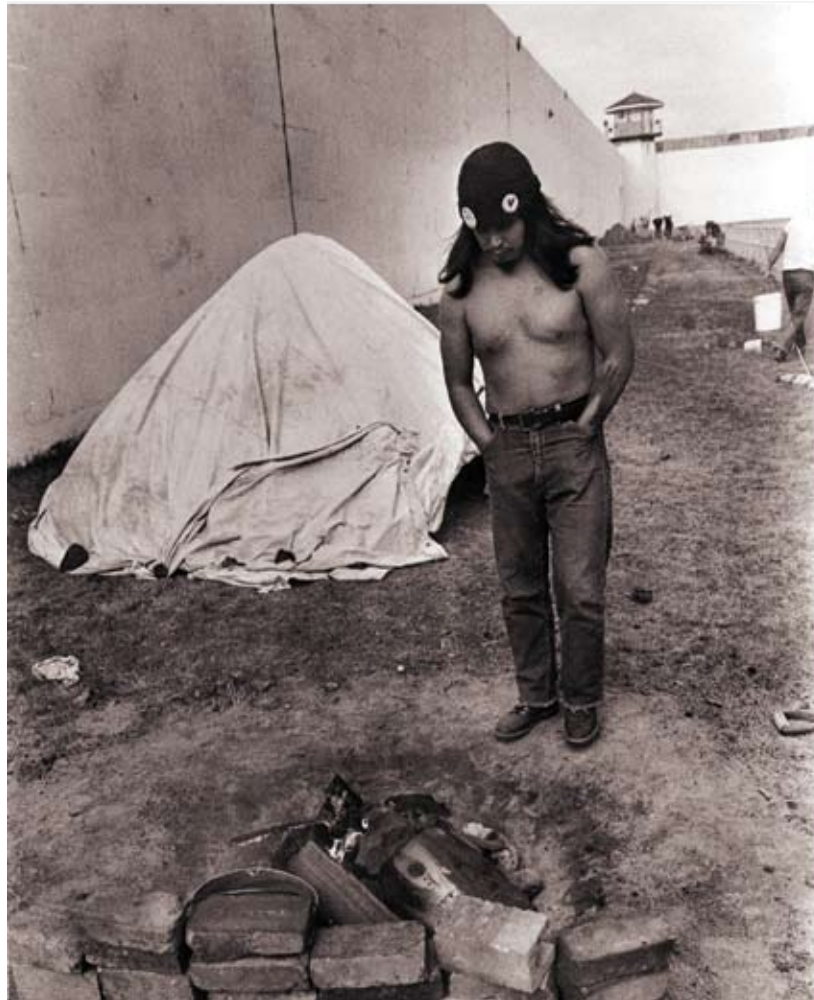




# Making the River



*JIMI SIMMONS STANDING IN FRONT OF SWEAT LODGE,  
WASHINGTON STATE PENITENTIARY. PHOTO BY ETHAN HOFFMAN.*

**TWO RIVERS CIRCLE PRESENTS AN ABORIGINAL LENS AND FLUFFY BEAR PRODUCTION**

## **MAKING THE RIVER**

A feature documentary film that follows the life of Jimi Simmons. Raised by the state, institutionalized as a youth and imprisoned as an adult. "Making the River" is a film about a tragedy transformed.

[www.makingtheriver.com](http://www.makingtheriver.com)

## SYNOPSIS

MAKING THE RIVER is the story of Native American Jimi Simmons who, along with his brother George, was charged with murdering a guard in Washington State's Walla Walla prison. George was guilty. Jimi was innocent. The film chronicles Jimi's quest for civil and religious rights, justice and freedom and the people who helped him along the way.

In 1954, when Jimi was only seventeen months old the US government dissolved his tribe, his family was torn apart and Jimi became a ward of the state, moving from orphanages, to foster homes, to juvenile detention and state correctional facilities.

