

RAW HONEY FILMS PRESENTS
A FILM BY THE WINGS COLLECTIVE

ANATOMY of WINGS

As is.

LOGLINE

Black and white, young and old, a group of women risk their personal identities to build a second family while creating a documentary-film across the inequities of their Baltimore City neighborhoods.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

At first gathered to create an after-school film project, ten Black middle school girls return each week to collaborate with their Black and *white mentors on a feature-length documentary about their own coming-of-age in Baltimore City. Weeks turn into years. Then, shortly before the girls' high school graduations, a sea of misunderstanding arises about what's to come. This self-defined 'second family' is left to question if their solidarity will survive the realities of living in a world of racial inequity.

**We have capitalized 'Black' and lower-cased 'white' in recognition of Black Lives Matter and Decolonizing Cinema with presence and spaciousness.*



Sirens and Church-bells sound together on a January night in Baltimore. Young women and their children light sparklers to celebrate that 2019 has arrived. Cut back to 2008. The young women are not yet mothers or first-generation college attendees. They are girls attending Dunbar Middle School in East Baltimore. It's a Thursday and they are getting on a van that will drive by abandoned row homes on their way to a prominent midtown arts college. It's their first day attending the 'Wings' Video Skills After School Program for Girls. Unbeknownst to them, they will be getting on this van every Thursday through to their high school graduations. Their mentors, Nikiea, a Black youth advocate from East Baltimore and Kirsten, a white Baltimore-based filmmaker originally from the Jersey Shore, teach the six girls, who identify as Black, video skills inside a college classroom of sleek glass walls. Eleven-year-old Sheila points her camera in Nikiea's direction and says "Miss Niki are you in this program?" Nikiea says, "Yes. I'm going to help."

About a year later during a Thursday meeting, Brittany, one of the older influential girls, adamantly brings the conversation of teen pregnancy into the space of 'Wings.' Nikiea responds by sharing she is not willing to get pregnant because of choices she needs to make for herself. Kirsten shares about the health challenges her son experienced from his birth. Brittany acknowledges her mentors with empathy. But no one in the ensemble is quite sure why they are returning every week. As the months unfold, the group realizes that they are called to make a documentary about their "oddly-functional-second-family" existing across the residential-systems meant to divide them. Next, in a bitter-sweet turn of events, Danisha who has just graduated the eighth grade announces she is moving back to Seattle to be with her mother who is dying from HIV. Danisha commits to sending her video-diaries back to Baltimore.

Now 2010, several years into meeting every Thursday, the young women begin attending six different Baltimore City high schools and each invites a friend to 'Wings.' Brittany invites Cami who on her very first day shares how she slowly watched her mother die from HIV. Sheila invites Quandra who becomes the first to express budding interests in boys through her videos. Then Tazz invites Tywana who articulates her hunger to be seen and heard by her family at home. Nikiea confesses that she had first been unsure if hanging out with white people was bringing her out of her character, but now with everyone coming together to share, share, and share some more, she is noticing a collective shift from the mindset of impoverishment to enlightenment.

Then on the eve of the girls' high school graduations, at a bi-annual retreat in the Maryland countryside, the self-defined second family erupts with a flood of emotion and misunderstanding they cannot control. Both mentors and mentees are left wondering whether 'Wings' will ever be the same—or if it will simply end? When the group realizes that Quandra is pregnant they come back together to support her as she ponders motherhood, completing high school, and holding onto her dream of attending college. The group returns to Baltimore for prom season. But the unknown of what will happen after high school is further complicated when several of the young women resist writing their college essays. Nikiea grieves her realization that mentors cannot change everything.

Now 2014 and removed from the lives they lived in high school, the 'Wings' group continues to work on their documentary. Though doing so has mostly shifted to inviting Kirsten to film important moments since most of the young women have chosen to put their cameras down. Brittany prepares for nursing in the medical field. Quandra navigates motherhood while attending college classes for pre-nursing. Tywana navigates her pregnancy while being briefly incarcerated. At a potluck gathering Danisha, who returned to Baltimore to study filmmaking, affectionately addresses Kirsten's skin color as the inside of a hotdog bun. The 'Wings' second-family is closer than ever but the completion of their documentary feels uncertain just as the lives of the young women feel uncertain. We then learn that Danisha is not going to make it to her second year of college. She simply cannot give up her core identity as a young Black woman to acclimate to a white-normative curriculum. Kirsten grieves the loss of what Danisha worked so hard for.

Then in 2016, Tazz who was thirteen when 'Wings' began, turns twenty-two and decides to film an update with everyone who appears in 'Anatomy of Wings'. Kirsten accompanies Tazz hoping for connection with everyone in the 'Wings' second-family. As Tazz interviews each of the 'Wings' women the audience learns that those who have become young mothers are very loving to their children. Tazz also asks how the documentary should end? Danisha, now working as a mentor to middle school girls says the film should end the way it began, with a group of women getting ready to go through some stuff, but equipped with a lifetime support system. Then returning to celebrate the 2019 New Year, the group lovingly questions if they are actually done filming? Maybe? Maybe not.



WINGS WOMEN



BRITTANY BACKMON



TESHAVIONNA "TAZZ" MITCHELL



SHEILA BUTLER



BRIENNA BROWN



MARQUISE WEEMS



DANISHA HARRIS



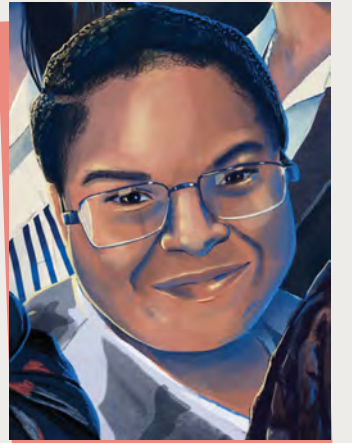
CAMI MCCRIEF



QUANDRA JONES



TYWANA REID



QUANISHA CARMICHAEL



WINGS MENTORS



KIRSTEN D'ANDREA HOLLANDER



JACKIE DUVAL-HARVEY



JANE COTTIS



NIKIEA REDMOND



KATA FREDERICK



CINNAMON TRIANO



TOPIC: SOLIDARITY BORN BY WITNESSING

We are witness bearing, femme filmmakers. Over ten years in the making, 'Anatomy of Wings' is an urgent film about young Black women's lives that matter in beauty and authenticity. A two-fold coming-of-age story, we begin as teenage girls from the East and West sides of Baltimore who grow up on camera while our fledgling video skills program grows into a women's collective of profound filmmaking. Our feature-length film focuses on the conditions needed for empathetic witnessing.

As creators, both in front and behind the camera, we tell our story about Black and white people coming together across radically different zip-codes so that ten Black teenage girls feel seen and heard in their daily lives. 'Anatomy of Wings' offers a replicable model of mentorship emphasizing seeing and hearing without judgment.

Even still, underserved youths' stories such as ours can frequently be based on the competitiveness of winning or losing a scholarship. We are not interested in perpetuating the myth that scholarships are the sole means of expanding beyond one's circumstances. Scholarships can be powerful but they are scarce regarding the magnitude of young people who deserve them. We must create a new narrative outside of the white-normative-gaze.

By speaking through this film we are expanding the definition of a worthwhile life. We are acknowledging a person's growth in the moment of her experience versus focusing solely on the potential of future accomplishments. Even when this means having to face the stigmas associated with young motherhood, whether or not one goes to college, or where one lands in the workforce. There is beauty happening in Baltimore. There is healing, there are young women coming-of-age, breaking cycles, and improving communities one breath at a time.

Since 2016 and across Baltimore City, 'Anatomy of Wings' has offered focus groups in various stages of development for young people to senior citizens. Baltimoreans from all socioeconomic, race, gender, class, and sexual orientation have viewed excerpts from the film-in-progress at public schools, universities, community centers, homes, and cafes. Participants have consistently reported that it is a stunning rarity to see young Baltimorean women empowered in love and light instead of being defined by a cinematic backdrop of scarcity and loss. We believe audiences are eager to engage films that are NOT about winners and losers. We believe audiences are ready for stories that are NOT about who is good and who is other. We are ready to share our story about how we want to live in this world.

