

Raid of the Rainbow Lounge

Filmmaker documents police action against gay bar in Texas

By Chris Carpenter

When Robert L. Camina learned that a newly opened watering hole for the LGBT community in Fort Worth, Texas, had been raided by police one night in June 2009, the young gay man grabbed his camera, began interviewing witnesses and became a filmmaker overnight.

The raid of the Rainbow Lounge ended up drawing national media attention, not the least because it occurred on the 40th anniversary of New York City's historic Stonewall Riots. But Camina's feature-length documentary about the incident serves as the definitive record of the incident.

Narrated by out actress Meredith Baxter (*Family Ties*), *Raid of the Rainbow Lounge* has won awards for Best Film and Best Documentary at festivals across the U.S. It is an objective account that shows how a community can change for the better when its LGBT citizens organize against injustice.

Camina, who is working toward distribution of the film this year, talked about his film during a telephone interview.

Question: How has your film been received at prior fests?

Answer: It's been received really well. The Desperado Festival will be the 20th fest we've screened at. The through-line I've heard at all the screenings is how shocked people are that this is so recent. People go in thinking the raid took place in the 1950s or '60s, not four years ago. That, and they are

impressed by [Fort Worth Police] Chief Halstead's 180-degree change on LGBT issues.

Q: Can you elaborate on Chief Jeff Halstead's connection to Phoenix?

A: He actually moved from Phoenix to Fort Worth in 2009 to become the police chief. He had only been chief for a few months when the raid occurred. Halstead was a 20-year veteran of the Phoenix Police Department and had been commander of its Homeland Defense Bureau. He began his law enforcement career in Phoenix as a patrol officer in 1988. People have been impressed by how Halstead owned his flaws in handling the raid, and he has gone from being a target of hate speech and death threats to a respected, outspoken advocate for LGBT equality and a hero to many.

Q: What impact would you say your film is having?

A: It illustrates that communities can come together and create change. I received an invitation from the U.S. State Department to screen the movie for a delegation of international leaders gathered to discuss human and civil rights for the LGBT community. The White House and Department of Justice have requested DVD screeners of the film. We are having an impact far beyond Texas; it's having an international impact.

Q: How did you fund the movie?

A: I joke that I made this movie com-

pletely backwards. I jumped in and shot it first, and worried about funding later! Shooting and editing the film was a two and a half year process. We used online fundraising, eBay, art auctions. I even did drag one night. We do what we have to do. The film really wouldn't have been possible, though, without the generosity of my associate producers, Thomas R. Anable, Charles Goodman, Shep Shepard and Brian Long.

Q: What have you learned from your experience? What advice would you give other novice filmmakers?

A: Stay true to your vision. It sounds cliché, but there are so many filmmakers out there now since movies are a lot easier to make with online resources. It can get very frustrating to get your film out there, so you have to stick with it. And I've learned that on future projects, I will definitely have pre-production.

Q: Do you have any other projects in the works?

A: In 2013, I hope to start production on a comedy. *Raid* was the right film for me to begin with at the right time, but I love comedy and look forward to narrative storytelling.

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Raid of the Rainbow Lounge will be screened at 3 p.m. Jan. 26 at the Desperado LGBT Film Festival. Filmmaker Robert L. Camina will do a Q&A after the screening.



Photo by Felipe Gutierrez

A candlelight vigil outside the Rainbow Lounge.