In 1979, Jimi and his brother George were serving a sentence at Walla Walla prison for assault and robbery. There began a series of events, which led to the longest prison lock-down in Washington State history and first degree murder charges that were brought against Jimi and his brother George Simmons for the death of the prison guard.

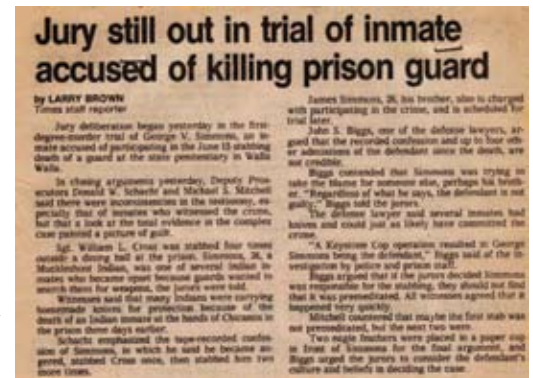
George Simmons was tried first and was found guilty and eventually committed suicide. When it was Jimi's turn, he was appointed an attorney who had never defended a felony case. Faced with almost insurmountable odds that he would be convicted and executed, the defense team was formed. In 1981, after spending two and a half years in solitary confinement, Jimi was tried and acquitted of first-degree murder.

## FEATURED INTERVIEWS

**Jimi Simmons** (Rogue River/Muckleshoot) is one of 13 children and a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, Oregon. Jimi was sent to live in an orphanage and later reform school and foster homes after the Eisenhower administration began terminating tribes and assimilating children into mainstream society. At 25, Jimi and his brother were sentenced to Washington State Penitentiary for assault and robbery. In 1979, he was charged with murdering a prison guard and faced first-degree murder charges. In 1981, after spending 2 1/2 years in solitary confinement, he stood trial and was acquitted. Jimi was paroled in 1983. Now, Jimi is a leader in the American Indian community. He is on the Diabetes Advisory Council, teaches classes on Diabetes and is a jury member and sponsor for the American Indian Film Festival. He is married to Karen Rudolph, his wife of 20 years. They have two children.

**Leonard Weinglass**, a prominent social justice attorney and civil rights activist. He defended Tom Hayden, Angela Davis, Daniel Ellsberg, Skyhorse and Mohawk. Weinglass is currently defending one of the Cuban Five.

**Phil Lane Jr.** (Dakota/Chickasaw) worked for the past twenty-eight years with indigenous people in North and South America, Micronesia and Africa. He was the founder of the Four Worlds Development Project, a non-profit organization that supports individuals, families, communities and nations in building a healthy and sustainable future for the human family.



## FEATURED INTERVIEWS (CONT.)

**Ed Mead** is a former member of George Jackson Brigade who spent 18 years in prison. An organizer of Men Against Sexism at Walla Walla, Mead is also the co-founder of Prison Legal News and developed Prison Art, a website founded to sell prison artwork.

**Karen Rudolph** is a feminist grassroots activist and retired Chairman of the Board at Rudolph & Sletten, Inc. Rudolph helped organize lobbying efforts, demonstrations and wrote educational material to support Native American civil rights. In 1979, Indians from Walla Walla prison wrote The Native American Solidarity Committee, a group she was a member of, and asked for help in the Simmons brothers' case. Rudolph was responsible for recruiting the defense team and raising money for the defense. Karen and Jimi were married in 1987 and live in Los Altos with their two children.

**Raul Salinas** (Yaqui) is a Chicano/Native American poet and human rights activist and has served time in three of the most dangerous penitentiaries: Leavenworth, Marion and San Quentin. Salinas founded Resistencia Bookstore in Austin Texas, which is dedicated to promoting social change.

**John Wolfe** is a Washington State defense attorney who served as co-counsel with Leonard Weinglass.

**John Biggs** is the Washington State defense attorney appointed to defend George Simmons. He is now practicing education law in the state of Washington.

