

RICH HILL

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY
TRACY DROZ TRAGOS AND ANDREW DROZ PALERMO



www.RichHillFilm.com



fb.com/RichHillFilm



[@RichHillFilm](https://twitter.com/RichHillFilm)

PRESS CONTACTS

US Publicity
Jessica Uzzan
jessica@hookpublicity.com

All Other Inquiries
Matthew Landers
mlanders@theorchard.com

SALES AGENTS

Linda Lichter
LGNA
310-205-6999
llichter@ligna.com

Kevin Iwashina
Preferred Content
310-993-7465
kevin@preferredcontent.net

International Sales and Screenings
films@journeyman.tv

ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

PICTURE MOTION
www.picturemotion.com

Wendy Cohen
917-596-3322
wendy@picturemotion.com

Christie Marchese
661-406-3121
christie@picturemotion.com

LOGLINE

Look inside the homes and lives of small-town, rural America, where isolated kids confront heart-breaking choices, marginalized parents struggle to survive, and, despite it all, families cling to the promise of equal opportunity and a better life some day.

SYNOPSIS

Rich Hill, Missouri (population 1393). Off the highway, next to the railroad track. ANDREW, 14, works on his bike, talks dreams with his dad, practices dance moves with his twin sister. He's just like a lot of American teenagers, except that his days are often also about survival. HARLEY, 15, lives with his grandma and eight other members of his extended family because his mom is in prison for attempted murder. Still, Harley is the first guy in the room to crack a joke and make you laugh when you least expect it. APPACHEY, 13, finds solace in skateboards and, despite his intelligence, has had to repeat the 6th grade, which doesn't come close to fixing what's broken in his life. These boys can be tough – they know how to walk with a clenched-jaw stare like they have nothing to lose. But when you get to know them up-close, you see their insight, their humor, and their determination to survive. And despite the isolation and brutality of their circumstances, their hope for a brighter future persists. They imagine that their hard work will be rewarded, and that, although there is no road map or role model, even they can live the American dream.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I made my first documentary BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY after discovering a picture of my father the day he was killed in Vietnam. The film was well received and won the Emmy Award for Best Documentary in 2004. It was difficult to find another film project with such a deep connection - and then came motherhood. In 2011, with my daughters in school, I formed a partnership with my first cousin, Andrew Droz Palermo, and found that we shared an enduring relationship with our parents' hometown of Rich Hill, Missouri.

Rich Hill is where my father grew up. As a child, I spent every summer and winter break there. Like many other struggling rural towns across America, the conditions have become increasingly bleak. Rich Hill has a sizable jobless population, starving local businesses and many vulnerable families. Yet, despite the grief that Andrew and I felt around its current circumstances, it was still a place of belonging and connection for us. We wanted to understand what it was really like to live in this mined-out coal town.

By November 2011, Andrew and I were in full production mode. We had great access within the community because our grandparents had been well known - for several decades, our grandmother was a grade school teacher and our grandfather, the town's grocer and mail carrier.

We filmed everything. Then, we rode on the school bus, and went home with kids. We were invited inside, welcomed by families who were eager to share their stories, but also surprised because no one had ever before taken such interest. We witnessed up close their challenging and often dire conditions and their deep bonds with each other.

The children were still young enough to have optimism; the adults' expectations were, for the most part, much lower. Everyone was in survival mode. And no matter what the age, they yearned for self-worth. With so few resources, they got by on little more than instinct and familial love. As a mother, I couldn't turn away. This would be more than a personal story about a particular place - this would be about families in towns across America, who were isolated and, in large part, ignored. We had found our film.

We narrowed our focus to three boys, each with a unique struggle and reserves of resilience and humor. Their families trusted us, giving us intimate access to share their stories, to capture their lives from an up-close and unflinching perspective - never shying from complexity, frustration, and despair.

At its heart, our film is an invitation to empathy, to share a connection with those who might otherwise be avoided and dismissed. Out of that place of connectedness and shared humanity, we hope audiences will question how we justify denying resources and social capital to vulnerable families, who are, at the most fundamental level, so much like our own.

