

# THE OVERNIGHTERS

**A Film By Jesse Moss**



**WINNER, SPECIAL JURY AWARD  
FOR INTUITIVE FILMMAKING  
2014 SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL**

**CANADIAN PREMIERE AT  
2014 HOT DOCS CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY FESTIVAL**

**TRT: 100 Minutes**

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## **THE OVERNIGHTERS SELECTED PRESS AND REVIEWS**

**"riveting...superior documentary filmmaking"**

The Hollywood Reporter, David Rooney

**"powerful... Steinbeckian...an indelible snapshot  
of a despairing moment in American history"**

Variety, Justin Chang

**"devastating... one of the most remarkable  
examples of layered non-fiction storytelling  
to come along in some time"**

Indiewire, Erik Kohn

**"It will leave you stunned..  
starkly bleak and devastatingly humane,  
and an indelible American documentary"**

The Playlist, Katie Walsh

**"remarkable... magnificent"**

Filmmaker Magazine, Brandon Harris

**"fascinating... a standout documentary at Sundance 2014"**

Movie City News, Jake Howell

**"a shattering experience; a masterwork of unbridled honesty...  
an exceptional, haunting film"**

Twitch, Jason Gorber

**"stellar...a masterfully directed piece of work"**

Film Threat, Brian Tellerico

**THE OVERNIGHTERS**  
**SYNOPSIS**  
**DRAFT: 3 February 2014**

*“The world has arrived on my doorstep.” – Pastor Jay Reinke*

**Logline**

Desperate, broken men chase their dreams and run from their demons in the North Dakota oil fields. A local Pastor risks everything to help them.

**Synopsis**

It is no secret that the United States has been facing a time of economic crisis. Many men and women have lost their jobs, their homes and even have trouble feeding their families. But in Williston, North Dakota the oil business is booming, nearly tripling the small town’s population in the past ten years. Unemployment is close to zero and starting pay in the oil fields can easily exceed \$100,000. In search of a better life or a quick dollar, thousands of desperate men and women flock to the region looking for work and often arrive with little more than the clothes on their backs or the cars they are driving.

Housing in Williston has become scarce and expensive, leaving even those who have found employment without a place to live. These newcomers arrive at Concordia Lutheran Church everyday seeking help, which prompts Pastor Jay Reinke to open the church’s doors to allow the “Overnighters” - as he calls them - to stay for a night, a week or sometimes even longer, sleeping on the floor, in the pews and in their cars in the Church parking lot. Far from home, and their families, they are desperately seeking the American Dream. On some nights, as many as sixty people call the Church home, which creates a vibrant but unruly ad-hoc community.

Members of Pastor Reinke’s Congregation and the Church’s neighbors voice their concerns about The Overnights, while the recent murder of a local schoolteacher by out-of-towners has sown fear and distrust in Williston. The local newspaper’s sensational coverage of violent crime in the area contributes to a growing sense of unease. Yet Pastor Reinke remains determined to unite a divided community. “The last thing we need to do is serve our fear,” he says.

As Pastor Reinke fights for these men and women against growing opposition, he is drawn into the whirlpool of their troubled lives. Some of them have criminal records, while others carry heavy emotional and psychological burdens.

Concerned that the presence of a registered sex offender named Keith in the Church parking lot may invite the newspaper's scrutiny and further erode support for the Overnights program, the Pastor makes a decision with fateful consequences. He invites Keith to live in his own home, with his own family.

A disgruntled former Overnighter tips off the newspaper, and things start to spiral out of control. Although Pastor Reinke fights valiantly to defend the program, the crisis continues to grow.

Facing an unyielding flood of migrants and opposition in seemingly every corner, the Pastor refuses to concede. But even he begins to question his own judgment. The moral imperative to "love thy neighbor" proves much easier to preach than live. The toll on the Pastor's family continues to grow as he is forced to confess a secret to his wife Andrea that has shattering consequences. It's a revelation that unlocks our understanding of his commitment to help "broken" men and fight for an inclusive community.

A modern-day "Grapes of Wrath," THE OVERNIGHTERS engages and dramatizes a set of universal themes, including the promise and limits of re-invention, redemption and compassion as well as the tension between the moral imperative to "Love thy neighbor" and the practice of one small, conservative community when confronted by a mighty river of desperate, job-seeking strangers.

