



Third World Newsreel
545 Eighth Avenue, 10th Floor, New York, NY 10018
T: 212-947-9277, Fax: 212-594-6417, E: distribution@twn.org

Excuse My Gangsta Ways

Genre: Documentary

Festival Categories: Documentary Short

Running Time: 15 minutes

Shooting Format: Digital Video (HDV 720p24)
16:9

Exhibition Format: DVD, Digibeta, Beta SP

Color: Color

Sound: Stereo

Contact: Corinne E. Manabat (Director/Producer)
gangstawaysfilm@gmail.com

URL: www.myspace.com/gangstawaysfilm

Synopsis

We all go through transitions in life, whether it's a career change, or moving, but for Davina Wan, hers has been very extreme - from the gang life to a "normal" life. *Excuse My Gangsta Ways* is a visual poetic documentary portrait on Davina Wan, a Chinese American woman, who was a former gang member from the 1990s Lower East Side. With interviews from her grandmother and godfather, we will take a look at the person she was and the person she has become, where fate and inspiration endure.

Logline

From tattoos, switchblades, to poetry, *Excuse My Gangsta Ways* is a documentary portrait about Davina Wan, an atypical Asian American woman, where fate and inspiration endure.

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Director's Statement

When I began filming in 2007, it was a long time coming. It all started in upstate New York at my undergrad college in 2000, where Davina Wan and I became friends. From there, we clicked instantly sharing our city stories, love of hip hop culture, music, poetry, and our pride of always "keeping it real" and being atypical Asian American women.

Through all these years I've known her, she would eventually open up to me about her past life of being in a gang. Davina and I would constantly have these conversations how one day her story should be shared for so many reasons: to open up dialogue for and about troubled youth, to create a project that was not the stereotypical gang film, to represent multi-layered non-traditional Asian American women, to defeat preconceived notions of people who join gangs, to remember her best friend, Ashley, and simply to show my admiration for my good friend, Davina. Her courage and strength makes her truly an inspiration to all.

It only felt right to do a poetic documentary portrait on Davina, as a therapeutic way for her to move on from her past and in the process, have our friendship become even stronger. *Excuse My Gangsta Ways* is proof that you can make something positive out of something negative in one's life.

Festivals/Screenings

Truth Be Told Student Documentary Film Festival, The New School, New York, May 2008

Filipinas for Rights & Empowerment Fundraiser, White Rabbit, New York, June 2008

Sulu Series, a monthly APIA artist showcase, Bowery Poetry Club, New York, August 2008

San Francisco International Asian American Film Festival, March 2009

Reviews

"An extraordinary look at Davina Wan's intense and troubled youth of drugs, crime and family dysfunction, and her eventual transformation. There's a lot of pain in this incredible young woman's world, and the whole audience was moved by her journey." --*Ravi Chandra, SFIAAFF Blog*

"One of the best short films I've seen in a while, because it tells a surprising story about Davina Wan and her past life. Definitely worth watching." --*Hyphen Magazine Blog*

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CAST



Davina Wan

A 25 year old Chinese American woman who was a former gang member from the Lower East Side intimately shares her story with reverence and honesty.



Cai Ping Wen (Davina's grandmother)

Her recollection of Davina as a child during good and bad times represents the struggle between traditional Chinese culture and American assimilation.



Michael Faulkner (Davina's godfather)

His thought provoking descriptions of Davina resonate beauty in an exclusive audio interview.



Corinne "Calamity" Manabat & Hanalei Ramos

Spoken word artists interpret & recite Davina's poetry of her intense struggle with death and going through transition.

CREW BIOGRAPHIES



Corinne E. Manabat
(Producer/Director/Editor/Principal Cinematography & Sound)

A native New Yorker from the forgotten borough of Staten Island, Corinne E. Manabat is a documentary filmmaker by day, and spoken word artist/lyricist by night. She was magna cum laude at SUNY New Paltz, earning her bachelor of arts in both radio/TV production and media management, with a minor in anthropology. After a few years working freelance in commercial production, most notably for The Montel Williams Show and Letnom Productions, she felt it was time to pursue fulfilling aspirations. Also known by her emcee name, Calamity, she performs spoken word poetry and rhymes for the love of hip-hop music. She uses her verbal content to address social issues and her experiences as a Filipino-American. She won the 2005 ImaginAsian TV's PSA Contest for APA (Asian-Pacific-American) Heritage Month with her spoken word montage "Proud and Free," dedicated to her deceased grandfather. Her vision is to use documentary media to tell the stories of people who are on the periphery of mainstream media, specifically Filipino and Asian-Pacific-Islander-Americans (APIAs). These are the communities where she feels rooted, especially in New York City, where she volunteers as a performer and videographer at rallies and events for several APIA organizations, such as the Sulu Artists Network.



