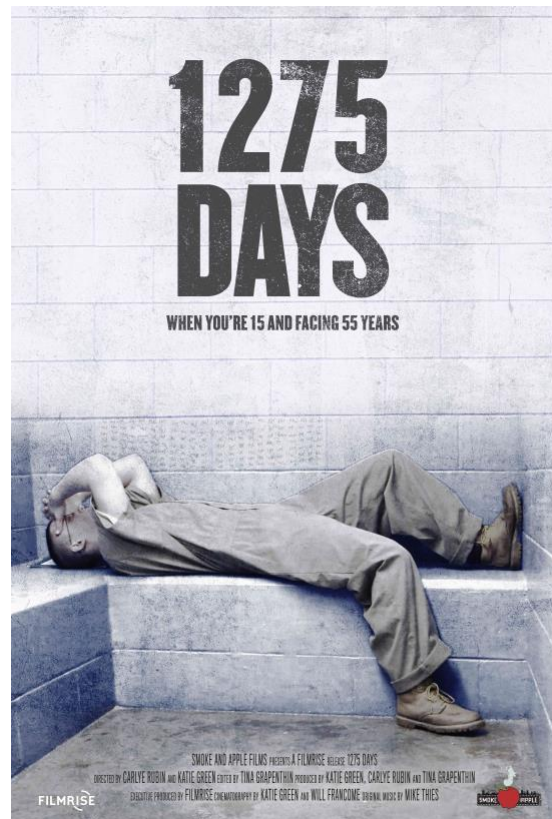




Presents
1275 DAYS



Directed and Produced by Carlye Rubin and Katie Green

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1275 Days

RT: 81 minutes

Short Synopsis

After a botched home invasion, 16-year-old Blake finds himself facing a virtual life prison sentence for felony murder. With the unwavering support of his single mother and teenage girlfriend, a David-and-Goliath uphill battle ensues in Elkhart, Indiana. They take on the system in hopes of a second chance.

Long Synopsis

After a botched home invasion, 16-year-old Blake and his friends find themselves facing a virtual life prison sentence for felony murder. The film focuses on the youngest of the group, Blake, and his family as they fight to reduce his 55-year sentence over a number of years. *1275 Days* is a David-and-Goliath tale that not only explores the complicated issues surrounding juvenile incarceration in America but exposes the financial and emotional burdens families of the incarcerated face.

Shot over four years since the original sentencing in 2013, this film paints a vivid picture of being young, incarcerated and grieving — all while facing an extreme sentence.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

We set out to make a film that draws attention to the disturbing number of juveniles serving extreme prison sentences in the U.S. When we began this film, the Supreme Court had just ruled sentences of mandatory life without parole for juveniles as unconstitutional. While such movement in the highest court is progress, the flaws within this system remain. America is the only developed country in the world to inflict this type of sentence on its youth. We are also shocked and outraged that many states lack a minimum age for sentencing children as adults.

Originally part of a film titled 'No Place for Children', we were telling the story of Blake and his family within a wider project exploring the impact such draconian punishment of juveniles has not only on those sentenced but on their families, as well. Participating in the Points North Pitching Forum completely changed our trajectory, encouraging us to take a hard look at how we were telling this story and whether or not it fit into this macro approach. Shortly after the fellowship, we realized the two cases we were documenting needed to be two separate films. The first ultimately became 'The Family I Had', which premiered at Tribeca Film Festival in 2017 and aired on Discovery ID; the other is '1275 Days'.

We have been following the story of Blake and his family since his conviction in 2013. The film documents each setback and victory to determine whether felony murder was the appropriate conviction, unraveling an exclusive inside look at the slow, arduous process of

navigating this complicated system. Their plight exposed the wider experiences and burdens (both financial and emotional) of having an incarcerated loved one.

