

# 'Peaceable' movie-making

James LaVeck's and Jenny Stein's film focuses on the transformational connection between farmers and animals

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**W**hen James LaVeck and Jenny Stein screen their films, audiences tend to become emotional. The couple, whose non-profit organization Tribe of Heart produces documentaries in search of a more just and compassionate future, have grown accustomed to these intense reactions. Making movies that encourage a sense of awakening about the state of the world and the environment, they are interested in changing the way people think.

LaVeck is the producer and Stein the director of "Peaceable Kingdom: The Journey Home," which will be shown at the Princeton Environmental Film Festival. As with all of their screenings, they will lead a discussion following the film.

"People are often exposed to information they didn't have before they saw the film," says LaVeck. "So there is this phenomenal opportunity for opening a dialogue on topics that are normally so politicized that a real dialogue just doesn't happen."

The subject of "Peaceable Kingdom" is the awakening conscience of several people who grew up in traditional farming culture and have come to question the basic premises of their inherited way of life. The film provides insights into the amazing, life-altering connections they make with animals in their lives, while also making clear the complex web of social, psychological and economic forces that have led them to their present dilemma.

"Peaceable Kingdom" has been presented at seven film festivals and been honored with several awards. Filmmaking comes naturally to LaVeck and Stein, who are both personal and professional partners.



Filmmakers Jenny Stein and James LaVeck will appear at the Princeton Environmental Film Festival.

They were aspiring Hollywood screenwriters, and later marketing and communications consultants in California's Silicon Valley, before making the decision to radically change their focus.

"Our story goes back 13 years, which is when we made the conscious decision to change the course of our lives," says LaVeck, who is the producer of Tribe of Heart films; Stein is the director and editor. "We realized that we were really being affected by issues of justice, sustainability, poverty, and so many other things, and that we needed to change. But we weren't able to do anything to affect that change. We had a lot of good things going, but there was something missing."

The couple relocated to Ithaca, N.Y., where they have been ever since. LaVeck grew up in rural New York state; Stein graduated from Cornell University in Ithaca. "We wanted to focus on addressing the present problems of our time," says LaVeck. "We have become much happier as a result. There is something about making that decision to commit fully to this path that enriches your life."

Among Tribe of Heart's other award-winning films is "The Witness," about a Brooklyn construction worker who becomes an impassioned animal advocate. As with "Peaceable Kingdom," the story is focused on awakening and change.

"We have developed a theory that just as fear is catching, maybe this awakening thing is catching, too," says LaVeck. "We have had our own awakening in the area of animal issues, and saw it as a great opportunity for exploration."

LaVeck likens the subjects of "Peaceable Kingdom" who have drastically altered their farming practices, to people who have had experience in the military and then worked for peace. "We believe the awakening of consciousness is a universal process," he says. "When people make changes out of concern for others, the power that results is really something special."

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