

BONES BRIGADE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY



Official Selection at the 2012 Sundance Film Festival
Directed by Stacy Peralta
2012 / Color / 90 minutes

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For additional hi-resolution images and interviews with Stacy Peralta and Tony Hawk, please visit: www.filmsalecorp.com/bones-brigade

SUPPLEMENTAL TONY HAWK INTERVIEW

QUESTION: What were your thoughts upon hearing that the BONES BRIGADE: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY was going to be made?

TONY HAWK: I was excited. I knew it was going to happen eventually, but I was more relieved that Stacy [Peralta] was directing it because anyone else's version wouldn't be from an inside perspective. I know Stacy is one of the best documentarians and when you combine that with the fact that he was there the whole time it's obvious that he was the best choice.

What was your reaction after seeing the first screening?

TH: I was surprised at how emotional it was. It seemed like it was going to be more of a celebration of our time, not anything so deeply emotional and personal. I had a sense of it during the interview, but I had no idea how deep everyone else would go. I thought I exposed as much as I could and felt vulnerable because of it, but then I saw the other guys and realized that I didn't even get started. After seeing it, I think we all feel a bit more vulnerable and exposed as to what the days of the Bones Brigade meant to us. I think Stacy is the only one who would have gotten it out of us. We just didn't trust anyone with our story.

Many TV shows have produced segments about your life—how does this film differ from them?

TH: This film is more about the psychology of what we did and why we even started trying to do it while those other TV shows highlight the accomplishments. This time we're really talking about what drew us into doing something so different.

What did you think of the segment on the magazine manufactured rivalry between you and Christian Hosoi?

TH: I was happy to explain it after having lived through it. I wasn't emotionally tied to it so it was pretty easy. I liked how it put it in a new light because a lot of people misperceived it as Christian and I being enemies. We weren't enemies—we were the top competitors who, by default, were pitted against each other in the eyes of the public. In reality, we were just having a blast being young and successful.

During the 1980s, that success rarely transcended the skateboard bubble. In the film, there's a clip from an Italian TV show featuring you and Lance. Can you lay out the backstory to give people a sense of how you were regarded by the mainstream back then?

TH: We were brought to Italy to perform on a TV show and were basically considered strange circus freaks. There was a Roller Boogie crew, a guy that juggled chainsaws, the hacky sack champions and us, as skaters. They built a ramp on stage and we explained that the ramp wasn't solid enough. Through various language barriers they told us that we'd never break this ramp. On one of my first runs, I kneeslid and my knee went through the ramp. Then they tried to dress us in what amounted to painted cellophane shorts. During our practice session, my board shot off the ramp into the audience seats. They thought it was too dangerous so they taped our

segment and showed it to the audience during the show. Lance and I then snuck into the audience so we were spectators to our own "demo."

The Brigade went through a lot of strange times together, did that create a unique bond between you guys?

TH: Absolutely. We have a strong connection that we'll always have because we did go through so much at a young age and within a short timeframe. We knew we were part of something special at the time, but I don't think we realized the resonance it would have and how formative it would be for people of the same age or interest levels. We were happy to be liked, but didn't recognize that we were inspiring people to follow their dreams. Some people saw us as examples of doing what you love despite the status quo.

Many skaters have a limited sense of the history. Do you think this film shows cultural aspects that are difficult to convey to younger skaters?

TH: I think it'll help enlighten kids nowadays as to what their roots are. Some of them make a lot of false assumptions about how we started skating and how we became successful. They just assume that it was always the way that it is now and you always had the opportunity to be successful and make a career out of skateboarding. None of that existed. I think we helped create that.

Has this documentary experience brought you guys closer?

TH: It's definitely been a catalyst for us to start working together again because we want to help promote the film, but also assess each other's interest levels in doing reissues and how far we want to take this nostalgia. It's definitely made us question if we want to live in this nostalgia or be known for who we are now and that's a fine line to walk. It's been an ongoing conversation with all of us. The bottom line is that we want to approach this as a group with a common goal.

Unfortunately, the group will be minus you in Sundance.

