

WOMAN ON FIRE

A FILM BY JULIE SOKOLOW

DISTRIBUTION COMPANY:

Meredith Finch
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FILMMAKING TEAM:

Danny Yourd
Producer
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Julie Sokolow
Director
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Documentary Feature, Color, 84 Minutes © 2016 ANIMAL, All Rights Reserved

Press Quotes:

Woman on Fire is "just what a great social awareness doc should be — equal parts heartwarming and infuriating." - **The Village Voice**

"Woman on Fire is a moving portrait of a New Yorker who's never been afraid to run where she needs to go, regardless of the dangers that might be waiting for her on the other side." - **Indiewire**

Woman on Fire's subject Brooke Guinan is "a superhero for the 21st century". - **Salon**

Woman on Fire is "essential festival viewing". Brooke Guinan is "a smart, funny, and determined role model". - **Toronto Film Scene**

Woman on Fire "adds up to something more than a profile of a singular heroic person; it's the story of a family that overcomes its initial anxieties to accept one of its own." - **Film-Forward**

Woman on Fire is a "remarkable portrait of a third-generation New York City firefighter" - **Eye for Film**

The film offers engaging portrait after engaging portrait, allowing everyone a chance to speak their mind" - **Hammer to Nail**

"Of all the documentaries premiering at this year's DOC NYC festival, none may be closer to New Yorkers' hearts than Woman on Fire." - **Nonfiction Film**

Links to Press:

[Village Voice](#)

[IndieWire](#)

[Salon](#)

[Toronto Film Scene](#)

[Film-Forward](#)

[Eye for Film](#)

[Hammer to Nail](#)

[Nonfiction Film](#)

Screenings to Date:

DOC NYC - New York, NY - November 2016
Oxford Film Festival - Oxford, MS - February 2017
Chicago Feminist Film Festival - Chicago, IL - March 2017
Thessaloniki Documentary Festival - Thessaloniki, Greece - March 2017
Omaha Film Festival - Omaha, NE - March 2017
Atlanta Film Festival - Atlanta, GA - March 2017
Wicked Queer: Boston LGBT Film Festival - Boston, MA - April 2017
Kansas City FilmFest - Kansas City, MO - April 2017
Florida Film Festival - Orlando, FL - April 2017
Newport Beach Film Festival - Costa Mesa, CA - April 2017
Bentonville Film Festival - Bentonville, AK - May 2017
Workers Unite Film Festival - New York, NY - May 2017
Inside Out - Toronto, ON - May 2017
The People's Film Festival - Harlem, NY - June 2017
Brooklyn Pride - Brooklyn, NY - June 2017
Frameline Film Festival - San Francisco, CA - June 2017
Female Eye Film Festival - Toronto, ON - June 2017
Seattle Transmedia and Independent Film Festival - Seattle, WA - July 2017
NewFest- Jackson Heights, NY - August 2017
Carnegie Museum of Art - Pittsburgh, PA - August 2017
Austin Gay and Lesbian International Film Festival - Austin, TX - September 2017
Outflix Film Festival - Memphis, TN - September 2017
Reeling: The Chicago LGBTQ+ International Film Festival - Chicago, IL - September 2017

Awards to Date:

Best Documentary Feature by Audience Award - Bentonville Film Festival - 2017
Best LGBT Film by Jury - Oxford Film Festival - 2017
Best Documentary Feature by Jury - Kansas City Film Fest - 2017
Best Documentary Feature by Jury - Workers Unite Film Festival - 2017

SHORT SYNOPSIS:

This portrait of courage under fire celebrates NYC's first openly transgender firefighter. For Brooke Guinan, fighting fires runs in her blood – both her father and grandfather served in the FDNY. But as a transgender woman, her path to service has not been without obstacles. Transitioning from male to female in what is still an overwhelmingly macho profession proves a challenge for her coworkers and her family, while her boyfriend reckons with the impact of Brooke's newly public profile on his parents.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

In February 2015, the Village Voice heralded the arrival of “New York's Bravest” – Brooke Guinan, the first openly transgender firefighter in New York City. As a third-generation firefighter, Brooke has a passion for heroism that runs in her blood. Her father George is a respected lieutenant and 9/11 survivor with a 35-year legacy in the FDNY. People always asked Brooke if she would follow in her father's footsteps. But when Brooke transitions from male to female in her father's workplace, it poses not only a challenge to a macho profession, but also to the customs of the people she cares about the most – her traditional family.

