

An Interview with Vivian Vasquez & Gretchen Hildebran

Co-Directors & Co-Producers of 'Decade of Fire'

Interviewed by Natalie Bullock Brown

N: If you would both tell us a little about yourself. Start with your name, where you're from, how you got into filmmaking. We can stop there and then we'll keep going.

G: My name is Gretchen Hildebran. I'm the co-director and co-producer along with Vivian of Decade of Fire. How did I get into filmmaking? I was pretty much obsessed with films when I was a little kid. When I was in high school, I had an English teacher who would show us, we would read a book, and then watch a movie adaptation and for some reason I was like that's what I gotta do. I studied film in college and then I did a lot of stuff around experimental film in San Francisco. Then maybe about 15 years ago, I saw some documentary films that really inspired me to get into the field. So, that's what I've been doing ever since.

N: Where are you based?

G: Brooklyn, New York

V: Hi, my name is Vivian Vasquez. I'm from the Bronx. I got into filmmaking because I began to tell stories about the history of the Bronx. I realized that I did have an important story to tell and was introduced to Gretchen Hildebran about creating a story on film. This is my first film, and with her partnership, I've become a filmmaker.

G: We should mention that one of our third producing partners Julia Steele Allen was an integral part of that process. It was the three of us who came together to decide to try to make this film about 10 years ago.

V: Julia introduced me to Gretchen.

G: Yea.

N: Tell us about Decade of Fire and how the project came about.

V: Julia and I worked together for an organization that had received funding to start a small high school in New York City in the Bronx. Julia began to write a curriculum about the history of the Bronx for an incoming 9th grade group. That curriculum was kind of like shot down. We weren't allowed to teach it because it was deemed a little bit too one-sided, too radical. I suppose that the reason was that we talked about hip hop and we talked about graffiti, and it was considered that we were glorifying those art forms. So anyway, she and I kept having conversations about the Bronx and she encouraged me to write about my experiences growing up in the South Bronx. Then eventually, she called me one day and she said I had a dream. We should do a film about this. Of course she and I both were not filmmakers. We didn't know what we were doing. Someone suggested that we write a treatment and we looked at each other and said, "What is that?" Then eventually she had known Gretchen and she introduced me to Gretchen. We met in a small little deli in Manhattan, and it was like a blind date. You know? "Hi, how are you doing? This is my story. Oh, this is my story. Do you think you want to do something? Wanna do it? I don't know. Are you interested. Okay. We'll give it a try" [laughing] That's how it started.

/ Then Gretchen began to film conversations with me and my friends from back in the old neighborhood in my living room. We would have long conversations about what it was like growing up in the South Bronx. You know? What were our experiences like playing ball, or going to school, having a great time. Eventually what came out it was not only that amazing sense of community that we all experienced growing up in the Bronx but also that collective pain that we shared out of the trauma of the fires. Or the crime and the violence, the stuff that we went through.

N: Gretchen when you first met Vivian and began to hear her stories, What did you think and especially in terms of a film coming out of her stories?

G: Well, I think...I was fascinated. I had just moved to New York from the west coast. So, I didn't know anything about this. I was really fascinated. I hadn't heard about the Bronx burning down. It kind of rang a bell for me for like images that I had seen as a kid. I grew up in Vermont, so pretty far away from the city. It sounded like this fantastical horrific story that had

happened in this place where I was now living. Nobody seemed to know about it. I mean Vivian's awesome. [laughing] We just hit it off. I think at the beginning we were really thinking about this being sort of a historical piece to explore the roots of why it happened. We didn't really conceive of it as a personal story about Vivian.

/ When we first started filming, I did some filming with you but the ideas or like the structure that we came up with was many years in the making. We spent a lot of years putting together kind of a historical cut that Vivian was apart of but we had kind of found all these other players that were also kind of apart of it.

V: And community...

G: Yes, definitely.