~ The Wings Women



ARTISTIC APPROACH

Baltimore City and the Maryland Countryside, USA allowed contrasting backdrops of beauty for the filming of 'Anatomy of Wing's. During our middle school years of 2008 & 2009 we, the young women of 'Wings,' filmed with SD camcorders and then switched over to the Flip Cam in 2010. Kirsten and her college students filmed with HDV Pro-Cams from 2008 through 2011. In 2012 the whole group switched to the NEX, and then in 2017 Nikiea Redmond's en-face interview was filmed with the Arri Amira. 'Wings was an 80% female crew, consisting of teenage girls, college students, and mentors filming expressively. Thus, no effort was made to hide the use of cameras or microphones during vérité, video-diary, or interview filming. Rather, the camera is consistently acknowledged as a tool to bear witness.

Intimate vérité capture of individuals, family activities, classroom interactions, and interviews provides a patient and unapologetic portrait of our small community embracing private courage and aspects of social unrest that typically go unseen. There is NOTHING extractive here. Together we present our Baltimore-bred documentary, a film that reveals unconventional healing against the back-drop of blighted cityscapes to the hub of an art-and-design college, where 'Wings' met regularly from 2008 to 2013 – the first six years of our ongoing relationship.



AUDIENCE

In 'Anatomy of Wings' both mentees and mentors show up as is and practice seeing and hearing each other without judgment. Our film is meant for anyone desiring connection to each other as women, men, girls, boys, transgender, gay, bisexual, non-binary, brown skinned, pale skinned, impoverished, wealthy, gluten-free, obese, or hairy legged. 'Wings' audiences include people working in nonprofits, community-advocacy organizations, schools, universities, and multicultural organizations committed to anti-Black racism, anti-racism, decolonizing curriculum, and understanding where these actions land on the continuum of ally-ship, collaboration, and solidarity. This includes those working with and within some of the world's most challenging environments to positively impact the adverse effects of structural racism, white-heteronormative media structures, and white-supremacy. Most important, this includes those studying professionally or personally to understand the pervasive cultural trauma resulting from African-American slavery and ALL stolen from Indigenous people.



ENGAGEMENT AND SOCIAL IMPACT



Through a workshop called 'Solidarity Born by Witnessing' we explore reflective prompts, 'Wings' film clips, and activities from our curriculum-guide-in-progress. Participants are guided to discover the conditions needed to engage and build upon empathetic witnessing in their own lives and in community. Additionally, our curriculum based on the 'Wings' model of seeing and hearing will support educators and mentors to enhance their existing programs or begin programs of their own. Finally, while touring with Film Festivals and during our Theatrical we will continue to mount our workshops in cities nationwide and abroad.





Nikiea Redmond | Co-Director, Co-Producer

Nikiea Redmond received her Bachelors in Corporate Communication from the University of Baltimore in 2011. Growing up in East Baltimore Redmond became a mentor to the youth coming-of-age around her. Redmond has assisted with filming, documenting, and editing historical footage of legendary East Baltimore artists, politicians, and community activists since the age of 14. Being a child in Baltimore's impoverished neighborhoods, researching the history of slavery in her family, traveling with Freedom Schools focused on teaching African history – and working professionally in the public-school system has provided Redmond with the experience to tell the 'Anatomy of Wings' story with a direct understanding of societal makeups and the human rights she wishes to see in the world. Additionally, Redmond serves as a liaison bringing together political organizations, community groups and stakeholders in East Baltimore. The Afro-American Newspaper presented Redmond with the 'Sam Lacy Award for Youth Leadership' in 2004. She is also a 2015 recipient of the 'Black Wall Street Journal Award' for her work in Baltimore City.

Kirsten D'Andrea Hollander | Co-Director, Co-Producer

Kirsten D'Andrea Hollander is a full-time professor at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), where she co-directs the MFA Filmmaking program. Equipped with an undergraduate degree in Painting from MICA in 1988, she turned to documentary filmmaking after receiving an MFA in Imaging and Digital Arts from UMBC in 1997. Having taught in higher education for 22 years, Hollander has witnessed its profound contributions as well as its devastating shortcomings regarding inclusivity, identity, and financial support for students from underserved circumstances. After making short documentaries to support innovative curriculum in Baltimore's public-school system, Hollander explored how the camcorder can be a collaborative tool to bear witness. In 2008 she launched the 'Wings Video Skills After School Program for Girls' and the recently completed 'Anatomy of Wings' feature length documentary. In 2011 Hollander was selected for an Independent Filmmaker Project Fellowship to launch her first feature length documentary, 'Us, Naked: Trixie & Monkey', which premiered with the DOC NYC film festival in 2014. In 2015, 'Us, Naked: Trixie & Monkey' received Best International Feature Length Documentary at the Netherland's DOCfeed Film Festival and Best Feature Length Documentary at New York's Coney Island Film Festival. The film went into international distribution with Random Media/The Orchard in 2017. Hollander lives in Baltimore City with her husband, son, and two silly dogs.



Sheila Butler | Star & Cinematographer

Sheila Butler joined the 'Wings' program in 2007 while attending Dunbar Middle School and then graduated from Dunbar High School in 2012. Sheila loves writing metaphoric poems and giving her reader different ideas to think about. In 2013, Sheila became a proud mother to her son Avonte. They travel every chance they get. Sheila wants to always create a safe and productive place for her son where he will know his possibilities are endless. Sheila wants everyone to see the world for its possibilities and to accept the help of others while also giving back to the community. Sheila says, "Every voice matters! 'Wings' taught me that we are never alone and we don't necessarily need to be birth-family-related to help each other grow. Never be afraid to express yourself. We have to listen to one another and stand together when we are faced with personal and societal challenges. A lot of people think the person you call a mentor has to be a certain type of person. A mentor is an experienced and trusted adviser. So anyone that you feel helps to motivate you and push you to do better can be a mentor."

Brittany Backmon | Star & Cinematographer

Brittany Backmon joined the 'Wings' program in 2007 while a student at the historic Dunbar Middle School. She graduated from Edmondson-Westside High School in 2011. The mother of two beautiful sons, Brittany lives in Baltimore County and is earning her Bachelor's degree from Morgan State University in Community Health Nursing. After her time with the 'Wings' program Brittany believes that we can all give advice to each other and that we should not fear judgment nor hold back how we really feel. Brittany says, "As sisters we can guide each other through troubles and through happiness." She has told her sons they can come talk to her about anything. This is the type of openness and communication she wants to see in the world.

Tazz Mitchell | Star & Cinematographer

Tazz Mitchell is living in Baltimore, Maryland, continuing the legacy of 'Wings' mentorship through her activities in a community marching band. Tazz experiences the marching world not as competitive, but as a fun, respectful community. Tazz loves coming together with her marching community for practices, parades, and fundraisers. She also loves spending time with family, especially watching her niece and nephew grow up. Dining out for sushi with friends is also at the top of her list. Currently, Tazz is a manager in a restaurant and has been baking for over a decade with her Nana. She is now also looking into writing recipes for vegetarian and gluten free connoisseurs and plans to open her own business. She dreams of traveling to other countries such as Madrid to gather culinary ideas. Tazz's advice to young women growing up today is to cherish every moment and to love everyone that loves you.



CAST & CREW

Marquise Weems | Star & Cinematographer

Marquise Weems joined the 'Wings' program in 2007 while in the sixth grade at the historic Dunbar Middle School. The youngest member of the 'Wings' Collective, she graduated from the Carver Vocational-Technical High School in 2013. The mother of beautiful twins, Marquise is a gifted hair stylist and service provider at the University of Maryland Medical Center where she loves to lend a supportive ear and heart to patients who want to share their personal stories. Marquise has worked with both community based photography and filmmaking projects. She feels that 'Wings' was her Film School and that such programs need to continue in Baltimore City.

Cami McCrief | Star & Cinematographer

Cami McCrief is a mom, wife, hard worker, and a student. After her time with 'Wings', Cami wants to tell other women to open-up and uplift each other. Cami says, "Growing up as a Black young woman in Baltimore there were all kinds of statistics placed on us before we even had the legal right to make our own decisions. You were either a drop-out, pregnant, or on drugs. Having 'Wings' in my life after losing my mom brought light back to the mission she set out for me. There is so much in this world that I would love to see change but most important, I just want us to love one another."

Brienna Brown | Star & Cinematographer

Brienna Brown joined the 'Wings' program in 2007 as a 7th grader at Dunbar Middle School. Presently, she is focusing on strengthening her relationship with God and raising her new baby girl. While she is an aspiring business owner, she also has future plans of completing college and potentially joining the U.S. Army. Brienna hopes that other people can learn there is a lot more to Baltimore City than they might think, including a lot of love, support, and good people. She believes the 'Wings' film will bring a new perspective to light.