With my second film, I return to the familiar ground of my first, and although the plot is very different, the feelings and themes explored are similar: kids want to know their place in the world and to be part of a family, however broken and scattered it may be. Like all of us, they want to belong, so that with that foundation, they can look forward to a future of possibility and opportunity. It is an honor to share their stories with you.

- Tracy Droz Tragos, Producer and Director

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Maybe I'm biased as a Missourian, but I find the beauty of rural America to be undeniable. The old trees, long dirt roads, and small towns - it's hard to point the camera in the wrong direction. Everything is stunning. Documentaries and narrative films highlight this aspect of small town life quite well, but I believe they often don't do justice to the people who live there. They get the most sensational material they can and then they fly out.

We met each of the boys in our film in different ways. One by recommendation, two by chance. Appachey was suggested to us by his teacher, and we immediately fell in love with him. At times, he can have a tough exterior, but during our first on-camera conversation, it was evident that he was wise beyond his years. With Harley, we were visiting one of his cousins and Tracy noticed him sitting quietly on the couch. She urged me to go talk with him while she took care of some releases and I can't be more thankful for that nudge. Harley often makes it difficult to hold the camera still because he makes us laugh. As for Andrew, I simply approached a group of kids playing basketball in the park one evening, but it wasn't until Tracy and I spent time with him and his family that we knew we wanted to follow him. There is such love within their home, despite the sometimes dire circumstances, and they aren't afraid to share it with each other.

After a year and a half of filming, we ended production with somewhere around 450 hours of footage, which has been painstakingly whittled down to a breezy 92 minutes. It was a bit hard to turn off the camera, and there are some darlings on the cutting room floor, but all is said and done. We're finished. We have made a film we hope our subjects can be proud of.

For me, the pull to be with these boys was strong. After our first shoot, I went home and watched footage of Appachey over and over. He just broke my heart in ways I didn't at first understand. He has such a creative spirit - he wants to test the limits of his environment, to challenge authority, to make and break things. He feels misunderstood, and he feels that he's alone. All things I've experienced in my youth, as have many. I began to see myself in him, and in all our subjects.

What really gets me about this, more than anything, is how unattainable the dreams of all three of our subjects may be. How can they possibly "pull themselves up by their bootstraps?" People often say that if they want to change their lives, they just need to work hard and make better choices. I reject that notion. I hope everyone can abandon it. If I were born into a different family and a different place, I would not be who I am today. No one can do it on their own. We all need help.

- Andrew Droz Palermo, Producer, Director, Cinematographer

OUR SUBJECTS



APPACHEY

Appachey, 13, is a lonely boy who wants to be loved. In the chaos and stress of his house, often the only way he gets noticed is to act out. He yells at his siblings and presents himself as one tough dude, lighting his cigarettes with a toaster and stabbing the walls with a blade. But if you sit with him long enough, it's easy to see his vulnerability and longing. He'll want to show you stuff – poems that he's written, his skateboard, the place he tagged under the bridge.

Even though Appachey is remarkably book-smart, school is really tough. He makes a ruckus on the school bus, swears in gym, and ends up getting kicked out of 6th grade – so he's made to repeat it.

But doing the same work a second time doesn't fix the things that are broken in Appachey's life and by March 2013, he is in the courthouse facing a youth conviction sentence, following in the footsteps of his older brother. He sits with his mother in the lobby. Away from the noise of his home and his siblings, she offers her son the affection and attentions of a devoted mother. But soon thereafter, Appachey is driven away by the sheriff to a Missouri juvenile justice facility.



HARLEY

Harley, 15, lives in a doublewide with his “best family member,” his grandmother, because his mother is in prison for attempted murder. Harley is on medication that mutes his moods, but when he is confronted with struggles, his anger and fear come out. It has been a year since Harley has seen his mother - he mourns her absence, but doesn’t talk about it much. He retreats from friends and the world, wanting only to curl up on the couch, out of school, in front of the TV, taking life day-by-day.

Harley’s biggest fear is being taken away from his grandma. He calls her often just to check in “because anything can happen.” What saves Harley is his self-deprecating humor and his knife collection. At any given moment, Harley will make you laugh with a wise-crack or try to make a trade with one of the knives in his shoebox.

