

AND SO I STAYED

Directed by Natalie Pattillo and Daniel A. Nelson



USA, 2021, English
Running Time: 91 minutes

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SYNOPSIS

AND SO I STAYED is an award-winning documentary about survivors of abuse fighting for their lives and spending years behind bars. These women paid a steep price with long prison sentences, lost time with loved ones, and painful memories. Formerly incarcerated survivor-advocate Kim Dadou Brown, who met her wife while incarcerated, is a driving force in the passage of New York's Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act (DVSJA), a new law meant to prevent survivors from receiving harsh prison sentences for their acts of survival. Nikki Addimando, a mother of two young children, suffered the consequences when a judge didn't follow the law's guidelines. Tanisha Davis, a single mother who was ripped away from her son in 2013, is hopeful the new law is her way out of a harsh prison sentence.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

NATALIE PATTILLO - As someone who still has to deal with my abuser — despite leaving and doing exactly what the system demands of me — the mission to make this film is a personal one. In addition to my experience as a survivor, in 2010, my sister, Jennifer, was killed by her then-boyfriend. I often wonder what would've happened if Jennifer, like the survivors in the AND SO I STAYED, fought back? Would she be in prison if she killed him to protect herself? So often, people say that survivors "could've left" but ignore the fact that while they are in the process of leaving and safety planning, the danger drastically escalates.

As a survivor and woman of color, I believe that our film can uplift survivors in a culture where they are disbelieved and villainized rather than protected. Because of my experiences, I have upheld the core value that this film must be trauma-informed in every stage. That mission has allowed AND SO I STAYED to develop into a deeply intimate film with survivors who trust us with their fears and trauma and feel comfortable recounting the harrowing physical and mental violence that they were subjected to in their abusive relationships, a misogynistic and racist legal system, and a cruel prison system. I believe it is my personal duty to not just make this film, but to make a searing, indelible impact on everyone who engages with it.

DANIEL A. NELSON - Working on this documentary has been a privilege, especially working with women such as Co-Director Natalie Pattillo, who has been covering this issue long before I was moved into action five years ago. In

this time though, I've seen first-hand how misogyny and racism, which is so rampant in our society, creeps into courtrooms and distorts the truth. When a male judge can stare a domestic violence survivor in the face and tell her that she "reluctantly consented" to the horrendous abuse she was subjected to, despite evidence saying otherwise, or a white male prosecutor can call a mom and survivor, who is Black, a "hood diva", it tells you everything you need to know about how much work needs to be done.

Listening has been imperative for me throughout this production. It's my responsibility to listen to the experiences of women like Natalie, Kim, Tanisha, Nikki, and so many others and accept that there will always be nuances that I can never fully grasp. Over the last five years, I continue to work to hold myself accountable not only by listening, but being an active participant in the study and research of these issues as I continue to learn from women leaders everyday. It's critical for men to stand up against toxic masculinity and follow the lead of women, like Natalie and Kim, who are tireless in their fight to end gender-based violence.

FACTS, STATISTICS & WHAT'S AT STAKE?

COVID-19 is magnifying the dangers of staying at home with an abuser or dealing with a violent ex — circumstances that existed well before the pandemic because of how our society and legal system responds to domestic violence victims. Within the two weeks that victims try to leave their violent relationships, they are 70 times more likely to get killed by their abusers, according to the Domestic Violence Intervention Program. One third of homicide victims with temporary protective orders were murdered within the first month of filing the order, according to a 10-city study.

With courts and police throughout the country failing to respond to domestic violence reports, and now even more so during the pandemic, victims have no choice but to fight back and protect themselves and their children. Since COVID-19, the mainstream discourse around domestic violence has amplified, however, the unjust incarceration and criminalization of survivors who fight for their lives is still overlooked. Today, women's prison populations across the nation are teeming with survivors. In New York, 67 percent of women — a conservative estimate — are sentenced to prison for killing someone who abused them. The average prison sentence for men who kill their female partners is 2 to 6 years, according to the National Coalition Against Domestic

Violence. But, the average sentence for women who kill their male partners is 15 years. This, despite the fact that, as stated by NCADV's findings, most women kill their abusive partners in self-defense.

Prosecutors, police officers, juries, and judges criminalize victims of abuse, especially those who, like Tanisha, are Black and Brown, for their acts of survival yet fail to protect them and often inflict more harm. A 2015 report by the Human Rights Project for Girls exposed the "abuse to prison pipeline", showing that girls, and disproportionately Black and Brown girls, are "punished as perpetrators rather than served and supported as victims and survivors."

AND SO I STAYED aims to hold the legal system and public accountable by exposing the unjust misogyny and racism embedded in these power structures while also portraying the resilience, hopes, and dreams of survivors and their loved ones. We are subverting from a true crime format that too often fetishizes pain and caters to the false narrative spun by a legal system that inherently oppresses women and those who are BIPOC, transgender, gender-fluid, disabled, and/or incarcerated. The film demands viewers to bear witness to the generational trauma that is perpetuated when mothers, like Tanisha and Nikki, are incarcerated and taken away from their children. It also shines a light on the long term effects incarceration can have on survivors like Kim, who is still struggling to find a decent job with a felony appearing on her background check.

