Dreams.

This is what stories and films are built on. This is what fuels the people who make them.

Money. Fame. Power. These may be side effects of success, but they aren't what motivate the true artist. They say you can mix art and business, but I've tried it, brother, and no bartender alive can make that cocktail taste right to me.

The filmmakers I feature here aren't doing what they do to one day get rich and live big in Hollywood. They aren't in it for Bentleys and a shot at a Kardashian sister. They're in it because they dream of doing something great, of making great art. They dream of transcending themselves and their social expectations. They dream of showing the world, or maybe just one small segment of it, that they did it; they had a vision, and they brought it to life. How many of us can say the same?

I've just finished watching AMERICAN MOVIE for the first time in a few years and I'm reminded how much I admire Mark Borchardt. You see, Mark has big dreams of being a filmmaker. His head is full of visions of the future where his life is finally in line with his dreams. For all his big ideas, Mark Borchardt seems to have never really found his place in this world. On one hand he's a man who tries to live without compromise, who is consumed by his artistic vision. On the other hand, he is faced with the reality of his situation; he's broke, he's got no connections in the business, he's probably got a drinking problem. He's in a constant struggle between his dreams and his circumstances, and most people seem to just wish he'd get a decent job and give up on all his crazy moviemaking.

Mark had two ambitious projects on the go. One is a feature called NORTHWESTERN that remains unfinished to this day. The other is a short film called COVEN which had been in this state of on-again, off-again production based on Mark's wild upward and downward swings of enthusiasm, depression and sobriety, for years. His friends are supportive but most seem to see him as a bit of a harmless loser and participate in his schemes mostly just to make Mark happy. They don't seem to have the same high hopes Mark has about the future of these films.

People watch AMERICAN MOVIE to laugh at Mark Borchardt. They see him as a washed up drunk who cleans toilets for a living, who has to beg his friends and family for the cash to make a movie that nobody wants to watch. But these people are laughing from the comfort of their couches. Mark Borchardt is the one person in ten thousand with the nerve to follow his vision, to get off the couch, to risk his heart and soul on something that is actually important to him, rather than numbing his mind with distractions.

When you're young, maybe you think success is a Kardashian on the hood of a Bentley. But you get older, and life kicks you around for a while, and one day the familiar concepts of success and failure lose meaning, and you realize that success really means doing anything at all. Giving form to a dream, and holding it up to the light. Having the courage to reach beyond just thinking about it and talking about it to actually doing it. Everything else is the gravy.

Mark Borchardt is a man with a dream that he is trying to actualize, and AMERICAN MOVIE documents his struggle, mostly against himself. That's real to me, that's what I think most of us can relate to: the struggle against yourself and the battle for the discipline and self-mastery required to live the creative life and attempt greatness.

At one point, when Mark is itemizing how many copies of COVEN he will have to sell on VHS in

order to finance NORTHWESTERN, you realize that this is war for him—the act of creation is painful to him, but he is driven to finish it. Not for money, not for fame, but just so that he can look at his dream and look at the people he's shared his life with and say he did it, goddamnit. It's life or death for him; life or death of the soul, of the person he sees himself as in his heart and the person he wants his loved ones to remember. You feel terrified that he might fail, because you realize that Mark's failure would mean the final stamping out of his spirit.

There is a scene where Mark has parked his car at the airport and he is writing, isolated. He knows how distractions prey on him—he knows he is weak—so he literally imprisons himself to try to reach his goal. It's life or death of the soul time for Mark, and he's choosing life.

I think a lot of the filmmakers we see in this space can relate to Mark to some extent or another. I think some of them may be locked in that life or death battle of the spirit. This is probably one of the other reasons I want to support them and build something for them, a place where they are appreciated and understood.

Watching Mark premiere COVEN at his local theatre is a beautiful moment. No matter what happens in Mark's life afterwards, he will always have the memory of laying himself bare before an audience and saying, "I did it. I'm not worthless. I finished something I started and I'm proud of that."

Whatever else we might be able to say about Mark as a filmmaker, we cannot take that away from him. He endured, he battled himself to realize his dream, and he won. He's got a finished film in the can.

What is your dream?

I quit my day job this week. I did it for a bunch of reasons, but at heart it's because my day job is drawing me closer to that death of the spirit and I want to choose life. I want to take a run at living that dream I've had since I was a boy.

I hope you'll stick around and see what happens, see if we can't make something great out of

this. See which side wins  out in the end.

PS: The full feature of American Movie is  available legally and free of charge on YouTube:

{youtube}02_mbe89rc4{/youtube}