**Gary Edwards**, a Washington State Penitentiary correctional officer who retired after 33 years of service.

**Richard Mason** is a Washington State Penitentiary correctional officer who retired after 30 years of service.

## MAKING OF MAKING THE RIVER...

It had been more than 20 years since Jimi Simmons crossed the metaphorical river – the river to freedom — and he felt it was his time to speak up about the events that took place while serving time at Walla Walla prison. Thus began the documentary film project MAKING THE RIVER.

Jimi and his wife Karen Rudolph hired a production team and after working with them for two years decided that a new vision was required.

While attending the American Indian Film Festival (AIFF), a 20-minute documentary titled “Sa’ah” (Over There), directed by Sarah Del Seronde, caught their attention. Immediately, Jimi and Karen knew that Sarah Del had the right sensibility to tell Jimi’s story so they brought her on board as the film’s new director and Seronde’s business partner Paul Stoll, as producer.

After viewing the 45 hours of footage shot by the first crew, Seronde and Stoll began to piece together the narrative of Jimi’s story by creating a paper edit for Simmons and Rudolph to approve. From there, the duo took over the interview process and the search for archival footage and photos.

## MAKING OF MAKING THE RIVER... (CONT.)

“When we jumped in it was sad to see on a personal level that Jimi literally had no photo albums or pictures from his youth, just an institutional archive,” expressed producer Paul Stoll.

Seronde and Stoll came across a book titled “Concrete Mama” that explores prison profiles from Walla Walla between the years 1970 - 1979. Published in 1981, “Concrete Mama” contains archival photos, including shots of Jimi Simmons by photographer Ethan Hoffman. When they discovered that Hoffman had since passed away, Seronde and Stoll were able to obtain clearance from Hoffman’s estate to use the photos in the film. In addition, Seronde and Stoll began collecting photos from various people from Jimi’s past as they interviewed them, gradually piecing together a photo album that could visually tell Jimi’s story.

In the Summer of 2007, Seronde and Stoll took a tour of Walla Walla prison to gain insight on prison life in the late 70’s. They discovered that the Simmons Brothers and the events of 1979 had remained a strong part of the institutional memory. By 1979, the prisoner rights movement had led to what appeared to be extraordinary liberties for the prison population. Prisoners had won the rights to practice their religions and their cultures in various ethnic clubs. The guards union protested the liberal atmosphere as a possible threat to security. The prisoners accused the guards of playing favorites and pitting racial groups against each other for their own ends. Prisoners murdered other prisoners without fear of legal retribution. The local district attorney went on record that he would not prosecute any murders in the prison unless there was a guard witness. This led to a proliferation of weapons as inmates sought to arm themselves in self-defense and for retaliation for attacks on their groups. This ultimately led to the stabbing of a prison guard and the longest lockdown in Washington State history.

During Seronde and Stoll’s tour everyone they spoke to from the guards to the inmates knew of the Simmons brothers and their cases. Clearly this had been a pivotal time in the transformation of the prison system. After 1979, the Department of Social Behavior Services (DSBS) completely re-examined the system and created the Department of Corrections, under the umbrella of DSBS. The Department of Corrections took away “many of the liberties” prisoners had before 1979 and created a tighter infrastructure. Walla Walla has since installed metal detectors, maintains periodic shakedowns and paved over the prison grounds, which keeps prisoners from congregating in groups.

Seronde and Stoll edited the movie as they continued their research and interviews, showing Jimi and Karen a new cut every couple of months. Karen and Jimi had a hard time watching the interviews because it brought back painful memories of a difficult time in their lives. Sarah Del and Paul interviewed Jimi more than nine times but found it a challenge to get him to completely open up about his past.

“Asking any individual to speak about their mistakes is difficult,” explains director Sarah Del Seronde, “but asking an ex-prisoner to talk about prison is a tremendous challenge. We learned we were asking questions that were not discussed among prison inmates. These discussions violated a type of “prison code”. We kept coming up against the prison code.”

