

WEHO TIMES

- **Culture**

Documentary Film DISARM HATE Explores Gun Violence Against the LGBTQ Community

By

Paulo Murillo

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Documentary feature film *Disarm Hate* — a movie about the effects of gun violence against the LGBT community — is finally getting its worldwide release today, June 23, 2020, via multiple streaming platforms, including Amazon Prime Video, FandangoNOW, Google Play/You Tube Rentals, InDemand (Comcast & Cox), Microsoft Store and Vudu.

It is available in the following link: <https://linktr.ee/Disarmhate>

The documentary narrated by Harvey Fierstein, takes place four years ago in 2016, two months after the Pulse gay nightclub shooting in Orlando Florida where 49 lives were lost. Director Julianna Brudek documents nine LGBT individuals who decide to pack into an RV and make the uncomfortable long haul from Los Angeles to Washington DC to be part of the *Disarm Hate* rally, an LGBT demonstration calling for gun reform and an end to gun violence against LGBT people.

The cast includes some familiar faces like Ashlee Marie Preston, a diversity speaker, media Advocate, trans activist and executive producer of the film; Asher Glynn, actor, activist, stay at home parent; Alexis Sanchez, activist, Advisory Board Member at City of West Hollywood; Chris Bland, “Retail Queen” at Macy’s, activist; Donato Crowley, artist, actor, designer; Dusty O’Donnell, USAF veteran, peer support specialist, stand-up comic; Joey Gylonda, motivator, artist, activist; Michelle Haro, actor, singer, drummer; and Rachel Fisher, actor, writer, podcaster, pie chef.

The film captures the discomfort, the obstacles, the RV breakdowns, nervous outbreaks, laughter, friendship, moving moments and there's even a romantic hookup, as the nine individuals share their personal stories and learn about the history of gun violence in the LGBT community. They shoot guns at a shooting range, visit past crime scenes where LGBT people were murdered or injured by guns, and they meet a member of the Pink Pistols, the nation's first pro-gay, pro-gun group.

On the other side of the country, footage follows the struggle of Jason Hayes, a New Jersey celebrity hairdresser, activist and the organizer of the Disarm Hate rally. Hayes had no political experience, money or celebrity backing when he began organizing the national rally to demand LGBTQ equal rights, fight the NRA and challenge America's obsession with gun violence.

The documentary feature, a Rugged releasing, a subsidiary of Rugged Entertainment, is a call to action for anyone new to activism, tired of divisive media politics and ready to get out and make the world a better place by spreading knowledge, understanding and compassion in a world where it is lacking.



Julianna Brudek, Director

In this WEHO TIMES interview, director of Disarm Hate Julianna Brudeck, looks back at the sweat and tears she poured into the film and what motivated her to keep trudging until the film was released to the masses. "I wanted to bring awareness to how disproportionately gun violence has affected the less privileged members of our community," she said. "Two weeks before Matthew Shepard was brutally murdered, Rita Hester, a trans woman of color, was murdered, and the media buried the story. Forgotten forever. I didn't want that to happen to the Hispanic LGBTQs that lost their lives at Pulse Nightclub. As a community, we must remember the hate crimes, and work together to stop violence perpetrated on each and every one of us."

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What was the Genesis of the Disarm Hate Documentary?

The Pulse shooting in Orlando happened on June 12th, 2016. I was sitting on the couch watching the news pour in. It was devastating. Pride in Los Angeles was the next day and I couldn't sleep a wink. My partner and I went to Pride and there was a bomb scare. The tension on the parade route was palpable. It was unlike any pride I'd ever been to. Police and bomb squads were there en masse. It was a horrible feeling. The vigil in Los Angeles for Pulse was Monday after Pride at city hall. The days after just melted by. I felt so helpless. I thought, 'What can I do? Where can I go?' No one was properly addressing this tragedy. Every waking moment, I searched forums and facebook for events that would celebrate

these 49 lives lost at Pulse. Suddenly, I saw a post by this man, Jason Hayes, a celebrity wig stylist. He was putting together a national rally in D.C. at breakneck speed to celebrate the 49 lives lost at Pulse, demand LGBTQ equal rights and sensible gun reform He called the rally: DISARM HATE. I said, 'I have to get there to film this!'

