

A WILL FOR THE WOODS

feature documentary



**Feature Documentary Film
*A WILL FOR THE WOODS***

Directed by Amy Browne, Jeremy Kaplan, Tony Hale, and Brian Wilson



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Logline

Determined that his last act will be a gift to the planet, a man prepares for his own green burial.

Short Synopsis

What if our last act could be a gift to the planet? Determined that his final resting place will benefit the earth, musician, psychiatrist, and folk dancer Clark Wang prepares for his own green burial while battling lymphoma. The spirited Clark and his partner Jane, boldly facing his mortality, embrace the planning of a spiritually meaningful funeral and join with a compassionate local cemeterian to use green burial to save a North Carolina woods from being clear-cut.

With poignancy and unexpected humor, *A Will for the Woods* portrays the last days of a multifaceted advocate – and one community's role in the genesis of a revolutionary movement. As the film follows Clark's dream of leaving a legacy in harmony with timeless cycles, environmentalism takes on a profound intimacy.

Synopsis

What if our last act could be a gift to the planet? Musician, psychiatrist, and folk dancer Clark Wang prepares for his own green burial in this immersive documentary.

While battling lymphoma, Clark has discovered a burgeoning movement that uses burial to conserve and restore natural areas, forgoing contemporary funeral practices that operate at the ecosystem's expense. Boldly facing his mortality, Clark and his partner Jane have become passionate about green burial, compelled by both the environmental benefits and the idea that one can remain within the cycle of life, rather than being cut off from it. The spirited pair have inspired a compassionate local cemeterian, and together they aim to use green burial to save a North Carolina woods from being clear-cut.

Making the most of the time that he has, Clark finds joy in his music and dance, connection with his friends and family, and great comfort in the knowledge that his death, whenever it happens, will be a force for regeneration. The film follows Clark's dream of leaving a loving, permanent legacy, and environmentalism takes on a deeply human intimacy.

Documenting one community's role in the genesis of a revolutionary movement, *A Will for the Woods* draws the viewer into a life-affirming portrait of people embracing their connection to each other and to timeless natural cycles.

Website, Trailer, and Social Media

Website: www.awillforthewoods.com

Trailer: www.vimeo.com/62452617

Facebook: www.facebook.com/awillforthewoods

Twitter: @WillfortheWoods

Instagram: [awillforthewoods](https://www.instagram.com/awillforthewoods)

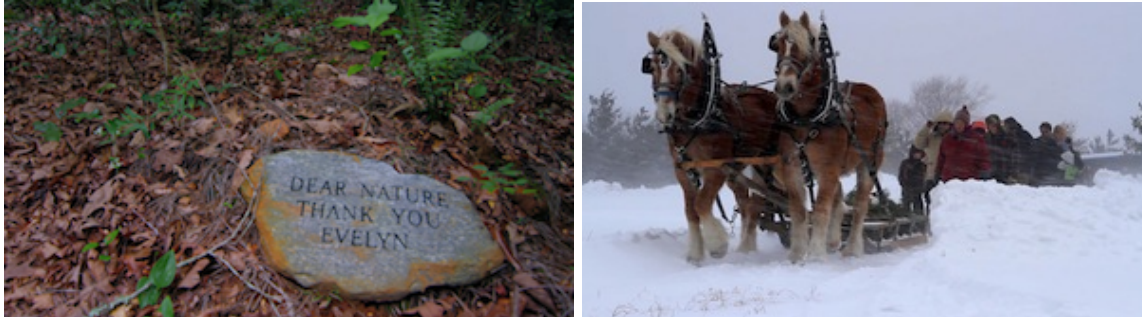


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What Is Green Burial?

Green burial is a simple and natural alternative to resource-intensive contemporary burial or cremation. The deceased is laid to rest in the earth using only biodegradable materials and without a vault or toxic embalming, in a woodland or other natural setting, often with a fieldstone or indigenous plant marking the grave. This practice can be used as a conservation tool, enabling the acquisition, restoration, and stewardship of natural areas. Simple natural burials were prevalent for thousands of years (and still are in many parts of the world, including in traditional Muslim and Jewish burials) before the contemporary funeral industry propagated the standard of expensive and elaborate funerals divorced from natural processes.