## **MAKING OF MAKING THE RIVER... (CONT.)**

The filmmakers asked Jimi if he would do the interviews as his alter ego “Dexter”, a name he was dubbed by fellow inmates while serving time. To take on this persona, Jimi shaved his beard, created a goatee and wore a headband similar to what he sported while in prison. By becoming a reincarnation of his past, Jimi was able to let his guard down for the first time and give the filmmakers honest insight on events that took place while in Walla Walla prison. The majority of Jimi’s interviews showcased in the film are actually coming from his alter ego, “Dexter”.

“He went by a different name,” states Seronde. “He had a different set of values. When he was paroled from prison, he had to leave that person behind because there was no need to exist like that in the free world. But, we needed to speak with Dexter to complete the story.”

Editing the footage as they continued conducting interviews lead to a quick post-production process. MAKING THE RIVER was completed in the Fall of 2007, screened in competition at the 2007 American Indian Film Festival and garnered Jimi an Eagle Spirit Award. The filmmakers hope this orphan film does find a home at a distribution company, so that diverse audiences can hear the Jimi Simmons’ story.

## **DIRECTORS BIO**

Sarah Del Seronde - Director/Producer

Daughter of a Dine’ mother and a French American father, Sarah Del Seronde’s bicultural identity shaped her educational pursuits, interests in travel and global indigenous people and the desire to be a bridge between cultures. Seronde started an independent multimedia company, Aboriginal Lens, in Flagstaff, Arizona with her business partner, Paul Stoll. Her short film “Sa’ah” premiered opening night at the American Indian film festival and can be found on National Geographic’s “All Roads Film Project”. Making the River is Seronde’s feature film debut.

## **PRODUCERS BIO**

Paul Stoll - Producer

Paul Stoll is of Tongan and German-American descent. A graduate of the Zaki Gordon Institute, he is co-founder of Aboriginal Lens, LTD., an independent multimedia production company based in Flagstaff, Arizona working to express multicultural perspectives through video and audio.

## **PRODUCTION COMPANY BIO**

Aboriginal Lens is an independent media and audio production company founded in Flagstaff, Arizona by Director Sarah Del Seronde and Producer Paul Stoll. The production company was established to express multicultural perspectives through media and to support up and coming indigenous filmmakers to do the same.

## EXECUTIVE PRODUCER BIO

Two Rivers Circle is a small partnership dedicated to social justice and to cultivating creativity in indigenous communities. Two Rivers seeks to increase the circle by fostering collaboration; to expand the circle by encouraging new generations and to complete the circle by celebrating the accomplishments of indigenous artists.

## CREW LIST

DIRECTOR/PRODUCER.....Sarah Del Seronde  
PRODUCER.....Paul Stoll  
CINEMATOGRAPHER.....Larry Blackhorse Lowe, Paul Stoll  
EDITOR.....Sarah Del Seronde, Cedar Sherbert  
SOUND.....Paul Stoll  
MUSIC.....Larry Groupé

## QUOTES AND ACCOLADES

*“Simmons’ story is compelling and shines needed light on problems in the criminal justice system”*

—Hope Richardson, Media Rights

*“I got some of my paperwork from an orphanage through the Freedom of Information Act and it said in the report that when I was eight-years old, I questioned authority... I liked that.”*

—Jimi Simmons, KPFA radio interview

**EAGLE SPIRIT AWARD**  
American Indian Film Festival  
San Francisco, California  
November 2007

## **FESTIVALS**

### **Screened:**

#### **American Indian Film Festival**

San Francisco, California

#### **Bill Wilson Center Benefit Screening**

San Jose, California

#### **Cine Las Americas**

Austin, Texas

#### **National Museum of the American Indian**

New York City, New York

#### **Seattle International Film Festival MyFestival**

Seattle, Washington

#### **Indigenous Arts + Film Festival**

Denver, Colorado

#### **Talking Stick Film Festival**

Santa Fe, New Mexico

#### **Olympia Film Society**

Olympia, Washington

#### **United Nations Association Film Festival**

Palo, Alto

#### **Critical Resistance**

Oakland, California

## **CONTACT**

For questions, screeners, or images you can either contact:

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