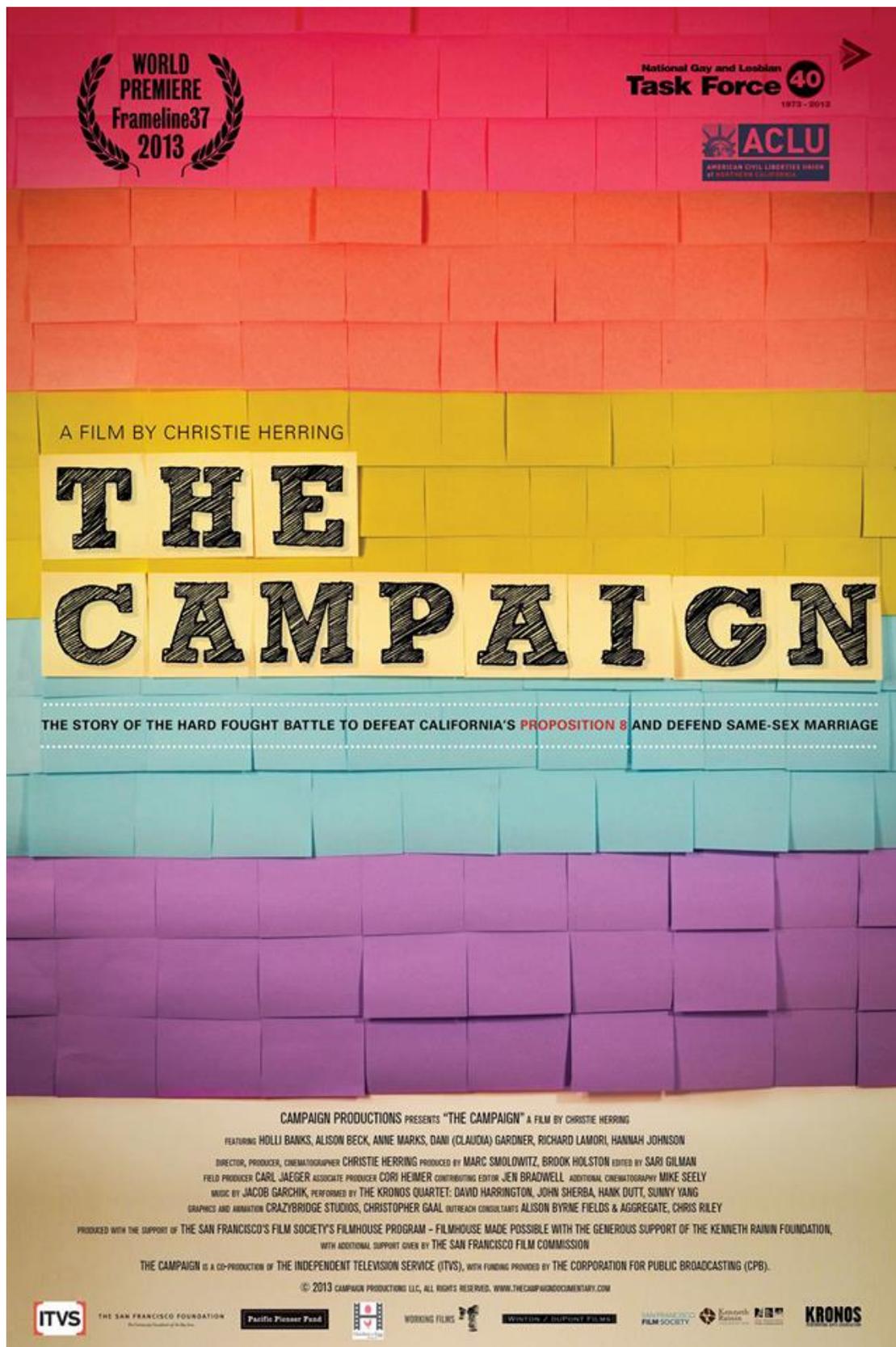


"The Campaign" tells the story of the tireless work against Prop 8

By [Erika Staron](#) August 23, 2013

When I first heard that there was a documentary addressing Proposition 8, I thought to myself, "What if anything still needs to be said about Prop 8?" After watching the nearly hour-long documentary on the interworkings of California's historic "No on 8" campaign, I found the answer to my question: plenty. *The Campaign*, which is building steam on public broadcasting stations across the country, is more than just a film outlining the fundamental struggles of the marriage ban in California. It is also about the people behind the campaign, the time they sacrificed, and the personal struggles surrounding the rights they were fighting to protect.



"For me [the story] always came back to the people, the characters that the story follows – what would motivate an everyday person to drop everything to stand up for a cause they believe in?" said director **Christie Herring**.

The film showcases both the glee before and devastation after the Prop 8 initiative was proposed, highlighted by the personal experience of the people involved. Herring wove the history of same-sex relationships and

their struggle to gain recognition together with the stories of volunteers including **Alison, Holli, Richard, Anne, Claudia,** and **Hannah**. Seeing a film featuring a primarily female-driven ensemble of characters felt empowering, and Herring's determination to find the personalities within the struggle, refreshing.



"The moment I walked through the doors of the No on Prop 8 campaign headquarters in San Francisco, I knew I had walked into a film I had to make," Herring said. "What grabbed me was the life in the room, the willingness of people to do tedious and uncomfortable work for little if any pay, the range of volunteers from homeless gay youth to elderly heterosexual grandparents, and the unspoken agreement to suspend cynicism and past experience long enough to just maybe make a difference. It seemed that everyone walked in the door looking for a kind of community, and in that they became a microcosm of what connects us all. I was compelled to film, not knowing where it would lead me. I put all of my paid film work aside, gathered my resources and support, and the work began."