Quandra Jones | Star & Cinematographer

Quandra Jones joined the Wings program in 2009 and graduated from Dunbar High School in 2012. She lives in Baltimore City and is earning her associates degree from Baltimore City Community College in General Studies. When asked to describe what she learned as a cinematographer and mentee of the 'Wings' program, she said she learned to "accept the people that genuinely want to help you....they keep pushing you and lift you up when you are down." She enjoys spending time with her family and takes pride in being a strong source of support for her children.



CAST & CREW

Tywana Reid | Star & Cinematographer

Tywana Reid joined the 'Wings' program in 2010 while she attended Frederick Douglass High School. She is now a supervising service manager at Chipotle with 15 employees under her direction and believes that creativity can bring peace and beauty to counterbalance the harshness of the world. For Tywana, the 'Wings' program helped her to understand that she, like so many women, has "obstacles to overcome." Remaining true to herself is her goal and her favorite activities are singing and dancing.

Quanisha Carmichael | Star & Cinematographer

Quanisha Carmichael joined the 'Wings' program in 2010, while attending The REACH! Partnership School, a public charter high school operated by Civic Works, a Baltimore nonprofit affiliated with AmeriCorps. Quanisha began her medical assistance studies at the former Sojourner–Douglass College, a Baltimore based private college organized around Afrocentric focus and study. At Sojourner–Douglass Quanisha flourished as both student and administrative assistant. Currently, Quanisha is furthering her education in medical assistance. In her spare time she loves to work out at her favorite gym, make healthy smoothies and salads, and advocate for wellness.

Danisha Harris | Star, Cinematographer & Songstress

Danisha Harris is a multifaceted artist and storyteller residing in the Seattle, WA area by way of Baltimore, Maryland. Two of her original songs are showcased in 'Anatomy of Wings'. Danisha started life as a writer and avid reader, later developing a love of theatre and the arts in general. Co-founder and leading lady of indie music collective, No Idol Music, she weaves her musical gifts and storytelling abilities into neo-soul magic under the stage name TWIYA (The World Is Yours Always). She also supports community development through her grassroots group, The Afro Collab. Connecting with and uplifting people, encouraging them to reach their fullest potential is what she strives for. Working in the Human Services and Education fields has given her another way to achieve that goal. Through her music and activism, she hopes to create spaces where people can be their authentic selves and break free of any barriers that society might place upon them. Currently, she is finishing her Bachelor's degree in Psychology and hopes to go to Law school. She would like to spread the 'Wings' message of radical acceptance and inspire all people to speak their truth and validate others.



Trinidad Rodriguez | Editor

Trinidad Rodriguez is a filmmaker living in Brooklyn. She is the creator of the series documentary 'Neighborhood Slice' which was broadcast weekly on public television for two seasons. As the program's director, cinematographer and editor she has explored the evolution of NYC's unique immigrant neighborhoods through the lives of long-time residents. Rodriguez produced the feature-length documentary 'High Tech, Low Life' about citizen journalists in China that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and aired on the acclaimed PBS series, POV. She edited 'Black in America: Black and Blue', a feature documentary about the impact of aggressive policing tactics on the lives of young black men, which aired on CNN. Her short documentary 'Our Lady Queen of Harlem' which she shot, directed, and edited, premiered at MoMA's Documentary Fortnight and is distributed by Third World Newsreel. Rodriguez's work has appeared in Newsweek, New York Magazine, PBS, Robert Wood Johnson foundation and in a variety of other independent documentary projects. Her editing expertise and fresh eyes were crucial in making sure the 'Anatomy of Wings' storyline was edited for an inclusive audience.

Kata Frederick | Assistant Producer, Principle Cinematography, Contributing Editor

Kata Frederick is a shape shifter and a free spirit. He is currently a User Experience Designer thinking about how to empower all humans with the unraveling technologies of the future. Kata has also been a Special Education Teacher for Baltimore City Public Schools, a nerdy library assistant, and a vagabond housekeeper on a tiny Island in the middle of the ocean. For Kata, weekly meetings with the 'Wings' crew was a magical universe of its own, where every person could unleash the power of their truest selves. Kata carries the lessons of 'Wings' everywhere he goes. Kata lives in Baltimore, Maryland with his partner Amy, pup Linus, and an extremely hairy cat Siddhartha.

Cinnamon Triano | Cinematographer

Cinnamon Triano is a documentary filmmaker currently living and working in Detroit, MI. She received her BFA in Video and Film Arts from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2012. Triano was a cinematographer for 'Anatomy of Wings' throughout her undergraduate career and during various visits to Baltimore after her graduation. She remains close to the young women who appear in the documentary. Her thesis film, 'The Mary Jane Project', screened internationally at film festivals and museums. Since graduating, she has gone on to work internationally on numerous long-term independent documentaries in Los Angeles, Detroit, the Netherlands and more. Most recently, she was an Associate Producer for the Netflix Original sports docuseries 'CHEER'.

Julia Golonka | Cinematographer & Assistant Editor

Julia Golonka is a Baltimore-based cinematographer and editor with a degree in Film & Video from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2015. She first joined the 'Wings' Filmmaking Collaborative as an intern in the fall of 2010. She continued on as cinematographer and assistant editor. In 2019 Julia was named a Documentary Fellow by Johns Hopkins Saul Zaentz Innovation Lab for her latest film 'Don't Put Her Down' about Hazel Dickens, one of the first women to front a bluegrass band.



ellen cherry | Film Composer

ellen cherry is an award winning Song & Story Alchemist, musician and performer, based in Baltimore, Maryland. She is the composer and pianist for the 'Anatomy of Wings' original score. Mixing equal parts of pathos and humor throughout her songs, her singular voice and her banter gives audiences a peek into a whimsical, curious mind. After a devastating car wreck caused by an intoxicated driver in 2013, *cherry* was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and has spent the last seven years fostering recovery and resilience, her own and others, through performance, music, and storytelling. Once a year, she swims a long distance in a large body of water.

Allen Moore | Contributing Cinematographer

Allen Moore has made independent documentaries for over 40 years. He is the recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts Media Arts Grant (1989); a NEA Media Arts Fellowship (1994); a Guggenheim Fellowship in Filmmaking (1982); and has received two Primetime Emmy nominations for Outstanding Cinematography (1995 and 2012). Moore has also served as Director of Photography for Ken Burns' 'The Civil War'; 'Thomas Jefferson'; 'Lewis and Clark', 'The War', 'The National Parks: America's Best Idea' and 'The Roosevelts: An Intimate History' – and was a cinematographer for 'The National Parks' which won a Primetime Emmy in 2012. 'Anatomy of Wings' is primarily shot by the girls and women who appear in the documentary. However, when the film's directors, Nikiea Redmond and Kirsten D'Andrea Hollander, decided to film an en-face studio-interview, Moore who had followed the progress of 'Anatomy of Wings' for the past ten years was eager to lend a hand.

Richard Hankin | Consulting Editor

Richard Hankin is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and editor, and the founder of Looking Glass Films, an independent production company. Hankin has worked on films for both theatrical distribution and for HBO, NBC, ABC, PBS, Showtime and Netflix. 'Capturing the Friedmans', which Hankin co-produced and edited, won numerous awards, including the Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival, and an Emmy for Hankin's editing. The film was nominated for an Academy Award and was honored by the International Documentary Association as one of the best documentaries of all time. Hankin won both an Emmy and an American Cinema Editors Award for his work as Supervising Editor on 'The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst', the groundbreaking six-part documentary series for HBO. Hankin has served for many years as a Creative Advisor for the Sundance Institute Documentary Editing and Story Lab, and is on the faculty of the School of Visual Arts Social Documentary Film program.



CAST & CREW

Alison Steinkamp Welch, MS | Associate Producer

Alison Welch has more than a dozen years of experience leading strategic change. Her most recent role involved education programming in East Baltimore, one of the largest community redevelopment projects in the nation. This led her to support young girls growing up in the community and ultimately creating the initial program that evolved into the 'Anatomy of Wings' documentary. Prior to her work building neighborhoods, Alison served as the Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing, leading the development of the School's strategic plan and coordinating several task forces. She completed her graduate work in the field of Organization Development at Georgetown University and American University. Alison has been involved in community service throughout her twelve years living in Oak Park, IL, a near-west suburb of Chicago. She presently serves as the Vice President of the Board for Sarah's Inn, a local domestic violence agency. Alison and her husband Kevin have two children ages eight and twelve.

