

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

Our intention is to create a short film, and then a feature film, about the 1982 massacre at Dos Erres, told through the eyes of Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda. We are fortunate that a company like ProPublica, which is dedicated to bringing about reform through uncovering injustice and corruption, has done such phenomenal work on this story. In line with your commitment to spread your stories by every means possible, we'd like to partner with your organization to raise awareness about the atrocities committed at Dos Erres.

The film will stay as faithful as possible to facts in the original story. We plan to shoot all part of both the short and the feature film Guatemala. The short film will be developed a shot in conjunction with the feature screenplay. When the short film is complete, it will be used a marketing tool, through the film festival circuit to raise funds for the feature. In turn, the domestic distribution effort for the feature will include general or limited theatrical releases, domestic television, and various VOD and internet platforms. The international distribution effort will include theatrical and television presentations, in addition to international film festivals.



## SYNOPSIS



The feature film will follow two parallel timelines.

The first is the present-day investigation (by Au Elena Farfán, Sara Romero, and the ProPublica team) of the crimes committed at Dos Erres. We will follow the relentless pursuit of the truth, from the discovery of the bodies in the well, through the confessions of Pinzón and Ibañez, to the discovery of Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda, and his ultimate reunion with his father. Viewers will witness the first conversation between father and son via Skype, and will be left with the image of Oscar cheerfully making his bed on the couch in his livingroom, his father in one bedroom, and his wife and children in the other. We will see the effects of the Dos Erres investigation on world events (extradition and criminal trials of the masterminds and executioners), and will devote a significant portion of the present-day timeline to Oscar's reaction to learning the truth about his past.

The second timeline covers the 1982 massacre itself, and the weeks leading up to it. We will watch as the first child is thrown into the well, and as the soldiers brutally kill the entire village. Pinzón and Ibañez will be recognizable, and the viewer will struggle to play their assigned roles in the massacre. The protagonist of this timeline, however, will be Oscar's adoptive father, Lt. Oscar Ovidio Ramírez Ramos. We will witness Lt. Ramos' killing of innocent civilians, his decision to adopt Oscar, and the story he tells his family when he brings Oscar home.

The short film will be a structurally similar, abridged version of the above. The second of these two timelines will be compressed significantly due to limited running time.



## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

The best films -- the best stories of any kind -- urge viewers to ask questions, to explore aspects of their world or themselves that might otherwise have remained in the dark. The story of Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda is as successful in this respect as any work in the history of investigative journalism. Reading it for the first time I was overcome, first by the tragedy of the massacre, and later by the beauty of the reunion between father and son. This film will first address the geopolitical chaos, what might be called the collective insanity of the Guatemalan military, in the 1980s. We want to make known the atrocities that shaped Oscar's life, to offer a human reminder of the horrors now forgotten by much of the world. By telling Oscar's incredible tale, one that is moving and tragic but ultimately hopeful, we aim to inspire the viewer to stand against injustice in the future. The message is that it's never too late — to confess and be forgiven, to repair the bonds that hold a family together, and to do the right thing.

We want to examine the intensely personal journey to reunite a boy (now a man) and his father. The characters in this story weave a broad tapestry of humanity: a father believes his son is dead for 30 years before learning the truth; a human rights activist and a journalist seek to bring the truth to light; a cook-turned-soldier strives to assuage the guilt of his past crimes; and a family hides a terrible secret from a child they've grown to love. These individuals are the human faces of an international tragedy. In the stories of their lives, the universal is made personal — fighting for truth and justice is inextricably intertwined with the search for their own resolution.

A story like Oscar's must be told in a manner which is compelling, moving, informative and grippingly entertaining, and which is faithful to the historical events that shaped his life. The stories of the survivors of Dos Erres span an entire continent, from Canada to Las Cruces, and decades of history. The viewer will be taken on a journey through unfamiliar places, times, lives, but at the center is the pure, powerful search for knowledge, justice, and closure.

Why should we be the ones to bring this story to the screen? Because, we are prepared to devote the next several years of our lives to making this film right, to telling the story with the honesty that the subject matter demands. A message like this deserves to be a passion project. Michal and I have been looking for a project like this for years. From the moment we first encountered your story, we knew we'd found it. We were overwhelmed by the story's humanity, its moral ambiguity, and its strong sense of family. Through Oscar's experiences, we can move and inform viewers around the world. We believe that we can heighten public awareness of, and resistance to, such atrocities in the future. This, of course, is the dream of every professional storyteller: to tell a story that matters. We know that Oscar's is more than just a great story — it has the power to resonate with people of all walks, to move them to tears and action, and to change the way they see the world. It would be an honor to devote ourselves to bringing this story to life on the screen, and we are eager to get started.

## GENRE AND TARGET AUDIENCE

*Finding Oscar*, will be a personal drama with multi-lingual dialogue and an international cast. It will be ideally suited for viewers both in America and overseas. A portion of the film will be set in America and will take place largely in English. The English-language component will be advantageous for distribution and festivals, but the majority of the film will be set in Guatemala and will take place in Spanish, making it a natural fit for viewers in Spanish-speaking countries.

We anticipate that the film will have a broad, cross-genre appeal (incorporating elements of investigation, political, historical, and personal drama, human rights, and immigrant issues). The typical viewers will be males and females ages 18-55, in all of the major English and Spanish speaking markets, including the US, UK, Canada, Mexico, Argentina, Spain and others. The short film will likely appeal to the younger end of the spectrum, while the feature will likely appeal to the older end.





## FINANCING STRATEGY

Bringing this story to a mass audience is by no means an easy feat. The complex, challenging (not to mention multi-national, multi-lingual) story by and large rules out traditional studio financing. We have outlined a plan which pulls together the best of independent film financing and public interest/charitable projects to make this film a reality.