The volunteers and staff members in the film prove to be some of the most captivating characters to represent this movement. Field Organizer **Holly Banks**, a first-time campaign volunteer from New York with a background in music theater, abandoned moving to Boston to be with her girlfriend to go to California to work on the campaign. She makes some of the best points of the film, explaining that while voters are uncomfortable with same-sex marriage, they are also uncomfortable taking rights away from other people. As one of the most affected by the weight of the campaign, Banks exclaims, "They're trying to write discrimination into the Constitution. What could be more important than that?"



College student **Claudia Gardner** struggles to find a balance between apathetic voters' frustrations and the "Yes on 8" signs found in her hometown, while **Richard Lamori**, a retired postal worker, represents an older generation having moved to San Francisco in 1953. Lamori finds himself fighting not only for his relationship with his deceased partner but also for future generations.

Anne Marks, the Deputy Field Director, struggles to make plans to marry her partner on election night. At the same time **Alison Beck**, who was one of the first to get a marriage license in June of 2008, coordinates interfaith groups for "No on 8" out of her church in Berkeley. Her passion comes from the media's portrayal of the "Christians vs. The Gays" in 2000 and the lack of representation of people whose religious faith motivates them towards the cause.

My personal connection to the film lies with a sixth staff member, **Hannah Johnson**.

On a vacation to California back in January of 2008, almost a year before the election, my friend Sarah and I stayed with Hannah, who had spent several years working as a volunteer in the "No on 8" office. While I wasn't aware of the magnitude of her work at the time, I knew she had just finished working on the Fair Wisconsin campaign in 2005 to devastating results.



Hannah, who identified as straight, had an unmatched drive and generous spirit that was breathtakingly contagious. Sarah remembers Hannah telling her that a filmmaker named Christie began volunteering for Prop 8 and how Hannah only wanted to be a part of a film if it genuinely paid homage to the heroic and dedicated volunteers. As one of the Field Directors on the campaign, she worked tirelessly traveling around the state, sleeping on volunteers' couches and living with strangers fighting for the cause. It was during this time that she met her husband, Matt, a fellow volunteer.

