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[An Interview With Independent Film Maker Bill Brown About *The Other Side*](#)

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by [Simon Barrett](#) in [Interview](#), [Movie Reviews](#), [Reviews](#)

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I recently had the good fortune to review *The Other Side*, it is a well made, and thought provoking, non judgmental view of the trials and tribulations facing the people who live along both sides of the US Mexico border. It is contained on a DVD compilation of Bill's work called *Homeland Insecurity*. Most people are unaware of the delicate economic balance that exists in the border region, a balance that assists both countries. Instead they base their views on the vitriolic rantings of gas bags like Lou Dobbs (CNN). The truth is a lot different, and Bill Brown has done a wonderful job of putting it into perspective. I was lucky enough to catch up with Bill and ask him a few questions.

Can you tell us a little about yourself Bill?

I'm from Lubbock, Texas. It's famous for a couple things. The local Lion's Club used to hold the Guinness World's Record for the Most Pancakes Flipped— 30,000 or so— until the Fargo, North Dakota Kiwanis broke the record earlier this year. Lubbock is also where Buddy Holly is from. There's a big bronze statue of him near the Civic Center. I moved away from Lubbock in high school because I didn't like the place so much. But then, from a distance, I began to appreciate its finer qualities: the big skies; the crazy thunderstorms in the spring; the tumbledown farm houses on the outskirts of town. I recently moved to Madison, Wisconsin. This winter, Madison broke its previous record for the most snowfall ever.

Where did the idea for *The Other Side* come from?

Years ago, I made a movie called "Confederation Park." It documents a trip I took across Canada on the Trans-Canada Highway (which, by the way, is the longest highway in the world: 6000 miles or so). Midway

through making that film— I was in Manitoba, or maybe Saskatchewan— I decided that, some day, I wanted to travel along the U.S.-Mexico border and make a film about it. That's where "The Other Side" came from, which is a kind of sequel, or maybe a companion piece, to my film about Canada. By the time I got around to making "The Other Side," 9/11 had already happened and the U.S. border had gotten a lot more tense. The "war on drugs" had given way to the "war on terror," and scores of migrants were dying every summer in the deserts of California and Arizona as the Border Control cracked down on illegal immigration. What began as a trip along the southern border turned into a documentary about border activists establishing water stations out in the desert.

How long did it take to complete?

It took a couple years, shooting for a few months at a time.

I loved the 'home movie' style, but clearly this was produced in a very professional manner. What equipment did you use, and who else was involved in the project?

My movies are mostly solo projects, which is partly why they take so long to make. I shoot 16mm film with an old Bolex camera, and I record sound on a cassette recorder. 'Home movies' is a good way to describe my films, but I also think of them as postcards. They're even sort of structured like postcards: a pretty picture on the front, and a voice-over instead of some text written on the back. Thanks for saying they look professional. If you saw me at work, I think you might change your mind.

One of the biggest challenges facing an indie movie maker is money. There never seems to be quite enough of it. Was funding a big issue for you?

Funding is hard. I've been lucky to get a few grants over the years. Without those, I could never make these films. At some point, I realized I would never make a living off my movies. That was a helpful thing to figure out. It meant I didn't have to worry about recouping my costs or anything crazy like that. All I had to worry about was figuring out how to fund the next project.

What sort of feedback are you getting about *Homeland Insecurity*?

Thanks to Joe Biel and the kids at Microcosm Publishing, I was able to put out the *Homeland Insecurity* DVD, which includes my film "The Other Side," plus a couple other shorts. I think some people are confused by the films. I came to film making as an art student, so they're a little artier than the average documentary. But then again, that's also what some people like about them. A couple summers ago, some friends and I rode our bikes from Washington, D.C. to Denver and screened "The Other Side" along the way. I wound up showing the film to a wide variety of audiences: anarchists in Lawrence, Kansas; Unitarians in Springfield, Illinois; Latino activists in Lafayette, Indiana. Most of these audiences had little or no experience with experimental films, but they often seemed happy to see political issues they were familiar with explored in an unfamiliar way.

One of the aspects that I found alluring in *Homeland Insecurity* was your very non judgmental style, the subject matter of border security and illegal immigration is one that tends to make people take sides. Was it hard to maintain the neutral commentary?

It was hard, and I'm not sure I pulled it off. I definitely don't hide my sympathies. For instance, I never talk to the Border Patrol. Maybe I should have, but I knew they'd never be straight with me because, you know, they're bureaucrats and they're cops. Anyway, I've always made my films from a first-person perspective. I try to be fair and observant, but they're ultimately very personal and subjective.

What is your next project going to be?

I've been shooting some film in and around Cumberland, Maryland. It's where the military reservists who abused Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib were based. I'm not exactly sure where this project is headed, but it's got something to do with tracing a line from Abu Ghraib back to the little Appalachian towns where these soldiers came from.

What else should we know about Bill Brown?

I write a zine about traveling around and eating at old diners and sleeping in creepy motels. It's called Dream Whip. It makes a good stocking stuffer!
<http://www.microcosmpublishing.com/catalog/zines/1725/>

Thanks very much for taking time to talk with us, and I am sure I speak for all at Blogger News in wishing you great success with *The Other Side*, and your future projects.

thanks, Simon!


The Other Side can be found on the DVD *Homeland Insecurity* which is available through [Amazon](#).

Simon Barrett

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March 2008

S M T W T F S

[1](#)

[2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#)

[9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#)

[16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#)

[23](#) [24](#) [25](#) [26](#) [27](#) 28 29

30 31

[« Feb](#)

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- [May 2007](#)
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