

DESERT AROUND ME is a documentary film written and produced by Linda Sanders that uses state-of-the-art micro and macro (drone-driven) photography by Italian-based award winning director Alessandro Beltrame.

Linda Sanders plans to use the film as a public outreach tool and plans to screen it in educational, healthcare and public settings where it can raise awareness about the ADHD epidemic.



*Alessandro Beltrame, director of 'Desert Around Me,' with Team IRUN4Ultra member, Carlos Sá, during filming*

Sanders concept for this documentary is based on her journey as a parent of two learning challenged family members and the reason why she founded her nonprofit public charity organization, Hope So Bright. Healthcare providers, education specialists and athletes are interviewed in the documentary.

Sanders plans to enter DESERT AROUND ME into national and international film festivals. If fortunate enough to win an award, she plans to submit her film to "Independent Lens" on PBS, and to other TV magazine and news format documentary outlets.

Suited for general, social, education, sports and health-minded audiences, Sanders hopes that viewers of her film will feel moved to support her nonprofit by purchasing tickets to her Foundation's events, making donations, volunteering, and advocating for ADHD sufferers. The audience for this film includes those who suffer with ADHD, those who treat patients with ADHD, the education and special education community at large (pre-K through university-level) as well as any individual or organization advocating for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy as an alternative treatment to prescription medication.



*Alessandro Beltrame films Team IRun4Ultra member, Jason Schlarb, as he trains for Mds in his home state of Colorado*

DESERT AROUND ME incorporates footage of the 2016 Marathon des Sables. Sanders' IRUN4ULTRA team ran six marathons over six days across the Sahara Desert in Morocco where temperatures regularly exceeded 125 degrees Fahrenheit. Tackling endless sand dunes, burning salt flats, dried river beds and rocky slopes, the team carried all of their food and clothes, sleeping bags, cooking equipment and first aid for the entire week on their backs.

The Marathon des Sables has achieved mythical status as it tests athletes to the limit of their capabilities. The race is run in six stages. Each stage is roughly marathon distance, with the exception of the middle stage, known as the infamous double, where racers set off to complete a double marathon distance of at least 52 miles. For many, this means running through the night.



*Team IRUN4Ultra member, Ricardo Mejía Hernández, resting his tired and blistered feet between stages*

The two main fears that the athletes face are dehydration and terrible skin-searing blisters. Water is rationed so there is only enough for drinking and no chance of washing during the six days. If one is unfortunate enough to suffer dehydration and has to be put on a drip, they incur a penalty. A drip means extra water in addition to one's ration. Each night, as the runners passed the finish line, they inspected their feet for damage. The extreme heat burning up through their shoes, combined with sweat and sand, meant that very few escaped the trauma of agonizing blisters. Foot injuries cause the most withdrawals from the race. Runners line up to have their feet inspected, disinfected and bound by a team of doctors on duty every night, trying not to flinch at the screams and groans coming from inside the medical tent.

Runners must carry and cook their own food, carefully considering the weight to nutrition value of every meal. No one wants to wear a backpack that weighs more than 25 pounds. Every night, the runners erected goat hair tents. Each tent was shared by a mixture of eight males and females. By the end of the race, the camp looked like a scene from "The Walking Dead" as the runners hobbled to and fro on their brutalized feet, most slumped and exhausted under the shelter of their tents trying to escape the sun and recover for the next day.



*Team IRun4Ultra rests after one of the long stages*

“We chose to participate in this race, because of its extreme nature and difficulty,” said Sanders. “We wanted to highlight the problems people face who suffer with an ADHD diagnosis, and particularly how families and children cope day after day. It takes a true hero to come through it and we hope that our Marathon des Sables team will represent the courage and tenacity that families show every day in the fight against ADHD.”

Great sporting achievements often have a gripping tale behind them. Sanders has used endurance sports as a way to capture audience attention and to tell her story. The stories that are usually the hardest to believe are the ones in the world of sports that actually happened. These true stories, like that told in DESERT AROUND ME, end up inspiring athletes and laypeople alike for generations.



*Linda Sanders and Alessandro Beltrame filming in the Sahara Desert in Morocco for the race*

The panoramic or wide-angle photography in DESERT AROUND ME captures a wider perspective of the landscapes shown in the film. The elongated fields of view give the viewer a sense of scale and magnitude of the locations in which ultramarathons take place. One is immersed in the actual experience of running for a cause, with the terrain, altitude, temperature and climate challenges of the location. With an emphasis on detail, texture and pattern, Beltrame utilizes macro imaging where extreme close-ups allow the viewer to see things in a scale larger than life size.

The cinematography affects the way the viewer actually sees the events in the film. Whether they realize it or not, the way DESERT AROUND ME is filmed, where the characters are in each shot, (particularly the elite athletes), and what is shown to the viewer as opposed to what isn't, has an emotional impact on the audience. By training the camera on athletes during an ultra marathon, the essential quality of being human is revealed. The audience is transfixed by the internal and external struggle and meaningful journey they are taking with these characters. Athletes are natural performers and draw the audience in making it difficult to take one's eyes off of them; they invade the frame, in a tight shot, in a wide shot, and everything in between. Even when filmed in silence, the athletes tug at your heartstrings.



*Dr. Oren Boxer, a Clinical Neuropsychologist, is interviewed for the film*



*A still frame from the film*

The film's aesthetic and visual palette largely determines its mood, feel and theme. The better a film looks, the more exciting it is to the eye, and the more memorable and stimulating. The intense color saturation of imagery throughout DESERT AROUND ME is breathtaking. The different qualities of light are apparent in the various locations where the film is shot and beautifully displays the changing of the seasons throughout the year while serving as a metaphor for transformation.

The ebb and flow of the film's soundtrack melds with its images. While the music score has more of a subliminal importance, the sound is not distracting to the audience, but yet complimentary and noticeable. The ambience of the music subconsciously tells the viewer how to feel. Each scene's weight, scale, and importance is supported by sound. Knowing how to complement the visual shape of a documentary film with the auditory shape of its soundtrack is apparent in DESERT AROUND ME. Large objects are accompanied by bass; small objects are highlighted with delicate, more intricate sounds. Fast movement is accompanied by quick tempos. To get the audience's attention, amplified sounds are used, while muted tones allow for contemplation. There are also pauses throughout the documentary that allow for natural sounds to take center stage.



*Team I Run 4 Ultra flashing their second-place medals!*

The viewer can connect with the characters shown in the film and really feel what writer Sanders intended them to feel: the full range of emotions, yet ultimately, inspired, called to action, informed and hopeful. As American director, Elia Kazan once remarked, "...after a film, you should be changed in some way."

The film is simple, honest, and delivered with passion, mirroring the things that make films so great. It leaves the viewer with the message that if you put your effort and concentration into playing to your potential, to being the best sportsperson that you can be, you will triumph and be a winner. Or, as Sanders says, a "hero." DESERT AROUND ME shows, that while life is often unfair, we all have the power within us to shape our own destiny by the choices we make and that there is always hope.