At what point did the idea become a reality for you?

Right after I saw Jason Hayes' post online. I found him on facebook and started inboxing him. He left me on READ for a week. He didn't respond. I was persistent though. That's the one thing I learned in film school. You might meet people and network, but it means nothing if you don't follow up and be persistent. Well, I kept writing him. I must have annoyed the hell out of him. He finally called me one day at the end of June and said, 'I can't even pay for this rally let alone finance your film.' I laughed. I didn't expect that but that was the first thing Jason said to me. We laugh about it today. Once I got his blessing that I could come to DC and film him and his rally, I set up an Indiegogo page and started asking for funding.

How did you end up selecting the cast of characters?

So, at some point, I realized that filming a rally alone would be super weird. Like, that's great for archival purposes, but I wanted to document this moment after Pulse. We were in such a strange time politically. It was the summer before Trump was elected. Also, I thought it would be great if members of the LGBTQ community would come with me. We would start a conversation on the road to Disarm Hate. At first, I didn't know who to bring or how many. I looked through my facebook for friends. I looked through my files at all my casting headshots. I was a talent booker and casting assistant for years for MTV, ABC, etc, so I had all these headshots. But I thought these have to be activists or at least people that would be excited by the thought of this. I put down three piles on the floor. My first batch included ten. Second batch, same. I reached out to first batch of people and eight out of ten said yes. That's who I'll take. Dusty, Donato, Alexis, Ashlee-Marie, Rachel, Chris, Joey, and Michelle.

I did not expect such a high return. I really thought no one would be up for this. When eight said yes, I looked into RVs that would be able to house all eight plus the film crew. Lastly, Asher Glynn was my unexpected number nine. He was a dear friend of mine. We both lost the same mentor from suicide months prior. He called me up when he heard about the project and demanded, 'I gotta come with you.' I couldn't refuse.

How did you get Harvey Fierstein on board to narrate your movie?

Jason Hayes, the founder of the national Rally, DISARM HATE and for whom this film follows, has done Harvey's hair/wigs on broadway for years. Harvey was a huge supporter of the rally, DISARM HATE and an ardent gun violence prevention advocate. As many in our community know, he was the first out loud and proud activist in the industry. He provided the narration as a way of support for DISARM HATE and the movement.

Did you have any idea you would get the kind of footage that you got in the RV?

No. Years of working in reality TV and on film sets would never have prepared me for the hell that awaited me on the RV. During planning, It seemed easy. Once on the road, so many things went wrong. The RV was way too small and went very slowly. We were literally four

hours behind schedule on the first day and that led to half a day behind the next day and so on and so forth. We could never catch up no matter how fast or how prudently we stuck to the schedule. The Fridge broke down the first day and all the crafty spoiled. For the rest of the trip the RV smelled like the trash behind your favorite sushi restaurant. No one could sleep in the cramped space provided. The first night, I was lying on the sticky, dirty floor next to the DP, Jim. Both of us were cradling our cameras. We had just filmed/ driven 20 hours and we were just trying to shut our eyes for a few minutes. I looked over at him and he shot me a look that said, we are going to die and I hate you. This was day one. We had eight more to go.

As you could imagine, the above environment made it very intimate. When filming, I was literally in everyone's faces. I think the rawness is unlike anything you've seen. I captured it because of this completely undesirable filming situation.

At what point did you realize you had something special that you felt you needed to share with the world?

When I got home, I got halfway into my house, dropped my footage and flopped over on the couch in the living room. I was exhausted. I didn't get up for two days. I didn't look at the footage for two weeks. When I finally looked at it, I thought no, this isn't a film. I was very discouraged that the trip nearly killed me and I had nothing to show for it. I showed a couple of clips to an editing friend of mine and she said, "Keep going. This has value."

