

September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2022

Attention: Film Festival Panel

In its very nature, the story of Oksana is polarizing to say the least and I believe it behooves me to explain just how I came about this true story and what it has meant to me as well as to much of it's audience.

I first heard the story while working on another film project with our lead Actress, Daria Diache. Daria was born and raised in the same coastal city, Mykolaiv, Ukraine, as Oksana Makar. Though she never knew her personally, Daria had heard Oksana's story in the days, months, and even years following the events depicted in our film. Sadly, the societal narrative being told was not of a girl brutally raped and ultimately murdered, but of a girl from the "other side of the tracks" who put herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Oksana's story had been used by parents and grandparents, teachers and authority figures to warn young Ukrainian girls about the consequences of being too loose or keeping bad company. At learning this, I immediately cringed. Though I understood the message, I strongly felt that the stronger message conveyed should have been the atrocity that is violence towards women. This stirred a desire in me to learn more.

While researching the film, I read article upon article as well as countless interviews and learned that her three attackers were twenty-somethings of societal influence and had been jailed immediately following the incident only to be released a day later. At least one of them was the son of a Ukrainian political figure with a great deal of clout. This injustice sparked an outcry from feminist groups who learned of Oksana's brutal attack and took to the streets in protest causing the attackers to be jailed once again and ultimately tried for their crimes. In learning this, I couldn't help but wonder... if there was protesting and the men were later tried, why then was her story still used as a cautionary tale for girls to "do the right thing"?

That's when I decided that, though the crisis of violence towards women was clearly on display in Oksana's story and would be a large theme in our film, our central, underlying theme would be one that often goes unnoticed like a camouflaged snake lying in wait. The central theme for Oksana's true story is rarely addressed and it is that of victim shaming. Please help us to uncover and shed light on the tragic injustice of victim shaming which often camouflages as a cautionary tale in not just Ukraine but every society around the globe. As Oksana pleads in our film, "No matter who I am, no matter what I've done, I didn't deserve this." We all have a divine freedom of choice that nobody deserves to have taken away.

All the Best,

Wil Crown  
Director of OKSANA