V: Gretchen accessed the community. **/** We spoke to a lot of people in the community to legitimize what we were hearing or reading about the research. We would gather a piece of information and then talk to people. Not just researchers, not just professors, but people who lived through the fires.

N: Can you tell the story of the fires? Just briefly give us a context for what you're talking about when you talk about fires?

V: In the South Bronx during the 1970s, the South Bronx had a fire epidemic. 80% of the housing stock in the area burned and over 100,000 people were displaced. Over 100,000 people, almost a quarter of a million people were displaced.

G: There's not a lot of records. That was part of what was going on. So you don't really know exactly, but it was anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000.

V: There were on average 35-40 fires a day. In terms of the personal experience, and if you talk to people who came from that time. We always felt small. There was always a fire at night, during the day. There were always fire engines going and that was how I grew up as a kid. You know just fires constantly, constantly. The Bronx was devastated and there was a lot of abandonment. Eventually by the 90s, the Bronx was rebuilt. However, years later, there's

a question about what happened. How did that happen? For a long time I think that, I'll speak for some of the people in my community and for myself. You know how you'll have a horrific experience or you go through something in your childhood. You kind of put it aside because life happens. You grow up, you have kids, and people ask you like "Gretchen or Julia that happened? You had fires everyday? What?" For some of us, yea we had fires. It was like nothing. The more I researched, then the more we researched together, the more it became completely unacceptable that we had a time and place where this horrific experience happened to a group of people and it was just like as a matter a fact. Nobody told the story. We didn't really realize what happened. It happened. Somehow we all knew who was in charge. We knew we didn't burn the Bronx. We were blamed for burning the Bronx. We knew we didn't but OK we're just going to move on. And at some point we decided "wait a minute, we have to tell this story." We have to flip that narrative and just flip the story and say, "Wait a second. Let's go back and expose the truth about what really happened here, why it happened, and that it wasn't our fault and that we weren't to blame." That was a function of racial discrimination and it was a function of a lot of racism that continues today. If we don't begin to talk about those policies that happened that still impact us today, we're not gonna move forward in making progress and fighting injustice, no.

N: Talk about the process of thinking about making a film and then at what point it was decided or you know the aha moment was like Vivian needs to co-direct and co-produce that. How did that come together?

G: We did this first phase of production for maybe a year or so. I cut together like a 30-minute historical thing and I brought to Vivian and Julia. You were part of that cut. I was like "Here we have this. This is cool. We can use this in the community. We can live with what we have or we could try to make a film." I was like it might take a little while [laughing] little did we know.

V: We didn't know it was gonna take 10 years.

[laughing]

G: At that point you know, I felt pretty clear and it was very clear from that point forward that the story that I would be able to tell as a filmmaker would be a pretty limited story given that I'm not from this community. And it's a community that has experienced enormous degree of outward analysis, stigma, policy-making, everything. People feel comfortable saying what the Bronx is, who lives there, what should be done about it. [People] who

don't have a connection or any, as our cinematographer Eddie who's also from the Bronx would say, "They don't have any skin in the game."

G: I think it was just clear. / **Vivian had connected me with a lot of people. I had done my own research and connected with people. When it came to talking to people in the neighborhood about what they lived though, people often didn't feel that comfortable talking to just me. I didn't want to push that. I think there's a lot of ways to deal with that situation but I really felt like it made sense for us to work together and I proposed that - that we work together as producers. And so that means we're making decisions about who we're gonna talk to, what we're gonna say. So that when Vivian and I both show up to do an interview, they can trust Vivian. She's not only gonna be the one asking the questions but she's also gonna decide what we'll do with this material once we're done filming.** There was like a real trust there I think that could be made with someone who also is putting their own story out there and has, like Eddie said, "skin in the game" as far as a stake in how this community is portrayed. I think it felt like the most direct way to get to what we wanted which was for people to be able to talk about this thing that doesn't get talked about very easily or very well. People are often told what happened to them. So, I don't know. What do you think about that?