Jane Cottis | Segment Producer

Larry Jackson | Cinematographer

Devon Brown | Cinematographer

Katty Hueras | Graphic Designer

Jeffrey Chance | Colorist

Jimmy Powell | Colorist

James P. Duffy | En-Face Interview Audio

Camila Franco Ribeiro Gomide | Additional Voiceover Audio

Sherria Lovelace | Assistant Producer

Darrée Hyun | Assistant Producer

Samantha Mitchell | Assistant Producer

Gabriel Mantegna | Assistant Producer

Gillian Goodwin | Assistant Producer



WINGS MEMORIES & FUN TRIVIA

In April of 2011, after a night of settling differences between one another, I finally came out and told the group I was pregnant. In my head I guess you can say I was still processing the whole idea of being pregnant at 16. I didn't initially come out and say anything because I didn't really know how to. I don't know exactly how I came out and said it, but I know I was relieved when I did. The love and support I received was amazing. The energy from the girls and mentors made me feel like I would be ok. Besides my family, my 'Wings' family were the only other ones who knew. I trusted them and still do till this day.

—**QUANDRA JONES**

The last morning of our retreat will be forever solidified in my mind. We were all exhausted yet calm and connected. We were cleaning-up the retreat center and getting ready to depart. Everyone had odd chores like dumping sawdust in outhouse toilets, rolling yoga mats, and sweeping the yurt. But Jane also needed to deal with a flat tire. None of us had changed a tire before. A few of us walked out to the parking lot and calmly read a tire changing manual. We had spent a whole weekend empowering each other and learning how to trust one other. That trusting energy spilled over into this unexpected tire changing. Brienna and Quanisha did most of the work and Quandra and I were the moral support team. After all that had transpired that weekend, it felt so natural to take on a daunting task and conquer it. —**KATA FREDERICK**

Regarding the changing of my tire, I just remember being really impressed with ourselves. We read the manual and as strong women we changed it easily. It was certainly my first, and a first for all. I was so proud! —**JANE COTTIS**

A lot of people ask me how I was able to be so vulnerable and open on my very first day at 'Wings.' I just knew this was the space to have my grief witnessed regarding Theresa's, my mother's death. I did not hold back. What people don't know is what happened just hours before when we were not filming. While Brittany was busy sneaking me on the 'Wings' van in front of our high school, Edmondson Westside, Ms. Kirsten was like "excuse me. I cannot let you on this van without a release form." Brittany said I'm not going to 'Wings' today if Cami can't come! Ms. K just kind of stared at me and then said "get me some verbal permission that your family is ok with you getting on this van." I called my aunt on Ms. Kirsten's cell phone. Ms. K grilled my aunt with questions: did she know where I would be; what I would be doing; what snacks and food I would be eating; did I have any allergies; when the van would return me home? I actually started to walk away and then Ms. K called out with a big smile and said "Cami let's get going." But she made sure I had that release form signed for the next week! —**CAMI MCCRIEF**



WINGS MEMORIES & FUN TRIVIA

An important day for me, that we were NOT permitted to include in our documentary, was when we had a group of young men from a foster home join us for an evening of 'Wings' conversations. We showed some of our film clips and told the guys what it was like to share our video diaries and film clips with our families. These young men did not really have families to go home to. I felt Ms. K's heart break that night. She could not hide her tears as she wondered where these boys' mothers were? But it is still one of my fondest 'Wings' memories because we told the young men that "against all odds you can achieve." I wish we could have included that night in our film. But the foster care director decided she did not want the footage in our documentary. I'm sure she had her reasons. —**CAMI MCCRIEF**

I must say that one of my most proud cinematography moments was filming the children of the 'Wings' women running in circles around a lamppost. That was the night we filmed with sparklers to celebrate the 2019 new year. Marquise said, "Hey Ms. Kirsten you should film the kids running around and playing." Marquise is a true film director. Last year while having lunch with Marquise and her twins, literally a few weeks before social distancing began, Marquise said: "'Wings' was my film school." As an educator trying to understand how education will become truly equitable, I wept for weeks after Marquise shared that with me.

—**KIRSTEN D'ANDREA HOLLANDER**

My emotional memory was losing my great grandmother. Then on a Saturday afternoon, Ms. Jane extended her hand out for me to come to the MICA college campus and talk. At first I told her "no, I was good...I don't want to talk to anyone." But then I decided to go see her and I poured my heart out. We talked about a good memory I had with my great grandmother. Ms. Jane said "always go by the good memories." Moral of the story: Since then Ms. Jane has been affectionately calling me "little feet". Well, because, I have little feet. — **BRITTANY BACKMON**

I was a 'Wings' intern, and in my last semester of high school during the 2011 retreat weekend in Mt. Airy, Maryland. I was one of the cinematographers for the womanhood recognition ceremony where each of the 'Wings' women had a bouquet of flowers. Kirsten remarked that I was the same age as some of the young women participating in the ceremony. Next, everyone gave me a flower from their bouquet so I could be included. Even making sure I had one of each color. I had only been involved with 'Wings' for a few months at that time, yet remember feeling so welcomed and connected to everyone in that moment. Then another cinematographer took my camera and Quandra linked arms with me as we walked back up the hill to the retreat center. — **JULIA GOLONKA**

A memory that will always stand out is my last 'Anatomy of Wings' film shoot. Ms. Nikiea and Cinnamon came to Seattle and filmed me with my 12-year old photography students. I was 22 years old and really tryna give my students a 'Wings Experience'. It was funny and emotional at the same time cuz I didn't know what I was doing. But I was trying to be like Ms. Nikiea on our first day of 'Wings' back in 2008, when Ms. Nikiea was like 21 years old. —**DANISHA HARRIS**



WINGS MEMORIES & FUN TRIVIA

At our first retreat in the countryside of Mt. Airy, Maryland I don't remember how the chickens got out. But I remember I was in the kitchen and I got called outside. I'm like "why are we catching chickens?" Marquise and Brienna were chasing a chicken and I started running with them. The whole experience was funny and kind of scary. I was afraid that the chickens would peck my hand! But it was loads of fun running around after the chickens. We managed to get them all back in their area. Marquise picked up most of the chickens by their feet. After that, we went into the kitchen, washed our hands and sat and joked about it. That day was also my first time having vegetarian lasagna.

—SHEILA BUTLER

From the first day on the 'Wings' van to our high school graduations — these are all memorable moments for me. It was life changing and an eye opening experience. I want to thank my best friend Tazz, for inviting me to 'Wings'. My first day was both nerve wrenching and exciting. Once the cameras were rolling, the talking began to complete strangers who I told my secrets about my mom and my sexuality. And also why I had felt alone. Just when I thought I was being judged I realized these strangers were showing me love and appreciation. That was the first day I felt like I could give my heart away — and not just to anyone, but to my sisters, mentors, and godmothers. We continue to make memories cause we're family. I love my family.

—TYWANA REID

Our overnight trips are my most memorable because during those times we were temporarily a real family, having to set rules, challenge beliefs while making sure we did so in a supportive and caring way. I am especially fond of the first trip because challenges began as soon as we walked into the building in Beallsville, Maryland. At this point, the girls were tired and hungry and when they walked into the dining room, there were pitchers of water with ice and sliced lemons on the table. Their immediate response was that they were "not drinking that water". We also let them know that only vegetarian meals could be prepared by the chef. I think the only reason they did not leave at that point was because it was pitch dark outside and they had no clue how to get back to Baltimore. Fortunately, we were together long enough to get past those issues. It also helped that the next morning, the chef prepared an assortment of breakfast and lunch options, and even made oatmeal raisin cookies (which they enjoyed not realizing those cookies were actually vegan). —JACQUELYN DUVAL-HARVEY

In 2008 I was new faculty to MICA's Film and Video department where 'Wings' was being hosted every Thursday. Jane Cottis, who taught in this department, introduced herself and said she wanted to join as a 'Wings' mentor and to help teach video skills to the girls who were attending Dunbar Middle School. But then the girls graduated to six area highschools, including Dunbar High School, Edmondson-Westside, Reach Academy, Frederick Douglass, Western, and Carver Vocational-Technical. We picked the young women up from their high schools every Thursday via Mr. William Bentley graciously driving the MICA aka 'Wings' van. But due to Baltimore's afterschool traffic being so heavy, this did not always work to start our class on time. Jane started picking up some of the young women from their schools and driving them to class as well. Between Jane and Mr. Bentley we were able to maximize our class time! Jane also went food shopping every week to make sure the young women had healthy snacks and dinner. The 'Wings' women hope to visit Jane in England where she is returning with her wife Karmen after many years of living and teaching in the U.S. —KIRSTEN D'ANDREA HOLLANDER



