attendance they might get another week and perhaps land a deal that can get the film commercially distributed.



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