



# WHICH WAY HOME

A Film By Rebecca Cammisa

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**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS  
WHICH WAY HOME**

**Synopsis**

As the United States continues to build a wall between itself and Mexico, WHICH WAY HOME shows the personal side of immigration through the eyes of children who face harrowing dangers with enormous courage and resourcefulness as they endeavor to make it to the U.S. The film follows several unaccompanied child migrants as they journey through Mexico en route to the U.S. on a freight train they call "The Beast." Director Rebecca Cammisa ("Sister Helen") tracks the stories of children like Olga and Freddy, nine-year old Hondurans who are desperately trying to reach their families in Minnesota, and Jose, a ten-year-old El Salvadoran who has been abandoned by smugglers and ends up alone in a Mexican detention center, and focuses on Kevin, a canny, streetwise 14-year-old Honduran, whose mother hopes that he will reach New York City and send money back to his family.

These are stories of hope and courage, disappointment and sorrow. They are the ones you never hear about – the invisible ones.

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SUBJECT BIOS**

Kevin

A canny 14-year old Honduran who is traveling through Mexico to get to the United States. His reason: to find a job and send money back to his mother, Lupe. Kevin hopes to buy her a house so that she can leave an abusive relationship. Lupe hopes he will find work, or some U.S. citizen will adopt him. Kevin wants to go to Manhattan.

But the trip he takes is a revelation to Kevin – he was prepared for the harshness of the journey, but the violence that he experiences and witnesses takes its toll. Unexpectedly, he reexamines the high cost migrants pay for their common dream of a better life in the United States

Fito

A 13-year-old Honduran whose mother abandoned him when he was very young. Fito lives with his grandmother, but she is very poor, even though she has a job making cigars. He wants to change his life, so he is traveling to the U.S. for work and also with the hope of being adopted.

Yurico

A 17-year-old Mexican who ran away from his mother and has lived on the streets of Tapachula, Chiapas since he was seven. Yurico proclaims that his life has been spent begging and sleeping on streets, thieving and abusing drugs. He sometimes makes money by washing buses at the city depot. Yurico wants a better life for himself, free of drugs and violence, so he is traveling to the U.S. to find a loving family to help him.

Jairo

A 14-year-old Mexican who has a father that never accepted him, and a mother who was killed one year ago. He has been living on the streets of Chiapas since then, and has decided to go to Laredo, Texas. Jairo's schooling is very important to him, but he cannot afford to continue his education. He wants to find employment in the U.S., and then return to Mexico with money to hire a tutor.

Jose

A nine-year-old Salvadoran whose mother, Rosa, left to go work in the United States. Jose lives with his aunt, and has not seen his mother in three years. Jose wants to live with his mother, so he traveled through Mexico on a bus with a smuggler. When Mexican Immigration boarded the bus, the smuggler abandoned Jose, who was then taken to a detention center.

Olga & Freddy

Nine-year old Hondurans being taken to the U.S. by smugglers. Their means of travel is by climbing onto Mexican freight trains. Olga is trying to get to her mother and sisters in Minnesota, while Freddy is trying to reunite with his father. They both have witnessed many accidents while riding the trains, but hope that God will bless their journey.

Juan Carlos

A 13-year-old Guatemalan who left a letter for his mother, Esmeralda, stating that he was going to the U.S. to help her and his siblings. Juan Carlos' father abandoned the family years ago, so he feels that it is his responsibility to provide for them. He also wants to find his father in New York, and confront him about why he's forgotten them.

## **HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS WHICH WAY HOME DIRECTOR Q&A**

### **How did you become involved the issue of migration?**

In 2002, when I completed my first documentary, "Sister Helen," a friend suggested that unaccompanied child migration should be my next subject. I was completely shocked that this phenomenon was even happening and I immediately started researching the subject. At the time, I could not find any films specifically made about the plights of Central American and Mexican child migrants. So I began the process of trying to find funding for the project.

### **How did you meet your interview subjects?**

I met my subjects in many different ways' mostly in immigration detention centers, by the railroad tracks, and other locations where migrants converged to travel north. I felt it was extremely important to find families of children who had died migrating in the Sonora Desert, to make the point that this is an urgent child welfare issue.

