



## Point and Shoot Discussion Guide

Directors: Marshall Curry

Year: 2014

Time: 83 min

### You might know this director from:

If a Tree Falls (2011)

Racing Dreams (2009)

Street Fight (2005)

## FILM SUMMARY

Many people have claimed that war is where they lost themselves, but Matthew VanDyke went to war in order to find himself. Having spent the first part of his life under the warm protection of a privileged upbringing, Matthew never had to struggle for basic necessities, and he never had to answer for himself. That's not to say that his existence was trouble-free. Plagued by debilitating obsessions and compulsions with few friends to confide in, he lived a virtual existence through movies and games.

All that changed when VanDyke motorbiked 35 thousand miles across Northern Africa and the Middle East with nothing but a camera to witness his adventures, mishaps, and obsessive-compulsive interactions with the world around him. After his adventures abroad, the Matthew who returned home to his mother and girlfriend was not the same Matthew as before. This is where the story really begins.

The people VanDyke met on his travels, particularly Libyan Nuri Funas and his group of friends, struck a chord deep. When news of the Libyan Revolution reached him, Matthew boarded a plane to the Middle East, smuggling himself into a violent, combative Libya. Not even a six-month stint in solitary confinement could sway VanDyke on his quest to participate in and capture on film a nation at war.

POINT AND SHOOT is a remarkably honest film about one individual's battle to face himself in the challenge of a lifetime, responding to his own personal call of duty.

## FILM THEMES

After a protective childhood in America, Matthew VanDyke dives into manhood by embracing the Libyan Revolution as his own with a camera in one hand and a gun in the other.

### SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Matthew VanDyke spent his first 25 years living vicariously through images and stories in films and on TV. After purchasing a motorcycle, a camera and a plane ticket, he was confronted with the question of who he was and what he believed in. The person who went out on a solitary adventure returned home with a different point of view and had become a political activist who championed social change. Whatever image VanDyke had of himself, it was put to a life-threatening test, leading him to undergo a process of self-transformation in record time.

### THROUGH THE CAMERA'S EYE

Initially inspired to reinvent himself for the camera, VanDyke soon realizes that he is not alone in his quest to carve out an idealized self-image through the medium of film. He offers powerful proof that, regardless of the risks, we are all eager to capture the moment as proof of our involvement in life. We share an enormous desire to share, to say that we were there, and VanDyke's film reveals camera after camera raised in an image-capturing salute, testifying to the power of the picture as proof.

### REVOLUTIONARY VS. FILMMAKER

A foreigner battling in a foreign war, VanDyke was an outsider wherever he went. Neither pure journalist nor pure rebel fighter, he was regarded as an anomaly by both Libyans fighting for freedom and the western journalists documenting the events. Frustrated by this grey territory, VanDyke threatened to toss aside his camera and become once and for all a fighter amongst fighters. However, Libyan Nuri Funas insisted that VanDyke's work was an essential tool in documenting events and remembering those who lost their lives, and so Matthew embraced both roles at once, becoming the revolutionary filmmaker.

### OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER (OCD)

Hand-washing. Sugar. Harming others. VanDyke's OCD reactions tied him to particular actions. Discovering something he truly believed in—fighting to liberate the closest friends he had ever had—helped VanDyke control his obsessions and compulsions. Yet perhaps the very disorder itself, with its excessive manifestations, drove VanDyke to keep returning to the life-threatening battlefield. A war zone might be an unlikely place to find someone with a fear of harming others, but perhaps the extreme situation appealed to the extreme within VanDyke. That which hindered him also empowered him.

**“I wasn’t just watching television or reading about other people. I was finally having my own adventure. It was incredible.”**

Matthew VanDyke

**“Adventure’s a little bit like a drug and you build a tolerance to it and you have to take it to the next level.”**

Matthew VanDyke

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. Do you feel VanDyke should have returned home following his release from prison, where he was held for 6 months?
2. Have you ever known anyone diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)? How did this OCD affect his/her daily existence?
3. How much did you know of Libya before watching POINT AND SHOOT?
4. Have you ever traveled abroad on your own? If so, where and for how long? If not, did VanDyke’s adventures spark a desire for solitary travel?
5. What do you think are the personal benefits of traveling abroad?
6. War has become highly documented since more people have access to cameras. What are the positive and negative aspects of this type of citizen journalism?
7. Do you think VanDyke’s OCD affected his decision to return to Libya to fight alongside his friends? If yes, how so?
8. Lauren Fisher supported and continues to support her long-time boyfriend through his dangerous life choices. Would you be able to support a partner in the same way, time and time again?
9. Have you ever been to the Middle East?
10. Do you think VanDyke should have put his camera down and focused on fighting, or was it crucial for him to capture the live happenings on film?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- Director Marshall Curry was previously nominated for two Academy Awards for his documentary films “If a Tree Falls: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front” and “Street Fight.” Before becoming a filmmaker, Curry worked at a design firm, taught English in Mexico, worked in public radio, and taught Government in Washington D.C. He studied Comparative Religion at college, and has studied the history, philosophy, and economics of non-profits.
- Matthew VanDyke had seen Marshall Curry’s work, and contacted him to see if he would be interested in making a film with his footage. Curry was fascinated by VanDyke’s story and shot around 20 hours of interviews with him. That footage, along with the hundreds of hours of footage VanDyke shot on his travels, took Curry one year to edit into POINT AND SHOOT.
- Lauren Fischer, VanDyke’s long-time girlfriend, worked as an elementary school teacher in Baltimore while he was off on his travels.
- At least 30,000 Libyans died in the 2011 Revolution, referred to as the Libyan Civil War.
- Matthew VanDyke’s first film, “Not Anymore: A Story of Revolution” was released in 2013 and is a documentary short about the conflict in Syria. The film went on to win 61 awards, including Best Human Rights Short Award at the Isle of Wight Film Festival.
- In 1912, Italy colonized the Libyan region where around 150,000 Italians settled, constituting 20% of the population at the time. Italy adopted the name Libya in 1934, a name the Ancient Greeks had previously used to refer to all of Northern Africa. After Italy’s defeat in WWII, Libya was under Allied occupation, and eventually received its independence in 1951.
- Libya has undergone many name changes, from Libya in 1934 to United Libyan Kingdom in 1951 to the Kingdom of Libya in 1963. After Gaddafi’s coup d’état in 1969, he renamed the nation the Libyan Arab Republic. After his overthrow in 2011, the transitional council referred to the country as simply Libya. The current name, State of Libya, was adopted in 2013.
- POINT AND SHOOT was awarded Best Documentary Feature at Tribeca Film Festival, Extraordinary Courage in Filmmaking at the Little Rock Film Festival, and a Special Jury Prize at the Independent Film Festival of Boston.
- Oil accounts for 97% of Libya’s exports, with Libya having the largest oil reserves in Africa.
- Approximately 97% of Libyans are Muslim. The official language is Arabic, and Libyans consider themselves to be a part of a wider Arab community. The most common public transport between cities is bus, as there are currently no railway services.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be gripped by its story.
2. Watch Matthew VanDyke’s short film, NOT ANYMORE: A STORY OF REVOLUTION, about the conflict in Syria.
3. Expand your own worldview. If VanDyke’s approach seems too daring, study and work abroad programs offer tailor-made opportunities to experience life beyond your familiar borders.
4. Follow Matthew VanDyke’s blog, [The Freedom Fighter Blog](#).
5. Support [the International OCD Foundation](#), that conducts research into obsessive-compulsive disorder, as well as offering advice and assistance to those afflicted with or affected by this disorder.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**