



# OVERBURDEN

TWO WOMEN AND THE MOUNTAIN BETWEEN THEM

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MILESFROMMAYBE PRODUCTIONS, INC. PRESENTS

*A film by Chad A. Stevens*

# OVERBURDEN

Two Women and the Mountain Between Them



HD 65 Min. | Directed by Chad A. Stevens | Produced by Elena Rue and Catherine Orr

OVERBURDEN is a disarming and powerful new film that shows the human stories from coal country – including stunning events that will either divide or unify a community, its coal workers and their families. The story, unfolding over eight years, follows a fiery, pro-coal right-winger and a tenacious, environmentalist grandmother as they join forces to take on the most dangerous coal company in America. According to *The Guardian*, the coal industry is in a “terminal decline,” leaving these communities facing an uncertain and dire future. OVERBURDEN is the first film of its kind to document the end of the age of coal and celebrate the heroes who are standing up to rebuild their fractured communities.

OVERBURDEN premiered on Friday, April 10, 2015 at Full Frame Film Festival. The film received an honorable mention for the Nicholas School Environmental Award at Full Frame and the Special Jury Prize for Documentary at the Amsterdam Film Festival.



Lorelei Scarbro, left, and Betty Harrah join forces to take on the most dangerous coal company in America, Massey Energy.

## NOTABLE QUOTES

“A remarkable document, powerful testimony to the absurd destruction that coal has brought to the mountains of Appalachia, and testimony also to the remarkable women and men who have done their best to deal with an almost impossible trauma.”

– Bill McKibben, author **The End of Nature**

“Overburden should be required viewing for President Obama, the Congress, and anyone who has ever depended on coal-fired electricity.”

– Jeff Biggers, author **Reckoning at Eagle Creek**

“Chad A. Stevens has authored a documentary about a problem that needs to be more widely known, about a people who need to be better understood, and about courageous heroism that needs to be seen to be believed.”

– David Shreve, Jr., **Audiences Everywhere**

## 60 WORD SYNOPSIS

After a mine explosion kills her brother, a pro-coal activist joins forces with a tree-hugging grandmother to take down the most dangerous coal company in the United States. Lorelei, fighting to stop mountaintop removal, launches a campaign to build wind farm. Betty, who lost her brother in the disaster, joins Lorelei’s fight to bring justice and economic diversity to the coal-fields of Appalachia.

## 300 WORD SYNOPSIS

The gas that caused the explosion was completely invisible. On April 5, 2010 the men working at the Upper Big Branch mine were doing what they always do, mining coal. But when a spark ignited the methane, a fireball ripped through miles of underground tunnels killing everything it touched, including 29 men. After the explosion, ambulances raced by Betty Harrah’s home. An hour later Betty, a fierce supporter of the coal industry, answered the phone, and as the voice revealed that her brother, Stevie, had died with 28 other men in the largest mining disaster in 40 years, her life changed forever. Yes, as Betty says, “coal is life here,” but, she continues, “Massey Energy murdered my brother.”

It’s not easy to take sides when the only option for a decent wage means putting your life, your home and your community at risk. Lorelei Scarbro knows this better than anyone. Her husband died of Black Lung, and Massey, the fourth largest coal company in the U.S., just announced

plans to begin a 6000-acre mining project that would threaten her home. In 2007 Lorelei spoke out for the first time at a public hearing. “This isn’t coal mining,” she yelled. “This is the rape of Appalachia!”

OVERBURDEN is the story of a fiery, pro-coal right-winger and a tenacious, environmentalist grandmother as they take on the most dangerous coal company in America. These two lives intertwine as Betty and Lorelei unite to rebuild their fractured community. Decades after Barbara Kopple filmed *Harlan County, USA*, the coal industry is now facing extinction, and with an increase in alternative energy and the work of these two courageous women, the epicenter of change may just come from the most unexpected place, the ridges of the Appalachian Mountains.



On Earth Day Lorelei’s grandchild, Levi, was born. “This is a symbolic day,” Lorelei said. “My grandchildren are the reason I do what I do.”

## DIRECTOR STATEMENT

Having grown up in Kentucky, I thought I knew Appalachia. I thought I knew what it meant to be a coal miner. I thought I understood the ways in which the land had shaped the people. I thought I knew what it looked like to raise a family there, to provide, to do what’s right. But after beginning this project nearly 10 years ago, I learned that it’s a place of coal and contradictions.

This film is largely about those contradictions. For those on the outside, like myself, the answers seem easy. Coal is bad. Water is life. Don’t blow up the mountains. What’s hard to see from the outside is the reason folks are so dedicated to the very industry that ultimately, and statistically, ends their lives 10 years earlier than other Americans. This is because the region has been engineered to support only one economy, a coal economy, leaving families with only one option: a

job in the coal mine. Even though that very coal company may blow up your land, it's also the company that signs your paychecks, that gives you health insurance, and that feeds your children. And people fight fiercely to defend their families.

