

Creating A Documentary About The Oil Field

Their faces, along with their cameras, could be seen all around Stanley for most of the last month, but it all started last January with a New York Times article about oil in North Dakota. That's when Noah Hutton, Sara Kendall and Sam Howard first got the idea to come to North Dakota and create a documentary about life in the middle of an oil boom.

Sara is originally from New York City. She is attending school in Southern California, where she is majoring in a combination of liberal arts and politics. Sam is originally from the Los Angeles area. He is attending school in New York where he's majoring in business but also has an interest in film. Noah is originally from New York City and is attending school there where he is majoring in art history and neuroscience. Sara and Noah are friends that met while they were in high school, while Noah and Sam are stepbrothers.

Last January Noah came to North Dakota and spent about a week here. He drove around and talked to people in Stanley, Tioga, Bismarck and just about all over. He decided this was the project he wanted to do and then spent through the spring raising money from independent donors. He says they raised just enough to get here and pay their expenses while they were here.

The three arrived in Stanley on June 19 and checked into the Painted Horse Motel. Originally they thought they might do interviews and film in other areas, but in the end they focused their base on Stanley. Their time in Stanley came to an end as they were scheduled to leave on Sunday, July 20.

While here they did about thirty individual interviews. They also

spent some time interviewing and attending meetings that were sponsored by Senator Byron Dorgan when he was last in North Dakota. They also attended a Stanley City Council meeting.

Most of the interviews focused on how the oil boom affects everyone, including the influx of new people and the businesses necessary to support the industry. They strove to get a wide variety of interviews including young people, rig workers, city and county officials, as well as landowners being impacted by the oil boom. They spent time at the courthouse, including getting shots of the lines of briefcases in the morning that establishes the order for the land people as they do their research. As part of their interviews, they also spoke to County Recorder Joanne Stanley and County Clerk of Court Debbie Nichols.

All totaled they expected to have about 40 hours of film by the time they left. That included interviews and filming of rigs and just general activity in the area. Their footage also includes flights over the rigs. Danny Lindberg took them up once during the day and once at night to film the area from the air.

Looking at the trio, you noticed they were frequently using both a larger, more sophisticated camera as well as a smaller, handheld camera. They say this allowed them to get simultaneous cover from different perspectives, which came in handy in situations like the July 4 parade and attending public meetings.

The ultimate goal with all the footage is to create an independent documentary and submit it to festivals by this fall. The film should be between one and one and one-half hours long once completed. They hope to have an unbiased look at what's happening. They've seen the media coverage and recognize that most come wanting to find what will fill their lead, edge or preconceptions rather than just looking for the story. Their goal is not to guide people or influence them with their own approach, but rather to let what the interviewee says dictate the story and its direction.

Along the way, they say they made some friends in Stanley. They also say they got to see a different side of life. They come from a liberal, spread out area to a completely different lifestyle in a small conservative town. They found tight knit families that live close to each other by choice and thought it was really interesting to see how friendly the community really was. They also gained a different perception about the American worker, far from what they have ever seen at home.

As they go, each will take something different with them. Sara says that what impressed her was how

open the landscape is, the enormous sunsets and the feeling that the sky starts at your ankle. She was touched by the hospitality she encountered as she shed some of the distrust of people that she saw in her own environment. She smiles when she talks about trying to reconcile that people leave their keys in the ignition.

Noah says he saw the openness even extend to the politicians they interviewed. He found that with Senator Dorgan, whom they interviewed first in Medora. They then followed him to his town meeting in Stanley where he made a point of introducing them to everyone in the room. He hopes to come back here someday.

Editing for the film will start as soon as they get home. Noah says he wants to devote the necessary time to get it done by late fall. He has someone waiting in New York to help with the process.

Noah spent last summer in Uganda working on a documentary film and knew that he wanted to find something to do this summer. This project was a perfect fit for someone who admits that he is interested in film as a craft, not something he is studying. Sara has a grant from school to write a piece of non-fiction about her experiences during this project. She will finish that this fall as well. Sam, who isn't really interested in film as much as the others, says his job was budget and marketing. However, he too is glad he came.

Sam is a ten-year Viking fan, which can be difficult when you live on either coast. He has friends in New York he gets together with, but being in an area with so many Viking fans was a change for him. He was sad to miss training camp since they were headed home on Sunday, but he says he would love to come back and try that. He also says he would love to keep in touch with some of the other Viking fans he met here.

All of them are glad they stayed this long. They say that by settling in they were able to get a better sense of what's going on. They also believe they were able to talk to a wider range of people that had they swooped in and out. In the end, they have made relationships and they plan to stay in touch. They believe this will show up in their film as well.

To follow up on their project, you can check out their website at <http://couple3.com> and check out their blog at <http://couple3.com/blog>