AND SO I STAYED leaves viewers with these indelible questions:

Is justice served when survivors of abuse are incarcerated for their acts of survival?

What can we do to protect survivors and their children?

NEW YORK'S DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS JUSTICE ACT

The Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act is a New York State law that allows judges to assess whether domestic abuse was a "significant contributing factor" to the alleged crime.

For example, if a survivor commits a crime because:

- a violent partner or family member abuses them, a judge can consider that a “significant contributing factor.”
- their abuser coerces them (threatens their life or safety, etc.), a judge can consider that a “significant contributing factor.”

This allows judges to implement shorter sentences and, in some cases, alternative-to-incarceration (ATI) programs. ATIs are court-mandated programs that fall under the authority of governmental or non-profit agencies. They operate in conjunction with the legal system across New York State. The law also permits currently incarcerated survivors, who meet the criteria, to apply for resentencing or earlier release.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Natalie Pattillo - Director, Producer, Writer

Natalie Pattillo is a New York-based multimedia journalist. Her reporting bylines include the New York Times, MSNBC, VICE, Jezebel, New York Magazine, Al Jazeera America and Salon. In 2020, she was awarded the Media Award from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. She received a Master’s degree from Columbia Journalism School in 2017. Natalie understands the nuances of the abuser-victim dynamic because she survived domestic violence in a past relationship. These experiences, as well as the death of her sister who was killed at the hands of an abusive boyfriend in 2010, fuels Natalie’s mission for AND SO I STAYED to make a meaningful impact.

Daniel A. Nelson - Director, Director of Photography, Producer

Daniel A. Nelson recently finished work as a cinematographer and researcher on Oscar-nominated director David France’s feature-length documentary THE DEATH AND LIFE OF MARSHA P. JOHNSON about the suspicious death of Marsha P. Johnson, a woman who helped put the “T” in LGBT, that premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival in April 2017. The film is on Netflix. Daniel received his master’s from the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism in documentary filmmaking in 2016. His thesis at Columbia was a short documentary called POSTURE about the controversial world of competitive yoga, which premiered at the Long Island International Film Expo in July 2017 and was published in Yoga Journal.

Tyler H. Walk - Editor

Tyler H. Walk is a Sundance 2020 Special Jury Award for Editing, Cinema Eye award winning, and Emmy-nominated editor whose most recent projects include David France's WELCOME TO CHECHNYA, the Oscar-Nominated HOW TO SURVIVE A PLAGUE, and Michael Moore's WHERE TO INVADENEXT. A graduate from Penn State University and The Edit Center, Tyler is also an amateur pinballer and pretend rock star by night. In addition to cutting feature films, Tyler is directing his first feature about the Small-World Phenomenon. His Bacon number is 2.

Natalie Schreyer - Executive Producer

Executive Producer Natalie Schreyer is a journalist whose work focuses on domestic violence survivors and the broken systems that fail them. Her writing has appeared in Mother Jones, Ms. Magazine, USA Today, CNN, The Atlantic, and others. She holds a master's degree in journalism from American University.

Julian Lim - Cinematographer, Associate Producer

Julian Lim is an Emmy-nominated documentary producer, shooter, and editor. Julian is also a graduate of the Columbia Journalism School program, where he teaches video journalism as an adjunct professor. He earned his B.A. in journalism and Asian American studies from San Francisco State University. Prior to Columbia, he has worked for The Philadelphia Inquirer, Gannett, and Gatehouse Media as a newspaper page designer.

Sarah Bellingham - Cinematographer

Sarah Bellingham is a documentarian and freelance video journalist. She is an adjunct professor at the Columbia Journalism School for documentary and video journalism. Sarah's past documentary work includes HLN's Inside with Chris Cuomo, HHMI's Great Transitions: The Origin of Birds and HHMI's The Origin of Species: The Making of a Theory. Her freelance work has appeared on The Washington Post, BBC, Eurasianet, The Daily Beast and Food Network. After working on an independent documentary in Boston, Sarah attended Columbia Journalism School where received the Columbia Alumni Fund, Jonathan Maslow Endowed Scholarship Fund, UPS, Keene and Taishoff Scholarships. Following graduation, she was awarded a Pulitzer Student Fellowship. Sarah is also the co-director and cinematographer of PEOPLE 4

TRUMP, a documentary following Trump supporters in Pennsylvania over the course of four years.

Osei Essed - Composer

Osei Essed is a multi-platform artist, performing and writing for screen and stage. Recent film composition credits include the award-winning films ALWAYS IN SEASON (2019 Sundance Special Jury Award), PERIOD. END OF SENTENCE (2019 Academy Award winner), TOWER (2018 Emmy winner) and JIM: THE JAMES FOLEY STORY (2016 Emmy Winner). Essed performs with the Brooklyn-based bands The Woes and Big Hands Rhythm and Blues Band.

