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ANNIE MAE -- BRAVE HEARTED WOMAN

Project Description: ANNIE MAE--BRAVE HEARTED WOMAN

The body of Annie Mae Pictou Aquash, a young Indian woman who fought passionately for social change for her people, was found in a ravine on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in 1976. Initially her death was attributed to "exposure", her hands severed and sent to Washington, D.C., ostensibly for fingerprint identification, and she was buried in an unmarked grave in a Catholic cemetery. When the body was exhumed, a second pathologist found a bullet in her brain.

Annie Mae was born on the Micmac Reserve in Nova Scotia in 1945, and grew up in poverty like so many other Native Americans. While still in her teens, she went to Maine as a farm worker and drifted to Boston, Massachusetts, after the harvest. There she experienced problems faced by other Native people in urban environments such as poor education, ostracism, poverty, alcoholism and the lack of opportunity to function as Indian within the larger culture. Aided by other Native people, she helped found the Boston Indian Council.

Annie Mae grew increasingly concerned with education and its disruptive effect on Indian family life in bussing children hundreds of miles to BIA Boarding Schools. She began to see her role as an advocate for Indian people in political terms and joined others to protest Thanksgiving as a day of mourning for Indian people. She became part of the voice of the American Indian Movement, crying out against commonplace murders on the periphery of many reservations. She participated in the Trail of Broken Treaties, a caravan to Washington, D.C., and the subsequent take-over of the BIA Building when the right to hold traditional religious ceremonies at the Arlington Cemetery graves of two Indian brothers was denied.

The occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973 was an effort to gain self-determination and a time of solidarity for American Indians. The small group of traditional Sioux found themselves surrounded by U.S. military as the federal government lent support to the existing tribal government which didn't represent the people and had controlled its own impeachment trial. Along with others, Annie Mae came to the battle zone carrying supplies of food through rifle fire, tanks and FBI surveillance.

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Bitterness, suspicion and general mistrust existed between the Oglala Sioux and the FBI long after the Wounded Knee siege was over. The Pine Ridge Reservation was fraught with incidents of violence and terror. As she witnessed the spiritual commitment of the oglala people, their anguish and heartache, Annie Mae became a force of strength and support dedicated to the continuing struggle for simple justice, human rights and freedom.

As Annie Mae's activities became more helpful to the Sioux people of Pine Ridge, so did her name become well known to the FBI who sought her out for interrogation. Even though it was well established that she wasn't in Oglala the day of the Jumping Bull shootout when two FBI agents were killed, Annie Mae was picked up without a warrant, jailed, and her life threatened. Within several months her lifeless body was found by a rancher on the outskirts of the reservation. She had been murdered excution style, by a bullet fired at close range.

Through this portrait of Annie Mae--what she lived for and ultimately died for--a personal and intimate perspective of recent Native American history also emerges.

Form and Style:

Traditional and reportage documentary style is used throughout. Much of the first person narration is taken from Annie Mae's letters and from the FBI 302 Report. Stock footage, still photographs and graphics verify factual information. Television newscasts and personal testimony provide antithetical points of view and reveal that the FBI manufactured and coerced witnesses to obtain a conviction for the killing of the two FBI agents. It is interesting to note that interviews were not forthcoming from the U.S. Department of Justice, first pathologist Dr. W.O. Brown, former Tribal Chairman Dick Wilson, nor from the mortician's widow. The FBI granted only one interview.

Biography: LAN BROOKES RITZ

Writer/Producer/Director

Lan Brookes Ritz moved to film from a background of art and design with a first credit as Costume Designer on an independent feature film. In broadening experience on other features, commercials and documentaries, Ms. Ritz held various positions as set decorator, prop mistress, second unit script supervisor, production photographer, assistant director, assistant to the producer and floor manager on a cable TV series.

Pursuing her own vision, Ms. Ritz planned an aesthetic and lyrical film about a southwestern Pueblo, but in the research stage, the project took on a more serious form and shape and Ms. Ritz dedicated her efforts to ANNIE MAE--BRAVE HEARTED WOMAN, a feature length documentary film which has consumed her attention for the past four years. The film, winner of several awards, focuses on the long standing pervasive problems of Native Americans, and was written, produced and directed by Lan Brookes Ritz.

ANNIE MAE--BRAVE HEARTED WOMAN

84 min Documentary
16mm Color

Awards/Honors:

National Congress American Indians' American Indian Film Festival
Winner: Best Motion Picture

Film Advisory Board, Hollywood, Ca.
Winner: Award of Excellence

American Film Institute's American Indian Image, Kennedy Center
Selected to open invitational/non-competitive festival

San Francisco International Film Festival
Winner: Best in Category

Credits:

Writer/Producer/Director	Lan Brookes Ritz
Annie Mae's Voice	Carole Marie
Camera	Frank Byers - Victor DrBois
Sound	William Flicker -Carol Yasanaga
Editing	Jedidiah Horovitz -Jerry Feldman
Associate Producer	Larry Peter Radin

ANNIE MAE--BRAVE HEARTED WOMAN

statement by Marlon Brando

"In the name of democracy and progress, the United States assassinated many Indian leaders, Big Foot, Crazy Horse, Black Kettle...the list is endless.

"In 1863, when the seventy year old Mangas Colorado, an Apache chief, entered an army fort under a flag of truce to make peace with the U.S. forces, he was brutally murdered: his head was severed, boiled and skinned and sent to a phrenologist in Boston.

"One hundred and ten years later, Annie Mae Aquash, fighting for the freedom of the American Indian, was assassinated. Her body was dismembered by the FBI, her hands were cut off and sent to Washington, ostensibly for identification purposes. With this film, Lan Ritz has taken these grisly details and has created a sense of beauty of the human spirit that touches all our lives."