WINGS MEMORIES & FUN TRIVIA

During the early days of 'Wings' - the deep breathing and grounding exercises at the beginning of class were always accompanied by a lot of giggling. As a young mentor I tried so hard to keep a straight face — but it was contagious. It always made me smile. Over the years the giggling slowly died down. It's beautiful how we were learning together how to be alone with ourselves.—**KATA FREDERICK**

Hailing from Detroit, I was an undergraduate student studying in Baltimore as well as a mentor and cinematographer with the 'Wings' collective. I had not imagined I would be so welcomed as I was the night we went to Sheila's family Christmas party. Her mom, Ms. Yvette had set up all these beautiful decorations and the kitchen was full of delicious food made with love. When Kirsten, Sam, and I walked in the house I instantly felt so welcomed and like we were part of the family. Such a warm and special feeling to be there with Sheila and her family, I'll never forget it. 'Wings' opened so many doors to experiences like this and for that I'm so, so grateful. —**CINNAMON TRIANO**

Back in 2015, when I felt like we were never going to finish this film, I suggested we do a follow-up interview with everyone involved in "Anatomy of Wings." I was so excited to be the interviewer and to be camera #1. And if Ms. Kirsten was going to go with me to be camera #2 and to do the audio we really needed to get all this done while she had a semester's sabbatical from teaching. We filmed 15 people starting in September 2015 and finished in the beginning of January. My favorite question to ask each person was, "How should we end the documentary?" First we interviewed Dr. Jackie while she was the Director of Baltimore Mayor's Office of Human Services. We tried to film the front of the Mayor's building for an establishing shot but got in trouble for having our camera out. Finally, they let us go upstairs to film in Dr. Jackie's office! Overall, I thought I was going to be learning a lot more about filming interviews, which I did, but at the end of the day, I learned a heck of a lot about film producing because it took so much time to get the interview questions written and the interviewees scheduled! And to find locations where they would be comfortable being interviewed. We did several interviews at my Nana's home on Eastside. I also really appreciated interviewing people who had been behind the camera during our 'Wings' after school days, such as Cinnamon and Larry. These were the people we had trusted to film us for so many years of laughter and tears. People have asked me what it was like to do the final interviews for a film project that had been in production for over a decade. I was just so happy to be connecting with everyone and to hear how 'Wings' was continuing to nurture decisions in their lives.

—**TESHAVIONNA 'TAZZ' MITCHELL**



WINGS MEMORIES & FUN TRIVIA

My funny memory is when me and Tazz went on the first retreat in Beallsville, Maryland, a retreat that is not shown in our film. We didn't know the chef was going to be 'Veggie Annie' — a vegetarian! We are from east Baltimore, home of chicken boxes lol. So we were starving. Then when it was time to go to bed we thought that the old victorian retreat house was haunted by nuns...cause it had at one time been a convent. Dr. Jackie came in the room and said ladies what's going on? We told her the bed moved! She said there are no ghosts! Go to bed lol! Moral of the story: The house was haunted and me and Tazz slept in the same bed that night! Lol safe! —**BRITTANY BACKMON**

The main thing that's coming to me as a memory is how loud the 'Wings' van was. All that squeakin' and every time Mr. Bently hit a bump how the whole back of the van sounded like it was about to fall apart. lmao. We would just keep talking like nothing was happening. Ha. —**NIKIEA REDMOND**

I would like to chime in about how 'Wings' changed my food palette lol. I ate cashews and pistachios for the first time. And now they are my favorite snacks. Never will I ever eat that goddess salad dressing or those sun chips without nostalgia.

—**DANISHA HARRIS**

In the earlier after school days, video homework assignments were given. We would look at the footage each week when we gathered on Thursdays in MICA's Brown Center. Many video poems, video diaries, and footage of family were shared. It was beauty unfolding. Then came the moment where we needed to begin editing some of our footage to share outside of the safety of our classroom. Brittany volunteered to speak some voiceovers that we could use in our editing. I'll never forget what she said, "'Wings' is a place where you come to NOT get judged. 'Wings' is a family."

—**KIRSTEN D'ANDREA HOLLANDER**



1

Please explain your inspiration and point of view when you first started developing and collaborating on 'Anatomy of Wings.'

NIKIEA: As a teenager I started collaborating with filmmakers from the community and backpackers from Cali, Boston, and as far as Denmark. I was very fortunate to be trained by legendary Baltimore photographers and cinematographers who helped shape my love for capturing stories. As a mentor in the 'Wings Video Skills Program for Girls' back in 2008, I never imagined myself actually Co-Directing a feature. When Kirsten asked me to join her in directing and producing 'Anatomy of Wings' the collaboration was a no brainer. We'd been mentoring the youth in the 'Wings' program for years together and my role was and still is to make sure the stories are authentically told through the lens of the young women featured in our film.

As a filmmaker, the journey of following my inspiration to encourage everyday people to boldly tell their own stories is what keeps me going. I'm an East Baltimore girl born and raised in the heart of what we call "Down the Hill" or "Middle East Baltimore". My upbringing being directly rooted in the community and my education being exposed to schooling in the Archdiocese of Baltimore has gifted me with a foot in both worlds. My life's work is always connected to utilizing the skills and resources (and sometimes access) I've received over the years in a way that includes my community of Black & Brown women from Baltimore. I'm not a voice to the voiceless, I'm a change agent supporting oppressed voices coming to the eyes of people who may not have had an open heart to hear them.

KIRSTEN: I first lived in Baltimore when I attended college in the late 1980's. It was a wonderful experience but I never got to know the Baltimoreans who lived in the communities surrounding the campus where I spent all my time. When 20 years later my husband Scot and I returned to Baltimore to raise our son Sam, I realized I could NOT live in Baltimore again without knowing my neighbors. Then one night I saw the largest full moon I had ever seen rise over East Baltimore as I was driving on the 695 Beltway. Something struck my heart and I found myself volunteering for a girl's after school program where I met Nikiea Redmond and our now Associate Film Producer Alison Welch.

Alison was organizing yoga, sailing, and art events for young girls attending the historic Dunbar Middle School in East Baltimore. I began filming some of these events with the hope we would create an innovative curriculum video to share with additional girls. Unexpectedly, Alison was relocated to Chicago with her family and I found myself reaching out for support from The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) where I was a part-time professor. Next thing we knew, Nikiea and I were running a video skills program for girls that was based on using the camera as a tool to bear witness without judgment or expectation. Just seeing someone as they are, for who they are in the very moment of filming. Our first official meeting at MICA's Brown Center was February 14, 2008. In the footage of this meeting we are all wearing shades of red and pink.



2

What inspired you to become a filmmaker? Please explain your history in filmmaking.

NIKIEA: In high school I participated in a community and youth led newspaper called 'Kids/Teens Scoop'. This was before filmmaking with youth was a popular trend in Baltimore after school programs. We were given camcorders and the task of interviewing politicians running in the 2002 election. This was the first time I held a camera to capture someone else's story. I loved it.

My background as a young person was in photography. I was trained by a photography legend who lived in East Baltimore, Robert Houston. He taught me and my friend Mikal how to see life through the lens of the camera. That was my first experience bearing witness to the world around me with a device outside of myself. I loved that too. There's something special about giving a flower, a cloud, a building or grandma space and composition to just be as they are in the lens. Then to take the time to create a supportive space for the best presentation possible for their story to be told. As a filmmaker today, I carry that essence with me. My entire professional life is inspired by helping people see their stories as valuable and allowing them space to tell it as it is. I always say under my breath that people who consistently make films have to be crazy. The editing alone will make the toughest person run away. Yet I'm still here. The only reason is because I love telling stories. Through film I've learned to appreciate the silence in editing a sequence to evoke feeling. I've learned a valuable lesson creating documentary film and appreciating the heart of the film which lies within the character but also within the filmmakers.

