

THE LITTLE KITE

Synopsis and Director's Statement



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THE LITTLE KITE - SYNOPSIS & DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

by James F. Robinson

LOGLINE

A young Mayan girl, Tomasa, clashes with her strong-willed mother, and loses a beloved grandfather - her first experience with death and loss. Through the process of making a kite to fly in a "Day of the Dead" kite festival, Tomasa overcomes setbacks, and finds a new connection to her family, her culture and a deeper understanding of herself.

SYNOPSIS

Tomasa is a young indigenous K'iche' Mayan girl who lives in the remote mountain town of Chichicastenango, Guatemala with her Mother and baby sister Sophia. Her father has left the family to find work in Mexico, and has not been heard from in months.

Tomasa's mother Veronica makes intricate hand-woven textiles - the kind Mayan women have been crafting for millenniums. It is the only source of income for the family. Weaving is a sacred and endangered Mayan art, and Veronica insists that Tomasa become a weaver. Tomasa is not interested, a source of major conflict between mother and daughter.

Tomasa's Grandfather is dying, and lives far away. Tomasa is told she must weave a belt for him. But Tomasa makes a mess of the project - she rips it off the loom in frustration and hides it, a major act of rebellion for a Mayan girl.

That day the family learns the Grandfather has died. Tomasa instantly believes her rebellious action must have somehow caused the death of her Grandfather.

Veronica must sell her latest weaving, as well as her family heritage of vintage weavings for a pittance so she can pay a debt and pay to travel home for the funeral. They travel to Santiago Sacatepéquez, a Kaqchikel town with a different language and culture new to Tomasa. Tomasa's affluent Aunt and Cousin have come from the city for the funeral. Both are ashamed of their Mayan heritage and strive to pose as white "Ladinos."

There is a traditional Mayan-Catholic funeral. After, Tomasa finally finishes the belt, which goes on the family altar honoring the Grandfather. Maya-Catholic tradition believes candles must stay lit on the altar and the family must pray for nine days as the departed's soul passes out of Purgatory.

Tomasa meets Mr. Mérida, her Grandfather's former best friend. He is a master in the making of giant kites for the Santiago kite festival on All Saints Day. This festival is famous throughout the country, where kites as tall as 4 story buildings are made by hand and displayed. Tradition says the giant kites play a part in the welcoming of the ancestors' spirits as they visit their family in the cemetery.

Tomasa wants to build a kite to honor her Grandfather. She hopes this will make amends for her destruction of the belt. Mr. Mérida says girls don't build kites. Tomasa is stubborn - she begins the difficult process to build a kite, eventually with Mr. Mérida's reluctant help.

Tomasa secretly confesses her guilt about the death of her Grandfather to Mr. Mérida. The old man corrects her, telling her he was with her Grandfather at his death, the day before destroyed the weaving. Together, they finish a beautiful small kite.

Mr. Mérida falls ill and must be hospitalized. Then, Tomasa's jealous cousin secretly destroys her kite one night. Tomasa is devastated, but with her mother's encouragement, finds the determination to rebuild the kite from scratch, this time without Mérida's help. Despite setbacks and complications, the new kite, ugly and awkward, is finished just in time.

All Saints Day brings a spectacle of huge, brightly colored kites in a grand festival. Despite many failures, Tomasa is able to get her kite aloft with her hand-made belt attached as a tail.

From a hospital window, Mérida sees Tomasa's ugly kite flying in the air, darting around the beautiful giant kites of the men...

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

30 years ago, I scouted rural Mayan Guatemala for a sponsored film I was hired to make for a non-profit organization. That film was never made, but my contact with the indigenous Mayan people made a lasting impression on me. It seemed as if these people, despite the horrific political persecution they have suffered over the centuries, lived an enviable, "centered" life compared to my complicated, stressful and "convenient" life in the United States. Their mystical connection to their land, their gift for craft and the spiritual rhythms of their lifestyles reminded me how artificial our "First World" life had become.

THE LITTLE KITE is the result, it has echoes of De Sica's 'BICYCLE THIEVES', Truffaut's 400 BLOWS' and Kiarostami's 'WHERE IS THE FRIEND'S HOME' in that the film will allow us to see this magical world through the eyes of a child.

The beautiful and complicated textiles of this culture seemed to me to be a living art form. They are a physical form of mathematics you can hold in your hand and see with your eyes, a riot of color and design that proclaims Mayan pride and history. I learned that the Mayan language and tradition of weaving are about 3000 years old, predating the Latin language. Since first contact with the Spanish in 1534, both the Mayan language and textile art form have been under threat of extinction, especially during the genocide of the horrific Guatemalan Civil War of 1960 to 1996.

I always wanted to make a film among these people, and as America tumbled further into chaos and division as a result of the 2006 elections, my mind went back to Mayan Guatemala, and a story took shape. To my experience, these indigenous people live in a way that express a unique humanity which is little understood by outside cultures.

Some may ask why a non-Latino American filmmaker wants to make a film in Spanish and Mayan languages in Guatemala. Local Guatemalan cinema is in a period of growth and success right now, with IXCANUL winning the Alfred Bauer Prize at Berlin and NUESTRAS MADRES winning the *Camera d'Or* at Cannes Critic's Week.

I believe the specific viewpoint of THE LITTLE KITE has a place in current world cinema and will offer a unique vision of this unique and little-understood culture to wide international audiences, including in the USA where the theme and characters are especially timely.

I find "outsider" views of a culture can offer fresh and meaningful viewpoints. For example, there is a long history of non-Americans making insightful films about America, from mainstream projects from Fritz Lang, Billy Wilder, Roman Polanski, Ang Lee, Louis Malle and Michelangelo Antonioni to art-house favorites from Wim Wenders, Werner Herzog, Agnes Varda and Park Chan-Took. These types of films illuminate American culture through the fresh eyes of a foreigner. I believe an outside view of Mayan Guatemala culture will have validity in the same way.

Stylistically, THE LITTLE KITE will be shot in a fresh, naturalistic style, with a palette derived from the colors of Mayan weaving. Featuring the perspective of the girl Tomasa, we will see the story unfold through her eyes.

THE LITTLE KITE will be shot in two separate regions of rural Guatemala, in the ancient K'iche' Mayan market town of Chichicastenango in the mountainous Department of Quiché and the Kaqchikel community of Santiago in Sacatepéquez, the site of a giant kite festival that goes back hundreds of years. These communities represent two different Mayan "nations" and two different languages. The cast will feature many indigenous Mayan non-actors and will contain three languages; Spanish, K'iche' and Kaqchikel.

James F. Robinson
writer-director

A "teaser" video trailer shot during the kite festival, gives an example of the look and tone of the project: <https://www.zappictures.com/preproduction>

A "Look Book" contains photos from Mayan Guatemala, can be seen here: <https://www.zappictures.com/location-photos>

A webpage in Spanish can be found here: <https://www.zappictures.com/spanish>

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