Still every day is a struggle to stay in school. On his 16th birthday, Harley springs out of bed, filled with energy and expectation. But he can’t make it past second hour and has a blowout confrontation with the principal who won’t let him make repeated calls to his grandma. “The most important thing is your education,” the principal says. “No,” Harley counters, his hands shaking, “The most important thing is my family.” With our cameras rolling, Harley makes the choice to leave, which means another call to his probation officer and with that, Harley’s biggest fear, being taken away from his grandma, comes closer to being true.



ANDREW

What matters to Andrew, 14, is that his family is together. But they move so often, “it’s a joke.” Rich Hill is home base, a cheap place to stay when other towns don’t work out. Often, short on rent, Andrew’s family leaves in the middle of the night with only the clothes on their backs and a few belongings in garbage bags. Still, Andrew believes deeply in his father’s ambition: to find a town with jobs aplenty; to buy a big house on the lake; even to hit it big in the singing business.

In a new town, it seems that things might be taking a turn for the better. Andrew is allowed to play middle school football even though he arrives mid-season. He lifts weights, transforming his body and his self-esteem. The family talks about settling for good, at least until high school graduation.

But the money his father is making from odd jobs just isn’t enough for the family to make it through winter. By spring, they are late on the rent and lose their home once again. With nowhere else to turn, they find themselves moving back to Rich Hill, living with relatives who themselves are barely making ends meet. Things are tense, what with the emotions and energy of twelve people – nine of them under age seventeen – in such small quarters. Still, even in their struggle, there are moments of celebration. Andrew and his family still have hope. His father dreams big for himself and his family, with another move planned, and the promise of another new beginning.

THE SETTING

Rich Hill, Missouri. Seventy miles south of Kansas City, fifteen miles east of the Kansas border. Once a thriving mining town, shortly after World War II, the coal was gone – mined out. Stores closed, people moved away, farms were sold. It's a story that could be told in hundreds of towns across America.

But people still live here: 1,393 of them at last count. Deep potholes line the gravel roads, and property tax is almost nonexistent. The town center is littered with piles of bricks, and crumbling buildings are all that remain of the original bank, the corner pharmacy, a cafe. Yet there is still the dream of transformation on the horizon: if only the citizens could attract more business or Rich Hill could be home to an industry once again.

Every year on the 4th of July, like many communities across America, the town puts on a grand celebration, with a carnival and a parade. Rich Hill has a record-setting pie auction to raise the funds for the fireworks. It is a once-a-year time to be part of something larger and grander – the way things used to be – for even a few days. And then the carnival pulls out.

STYLISTIC AND VISUAL APPROACH

Our approach is to appeal to our audience's heart rather than to its intellect. We have filmed on the RED Scarlet. Our stunning 4K resolution makes for beautiful, cinematic images that draw us deeply into the stories. Andrew Droz Palermo, co-director and cinematographer, brings his intimate and richly impressionistic photographic style to the film.

Our images are of cycles – the carnival rides, the washing machines, the wheels on a broken car, the passage of time that opens and closes on the town's celebration at the 4th of July. These images support the narrative and the cycles of poverty it reveals.

Interviews are minimal, with most of the story revealed through vérité scenes, observing our subjects' circumstances and challenges, only stopping when conversation and reflection warrant. While there is inherent drama surrounding our subjects' circumstances, our focus remains emotional and personal. Through our imagery and meditative score, we draw our audience into the moments, focusing on the gestures and facial expressions of our subjects.

OUR IMPACT

In rural communities such as Rich Hill, the plight of youth can be especially startling: the absence of resources can, and often does, limit young people's vision for the future and keep them locked in abusive situations, prolonged states of dependence, and dysfunction. Their needs go much deeper than running water, having enough to eat and safe shelter. Some have experienced trauma, or have been abused by family members or bullied at school. They are dealing with grief, addiction and the realities of parents' or siblings' incarceration. Frequently, they are also dealing with transition from their own juvenile detention and the challenge of putting their lives back together without much support. Where youth in an urban setting might have access to sources of help and hope, kids in rural areas often are stranded and their acute need goes unseen and unrecorded.

