



# VALENTINE ROAD

TRT: 1:29:00 minutes

DEBUTS ON HBO IN 2014

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**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS**  
**VALENTINE ROAD**  
**SYNOPSIS**

In February 2008, a classroom shooting shattered the coastal, working-class town of Oxnard, California. As the community reeled and the national media descended, a 15-year-old lay dead and his 14-year-old attacker awaited trial for murder. Was this a hate crime, retaliation for unwanted playground flirting or something more complex?

The sensationalized tale of a flamboyant, young, biracial boy pushing an emerging young white supremacist to his breaking point made for great headlines and drew attention to the plight of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teens, as well as the overwhelmed educational and juvenile justice systems. But it only scratched the surface of the real story. VALENTINE ROAD picks up where the traditional media coverage left off, delving deeper to explore the entwined paths of victim Lawrence “Larry” King and his killer, Brandon McInerney. Family, friends, teachers and classmates of the two young men, as well as their attorneys, law enforcement officials, jurors and mental health professionals, discuss the aftermath of the deadly incident, the trial and its impact on the community.

Through interviews, cinéma vérité footage and the examination of details and documents leading up to and including that fateful day (later brought into trial), filmmaker Marta Cunningham unravels the multifaceted human narrative that links Larry and Brandon. Both were troubled individuals growing up in difficult homes. The film raises key questions facing schools and communities all over the country: what do you do to help kids like Brandon and Larry before violence occurs – and what do you do after you’ve failed?

For Immediate Release

**VALENTINE ROAD SPOTLIGHTS THE MURDER OF A YOUNG MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT BY A FELLOW STUDENT AND THE FAR-REACHING EFFECTS OF ITS AFTERMATH**

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February 12, 2008, started like any other day at E.O. Green Junior High School in the California beach town of Oxnard, northwest of Los Angeles. Eighth-grade students filed into a computer lab to do an assignment on the topic of tolerance. But before the class was over, 15-year-old Lawrence “Larry” King lay fighting for his life, shot twice in the back of the head at point blank range by classmate Brandon McInerney. Two days later, on Valentine’s Day, Larry died—the victim of a hate crime that grabbed national headlines and dramatically changed the lives of students, teachers and a community.

An official selection of the U.S. Documentary Competition at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, VALENTINE ROAD is a powerful and disturbing documentary that unravels the tragic murder of a young teenager who had begun exploring his gender identity. The film unpacks circumstances that led to the shocking crime as well as its complicated aftermath. Directed and produced by first-time filmmaker Marta Cunningham and shepherded by award-winning producers Sasha Alpert (HBO’s AUTISM: THE MUSICAL) and Eddie Schmidt (HBO’S TWIST OF FAITH), the film raises urgent concern for the safety of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) teens while challenging the efficacy of our country’s educational and juvenile justice systems. VALENTINE ROAD has been selected as an official entry in the 2013 Sundance Film Festival’s U.S. Documentary Competition and will have its television debut on HBO.

The film’s two chief protagonists—Larry and Brandon—couldn’t be more different in many ways and, yet sadly they also had much in common. Multiracial Larry had

become increasingly open about exploring his gender identity. He was drawn to feminine items and had recently taken to wearing makeup and heeled boots to school. Brandon was white, straight and had a growing interest in white supremacist ideology. But both had deeply troubling childhoods. Larry had recently been transferred to a shelter for abused and neglected kids, while Brandon grew up in a house exposed to meth binges and an abusive father who once shot his mother during an argument.

The spark that ignited the tragic shooting grew out of a schoolyard Valentine's game in which students professed their romantic feelings for a chosen classmate. Larry asked Brandon to be his Valentine in front of Brandon's basketball buddies. Humiliated and offended, Brandon vowed revenge and soon afterwards made good on the threat.