Jacob Bloomfield-Misrach - Supervising Sound Editor

Jacob Bloomfield-Misrach is a composer and sound supervisor. He owns the post production company IMRSV Sound, and has expanded the company nationally, partnering with Berkeley Sound Artists. Jacob now oversees 100 projects per year for clients like Marvel, Google, Apple, and Facebook, and won a Telly Award in 2016. He recently composed the score for the Slamdance Official Selection MAJNUNI, and was the Sound Supervisor for the 2020 Sundance Award winning film, CRIP CAMP. Other recent work includes YOU CANNOT KILL DAVID ARQUETTE (Super LTD) and 12 HOUR SHIFT (Magnet Releasing).

Film Protagonists Biographies

Kim DaDou Brown

Kim DaDou Brown is a domestic violence survivor who shot and killed her boyfriend when he attempted to strangle her to death in 1991. The price of fighting for her life cost 17 years behind bars. Even before her 2008 release, Kim has been a driving force in advocating for the passage of the DVSJA.

She lives with her wife, Bell Brown, in Rochester, New York. The couple, who are in their 50s, met at Monroe County Correctional Facility when Kim was 24 and Bell was 28. When Bell was released before Kim, they wrote letters back and forth, dreaming about what their lives would be like together when Kim was out. In 2016, eight years after Kim was released, the two married.

Bell, who is Black, says that the police and legal system have not only racially profiled and criminalized her since she was a teenager, but also “snuffs the life out” of abuse survivors like Kim, Nikki, and Tanisha. Kim and Bell

constantly search for stable employment, but felonies appearing on background checks limit their opportunities.

As an advocate for the DVSJA, Kim writes to currently incarcerated survivors and her drive to get the law passed is further fueled upon learning more about Tanisha and Nikki's heartbreaking stories. Kim confronts politicians in Albany. She marches in the Women's March to collect signatures of support in New York City. She shares her traumatic story with the press. She's unstoppable even when she feels like giving up. Politicians against the bill say it's a "get out of jail free card" but Kim pushes back on that falsehood year after year. The advocacy work, which is all unpaid, wreaks havoc on Kim's arthritic body and the PTSD is overwhelming. Still, Kim is tenacious in her fight to free survivors from prison.

Nicole "Nikki" Addimando

Nicole "Nikki" Addimando is a loving mom of two young children, self-taught artist, and survivor of domestic violence. She's a truly courageous person who cares deeply about her loved ones and those in need.

One night in the fall of 2017, Nikki shot and killed her abusive partner after he pointed a gun in her face and threatened to kill her, their kids, and himself. At trial, Nikki testified to years of physical, sexual, psychological torture by her abuser who assaulted, which was documented in forensic exams and corroborated by multiple witnesses.

When New York's Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act became law in 2019, there was hope that the abuse she was subjected to would be taken into consideration at her sentencing.

In February 2020, however, Judge Edward McLoughlin denied Nikki's DVSJA eligibility because he felt she "reluctantly consented" to the rape and abuse she endured. Nikki was sentenced to 19 years to life, leaving her family, friends, and children heartbroken.

Tanisha Davis

Tanisha Davis is an amazing mom, survivor of domestic violence who is known to be the "mother hen" of her family. Her son, Ja'Sier, describes her as someone who radiates "positive vibes" and "gives really good advice"

In 2012, after enduring years of brutal violence, Tanisha stabbed her abuser a single time with a kitchen knife during an incident of domestic violence, inadvertently killing him. Despite overwhelming evidence of the horrific abuse she suffered—including multiple witnesses, calls to the police, and orders of protection—Tanisha was convicted of first-degree manslaughter and was sentenced to 14 years in prison, ripping her away from her young son, Ja'Sier.

On March 9, 2021 Tanisha won her resentencing application under the Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act after spending 8 years behind bars. Instead of having to wait until her son turned 21, when her original 14-year sentence would be served, Tanisha and Ja'Sier, 15, reunited on March 15, 2021. She is based in Rochester, New York.

Like Kim, Tanisha hopes to help free more incarcerated survivors and support others in seeing the red flags in abusive relationships before the danger gets to a critical point.

PRESS

- **“And So I Stayed’ examines how the courts treat women who kill their abusers. The movie played a role in one case that resulted in freedom after a conviction.”** — [The New York Times](#) (published 6/11/21)
- **“A powerful story.”** — [Deanna Dewberry, WHEC-NBC Rochester](#) (published 5/10/21)
- **“Really powerful and important work.”** — [Mady Mills, Bloomberg Quicktake](#) (segment starts at 36:00, published 4/29/21)
- **“[And So I Stayed] pairs the hard data with the real, intimate stories of those who have survived and been incarcerated.”** — [Abbie Perrault, The Big Bend Sentinel](#) (published 3/31/21)