KIRSTEN: I have always identified as being an artist and originally worked with oil paint and water-based media. In my paintings I was searching for embodied forms of the Intuitive Feminine even though I had no conscious idea that was what I was doing. Additionally, I was often told my paintings were "essentialist" — reducing women to their biology. In turn, I read everything I could on the Cartesian mind-body split and remained convinced that the exploration of full-cellular embodiment and breath is what I would continue to explore in my paintings. I did NOT want to live in the mind-body split. Making my paintings was keeping me whole. Gratefully, there was a Philosopher-In-Residence at the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) where I was studying as an undergraduate. Dr. Richard Kalter recognized that I was trying to bring a non-gendered, luminous, embodied Intuitive Feminine presence into relevance for a busy and overtaxed world. An ordained Episcopalian, Richard would later marry my husband Scot and I when we could not find a Rabbi or a Priest willing to perform our marriage ceremony together. But back to school days...



2

(continued with Kirsten)

Nonetheless, I spent a summer at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine during my last summer as an undergraduate. This was 1987 and there I not only had a private conversation about the element of fire with the Comparative Mythologist, Joseph Campbell, and his wife, the dancer Jean Erdman, but I also had the opportunity to study with the legendary Painter, Agnes Martin, who was revered for her discretion, inwardness and silence. Ms. Martin told me to trust my paintings just as Dr. Richard Kalter had. And I also learned that Ms. Martin had worked in 16mm film. Later, In my mid-twenties I began to sculpt the forms in my paintings out of earthy materials such as beeswax, silks, seashells, and coconuts.

I wore these forms on my body while my husband helped me film on "Super-8" what I deemed to be my "performances NOT for stage." But, I loved sharing these "moving-paintings-performances" in public art spaces.

Later in 1993, while studying film in graduate school at University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC), my content turned to young girls experiencing the onset of menstruation as an experience of power versus the taboo I had come to know during my own coming-of-age. In my thesis film, 'A Cultural Object: The Tampon,' I explored girls' connection to the Earth as they questioned religious and political projections on their bodies. This short film went on to travel around the U.S., won awards, and even had a standing ovation at a screening in Baltimore. I was

frequently brought to tears that a film about girls and their bodies was being acknowledged as important.

Yet, I was also including media clips in this short film and it haunted me that feminine hygiene products on television were stained only with blue liquid, when clearly it was ok to show red blood in violent media. Additionally, the four young girls who were empowered to question "the stain of original sin" on their bodies were played by my youngest sister (11-years old) who like myself is of Italian-Irish descent, two of her friends (11-years old) also of Italian-Irish descent and one girl of Korean descent (11-years old) and had been adopted by a family in the middle-class beach town where we were filming — and where I too had grown-up. I state all this to position the fact that the only media clip I could find of girls imaged with red blood was a news clip where a violent action had taken place. And the four young women in the news clip were Black. Please remember this is all happening right BEFORE the onset of the internet. Thus, to find current media images I was literally videotaping images from a television monitor. It was the paradox of these unequitable and systemic images that "moved" me from experimental narrative to non-fiction storytelling about radical trust, collaboration, and community. Though it would be nearly 20-years later till I would have the opportunity to collaborate with young girls on a film again.

In the late 1990's I was becoming a new mother and co-directing 'Eve's Fire' with my Mystery School teacher and friend Sheila



FILMMAKER Q & A

WITH NIKIEA REDMOND & KIRSTEN D'ANDREA HOLLANDER

2

(continued with Kirsten)

Foster. 'Eve's Fire' was an experimental-documentary that was not a short film but not a feature. This film was about women's Intuitive Feminine initiations and it taught me about the power of making a film from within a community you are actually part of. This was the beginning of my understanding to NOT make extractive work — meaning do not go into a community, take their story and leave. We spent six years on 'Eve's Fire'. It never made it to film festivals or broadcast. We had a few intimate screenings in 2003 and then later learned it had become somewhat of an underground women's book club type of experience. I was left feeling that the Intuitive Feminine was too taboo for non-fiction filmmaking. But to be completely honest, I also knew in my heart that the project had unintentionally and unconsciously bypassed racial inequities. Let me be clear that Women of Color had been continually invited into the Intuitive Feminine work so beautifully depicted in 'Eve's Fire'. But ultimately the film did NOT include women who for systemic inequities did not yet have access to the Mystery School work we had filmed.

Some years went by and I was trying to muster up the courage to commit to a new project. I realized I needed to tell a story about radical trust and perseverance if I was going to continue

making films. It was now 2006 and I found myself filming Beatrix Burneston aka Trixie Little and her then partner in life and performance Adam Krandle aka The Evil Hate Monkey. From the first night I saw them perform at the OttoBar in Baltimore, MD, I was overcome by their bravery on stage and their mastery in drawing community together. Trixie and Monkey's commitment to their peculiar circus-burlesque act was unmistakable. I knew their commitment could tell the story of radical trust I was seeking. Then in 2008, while still filming Trixie & Monkey I also began filming 'Anatomy of Wings' in collaboration with the young women who would ultimately be featured in the film. 'Us, Naked: Trixie & Monkey' premiered in 2014 at DOC NYC where it was noted as an "exploration of the sacrifices made for one's passion, the meaning of success, and the strength that comes from partnership." It went on to bring much joy, showed around the U.S and Europe, won awards and then went into distribution. And now, 'Anatomy of Wings' a twelve year journey of an ensemble of women learning to see and hear each other across race, age, gender — and to collaborate across neighborhoods designed to stay divided, is finally ready to share with the world.



3 What would you like the audience to 'take away' after seeing the film?

What if every girl becoming a woman knew her story was important? What if this was a truth for girls coming-of-age in our nation's underserved and red-lined neighborhoods? We must all work together to not only elevate BIPOC voices but to ensure people have the equitable means to tell their own stories from behind and in front of the camera. This is how we commit our hearts to anti-Black racism, anti-racism, decolonizing cinematic storytelling, and understanding where these actions land on the continuum of ally-ship, collaboration, and solidarity.

Who can we be together? What are the edges between allyship and committed collaboration? What does it mean to bear witness to someone else's experience? Can you step out of your own experience with personal trauma to bear witness to someone who may not only have personal trauma but also systemic and historical trauma coursing through the cellular consciousness of their body? Can you see and hear someone else in a way that you are so incredibly present that they too have an opportunity to release trauma on all levels from their cellular awareness? Are you willing to collaborate on creating a new lens that is not engulfed in colonistic-patriarchal-cis-gendered-perception, but to see and hear someone else through unconditional love? Near the end of 'Anatomy of Wings' Nikiea says: "Imagine what that person you are seeing and hearing is capable of."

4 What is your relationship to the subjects of the film and how was it working with them?

We function as a family to this day. One of our young women was recently assaulted and was fighting for her life. No one was allowed to visit her in the hospital due to Covid. We got on a Zoom to meditate and pray for her healing. That was the most challenging moment we have had together. We were terrified that we might lose her. She said she could literally feel us "praying into her." That's who we are together.

Our collaboration has always been wonderful but never easy. The same systemic structures that keep so many young people in underserved school systems also creates this unmentionable line that you are not supposed to connect across. This is where we need to look at the continuum of allyship and collaboration. Systemic structures can allow for allyship but collaboration has to blast through constructs in a whole different way. Our way is by bearing witness. Our success as a community, documentary film, curriculum and workshop will always come back to creating the conditions needed to truly see and hear one another without judgment or expectation. Additionally, our collective relationship includes a business plan for the young women featured in 'Anatomy of Wings'. This is NOT an extractive process where a hierarchical few are positioned to benefit from potential proceeds. We want to be an example to the world of what shared and equitable abundance can look like!



5 Where and how did you film?

This Baltimore-bred documentary reveals unconventional healing against the back-drop of blighted cityscapes to the hub of an art-and-design college in midtown Baltimore, The Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA), where Kirsten still teaches to this day. 'Wings' met regularly in MICA's Brown Center from 2008 to 2013, the first six years of our ongoing relationship. Intimate vérité capture of individuals, family activities, classroom interactions, and interviews throughout the east and west sides of Baltimore, provide a patient and unapologetic portrait of our small community embracing private courage and aspects of social unrest that typically go unseen. The contrasting footage of our Maryland Countryside retreat was filmed at the Gaia Healing Center in Mt. Airy, Maryland.

