

“The Silent Thief”

A Native American Health Film Project

Produced by
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in association with
The Toiyabe Indian Health Project, Inc.

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Introduction

There is a silent thief that is stealing the most precious treasure of the Native Americans and American Indians. Cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of American Indians and Alaska Natives. This would seem obvious because it is the number one killer of all Americans.

What most don't know is that the major health factor leading to cardiovascular disease among American Indians and Alaska Natives is diabetes. The modern western diet is wreaking havoc in these indigenous populations and many others around the world. Only after this *silent thief* is exposed and unmasked can the healing begin.

Title

The Silent Thief

Premise

This is a documentary about why diabetes leading to heart disease has become the number one killer of American Indians and Native Americans. It is an exploration of the root causes, public perception, and scope of these tragic afflictions. By using the experiences of real people telling their stories using their own words, it delivers a powerful and persuasive message to this "at risk" group about the many factors leading to the onslaught of diabetes and heart disease. This documentary is also a call to action and delivers a message of hope that this silent thief can be defeated.

Genre

This project is a documentary. It is real people telling their own stories using their own words.

Running Time

This program is not being created to fill any predetermined time slot so the exact running time will be determined during the final editing process. The finished program will be approximately 30 minutes in length.

Format

The DVCPRO-HD video format will be used during production. This is a high definition format is used on Panasonic Vericam cameras. While high definition video is not yet a widely used standard, using it for this project will increase the useful life of the production footage. The high definition coverage can easily be down-converted for standard definition broadcast and distribution.

Motivation

We have several reasons for selecting this topic for my thesis project. We have personal interest in pursuing this effort. For the last ten years, We've worked with the Hualapai Indian Tribe in Peach Springs, Arizona. We organized and presented a marathon running race for two years on their reservation. We also organized an international auto rally race on their lands for the last 10 years. During this time we became friends with many of the tribal members and developed a genuine appreciation for their culture and lifestyle. We also saw evidence the devastation to individuals and their families caused by alcohol and our modern diet.

Native American Indians, are a proud and quiet people. Our reasons for taking on this project does stem from any altruistic perception of these people being needy or helpless. They are also very capable and self-sufficient but they are often reluctant to draw attention to their personal and communal struggles. Our motivation comes from a desire to give something back that will be lasting and might help future generations.

Why us? What special skills and insight do We bring to the table? This project is important. This project fills the gap between need and solution bringing attention to the problem so the healing can begin. We will couple our experience and abilities as an interviewer and filmmaker to create a documentary that is both relevant and persuasive. We can make a difference by making people aware of this hidden and silent killers. It was these silent, unspoken, realities that lead me to name this film *The Silent Thief*.

Background

It took some time for us to realize the depth of the problems facing the Hualapai and many other Native American groups. From the outside, it's easy to see the ravages a modern diet has brought them. A large percentage of American Indians and Native Americans are obese. The struggle with alcohol abuse is often hidden just below the surface but the pain and suffering from alcohol related traffic deaths has touched many families.

These problems are not due to any personality flaw endemic to this population, or a cultural disposition toward self-destruction. There are real and serious physiological reasons that contribute to the pervasiveness of these problems. According to a study results from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, "...American Indians in the past had very low CVD (cardiovascular disease) rates, CVD today is the leading cause of death among American Indians. Approximately 30 percent of American Indian deaths for all ages is associated with diseases of the heart, and the number of American Indians ages 45 years and older with heart disease exceeds the next three leading causes of death (cancer, diabetes, and unintentional injuries) combined." The study goes on to point out how diabetes has become a major part of the problem, "...the Strong Heart Study has confirmed that diabetes is a major risk factor for CVD among American Indians. The study continues to focus on understanding why this increase in CVD occurs in individuals with diabetes and, more importantly, what can be done to reverse the trend."

The NHLBI report concludes by stating the need for programs tailored specifically toward this group of citizens and how, "Diabetes was found to be the most important factor contributing to the rate of CVD among American Indians." In their conclusions the researchers stressed the need for both community and school based prevention programs to promote physical activity and healthy diets for Indian children to reduce their risk of developing diabetes.

The NHLBI's study clearly identifies the need for a program tailored toward the American Indian population. Their Health Heart educational program was developed as a result of this study. The Health Heart program has been successful in helping many participants to change their eating habits and incorporate more physical activity into their lifestyle. What is missing is the call-to-action that sets off the personal alarm bell and motivates them to sign up for the Health Heart program or making lifestyle changes to improve their health.

The Silent Thief project will fill this void. This documentary is, the missing call-to-action.

Preparatory research

We have conducted intensive research into this subject. We have gathered and read over 400 pages of data, surveys, and background information from research on the internet and online research libraries. The National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute has issued four comprehensive documents focusing on heart disease and diabetes in the American Indian populations. The information from these sources make up the bulk of the quantitative data used in this project. This research was used to develop the questions being used to put a human face and emotions behind the data.

We will be working closely with Dr. Rick Frey, PhD who leads the Healthy Heart program on the Paiute Reservation near Bishop, California. Dr. Frey administers the grant that is partially funding this project. Dr. Frey's personal experience and contacts serve as the spine of this documentary. He has also been a source for many contacts and information sources.

Dr. Nancy Walter, PhD is an anthropologist that has done extensive research on the Paiutes. Her collection of old photographs that will help to illustrate the migratory nature and physical activity of the tribe's ancestors. Her research on the food sources available along the migratory routes is used to establish the tribe's early diet and food sources. Methodology

Distribution Strategy

Our goal is to carry the message of the "Silent Thief" in a quickly and inexpensively way to as many people as possible. To that end, the finished program will be available in several formats from several distribution sources. A portion of the budget has been designated to produce 100 standard DVD's that will be available to groups and organizations at no charge.

