Rigoberta Menchu: Daughter of the Maya (Straight Shooter Review)

Director: Dawn Engle
Production Company: Gravitas
Genre: Documentary
Running Time: 61 minutes
Release Date: June 2016
Expected Rating: PG-13, due to adult imagery and testimony
Website: PeaceJam.org
Trailer: Click Here
Online Rent: Click Here
Online Purchase: Click Here
Review Issue: #125 (07/16)
Reviewer: Jeremy T. Hanke
Final Score: 9.5 – Definitely worth watching at a festival or with a community!

I grew up believing the Mayan Indians were a long lost civilization, like the lost tribe of the Maori. I knew about their amazing science and their calendar, but, at some time in my childhood, had come to believe that they’d been slaughtered by the Aztecs and no longer existed.

As often happens with Dawn Engle's films through PeaceJam, I learned a lot about both people groups and people that changed my perception through this film—not the least of which being that the Mayan Indians still exist as the indigenous people of Guatemala (as well as a number of other Latin American countries), despite genocidal attempts of a 36 year civil war.
Story

The story of Rigoberta Menchu is the story of a Mayan girl who's entire family were eventually slaughtered in unspeakable atrocities during the civil war that tore apart Guatemala. Her survival when everyone else in her family and most of the people of her home village were killed was a miracle, but, rather than fleeing as many might have, she worked with a church organization that helped unite the oppressed and attacked indigenous people groups of her country. She would go on a 10 year exile, raising support for her people from abroad and educating the UN about the kidnappings, slaughter, rape, and genocide being conducted in her country.

Despite the dark and horrific things described throughout this movie, Dawn Engle helps keep the story of hope that Menchu holds onto from ever being lost. So tirelessly did Menchu work to bring unification and civil justice to her country, that her receipt of the Nobel Peace prize pales in comparison to the rest of the accomplishments of her life—including forming an Indigenous People’s Party for the first time in her nation's history.
Watchability

Some of the previous PeaceJam films in this series have been a bit longer and this has led to some slower parts in the middle. However, coming in right at an hour, this film is tight, lean, and extremely engaging. Even the parts that almost made me want to look away—like the hooded survivors of rape and sexual slavery testifying to their captors’ abuse—kept me riveted. (*Engle did not translate their testimonies to protect their anonymity, but the rest of the documentary keeps you fully aware of the atrocities being conducted there.*)

How Far Did you Watch Through It:

100%

**Why?**

As a film, it pulled me in and made me connect with an amazing woman who overcame great hardship and continues to fight to unite her people.

*Closing Thoughts*
If you’re like many Americans who grew up during the 1980’s, it can become easy for all the international violence during that era to overwhelm us. Dawn Engle’s portrayal of Rigoberta Menchu allows us to hear the tale of Equador and the Mayan people in a way that doesn’t shy away from the atrocities they’ve endured, yet always keeps a firm target on the hope that continues to inspire them.

PeaceJam’s mission is to connect Nobel Laureates with people they can mentor and Dawn Engle continues to do a great job helping the world be mentored by these laureates through these films.

**Final Score:**

9.5 – *Definitely worth watching at a festival or with a community!*

Jeremy T. Hanke

The director of two feature length films and half a dozen short films, **Jeremy Hanke** founded MicroFilmmaker Magazine to help all no-budget filmmakers make better films. The second edition of his well-received book on low-budget special effects techniques, *GreenScreen Made Easy*, (which he co-wrote with Michele Yamazaki) is being released by MWP in fall 2016. He’s curently working on the sci-fi collaborative community, **World of Depleted**, and directed the debut action short in this series, **Depleted: Day 419**.