VALENTINE ROAD weaves together interviews with a broad range of people whose lives were touched by the tragedy on all fronts, including students like Marina and Mariah, who witnessed the murder; Brandon's mother, brothers and girlfriend; defense attorneys Robyn Bramson and Scott Wippert; prosecutor Maeve Fox; Oxnard homicide detective Jeff Kay; teachers at the school who knew both Larry and Brandon; and jurors from Brandon's trial. Their honest thoughts and feelings about the case and both boys' choices on that day highlight the complexities of the tragedy.

But aside from the incalculable human cost of the shooting, the film also explores its wider cultural and systemic impacts. For example, under a California law designed to deter on gang violence, Prop 21, Brandon could be tried as an adult, potentially facing life in prison without the chance of parole. Through interviews with legal teams, jurors, homicide detectives and hate-crime experts, the film delicately straddles the moral razor's edge of the law as Brandon's case meanders to an eventual criminal trial. Some

of the interviewees, including members of Brandon's jury, express strong support for Brandon because of their beliefs and their insistence that he shouldn't have been tried as an adult without a chance for rehabilitation.

VALENTINE ROAD also reveals the polarizing and often dangerous attitudes toward tolerance and gender expression in the United States. Even Larry's teachers span the spectrum of perspectives on how to manage a student exploring his gender identity. His eighth-grade teacher Dawn Boldrin, who was in the computer class when he was shot, was sympathetic to his situation; she even gave him an old prom dress from her daughter. She acknowledges that, "other teachers had a lot of issues with Larry and because I didn't have any, they didn't like the way I was handling my situation." At the same time, his seventh grader teacher, Shirley Brown, often told Larry to keep his situation private and to himself: "Larry shouldn't have expressed himself so blatantly, openly transsexual."

In 2008, the year that Larry died, 1,706 LGBT hate crimes were reported to the FBI (source: FBI website <http://www.fbi.gov/news/pressrel/press-releases/fbi-releases-2008-hate-crime-statistics>). In 2011, 76% of transgender students K-12 were harassed and bullied at school, 35% were physically assaulted, and 31% reported harassment by teachers or staff. For multiracial transgender children the figures are 10% higher. (source: Grant, Jaime M., Lisa A. Mottet, Justin Tanis, Jack Harrison, Jody L. Herman and Mara Keisling.) "Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey." Washington: National Center for Transgender Equality and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2011.

“I don’t think people realize how brave Larry was, being out to that many people,” says a student during a candlelight vigil in Larry’s memory. “It must’ve been extremely difficult.”

Ultimately, VALENTINE ROAD is a story of two victims—the deceased and the murderer—whose paths led them to this incident. In tracing the human wreckage of their tragedy, the film questions notions of justice and identity. It puts an emotional and undeniably human face on a key issue facing social service agencies and schools all over the country—namely, what can be done to help kids like Brandon and Larry before a tragedy like this occurs, and what can be done in the event of failure?

VALENTINE ROAD is directed and produced by Marta Cunningham; produced by Sasha Alpert & Eddie Schmidt; director of photography Arlene Nelson; editor, Tchavdar Georgiev; consulting editor, Yana Gorskaya; music supervisors, Justin Gage & Dave Stone; associate producer, Kevin McSeveney; executive producers, Jon Murray & Gil Goldschein. For HBO: supervising producer, Lisa Heller; executive producer, Sheila Nevins.

**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS**  
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**DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I first heard about Lawrence King and the tragic circumstances of his death from a small article in the Southern Poverty Law Center magazine. I was horrified by what I read and wondered how I had not heard about the incident when I lived a mere 45 minutes away. Searching further, I found the *Newsweek* cover story, "Young, Gay and Murdered." It was clear that this was a major story with wide-ranging significance, yet unlike Matthew Shepard, whose murder provoked national debate, it came and went in a flash. The coverage that existed seemed to frame the story in simple, black and white terms. Some of the media coverage was portraying the real problem as Larry being "too gay, too soon," and the shooting was therefore implied to be an inevitable response to an untimely provocation.