Meanwhile, Brooke's boyfriend of two years, Jim, struggles with to come out to his family. A wise-cracking Air Force veteran, Jim still hasn't told his mother that Brooke is a transwoman. Brooke and Jim realize that having the life they want means being vulnerable in the face of judgment. As we watch the couple buy a house together and consider marriage, we reconsider what it means to be man and woman, gay and straight, traditional and nontraditional. A heartfelt portrait of change in the American family and workplace, *Woman on Fire* is a testament to love, courage, and loyalty.

LOGLINE:

Woman on Fire follows Brooke Guinan, the first openly transgender firefighter in New York City. A character-driven documentary, the film follows Brooke as she sets out to challenge perceptions of what it means to be transgender in America today.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

Brooke's radical fierceness in a viral photograph for the 2014 "So Trans So What" campaign captured my imagination—and that surprised me. I am not transgender, and before I met Brooke, I had never engaged deeply with a trans individual. Learning and expanding my perspective was a critical component to my process during the making of *Woman On Fire*.

Trans people often only make headlines because they are the victims of tragedy, denied of their human rights or worse, murdered for simply being who they are. Brooke's version is different: she entered the spotlight as an empowered hero. Her experience offers a space to positively center trans lives and offer hope for a more just and inclusive society. This isn't the story of an outsider. It is the story of America.

I spent a lot of time filming as a one-woman crew. There were week-long stretches where I would basically live with Brooke and her family. I was so intrigued by Brooke's relationship with her father George, a second-generation FDNY lieutenant who is Republican and devoutly Christian. Brooke's family is a microcosm of the polarized political forces in America today. George's acceptance of Brooke suggests that our divided society is capable of reconciling its differences, that love can trump hate.

My friendship with Brooke developed quickly, which encouraged the film's intimate style. As a cis-gender bisexual woman, I connected with the anecdotes that Brooke shared with me. Brooke's process of coming out as a transgender woman in a macho workplace—the New York Fire Department—resonated deeply. It reminded me of my own, smaller struggle to assert myself in the hetero male-dominated film industry.

Brooke's inner strength and resilience was a source of inspiration and kept me going throughout the filmmaking process. While we were shooting, we faced the challenge of gaining access to film inside FDNY firehouses. Fortunately, the FDNY press office supported our film due to their respect for Brooke and George. As a result, *Woman on Fire* possesses uniquely intimate footage of firehouse culture.

Brooke taught me how to stand taller in the face of fear and live authentically. Society is ultimately flexible, what is strange today is familiar tomorrow. It's up to each individual to be the trailblazer of her own life, to be true to herself and to stand up for the rights of others.

Currently, there are only 52 women firefighters in a workforce of over 10,000 FDNY firefighters. That is less than 1%. There has only ever been one openly transgender NYC firefighter—Brooke Guinan. In society at large, ninety percent of trans people report experiencing discrimination in the workplace. Their unemployment rate is double that of the general population.

Woman on Fire demonstrates the struggles women and LGBTQ people face in the workplace. The film reveals the dire need for these populations to have access to good paying, secure jobs in the FDNY and beyond. Most importantly, *Woman On Fire* is a celebration of Brooke and her female and LGBTQ colleagues who work hard and succeed in the face of intense opposition.

SELECT CHARACTER BIOS:

Brooke Guinan

Brooke Guinan is the first openly transgender firefighter in NY and a role model and advocate in the LGBTQ community. She's been featured on MSNBC, Huffington Post, The Advocate, NY Daily News, and in 2015, her story made the cover of the Village Voice. She currently works at FDNY Headquarters where she is the LGBTQ Outreach Coordinator. She's developing the FDNY's first LGBTQ training program and frequently speaks at colleges, universities, and rallies to spread awareness about trans issues.

