

Advocacy in a Minute: 60-Second Climber Stories

Stemming from a feature film project, video vignettes tell stories about tower climbers that highlight the dangerous nature of their work and the need for safety measures to prevent injuries and fatalities.

By Bridgette Hester, Ph.D.

One of the hardest things about being an advocate is the reach needed to be effective. How do you reach people? How do you make people aware of the situations and the population you serve? How do you touch them in a way that it makes them feel connected with the cause?

Over the nearly seven years that I have been involved with families of the fallen and that I have pursued advocacy on behalf of active tower technicians, I have sought creative

ways to reach companies, associations and technicians to make them aware of Hubble Foundation. We are a small grassroots organization with no political pull, a limited staff and dedicated volunteers. It can be rough going. Luckily, for the tower technician, a new, fresh and gifted advocate has emerged, Tisha Robinson-Daly.

In July 2014, Joel Metz was killed when a cable used to lift an 1,800-pound boom snapped and decapitated him. His headless body hung

in its harness for five hours before rescue workers were able to bring it down to the ground. A friend who works in the telecom industry told the story to Robinson-Daly, a young mother, wife and filmmaker in Pennsylvania. She was devastated by the horrific way in which Metz had died. She didn't know Metz, but elements of his death struck a chord with her.

"I was also struggling with the death of my father, who worked on the road when I was a kid," Robinson-Daly said. "I was having a hard time accepting that he was gone. Maybe it was the correlation between Joel dying and leaving behind his kids and my father dying and leaving me behind that sparked the fire within me to expose the injustices, safety concerns and other challenges climbers were contending with."

The combination of these things and the fact that no one she told Joel's story to seemed as mortified as she was, affected her. "When I heard the tragedy of Joel Metz, I was in shock that such a gruesome accident happened to someone who was just doing their job," Robinson-Daly said. "But what I think affected me even more, was the sort of hollow response, I'd get from people whom I would tell



Filmmaker Tisha Robinson-Daly.

his story.”

Since then, Robinson-Daly has been using social media and her gift as a filmmaker to learn about the technicians and the job they perform. “It became my mission to not only make people aware of the men and women, who we rely so heavily on for our cell service, but to also encourage them to care about their safety and well-being,” she said.

Robinson-Daly is an up-and-coming filmmaker, and her desire to capture the real story of how technicians perform their jobs and balance their families is garnering some attention.

In May 2017, Robinson-Daly was named one of the top 30 writers by Roadmap Writers for her feature screenplay, “High,” which delves into the mysterious world of telecommunication tower climbers. In September 2017, she received an honorable mention from SAGindie and attended the 2017 Stowe Story Labs in Stowe, Vermont.

She was invited to participate in the Sundance Institute’s 2017 Philadelphia Screenwriters Intensive. In January 2018, Robinson-Daly received a Sundance Institute and Knight Foundation Fellowship. In February 2018, the institute published an article Robinson-Daly wrote about her experience at the Screenwriter’s Intensive. In April 2018, the institute awarded her a production grant for “High,” and the following month, Robinson-Daly attended a Sundance Producers Master Class in Detroit in support of *High*, the feature film.

Robinson-Daly’s curiosity about, appreciation for and love of the technicians separate her from others who have made films, special stories or reality shows about workers in tower con-

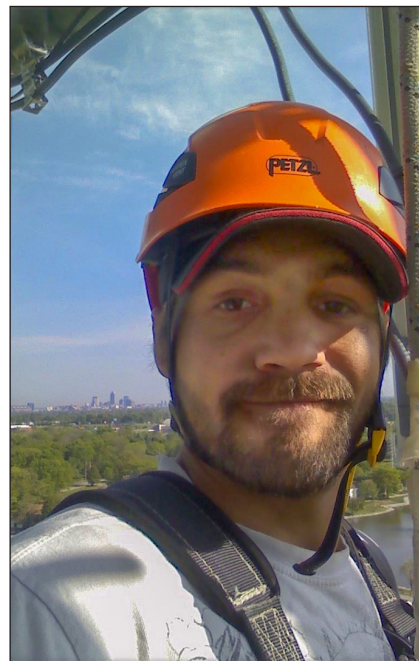
struction and maintenance. Advocates such as myself often hear from others in the industry that all technicians are uneducated druggies or ex-cons. I have heard the term “paid monkeys” thrown around quite a bit in the last six years.

In contrast, Robinson-Daly said she has had fascinating, intellectual and stimulating conversations with climbers. “Many times, the topics are way over my head,” she said. “I have found climbers to be super-intelligent, with vast knowledge on many topics.”

Getting her feature film made is a huge feat that takes a lot of time, money and resources. Meanwhile, Robinson-Daly has also started to produce a series of episodes about the technicians called “60-second Climber Stories.”

“Although *High*, the documentary, and *High*, the feature film, remain my top priority, the *60-second Climber Stories* project allows me to write, direct and produce a short, informative segment, every month,” Robinson-Daly said. “Tower climbers are dying, and still very few people are talking about it. It felt imperative to act now, and *60 Second Climber Stories* was my solution to that.”

The short format of the climber stories has proven to be effective. Robinson-Daly’s first two episodes have been viewed over 10, 000 times, and her following of her film projects and advocacy has increased by more than 30 percent. Although Robinson-Daly sees herself as an advocate, it was not her intention to become an advocate. She said that the more she learned, the more deaths that occurred among tower workers and the more injustices that have been exposed made it impossible for her to walk away and turn a blind eye. “My hope is that now that



Joel Metz

more and more people are aware of the lack of safety precautions and unsafe working conditions that climbers are often exposed to, that they too will stand up, spread the word, ask questions and demand answers,” Robinson-Daly said. “We all benefit from the climber’s sacrifice, so I invite everyone to see this as a universal problem that we’re all a part of, and to get involved.”

Video of Robinson-Daly’s work appears on the Vimeo and YouTube websites. ■

Bridgette Hester, Ph.D., is the founder and president of the Hubble Foundation, which is dedicated to promoting the safety of tower workers, site crews and green energy turbine climbers. The Hubble Foundation website is at www.hubblefoundation.org. A question-and-answer article by Hester with Tisha Robinson-Daly appears on the Hubble Foundation website.