## THE OVERNIGHTERS DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“My sweetheart and my parents  
I left in my old hometown  
I'm out to do the best I can  
As I go ramblin' round”  
*Ramblin' Round, Woody Guthrie*

The themes of re-invention and self-invention in American life have long interested me and inspired my film work, from CON MAN (the story of an Ivy League impostor) to FULL BATTLE RATTLE (the Iraq war through the prism of role-play). The lure of the boomtown and its powerful place in the American imagination resides in its seductive promise of redemption and fortune for the brave and the desperate. It is this theme – played out in stark, raw terms in North Dakota and viewed through the prism of Pastor's Reinke's Church - that drew me to this story.

As a student of American history, I was fascinated by the idea that a Boomtown existed in modern-day America. Stories about Williston suggested an intoxicating and possibly combustible mixture of oil, men, money, opportunity and crime.

How did the reality of Williston square with our understanding of historical boomtowns like Deadwood, Dodge City and Gold Rush San Francisco? Although the history of those places is now inseparable from their mythology, I was curious to see Williston up-close and measure it against these places I'd only read about in books or seen depicted in Hollywood westerns.

The story of modern-day Williston and the mass-migration of Americans in search of work also recalls the Dust-Bowl migration of the 1930s, Steinbeck's classic novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* and the folk ballads of Woody Guthrie. These echoes convinced me that this was a deeply, uniquely American story worth pursuing.

I also suspected that the flood of relentlessly positive stories about easy opportunity and high-wages in Williston and the economic promise of energy and oil concealed a darker, ground level truth.

My introduction to Pastor Jay came through a clergy column that he published in the Williston Herald, in which he called on townspeople to welcome outsiders. The sincerity of his sentiment struck a chord in me, and I called him. He spoke

warmly and passionately, and he invited me to visit him at Concordia Lutheran Church.

When I arrived at the Church shortly after our conversation, there were about fifty people sleeping there. I met tradesman from Southern and Western states hard hit by the housing bust, African immigrants, kids from rural communities with no employment prospects, broken men, ex-cons, guys with PhDs and even a middle-aged Filipina nurse from my hometown, San Francisco, hoping to land a job as a flight-attendant. Pastor Jay told me: “The world has arrived on my doorstep.” And he was right.

It was a raw, emotional place. Desperation forces people to drop their usual defenses. Men cried as they showed me pictures of their children. They told me about their dreams of lucrative jobs on the oil-rigs that checkered the prairie landscape. I decided to stay and film. I was determined to make an observational documentary. I had no idea how the story would turn out, but I found a path to follow and someone to lead me down it.

For the first six months of production, I slept in Concordia Lutheran Church, among the men. This was largely out of necessity. All the hotels and man-camps were booked solid by oil companies. The sleeping conditions, while not ideal, yielded a greater understanding of what the community inside and outside the Church was like, and helped me forge a strong relationship with both Pastor Jay and the men I chose to follow.

There were times, during production, that I felt like an Overnighter. Perhaps the forces that drew me to Williston – a search for opportunity, work and meaning in my life – were not far different than those that compelled the men I met. It was enormously difficult to find support for the film, which made the journey seem closer to folly or failure at times.

I'd like to think I emerged unscathed, but it was an intensely emotional and occasionally lonely experience. Two men I met and filmed with in the program – but only briefly – killed themselves in Williston. I had a gun pulled on me in Wheelock, and was attacked by a broomstick wielding woman. I cried with Pastor Jay – several times. And I stumbled into scenes of sublime beauty. I was lucky to be present for some extraordinary and intimate moments in the lives of these men. I've done my best to return the trust they offered me by making a compassionate, truthful and hopefully lasting film.

— Jesse Moss

# **THE OVERNIGHTERS PRODUCTION NOTES**

## **Style**

My approach is immersive, intimate, observational filmmaking, in the spirit and style of my two previous, feature-length documentaries: FULL BATTLE RATTLE and SPEEDO. I worked alone in the field for the duration of production -- as director, cinematographer and sound recordist, often shooting handheld. While this approach had practical challenges, I found that it allowed an intimacy and flexibility that can be difficult to achieve with a larger crew (which I couldn't afford anyway).

I shot the film on a Sony F3 Camera, primarily with a Red 17-50 Zoom Lens.

## **Production**

Production took place between April 2012 and September 2013. I made approximately sixteen trips to Williston, each between five and eight days.

Editing took one year. The last shoot for the film - perhaps the most significant -- was in fact two weeks before we submitted the film to Sundance.

Amanda McBaine, my producer, is also my wife, and a crucial second set of eyes on the footage I was bringing home. The film was a family affair. Although my youngest daughter was quite insistent that I take her to "Norf Dakota" in my suitcase, I never did.

## **YouTube Videos**

The YouTube videos that are selectively excerpted in the beginning of the film fascinated me. Many people decided to document their own journeys to North Dakota and post diaries on-line. I felt this would be an effective way to communicate the aspirations and hopes that drive job seekers to boomtown North Dakota. In post-production, we contacted them, and learned that very few still remain in North Dakota.

