

KINO
INTERNATIONAL

PRESENTS

WINNEBAGO MAN



Directed by Ben Steinbauer

USA, 2010, 85 min.

Digital; 1.85 : 1

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SYNOPSIS

Reviewers: Please help us save the surprises for future audiences by not revealing the specifics of the storyline after Ben's first trip to the cabin.

SHORT:

A search for the legendary RV salesman whose hilarious, foul-mouthed outbursts were caught on video and became an online phenomenon. *Winnebago Man* is a laugh-out-loud look at viral culture and an unexpectedly poignant tale of one man's response to unintended fame.

LONG:

Jack Rebney is the most famous man you've never heard of — an RV salesman whose hilarious, foul-mouthed outbursts circulated underground on VHS tapes in the 90s before turning into a full-blown Internet phenomenon, seen by more than 20 million people worldwide. Filmmaker Ben Steinbauer goes in search of Rebney — and finds him living alone on a mountain top, unaware of his fame. *Winnebago Man* is a laugh-out-loud look at viral culture and an unexpectedly poignant tale of one man's response to unintended celebrity.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Best Documentary, Sarasota Film Festival
Best Documentary, Edmonton International Film Festival
Audience Award, Best Documentary, CineVegas
Founder's Prize, Traverse City Film Festival
Audience Top Ten Favorite, Hot Docs
Official Selection, South by Southwest (World Premiere)



ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

BEN STEINBAUER (DIRECTOR/WRITER/PRODUCER) is making his feature directing debut with *Winnebago Man*. He is the recipient of the 2007 Princess Grace Foundation Award for filmmaking. Steinbauer's short films have played at South by Southwest and aired on PBS. He teaches film at the University of Texas, Austin.

MALCOLM PULLINGER (WRITER/EDITOR/PRODUCER) is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker based in San Francisco. He produced and edited the documentary *Following Sean*, which received worldwide theatrical distribution in 2006 and was nominated for a Gotham Award. Other work includes the PBS doc *The Key of G* and collaborations with Wholphin and DJ Shadow.

JOEL HELLER (PRODUCER) is an award-winning media producer, writer and editor. His producing credits include the Primetime Emmy Awards Online and Random House's "Must-See Movies Video Renter's Companion." He was the associate editor of the Fox Searchlight comedy *The Ringer*, and has worked in the cutting rooms of Jim Jarmusch, Alan Pakula, Frank Oz, and John Waters. He has been spending way too much time online since 1982.

JAMES PAYNE/FIELDGUIDE MEDIA (PRODUCTION COMPANY) has worked on the productions of award-winning documentaries including *Hill Stomp Holler*, *The Fearless Freaks* and *Okie Noodling*, which he wrote and produced; he also co-directed *The Creek Runs Red*. He is the co-founder of FieldGuide Media.

BRADLEY BEESLEY (CINEMATOGRAPHER) is a critically-acclaimed documentary filmmaker based in Austin. His films include *Okie Noodling*, *Summertime!*, *The Creek Runs Red*, *Hill Stomp Holler* and *The Fearless Freaks* (a documentary about the Flaming Lips).

BERNDT MADER (CINEMATOGRAPHER) has directed and photographed 11 films, including *Road to Tlacotepec* – winner of the Audience Award at the 2008 Austin Film Festival. In addition to his film work, he is co-founder of the commercial production house The Bear.

CHRIS KEYLAND (SOUND MIXER) has recorded, edited, designed, and mixed sound for more than 75 shorts, features, commercials and TV shows. His feature credits include the Academy Award-nominated *Trouble the Water*, SXSW Audience Award winner *State vs. Reed*, and the Independent Spirit Award-nominated *Room*.



CHARACTER BIOS

Jack Rebney is the *Winnebago Man*.

Keith Gordon is a corporate jet pilot based in Las Vegas. Keith and Jack have been friends for more than 35 years.

Ghyslain Raza became known as the “Star Wars Kid” in 2003 after three schoolmates uploaded a videotape they discovered of Raza, swinging a golf ball retriever as if it were a light saber. The two-minute clip is one of the most viewed viral videos of all time.

Alexsey Vayner became famous in 2006 after his video resumé, *Impossible Is Nothing*, was leaked online as a prank by a prospective employer. Michael Cera (*Superbad*, *Juno*) then created a parody video, entitled *Impossible is the Opposite of Possible*.

Douglas Rushkoff is an author, teacher and documentarian who coined the term “viral video.” His best-selling books include *Media Virus*, *Coercion*, *Cyberia*, and *Playing the Future*.

Nick Prueher and **Joe Pickett** are the co-founders of the *Found Footage Festival*.

Charlie Sotelo and **Cinco Barnes** co-hosted more than 280 episodes of *The Show With No Name*, a popular cable access show in Austin from 1997-2005.

Alan Berliner is a documentary filmmaker and media artist based in New York. His critically-acclaimed films include *Nobody's Business*, *Wide Awake*, *The Sweetest Sound* and *Intimate Stranger*.

Ben Affleck quotes Jack Rebney in the feature film *Surviving Christmas*, directed by **Mike Mitchell**.

The Crew of the original industrial sales video, who are featured in *Winnebago Man*: **Tony Dahle** (The Intern), **Nick Dangeur** (Director), **Tom Jandric** (Gaffer), **Kevin Schmitt** (Video Engineer), and **Mike Welckle** (Cameraman).



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I first discovered the “Winnebago Man” in 2002, when a friend handed me a collection of underground videos on a beat-up VHS tape. The “Winnebago Man” clip, which featured the blurry outtakes of a middle-aged RV salesman having a meltdown while making a motorhome sales video, was far and away my favorite. When the torrent of expletives began, I felt like this was something that I was not supposed to be seeing. The comic timing of the video was so precise, it almost seemed like a fake, something scripted and performed.

The barrage of profanity was hilarious and jaw-dropping, but there was also something deeper. The Winnebago Man’s cursing and shouting — at the crew and at himself — was different from other meltdowns. He was at his breaking point, yet he still managed to maintain a level of self-awareness and humor. While I was doubling over with laughter, I also found myself empathizing with this man and his situation. He was tearing himself down, along with the artifice of film production and the posturing of sales and advertising. My roommate and I re-watched the clip every night for about a year. I memorized it, showed it to everyone I knew, and I tried to find out the story behind the video. No one seemed to know anything about the clip, despite its widespread popularity, and this further fueled my curiosity.

Then in 2005, with the birth of YouTube, the online video revolution took off — and the “Winnebago Man” clip became one of the first viral sensations. I was fascinated by the idea that millions of people had access to this man’s private moments of frustration, yet they knew nothing about him as a person. I wanted to know how he felt about this attention, and how the popularity of such a humiliating clip had affected him. I learned that his name was Jack Rebney, and I pieced together clues that eventually led me to the video crew. None of them had heard from or seen Rebney since the Summer of 1988 when they shot the commercial. So I hired a private investigator to find out if Rebney was even still alive.

As I got closer to finding him, I started to question my motivations. Was I turning into some kind of Internet stalker? At the heart of my curiosity was a fascination with new technologies that make it easy (perhaps too easy) to share information about ourselves and others. I wondered what happens to regular people who are suddenly exposed on the Internet in a negative light? What are the consequences of this new kind of accidental celebrity? And how does a person deal with unwanted notoriety of this magnitude?

The “Star Wars Kid,” the “Numa Numa” guy, “Ms. Teen South Carolina,” along with numerous others have found a place in our cultural vocabulary almost overnight as a result of their online exposure. Because videos can spread across the globe virtually instantaneously, a person's reputation can now become damaged in a way that is devastating and permanent. It used to be possible to move to another town where no one knows you. But today, the only option might be to completely drop out of society. So



when I learned that Jack Rebney had done exactly that, I figured it must have been because of his Internet notoriety.

I found Rebney living in a small cabin in a remote forest in Northern California. But it turned out that he hadn't retreated there to escape his online fans — he'd moved there more than 15 years ago. Not only was he unaffected by his popularity on the Internet, until recently, he was completely unaware of it. Once I began filming Rebney, I discovered that he had little desire to talk about his life or even about the video. His only desire was to express his ideas about politics and society. This was confounding to me at first. My experience has been that if you turn on a camera, before long, people will tell you their life story. This is especially true now — in the age of Facebook, Twitter, and reality TV — as we become less and less private people. Today, it's unusual if you can't find out about someone, simply by googling their name. Rebney, however, had worked in television for decades, and was distrustful of the media and media makers. He had a strong belief that our private lives should be guarded.

I began to question my voyeuristic impulse to explore the roots of Jack's anger. And after many frustrating dead ends, I took a step back and I realized I was missing the real drama that was unfolding right in front of me: my struggle with Jack over how he wanted to be represented and remembered. Rebney's desire to have an audience, while, at the same time, living behind a locked gate, is emblematic of our time. It's an impulse that many people can relate to. *Winnebago Man* explores the collision of privacy, celebrity and self-expression in the digital age, but ultimately, it is Rebney's choice to embrace his Internet fame and audience, that is the heart of the film.

Ben Steinbauer, April 2010



STATEMENT FROM JACK REBNEY

ON THE FILM

When Ben first contacted me, I didn't really have any idea what ultimately was going to happen. Why would anyone want to make a documentary about me? And not really about me, but predicated on this Winnebago nonsense. It didn't register at first. Ben wanted to make a film based on what he perceived my situation to be, and at first, he could not understand that notoriety is completely immaterial to me.

I think that *Winnebago Man* is a wonderful film and I attribute that to Ben's skill as a filmmaker, and the abilities of his editor and crew. It's not *War and Peace*. It's not *Doctor Zhivago*. But it says something, that after seeing it, people come up to me and throw their arms around me and they're still laughing. People come up to me with tears in their eyes. It's not surprising, then, that I like the film. And I haven't liked anything in about 20 years.

ON THE MEDIA

I have worked in various arenas of media during my life. I went to work for CBS in 1953. The people who were my mentors were the icons of news journalism in American: Ed Murrow and Eric Sevareid. I had the deepest respect for these men, for their professionalism, for their almost immaculate ability to separate themselves as journalists, newsmen, reporters, anchors and then commentators. They had to wear all of those hats. And they did it with brilliance. So what has changed? It's simple. Look at who owns media. It's preposterous when we look at what we hear and see today in terms of broadcast news coverage. I feel it's non-existent here in the US and it's tragic, because if we had networks with the cojones to tell us truly what is going on, there would be an immense house cleaning.

ON NEW MEDIA

In terms of Twitter, I understand that you can only speak to someone in terms of 140 characters. From my perspective, our children are going to forget about the English language and go back to the click language... click, click, click... and everyone will recognize that this kind of a click means 'oh well, let's go to the movies' and this kind of click means 'no, I don't think so.' The language is going to disappear completely! That's my understanding of Twitter... Ha! It's ghastly funny to me. But of course, what right do I have to make any analysis at all? It's like trying to eat soufflé.



ABOUT THE OUTTAKES CLIP

Following a grueling two-week shoot in August 1988 for a Winnebago sales ad, some of the crew edited together outtakes of RV salesman Jack Rebney into a four-minute clip, which eventually became known as “Winnebago Man.”

While the finished sales ad went to Winnebago dealers to promote the 1989 Itasca Sunflyer RV, copies of the “Winnebago Man” outtakes were being passed amongst the crew and their friends in Iowa. Eventually, the video fell into the hands of VHS tape collectors, who began copying and trading it, sparking an underground phenomenon that turned Rebney into a cult hero. When the online video revolution took off in 2005, Rebney became one of the first Internet superstars.

Today, the “Winnebago Man” video has been viewed by more than 20 million people worldwide, and continues to attract new fans from around the world — including a notable following in Hollywood. In May 2010, Conan O’Brien named the “Winnebago Man” clip one of his all-time favorites on YouTube. Spike Jonze is said to have sent out copies of the original video as Christmas gifts. Ben Affleck quotes Rebney in the film *Surviving Christmas*, and Alec Baldwin’s character on *30 Rock* has quoted and imitated Rebney. *Iron Man 2* features a vintage PR film made by Tony Stark’s dad that was inspired by the Winnebago Man video. There’s even a painting of Rebney — as Shrek — that hangs in the Dreamworks Animation offices.

Winnebago Man is the first theatrically-released feature film about a YouTube celebrity, and the outtakes clip is regarded as one of the original classics that helped launch the age of online video.

Original outtakes clip on YouTube: <http://tinyurl.com/winnebagoman>



THE QUOTABLE JACK REBNEY

“Tony, do me a favor will ya please, will ya, will ya do me a kindness?”

“My mind is just a piece of sh*t this morning!”

“That doesn't make any difference to me at this juncture.”

“Don't slam the f**king door! No more!”

“I can't f**king make my mind work!”

“Bullsh*t, I'm gonna slate this f**ker!”

“I'm going to give a clue here now. I don't want any more bullsh*t anytime during the day! From anyone! That includes me!”

“We've got flies comin' for us.”

“Get out of here, you f**kin' flies!”

“Accoutrama?! What is that sh*t?”

“I'm blinded by that f**kin' hot light!”

“Do you believe any of that sh*t?”

“You're disturbing what's left of my brain!”



CREDITS

A Bear Media production in association with James Payne & FieldGuide Media

WINNEBAGO MAN

Directed by
BEN STEINBAUER

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MALCOLM PULLINGER
BEN STEINBAUER

Produced by
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MALCOLM PULLINGER
BEN STEINBAUER

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MALCOLM PULLINGER

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JEREMY LAMBERTON

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