

# THE CREEK RUNS RED

BY BRADLEY BEESLEY, JAMES PAYNE & JULIANNA BRANNUM

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

THE CREEK RUNS RED is a documentary told from the point of view of a small community and shows it's reaction to a decades-old environmental disaster. Like a lot of small towns, Picher, Oklahoma has been slowly bled by progressive urbanization and a failing local economy. However, this place has the added distinction of being one of America's most toxic landscapes and the nation's oldest Superfund site. Despite the facts, this hundred-year old lead-mining town somehow endures in a poor, rural corner of America.

There needs be more awareness of abandoned toxic waste sites like Picher, as well as, the sad state of environmental regulation in America. However, this film wasn't conceived to be an environmental advocacy or investigative journalism piece. We don't attempt to produce a culprit by the end of the film or outline a litany of compelling facts. We felt that the real intrigue of the story is the surprising and complex reaction to life in a toxic waste site. The co-filmmakers and I all share a fascination with folk culture and stories set in outlying places. Picher is a place like this. It's been somewhat preserved yet has been forced to adapt to it's past. Bradley Beesley suggested the idea for the film a few years back in part because it was such a conspicuously large, yet widely unknown story, centered in a tiny town that most people from Oklahoma hadn't heard of. At the time, my occupation was working in toxic America as an environmental geologist, which seemed fitting.

The third filmmaker Julianna Brannum, who is also a native Oklahoma and a member of the Comanche Tribe, provided direction in telling the perspective of the Native American segment of the community, which is central to the story.

This is a character driven story told as a series of interconnected vignettes that form a patchwork of the small, divided community. The conflict of whether to stay or leave town has pitted neighbors against one another who've lived on the same block their entire lives. The film contrasts a strangely beautiful landscape with the incredible environmental destruction — a sense of home with the desire to escape. As the Pentecostal preacher proclaims in the introduction, "Picher, Oklahoma can be like heaven or it can be like hell." We ask the viewer to decide.