George Guinan - Brooke's Father

George Guinan is Brooke's father and an FDNY lieutenant in Brooklyn with a 35-year legacy in the FDNY. He was also a 9/11 first responder. George identifies heavily with his Christian faith and is studying to become a deacon. He is also a Republican. George frequently supports his transgender daughter Brooke by appearing alongside her at advocacy events for the LGBTQ community.

Jim Baker - Brooke's Boyfriend

Jim Baker is Brooke's boyfriend and later in the film, her husband. Jim is a wise-cracking air force veteran who offers the film's comedic relief. He identifies as a straight male and sees Brooke as being "all woman". In the film, we watch Jim struggle to tell his parents that he is dating a transgender woman.

Sarinya Srisakul - Brooke's Colleague

Sarinya Srisakul is Brooke's friend and colleague and a firefighter in Manhattan. She is an outspoken voice in the FDNY for women's rights who has been featured by NBC, CBS, and the Village Voice among others. As the president of the United Women Firefighters, she advocates for the welfare of NY's women firefighters in an overwhelmingly male fire department. Sarinya encouraged Brooke to stay in the FDNY when Brooke had doubts and she accepted Brooke into the United Women Firefighters.

Susan Guinan - Brooke's Mother

Susan Guinan is Brooke's mother and a bubbly, vivacious force in the film. She identifies as traditional and conservative, and initially struggled to accept Brooke's transgender identity. These days, Susan has come to accept and champion Brooke as a trailblazer.

George and Charlotte Guinan - Brooke's Grandparents

George and Charlotte are Brooke's grandparents. The duo provides comedic relief – they aren't politically correct. Nevertheless, they offer support for Brooke that is refreshing to see from people of their generation. George is a retired FDNY firefighter.

FILMMAKER BIOS:

Julie Sokolow - Director

Julie Sokolow's films have appeared at the New York Times, TIME, and Huffington Post. She is the creator of the Healthy Artists documentary series, which profiles over forty uninsured artists who struggle to afford health care. Her feature film directorial debut *Aspie Seeks Love* won Best Documentary at the 2015 Cinequest Film Festival and gained acclaim in Vice, Filmmaker Magazine, and Salon. She is also a musician whose work has been praised by Pitchfork, Wire, and the Washington Post. *Woman on Fire* is her second feature film.

Danny Yourd - Producer

Danny Yourd is an award-winning producer from Pittsburgh, PA. He produced *Almost Holy*, executive-produced by Terrence Malick, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2015 and recently enjoyed a theatrical run. He also produced *Blood Brother* which won both the Audience Award and Grand Jury Awards at Sundance in 2013. Danny is a creative producer at the production company Animal.

John Pope - Cinematographer

John Pope is the cinematographer behind *Blood Brother* and *Almost Holy*. *Almost Holy*, executive-produced by Terrence Malick, premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2015 and recently enjoyed a theatrical run. *Blood Brother* won both the Audience Award and Grand Jury Awards at Sundance in 2013. He's been the cinematographer for many award-winning shorts, five of which became Vimeo Staff Picks.

ANIMAL - Production Company

Animal is the Sundance-winning production company behind films such as *Blood Brother* (2013), *Almost Holy* (2015), and *Fursonas* (2016). Their films have screened worldwide, theatrically, and at festivals such as Tribeca, IDFA, Sundance, and Slamdance. In 2016, ABC picked up the series *Downward Dog* based on a web series by Animal. Animal is also a full-service content company and winner of several Addy awards.

