



# THE SEDONA FILM FESTIVAL IS HERE AND THE MESSAGE IS OF HOPE

*Posted on June 16, 2021 by Tonatiuh Malanos-Rodriguez*



If you're not aware, the legendary Sedona Film Festival is back in town, and, for me, it was nice to sit down at a theater again and feel a sense of normality in a mad, mad world.

I've always loved the festival and appreciated all the culture and interest that it's brought to the community, and it was lovely being able to experience it again post-lockdown.

Speaking of post-lockdown, the world is certainly different now.

Back in the day (not even two years ago), you could run around the supermarket screaming swear words and then slip and faceplant on the floor and people would roll their eyes and barely take a second look (unless it was particularly funny, then everyone would film it).

Now, if you cough just once, the entire store will turn heads and stare at you as if you're the last human amidst a society of [bodysnatchers](#).

I'm obviously being hyperbolic, but there was just something positive and enjoyable about sitting down at the Mary D. Fisher theater amongst a small number of people, just enjoying movies like we used to without fear of someone sneezing next to us and ensuring our demise.

To summarize, people going to cinemas again without the near-certain risk of infection and the air of paranoia symbolizes progress - it symbolizes hope - and this hope is what I'm going to write about.

Yesterday, I went to see the Documentary Shorts Program, and I was expecting a diverse collection of films selected for quality alone, but I was mistaken.

While every film was certainly different, the core theme was the same, and the festival selected each film to reinforce this overarching narrative.

The core was a message - a message that we need - hope and unity.

I'll briefly review each film in this article, but the central point of each is essentially that things are pretty bad at the moment (or have been in the past), but there's still hope, and things are getting better.

This might seem superficial, cheesy, or ineffectual, but it's not - the purpose, however trivial or pandering it may come across, is what our

society needs. A society divided and depressed is a weak society that's easy to control and manipulate, and we can't allow the malefactors in the shadows to bamboozle us whilst twirling their moustaches and [cackling like Emperor Palpatine](#).

Moving onto the films, themselves, the first in line was the French documentary,

*Insignificant* (2020), directed by Clement Morin and Franck Courchamp.

The premise of the film was basically a British narrator (trying to hide her French accent) listing various scientific observations to showcase how insignificant humans are in the grand scheme of the universe.

To the delight of [nihilists, cynics, and misanthropes](#) everywhere, it was not only logically valid, but quite entertaining. For one, the CGI and VFX in the film were great - and the fact that this was a small production team and not a triple A studio with a platoon of animators is incredibly impressive.

If you don't understand how CGI works, I won't bore you with how complex the process is - I'll just put it in perspective for you. In a typical mainstream movie, *one second* of CGI in a Hollywood film can be estimated at \$24,000, which seems absurd. Why so expensive? Because animators are paid per hour (avg. \$30), and they work for *hours upon hours* just for once scene (even just one frame).

So, when I saw all the cool effects in *Insignificant* were made by less than 10 people (and didn't break the bank) I was impressed.

Beyond all the flashy CGI and charming almost-not-French narrator reciting the captivating script for us, it was a very enjoyable, visceral experience.

But here's where it falls within the narrative of hope that I'm going into.

Near the end of the film, humanity seems effectively knocked off its preconceived notion of superiority - but then the film drastically changes tone from an anti- Anthropocentric ego destroyer to a message of warning, then hope.

The final chapter of the film (spoilers follow) goes into the various atrocities committed by mankind, and how the question of whether humanity will stop its bad behavior and be good is "anything but insignificant." The glimmer of hope that humanity could still be redeemed, and needs to correct its course immediately, was a nice way to end the film.

Moving on, the next film was *Pandemic* (2020) a British documentary directed by James Worsley and Pedro de la Fuente about how people across the globe lived through the lockdowns, death, and destruction of the economy caused by COVID- 19.

As the film's own description reads, "it won't reveal anything new," but that wasn't the point. The point and message of the film is, much like *Pandemic*, that things aren't great at the moment, and that we need to course correct and come together to survive, and I give the film a thumbs up for staying positive instead of propagating the "Doomsday" narrative.

No matter your opinions on COVID, the government response, and the media's reaction to the pandemic, I think we can all agree that things are in pretty bad shape, and the only way to truly recover is to come together and unite, rejecting division and fearmongering and instead finding common ground and solidarity.

Next up was *My Brother's Keeper* (2020), a British documentary directed by Laurence Topham about a former Guantánamo "detainee" (read: prisoner) and his unlikely friendship with an ex-prison guard (and no, it has no similarities at all to *My Sister's Keeper* (2009).

The former "detainee," Mohamedou Ould Slahi, seems like a genuinely nice guy. Whether you think he was "innocent" or "guilty" is irrelevant - what is truly interesting is that this man was imprisoned (and never charged with a crime) for 14 years, yet when he was finally released, he did not emerge bitter and cynical with a disdain for America and a heart filled with anger and a need for revenge. He

was happy just to be free – to experience the world once again. That kind of mentality is rare and commendable.

And now you can see where I'm going with the "hope" theme. Just like *Pandemic*, *My Brother's Keeper* features a "lockdown" and showcases that it's objectively better to stay positive.



Furthermore, what is most interesting of all is that Mohamedou struck up a genuine friendship with one of the prison guards, which is incredible.

I won't spell it out word-for-word because it's something you should see for yourself. You have these two people who are practically opposites – especially in terms of their original situations – and their common ground and good nature pushed them together and kept things light.

If that isn't powerful enough to encourage us to unite and stop all the divisiveness that has been destroying our society for ages, nothing will be. It's time to come together, America (and the rest of the world, if you're reading this).

The last film was *Something to Give*, an American documentary directed by Gareth Gwyn about the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide and how it affects the various survivors and perpetrators.

The film features interviews of former perpetrators and survivors of the genocide who reflect on their experience – with a particular focus being on the regret and grief felt by the perpetrators.

Just like the previous films, the message is the same – things were bad, but now they can be good. If people from both sides of such an atrocity can find a way to move past their grief and find unity, I think we can find unity and get over our petty political bickering.

However, I will mention one thing about the film that was also pointed out by a gentleman in the theater when he addressed the filmmakers.

It's one thing to find peace and solidarity between opposing sides of a faction, like Imperial Japanese soldiers and American soldiers during WWII, but I think it's a bit odd (for lack of a better word) to portray genocidal murderers and their victims becoming friends as something that should be strived for.

Sure, it's great for the community to move past its terrible history and find unity, but I'm inclined to agree that "forgive and forget" is unjust in terms of genocide. The Nuremberg trials didn't consider how sorry those Nazis were. All I'm saying.

All in all, I appreciate the Sedona Film Festival's selections for their Documentary Shorts Program. Each told a unique story from a very different perspective from the other, but each had the same overarching theme – things may be bad, but they *can* get better.

And, if we cast aside our differences and unite against the true enemy – the various forces that *want* us to fight ourselves – things *will* get better.