RICH HILL takes a hard look at the despair of these youths, as well as at their talents and potential, and at what is at stake when they do not get what they need and deserve. We hope that by bearing witness to their struggle, audiences will see low-income rural families with new eyes and will respond to their condition with a greater understanding and a greater sense of urgency.

FILMMAKERS



TRACY DROZ TRAGOS
PRODUCER & DIRECTOR

Tracy Droz Tragos is an award-winning filmmaker who produced and directed *BE GOOD, SMILE PRETTY*, which aired on PBS's Independent Lens and won the 2004 Emmy Award for Best Documentary. The film also won Best Documentary at the Los Angeles Film Festival, the Audience Award at the Aspen FilmFest, the 2004 Fatherhood Award from the National Fatherhood Initiative, the President's Award for Excellence in Documentary Film from Vietnam Veterans of America, the 2004 Cine Golden Eagle Award and numerous other awards. For a year after the film's broadcast, Tragos traveled the United States, screening the film as part of an extensive ITVS outreach campaign, reaching hundreds of thousands of veterans and their families.

Tragos started her career at DreamWorks, SKG, where she rose through the ranks from assistant to writer/producer. She went on to produce the documentary pilot series *TRUE AMERICAN STORY*, which aired on E! Entertainment Television, and she co-wrote the short film *THE LAST FULL MEASURE*, which premiered at the 62nd International Cannes Film Festival. Tragos was for many years a judge for The Humanitas Prize, and has been a guest lecturer on documentary filmmaking at the USC film school.

Tragos holds a BA from Northwestern University and an MFA with honors in Cinema/Television from USC. She lives in Pacific Palisades, California with her husband, Chris, and two daughters, Penelope, 5, and Charlotte, 8. After a hiatus for motherhood, Tragos founded *DINKY PICTURES*, which is currently in development on a personal film about aging, faith and her adoptive father's itinerant ministry, as well as *RICH HILL*, which is supported by the MacArthur Foundation, the Sundance Institute, Film Independent, IDA and IFP.



ANDREW DROZ PALERMO
PRODUCER, DIRECTOR & CINEMATOGRAPHER

Andrew Droz Palermo is one of *Filmmaker Magazine's* "25 New Faces of Independent Film of 2013." In 2011, he lensed his first feature, Adam Wingard's smart horror film *YOU'RE NEXT*. At Sundance 2013, he premiered *A TEACHER*, directed by Hannah Fidell, and *BLACK METAL*, directed by Kat Candler.

After growing up in central Missouri, Andrew studied graphic design at Columbia College Chicago. He then progressed from photography to directing and shooting music videos for indie bands *White Rabbits*, *The Walkmen*, *Arms and Believers*.

Next for Andrew is *ONE & TWO*, a narrative he co-wrote and will direct, which participated in the Sundance Creative Producing Lab. *RICH HILL* is Andrew's first documentary, a proud collaboration with his cousin, Tracy.



JIM HESSION
EDITOR

Jim Hession has worked in the film and television industry for nearly 10 years. He is co-editor of the documentary feature film *MARINA ABRAMOVIC: THE ARTIST IS PRESENT*, which premiered as an Official Selection at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival, and for which Jim was just nominated for an Emmy. The film garnered numerous festival honors, including the 2012 Panorama Audience Award at the Berlin International Film Festival and the Special Jury Award at the 2012 Sheffield DocFest, before receiving a George Foster Peabody Award and an Independent Spirit Award nomination for Best Documentary of 2012. Including the film on his list of the year's 10 best movies, John Waters concluded that *MARINA* is "maybe the most perfect documentary ever made about an artist."

In 2013, Hession was presented with the 3rd Annual Karen Schmeer Film Editing Fellowship Award at the South by Southwest Film Festival. Hession began his career at HBO Documentary Films, where he assisted for a number of award-winning film editors, including Juliet Weber and Geof Bartz, A.C.E. He later worked for the production company Show of Force, where he edited numerous commercials, web videos, trailers, and industrial documentaries for clients such as PBS, The New York Times, and Amnesty International.

Hession holds a B.A. in American Studies from Tufts University. He lives in New York with his wife, Mariela, and their daughter, Isabella Rose.



