

# STORIES I DIDN'T KNOW

A DOCUMENTARY BY RITA DAVERN & MELODY GILBERT



"Deeply touching and important"

Curt Brown, STAR - TRIBUNE



PRESS KIT

Rita Davern | Producer/Director: [ritadavern@yahoo.com](mailto:ritadavern@yahoo.com)  
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# INFORMATION

Film Title	Stories I Didn't Know
Length	74 min
Date of Completion	May 17, 2020
World Premiere	May 2020, Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival
Website	<a href="http://www.storiesididntknow.com">www.storiesididntknow.com</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:ritadavern@yahoo.com">ritadavern@yahoo.com</a> , <a href="mailto:melodygilbert01@gmail.com">melodygilbert01@gmail.com</a>
IMDB	<a href="#">Stories I Didn't Know</a>
Trailer	<a href="https://vimeo.com/398335240">https://vimeo.com/398335240</a>
Twitter	<a href="https://twitter.com/storiesididntkn">https://twitter.com/storiesididntkn</a>
Facebook	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/storiesididntknow">https://www.facebook.com/storiesididntknow</a>
Instagram	<a href="https://www.instagram.com/storiesididntknow/">https://www.instagram.com/storiesididntknow/</a>
Exhibition Format	H.264 (1920x1080)
Frame Rate	24fps
Aspect Ratio	16:9
Audio	Stereo 44.1 kHz
Original Language	English
Subtitles	English
Country of Origin	United States
Countries of Filming	United States, Ireland
Categories	Indigenous Peoples, Native American, History, Social Justice, Culture & Society
Official Stills	<a href="https://www.storiesididntknow.com/press">https://www.storiesididntknow.com/press</a>





**Logline:**

A search for her ancestors leads a Minnesota woman down an unexpected path.

**Synopsis (44 words)**

We were always proud to say Great Grandpa owned Pike Island, but we never gave a thought to what happened to the people there before us. Now I know more. Am I ready to face what happened on the land where my ancestors settled?

**Synopsis (163 words)**

It's a family reunion ... what could go wrong? Plenty, as we soon learn when Rita Davern exposes an ugly reality at the heart of a family legend. Her family members have always been proud to say that their great grandparents once owned Pike Island, a beautiful piece of land at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. But when Rita relates what happened to the people who lived there before, some family members react with understanding, others with arguments and anger. Rita's attempts to understand what happened and why leads her on a journey that requires facing the complicated legacy of westward expansion in the U.S. Along the way she meets Ramona, a Dakota educator. What Ramona's ancestors experienced because of U.S. government policies puts faces and names on this story. Rita listens and learns. She wants to find a way to put something right. We learn the value of finding and facing the past by watching her journey.

**Synopsis (300 words)**

It's a family reunion ... what could go wrong? Plenty, as we soon learn when Rita Davern exposes an ugly reality at the heart of a family legend. Her family members have always been proud to say that their great grandparents once owned Pike Island, a beautiful piece of land at the confluence of the Minnesota and Mississippi rivers. But when Rita relates what happened to the people who lived there before, some family members react with understanding, others with arguments and anger. Rita and her family have spent decades reclaiming her family's story in the Burren region of Ireland. Like many children of immigrants, the past was often an unexamined topic. Her ancestors had their land taken away from them, she knew. They faced the threats of eviction and starvation. And out of desperation, some of them came to Minnesota for a new life. Once here, this Irish American family moved forward and the past was lost or forgotten. As she searches for her own identity, Rita makes a startling discovery. Her family, victims of occupation in Ireland, settled on Dakota land in Minnesota. The Dakota people, who thrived in Minnesota for centuries, were pushed out and then banished. European American settlers benefitted from their removal. Rita's attempts to understand what happened and why leads her to Ramona, a Dakota educator. What Ramona's ancestors experienced because of U.S. government policies puts faces and names on this story. Rita listens and learns. She wants to find a way to put something right. We learn the value of finding and facing the past by watching her journey. As a child, Rita was proud to say her great grandfather owned Pike Island. That pride has changed into a determination to face the complicated legacy of westward expansion in the U.S.

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

## Rita Davern

One of the first things I learned about filmmaking was the magic that happens when you adjust the focus on a camera. Put the subject in focus and one story emerges. Highlight the background and a different story comes to light. The making of this film required focusing on the background of my family's history in St. Paul, Minnesota. What external forces shaped the lives of my ancestors, both in Ireland and in the U.S.? It has been a good, hard trip through history. I am thrilled to share *Stories I Didn't Know* with others interested in taking that path less travelled.

