



AND NOW WE
RISE

A PORTRAIT OF SAMUEL JOHNS

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And Now We Rise: A Portrait of Samuel Johns was a co-production of Affinityfilms, Inc. and Vision Maker Media, with major funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB).

And Now We Rise: A Portrait of Samuel Johns was produced by Affinityfilms, Inc., which is solely responsible for its content.

Not Rated, 57 min, Color

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Photo by Mary Rosanne Katzke

PRODUCERS STATEMENT

We must highlight these positive stories as they unfold and which can provide a model for the rest of the state and world. We must examine the values of “community” and “context” in these stories, providing viewers with understanding of different lifestyles, which may currently seem foreign or inaccessible.

I have lived and worked with Alaska’s indigenous population since 1979. So many of the stories have been heartbreaking- assault and abuse, alcohol, suicide, homelessness, fetal alcohol syndrome, cancer and heal challenges unique to regions of our state. There is a change I have been sensing and wanting to share. We have the opportunity to showcase this change for our state, country and world.

It is a most empowering and uplifting story of our native people that I have the chance to share, and I hope that my love for our people is shown in my story telling.

Acknowledging historical trauma is a huge step in the grieving process, which comes before healing. For instance, when Spotlight hit the theatres, what people didn’t know was those priests were sent to Alaska! Those priest worked at boarding schools that Jack Dalton writes about- his own father is one of them. Same, which his Forget Me Not Facebook page - is showing how social media can be a big part of changing attitudes. Princess is working with the President on decisions about native lands. The general public needs to understand the impact historical trauma has had on our indigenous people, and how they are becoming involved and becoming the change. The change is brewing, and it’s hopeful.

And Now We Rise Press Notes

ABOUT THE FILMAKER



Photo Courtesy of Joshua Corbett

Mary Rosanne Katzke

Producer and Director

Mary Rosanne Katzke is currently a 2018 Rasmuson Fellow in Media Arts and has been writing and directing films since she graduated from the Radio-Television-Film School at the University of Texas, Austin. After a summer trip to Alaska, she began producing documentaries and formed Affinityfilms, Inc., a non-profit production company dedicated to the production of social issues films.

Her first film, No Word for Rape, was an award-winning documentary film about sexual assault in urban and rural

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Alaska. Grants from the American Film Institute, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Alaska State Arts Council allowed Mary to continue to produce films in the following years broaching such topics such as homeless people, domestic violence, and breast cancer. Many of these documentaries have been featured in prestigious festivals across the nation and Europe.

In 1988, Mary was offered an academic scholarship to attend New York University’s graduate film school where she completed her MFA in Writing and Directing. While at school, she continued to produce documentaries including Sea of Oil, an examination of the social and emotional impact of the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which was featured at the Museum of Modern Art, the Sundance Film Festival, and aired nationally on PBS’ POV Showcase.

Other completed works include: About Face: The Story of Gwendellin Bradshaw (feature documentary with grants from A&E Entertainment and Chicken and Egg Pictures); Day in Our Bay (Bristol Bay native way of life as crowd-sourced through 70 videographers); Backing Out of Time (care giving for parents facing Alzheimer’s); World School (family gap year of travel); Partners in Healing about integrative medicine; and In a Nanosecond, a full media campaign about living with traumatic brain injury.

Her current documentary, And Now We Rise, is funded in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting through Vision Maker Media and she is currently on the Fulbright Specialist Program Roster.



Photo by Mary Rosanne Katzke

LONG SYNOPSIS

In the opening of *And Now We Rise*, we are introduced to Samuel Johns via his own voice speaking of his painful childhood. He shares that he's come to place this in the context of a legacy of historical trauma in his community. We learn that many Alaska Natives run from pressing issues in their small villages to the city with high hopes, only to end up struggling to survive in a cash economy, often living on the streets.

Imagery from the rural communities demonstrates a stark contrast with the busy Anchorage urban environment. Sam takes us to the soup kitchen, Bean's Café, where he sees people who arrived years ago. He understands the need to numb the pain as he once abused alcohol himself, and how cultural genocide relates to his own story. Elders talk about how they were punished for speaking their language and how they didn't want their own children subjected to that pain. Sam was passed around to different families after his parents left, but his story is a little different in that he is driven to change things for others. His will be a mission-driven life.

He begins by bringing his music to Bean's Café where he triggers a spark of happiness in downtrodden patrons.

We then meet his family, including his daughter who inspired him to help the homeless by simply making sandwiches. Sam starts using social media to help those wishing to connect with family members back home by creating the Forget Me Not Facebook Group.

The Facebook Group grows rapidly. Anchorage Mayor Berkowitz talks about how Sam sees humanity in people, and that is key to addressing the problem of homelessness. Local television stations start to pick up on his work. We hear from board member Forrest Dunbar, who helps guide the early stages of building an official Forget Me Not organization. Sam is invited to speak in rural Alaska, an upstream effort to educate kids about embracing culture, avoiding substance abuse, honoring what elders have done for them, and the hazards of the city.

We meet Robert when Sam arrives at Bean's Café to take him to the airport. Robert hasn't been home to his rural village, White Mountain, in years due to doing jail time, and has no money to purchase a plane ticket, so he's been stuck in limbo. We get to see via iPhone how happy his mother is when he makes it to White

Mountain using a mileage ticket Sam was able to raise funds for on his Facebook page. More and more people are gifted with mileage tickets and sent home. The demands for help keep increasing.