## **THE OVERNIGHTERS THE OIL BOOM IN NORTH DAKOTA FACTS & FIGURES**

- The oil-producing region that spans Western North Dakota and Eastern Montana is known as the Bakken Shale deposit.
- Oil companies utilize hydraulic fracturing technology – “fracking” - to extract the oil underground. The introduction of this technology in 2008 helped ignite the current oil boom in North Dakota.
- North Dakota surpassed Alaska to become the nation’s second largest oil producing state. Texas is still the leader.
- In October 2013, North Dakota produced 941,637 barrels of oil. That month, there were 9,900 oil-producing wells in the state and 183 active drilling rigs.
- North Dakota has the nation’s fastest growing economy and lowest unemployment rate.
- North Dakota leads the nation in net migration. The population increased by 4% in the last two years.
- The population of Williston, North Dakota has approximately doubled since 2010 – jumping from 14,700 to 27,000 today.

## **THE OVERNIGHTERS SUBJECTS' BIOS**

### **Pastor Jay Reinke**

Pastor Jay Reinke is the Pastor of Concordia Lutheran Church in Williston, North Dakota. He has been the Pastor at Concordia for twenty years. He is originally from Idaho. He met his wife Andrea while working as an assistant pastor in Pierre, South Dakota. Early in the film, he says, of The Overnights: "Not only are these men my neighbor, the people that don't want them here are also my neighbor."

### **Andrea Reinke**

Andrea Reinke is the Pastor's wife. They have four children: Clara (20), Mary (18), Eric (15) and Ann (13). Andrea says: " "This is one of the hardest things we've ever had to do and I'll be glad when it's done."

### **Shelly Shultz**

Shelly Shultz is a member of the Congregation who voices her concerns about the Overnights program. "They're here to rape, pillage and burn," she says. "This is not my home anymore." Shelly is a native of Williston.

### **Alan Mezo**

Alan Mezo spent sixteen years in prison before coming to Williston from Spokane, Washington. He was searching for work. After meeting Pastor Reinke and staying in the Church, he became the Pastor's un-paid deputy, helping to oversee the program. "My growth is real," he says. "It's not an act. It's not something I'm putting on. I've been a pretty good con artist most of my life and this ain't a con."

### **Keegan Edwards**

Keegan Edwards came to Williston from Antigo, Wisconsin. He was 18 years old at the start of filming. He sleeps in the Church, and works inspecting oil pipe. He says: "'I figured it was time for someone in my family to be successful, not just another person in a little small town barely making it." When his girlfriend Sabrina and baby son Darron arrive, they move to the small rural town of Wheelock, forty miles from Williston. After his wife and son leave Williston, Keegan crashes his truck and is badly injured.

### **Michael Batten**

Michael Batten is a married, father of two, from Tifton, Georgia. He's a skilled electrician, but finds it difficult to get a job in Williston. He stays at the Church, and keeps himself busy by cleaning the tables and bathrooms. "My pride is gone," he says. With the help of his friend Dan, he prepares a resume and gets a good job. He moves out of the Church, and into a small, unfinished home he shares with four men. Although he's able to send money home, his wife is lonely and threatens to leave him for another man unless he comes home. He must make a devastating choice. "It's ironic that I came out here to save my family and it's probably gonna cost me my family."

### **Keith Graves**

Keith Graves is a married father of two from Los Angeles, California. He's a registered sex offender. Sixteen years ago, he was convicted of lewd behavior with a minor and served time in prison. When the Pastor learns about Keith's RSO status, he invites him to live with his family. Keith works as a truck driver. "This is definitely a place for a second chance," he says.

### **Paul Engel**

Paul Engel is from New York City. He says there's too much greed in Williston and too much anger. He wants to leave. Pastor Reinke convinces Paul to stay and briefly offers him a place to stay in his home. "I want to love you, Paul," he says. But he soon has to ask Paul to leave to make room for Keith, the sex offender. Paul feels slighted and vows retribution. "You sow the wind, you reap the whirlwind," he says. Paul tips off the newspaper that there is sex offender staying in the Pastor's home.

### **Todd**

Todd is a lost soul from Phoenix. The pastor listens to him, and hugs him. "You and I are more alike than we are different," he says to Todd. Then he puts Todd on a bus home.

### **David Rupkalvis**

David Rupkalvis is the Managing Editor of the Williston Herald. He defends the papers' decision to publish the names of all the sex offenders in Williams County, North Dakota. He argues that the benefits to the community outweigh the possibility that someone on the list might be hurt by the disclosure.