With thousands of juveniles being incarcerated in the US each year, Blake's case is unfortunately unremarkable. Many of these juveniles do not find resolution. So why tell *this* story? This family that lacked money, power and resources made up for it with love, dedication and a belief that they would find some sense of justice. We were drawn to documenting this uphill battle, never expecting that the underdog could actually win. After 1,275 days in a maximum security prison, we filmed Blake walk out — something we've never before seen this intimately in a documentary film. We're really proud of playing the smallest of roles in putting pressure on the powers that be that ultimately made a difference.

Women and Hollywood Q&A with Directors

Describe the film for us in your own words.

This film follows the case of Blake Layman of The Elkhart 4 after being convicted of felony murder when he was just 16. For us, this film is about what you would do for the ones you love. We saw first-hand how incarceration impacts not only the one inside prison walls, but their families as well. In this case, Blake's mother and his young girlfriend go to the ends of the earth to do all that they can to overturn a sentence they believe to be unjust. In documenting their uphill battle, we witness the emotional and financial toll it takes on a family who was struggling to make ends meet before finding themselves going up against the prison system and their local government.

What drew you to this story?

America has a major problem when it comes to incarceration and in no way is this more evident than in how the criminal justice system deals with juveniles. Thematically, we've always been very drawn to stories surrounding loss and how families overcome trauma. While on the surface this is not a story about loss, this family allowed us to look at a different type of loss: a boy losing his adolescence, a mother abruptly losing her son, a girl losing her first love. We wanted to show the ripple effects of such draconian practices.

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

People have never been more informed and engaged, so to be making films at this time is truly a privilege that we never take for granted. We see '1275 Days' as a cautionary tale with an outcome, as filmmakers, we never could have predicted. While this story has a clear-cut beginning, middle and end, the majority of similar cases do not. We want viewers to be asking questions about accountability. Blake and his family never lose sight of his responsibility for the crime, but the court system certainly has a duty to find a just and appropriate sentence, especially when it comes to minors. In many ways, this case is unremarkable when it comes to juvenile offenders: Blake acted in a group, while under the influence and impulsively without regard for consequences, as most juveniles do. We've all made mistakes when we were teenagers, a time we're most vulnerable to peer pressure. Are we meant to be defined by those mistakes for the rest of our lives? These are the types of questions we want to leave viewers with.

What was the biggest challenge in making the film?

Like making most documentary films, funding has been — and continues to be — the greatest challenge. This film had a very unique trajectory: the story of Blake Layman and The Elkhart 4 was part of a larger film we were attempting to make regarding the profound impacts juvenile incarceration has on entire families. Three years into making that film (then titled 'No Place for Children'), we hit a wall. In fact, the wall could not have been more public as we stood on stage at Points North Pitching Forum knowing full well we were making two films. One would go on to be 'The Family I Had', which we completed in 2017, and the other is '1275 Days'. Shifting gears so late into production put us at a real disadvantage in applying for funding. This film took longer to make because we had to focus on each film individually.

In terms of story, the struggle was trying to get other voices involved, like the prosecutor and the homeowner. We arrived on the scene shortly after the initial crime and tragic death of Danzele Johnson, so emotions and tensions were still very high. This was a small town, completely divided on which side they stood. From the beginning, Blake's family was open and on board, allowing us to really immerse ourselves in Blake's world. While we would have liked to have had more diverse voices discuss the case, we decided to focus on telling this story from the perspective of this one family. In doing so, we gained a more intimate understanding of their experience that may have been lost had we cast a wider net.

How did you get your film funded? (Is it a studio film, a crowdsourced film, somewhere in between?) Share some insights into how you got the film made.

We received a grant from The Jerome Foundation early on in the process. Funding is always a challenge, so we always try to think creatively about how to raise money for our films. After participating in Sheffield Doc/Fest: MeetMarket while we were still in development, we did a Kickstarter campaign where we managed to raise enough money to get out and film and begin editing. This campaign also allowed us to raise awareness about the project and to cultivate relationships with the countless organizations who advocate for prison reform and juvenile justice, all who helped us spread the word. Documentaries in the social justice arena have been powerful and successful in both shifting mindsets and helping bring attention to these issues.