V: I agree with all the all of what you said. But also even before we decided to add my personal story, I always felt like this was my film. I never felt like it was someone else's film doing a story about my community and me. We never set up that relationship that way.

/ **The way that we set [the filmmaking relationship] up was that whenever Gretchen, at some points Julia (Co-Producer), wanted to move in a direction there was always a conversation about which direction we were going into. Whether I think that the only decision I had not made was, for example, what kind of camera to buy because she knows the kind of camera.** But everything else in terms of the film, we talked about it together. I never felt like you were the outsider coming in because we worked on it together. It was put on my lap and I was made responsible and accountable from day one.

N: What did you think about that? How did you feel about that? Like the weight of that?

V: Yea, tremendous. It was at some points it was “Oh yeah, I’m gonna work on this.” I did not realize what I was getting into, in terms of the decision making, the kind of the craft of filmmaking, the different aspects of like talking to people, doing the research, trying to raise funding, trying to reach out to people. I mean all of the aspects I didn’t realize that. The other part was that I’m here working on driving a direction for this film and at the same time I’m in this film. The more and more it became how those policies affected my community and my life and my family. It was painful.

/ It was a very painful process. Here I am helping to direct, helping to produce. At the same time, I’m in it and rehashing those very painful memories. On the one hand then what happened there was that, besides my family who sort of understood and didn’t understand what I was doing. It was Gretchen, Neyda, and Julia who then held me so that I can move forward with the different roles that I played in making this film. Someone needed to be sort of the support for me to be able to get through some of the more difficult parts of making the film.

N: That’s powerful. I’m interested in what you learned from the whole process of doing a film like this, especially given your “skin in the game” and your connection, the emotion. You talked about the pain. Looking back, what do you think? What would you do differently? How would you approach this differently and particularly in terms of accountability? Gretchen you spoke very eloquently about how you weren’t part of the community, people didn’t trust you, and you not only recognized that but you respected that and you tried to do something to alleviate that. Talk about what else could be done and like what would you do moving forward if you all were to take on another film.

[Vivian laughing]

N: Let’s start with lessons. Like what did you learn from this process? Either one of you.

V: I don’t know. There’s so many.

G: Yea.

V: I mean just practically speaking, it's not earth shattering but one has to put in a lot of time to put their "skin in the game." I worked full time and I felt like I wasn't giving enough time to the process always because I was working and I was raising kids. It was just hard. For me to learn the different aspects of filmmaking, my learning curve was very slow. I think that my other partners, they understood what had to be done. I was like "What? Why are we doing this? Huh? One of the things that my partners did, in credit to them, was that they had patience with me. I resisted at times because I was like, "What am I doing?" Either resisting because I didn't want to follow on a narrative perspective, from that pain perspective. I didn't want to go there at times. What they were trying to help me do was find my voice and that was a difficult thing to do until sometimes I got impatient with myself and I think that may be a lesson learned there was to just trust the process a little bit because the process was actually a safe one. A safe process was made for me but I was not trusting the process at times because I didn't know where it was going to go and it was too hard.

N: Was part your distrust of Gretchen and Julia or was it just i don't know this process, I don't know where this is going and so I don't want to go there?

V: Yea, it was hard to go there one because, again. I'm a tough kid from the Bronx. I don't want to be seen vulnerable. I'm not gonna cry. In fact there were times when we were filming and something would come up and I'd say, "No, no, no, stop the camera. Nope. Nope, we're not going there." Then I'd be just fighting with myself about going there.

/ I learned that if you are going to tell a story, you have to go there. If you're gonna talk about, injustice. If you're gonna talk about things that happened that were not fair, if you're gonna explore something that went wrong, you have to go there emotionally. I had to learn, eventually, to trust that process and I still am learning that. I'm still trying to find my voice around that. Cause it wasn't' easy. It's not like I came to this with a voice. I'm gonna tell my story it was like "Oh Julia, did you know that we had fires and sometimes we had to sleep with our shoes on?" Then Julia was interested in my story. I didn't set out to become Vivian, Co-Director of Decade of Fire. It was this winding road. I think that a lesson learned was that if you're gonna begin to tell a story, work on trusting the process, do some self-reflection. Do some writing about how you feel. Be okay with what comes out the other side because there's always editing. Right? [laughing] Master editor.