TH: When Stacy told me the screening dates I was disappointed because I'd already committed to a tour in Australia. Had I known about Sundance earlier, I would have made it work, but it was too late: I was contractually locked in. I have a few days off during the tour and did try to figure out how to fly back for one of the screenings but it's physically impossible.

Even though you're spectacularly successful, do you still feel like that scrawny skate rat kid obsessed with something dismissed by most people?

TH: I don't think my success has changed my outlook on skating. If anything, it gave me a chance to skate more the way I always wanted to. For a long time, I didn't want to compete and I wanted to be more flexible in terms of my opportunities. During the '80s, if you weren't competing as a professional skateboarder, you couldn't make a living. That was the bottom line. But once it hit in this bigger way, I was able to create a new path for myself where I could still skate actively, be progressive and be recognized without competing. If anything, this success has allowed me to pursue my dreams on my own terms.

You pioneered new opportunities for professional skaters—are you still expanding those boundaries?

TH: Yeah. I'm still making it up as I go along. In a lot of ways, I'm one of the guinea pigs of how far can you take this and at what age do you cease being effective or progressive. I'm still trying tricks. I've spent the last two days trying to get a new trick on video and I'm going to go out next week and do the same exact thing until I get it.

INTERVIEW WITH STACY PERALTA

QUESTION: What was the most unexpected aspect of directing this film?

STACY PERALTA: How emotional it made me. Being the person asking the questions, i.e. the interviewer, got me very involved with each of the characters while shooting and all of them brought so much material to the project that it really knocked me out. Lance [Mountain] broke down in his interview, which made me break down. And Rodney [Mullen] was so emotional during his entire interview ... I hadn't expected that and it had a profound effect on me.

During the 1980s, the guys and I shared moments of high elation and triumph together. Whenever I said good-bye to them at the airport, it was always sort of emotional because we were coming from such a rich experience, but I'd never had anything like this where it was so condensed and concentrated in such a short period of time. The interviews were conducted during one week, about six people per day, which is a very heavy schedule.

You started with different expectations about what kind of film you were making?

SP: Yeah, I had low expectations. Seriously. I was going to cut this film myself. I was looking to work on a little film that I could do on my own time. It wasn't until we began shooting that I realized we had something very unique and I could not make the film alone. I needed to bring in somebody who knows how to tell stories. That's why I brought in the editor Josh Altman. I really needed a partner on this film. He was the perfect person because he has a terrific sense of storytelling and a great understanding of how to connect the emotion of the story.

I was too close to the material and quite a few times during post-production I told Josh, "I don't really know what to do with this part of the film—you have to take over here. I'm just too close to it." I had so much trust in Josh. He had such a good feel for the material and characters.

What were the origins of this doc? How far back had you been planning it?

SP: Around 2002 or 2003, Hawk, Cab, McGill, Lance and Tommy asked me to dinner at the LAX airport. They wanted to meet with me to talk about the possibility of a "Bones Brigade" documentary and if I would consider directing it. At that time, I was coming off of the success of Dogtown and Z Boys and didn't feel right about jumping into this field again, especially with a film where I was once again a character within the story. I felt it was too risky—way to risky. I was afraid of being looked upon as a narcissistic filmmaker. This is not to say that I didn't feel the Bones Brigade was a viable history and potential good story.

Over the years, one of the guys would reach out to remind me of it, but nothing happened until late last year when Lance called again and said something that tipped me over: "We're now

older than you and Alva were when you made Dogtown.” That line made me realize now was the time.

I talked to my wife at great length about the project. She knew my fears and reservations about the project and came up with the idea of calling the film "an autobiography." She figured that if anyone had any issues with me as the filmmaker or the guys making their own film in a sense, then telling them upfront should set it straight. The film is a collective autobiography. It's us telling our own story and we state that under the title of the film.

From a purely physical perspective, how did the documentary evolve?

SP: First thing I did was put the music soundtrack together. I do this with most of my films. I need to hear what the film sounds like, what it feels like and its emotional tenor. Once I assembled a couple of hundred pieces of music, I then began reaching out to photographers, asking them to send me their images from that era. I went through the Powell Peralta archives, which represents thousands of photos, and I looked through all the skate videos I made, including hours and hours of outtakes.

