

DOWN THE OCEAN

A FILM BY ERIK BARNES



OVERVIEW

No car, no money, no food, no plan, and not a clue, Mike the Dyke and Thursday, two seventeen-year-old best friends, from an impoverished dead-end West Virginia town decide to travel five hundred miles to Ocean City, Maryland one summer when they realize Mike's long lost father may be there and he may be rich.



THE STORY

Two teenage “Spinners”.

Stuck spinning signs on a corner of a shitty town in West Virginia. With an address to a restaurant in Ocean City Maryland. On a sippy-cup.

When Thursday is fired from his sign spinning job for some racist bullshit, Mike the Dyke quits in solidarity and torches their signs. And when Thursday is kicked out of his house because of it, Mike loses his shit. Thursday suggests a road trip to the Beach for the summer is the answer to all their problems. Mike’s deadbeat Dad lives there. Maybe he’d hook them up? Who cares if they are broke, got no car and the ocean is 500 miles away? Why the fuck not? Neither of them has ever even seen a beach before.

Should be pretty cool, right? Epic even.

Sippy cup in hand, they hit the road. On their quest, they evade park rangers, they narrowly avoid joining a cult, team up with some rad chick named Virginia, they rally with some alt-right nationalists, they get drunk with some very old black farmers, get chased by some rednecks, torch a car, and a lot more racist bullshit in between.

All in every effort to get “Down the Ocean”, where Mike will find his dad and paradise awaits.

When they find out Mike’s dad has somehow married into the rich crowd, Mike’s dreams hit the clouds. From broke as a joke to rich as a Dick, can Mike fit into the stuffed shirt, or will he always be Mike the Dyke? Does Thursday find a home? And what ever happened to Virginia?





THE CHARACTERS

MIKE THE DYKE

Mike, white kid, 17, coined Mike the Dyke because his last girlfriend turned lesbian, has a hot streak and strong sense of entitlement, with big dreams and an even bigger attitude. With a drug-addicted Mom, a deadbeat Dad, and a disabled Grandma he kinda/sorta takes care of, he feels the weight of a shitty universe on his shoulders and he'll do anything to get out. He's got a classic grin and laugh that'll keep everyone smiling, but a chip on his shoulder if anyone crosses him, including Park Rangers, "the biggest punk-bitches there ever was," according to him. Self-destructive? Yeah kinda. Self-determined? You betcha. Self-obsessed? Yeah, well...







THURSDAY

Thursday, black kid, 17, is one of too many kids in a chaotic family that forgets his name so much, they just call him whatever day it is. Yeah, the life of the middle child. He chose Thursday because “not every day is your day, but ya gotta pick one.” He spends most of his time with Mike because it feels good to be needed. Without Thursday, Mike’s self-destructive side would probably get the best of him. When things get really for the two of them, it’s Thursday’s idea to go “down the ocean”. Honestly, it’s the only thing he could think of at the moment to persuade Mike from doing some real dumb-dangerous shit. The smarter of the two, he always keeps the peace when they end up in trouble and is quick-witted enough to figure a way out, so far. He’s just gotta stand up for himself one of these days, rather than stand up for what everyone else needs. Yeah, the plight of the middle child.





OUR THEME

Mike and Thursday are classic best friends from two different planets. Neither fit into the mold of their broken hometown but, are bonded by a single idea:

Aim big and dream high! Wait...

Aim high, dream big? Hold on, too cliché...

One fist in the air, one foot in the gutter!!

Something like that.

Oh, and don't get addicted to painkillers and meth. Way too much of that in Parkersburg West Virginia. Either way, all they've got is each other. Guided by dreams of belonging, of the ocean, of a paradise they've never seen, Mike and Thursday hit the road to define who they are. To see the world. To catch it in all its glory.

But every time they jump in with a different group of people, they're met with disappointment, hardship, and assholes.

And it starts to tear even them and their bond apart. With the life-defining journey of one summer at the beginning of what will be the rest of their lives, Mike and Thursday realize it's not what the world has to offer you, but rather what you offer each other to get through all the bullshit the world throws at you.