6 What was your biggest challenge with making this movie?

Our greatest challenge was raising funds to keep both the afterschool program and documentary alive. Regarding the afterschool program, potential funders would ask us why we limited the program to ten girls? Our answer was and remains that lower numbers allows for intimacy and thus, true seeing and hearing to occur. This is utterly important for youth who have just spent their day in an overcrowded classroom. Our lived philosophy has always been, why not have ten groups with ten girls versus two groups with fifty girls? Nikiea has run after school programs with seventy-five to one hundred kids at one time. She explains first hand in 'Anatomy of Wings' that a child should be in space where they can share, share, share, share, share and share some more. Many children, youth, and young adults simply need an intimate space nourished by mentorship for their voices and hearts to open. It is our dream that many will be inspired to use our mentorship model of intimacy and longevity.

The actual making of the film was done by any means possible. Meaning, we used whatever cameras we could get our hands on. Sometimes we had funding. Sometimes we did not have funding. Sometimes things went on credit cards. During our middle school years of 2008 & 2009 the young women of 'Wings' filmed with SD camcorders and then switched over to the Flip Cam in 2010. Kirsten, her college students, and some of the young women filmed with HDV Pro-Cams from 2008 through 2011. In 2012 the whole group switched to the NEX, and then in 2017 Nikiea Redmond's en-face interview was filmed with the Arri Amira. 'Wings' was an 80% female crew, consisting of teenage girls, college students, and mentors filming expressively. No effort was made to hide the use of cameras or microphones during vérité, video-diary, or interview filming. Rather, the camera is consistently acknowledged as a tool to bear witness.



6

(continued)

Managing our media archive is a story unto itself. There were a myriad of 40 + people filming over a twelve year period. It's not possible to account for how many hard drives had to be consolidated over the years! But after years of iterations, when it finally became time to settle on a rough-cut strategy, we realized we were faced with breaking some traditions in the criterion of documentary film editing. We had been given advice by several prominent editors to cut down our film to begin at the Eighth grade graduation and to end on the high note of high school graduation. That this would be the best strategy for audiences to understand that the 'Wings' program had been successful. However it was clear in our hearts that this "traditional" and "feel-good" editing strategy is actually a systemic philosophy that supports a colonistic-patriarchal-cis-gendered-perception to stay in a comfort zone while learning about someone who is "other." Our dream was and remains for the audience to enter a dialectic state of bearing witness to fellow human-beings. In order to stay true to our dream, we had to also show the young women in 'Anatomy of Wings' living their post-high school lives. This was the only way to tell the truth about the continued inequitable challenges in Baltimore City. When a young woman ages out of the high school system and is NOT one of limited scholarship recipients she may not be able to survive the higher education goal of obtaining a degree. Or it may take six to eight years to complete a degree plan while also holding down a job to pay for tuition. Colonistic-patriarchal-cis-gendered cinema allows for a "feel good" media that allows the audience to focus on the few youth who "broke though the system" and then leave the movie theatre forgetting about everyone else.

7

What made this project come together and be successful?

During the earliest stages of 'Wings', we did not consciously articulate that we were embodying the Intuitive Feminine. Yet, somehow, we knew we could trust the conditions of the space we had created together. We did this WITHOUT bypassing the racial inequities amongst us, nor did we enable white-normative-comforts. Every week we came together as is and practiced seeing and hearing each other without judgement or expectation. This is what allowed us to respectfully film each other. This is what allowed us to bear witness with our cameras. After a 10 + year journey of exploring and engaging what conditions are needed to birth solidarity, we are naming our Intuitive Feminine path of empathy, witnessing, trust and EMBODIED non-judgment. We offer this path for girls, young women, their mentors, and their educators who are called to connect across race and to together heal the racial inequity and structural racism in our world.



8

What was the moment where you knew you had something?

Our original intention was to film the young women through their high school experiences as a supportive means of bearing witness. There was NO script. We honored life playing out. Then about a year into meeting as an afterschool program, Brittany, one of the older influential girls adamantly shared that an Eighth grade student at her school was pregnant. She said this after Jane, one of the mentors asked for ideas on a script where a young woman had to tell her family she was pregnant. The conversation turned immediately personal. We forgot that we were talking about developing a script. Danisha was adamant that babies were not going to have a good life if no one was present to take care of them in a stable home. Nikiea responded that she was not willing to get pregnant because of choices she needed to make for herself. Kirsten shared about the health challenges her son had been experiencing since his birth. And then Kirsten shared about a miscarriage she had prior to her son's birth. Brittany who at first thought she was being told what to think about teen pregnancy softened. She acknowledged the vulnerability in the room. That night we became a group of women bearing witness to each other despite our differences in age, skin color, or the inequities made present by the variables of our Baltimore City neighborhoods. We became us. It was the first night of making a compassionate film together.

9

Please address the music in the film. How did these choices come about?

We knew 'Anatomy of Wings' had to be scored by a Baltimore-based musician. We learned of *ellen cherry's* piano compositions through Samantha Mitchell, a Baltimore based Filmmaker. As *ellen* composed, she fell in love with the young women who star in 'Anatomy of Wings'. You can feel *ellen's* heart in her piano compositions that create a continuum of introspectrum throughout the film. And through another state of grace, Danisha Harris, one of our 'Anatomy of Wings' stars, had just finished recording some of her own original music as we were entering our picture lock stage. Danisha's 'Float' is heard while the camera POV flies over the rooftops of East Baltimore, and we hear 'Reign' during a dance party scene and again during the scrolling credits.



10

Please elaborate a bit on your approach to making the film and share some of your influences.

KIRSTEN: My influences — well how many women can I thank for opening the door to mine and Nikiea's film director's collaboration — Alice Guy Blaché, Zora Neale Hurston, Maya Deren, Agnes Martin, Liz Garbus, Zana Briski, Eve Ensler, Ava DuVernay, Dawn Porter, Garrett Bradley, and Dulcé Sloan to name just a few.

During every filming opportunity I ask myself — how can I bear witness with my camera in this moment?

I feel I am in a dance with the person I am filming — I do hand-held camera work whenever possible. Additionally, who I am behind the camera is deeply affected by the positioning of the camera and the pulse and breath I am experiencing in the moments I am filming. I have also learned to hold the intention to truly listen without the need to "fast-forward" to the outcome of an interview or conversation. This supports the person being filmed to share authentically. This intention also requires absolute scrupulousness. The filmed conversation needs to be treated as an autonomous event beyond what it might provide for the film. It's about listening deeply and asking only the questions that emerge from this constellation. I believe these are the crucial elements to bearing witness with the camera.

NIKIEA: In collaboration with Kirsten in making 'Anatomy of Wings', I knew my role coming from a mentor to an actual filmmaker would be tough but meaningful. My approach to making the film initially began with my connection to the youth featured and a responsibility as a woman from their neighborhoods to tell their story authentically. As a Black woman my approach in making this film changed so much. My modern influences are women like Ava DuVernay and local trailblazers like Nia Hampton who create spaces for marginalized women to share their stories unapologetically.

I've learned so many valuable tactics in creating a feature film, connecting producers to the film's vision, setting the space for characters to feel seen, creating a space for the audience to feel connected and lifting the essence of the story in a way that allows for a universal understanding of the overall message. This type of filmmaking isn't pretty. It isn't sexy either. It's gritty. Mixed in with a whole bunch of ugly crying and hair pulling, sleepless nights filled with haunting pictures of timelines and a whole bunch of icons (that I'm still learning what the hell they mean). This kind of filmmaking is 'for the birds'. If you know you know. With all of that pressure comes a pearl — a metaphor for the beauty of the story being shown. I'm grateful that my background in film began with photography. I'm grateful that I started in community-based filmmaking. These things kept me grounded and fighting for the real voice of this film to come to light. Asè to that!



11

What was your most memorable experience about filming 'Anatomy of Wings'?

NIKIEA: One of my more memorable experiences shooting 'Anatomy of Wings' happened during one of our classroom conversations in the 'Wings' after school program. The girls were older and some of them were graduating soon. That day on the van on our way to the program, we were pretty quiet compared to our normal loud laughing and talking as we took the girls to MICA. The cameras were on as normal; some girls were filming with their own cameras too. After dinner, we were sitting around the table discussing essays and college stuff and it hit me all of the sudden that as much as our program supported our girls; we still had so much more to do. For me that was life changing because I had always seen our 'Wings Collective' as life changing but knowing that we weren't able to help with everything made it tough to even want to be filmed having that conversation. We have so much footage of us joking around and having fun, but filming College Prep night was definitely gut wrenching.