I was in shock going through the old footage, especially with what Rodney and Tony were doing in the early-'80s. Even though I filmed this footage myself and was there to see these tricks being introduced, it was like seeing them for the first time. They were so ahead of their time. They were laying down the tracks for future generations. And it wasn't just one or two innovations—they invented books of maneuvers. Rodney is like Chopin where he invented the studies. Both Tony and Rodney invented an entirely new vocabulary of maneuvers in skateboarding.

I put together questions as I sorted through the photos and videos. Hundreds of questions. I wrote questions for around 45 different individuals. I had to have totally different questions for Lance Mountain than I had for Tony Hawk and totally different questions for Duane Peters than I had for Craig Stecyk. It took me months to assemble these questions per each individual, subject, year, etc. It's the questions that generate the answers, which generate the narrative of the film.

Did you structure the film beforehand and paint clear bull's eyes on certain subjects?

SP: As I put together the questions for each guy on the Brigade, I searched for the problems each of them may have faced during that time we were all together. What emerged was that Rodney's father was a huge obstacle physically, psychologically and emotionally for him. Tony had an issue being accepted by people—he was spat on by skate punks back in the day and called a circus skater and many people in the skate world had issues with his father. Lance expressed huge insecurities about measuring up to the other guys on the Brigade and his interview ended up being rich with great material. On the other hand, Caballero didn't have that many issues and I struggled with him to find some. He kept saying that he went with the flow of his career and didn't fight it. He didn't have a lot of drama in his career, same with McGill.

Did you realize early on that you'd have to convey the evolution of skating's

disenfranchised culture for everything to make sense?

SP: That's why we tried to show that skating went out of business in the early-'80s. SkateBoarder magazine died. The sport died. Arena contests died. Skateparks died. The kids who wanted to keep doing it had to build backyard ramps and we decided to take skateboarding in our own hands and have professional contests in kid's backyards. At the time, none of us knew if skateboarding would ever come back or if it was gone forever.

You and the core members of the Brigade shared a bond unlike any other in skateboarding. You were their boss, mentor and something of a father figure. How did that position affect how you made the movie?

SP: It gave me an insight into the story. I knew the inner workings. I was there when Tony got spat on. I was there when Rodney suffered from what his father did to him. I was there when the tricks were introduced. It was a very unusual tightrope for me as a filmmaker and participant. Again, this was the reason I needed a skilled editor like Josh. He was very helpful in giving me the confidence to tell this story.

Did you hesitate talking to the guys about painful issues?

SP: Not really. The one thing that really moves me is that we can do a project like this and interact as if no time has passed. My relationship with these guys is so different from the Dogtown guys where a lot of ego was involved. A handful of the Dogtown guys didn't get what they wanted out of their skate careers, but everyone in the Brigade got what they wanted. They got broken up and took the bruises, but kept going until they got what they wanted. As a result there were no scores to settle or festering issues with one another to resolve. When it was over, we all walked away as friends, realizing what an amazing experience we had together.

Did you schedule the interviews in a certain order or just let the skaters dictate when they were available?

SP: I purposely scheduled the secondary interviewees towards the end of the week and the primary characters up front. I had Sean Mortimer come in first because I knew he'd give the general overview of the Bones Brigade experience. I started with Sean so that my crew could understand the film we were making. Sean was the first person on the first day and Rodney was the last person on that day because I knew Rodney had the potential to blow the crew away with his emotional, psychology and articulation of his experience. It's very important to me that my crew understand the film we're making, that they get onboard and spiritually bond with it. I don't mean spiritual in a religious way, I mean that they connect with it and that's exactly what happened by properly sequencing the interviewees.

At the end of the first day, the crew was absolutely stunned by what they'd heard. I really wanted them to think, I can't wait to come to work tomorrow. When that happens, the crew comes to work excited and create a vibe that is tangible to people walking onto the set. The interviewees come in and feel that something special is going on. It makes a difference. Duane Peters came in and knocked his interview out of the park. Glen Friedman was amazing—everybody in the film gave amazing interviews.