### **What aspect of the children's journey surprised/ shocked you most? Were you surprised by their age, conditions, and circumstances?**

After researching this story for so long, I was not surprised or shocked by the circumstances of child migrants' lives. However, I was taken by their utter commitment to pursuing their dreams of reaching the United States. I did hold my breath when watching our young subjects hopping the trains. Sometimes, they treated the train like a playground; jumping from boxcar to boxcar, jumping off the train to run alongside it, only to jump back on again – just for laughs. They really did not have a "healthy fear" of freight trains as a dangerous means of travel.

### **What kind of impact did your presence have on the journey?**

We wanted our impact to be minimal. As observers, our job was to document their lives while traveling with them. However, since our subjects were children, we made it a point to remind them how dangerous the road ahead could be, and we offered to help connect them with migration officials if they wanted to go home.

The realm we were filming in was full of smugglers, gang members, and corrupt officials. As a crew, we were always mindful of how our child subjects could potentially be put in danger by the presence of our cameras and ourselves. On several occasions, we decided not to travel with children when threats towards us were made.

### **How long was the filming? Were there gaps in between shoots? How did you track your subjects?**

This film took six years to complete, and there were many gaps in between shoots. I first pitched this film idea in early 2003, and received a development grant from the Sundance Documentary Fund. In November 2004, I traveled to Mexico to research, scout locations, film child subjects, and edit a trailer for fundraising purposes. While filming in 2004, I was struck by the huge multitudes of migrants that had crossed over from Guatemala into Tapachula, Mexico, and were waiting on the tracks to hop freight trains going north. This fact made it very easy for us to meet potential subjects. Unfortunately, the development money ran out and I was forced to return to Mexico City and cut a trailer with the footage I had.

Shortly after HBO came on board, I decided to search for an executive producer. That same year, I approached Lianne Halfon, Russell Smith and John Malkovich of Mr. Mudd.

Fortunately, they agreed to executive produce, and while they worked tirelessly to find investors, filming was halted for a year and a half. Because of Mr. Mudds' involvement, I was able to return to Mexico to complete principal filming.

In 2006, investors were found, and I also received a Fulbright Fellowship to Mexico for Filmmaking. This 11-and-a-half-month fellowship began in the fall of 2006, and helped me greatly by providing: 1) a stipend that covered my living expenses, and 2) the most important factor – a work visa, which granted me the extended time in Mexico to complete filming.

Because there were many delays in filming, most of the time we would be forced to begin again with new child subjects. Also, after Hurricane Stan struck in 2005, the landscape in Tapachula, Mexico irrevocably changed. This hurricane destroyed infrastructure, train tracks, and wiped out the train bridge that trains took north. Therefore the trains stopped running and migrants were forced to find other dangerous routes to cross. Partial funding arrived in January 2007, but by the time we returned to film, it was much harder to connect with potential subjects. Our shooting schedule lasted three weeks when bureaucratic and contractual delays forced myself and my crew to suspend filming and leave the field again. Six months later, in July 2007, filming continued, and we had to find new child subjects. Also, the train company that operated in southern Mexico officially folded. We did not realize it at the time, but the train we took with our new child subjects was the last one that went north. Filming halted once again for three weeks, but we were able to follow up with our child subjects in mid-August through September, and again in November 2007.

### **Your crew has incredible access within the governmental agencies in Mexico. How were you able to get clearance?**

Gaining access and permissions from governmental officials and various agencies took many months to obtain. I was very fortunate in meeting Alejandra Liceaga, the film's production manager. She was instrumental in making those initial contacts, building support, and pursuing the permissions until we finally received them.

I must say that we received lots of support and good will from Central American and Mexican officials, who really believed in the story we were trying to tell, and so the accesses were granted.

### **What was your experience like on "The Beast" (the freight train used by migrants to hitch rides to the US border)?**

It ranged from wonderful to downright annoying. Speaking as a cameraperson, the terrain was breathtakingly beautiful and exciting to film. Speaking as a documentarian, riding the train with our child subjects was extremely important. I gained a true appreciation for what migrants sacrifice and endure by traveling just as they do. While I was riding the train in Chiapas, I thought a lot about the undocumented migrants I knew who were working in the U.S. and knew that many of them had made the journey north this same way.