In the days that followed, I couldn't get Larry out of my mind. There was a sweetness in his eyes, a sadness and a strength. I needed to know the truth about what happened, and I passionately believed Larry deserved to have his story told in a fair, unbiased way. I called the Ventura County courthouse to find out when the next hearing for Brandon, his accused killer, was taking place, picked up my camera, and began the four-year journey that became VALENTINE ROAD.

I first met the accused's Defense Attorneys at the Ventura courthouse where pre-trial motions and hearings were in process. As juvenile justice advocates, they claimed that the DA was abusing Proposition 21, a ruling originally designed to prevent juvenile gang members from gaming the legal system. Brandon wasn't in a gang, they said, moreover he had only turned 14, nineteen days before the shooting. If he's too young to drink, drive or see an R-rated movie, then surely he's too young to be tried as an adult for this crime?

The story had just acquired an unexpected dimension. Were there two misunderstood and vilified juveniles in this case? Perhaps Brandon's story was as important as Larry's. I needed to know more.

Although we were in communication during the long pre-trial process, it was not until the conclusion of the trial that Brandon's mother Kendra and brother James consented to be interviewed on camera. The results were astonishingly candid and revelatory. I could not help but be affected by their stories and wanted the audience to come along on this complex, if not infinitely sadder, journey with me. I had to tell the story of these two teenage boys who had both suffered so much abuse, and also the story of the survivors and witnesses of the crime, whose suffering in the years that followed had no other avenue of release.

The prejudice that I sensed in the initial media coverage, in the killer's motives and which played out in the trial itself, courses through the veins of our culture. As the

daughter of civil rights activists, I challenged myself to support the struggle of all citizens to equal rights before the law. When my parents married, it was illegal in most states. A parallel system exists today. It is my hope, and my intention, that this film play some part in the struggle for justice – and at the same time, that showing many sides of this story will illuminate the roots of the fear and hatred that threaten to prevent such tolerance from thriving, not just in the liberal metropolises, but in the often forgotten communities of our nation.

– Marta Cunningham



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**SUBJECTS' BIOS**

**Lawrence “Larry” King**

Larry King was a 15-year-old, student who was shot twice in the back of the head during an eighth grade class at school. He died two days later.

**Brandon McInerney**

Brandon McInerney is the 14-year-old, student who shot Larry King. Brandon’s parents have a history of drug abuse, and Brandon’s father has a history of physically and emotionally abusing Brandon.

**Dawn Boldrin**

Dawn Boldrin was Larry’s English teacher and was in the computer class when he was shot. She had given a dress to Larry days before the fatal shooting. After the shooting, Dawn found herself out of a teaching job, misunderstood by her family and working at Starbucks. Dawn now suffers from severe PTSD.

**Marina and Mariah**

Marina and Mariah were peers and classmates of Larry’s who witnessed the shooting.

**Kendra McInerney**

Kendra is Brandon’s mother, a recovering addict who expresses deep regret about not answering Brandon’s last phone call to her just before the shooting took place.

**James Bing**

James Bing is Brandon’s half-brother, who shares heartfelt accounts of Brandon’s difficult childhood.

**Jeremy McInerney**

Jeremy is Brandon’s other half-brother, who still believes that Brandon is the “good kid” in the family - the one he believed was destined to escape the poverty trap by virtue of his exemplary character.

**Robyn Bramson and Scott Wippert**

Robyn Bramson and Scott Wippert are Brandon’s defense attorneys who believe that despite the horrific nature of the crime, Brandon should not have been tried as an adult.

**Maeve Fox**

Maeve Fox is the prosecutor who passionately advocates for Larry, and attaches a hate crime and lying in wait charge to his case while mandating that Brandon be tried in adult court.

**Jeff Kay**

Jeff Kay is the lead Oxnard homicide detective who headed the investigation into Larry's shooting.