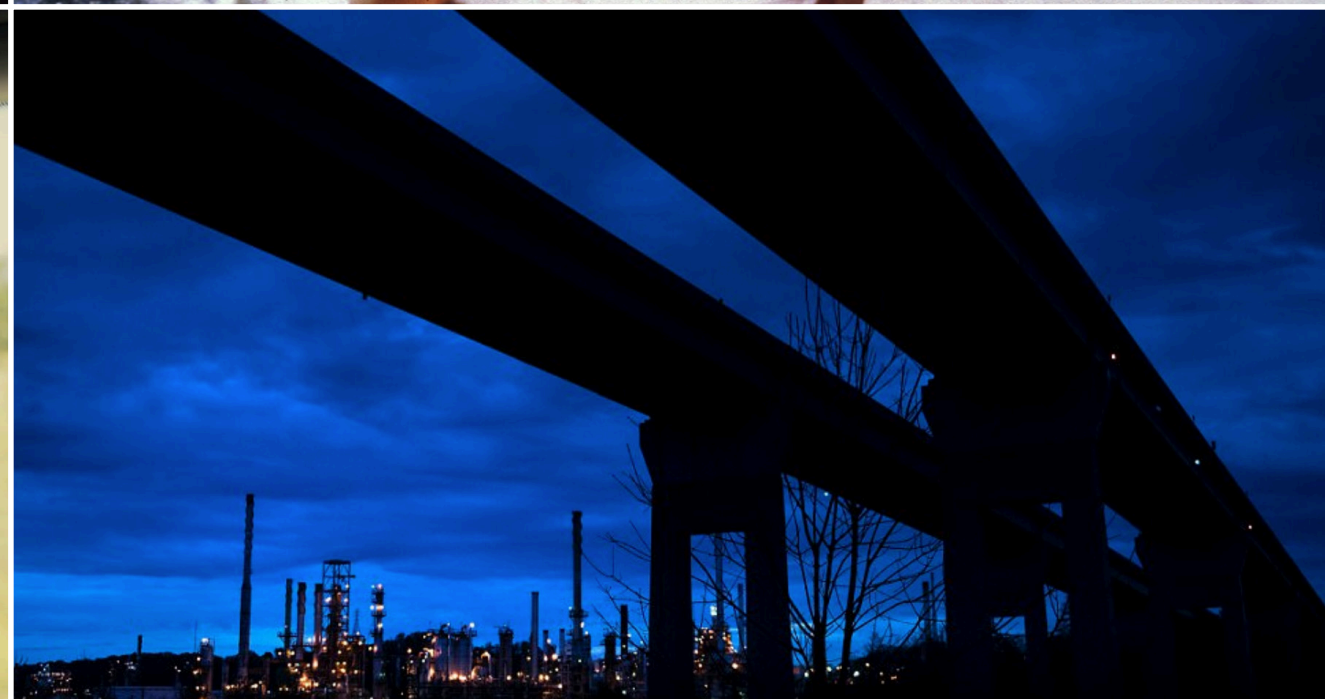
THE EXECUTION

Down the Ocean is inspired by two real people with exactly this quest one Summer in 2010. I had been hanging out with a group of young men who were all part of a crew of sign spinners in West VA. They all had come from very poor families in towns with a bleak financial situation, yet had big dreams of success and saw sign spinning as way to get there. And two of them had the relentless determination to get to the beach that summer. I saw their daily struggle and how far they had come and thought it was as epic and grand as any Hollywood blockbuster. Their plans for the future were hopelessly ambitious and just plain ridiculous, yet their unwavering sense of optimism was infectious.

The real thing is always more compelling than fiction, so I intend to honor the realism of these true sign spinners by taking their exact trip through West VA and Maryland to craft a realistic portrayal of how two teens would pull this off. I want to mix actors with non-actors and shoot an elevated and floating documentary style, where we can't tell the difference between truth and created, to bring us as close to the experiences of these kids as possible. We will shoot early

mornings and late afternoons to capture the Mid Atlantic in all of her summer beauty, a beauty I know and love, as I grew up outside of Baltimore. We will use Anamorphic lenses to capture the depth and feeling of the coming-of-age films we all love.

But we will never sacrifice the gritty realism of this immediate tale of overcoming drug-wracked middle America and fulfilling a simple childhood dream: making it to the ocean. We will never shy away from the ugly and violent reality of their lives, because that will make the joy of overcoming their situation that much more pointed, but we will never sensationalize it or make it seem overtly heroic. We will see the America that films like American Honey, Tangerine, and Moonlight have touched on, but we will see it deeper through the specific eyes of these two Mid Atlantic kids, living in a world no one has yet attempted to capture. With real locations, real non-actors and actors, real life stories, embedded into a desperate journey of innocence, we will see a portrait of two real American dreamers who just want a glimpse of the ocean.