[Gretchen laughing]

V: We'll do work around that.

V: So that's one lesson that I learned. I think that's sort of a big one for me.

N: Gretchen can I just piggyback - So what about what Vivian said in terms of trusting the process and then also the fact that she said you all were very patient with her? Did you set out to be patient? Did you think this was gonna be this type of process? [laughing]

[Gretchen and Vivian laughing]

G: Right. Well it really has been such a journey. I had made short films before I started this project. I never made a historical film. I never made an archival film. I was just finding out about the Bronx. There's so many layers. And much less meeting Vivian, being introduced into this community and the complexities of Puerto Rican, African American communities in the Bronx, specifically. I mean all of those. I don't know if you get a total flavor of that in film, but it is a very specific place in history. And there's so many histories. There's so many stories that could've been told. So patience...I think it's just a matter of respect and kind of listening honestly. Yea, I think I've developed as a person a lot in the course of this project in so many ways. As far as our collaboration, like patience with also myself, if I'm hearing something or there's something going on and I don't totally understand it. To let myself sit with it. I think maybe sometimes it was really hard when I might be pushing for something. Like, "We're gonna go pitch to these funders, and we have to practice this pitch, and we have to get it down and we have to know what we're gonna say."

/ There were times when I was too much. I was pushing too much. For us to finish and get through it, it meant that when I was doing something that was too much or wasn't patient or you know didn't work for other people to actually hear that and not throw up my hands and just like trust we can work this out and I guess for Vivian and Julia to trust me, that I will work at a different way of trying to make that happen, just like understand. We all had the commitment to it. I think that really helped - that we all kind of felt this common commitment to the film, and what we were trying to say, and because we could all trust each other on that and come back to that. And get

to know each other, like make space with each other, which I think is uncommon. There are some things about this process that were really difficult for me because I was holding down a lot of the technical sides of the filmmaking part. We could've probably used an additional associate producer or something like that. That was just a team decision...lessons learned [laughing], I could've used some more pure filmmaking support. But on the other hand, I think that it was good to have a process where the creative storytelling decision-making and moving through the process as a team took an enormous amount of patience and time but it was very worth it. It seemed like the only way we could get to it. I don't know how else to explain it. So, maybe it would've been...if I were to do it again, I would want to have maybe a little bit of a stronger filmmaking team. But I feel like I have that now. In the process of making a film, you kind of find out who you can rely on. Who's gonna help you get there? It's tough when you're getting to for the first time cause you're kind of working with everybody for the first time. You find out who's gonna be able to show up and do the work with you. But we were able to do that with each other around seeing the story through. I think Vivian, it was an immense amount of trust because how many times was I like "So, can you take off work again and come do more voiceover?" There was a lot of demands that I know like most regular people in their lives are not gonna have either the luxury or the desire to make that time. So I felt immensely privileged and lucky that you trusted the project and our process as a team enough to put that much into it from your own life.

v: / I mean we had a lot of full day meetings on Saturdays and Sundays and we met for years every Monday for two hours, just the producers meetings, not the work, just meeting and talking. So we were in constant communication about all aspects of the film for years. So that was good. Even like..and I joke about this. But even like "what do you think about the font for this?"

V: I'm thinking you want my opinion about the font? Yes, everything, I was requested and expected to sort of be apart of and that took a lot of time. I think it did take patience. She talks about it a lot but it took a lot of patience. That's sort of okay when Vivian gives us her feedback, we'll work on it.

/ If we were working on a story line or video, there was never a moment where I couldn't say, "No, that's not the way it happened" or "This is not what I want to say. Or this is how I want to say it." There was always a conversation and I always had the "skin in the game" in the film.

