

Finding Fidel: The Journey of Erik Durschmied
A Feature Documentary by Bay Weyman

Director's Statement

I was inspired to make Finding Fidel 10 years ago, when I discovered the remarkable footage and interview that Erik Durschmied shot in Cuba in 1958 on the eve of the Revolution. It was like a time capsule that captured the early promise of Fidel's rebel movement just before Castro came to power, at a time when anything seemed possible.

I didn't know at the time the circumstances of the interview, which called into question whether the promise was in fact a lie from the start.

I also didn't realize the impact that the interview had on Durschmied's own career, catapulting him into the front ranks of his profession. He became one of the top war cameramen in the world for the next 30 years, with a reputation that became both a boon and a burden.

And I also didn't realize that it would take so damn long to make the film.

I had been doing research for another film at the time, during which I had spent three months in Cuba becoming increasingly disillusioned by the ideological straight jacket of Fidel's Revolution. I saw Durschmied's footage as a way of exploring what I considered to be the lost promise of it's original ideals.

My disillusionment only grew in the process of trying to make this film. We applied for Journalist Visas from the Cuban Government three different times over a period of several years, and each time we were turned down with no explanation given. We finally decided to shoot the film guerrilla-style, with no official clearances, using small cameras and hoping that we wouldn't be stopped and questioned by one of the many police officers one sees on the streets of Cuba.

As it turned out, we never were stopped on our three week return journey with Erik to Fidel's rebel camp in the Sierra Maestra mountains, but half of our footage was mysteriously intercepted on it's way out of the country. Fortunately we had filmed the key scenes on two cameras, and so still had the coverage we needed to make the film.

Despite the frustration of all the official delays, the timing presented us with the opportunity of filming in Cuba on the 50th Anniversary of the Revolution, New Years Eve 2008. The milestone sharpened the context of the narrative. It's a film about Castro and the Revolution, about media manipulation, and an island waiting for change. And it's about one man's destiny. What's 50 years in a man's life?