The first step is a short film and a feature script. The short will hit the key emotional and plot beats of the feature, and will introduce viewers to the characters and the world. This film will be financed largely out of pocket but with significant donations of camera equipment and crew time (a feat already accomplished by the director on his last short-film outing) a small-budget short that has all the production value of the feature is a feasible proposition. A balance between local crew, and department heads brought from Los Angeles will also help achieve the best possible production value. In addition to the self-financed component of the short film, we can augment the budget with a small fundraising campaign, likely on a platform like Kickstarter.

Further, rental houses, airline companies, and hotels often have charitable "donation in kind" policies which could be useful in stretching the budget of either the short or the feature. A product placement deal with a commercial aviation company for example in exchange for transportation could be well within the reach of a film like ours, especially given the director's familial relationship to an individual who has worked for over 20 years in commercial aviation.

Having worked on a number of films which have played and been purchased at film festivals including Sundance, SXSW, and Cannes, we are comfortable with the environment, and the ins and outs of getting films noticed. The film festival circuit provides a unique opportunity to introduce the story to exactly the people that can help provide the funds for the feature. More generally, the short film provides a wonderful platform to get the message out about the human rights atrocities in Guatemala. Working with the film festival administrations at this point is crucial because they will effectively "give birth" to a project which may very well later return to them as a feature. The positive buzz from that process will be a boon for the marketing of the feature.

Beyond the film festival circuit, the short film will open doors to raising private equity from public-service-minded investors in the US and especially in Latin America. By encapsulating the powerful message, by proving our capability, and by introducing investors to the incredible story at the heart of the film, we expect to make private equity a significant portion of the feature budget.

Making the feature film is likely to involve a selection of deferred payments to key crew, especially producers. This is possible because the story is unique and powerful, and we are likely to be able to engage the services of those who, like us, are drawn to the story. Such deferral payments are also beneficial in that they incentivize the producers to see through the ultimate sale of the film.

## SALES & DISTRIBUTION

Mini-Majors: One distribution option is to go through one of the "mini-major" studios which have an interest in content that might play well overseas. Lionsgate, Relativity, and the Weinstein Company will certainly be on the list.

Independent Arms of Major Studios: While the major studios would not jump into the financing of a film like this, finding distribution through their indie arms is more than possible. Fox Searchlight (which has a history of championing challenging indie films which it often acquires at festivals) would top the list, along with Paramount Vantage, Focus Features, and Sony Pictures Classics.

Distribution Arms of TV Production Companies: HBO Films, Starz Media, Showtime Networks, and AMC Networks, all are involved either directly or through subsidiaries in acquiring and facilitating the multi-platform distribution of independent films. This is a strong option because they have a robust pipeline for independent films which can push them out to their target audience worldwide, and a strong revenue model which capitalizes on the strengths of independent films without massive production and advertising overheads.

Film Festivals / Film Markets: There are more than a dozen major film markets at which hundreds of international distributors are looking for new films to acquire. We have a relationship with multiple producers who specialize in this kind of distribution, and we expect that a territory-by-territory international distribution strategy will augment whichever domestic strategy proves the most useful. It is likely that, with a story such as this, more than half of the film's ultimate viewers will be overseas.

## PROPOSED OPTION AGREEMENT

We would like to turn Oscar Alfredo Ramírez Castañeda's story into a film, and we believe that the best possible way to do this is by obtaining the rights to your story and to your research on him. Specifically, we (Ari Levinson and Michal Zebede) would like to obtain story rights to *Finding Oscar: Massacre, Memory and Justice in Guatemala*; the option will enable us to draw from ProPublica's original article and e-book, along with any supporting materials (videos, photographs) made available through ProPublica. In the option agreement, ProPublica will represent (or coordinate with) Fundación MEPI and any other parties with a claim to the rights to the *Finding Oscar* story.

We would like to propose an initial option for 24 months for one thousand dollars, with a renewal option for 24 additional months for another one thousand dollars. The initial option will be applicable against the purchase price. The purchase price will be 2% of the feature film's budget, to be paid upon



commencement of principal photography of the feature film.

In addition to acquiring the story rights, we would like to interview the reporters Sebastian Rotella and Ana Arana, and obtain access to their research.

Standard reserved rights will be retained by ProPublica; while the story is under option, Ari Levinson and Michal Zebede will have the exclusive right to make a short and feature length film incorporating ProPublica's investigation, but print and web publication rights will be retained by ProPublica. Our option will not prevent ProPublica, Sebastian Rotella, Ana Arana, Fundación MEPI, or any other parties from publishing a follow up article or book.

We will provide ProPublica with a producing credit on both the short and feature film. A main title credit will also be provided to ProPublica on both the short and the feature; on the main title, we will include a subheading "based on the article *Finding Oscar*," appropriately crediting the author and/or entity as you see fit.

We are also prepared to use the short film as a fundraising tool for ProPublica, bringing your company to the attention of your target audience and donors, namely socially conscious individuals interested in meaningful stories, who may not have otherwise heard of ProPublica. We will take the short film to as many film festivals and markets as possible, explicitly pointing viewers during each Q&A session to ProPublica, which we will describe as a nonprofit company providing cutting edge and socially imperative investigative journalism in the public interest. Your organization will have full control and final approval over the language that we use in promoting ProPublica.

We are also prepared to provide ProPublica with free advertising through product placement. We expect to incorporate ProPublica and/or its journalists into the story, making your company's investigative work part of the narrative in both the feature and short film.

Thank you for taking the time to review our proposal. We look forward to hearing your thoughts on bringing Oscar's story to the screen.