N: Did you feel fully expressed throughout the whole process like you could say whatever you felt and you could you push back on whatever you felt was not correct that made you feel that freedom?

V: Most of the times I did and not all the times. **There were sometimes where I felt, “OK this has to get done and we don’t have time for me to learn this now.”** Like with pitching or writing proposals or something that sometimes I didn’t feel comfortable with, I would read something and then be okay with it but not give pages of feedback because I couldn’t do that. I didn’t have the time. Or I wouldn’t know what does a filmmaker want and it’s so interesting. We can talk about this at some other point. But the foundations I thought that would fund us never funded us and then the foundation that I thought would never fund us, funded us [Gretchen laughing] so you know it became a confusing world to me like who are we or when we would pitch it to people and I’m thinking, looking at the person like I’m looking at you and thinking “This person doesn’t really care about the film and I thought they would.” So sometimes those situations would disappoint me, you know and then I’m like nahh you guys can take that part. I don’t know. That’s not my world. I don’t want to keep begging or you know.

It was my sort of relationship or my hesitancy, trusting the film industry with the film and my story. I mentioned that there were funders that I thought would love the film and want to hear about what happened in the South Bronx and because it was so personal. Then there were funders who I thought probably would not care about what happened in the South Bronx, they ended up funding us. So, that was an interesting experience. And then also my own sort of personal resistance with wanting to work with that and putting myself out there to the industry.

N: Yea I can understand.

V: Yea, it wasn’t easy.

N: Gretchen you wanted to respond to that?

G: Well, it came up for me when you were talking about, how for the most part felt like you could say, “This line doesn’t sound right to me. That’s not really what happened.” We didn’t really jump on that, we rammed through it. Even if it’s like semantics. A lot of times it would be like that photo doesn’t feel right to me. Just from the filmmaker’s side of things... and I think this is

very common in the documentary field. There's this ethos that you are separate from your subject and you're supposed to be good and like do a good job and be nice to your subjects and take care of them. But the film is yours because it's your story and you're gonna decide and the subject doesn't know what makes a good film. In some ways that's often true, as far as like the filmmaking part of it. But I think, for instance, the instruction I often got and it's not specific to like where I studied film or anything. I think this was really common. You don't show your cut to your subject before the film is done. You just hand it to them when it's done cause they don't get to say what goes in the film or not. It's your film and...

V: [laughing] What?

G: I know.

V: You don't know how many times my son, my daughter, my husband - We've seen every single cut there is to see. See so I don't know what the ethos is because I've experienced a different kind of ethos [laughing]

G: Exactly. **/ I think that as far as giving suggestions or lessons learned to other filmmakers who are interested in doing collaborative projects is to let go of that idea that like yea, maybe that particular photo that you wanted to use works in a certain way. But you know for the health of the film and the integrity of the process, it's essential that Vivian gets to say at every stage of the way what feels right.** It's a different kind of film. I think that filmmaking kind of like journalism or many other artistic practices can be very predatory.

/ There's the potential in the practice to be completely collaborative or completely predatory and you have to decide for yourself where you put your own value and what you're going for. Am I going for complete artistic control where I get to say "that's the most beautiful shot so we have to use it"? Certainly, we debated. It's not like, "Oh. Vivian says that. So, we talk it out. It would very often be like What about? What are the other options?" There's always other options. I think you can feel panicked as a filmmaker like "I don't have options!" We have to do it this way. It takes a lot of flexibility and looking at all the possibilities of how to go about telling this story so that you can find that path, that you're making a good film. I'm not talking about making a less good film or a less interesting film or lowering your

standards in some way and I think that's often what gets thrown at people if they aren't kind of like adhering to this rigid ethos of separating yourself from your subject. I think that's a fallacy. Because I think we found power in this and like listening and finding what felt right to Vivian and making it really true to her story and having that be an actual directorial choice rather than me being like, "Oh, I heard your story. I know I can do this."

