

Teen directs new film on Hanford nuclear site

By ANNA KING
Northwest News Network

With help from his filmmaker mom and nuclear engineer dad, Augustin Dulauroy has pulled off his directorial debut on his feature film called “HANFORD,” all while going to school full time.

Dulauroy is 17 years old and a senior at Hanford High School in Richland, Washington.

“Sometimes I work on it until 11, or midnight and it’s like it’s going to be pretty rough waking up tomorrow,” Augustin Dulauroy said, laughing.

The film centers on the history of Hanford and ongoing challenges at the radioactive cleanup site. Dulauroy said he learned a lot interviewing historians, a scientist and Hanford workers.

And he reluctantly took some film lessons from his mother, Virginie Dulauroy.

“It’s lessons learned, you know,” said Augustin Dulauroy. “At the end of the day I made the decisions and sometimes they were wrong.”

His mother helped edit down the many hours of tape and taught him how to conduct an interview. His questions to experts navigate some pretty tricky territory on a highly controversial history.



Augustin Dulauroy, with help from his mother, Virginie Dulauroy, directed his first professional feature film titled ‘HANFORD,’ about the history and radioactive cleanup at the nuclear site.

Anna King/Northwest News Network

The bomb and a company town

The film depicts startling images of the bombs on Japan. It discusses the making of the material to construct those bombs, the company town of Richland and the ongoing complex cleanup of radioactive waste at the Hanford site.

And it recounts the strange case of a man named Harold McCluskey.

Robert Franklin is a Washington State University assistant professor of history. He says McCluskey was exposed to a lot of radioactive material in an accident at Hanford but somehow

survived.

“McCluskey should have died,” Franklin said. “He became known as the Atomic Man, in kind of a weird, like it sounds like a comic book, you know a superhero origin story, except that he didn’t develop any superpowers.”

The film’s director said the sequence he put together on the accident that exposed Harold McCluskey to americium in 1976 has stuck with him.

“It involves a relationship between nuclear physics, biology and chemistry. Because it’s a chemical explosion, that released nuclear material that affects organic tissues –

and so for me it’s like all the sciences coming together,” Dulauroy said.

In another terrifying, but also weirdly lighthearted moment, Franklin talks about ducks who would ingest radioactive waste while swimming, then let fly with small radioactive bombs of their own.

“You have these large ponds where water is cooling,” Franklin said. “Well, large ponds in the desert of still water are going to attract what? Birds, mosquitos. And birds like to drink water, uptake and eat vegetation that grows on the side of these ponds and then what do they do? They poop and

they fly.”

In another interview, Dulauroy talks to Vanis Daniels, a Hanford worker and longtime resident of Pasco, whose father and uncle also worked at Hanford.

At the time of Hanford’s construction, African Americans were hired for trade jobs, and were paid the same wage as white workers in similar jobs earned — but they weren’t allowed to live in the company town of Richland.

“If you were Black, you could live on the east side of the tracks (in Pasco), that’s where we are now,” said Daniels. “You couldn’t live in Richland.”

In the end, Dulauroy couldn’t include all he learned about Hanford. There’s no mention of the Hanford downwinders — the dozens of people who were exposed to radioactive iodine released into the air. The director also couldn’t get inside Hanford. The pandemic has shut down opportunities to get onsite.

Working with mom

And the mother-son team did have some creative differences.

“She would tell me, ‘When I did my documentary I did it like this,’” Augustin Dulauroy said, “and I would say yeah ‘But

it’s my documentary, and I’m going to do it my way.”

Virginie Dulauroy gave her son an important final push to finish the film.

“For a few weeks he didn’t do anything. I was like OK, it’s over we did all of that for nothing,” Virginie Dulauroy said. “And at that moment I had to push him to keep going.”

Augustin Dulauroy finished the film and it is set to debut on Amazon Prime this month.

“And so, you know sometimes she ended up being right,” said Augustin Dulauroy.

Now, he says, he knows what to do for his next film.

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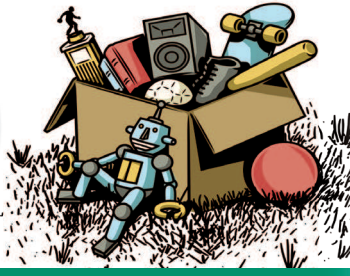
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