KIRSTEN: After folks see 'Anatomy of Wings' they often ask me what it was like to be filming while we, the ensemble of 'Wings', were crying and arguing on that fateful night in 2011 while on retreat in Mt. Airy, Maryland. The truth is that I was so upset I had NO idea we were still filming. Truly. I just wanted my family to come back together. I was praying to the universe that no matter how awful the night felt, that we might experience the grace of NOT bypassing each other's pain. To have an unwavering bearing of witness to each other. Nothing less. I was so taken over and had NO idea that Kata and Julia found the courage to continue to film. And though we, the 'Wings' women don't particularly enjoy seeing ourselves so upset in the footage, MANY MANY MANY people tell us how healing it is to see a group of women trust each other enough to fall apart into each other's hearts and into each other's arms. Yet, the footage comes nowhere near what we experienced together. And it may be years till those of us in the film completely understand all we learned that night. But it was REAL and the greatest teacher that LOVE is at the root of all if you are inspired to breathe into it.



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How do you think 'Anatomy of Wings' fits into your personal growth as a filmmaker?

NIKIEA: In making 'Anatomy of Wings' my perspective of collaboration has expanded. I've learned that my past experiences as a youth, where backpacking filmmakers would literally film us and leave with our stories NO longer has to be a reoccurring experience. Ten Black girls from Baltimore were promised that their story would be shown to the world. Today ten Black women get to see that promise kept. For me that's life changing. I'm grateful to be a part of this crew of filmmakers. We have figured out so many tools and tactics in collaborating to give this film a unified voice. All of the filmmaking I participate in from now on will be rooted in the confidence and dedication I've gained in collaborating on this film.

KIRSTEN: 'Anatomy of Wings' is the film that taught me that no matter how intentionally you film from your heart, even with capturing the most beautiful and vulnerable conversations between people learning to come together across race, age, gender, and systemic constructs — that even still the slippery slope to ONLY edit for a established criterion, aka a colonistic-patriarchal-cis-gendered-audience can still rear its ugly and inequitable head.

Documentary-film editing can either make audience members feel good about "learning about someone other than themself" or documentary-film editing can powerfully invite the audience to bear witness to someone else's lived experience. In order to decolonize the current and inequitable cinematic criterion we must embrace the palpable difference between 'learning about other' and actually bearing witness to fellow human-beings. 'Learning about other' allows us to leave the movie theatre feeling good about expanding our compassionate mind and then we go home to our same lifestyle. Bearing witness connects us, teaches us how to celebrate uniqueness, and to understand where we share universal experience. Bearing witness provides us with the courage to know our neighbor, collaborate with our neighbor, to be family with our neighbor. Bearing witness allows us to discover who we are together.



CINEMATIC & EDUCATIONAL INFLUENCES

This is an abbreviated list for the Cinematic and Educational Influences that have opened the doors for 'Anatomy of Wings'. For our full list please go to this [link](#) on our website [anatomyofwings.com](#)

1896

Perhaps if Alice Guy Blaché, the first narrative filmmaker who happened to be a woman (1896 - 'The Cabbage Fairy' and director of over 1000 + films) had been the prominent influence during the birth of cinema — instead of the unprecedented popularity of D.W. Griffith whose white supremacist narrative 'Birth of a Nation', shaped the cinematic standard by which most films are judged — well perhaps Ms. Blache's instinct and forward thinking to make films where people are supported to be raw and to speak in a way that's honest versus the theatrics of the patriarchal gaze — well perhaps a film like 'Anatomy of Wings' would not have been so challenged to be programmed. After a full year of submissions to all the major fests, it was the Black Femme Supremacy Fest and Slamdance who stepped forward and said we believe in what you have created here — we believe in the power of young women's voices. Yes, Ms. Blaché made Narrative work, and yes, 'Anatomy of Wings' is a documentary, but ultimately we are talking about storytelling. Experimental or otherwise, storytelling governs cinematic moving image, period.

1928

Zora Neale Hurston is finally being revered as an early and perhaps the first African American filmmaker. Hurston is widely known as the novelist and playwright of Their Eyes Were Watching God. The short ethnographic films she made, 'Children's Games' (1928), 'Logging' (1928), and 'Baptism' (1929) have been noted as potential research for her writing, yet her natural handheld cinematography intrinsically bears witness to both children and adults engaging their joy. A true inspiration for the camera being a tool to bear witness during the filming of 'Anatomy of Wings.' Imagine a world where Hurston's films had been a major influence during early cinema. Perhaps our Black youth would not have had to wait so long to see their cinematic likeness imaged in love and light. Hurston's foundational works of visual anthropology, and rare examples of the everyday lives of ordinary Black people in the American South during the era of 1928 can be seen at this link: <https://www.historicfilms.com/tapes/17832>

1940's

Maya Deren's experimental films encompass a dreamworld symbolism that is bold, embodied, cyclic, and deeply feminine. Ms. Deren was a rebel in Hollywood in the 1940's when studios were (and still are) catering to the exalted interests of Western audiences, leading to the dominance of cis, white, heterosexual narratives in film. Ms. Deren understood that film could contain elements of magic and ceremony within both its making and content.



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2003

Liz Garbus' 'Girlhood' respectfully articulated the alarming challenges of underserved girls becoming women in Baltimore.

2004

Zana Briski 'Born Into Brothels' was the original inspiration to raise funds for camcorders for the 'Wings' students and to develop a curriculum based on creativity and finding voice through video skills. In the film, children growing-up in a system are provided with a creative option to see their world through cameras.

2008

Tia Lessin and Carl Deal's 'Trouble the Water' is a documentary that continues to profoundly teach about truth telling in filmmaking. I, Kirsten, have deep respect for the trust Dean and Lessin built with their film subject Kimberly Rivers Roberts whose own footage of Hurricane Katrina was revered and authentically included in what became a collective documentary. Meaning is created out of the mix of perspectives to give viewers a you-are-there, human immediacy within a cataclysmic event. The result is empowering, giving Ms. Roberts a voice beyond the conventional documentary talking head.

2009

Eve Ensler's 'What I Want My Words To Do To You' explored a creative and brave safe space for women in prison to share their stories with each other.

2010

Stanley Nelson's 'Freedom Riders' is an American historical documentary produced by Firelight Media, a non-profit filmmaking company founded by Nelson and Marcia Smith. 'Freedom Riders' is based in part on the book Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice by historian Raymond Arsenault. The documentary marked the 50th anniversary of the first Freedom Ride in May 1961. During the release of this film Mr. Nelson visited MICA's campus and some of the 'Wings' women attended an intimate discussion with him where they shared an early 'Anatomy of Wings' trailer.

2016

Ava DuVernay's '13TH' combines archival footage with testimony from activists and scholars to examine the U.S.'s history of racial inequality drives a prison system that is disproportionately filled with African-Americans. And of course, EVERYTHING by Ava DuVernay is an inspiration and has opened the door for 'Anatomy of Wings.' We reference more of her influential work on [anatomyofwings.com](#)



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2016

Raoul Peck's 'I Am Not Your Negro' is a documentary film based on James Baldwin's unfinished manuscript Remember This House. Narrated by actor Samuel L. Jackson, the film explores the history of racism in the United States through Baldwin's reminiscences of civil rights leaders Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr., as well as his personal observations of American history. The film challenges what Americans as Baldwin states, "You need to ask yourself why you need someone to be your negro?"

2017

Amanda Lipitz's 'STEP' documents the senior year of a Baltimore girls' high school step team as they try to become the first in their families to attend college. The girls strive to make their dancing a success against the backdrop of social unrest. This film came out while we were trying to finish 'Anatomy of Wings.'

2018

Morgan Neville's 'Won't You Be My Neighbor' examines the life and legacy of Fred Rogers, the beloved host of the popular children's television show Mister Rogers' Neighborhood. The film honors the importance of neighbors connecting across imposed systematic divides. The film also stresses Roger's famous words, "Love is at the root of everything...love or the lack of it."

2020

Garrett Bradley's 'Time' blends cinematic genres to investigate the tireless 21-year campaign of Louisiana woman Fox Rich to secure her husband's release from prison after he received a 60-year sentence for robbery. Bradley made the film composed of both newly shot material and archival footage from decades of home movies that Rich recorded to document her days, months, years of waiting. Another beautiful example of collaboration through shared footage.



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SALES INQUIRIES: Glen Reynolds of Circus Road Films, glen@circusroadfilms.com | PRESS & OTHER INQUIRIES: Kim Dixon of dominion3 Public Relations, kim@dominion3.com

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