NATHAN HALPERN
COMPOSER

Nathan Halpern is a composer and singer/songwriter from New York City. His most recent film score was for the Emmy-nominated *MARINA ABRAMOVIĆ: THE ARTIST IS PRESENT* (HBO Films), winner of the Peabody Award, as well as the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the Berlin International Film Festival. Screenfanatic said of the film: "a mesmerizing, incredibly moving piece of cinema, perfectly matched by the electrical charge of Nathan Halpern's score"; New York Music Daily said: "A chillingly Lynchian soundtrack...Halpern is a master of noir." He also scored Robert Redford's *All the President's Men Revisited*, which has been nominated for the 2013 Primetime Emmys for Outstanding Nonfiction or Documentary Special.

Halpern made his film scoring debut in 2011 with *RENEE* (ESPN Films / 30 for 30), whose music was lauded as an "excellent score" by The Huffington Post and "a hauntingly poetic score" by *The Examiner*. Other recent film scores include *IN SO MANY WORDS* (from Director Elisabeth Haviland-James, producer of HBO's *THE LOVING STORY*), premiering April 2013 at Full Frame Documentary Film Festival; and *HERE ONE DAY*, screening at HOT DOCS in April 2013. He has contributed music to the PBS documentary series *MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA* (narrated by Meryl Streep) and *HALF THE SKY*. He was commissioned to write original music for the documentary *AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: 50 YEARS* (Show of Force), as well as a series of commercial spots for Sony, Kodak, Neiman Marcus, and *The New York Times*. He is currently scoring *THE POISONER'S HANDBOOK* for PBS/American Experience.

Halpern spent his early music career touring the USA and Europe with his art-punk band The Flesh (Kanine Records, Gern Blandsten Records), and is currently recording his debut solo album with co-producer Martin Bisi (Brian Eno, Sonic Youth), supported in part by a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY
TRACY DROZ TRAGOS AND ANDREW DROZ PAELRMO

EDITED BY
JIM HESSION

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
ANDREW DROZ PALERMO

MUSIC BY
NATHAN HALPERN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
ROBERT A. COMPTON AND MICHAEL J. ZAK

CO-PRODUCERS
DAVID ARMILLEI AND CHRIS TRAGOS

POST PRODUCTION SOUND SERVICES
SKYWALKER SOUND

SOUND DESIGNER AND RE-RECORDING MIXER
PETE HORNER

COLOR TIMING
PREHISTORIC DIGITAL

ADDITIONAL EDITING	ANDREW DROZ PALERMO TRACY DROZ TRAGOS WILLIAM HAUGSE
SUNDANCE EDIT AND STORY LAB ASSISTANT EDITOR	JESSIE DORFMAN
FILM INDEPENDENT EDITORIAL ADVISORS	DOUG BLUSH JEFF MALMBERG
SUNDANCE EDIT AND STORY LAB EDITORIAL ADVISORS	JEAN TSIEN ROBB MOSS CAROL DYSINGER KATE AMEND VICTOR LIVINGSTON TOM HANEKE
MUSIC SUPERVISOR	KATE URCIOLI
PRODUCTION SOUND EQUIPMENT GENEROUSLY DONATED BY	CHIMAERIC DAVID ANDERSON JOSH JOHNSON KAMAU BILAL JEN HUEMMER ERIC MOUSEL
POST-PRODUCTION SOUND SERVICES SKYWALKER SOUND A LUCASFILM LTD. COMPANY MARIN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA	
SOUND DESIGNER AND RE-RECORDING MIXER	PETE HORNER
SOUND EFFECTS EDITOR	ANDRE ZWEERS
FOLEY EDITOR	STEVE BISSINGER ZACH MARTIN
FOLEY ARTISTS	ANDREA GARD FRANK RINELLA
FOLEY RECORDIST	FRANK RINELLA
DIGITAL EDITORIAL SUPPORT	DANNY CACCAVO RYAN J FRIAS SCOTT LEVINE
DIGITAL INTERMEDIATE PREHISTORIC DIGITAL SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA	
COLORIST	CHRIS HALL
DIGITAL INTERMEDIATE PRODUCER	WILLIAM ADASHEK
DIGITAL INTERMEDIATE PRODUCER	KEVIN CANNON
ONLINE EDITOR	JOSEF SIPKINS
VISUAL EFFECTS	JOSH JOHNSON WILLIAM ADASHEK JOSEF SIPKINS

