

Creative Warrior Alyson Spery

Alyson was sitting on the floor of the Jackson Hole airport, waiting to board her first flight to Tlaxcala, Mexico to shoot a film, when she was struck with a quiet thought: to let go of what she thought she was supposed to do or say in her film project. It dawned on her to teach filmmaking to Mexican-Americans in Tlaxcala and in Jackson, Wyoming, so they could have the creativity and freedom to tell the stories that they wanted to tell. She could have let this thought go, to swirl away and vanish into the electrical pool of unmaterialized ideas forever, but instead she followed this subtle urge.

In 2019, she founded DIY Docs as a nonprofit film production and education program to help people create and share their own stories. DIY Docs' flagship project is Sister Cities: a collection of short documentaries directed by people from the closely intertwined communities of Teton County and Tlaxcala, Mexico.

I met Alyson when she was fundraising for Sister Cities. She explained to me how the town of Tlaxcala, Mexico is a sister city to Jackson, Wyoming. Many people who live in Jackson are originally from Tlaxcala or have family members who live there. As a white person in Jackson, I have walked around completely unaware of the Mexican American way of life here and it's been completely lost on me that Tlaxcala is a community deeply connected to my home. I certainly wasn't aware of their fears, desires, or dreams.

This past winter, Mexican-American community members living in Jackson shot and edited their first short films, and Phase I of Sister Cities was screened at the Teton County Library. In 2021, Phase II of the project will begin when Alyson spends almost a year in Tlaxcala teaching filmmaking in the communities that have been shaped by immigration to Jackson. The films shot in Jackson will be shared via community screenings in Tlaxcala, as well.

The complete docu-series premieres in the fall of 2021 in Jackson, Wyoming. All films are available online at www.diydocs.org/sistercities.