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**FILMMAKERS BIOS**

**Marta Cunningham, Director/Producer**

Marta Cunningham is an accomplished actor turned first-time filmmaker. A native of Northern California, she was so moved by the story of Larry's murder that she became embedded in Oxnard and soon began filming those whose lives were touched by the tragedy. At the age of 14, Cunningham danced with the company at The Peninsula Ballet Theater. She was awarded the prestigious Baker Scholarship at Georgetown University, where she studied English literature. She then moved to Los Angeles where she worked as an actress, writer, dancer and choreographer before focusing on directing and producing.

**Sasha Alpert, Producer**

Sasha Alpert produced the Emmy<sup>®</sup>-winning documentary "Autism: The Musical," which was honored with numerous festival awards and was broadcast on HBO in 2008. A Senior Vice President of Bunim/Murray Productions, Alpert founded the company's documentary division, where she also produced "Shadow Billionaire," the story of DHL founder and tycoon Larry Hillboom, who disappeared mysteriously, leaving many unacknowledged children and their young mothers to fight for a share of his vast fortune. VALENTINE ROAD is the company's third documentary. Alpert also produced "Forever Hollywood," a film about the history of Hollywood, which has been playing continuously at the American Cinematheque's Egyptian Theater in Los Angeles for thirteen years.

Alpert also wrote, directed and produced a documentary on the Western film as part of the PBS series "The American Cinema." She has also produced numerous documentaries and specials for PBS, including films on film noir, poets Sylvia Plath and T.S. Eliot and on Nobel Laureate Joseph Brodsky. Additionally, she has produced specials for CBS, MTV, TBS and The Disney Channel. At Bunim/Murray, Alpert has cast many seasons of "The Real World," "Project Runway," "Starting Over," "The Simple Life," "Bad Girls," "Best Ink" and numerous other network and cable shows.

**Eddie Schmidt, Producer**

Eddie Schmidt is an Oscar<sup>®</sup>-nominated documentary filmmaker and producer of numerous Emmy<sup>®</sup>-nominated nonfiction television series and specials. Schmidt has produced five feature documentaries that have premiered at the Sundance Film Festival: IFC's "This Film Is Not Yet Rated," which he co-wrote; HBO's Academy Award<sup>®</sup>-nominated "Twist Of Faith"; "Chain Camera," a cultural precursor to YouTube; the all-star Emmy<sup>®</sup>-nominated PBS music documentary "Troubadours"; and VALENTINE ROAD. Schmidt was also the executive producer of "Beauty Is Embarrassing," which premiered at South by Southwest and will broadcast on PBS.

For television, Schmidt has produced, directed and written documentary, reality and comedy series and specials for HBO, IFC, NBC/Universal, A&E, Lionsgate, PBS, E!, Style, GSN and Current. Recent credits include directing NBC's Emmy®-nominated series "Who Do You Think You Are?," and serving as supervising producer of A&E's "Storage Wars New York."

Last year, Schmidt was one of 30 documentary directors invited to create a short for Cinelan's "Focus Forward" initiative. His film, "Good Bread," premiered at the LA Film Festival and, to date, has generated over 200,000 views online. Schmidt also served as Board President of the IDA (International Documentary Association) for three years, the maximum term.

**HBO DOCUMENTARY FILMS**  
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**CREDITS**

BMP Films in Association with Eddie Schmidt Productions  
Presents  
Valentine Road

Directed & Produced by  
Marta Cunningham

Produced by  
Sasha Alpert & Eddie Schmidt

Executive Producers  
Jon Murray & Gil Goldschein

Associate Producer  
Kevin McSeveney

Director of Photography  
Arlene Nelson

Edited by  
Tchavadar Georgiev

Consulting Editor  
Yana Gorskaya

Music Supervisors  
David Stone & Justin Gage

Original Music by  
Michael Orendy

FOR HBO  
Supervising Producer  
Lisa Heller

Executive Producer  
Sheila Nevins