There was an actress working on the film as a digitizer and she wrote a letter to a friend in England saying how much they both had to change their lives after hearing these skateboarders talk about the artistic process.

Even though there's lots of serious subject matter, the film is peppered with self-deprecation and the guys busting each other's balls. "Freak" is used as a complement. And you really stick it in and break it off with your dorky early footage.

SP: One thing I learned from Dogtown was that I didn't want this to be us patting ourselves on the back. I was hyper aware of that. But, if you look back, the Bones Brigade was hands down the most successful skateboard team of all time and so how do we say that ... without saying it, you know?

I felt there was potentially funny material from my career in the '70s and when I saw that goofy footage, I let Josh run with it. Josh understood how to take that material and cut it into the film in a way that makes those shots contextual but also funny. Glen Friedman and I were talking on the phone, months before production began, and he began ripping apart The Search for Animal Chin. He just tore it to shreds and made me laugh hysterically. We flew him out and got that on film. At the first screening, when the Chin segment came on, I could hear Rodney and Tony almost throwing up from laughing so hard. That was gratifying. There is a certain comic ownership to burning oneself.

It's important to have that tonal mixture. When you have the guys tell the story about Rodney running out of the van, well, it shows that Rodney is a really unique, special guy and he's imperfect in that regard. He's extremely eccentric and he has needs. It was very, very important for me to give this film a personality that didn't resemble Dogtown in any way, either visually, physically or emotionally.

Visually, it doesn't look anything like Dogtown. Most of the skating footage was shot on videotape and you emphasize that medium's inherent defects rather than treating them as problems. Josh did an amazing job with the titles, which even have that degraded tracking line going through them.

SP: Josh and I worked really hard on the graphics and titles and I think it fits with that ugly '80s video look.

After the first screenings, Tony Hawk commented a few times on how unexpectedly personal the film was for him.

SP: Look what Tony overcame during his early career! That says more about his character than anything else. He overcame so much adversity and that's what makes a good story.

How has the experience been with the Brigade after the film? Do you think it rekindled anything within them?

SP: They feel that as a unit, they had an experience in skateboarding that nobody else had during that decade. They've all told me that at different times. But, and this is very important, they did it at a time when skateboarding wasn't accepted by the mainstream. They clearly

weren't doing it for the money because in the early-'80s there wasn't any money to be made in skateboarding so there was a purity of intent to it. Like Lance said, their bond is similar to guys who experienced war together because at a very young age they shared one of the most meaningful and impactful experiences of their lives. Now we have it on a piece of film that we can share.

Sundance seems almost like a tour redux for the Brigade. They used to travel the world together, stuffing themselves into budget vans and cheap hotel rooms. This time it's going to be full skate camp at a rented house with everybody crammed together.

SP: It's going to be just like that! I only wish Tony could be there ... he tried to find a way back from Australia but it wasn't feasible. He was actually trying to schedule flying in from Australia, attending a screening and then flying back. Tony called it "a global mission" in an email, but he couldn't make it work.

There are around 20 million skaters worldwide and many of the Brigade remain stars. How do you think skaters will react to the film?

SP: I would hope that the things these six individuals say in the film are things that other skaters and athletes and artists feel but perhaps have not been able to articulate. Non-skaters who have seen the film tell me they relate to it for the same reasons. At early screenings, I had people tell me the film isn't about skateboarding—it's about family. It's about the artistic process. It's about overcoming obstacles. Everybody is taking something different from it. The goal has always been to make the film universal and transcend the skateboard audience.

Last question and this concerns the skateboarders who shredded during the '80s—will they ever be able to look at The Search for Animal Chin [The most successful skateboard video in history, released by Powell Peralta in 1987] the same way again?

SP: Ha! My wife says that I've ruined it for so many middle-aged skaters and that they'll never look at Animal Chin the same way again. But another person told me that they'll actually appreciate Chin even more. I really don't know.