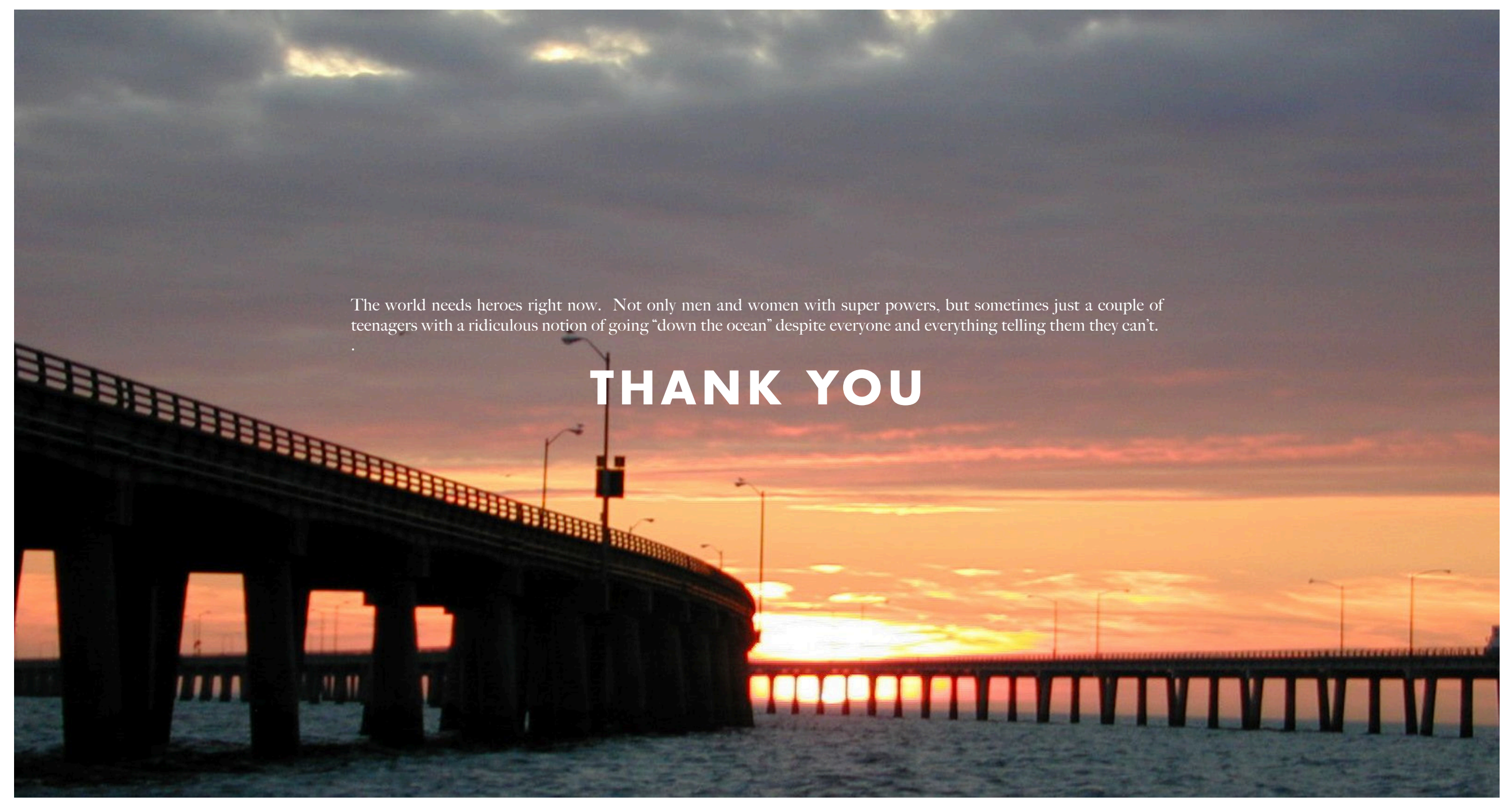
A silhouette of a person sitting on a rock against a twilight sky, with a utility pole on the left.

PERSPECTIVE: DIRECTOR ERIK BARNES

I am the son of two working class parents from Baltimore Maryland. My father worked in construction and my mother was an elementary school teacher. I learned very early that hard work could only get you so far. You had to aim high and put yourself out of your comfort zone if you were to achieve your dreams. Unlike most bios of directors, I did not have access to a video camera as a young person. I didn't know making films was an option for "regular people". Instead I wrote comic books. This led to a passion for art and I was fortunate enough to be accepted to a prestigious art college (RISD). It was here that my mind was expanded as I was exposed to many great underground directors and the avant-garde. I discovered filmmaking and soon found work in the industry in New York City, eventually moving out West to Los Angeles, the movie capital of the world.

The mindset of thinking big and aiming high is at the heart of the film *Down The Ocean*. Two working class kids with a ridiculous notion of going to the beach, despite all the practical obstacles in their path, is very much a metaphor for my approach to life. In my heart, I see myself reflected in the characters of this film, and I share their passion as well as their foolhardiness. My co-writer and myself bring a deep knowledge and understanding of the story-telling craft, and it is reflected in our powerful script. The two of us have a deep love for our characters and it is this compassion that will resonate with our audience and make this film leap off the screen and into the hearts of our viewers.



A long pier extends into the ocean at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright orange and yellow glow that reflects on the water. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The pier is silhouetted against the bright sky, and its structure is visible in the foreground and middle ground. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

The world needs heroes right now. Not only men and women with super powers, but sometimes just a couple of teenagers with a ridiculous notion of going “down the ocean” despite everyone and everything telling them they can’t.

THANK YOU