Chloe Walters-Wallace
(Additional Sound)

Chloe Walters-Wallace has been involved in the film industry from birth. Her mother, Maxine Walters, renowned film producer in Jamaica, West Indies toted Chloe around on sets and ever since, Chloe hasn't been able to keep away from the film industry. After getting bitten by the acting bug in high school, Chloe went on to a college career in theater, performing in classical shows such as "Medea" & "The Marriage of Figaro" to alternative shows such as "What You Need- A Play about Rape" and finally to her own one woman show- "Entertaining Anthropology- a critical look at the prejudice history of the anthropological practice." While in college she also majored in anthropology, leading her to the Mellon Mays Fellowship and her research project on Jamaican women in Spain during the Franco era, during which she was thinking the entire time "I wish I had a camera." She hopes to move on the directing and creating more documentaries on the Caribbean diaspora as well as a possible career in programming.



Adele Pham
(Additional Cinematography & Sound)

Adele Pham grew up in Portland, Oregon, and has been pursuing documentary and fiction filmmaking in New York City for the past four years. She also has a background in creative writing and journalism.



ManSee Kong
(Translator)

ManSee Kong is a native New Yorker raised by overworked Chinese immigrants. She freelances on social issue documentary films, is a media educator with Global Action Project, and provides outreach assistance at Third World Newsreel. Her involvement with the Chinatown Justice Project of CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities, which organizes low-income Chinatown tenants facing displacement caused by gentrification and neoliberal policies, was what led her to pursue a career in documentary filmmaking. She believes that films - especially documentary films - can be a powerful organizing tool for social justice. In 2008, she plans on attending NYU's MFA film program to hone her filmmaking skills and create films that bring light to the struggles of underserved communities at home and abroad.

Production Stills:



Soundtrack

“Mom Gets Old” produced by Chaz “Koba” McHale
www.kobasounds.com



“4 Your Love”
(C.Chin, T. Ebato)
Performed by Taiyo Na
© 2008 Issilah Productions LLC
www.taiyona.com



”So Long” by Magnetic North
www.magnetichiphop.com

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Funders

Excuse My Gangsta Ways is a Third World Newsreel production workshop production in cooperation with The New School. Due to this, this production was made possible with the support of:

The National Endowment of the Arts
The New York State Council on the Arts
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The North Star Fund
The Funding Exchange
The Ford Foundation
The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs
Material for the Arts
The New York City Department of Sanitation
The New York City Department of Education

Filmmaker Corinne Manabat creates visual poetry with *Excuse my Gangsta Ways*

Interview by Ed Moy

March 25, 1:58 AM, www.examiner.com

In *Excuse My Gangsta Ways*, filmmaker Corinne Manabat creates a "visually poetic" documentary portrait of Davina Wan, a 25-year-old, Chinese American woman, who was a former gang member from the 1990s Lower East Side. Through interviews with Wan's grandmother and godfather, Manabat explores the life of the person Wan was and the person Wan has become today.

What inspired you to make *Excuse My Gangsta Ways*?

I was looking to do a documentary portrait on a native New Yorker (since I'm a native New Yorker myself), and it being my first directed film, I wanted it to be intimate. Two main criteria that came to mind were to portray someone who defied the Asian stereotype that I constantly see in mainstream media and also who represented more of the strong unconventional women that surrounded my own life, Davina, being one of those women. Davina Wan is a good friend of mine whom I've always admired and felt inspired by her life story, and it only came natural to do my first documentary on her.

You describe the film as being "visually poetic." Tell us about how you developed the story and your cinematic style.