What inspired you to become a filmmaker?

As a filmmaking team from two different countries, we had our own individual trajectories that lead us to making films — and making them together. We both lost our mothers during our formative years, which we believe left us with a drive to want to explore certain issues or tell stories that make people feel something, whether it be anger, sadness or joy. Documentaries can and should move people in some way. At least once during every project, we inevitably acknowledge our ability to be able to immerse ourselves in different places with interesting people who are often moving through defining moments in their lives. It is often intimate, difficult and challenging, and we never take that for granted. While we do not remotely take credit for the outcome, there is a part of us that believes, with this film in particular, that Blake and the other boys would have been just another case of juveniles serving a virtual life sentence had there not been that presence of a documentary crew "watching" this case and adding pressure to the powers that be. Perhaps it had no bearing at all, but if we did play any role in the outcome... Well, then there is nothing better than knowing you helped shift the pendulum the right way. That is what continues to inspire us to make films.

What advice do you have for other female directors?

Be kind to yourself. Share your work. Find an amazing team that you can consistently work with. We have worked with many of the same people on all of our films (beginning with our editor/co-

producer, Tina Grapenthin). Find your people and stick with them... It will come back to you tenfold.

Name your favorite woman-directed film and why.

We are always inspired in particular by matriarchal documentary film. We love the fact that we are part of an industry of which women are at the helm in so many aspects of the process. There are too many amazing docs made by female filmmakers to name. As a filmmaking team, we really look up to Heidi Ewing & Rachel Grady. Having heard them speak to their process, we saw many parallels with how they collaborate: with mutual respect for one another and how they let humor guide them in the same ways that we do.

What differences have you noticed in the industry since the #MeToo and #TimesUp movements launched?

While we appreciate the existence and power of such movements, we would be lying if we said that they have directly impacted us as documentary filmmakers. That being said, it is encouraging that such significant and long overdue issues are finally being acknowledged in such public and meaningful ways. We continue to be inspired by women who speak out and welcome the sometimes difficult conversations these movements have brought to the surface. We are hopeful that this will trickle down to fairly paid opportunities for independent female documentary filmmakers.

ABOUT THE DIRECTORS

Carlye Rubin

Carlye is a Director/Producer passionate about telling stories that break taboos (talking about death), providing injustices a platform (extreme sentencing of youth) and giving voices to the marginalized (a teenage refugee soccer team [a work in progress]). After working in various capacities on documentaries including *Capitalism: A Love Story* and *The Swell Season*, she co-founded Smoke & Apple Films with Katie to make her directorial debut with *The (Dead Mothers) Club* (HBO, 2014) and followed up with *The Family I Had* (Tribeca Film Festival, Discovery I.D., 2017). She and Katie recently completed *1275 Days* (2015, Points North Fellow) and are currently developing new projects.

Katie Green

Katie is a Director/Producer/Cinematographer from London. She began working in docs in 2007 as one half of the writing team behind *In Prison My Whole Life* (Sundance Film Festival, winner of Best Film Prize at Geneva Human Rights Film Festival). After co-producing a handful of social justice-focused films in the U.K., she moved stateside to co-direct her first feature doc *The (Dead Mothers) Club* with Carlye. The pair then co-founded Smoke & Apple Films and have recently completed their second feature, *The Family I Had*. Now usually found somewhere between New York and New Orleans, she continues to

collaborate with Carlye in development on several new projects.

SMOKE AND APPLE FILMS PRESENTS A FILMRISE RELEASE 1275 DAYS

DIRECTED BY CARLYE RUBIN AND KATIE GREEN EDITED BY TINA GRAPENTHIN PRODUCED BY KATIE GREEN, CARLYE RUBIN AND TINA GRAPENTHIN

EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY FILMRISE CINEMATOGRAPHY BY KATIE GREEN AND WILL FRANCOME ORIGINAL MUSIC BY MIKE THIES