### **Did you have to take any special precautions to ensure safety, as riders are often killed?**

The first day we worked on the train tops took some getting used to. At times, it was extremely frustrating for a crew of three to work effectively.

Keeping the camera steady was sometimes problematic and not getting hurt by passing train braches, or not getting the boom pole tangled in passing power lines, was a bit daunting. On two occasions, Lorenzo Hagerman, our D.P., almost fell off when the train's brakes shook

the boxcars. Also, the train tops are narrow, so we had to make sure we moved around each other, very carefully, to capture our subjects. There were times that it was just too dangerous to get up and move, so we did not do things like hop from moving boxcar to boxcar, and we did not try and climb on and off trains when they were moving at accelerated speeds.

My most frustrating experience aboard was when one of our subjects, Kevin, insisted on climbing onto a particular boxcar. Unfortunately, the top of this car was coated with unsealed fiberglass, and for 14 hours straight, we were all itching terribly because the fiberglass got into every pore of our entire bodies.

### **What is your intended impact for the film?**

To make the public aware of the realities of child migration, and to provide a greater understanding of not only how but also why children are so driven to make this journey alone. Many child migrants are trying to find relatives, so one challenge is how to provide laws that migrating children and their parents can be reunified safely. Lastly, and very hopefully, that this film will serve as a catalyst to promote a dialogue that leads to creating humane, immigration policy reform in the United States.

### **Have your views on US immigration changed since you started making this film?**

No. My views on the U.S. immigration system, vis-à-vis Mexico and Central America, have not changed. The root causes of pan-American migration are neither understood nor addressed appropriately in our country. Compounding it all is the toxic political rhetoric surrounding the issue of undocumented migrants and their place in American society. The resulting myriad of problems associated with immigration issues must be solved in the spirit of a shared responsibility between nations.

In the past, many Central American and Mexican migrants found seasonal employment in the U.S. and then returned to their countries to be with their families. No longer. Since the U.S.-Mexican border has been much harder to cross, undocumented migrants, fearing they will not be able to get across the border again if they go back home, stay in the U.S. Families remain separated until children can be brought (in most cases smuggled) or make their way on their own to this country.

After witnessing what adult and child migrants endure on their journey just because they are trying to achieve a better life in the United States – hunger, violence at the hands of gangs and corrupt officials, rape, and possible death or dismemberment by falling under freight train wheels – I believe that policy reform needs to happen urgently.

**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS  
WHICH WAY HOME  
PRODUCTION BIOS**

**REBECCA CAMMISSA, DIRECTOR**

Rebecca Cammissa became a filmmaker in 1998, when she teamed up with Rob Fruchman to co-direct, co-produce, and shoot the feature documentary film, "Sister Helen," which aired on HBO's Cinemax network, won the 2002 Sundance Film Festival's Documentary Directing Award, and was nominated for a 2004 News Documentary Emmy® Award for Outstanding Cultural & Artistic Programming.

Rebecca also shared in winning the Gold Hugo Award for Best Documentary Film at the Chicago International Film Festival, the Jury Prize for Best Documentary Film at the Newport Film Festival, the Best Documentary Film Award at the Nashville Film Festival, a Grand Marnier Foundation Film Grant, and a New York State Council on the Arts Media Fellowship.

Ms. Cammissa was nominated for a Distinguished Documentary Achievement Award by the International Documentary Association, and was nominated for an Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentary Film Award by the Directors Guild of America.

In 2003, Rebecca founded Documentress Films, and received development support from HBO, the Sundance Documentary Fund, the Wellspring Foundation, and the William J. Fulbright Fellowship in Filmmaking for "Which Way Home."

**LIANNE HALFON, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

After a host of critically-acclaimed independent films, Oscar®-nominated producer Lianne Halfon has truly made her mark in Los Angeles and the entertainment industry at large, and continues to break barriers with her Mr. Mudd producing partners, Russ Smith and John Malkovich.

Most recently, Halfon served as the executive producer of WHICH WAY HOME, a documentary by Sundance Award winner Rebecca Cammissa. The film tells the story of children crossing the border from Mexico into the United States. Shot in Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala and the American southwest, WHICH WAY HOME is currently in post-production and will have a TV premiere on HBO in August 2009.