Whose idea was it to send the cast to shoot guns at a shooting range?

Mine. I believe in a well-rounded education. I do not like guns, however, I thought if we were going to talk about guns and how gun violence has affected our community, we needed to feel the power in our hands. To see what it's really about. Out of the nine, I think six had never shot a gun before.

What made you the most nervous while being on the road?

We were at a gas station in Arkansas and there was a pick-up truck full of shirtless men in the parking lot in front. One of our cast, Alexis, a trans Lantix woman, had to use the bathroom but, no one stayed behind to walk with her. Everyone just left the RV. She was afraid to leave by herself. Alexis had already experienced fear on the road, unbeknownst to me, she was sized up and given dirty looks at a previous gas stations in the South. When, I learned of this, I started thinking more about how we can be safer as a group.

The other scary thing that happened. We were in the middle of the woods, parked to the side and the sun was going down. Someone left the RV on while we filmed a segment and the battery completely drained. I had to go get jumper cables and get us up and running again. I panicked. It was completely possible that we would be stranded in the middle of the woods, on the Appalachian Trail In Pennsylvania. This is in the movie.

What are some of the fondest memories you have about that trip?

Watching these nine people come together and emote. There was something so disarming about the way they broke down barriers in communication. The way they wanted to talk about the violence that plagues our community and how we can best be activists. I was watching them through the lens of a camera primarily but I saw nine authentic people that really wanted to evoke change. And the message is clear. Change comes by listening to each other. Allyship is listening.



Juliana Brudek at the All Black Lives Matter March – Photo by Peter Spierer

Is there anything you wish you'd done differently?

I wish I would have kept in better touch with the cast. After the film wrapped, I was consumed by finishing it. It took everything I had. I went through four editors. If I thought the RV was a nightmare, I had no idea what was to come in post production. I put my whole life on hold and I lost sight of important relationships. I admire the cast so much. I wish I checked in with them more.

The Doc was shot four years ago. What's your relationship like with the cast members today?

I am very close to Ashlee-Marie Preston. She is also the executive producer on the film. I don't think the rest of the cast expected it to take so long to finish. They are very professional. They have been good sports about the whole process.

What kind of feedback did you get from them after they saw the finished product?

Mixed. Some of them really love the film. Others like Dusty, expressed disappointment with not being in it as much as she would have liked.



Disarm Hate at the All Lives Matter in front of My 12 Step Store in West Hollywood – Photo by Paulo Murillo for WEHO TIMES

When you strip down the Doc to its bare bones, what is the main message that you hope to convey to the viewer?

It takes one person to make a difference. LOVE IS ACTION.

Who do you think will be interested in this sort of documentary?

Everyone in the LGBTQ community will find something of value in this documentary. Straight allies will learn so much too. I have to confess, I didn't really know the fractures within our own community. I didn't know what it took to put on a national rally. I didn't know what it took to listen — truly listen to people even when they share similar opinions.

What do you recommend most about your new movie?

This is the LGBTQ community raw and exposed. You've never seen anything like it before.

Lastly, what does it feel like for you personally to have your movie finally come out to be consumed by the masses?

Ah. I finished it. I can die now. Just kidding. I never thought this day would come. I'm proud and beyond grateful regardless of what happens next.

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The crew of Disarm Hate includes: Julianna Brudek, Director; Peter Spierer, Executive Producer; Ashlee Marie Preston, Ex. Producer & Cast; Daniela Hinsch, Editor; and RJ Holguin, Producer.

Disarm Hate became available for viewing today, June 23, 2020. To learn more, visit the film's social media platforms at:

<https://www.facebook.com/DOC2DISARMHATE/>

Twitter: [@DISARMHATE](https://twitter.com/DISARMHATE)

Instagram: [DOC2DISARMHATE](https://www.instagram.com/DOC2DISARMHATE)

<https://wehotimes.com/documentary-film-disarm-hate-explores-gun-violence-against-the-lgbtq-community/>