Since that summer in California, and after the upsetting loss, she continued to fight for what she thought was right. She made her life's work human rights, most recently working with the Garden State Equality's Freedom to Marry campaign. She took Spanish classes to communicate with Spanish-speaking voters and knitted gloves for volunteers who had to go door to door. As Hannah relayed in an email, "One of the last times I saw Christie was when we were packing up the office. She said she didn't know when she should stop filming. She was supposed to come to New Jersey a few months ago, but her trip got canceled. I'm hoping she makes it out here in time to see us win."



Hannah was one of those people with so much passion for social justice, and so much optimism for the cause, that news of her passing this past May was all that more devastating. Among the important stories told in *The Campaign* is the one of an extraordinary ally to the community.

"Hannah Johnson had everything to do with my getting access to film the No on 8 Campaign," Herring said. "It was Hannah and also Anne Marks (who is in the film) who first heard my request, sent it through the right channels, and encouraged it along. When I later found out that others had asked and been denied and that I was the only filmmaker given this access to film behind the scenes in the state Headquarters, I took a big step back to take stock of what that meant. I knew how much this election was heating up California and the nation, and I knew how much it was heating up my own emotions – since it was my right to marry that would be voted upon.

Hannah was proud of the work and, above all, proud of the young people who volunteered their time and enthusiasm to the No on 8 Campaign. I was shocked to learn that she was not only 23 herself, but was already a veteran of marriage equality ballot initiatives. She was concerned that they not get too down and feared that a loss would devastate them – much the way she felt devastated after her first marriage race in her home state of Wisconsin. She was also a straight ally who felt as strongly about equality and especially marriage equality as anyone I've ever met. It was an honor to have known her."

And so it goes, everyone can find a personal connection to this story, these struggles, and this debate. We all know how this particular battle ended, with an onslaught of emotions that could be felt around the nation.

"The feeling in the No on Prop 8 headquarters on the day after the 2008 election was one I will never forget," Herring said. "When I got to the headquarters, it was quiet except for a malfunctioning fax machine and the shuffling around of the two people who were there. People arrived one by one, and things remained mostly quiet and very somber. Everyone was raw."

At some point, it became clear that everyone present would sit in a circle and talk about the campaign and the loss. Hannah and Anne asked each person if I could stay and film, and each person said yes. It was an honor to sit in that room and hear the stories of a beautiful community of folks. They talked about their families, coming out as LGBT, coming out as straight allies, experiencing harsh homophobia on Election Day, and their plans for the future."

Obviously, there have been huge milestones in the fight for equality since the film wrapped and as Herring said, "*The Campaign* is one chapter in a very long story – a story that began long before 2008 and is very much ongoing."



The Campaign will start a wave of broadcast events across the country this Sunday, August 25. Immediately following each broadcast on WHYI, WKOP, Idaho Public Television and KQED, the documentary team will participate in a post-film conversation (Google Hangout) with local community organizations. Ask a question of the Producers or local organizers via Twitter using hashtag #campaigndoc, ask on their Facebook Page, and check out an [up-to-date broadcast calendar](#). Past that, Herring plans to make some additional footage available online over the coming months.

"The day DOMA was overturned and Prop 8 was thrown out will stay with me forever," Herring said. "It was a day of unabashed joy here in San Francisco. We were three days out from our fantastic festival premiere of *The Campaign* at Frameline. On that day, I had seen many of the No on 8 Staffers and Volunteers for the first time in years. And certainly many I had not seen since we had all heard about Hannah. So, all of the emotions of Prop 8 were fresh. I was filming in SF City Hall the morning of the Supreme Court announcement – 7:30 a.m. I thought this would be my last shot of the film ... until two days later when it was suddenly announced that same-sex marriages would resume in California. I rushed again to City Hall for what does in fact conclude the film that will air on public television – a happy ending."

As for Hannah's legacy, [a tribute fund has been set up by the Task Force](#) to sponsor and train young activists in her honor. There's also [an educational scholarship that has been set up in her memory](#).

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