From interviewing Davina and what she has told me about her life, I knew that it was very personal, raw, and emotional. I wanted to avoid the common method of documentary verite style, and wanted to give the audience a visual emotion of what she, her godfather, and grandmother were telling me in their interviews. I wanted the viewer to feel like they were watching a hybrid of documentary and a narrative. The simple fact that most of the story already happened in the past, I had to think of innovative ways to portray that (most of the shots I took were on the fly when I'd be on a location) because I refused to do re-enactments, which is totally not my style. The still simple shots were to show that contrast of the raw grittiness of New York City but shown in a beautiful way to represent Davina's internal and external struggle of her past, her memory, and her growth/change. The selected shots of New York City were areas where she used to hang out at when she was in a gang. In a way I was also avoiding to have the film look like a typical gang film. Also the shots of the tattoo were intended to be close up and you hear the sounds of the needle because the tattoo to me represented one of the themes: from pain, something can be beautiful, and can symbolize Davina's growth as a person, but also to defy the stigma that getting a tattoo is a bad thing (once again trying to defy a preconception just like how people in a gang are bad people).

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As a TWN Workshop production and part of the Call for Change Series, what kind of support did you receive for the film?

Third World Newsreel is an amazing media organization (www.twn.org) that supported me throughout the making of this film. The story idea and the pre production first came out of the production workshop I was in, and then evolved in which they picked up my film for distribution. Their mentorship and encouragement really helped me become a better filmmaker and am so grateful to be involved with them. The organization continues to run by its many grants by funders, and by a domino effect, since my film was part of their TWN workshop production, my film had the support of their funders such as NYSCA, the Ford Foundation, etc.

Tell us about your relationship with Davina Wan. How did you two meet?

It all started in upstate New York at my undergrad college in 2000, where Davina and I became friends. From there, we clicked instantly sharing our city stories, love of hip hop culture, music, poetry, and our pride of always "keeping it real" and being atypical Asian American women. I've known her for over 8 years now, and making this film together has made our friendship stronger.

Was it difficult getting Davina to open up her life on camera?

In general it usually takes a while for anyone to open up in front of a camera. I tested things out by having pre recordings of us in conversation while I put a camera on her in the room just so she would get used to it. I think after the 3rd time, she didn't even notice it.

Did her family approve of the project? What kind of support did they offer?

Her grandmother and godfather were so gracious to participate in the film, but her mother and father on the other hand were too shy and did not want to be interviewed, but were willing to give archival pics.

What challenges did you face during production?

Some challenges I faced during production were: schlepping heavy camera and sound equipment in the busy streets and subways of New York City because I was trying to cut costs. On average I was either by myself or with one or two other crew members. During rush hour, no one would help you carry equipment up the stairs when the elevators didn't work. Shooting outside in cold weather by the water was not always fun. I was living on Staten Island at the time which is about a two hour public transportation commute into Manhattan (so total of four hours of traveling time back and forth), and I shot most of the film in Manhattan and Brooklyn. Due to the long commute, there were many nights where I had to sleep on friends' couches and store equipment at their apartments. Besides making this film, I was also crewing on three other short documentaries at the same time, so scheduling and time management were key. One of the shorts I was helping out on during that time happened to also be in the SFIAAFF as well, "Parallel Adele."

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Did you encounter any problems with gangs as a youth?

I did not encounter any problems with gangs as a youth, but I probably would have joined a gang if there was one in my neighborhood when I was young.

What message do you hope audiences will take away from watching the film?

If they had preconceived notions of people in gangs, I'd hope that it has changed. I hope that any thoughts of the model minority stereotype has also changed. I hope that audiences got to feel the emotions, and feel inspired by Davina's story, and to think about their own lives. We all are human and make mistakes in our lives. There is a cause and an effect in everything. From struggle, beautiful things come out of it, and that this film is proof that you can make something positive out of something negative in one's life.

What's next for you?

I am currently in the research & development phase for an experimental video project about my grandfather, a former labor union organizer in the Philippines and WWII veteran and I am in post production for a documentary short, "Lupita" (working title) about a NYC street performer who dances with mannequins.

Is there any advice you'd like to share with aspiring filmmakers?

Despite what some people around you might say, if you love what you do, and that love is filmmaking, continue to do it. It will be hard, and there will be ups and downs, but the support and encouragement from fellow filmmakers, family, friends, and colleagues will help you along the way. Try to meet other filmmakers and colleagues because I'm pretty sure they understand what you're going through and plus, you never know what opportunities that may arise. Just stay positive and always follow your gut. Be assertive, focus, and good luck!