

## BEHIND THE LENS

### DIRECTOR INTERVIEW



Hannah Weyer has a Master's Degree in film from New York University. Her thesis film was the award-winning "The Salesman And Other Adventures." Her debut feature, "Arresting Gena," premiered in 1997 at the Sundance Film Festival, and in Europe at the Berlin Film Festival. Weyer's first feature documentary, "La Boda," also featuring the Luis family, looked at migrant life through the prism of a border wedding fiesta. "La Boda" aired on the 2000 season of P.O.V., with an encore broadcast last year.



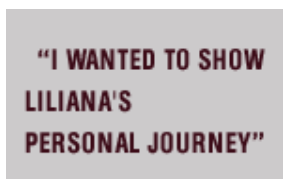
### P.O.V.: What is your motivation as a filmmaker?

**Weyer:** One of my motivations as a filmmaker is to be a part of a collaborative creative process that helps me learn about communities outside of my own and in turn share those experiences with others.



### P.O.V.: What generally inspires your interest?

**Weyer:** I have been interested in the passage of time when girls first begin to form their sense of self as young adults, when they first test their limits in the world as they understand it and when they begin to recognize their own unique abilities which enable them to thrive in their homes and communities.



### P.O.V.: What inspired you to make "Escuela"?

**Weyer:** Before making "Escuela," I made a documentary called "La Boda" which follows Elizabeth Luis — a 22 year old Mexican-American migrant — in the weeks leading up to her wedding. During the making of the film, Elizabeth and I became very good friends and she shared many stories about what high school life was like for her as a migrant student. Elizabeth talked about the pressures of working during the school year in order to help support her family, of having to leave school mid-semester when her family looked for work in the agricultural circuit and the toll all of this took, both on her ability to learn and on her ability to make and keep friends. La Boda contains a "chapter" that focuses on Elizabeth's high school experience, but I felt that the stories she had shared could support an entire film that showed the pressures all migrant students experience. Liliana, Elizabeth's younger sister, was just about to start her freshman year of high school and I asked her if she would be interested in working with me on the film. Liliana, who is a bright, spirited teenager, readily agreed.



### P.O.V.: What were your goals in making "Escuela"? And what would you like to see happen with it?

**Weyer:** I wanted to show Liliana's personal journey — her rite of passage from adolescence to young adulthood as she braved the challenges of high school as a migrant student. I also wanted to illustrate the nuances and complexity of the educational system which all migrant students inhabit.

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I hope that viewers will learn about the pressures and challenges migrant students face in order to get a decent education. I also hope that educators working with migrant students can use the film as a jumping off point for discussions and actions that will ultimately better the students' experiences. The film can be used in classrooms where discussions around bilingual education, racial profiling, the rights of workers, the rights of students, and other topics and themes raised in the film can take place.

**P.O.V.: What was the most surprising thing to you in making "Escuela"?**



**Weyer:** I think I always knew or could imagine that for any family, moving households was a difficult task. But before filming the Luis family as they prepared to migrate between states, I really had no idea how enervating the experience could be. I witnessed and experienced first hand the days spent packing up the house and the chaos that surrounded a household move. It was physically and emotionally exhausting. It dawned on me that the Luis family did this three times a year, every year like clock-work in order to make ends meet. On top of this, Liliana and her sisters were pulled out of school mid-semester and they did their best to say good-bye to friends, finish up homework assignments, and collect their school records and grades. And still — no more "Romeo and Juliet" — even if Liliana was just beginning Act II. In Liliana's new school, the English class was mid-way through a discussion on a modern short story they had just read. Being in the midst of this upheaval made me feel a deep empathy for Liliana and I hope that the film captures the details of Liliana's experience for others to experience as well.



**P.O.V.: What are you currently working on or what would you like to be working on?**



**Weyer:** I am currently working on the film guides that I would like to see accompany the film into the classroom, workshops and teacher training seminars. I am also working with Women Make Movies, the distributor of the film, to get the film screened at as many educational conferences and youth-based organizations as possible.

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