v: / We also had screenings in the community to receive feedback. We asked people to come and take a look and give us their opinion about it. I also showed the film to key people throughout the time like Joey, you know I showed him different pieces. Joey, the community leader in the Bronx and some other folks that we showed the film to like "what do you think about this?" It was very important to me that my community would stand by the film as well. It wasn't just Vivian's story but I'm here representing what happened to us in the South Bronx. I wanted to make sure that they experienced the same thing, that I was on the track, that it was our story. Quite frankly, I was kind of nervous about the whole thing throughout. On the morning of our first premiere, I was very nervous because I knew that it was gonna go out into the world. It was gonna go out into the world in a really particular way. It was being premiered in a place downtown all the way downtown in Manhattan where a lot of the South Bronx folks don't really go downtown to look at films. They stay in the Bronx. So they go to some other Manhattan places like to you know the 125th street movie theater in Harlem. Folks don't go downtown for festivals. Not for the most part. But what happened was that -

/ at our premiere the Bronx was in the house and that was tremendous. Not only was that tremendous but you know, not that they represented the entire Bronx population, but they loved it. And we've been doing community screenings throughout the Bronx and in Manhattan and Brooklyn and folks are loving it because the film... What we're hearing over and over again is that it speaks to their experience, it speaks to their experience of their mothers, of their grandmothers, of their fathers, of their neighbors and it is somehow we were able we managed to tell a story that is connecting us all over again, and helping us sort of reflect. It's helping us heal. It's also helping us look to the future about how this is

still happening today. We're waking up and we're saying, "Oh my God. Displacement is happening. Gentrification is happening." They're still doing the same thing to us. What are we gonna do about it? I'm happy that somehow the process that we went through was able to kind of...it transitioned. We made that connection of making sure that we understood that our process had to be very collaborative and now I feel that that same process is being transferred with the community because the film is now being used as a way to have these shared conversations. And it's connected us but I don't think that we would've been able to have these forums and these community conversations without the collaborative process that we went through.

N: What I'm hearing is that the authenticity in the film, comes from the approach. You would not be able to get. So can you restate that?

V: Go ahead Gretchen [laughing]

G: I think just the way you said it. **/ I think that what we get to in this film is Vivian in a voice that feels organic and authentic to her. It's telling this story. Not only is this story rarely told of what happened to her community but that a voice within the community getting a chance to tell that story themselves, in their own words, in a way that feels genuine, that resonates with a lot of people** in NY, it resonates with people... The screenings we've had outside of New York, every screening we have people... I was just in Cleveland and a woman came up and she came with her teenage son and she was in tears and she said, "I've never been able to explain this story to anybody" and that's gonna hit individuals. But I think in general, this is an unusual film in many ways. And I don't think we could have made this film without the process that we had.

V: Right. It's sort of the expansion of that community conversation has been rooted in the way that we collaborated and the way that I was able to use my voice in the process of making the film.

G: Just to add one thing - I think to add in Julia's voice since she's not here. Julia who is our third co-producer. We actually have a fourth co-producer who came in maybe about three years ago. So, she's been part of the process as well, but Julia, Vivian and I - in the conception of the film,

/ Julia (Co-Producer) is a housing activist and she worked in the Bronx as an organizer for many years. That's how

you guys know each other. Her approach, which I think was also really important to this. She always wanted this film to be a tool, not just a like “Let’s put this story out there and see what people think.” She was very specific and that was another guiding force that was part of the collaboration was her vision of how this history could impact work happening on the ground today. Of the many elements that were in the mix, that was a really important one. I don’t know what you...

V: Absolutely. I mean it’s always been about community. It’s always been about justice. It’s always been about using the film to figure out a way to sort of elevate the work that we’re doing around justice in the city. To speak about Julia really quickly. She was also one of those people that you can trust, that I trusted. I trusted Julia to introduce me to Gretchen and throughout the process. Julia and I go back, way back. There was a very deep trusting, loving relationship there that made it happen as well. Then Neyda came on and Neyda was like our Godmother [Gretchen laughing] of sorts, our spiritual godmother to help with the process.