What I've most loved about this exploration is the new conversations and connections it has made possible. That opportunity - to discover and reflect on our past - is a healing and rewarding thing. It is at the core of *Stories I Didn't Know*. I am deeply hopeful about what's possible when we find our past, face it and learn from it.

## Melody Gilbert

Rita hired me to help her make a historical documentary about her grandmother. It didn't take me long to realize the film was actually going to be about Rita. She just didn't know it yet. It took me almost three months to convince her that she should be the narrator and tell her story. Once she agreed, I knew we could be partners and co-directors on this film that would focus on Rita's journey of questioning and healing.

I saw so many layers to her story. It was a storyteller's gold mine! I also suspected that the bigger story in here was not always what we do as humans, but that we try. You don't need to be Irish or Native American or Minnesotan to appreciate this film because this story could be about anyone trying to understand their family history and the stories that get uncovered along the way. This is not a film that gets wrapped up in a nice bow, but I do hope it does make people think.

## CREW



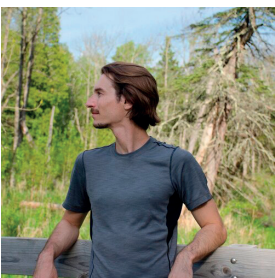
### **Rita Davern | Director | Producer | [IMDB](#)**

Over the past 40 years, Rita Davern (originally Davoren) has traveled the Burren, birthplace of her grandmother's people in County Clare, Ireland. Her daily life, like that of her father before her, includes time searching for the people, places and stories her immigrant ancestors left behind. When drinking tea with Irish friends and relatives, the conversation often turns to those who stayed and those who left, as the devastation of colonization, hunger and emigration took its toll. Rita knows first-hand that, for U.S. people with European heritage, reconnecting to our homeland and our cultural history adds huge richness to our lives. Rita worked as a communication and leadership trainer for twenty years. When her adopted Korean son became ill, she learned, and now teaches, Parenting-by-Connection, an approach to parenting that builds close, healing relationships with children through play. *Stories I Didn't Know* is Rita's first film. She is currently working on a second film, *Burren Girl*, focused on the Ireland part of her family story.



### **Melody Gilbert | Director | Producer | [IMDB](#)**

Melody Gilbert is an award-winning documentary filmmaker who has directed, produced, shot and edited eight feature-length documentaries that have screened at noteworthy film festivals and been broadcast internationally. She also serves as a producer for other documentary projects that inspire her, including *LOVE THEM FIRST: LESSONS FROM LUCY LANEY ELEMENTARY* (2020 Alfred I. duPont award) and *BENEATH THE INK* (nominated for a 2019 Emmy for Outstanding Short Documentary that qualified for an Academy Award), *WOMEN OUTWARD BOUND* (2016/PBS) and the James Beard award-winning *THE STARFISH THROWERS* (2015). The films that Melody directs are noteworthy for featuring a rare intimacy with her subjects as she unearths previously hidden worlds. She works mostly solo and has the ability to get people to reveal their innermost thoughts, whether it's the family of a child who can't feel pain (*A LIFE WITHOUT PAIN/SXSW*), a former Vice President of the United States (*FRITZ: THE WALTER MONDALE STORY/PBS*), or people who have full-fledged relationships with synthetic companions (*SILICONE SOUL*, currently on STARZ). Melody is also a passionate educator currently on the faculty at Northwestern State University in the Department of New Media, Journalism, and Communication Arts. The Documentary Channel calls Melody "one of the most fearless filmmakers in contemporary documentary cinema." Read more about Melody at [www.frozenfeetfilm.com](http://www.frozenfeetfilm.com).



### **Miles Painter | Editor | Cinematographer | [IMDB](#)**

Miles Painter is an editor and cinematographer with a strong passion for documentary. He previously collaborated with Melody Gilbert as the lead editor of "Silicone Soul," and has also worked as assistant editor on the Netflix doc-series "Making a Murderer" and editor on the feature documentaries "Eating Up Easter," "Not in My Lifetime," and "Circle the Wagen." His current work in documentary film combines years of experience in the entertainment industry with an MSJ from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.



