

## Production Information

---

“Now comes the threat of climate crisis--a threat that is real, rising, imminent, and universal. Once again, it is the 11th hour,” said Al Gore in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Peace Prize, and then he posed a challenging rhetorical question: “Have we the will to act vigorously and in time, or will we remain imprisoned by a dangerous illusion?”

By the time these words were spoken, Brian Hill, the acclaimed British documentarian, and his longtime producing partner, Katie Bailiff, were already at work on *Climate of Change*, a new project under their Century Films Ltd. banner that would bring attention to ordinary, everyday people forced by circumstance to “act vigorously and in time.”

It was Century Films’ eclectic, award-winning slate of topical human interest documentaries for British television that brought Hill and Bailiff to the attention of Diane Weyermann, EVP of Documentary Films for Participant Media, the company responsible for Al Gore’s global wake-up call, the internationally acclaimed documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*.

Weyermann encouraged Hill and Bailiff to make a full-length film that would further illustrate the impact of climate change on ordinary people, who have taken extraordinary measures to find solutions to this problem. They discussed a more positive, even optimistic documentary about regular citizens who were tackling these enormous problems on their own, in their own communities, out of their own pockets.

“We are making a record of what people are doing around the world to take positive steps towards ending global warming,” says director Hill. “People from all walks of life, cultures, religions, and from disparate parts of the planet have decided that things have gone far enough and are taking responsibility for the world they live in.”

The filmmakers traveled the globe in search of compelling subjects, the ones who form the “tip of the spear” of the green revolution. They narrowed down their selections to four continents (Eurasia, Africa, North America and Australia/Oceania). For some of the sequences, subjects speak of the actions they are taking to improve their environments; in others, the visibly toxic environments speak all too well for them.

In India, they discovered a group of precocious thirteen year old students demonstrating against nonbiodegradable plastics in the streets of Patna; their impeccable school uniforms and clipped English accents contrast radically with the grinning ragamuffins who rushed the film

crew every time Hill and company set out to capture the lifestyle of Dharavi, the vast slum section of Mumbai where perhaps a million people of all ages grapple for existence each day.

In America, they documented the struggle against the shocking residual damage to the Appalachian Mountains caused by big coal companies in West Virginia as well as the seven adjacent states that also suffer degradation to their mountains, forests, water and air. Infuriated residents, some going back seven generations, take their fevered appeals to Washington, D.C. where they lobby Congress for increasingly strict legislation to prevent the irresponsible decapitation of mountaintops and the poisoning of freshwater streams.

“Nothing could have prepared me for the scale of destruction of the natural landscape in West Virginia,” says director Hill. “I find it almost unbelievable that in a 21st century democracy, coal mining companies are allowed to destroy mountains, poison waterways and fill in valleys, just in order to gain more profit. It felt like stepping back into the era of 19th century robber barons, who did exactly as they pleased with no thought for the consequences to the environment or the people who live there.”

In Africa, they met Joshua Sena Alouka, a tireless activist in Togo who has galvanized his countrymen to become crusaders for conservation. In an interview with *In Motion Magazine*, he explained how his group got started and his own zealous commitment to the cause:

*“It started in a mountainous region. When I was very young I lived in a big forest. But if I bring you to my village today you will believe that you are in the Sahara. But you are not in the Sahara. You are in Togo in West Africa, which originally was in the tropical region. It started from this point. We were touched by the degradation of the environment and we put together some youths, some children, and we started this thing. Little by little, people started appreciating what we were doing...they see the real effect, that the real consequence is the good impact that our work is producing on the environment. Now more children are involved in this environmental process, and they have started to have confidence.”*

In Papua New Guinea, where loggers have already decimated two-thirds of the world's second largest rainforest, they met Sep Galeva, a former policeman who left a good job in Port Moresby and returned to his boyhood home to do his part in rescuing his beloved rainforest from the big logging companies. He has worked in coordination with Greenpeace UK and Greenpeace Australia Pacific and explains their recent accomplishments:

*“What we have shown is that anybody can do this. Forest communities around PNG don't have to rely on industrial logging for survival, they can do it themselves in a way that protects the environment and keeps the land for future generations. Our bad experience with illegal and destructive logging from the Kiunga Aiambak road project, run by Concord Pacific, made my people choose eco-forestry instead so that we have control over our land.”*

In London, they chronicled a few days in the life of an environmental warrior of an altogether different sort, the utterly *au courant* Solitaire Townsend, who is about to be named “UK Ethical Businesswoman of the Year” for the 100% eco-friendly and/or socially conscious work she does on behalf of the marketing company she co-founded, Futerra Sustainability Communications. “Solitaire was a tough call for the film,” admits Hill. “She's a sophisticated, well-connected professional woman who runs a communications company. I felt it was important to include a middle class westerner who was taking a stand against climate change and doing her bit to help.”

In the uppermost Atlantic Ocean, about 600 miles from the North Pole, is the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard, where the Global Seed Vault (also known as the Doomsday Vault) opened in February 2008. Here is a man-made wonder, a Noah’s Ark of plant life, with duplicates of 4.5 million original seeds stored in 1,400 gene-banks found in 100 countries around the world; there are 100,000 different varieties of rice alone. Hill went there with the smallest crew yet--a cinematographer, sound recordist and his 13 year old son, who pitched in on odd jobs during his school holiday.

*...Here is a nursery of a kind.  
Here, cradled in permafrost, rooted in ice*

*lie the kernels and pips, the stones and beans,  
the bracken and fern, the rose and the peach,  
the stamen and tendril, the stalk and the leaf.*

*All in all an implausible crib  
where the inklings of life*

*lie dozing under the northern star,  
lie waiting under the frozen north,  
lie dormant under a polar roof.*

*A doomsday allotment, just in case.*

*The seeds of the world for the world after this.*

*The work and the sign of a civilization  
stashing provisions and holding its breath.*

- Simon Armitage, *Climate of Change*

\*

The Svalbard Global Seed Vault inspired *Climate of Change* screenwriter Simon Armitage to compose some of his most poignant verse, voiced with contrapuntal lyricism by the film's narrator, the brilliant Academy Award®-winning actress Tilda Swinton. One of his country's most venerated writers in all forms of media, Armitage was named Britain's official Millennium Poet in 2000. He has frequently collaborated with Brian Hill since their groundbreaking 1998 BBC2 documentary *Drinking for England*, an entertaining yet cautionary tale set to free verse and song.

Hill believes the two of them may have inadvertently spawned a new genre of film, the musical documentary; a later project for Channel 4, *Feltham Sings*, earned Hill a BAFTA Award for Best Documentary while Armitage picked up an Ivor Novello Award for his lyrics. Katie Bailiff has produced all of their musical documentaries, most recently *Songbirds*, which was accepted into the World Documentary Competition at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival.