

TELLURIDE

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# MOUNTAINFILM

## *The Guardians*



*Directed by Andy Maser & Jenny Nichols*

Fighting threats of poaching, habitat destruction and the instability of new national independence, a community in Namibia must protect the exceptional local wildlife and surrounding natural environment. *The Guardians* tells the story of Jantjie Rhyn, a farmer living with lions and other free-roaming wildlife. Rhyn and his community are committed to protecting the lions because responsible tourism and national pride make their wildlife worth more alive than dead. He represents the one in five Namibians today who are directly involved in conservation, making him a true guardian of Africa's natural legacy. (USA/Namibia, 2014, 6 minutes)

### **Discussing the Film:**

*The following questions are intended to spark discussion and activities related to both the content and storytelling elements of this particular film.*

1. What were some of the most interesting images from *The Guardians*? What sights and sounds do you remember the most about the film?

*For more information on the filmmakers or to see other tour destinations and films, visit [mountainfilm.org](http://mountainfilm.org).*

2. Do you think the farmer Jantjie Rhyn is an interesting central subject for the film? Why or why not?
3. Are there wilderness areas in your own community that you would want to preserve? What do you think the purpose/importance of those wilderness areas is to your community at large?
4. Talk about your own personal ecosystem in the school. Give examples. (Follow up: Do a week-long monitoring exercise where groups in your classroom collect data on different places in the school and how they are comprised and used.)
5. Global climate change is causing massive flooding in Namibia and affecting the agricultural output and ability of farmers to make a living. What are the climate change issues in your own community? Give some examples.
6. Do you think global climate change is negative, or is it part of the natural process of a changing world? What examples can you give back up your opinion?

### Extensions:

1. **WATCH:** Visit director Jenny Nichols online at her company Pongo Media to find out more about her upcoming film projects and conservation efforts around the globe: <http://pongomediaproductions.com/>.
2. **WATCH:** Visit co-director Andy Maser's website to watch some of his films and see what projects he's working on: <http://maserfilms.com/>.
3. **READ:** Jenny Nichols' *National Geographic Adventure* blog, written during filming for *The Guardians*: <http://adventureblog.nationalgeographic.com/author/jennynichols/>.
4. **DO:** Visit the World Wildlife Fund's website to find out more about conservation efforts in Namibia and how you can get involved: <http://www.worldwildlife.org/places/namibia>.
5. **DO:** Research wildlife organizations in your region and find a conservation effort that you can join. Work with your teacher to create your own public art project to raise awareness about this conservation effort.

## Filmmaker Conversation:

Jenny Nichols, co-director of *The Guardians*

### Why is filmmaking conservation stories important to you?

**Jenny:** I started off with a background in still photography. I worked with the international League of Conservation Photographers. The idea was that visuals were very powerful in conservation efforts. The idea was to have these nature photographer become warriors for the front lines of conservation. In media, you will see that the best images will get you on the front page of *Time* or *National Geographic*. Filmmaking was a logical next step. The person who actually taught me how to film was Andy Maser, my co-producer/director/editor on *The Guardians*. This project was a completely equal partnership.

### What was the filming process like? How do you create the story?

**Jenny:** I'll try and simplify. Andy and I had worked together on a few projects. We had a colleague that worked at World Wildlife Federation (WWF), Jeff Parish. We were looking for a really cool migration route story, but WWF wanted us to do something on people living with wildlife and how tourism is benefiting local communities, if done right. We were lucky to have a lot of ground support. That's something that's very useful when working with conservation groups, because it gives you access to areas you would never be able to get on your own. You're not recreating the wheel. These people have been working on the ground in Namibia for decades. This guy, Jantjie, became our story arc, and we found him on our second-to-last day in Namibia. We were looking for a local person to tell their point of view, because that's what the story was about.

### How important is finding a character to film?

**Jenny:** The human element is the most important thing. Well, films about salmon are a great example. There are a lot of great films about salmon out there now, but the films are not really about the salmon. They're about the people who love them. I think, in documentary filmmaking, having a human character helps people relate to the issues in the story. You can't have scripted people. In *Guardians*, Jantjie is just a person who lives in Namibia. The main thing that you have to do when filming someone is level with people about their values. A lot of people look up to Jantjie in his community. He's seen as a benefit to his people. There's more access to food and education through tourism. Poaching is running rampant all over Africa, but in Namibia it's not. Because people, or communities, own their wildlife. The government doesn't own the wildlife. If people kill wildlife, they're stealing from their neighbor.

### What was your favorite part of the film?

**Jenny:** The thing I like about filmmaking is all the layers. In this film, at the very end, Jantjie is in his corral closing in the goats, and he's sort of looking down. Then he smiles. The music is soaring and he's having this "ah ha" moment. There's so much positive about that scene. It's also the music and the

resolution. It's so cool to work with someone like Jantjie. He comes up with these little gems. We were talking about lions and he says, "Yeah. I'm going to act like one. Have no fear." It was perfect.

**Do you think the film has had an impact? Do you feel it is successful?**

**Jenny:** You know, it's hard to see an impact completely. It was a very different film than WWF has made before. We were able to share it through Nat Geo showcase. Within a few hours it got thirty thousand views. WWF Namibia is planning to screen it in the places where we filmed, as a piece for community building. It can always do more. I wish it could do more. You can make the best movie in the world, but if you don't get the film out there, it doesn't have an impact.

**What piece of advice would you give to a student who wants to get into filmmaking?**

**Jenny:** I like working with conservation groups. It grants you unique structure and access. You learn from people in your industry; assisting photographers and filmmakers is a start. If you can find someone to work with, do it. There are so many people that are already doing cool things. Collaboration is such a huge part of it.

**What's your next project?**

**Jenny:** Andy is doing a piece on the Grand Canyon with climber Timmy O'Neill. They're filming two blind kayakers. I'm working with Sarah Menzies on *Afghan Cycles*, a film about the first women national cycling team in Afghanistan. That's a very exciting project. I'm much more emotionally connected to it. I'm also working on a piece about a dam being built in the Peace River Valley in British Columbia. That's really about changing the way people think about progress, versus building new, obsolete technology.