Sam continues to write music as a hip hop artist with his homies, singing "Forget Me Not" and talks about how "Me Against the World" by Tupac was his inspiration to learn how to compose hip hop music. He performs his piece, "Wake Up", which addresses domestic violence at the annual Alaska Federation of Natives conference in front of hundreds more people.

Facebook keeps growing. The crowds love him.

Sam travels by boat on the Kuskokwim River where we meet Mike Williams who is his guide, and who has lost all six of his brothers to alcoholism. Mike is bringing Sam out to help stem the tide of loss of young lives. Sam interacts with students of all different ages, using storytelling, basketball, speeches, his drum and his hip hop music to engage them. "We use our music to heal from grieving" he reminds them. "Culture is vital to our people, because it makes you rich in here," he says tapping his heart. "How do you say addiction in your language? It's not there because it's not for us."

Sam addresses the entire community in the tiny village of Akiachak, and why he writes the music he does before singing "Kryptonite" with lyrics "My ancestors survived just for us to have a whole generation with no pride in who they are..."

CNN finds him and the Facebook group is now nearing 15,000 members. The crowds get bigger, the demands for more appearances flow in, and he is greeted with standing ovations. Forrest Dunbar talks about how Sam is flooded with requests and from the beginning he has been worried that Sam will become overwhelmed. We hear real letters being read, imploring him to help. Sam shares that he is not prepared to carry the weight of so much misery.

Meanwhile Facebook counter continues to climb to 25,000 which is the maximum for groups like this, and... Sam drops out of public eye for a reprieve.

It's not until Standing Rock begins to make national news that Sam gets renewed energy for activism. He makes the decision to travel down to join his Native American brothers and sisters in the Standing Rock

protests. The experience of traveling outside Alaska has a refreshing impact. In a brief moment of joy he photographs horses along the roadside. From the moment Sam arrives at the tent city of thousands, we can sense his growing excitement. He helps put out a fire, and runs into a celebrity to whom he bestows with his handmade fur mittens. He is happy to do his part, without being famous like he has become back home in Alaska.

We hear strains of the title song, "And Now We Rise," with a montage of peaceful marches and protests featuring Sam taking it all in. Sam's music plays as we wrap out of the Standing Rock experience--upbeat, and happy.

Sam visits Robert in White Mountain to see how he's coming along since getting his ticket home. He meets Robert's mom and aunt, who tell how relieved they are that he made it home. Robert expresses sincere gratitude for all Sam has done to help his people, and Sam seems ready to go home to face his past.

While in Kluti-Kaah, aka Copper Center, Sam is joined by his first cousin to re-visit the old homestead, now in ruins. He recalls the Christmas after his parents left and how he was terrified he would be forgotten during gift giving time, but how his Aunt Becky made sure he had something. He recalls the deep depression of childhood and how he contemplated suicide, but somehow saw a different vision for himself. His former middle school English teacher speaks of reading Sam's first Facebook post about helping the homeless, and how it made her weep.

Sam speaks to the new young people at his high school, telling them how important it is to advance their people forward like his own well-respected grandfather did. He concludes by sharing how his work for his people drew enough attention that he was invited to meet President Obama, a highlight of his life so far.

And Now We Rise ends with a montage of Sam singing his hip hop song, "And Now We Rise", standing between his two daughters, with a positive, uplifting series of images from the film cut to the music to implant feelings of appreciation and hope.



Photo by Mary Rosanne Katzke

MEDIUM SYNOPSIS

And Now We Rise is a portrait of an exceptional young activist, Samuel Johns, motivated to help his Alaska Native community to lead sober, productive lives. Abandoned by his parents as a child and raised by numerous relatives, Samuel matured into a man who seeks to understand the roots of what happened within the larger context of historical trauma and loss of culture. He is an “everyman” who heals and grows by stepping up to help others, and becomes revered by the community.

He is able to use his skills and talents for public speaking, writing hip hop music, and creating the Facebook Group, Forget Me Not, which connects those experiencing homelessness with far flung family members. This group has now grown to almost 25,000 members and as his success grows, Sam becomes emotionally drained and overwhelmed with facing so many heartaches and requests for help. Seeing the national movement for Standing Rock, Sam travels to North Dakota to participate and learn

from other activists, which revitalizes him. Over the course of the three years this documentary follows him, he is eventually able to return to his home village, revisiting the source of so much childhood pain, and speaks to youth at his former high school where he is embraced as a hero.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

And Now We Rise is a portrait of Samuel Johns, a young Athabaskan hip hop artist, founder of the Forget Me Not Facebook Group for displaced people in Alaska, and activist for a cultural renaissance as he heals from his own legacy of historical trauma.



Photo by Mary Rosanne Katzke

CREDITS

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Mary Rosanne Katzke

Director of Photography

Nara Garber

Editor

Todd Hardesty

Composer

Brian Satterwhite

Hip Hop Music

“AK Rebel”
Samuel Johns
“Rise”
“Wake Up”
“Kryptonite”

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Daniel Nissenbaum

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Greta Artman

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Ivan Bacon
Corin Katzke
Sye Larson

Production Intern

Jonny Rouse

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Todd Hardesty
April Frame
Jensen Seifert
Tom Trainor

Additional Editing by

Taylor Segrest
Richard Cooper

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Bryan “Muhnee” Leiser
Shoe Strings Studios

Sound Mixer and Colorist

Richard Cooper

Graphic Art by

Randy Bangerter

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Photo by Mary Rosanne Katzke

SPECIAL THANKS

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