## **THE OVERNIGHTERS FILMMAKER BIOS**

### **Jesse Moss, Director, Producer, Cinematographer**

Jesse Moss is a San Francisco-based filmmaker. He produced, directed and photographed FULL BATTLE RATTLE, about the US Army's fake Iraq in the Mojave Desert. The film premiered at the 2008 Berlinale (Panorama), won the Special Jury Prize at SXSW and opened theatrically at the Film Forum in New York. Prior to that he produced, directed and photographed SPEEDO: A DEMOLITION DERBY LOVE STORY, which won festival awards and critical raves across the country, aired on PBS/POV and was optioned by Warner Bros Pictures. His first film, CON MAN, about an Ivy League impostor was commissioned by HBO. He also produced WILLIAM KUNSTLER: DISTURBING THE UNIVERSE, which premiered at Sundance in 2009, was released theatrically by Arthouse Films and opened PBS/POV's 2010 series. Moss has twice been a fellow of the MacDowell Colony and the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program. He is a lecturer in the Cinema Department at San Francisco State University.

### **Amanda McBaine, Producer**

Amanda McBaine is a fifth-generation San Franciscan, but spent most of her adult life in New York writing and working in film. She has produced and edited documentary film for PBS, HBO, Court TV and the Discovery Channel, in addition to various government agencies and NGOs including: NIH, CDC, WHO and the Department of Veterans Affairs. She is currently a novel loosely inspired by her great-great-grandfather's whiskey business. Amanda relocated to San Francisco in late 2011 with her husband and two daughters. She received a BA from Vassar College and an MFA in creative writing from the New School.

### **Jeff Gilbert, Editor**

Jeff Gilbert is an award winning director, writer and editor. His work encompasses film and documentary as well as corporate videos and commercials, and has played on television and in theaters worldwide. He holds an MFA in filmmaking from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and resides in Los Angeles.

### **T. Griffin, Composer**

T. Griffin is a songwriter, composer and producer working in Brooklyn, New York. Alone and with his band The Quavers he has released five critically acclaimed CDs of songs in a homespun electronic style that's been described as 'porch techno'. A prolific film composer, he has scored over two dozen feature-length

narrative and documentary films, and twice been nominated for CinemaEye honors for original music score. In 2008 he was one of six composers selected as fellows at the Sundance Composers' Lab. Notable film scores include Liza Johnson's RETURN (Cannes, 2011), Tristan Patterson's DRAGONSLAYER (SXSW Grand Jury Prizewinner 2011), Marshall Lewy's Robert Carlyle vehicle, CALIFORNIA SOLO (Sundance, 2012) and Michael Almereyda's NEW ORLEANS, MON AMOUR, starring Elizabeth Moss. He has co-created music for several live film/music events that have toured the world, including Sam Green's UTOPIA IN FOUR MOVEMENTS, Jem Cohen's WE HAVE AN ANCHOR and the FACTORY FILMS of the late Danny Williams.

**THE OVERNIGHTERS  
CREDITS**

A MILE END FILMS PRODUCTION

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

AL DI LA FILMS AND IMPACT PARTNERS

THE OVERNIGHTERS

PRODUCED, DIRECTED & PHOTOGRAPHED BY  
Jesse Moss

PRODUCER  
Amanda McBaine

EDITOR  
Jeff Gilbert

MUSIC  
T. Griffin

ADDITIONAL EDITING  
Don Bernier  
Jesse Moss

WRITTEN BY  
Jesse Moss

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The town lacks the infrastructure to house the overflow of migrants, even for those who do find gainful employment. A modern-day Grapes of Wrath, award-winning documentary *The Overnighters* engages and dramatizes a set of universal societal and economic themes: the promise and limits of re-invention, redemption and compassion, as well as the tension between the moral imperative to "love thy neighbor" and the resistance that one small community feels when confronted by a surging river of desperate, job-seeking. Share this Rating. Title: *The Overnighters* (2014). 7,4/10. Want to share IMDb's rating on your own site? It's the humanizing act of the filmmaker, such as the small talk between the overnighters and especially the scene in the credits. It's the fact that he transforms these faceless people whom the town fears to people that the audience enjoys is what is so astounding. When people disagree with Pastor Reinke's plans, you feel for the overnighters and him. *The Overnighters*. Critics Consensus. Hard-hitting, absorbing, and painfully relevant, *The Overnighters* offers an urgent and compassionate picture of life in 21st century America. 97%. TOMATOMETER. This 10-digit number is your confirmation number. Your AMC Ticket Confirmation# can be found in your order confirmation email. *The Overnighters* Photos. View All Photos (23). Movie Info.