



“WILLIAM KUNSTLER: DISTURBING THE UNIVERSE”

By Emily Kunstler and Sarah Kunstler

Tuesday, June 22, 2010 on PBS (Check local listings)

Filmmaker’s Statement

William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe grew out of conversations that my sister Emily and I began having around our father and his impact on our lives. It was 2005, ten years after his death, and Hurricane Katrina has just shredded the veneer that covered racism in America.

Growing up, we were imbued by our parents with a strong sense of personal responsibility. We, too, wanted to fight injustice; we just didn’t know what path to take. I think both Emily and I were afraid of trying to live up to our father’s accomplishments.

It was in a small, dusty Texas town that we found our path. In 1999, an unlawful drug sting imprisoned more than 20 percent of Tulia’s African-American population. The injustice of the incarcerations shocked us, and the fury and eloquence of family members who were left behind moved us beyond sympathy to action.

While our father lived in front of news cameras, we found our place behind the lens. Our film “Tulia, Texas: Scenes from the Drug War” helped exonerate 46 people.

One day, when we were driving around Tulia, hunting leads and interviews, Emily turned to me. “I think I could be happy doing this for the rest of my life,” she said, giving voice to something we had both been thinking. It was years later that we realized our father had made a similar journey to the South and left a trail of breadcrumbs we had unconsciously followed. The journey had changed his life as well.

When we decided to make a film about our father, we worried that the people we interviewed would see us only as Kunstler’s daughters. But rather than being an impediment, this inevitable framework became a strength. While we loved our father’s extravagant greatness, we also suffered his frailty. And we knew that many other children, especially those who were young when a parent died, take a similar adult journey toward reconciling the parent with the person.

Today, with the election of America’s first African-American president, it is tempting to relegate the civil rights movement to a bygone chapter in a history book and to celebrate our victories without acknowledging how much work remains. More than 50 years have passed since the Supreme Court ruled that separate schools for white and black children are inherently unequal. Still today, racism and bigotry cast ugly shadows on our schools, streets and courtrooms. Emily and I wanted to bring our father’s story, and the battles he was a part of, out of the past. We want our film to remind audiences that freedom is a constant struggle and that the people who fight for it are heroes, not because they are without flaws, but because when they see injustice they find the courage to act.

William Kunstler: Disturbing the Universe is a film about and for people of courage. We hope that it communicates that the world we inherit is better because someone struggled for justice, and that those changes will survive only if we continue to fight.

— Sarah Kunstler, Director