



INTERVIEW WITH Leanna Borsellino – FILMMAKER



Leanna Borsellino is the daughter of a sex trafficking survivor, with an acute understanding of the difficult journey to freedom. Her love of film led her to attend Oral Roberts University, where she graduated Magna Cum

Laude with a degree in Drama/Television/Film. She was honored with the award for Most Outstanding Senior in the Communication Arts Department in 2007. Leanna was also accepted into the Los Angeles Film Studies Center, a capstone program dedicated to immersing its students in real world application. She began interning at The Robert Evans Company (known for The Godfather I & II, Chinatown, Baby), which led to a job as the assistant of the company's two top producers. Leanna then worked in production at Digital Domain (Titanic, Curious Case of Benjamin Button, Tron), an Academy Award-winning digital effects company. After two years in the commercials division, the death of her grandmother prompted her to move home to Austin, TX to be near family. Leanna now

Tell us about your background and when did you decide to become a filmmaker?

I realized when I was a young teen that I could use art as a form of catharsis to help me process traumatic events I experienced in my childhood. It was a way for me to speak openly about pain, without people realizing I was actually being vulnerable and creating art from personal experiences. It allowed me to gauge my audiences reaction and shock, and to form new ways to connect. I went onto film school in Los Angeles, and secured my first job at Paramount Studios working for Robert Evans (creator of The Godfather). As an Italian-American, being given the opportunity to work for the creator of The Godfather, was a dream come true.

Films that inspired you to become a filmmaker?

Gone with the Wind Spartacus Kill Bill The Butterfly Effect Life is Beautiful

The Godfather, House of Flying Daggers, Walk The Line, The 5th Element, Slumdog Millionaire

Who is your biggest influence?

Quentin Tarantino; his films are over the top with shock factor, and I love how he pushes the boundaries to make his audience uncomfortable. His style is undeniable, you always know when you are watching a Tarantino film

What were some of the challenges you had to face in making your films?

Being that my film is a documentary, my biggest issue was funding, and keeping our supporters invested. It took me 7 years to complete this film. It required patience, persistence, and discipline to see it through. A lot of times it just seemed easier to walk away, but I had already invested so much of myself, I never would've forgave myself if I had quit.

Do you have a favorite genre to work in? Why is it your favorite?

Drama/Action Thrillers - It gives me more of an opportunity to tap into the subconscious

What's your all-time favorite movie and why?

Gone with the Wind. I feel like it was ahead of its' time. I connected deeply with the characters and the story. So many people I know who watched it despised Scarlet, I saw her as a heroine, and I adored the levels of her character and how she was portrayed; I also appreciated that it didn't have a stereotypical happy ending.



If you could work with anyone in the world, who would that person be?

Quintin Tarantino

Tell us something most people don't know about you.

I broke my rib once during a performance on stage in front of over 500 people - I was Dromio of Syracuse from Shakespeare's "Comedy of Errors". I played off the broken rib and completed the entire performance; not one person in the audience (besides the director) knew until curtain call/Q&A afterwards when I told them that my rib snapped.

The one person who has truly believed in you throughout your career.

Besides my parents, my first boss at The Robert Evans Company - producer Henri Kessler. He wanted to hire me back onto the lot, but I told him about the documentary I wanted to make. He told me to do it, that it would be the most difficult film I would ever make, but it would be worth it in the end. He also advised me to change the name. I did. And he was right.

What was the most important lesson you had to learn as filmmaker?

Not everyone on your team cares about your message, and sometimes they just want a paycheck. It's my job to weed those people out.

Is it harder to get started or to keep going?

Keep going.

What was the particular thing that you had to conquer to do either?

Getting started was fairly easy. I already had the base amount of money to get the initial shots in order to get people excited and supportive. Where it got difficult was needing to replenish and keep going to the same people to raise funds, after a while they don't want to give as much and expect a finished product. Plus, since I created a documentary, the story evolved and really took on a life of its' own at a certain point. It was hard for me to plan for the films message and how it evolved. Plus, it was really hard for me to separate myself as "Leanna Borsellino, the filmmaker" and "Leanna Borsellino, the subject". I needed a strong team of people that I trusted that would reel me in case things got too heavy.

What keeps you motivated?

What keeps you motivated?

Knowing that this art can help so many broken families and abused children who feel that they may not have a voice. I'm hoping my film can give them a voice, and also encourage them to know that life can still be beautiful and worth living.





How has your style evolved?

I would say my style is blunt. I don't want to hold the audience's hand, so to speak. At first I tried to use filtered "language", but eventually I realized if I want to get my point across, I need to be more in the audience's face and make them uncomfortable. My goal is not to necessarily make perfect art, but honest art.

On set, the most important thing is:

Empathy. While I want to evolve past documentary filmmaking, if my crew can't have empathy for the subjects being interviewed, then it is likely the person being interviewed is aware of that, which causes them to close off, and makes the process more like pulling teeth.

The project(s) you're most proud of:

This one - *Another Child*.

The most challenging project you worked on. And why?

Another Child. It's an extremely personal story. I initially intended to tell this story vicariously, and somehow it evolved overtime into me producing and directing a story about my own chronic childhood sexual abuse, and my mother's abuse leading her into prostitution. It doesn't get more raw or vulnerable than that. I'm not just asking people to judge my art, I'm asking people to judge my life.

What are your short term and long term career goals?

Short term. Get this film seen by as many people as possible. I hope it creates conversations that can ultimately bring healing to families. Long term - I would love to create a trilogy on the downfall of the Roman Empire. It is my favorite time period, and I am obsessed with stories from that genre.

Your next projects?

TBD; there has been talks of creating a mini-series, since I have well over 400 hours of footage and interviews. I'd also love to get started on creating a trilogy of the fall of the Roman Empire... But I need to see where the life of *Another Child* goes first.

Please share with us where people can find you on social media, so our readers could keep track of your career:

IG - @leannaswinger @anotherchildfilm

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Facebook: Leanna Borsellino Swinger

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