Initially, this program will be used to promote participation in the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute's Healthy Heart educational program but many more uses for this documentary. The documentary will also be incorporated in to the curriculum for the Healthy Heart course offered by the Toiyabe Indian Health Project . The 30 minute format is also perfect for presentations at other meetings and conferences where it can be used to promote the Health Heart course or just to draw attention to this important issue.

The program will also be formatted and compressed for and viewing from websites in streaming media formats. This will allow Internet users to access the documentary and play it over their web browser using a free plug-in with their web browser.

A high definition tape master will be maintained by the producer so broadcast quality reproductions can be created in various format.

Audience

This program is being created for American Indian viewers. However, the content of this program includes information that is important to every American. The same crisis being faced by American Indians is also widespread across other ethnic groups to a greater or lesser extent. While the target audience for the “Silent Thief” is American Indians, this program will be produced to be relevant to everyone.

Story Treatment

This film is a documentary about why heart disease has become the number one killer of American Indians and Native Americans. The goal is to explore the depth of this problem and to educate members of this “at risk” group about the factors leading to heart disease. The hope is to deliver a powerful and persuasive message by using the experiences of real people, telling their stories in their own words.

Opening Segment: The Loss

The film opens with a short narrative segment showing views of the majestic beauty of the American West. We see mountains, plains, a river flowing through a meadow. These images dissolve to a middle-aged Native American husband and wife walking through a grassy meadow.

A tribal elder speaks in voice-over-picture, “Our people have a legacy of living in union with nature. Our Fathers and mothers found everything they needed, here on our lands. But our world has changed. There is a thief among us. This thief slipped silently into our communities. At first, the thief stole so slowly that no one noticed.”

The husband stops walking and looks at his wife as she moves ahead of him. He looks confused. We hear, “But now the thief has grown bold and he steals from us in the day as often as he does in the darkness.”

The wife looks back and does not see her husband. He is simply gone. We hear, “The thief is cunning. Often do not hear him coming. He is evil because he steals only that which is most precious to our families.”

The scene dissolves slowly to a view of the sun setting over a western canyon. The elder speaks again, “Now we have given the thief a name. We have learned his face and he can no longer hide.”

Opening titles roll introducing the program: *The Silent Thief*.

The film uses the participatory documentary approach as we meet and speak with people with a first hand knowledge of this problem. Each interview subject is introduced with a short biographical segment using live footage of them in the everyday life combined with personal and family photographs.

Segment Two: The Doctor

Interview with a doctor in Bishop. The doctor has spent many years working with local Bishop residents, many of whom are members of the Paiute Indian Tribe. After learning about the doctor's background he talks about his experience with the heart disease problem in the American Indian and provides a historical perspective to the problem.

Segment Three: Historical Background

This segment explores the history of one American Indian tribe. Using historic photographs and anthropologic data, the migratory culture and diet of the Paiutes will be examined. The diet of the migratory hunter-gather will be contrasted with the modern diet.

Segment Four: The Athlete

Billy Mills is a famous American Indian athlete, Olympic gold medal winner, and fitness advocate. A biographic element introduces Billy showing the historical footage of him entering the stadium at the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 in ninth place and then going on to lap the field to win the gold medal. In his interview, Billy provides insight into the problems of diet and inactivity. He also talks about efforts to reverse the negative effects of the modern lifestyle.

Segment Five: Personal Stories

This element further illustrates using the words of American Indians. Each in turn tells their personal story. A father tells about losing his sons. A wife and widow share how heart disease has devastated her family. A healthy young mother talks about her heart attack. An Indian Health Service staff member talks about the size and scope of the problem.

Segment Six: The Facts

The size and scope of the problem are documented using facts, charts, and statistics compiled by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Segment Seven: Solutions and Future

Dr. Rick Frey, an educator talks about the program titled *Honoring the Gift of a Healthy Heart* from the NHLBI. This program was designed specifically for the AI and NA. Then, each of the previous speakers weighs in on possible solutions and hopes for the future. A feeling of optimism tempered with a realization of the magnitude of the problem pervades this final segment.

Segment Eight: Closing, Hope

Again we see the images used in the opening segment. The husband and wife are walking through a grassy meadow. A tribal elder speaks in voice over the picture, "Our world has changed. We have called out to the thief that walks among us and we have given him a name. We have told him he is not welcome here anymore." Fade to black.

Financing Sources

The project is fortunate to have already found a primary funding source for this project. The Toiyabe Indian Health Project, Inc. is an Indian Health Service entity. It includes the tribes and land between Death Valley in the south and Coleville in the north. That's nine tribes, seven of them federally recognized. Their mission is the health of the native people in their service area.

Toiyabe has a federal grant for their Healthy Heart Program from which they have earmarked \$10,000 for this project. These funds become available in late March. This money will be enough to fund about 20-30% of the budget. The remaining 70-80% of the film's budget will be funded from other sources.

Department and Crew Outline

Position	Name
Producers	Ray Hocker
Co-Producer	Donna Hocker
Associate Producer	Rick Frey, PhD
Director	Ray Hocker
Director of Photography	Harris Done
Unit Production Manager	Donna Hocker
Sound Engineer	TBA
Gaffer	TBA
Key Grip	TBA
Technical Advisor	Rick Frey, PhD
Medical Advisor	Dr. Bruce Parker, MD
Medical Advisor	Dr. Scott Clark, MD
Editor	Ray Hocker