THIS FILM WAS GENEROUSLY SUPPORTED BY GRANTS FROM THE JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T. MACARTHUR FOUNDATION
SUNDANCE INSTITUTE DOCUMENTARY FILM PROGRAM
THE CINEREACH PROJECT AT THE SUNDANCE INSTITUTE
INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY ASSOCIATION
PARE LORENTZ DOCUMENTARY FUND
THE PACIFIC PIONEER FUND
THE FLEDGLING FUND

THIS FILM WAS ALSO MADE WITH SUPPORT FROM FILM INDEPENDENT
INDEPENDENT FILMMAKER PROJECT

FISCAL SPONSORSHIP INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY ASSOCIATION

SALES KEVIN IWASHINA, PREFERRED CONTENT
LINDA LICHTER, LGNAF

LEGAL LINDA LICHTER
JEFF SPRINGER
LICHTER GROSSMAN NICHOLS ADLER AND FELDMAN, INC.

CLEARANCE AND FAIR USE LEGAL CHRIS PEREZ
DONALDSON + CALLIF

PRODUCTION LEGAL ANNIE LIN

PUBLICITY DAVID MAGDAEL AND ASSOCIATES, INC.
DAVID MAGDAEL AND ESEEL BORLASA

IMPACT AND ENGAGEMENT PICTURE MOTION
CHRISTIE MARCHESE AND WENDY COHEN

KICKSTARTER SUPPORT MILENA PASTREICH, VIDEO
GRACE WOODARD, OUTREACH

KICKSTARTER MUSIC TYLER POWELL AND WESLEY POWELL

GRANT WRITING SUPPORT JOANNA RABIGER

GRANT EDITORIAL GENEROUSLY DONATED BY LUIS MORENO, JUMP

PRINTING SERVICES GENEROUSLY DONATED BY MODERN LITHO-PRINT CO
DARLA MOORE PORTER

SUPPORTERS



SELECTED PRESS

“Often heartbreaking, Rich Hill presents real life as few filmgoers know it.”

- The Hollywood Reporter

“A truly moving and edifying film, ‘Rich Hill’ is the type of media object that could and should be put in a time capsule for future generations.”

- IndieWire

“The most immediate aspect of Palermo and Tragos’s filmmaking is their palpable empathy. They are committed to showing the dignity of their subjects without idealizing their disadvantages or exploiting them.”

-Paste Magazine

“It is an amazing film.”

- CNN

“... a marvel of hard-won heartbreak – a story about boys who have the deck stacked against them and are determined to play their hands, whether they understand the game or not.”

-Rolling Stone

“‘Rich Hill’ Looks Like a Strong Candidate for the Best Documentary of 2014”

- NonFics

“The filmmakers let the boys speak for themselves, their voice-overs as poetic as those in the films of Terrence Malick.”

- The Boston Globe

“Rich Hill is nearly flawless ...”

- Movie Mezzanine

FILM FESTIVALS

Sundance Film Festival 2014 - *Worldwide Premiere, Won the U.S. Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary*

Hot Docs - *International Premiere*

True/False Film Fest

Eastern Oregon Film Festival

Tree Fort Film Festival

Cleveland International Film Festival

Dallas International Film Festival

Salem Film Fest

Sarasota Film Festival - *Won a Special Jury Prize for Directing*

Manadnok International Film Festival

Ashland Independent Film Festival

Full Frame Documentary Festival

Wisconsin Film Festival

Kansas City International Film Festival - *Won the Jury Prize for Best Heartland Documentary*

Independent Film Festival Boston

Little Rock Film Festival

San Francisco Documentary Festival

Nantucket Film Festival

Cinetopia International Film Festival

Human Rights Arts and Film Festival

Seoul International Agape Film Festival

Documentary Edge in New Zealand

Champs-Elysees Film Festival