N: So how do we explain or translate what you all...like how we bottle what you all did, right? How do we communicate it to filmmakers, especially filmmakers who are not people of color, who want to tell stories in communities of color but don’t necessarily see the benefit and the value of this collaborative process, not only for the filmmaking process but for the end result and what it will do in the world?

v: Well, / I think that if a filmmaker who is not from a community wants to go into a community to say something about that community, to tell a story, they have to really reflect upon their own issues of power, their own relationship to power, and what that means in the service of doing a story because it’s about telling the story. If the filmmaker cannot share power or doesn’t understand that the community... you know especially if it’s a community that has been oppressed for many years then there are a lot of dynamics and a lot of negative relationship to power and people have to go in understanding that and they have to be able to give people power. I’m using that word a lot, I know. But to give people power to imagine how they want to tell their story in service of telling the story in the film.

If a person can't come to terms with that, then I don't know whether that film will always be authentic or will be true to who they're trying to tell a story about.

N: Gretchen do you have anything:

G: Yea, I think it's kind of maybe the same thing that Vivian said which is just... and I would also add the word to white filmmakers and there's a lot of them. There's a lot of white filmmakers going into communities, and like that was me. That's what I did. I was making a film in a community and I was a total outsider to that community. I don't think that it's an impossible thing to do. I think if you go in and you have the film in your head and you really stick to the film in your head rather than discovering it in your process, then you're gonna have a bad time. You're gonna probably not get along that well with people. You just might run into problems, and I don't think your film is gonna do justice to the community or the story. Honestly,

/ I think for white filmmakers it's very important to recognize that you might think you know a lot more than you actually know. That you might know how to make a film, but you're not the expert in this place. With these people, they are the experts in their own lives. I don't care how many historians you've interviewed. People are the experts in their own lives and if you can't respect that, you're gonna have a lot of problems in your films. And certainly, lots of films get made that way.

V: And people are tired of other people telling their story.

G: Yea for good reason. Those stories are tired, you know. They're everywhere. We've had that forever. So that would be my advice.

/ Get ready to let go of being in charge of the story. You might have to be in charge of a lot of pieces of this, but in order to move it forward because you are the one that most likely has the educational background, contacts, access to money, access to resources that are necessary in order to make... like it takes a huge amount of resources to make a film.

It's ridiculous how many resources! But it also takes people, that's your number one resource in a film is people and respecting on every level all the people that you worked with. And we could also talk about who you choose to bring on as collaborators. That's a whole other issue, but just as far as working within a community, recognizing that just because you're holding those pieces that are about access and resources, doesn't mean that you know what's best for the story or that you know it better than the people you're talking to. You're there to learn, and if you're not ready to learn, you're not gonna find out what your story is really about.

V: But also you know the idea of access to money and resources, you know.

/ There were plenty of times where I was told by my friends from the neighborhood "Oh you better be careful. How much money you gonna make. You gonna make a lot of money? Oh, are they gonna make money and you're not make money? You gotta protect yourself cause now Gretchen is gonna do a story..." You know. There were all these questions about money and I'm like it's not like that. The reason why I can say it's not like that was because I was taught... like we went through this process, I understood how much money it takes [laughing] to make a documentary you know. We're not making any money here but I can say that on solid ground because I know what the nuts and bolt of it is. So part of it, again, about doing a film in the community is that the community has to be educated on what it takes on all the different nuts and bolts, on all the background of pieces that from the community folks might not know. We see a film and we're like "Oh, that's money. No, it's not." This is the way that the financing of this works. We actually have to pay people. Film costs a lot of money. A light costs a lot of money. To get an audio person to come in and do... that all costs money and we need to figure out how to raise money and do this film at the same time. So, it's educating people in the community about what it takes to get a film done because there are these perceptions about white people coming in a community with a camera.