In the process called mountaintop removal coal mining, “overburden” is a term used to define the rock, soil, trees and ecosystem that lie above a seam of coal. This overburden is blasted and bulldozed away to access the coal below. It is shoved into valleys, discarded, much like the people who live and work in those valleys are cast aside. The goal of this film is to humanize those people, to explore the complicated issues and to spark conversation that can move beyond the expected and polarizing debates and allow viewers to access an empathetic view of a people and a place that few Americans truly understand.

## CREW BIOGRAPHIES



**Director and cinematographer:** Chad A. Stevens is an Emmy-winning filmmaker, editor, journalist and teacher. Before becoming a professor at the University of North Carolina, he was a producer and editor at MediaStorm, where his work focused on a range of topics from PTSD to the aftermath of genocide in Rwanda. After beginning this project in 2006, the lion's share of Stevens' work has centered on environmental documentary. This creative focus intersects with his scholarship in innovative projects ranging in topic from hydraulic fracturing to the BP Gulf oil spill and includes *Powering a Nation*, an interactive documentary

series funded by the Carnegie and Knight Foundations. These efforts have led to many awards, most notably an Emmy in New Approaches in Documentary for his collaboration in the Pulitzer-Prize-winning project, *Caught in the Crossfire*. Other awards include a Special Merit Award from the Grantham Prize, an Alfred I. DuPont - Columbia University Award silver baton and a win at the SXSW Interactive Festival. Stevens' first short, *Leveling Appalachia*, received the National Magazine Award for Digital Media and has been used in university curricula across the country. Excerpts of the project are featured in the eBook version of Al Gore's new release, *Our Choice*, a sequel to *An Inconvenient Truth*.



**Consulting editor:** Toby Shimin – a distinguished documentary film editor for nearly two decades. Her most recent film, *How to Dance in Ohio* premiered at Sundance in 2015 and was broadcast on HBO 2015. Shimin began her film career as a sound editor, where she worked on such projects as *Fire from the Mountain* and *Working Girls*, winning a Special Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. She switched to picture editing in 1988 when she cut *The Children's Storefront*, which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Short Subject Documentary. Since then, she has cut numerous films that have been accepted at Sundance, including

*A Leap of Faith*, *Martha and Ethel*, and *Out of the Past*, which won an Audience Award. She has edited several projects for PBS, including *AIDS Warriors* for the 2003 season of Wide Angle and



two projects for *American Experience: Miss America*, which premiered at Sundance in 2002; and *Seabiscuit*, for which she received a 2003 Emmy nomination. More recently she edited episode two of the Emmy-nominated *Reporting America at War*, *Three of Hearts: A Post-Modern Family*, which premiered in September 2004 at the Toronto Film Festival, and *Two Square Miles* which was part of the 2006 Independent Lens series on PBS, *Everything's Cool*, premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival and *A Sea Change* has won several festival awards, including the NOAA 2010 Environmental Hero award and was screened and broadcast internationally. A recent project, *Buck*, won the 2011 Audience Award at Sundance and played in theaters nationwide.



**Co-producer and editor:** Catherine Orr is the co-founder of StoryMineMedia, a documentary production studio that produces independent projects and partners with nonprofits, foundations, and other organizations to create video stories that move people to action. Orr is a graduate of the master's program at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism, where she was a Roy H. Park Fellow, and the editor-in-chief of *Coal: A Love Story*, an interactive documentary funded by the Carnegie and Knight initiative. Her individual and collaborative work has been recognized by SXSW Interactive and the Grantham Prize for Environmental Journalism.



**Co-producer and editor:** Elena Rue is the co-founder of StoryMineMedia, a visual storytelling company specializing in documentary storytelling. She is part-time program director of the Lewis Hine Documentary Fellows Program at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University, where she also teaches multimedia classes. She spent three years coordinating the Literacy Through Photography program at the Center for Documentary Studies, working with teachers in Durham and abroad to use photography as a tool for learning in the classroom. She is a 2011 graduate of the master's program at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill School of Media and Journalism.



**Composer:** Tyler Strickland is a film composer and songwriter based in Los Angeles. Tyler scores have been heard in the 2015 Sundance film *Hot Girls Wanted*, a documentary about the amateur pornography industry produced by Rashida Jones, as well as *Fresh Dressed*, the star-studded, CNN-produced documentary about the history of urban fashion. Tyler has also scored other 2015 films, *The Many Sad Fates of Mr. Toledano* (Tribeca Film Festival, Sheffield Doc Film Festival), and *Overburden* (Full Frame Doc Film Festival). Tyler's scores have accompanied other acclaimed documentary films such as *The Genius of Marian* (Tribeca Film Festival 2013), *Tough Love* (Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2014), Emmy-Winning series from NPR in 2014, *Planet Money Makes A T-Shirt*, and more.

## CREDITS

A milesfrommaybe Production  
in collaboration with StoryMineMedia

*Director and Cinemtographer*  
Chad A. Stevens

*Producers*  
Catherine Orr and Elena Rue

*Editors*  
Catherine Orr and Elena Rue

*Consulting Editor*  
Toby Shimin

*Original Score*  
Tyler Strickland



Coal production in the United States is in "terminal decline," according *The Guardian*. But mines that have not been shuttered are still in operation 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.