### **Charlie McCarron | Composer | [IMDB](#)**

Charlie McCarron is a film composer, video producer, visual artist, and board game designer in Minnesota. He is the executive director of Film Score Fest and producer of the podcast Composer Quest. Charlie has composed for the Emmy-nominated short documentary BENEATH THE INK, STARZ documentary SILICONE SOUL, and Kare 11's LOVE THEM FIRST: LESSONS FROM LUCY LANEY ELEMENTARY (2020 Alfred I. duPont award), the best-selling film in the history of the Minneapolis–Saint Paul International Film Festival. Charlie writes in a variety of styles, but he specializes in subtle, emotional scoring and fun, quirky scoring. Find more about his work here: [www.charliemccarron.com](http://www.charliemccarron.com)



### **Chris Chiabotti | Colorist | [IMDB](#)**

Chris Chiabotti has been working in TV and film for 20 years in Minneapolis. Edit and Color for award-winning commercials and documentaries fill his days - raising kids and turning wrenches fill his nights and weekends. Recently, Chris has started his own production services company called Finnish Tin House and you can find more of his work here: [www.chrischiabotti.com](http://www.chrischiabotti.com)



### **Dumitrita Pacicovschi | Associate Producer | [IMDB](#)**

Dumitrita is a film festival programmer and producer who has worked on several documentaries, including “Silicone Soul” (producer), “Beneath the Ink” (associate producer) “The Summer Help” (associate producer) and “Women Outward Bound” (production assistant ). She is also the producer of “Minka,” a documentary directed by Igor Myakotin. Dumitrita worked for film festivals around Europe (Thessaloniki Documentary Film Festival, Edinburgh Spanish Film Festival, Cheap Cuts Short Documentary Film Festival) in various roles and is on screening committees for many other festivals including AFI DOCS. She graduated with a MSc in Film Studies from the University of Edinburgh and currently heads the industry side at Moldox International Documentary Film Festival for Social Change and organizes the advanced documentary workshop and pitch at the festival.



### **Jesse Marks | Sound Mixing | [IMDB](#)**

For well over a decade Jesse has been dedicated to a career in sound production for video. He composes original music compositions, creates realistic sound design for film, and delivers your mix to your final specifications within your deadlines and budget. In his own words: As a sound engineer, I have been trained to critically listen. This set of skills has changed the way I experience each day. As a result I pay closer attention to my everyday surroundings. Whether it be a voice, a musical tone, or a natural environment, the experience of sound is universal. As I discover more about the world by listening, I am able to reflect on my own life. I wouldn't see the world in the way I do today without sound. Find Jesse's work here: [www.jessemarksmusic.com](http://www.jessemarksmusic.com)

# Credits

## Directors

Rita Davern  
Melody Gilbert

## Editor

Miles Painter

## Producers

Rita Davern  
Melody Gilbert

## Cinematographers

Melody Gilbert  
Miles Painter

## Composer

Charlie McCarron

## Writer

Melody Gilbert

## Associate Producer

Dumitrita Pacicovschi

## Sound Mix

Jesse Marks

## Colorist

Chris Chiabotti

## Aerial Photography

Minnesota  
Robert Zarracina, Flight Ventures LTD  
Bruce Christianson, Sight Flight  
County Clare, Ireland  
Paul Naessens  
Fionn Rogers  
Kevin Smith

## Drone Spotters

Bob Larson  
Bob Schunicht

## Intern

Alicia Hathaway

## Adviser

Mary Ahmann, Minneapolis Community & Technical College

## **Social Media and Website**

Dumitrita Pacicovschi

## **Additional Cinematography**

Katrina Costello, Sea Fever Productions  
Gavin Gallagher, Dreamcatcher Productions  
Kevin Koenig  
Chris Newberry  
Maria Schoeller

## **Trailer Color Grading**

Nick Hillyard

## **Additional Footage**

Minnesota Humanities Center  
Mona Smith, Allies:media/art  
WCCO TV: Dimension  
Reuben Kitto Stately

## **Additional Music**

“Dear My Future Son”  
by Reuben Kitto Stately [KITTO]

“Eagle’s Ebony Cry”  
Courtesy of Chillbilly Dynasty  
Featuring Rev Hillstrom on flute

## **Legal**

Aaron Young, JD, LLM, Young Entertainment Law. PLLC

## **Research**

Fort Snelling State Park  
Minnesota Genealogical Society International  
Minnesota Historical Society  
Ramsey County Historical Society  
Frank Lewanovich  
Mary Wickersham

## **Historical Photos**

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Whitney’s Gallery



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Mac Huelster

Don & Ginger Ireland-Schunicht

Molly Ireland-Schunicht

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Molly Krehbiel

James Laine

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Susan Parker

Cory Penttila

Allyson Perling & Glenn Hardin

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