END CREDITS

Director	Julie Sokolow
Producer	Danny Yourd
Cinematography by	Julie Sokolow Danny Yourd John Pope
Additional Cinematography by	Tyson VanSkiver
Executive Producer	Michael Killen Kathy Dziubek Jim Kreitzburg
Original Score	Danny Bracken
Post Production Facility Editor Editorial Advisors	Animal Julie Sokolow Steve Hoover Kurt Sampsel
Colorist/Online Finishing Post Production Tech Support Post Production Assistant	Allan Stallard Nathan Voltz Olivia Vaughn
Sound Editing, Sound Design, and Re-Recording Mix - Dan Rosato for Gilded Audio	
Legal Services provided by Attorney	Sloss Eckhouse LawCo Jackie Eckhouse
Legal Services provided by Attorney	Donaldson + Callif Dean Cheley

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FAQ FOR THE DIRECTOR:

1. Describe the film for us in your own words.

Woman on Fire tells the story of Brooke Guinan, the first openly transgender firefighter in NYC. We follow her journey as a kid growing up in the suburbs of Long Island to now in her 20s, rising as a role model on billboards in Times Square. We also learn about Brooke's unique family — both her father and grandfather are firefighters. The film is a heartfelt portrait of Brooke's family life, love life, and her struggle to be her true self in one of the most traditional professions in the world.

2. What drew you to this story?

I first learned about Brooke when a photo of her went viral. She's standing tall in her firefighting helmet and a shirt that reads, "So Trans So What."

The photo was accompanied by interviews with Brooke and her father George, a respected FDNY lieutenant with 35 years on the job. He's also a devout Christian and Republican.

Brooke and her father's relationship seemed to embody the polarized political forces in America today. I wanted to explore what it was like for them to coexist in the same family and workplace.

3. What do you want people to think about when they are leaving the theater?

I hope people recognize the story's universality. We've all had moments when it's difficult to be true to ourselves at work, at home, or in our relationships. If people can relate to Brooke's story, then hopefully they'll leave the theater with a new sense of respect for transgender people.

I also hope that women and LGBTQ people in particular can draw inspiration from Brooke's bravery in pursuing her own dreams.

4. What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

Editing the film was the biggest struggle, because I wanted to cover every moment of Brooke's dynamic life. She was busy recruiting and training women and LGBTQ people for the fire department all while buying a house with her partner Jim and considering marriage.

So the film is part work story, part love story, and part family story. Editing took a lot of grueling work over the course of one year.

5. How did you get your film funded? Share some insights into how you got the film made.

The film was produced by Animal, a Pittsburgh-based production company with incredible titles to its name, like *Blood Brother* (Sundance-winning documentary, 2013) and *Downward Dog* (ABC sit-com, 2017). I'm very fortunate that Animal and my producer Danny Yourd were with me every step of the way, believing in both me and Brooke's story. We also received a completion fund grant from Frameline, which supports LGBTQ films.

6. What's the best and worst advice you've received?

The best advice was to keep the film focused on Brooke — I'm really glad Brooke is clearly the main voice.

The worst advice was to give the men in the story more screen time. There are a lot of compelling people surrounding Brooke's life and it was easy to get seduced into a more ensemble approach, but it was important to us to center Brooke's voice in telling her own story.

7. What advice do you have for other female directors?

Embrace the challenge. Do it *because* it's hard, not *even though* it's hard. Your story is important, but you will sometimes have to stand up against naysayers to tell it. That's part of the journey.

8. Name your favorite woman-directed film and why.

There are too many to name! I'll always love Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*. It's funny and beautiful and the fact that she wrote, directed, and starred in it inspires me.

9. What's next for the film?

We're continuing to play film festivals worldwide (from San Francisco to Copenhagen). This past May 2017, we announced that the film was acquired by the Brooklyn-based distributor FilmRise. We will have exciting news soon about our wider release of *Woman on Fire*.

10. What's next for you? Any new films in the works?

I'm directing a new documentary feature with the same core team behind *Woman on Fire*. As with *Woman on Fire*, Danny Yourd will be producing, John Pope will be our cinematographer, and Animal will be the production company. I'm directing and editing. Olivia Vaughn, who wasn't involved in *Woman on Fire*, but who produced my last short film, *The John Show*, will also be producing this new film.