In 2008, Fox Searchlight released the Mr. Mudd-produced picture *Juno*, It received Oscar® nominations for Best Picture, Best Director and Best Actress, and won the Academy Award for Best Screenplay.

Halfon has served as producer or executive producer on a variety of award-winning films, including the Sundance Grand Jury Prize Winner *Crumb*, *Ghost World*, *The Dancer Upstairs*, and *How To Draw A Bunny*.

**JOHN MALKOVICH, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

John Malkovich is one of the most compelling presences in cinema today, with thought-provoking performances in countless independent films, mainstream movies, and international theater productions.

The acclaimed actor is currently in production on *Jonah Hex*, the upcoming superhero film co-starring Josh Brolin, Michael Shannon and Will Arnett. Directed by Jimmy Hayward (*Horton Hears a Who*), the film will be distributed by Warner Brothers. As a producer, Malkovich is overseeing the production of the feature film adaptations of *Paper Towns* and *Broken City* with his Mr. Mudd banner.

Malkovich recently starred in *The Great Buck Howard* opposite Tom Hanks, which had its premiere at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, and The Coen Brothers' comedy, *Burn After Reading*, in which Malkovich is part of a stellar ensemble featuring Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Frances McDormand and Tilda Swinton. The film premiered at the 2008 Venice Festival. Also in 2008, Malkovich re-teamed with Clint Eastwood for the highly-anticipated film *Changeling* with Angelina Jolie and Amy Ryan and produced by Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's Imagine Entertainment.

In 1998 John Malkovich joined producing partners Lianne Halfon and Russ Smith to create the production company Mr. Mudd, whose first film was the notable *Ghost World*, directed by Terry Zwigoff. In 2003, Malkovich followed this up with his own feature directorial debut, *The Dancer Upstairs*, starring Academy Award® winner Javier Bardem. Other Mr. Mudd credits include *The Libertine*, starring Johnny Depp and Samantha Morton and *Art School Confidential*, also directed by Zwigoff and written by screenwriter/cartoonist Dan Clowes. Last year, Mr. Mudd landed its biggest box office and critical success with *Juno*, starring Ellen Page, Jennifer Garner and Jason Bateman. The film, distributed through Fox Searchlight, received an Academy Award® for Best Original Screenplay (Diablo Cody) and three other nominations, for Best Motion Picture, Best Actress (Ellen Page) and Best Director (Jason Reitman).

#### **RUSSELL SMITH, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**

With an established background as a producer of some of America's finest theatre, Russell Smith has segued to film, and become a go-to producer for cutting-edge independent cinema, garnering numerous honors, including an Academy Award® nomination, along the way.

Along with his Mr. Mudd partners, John Malkovich and Lianne Halfon, Smith served as executive producer of WHICH WAY HOME, a documentary by Sundance Award winner Rebecca Cammisa. The film tells the story of children crossing the border from Mexico into the United States. Shot in Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala and the American southwest, WHICH WAY HOME is currently in post-production and will have a TV premiere on HBO in August 2009.

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HBO Documentary Films Presentation  
in association with GOOD/White Buffalo Entertainment  
of a Mr. Mudd/Documentress Films Production

# WHICH WAY HOME

Directed and Produced by Rebecca Cammisa

Executive Producers

Lianne Halfon  
John Malkovich  
Russell Smith

Executive Producers

Jack Turner  
Bristol Baughan  
Bette Cerf Hill

For HBO Documentary Films

Executive Producer  
Sheila Nevins

For HBO Documentary Films

Supervising Producer  
Sara Bernstein

Directors of Photography

Lorenzo Hagerman  
Eric Goethals

Camera Operators

Lorenzo Hagerman  
Rebecca Cammisa  
Eric Goethals

Editors

Pax Wassermann  
Madeleine Gavin

Music Composed By

James Lavino

Additional Music Composed By

Alberto Iglesias

Sound

Luis Mercio  
Gabriel Coll Barberis  
Jesus Sanchez Padilla  
Eduardo Trejo

Field Producers  
Nina Alvarez  
Eric Goethals  
Lorenzo Hagerman  
Alejandra Liceaga

Field Producers  
Stephany Slaughter  
Gabriela Sosa  
Sascha Weiss

Production Manager  
Alejandra Liceaga