The Green Burial Movement and the Funeral Industry

As the world has become increasingly concerned with climate change and environmental degradation, the role that our funeral and burial practices play in these matters has gone largely unaddressed.

The typical American-style funeral — with a casket made of precious wood or metal, a concrete vault, a large marble or granite monument, and embalming — is incredibly resource-intensive, and it has become common in much of the world. In the U.S. alone, approximately 33 million board feet of mostly virgin wood, 60,000 tons of steel, 1.6 million tons of reinforced concrete, and 5 million gallons of toxic embalming fluid are put into the ground every year. Further, the large tracts of land that conventional cemeteries occupy are typically covered in turf grass in need of constant maintenance in the form of mowing, watering, and the application of chemicals. Cremation, sometimes misconstrued as a green alternative to conventional burial, consumes a large amount of fossil and other fuels, and as the body is burned at high temperatures, particulate pollution, CO₂ (approximately 110 pounds per cremation, on average), and toxins such as dioxins, furans, and mercury are released into the atmosphere.

The burgeoning green burial movement seeks to change these conventions — not only by greatly reducing resource use and pollution, but also by using burial as a conservation strategy to protect and restore natural areas. In addition to these environmental benefits, the cost of a green burial is often much less than that of a conventional one. Furthermore, green burial offers many the solace of knowing that they will remain within the cycle of life.

Created over the course of four years, *A Will for the Woods* documents the movement's progress by focusing on some of its key figures, including Joe Sehee of the Green Burial Council; Kimberley and Dr. Billy Campbell, founders of the nation's first conservation burial ground; and Dyanne Matzkevich, who is saving a tract of forest within her conventional cemetery by turning it into a green burial ground. The film's main focus, however, is the story of Clark Wang and Jane Ezzard. Faced with the possibility of Clark's imminent death, they find beauty and comfort in the environmental and spiritual significance of green burial.

Directors' Statement

Stuck in traffic over the vast Calvary Cemetery in Queens, New York, Amy Browne decided to make a film about green burial. She had first learned of the concept two years earlier from her sister, Sophie, who was researching the topic with Professor Roger Short of the University of Melbourne. While Amy had been curious about Sophie's work, at twenty, she had not given death or funerals much thought, and conventional burial and cremation had not inspired her interest or awe. In 2009, Sophie came to visit Amy in New York and they took a road trip. Idling on the busy city overpass, Amy looked down on the stark cemetery crammed with tombstones, mausoleums, roads, and a scattering of trees. How depressing! What a waste! The place seemed spiritually, emotionally, and ecologically void — little chance for life, regeneration, or a meaningful legacy. Amy turned to her sister: "Tell me more about this green burial?"

That conversation led to what would become a four-year filmmaking journey, a collaboration between co-directors Amy Browne, Jeremy Kaplan, Tony Hale, and Brian Wilson. What drew the four of us to the topic was not a fascination with death, but a realization of the life-affirming power of this new/old idea that our bodies can remain within the cycle of life.

Inspired by the concept, Amy began researching the topic, and soon joined forces with Jeremy, whom she met at The New School. It seemed that everyone they talked to about green burial mentioned Joe Sehee, founder of the Green Burial Council. They arranged to meet him at a funeral convention in Texas, where they were immediately drawn to his charisma and passion for the cause. As the sole environmental regulator in the vast and entrenched multi-billion dollar funeral industry, Joe and his nonprofit organization were a compelling underdog story. Following Joe for several months opened up the very large scale of this issue and demonstrated that this infant environmental movement was growing into something that could change funeral and burial conventions, as well as attitudes about death.

Amy and Jeremy heard from Joe about a man in North Carolina who was planning his own funeral and inspiring his community to think about green burial — and that he would love to speak with them. Within minutes of meeting Clark, they were immersed in his daily life of doctor's visits, radiation treatments, and discussing green burial with anyone who was interested. They quickly established a close connection with Clark and his partner Jane during that first week in Durham. After only a few days, Amy and Jeremy were moved and honored when Clark and Jane invited them to follow his entire journey, and if he didn't beat the cancer, to film his funeral and burial. Clark wanted the world to witness the power, significance, and beauty he saw in green burial.

While Amy and Jeremy continued shooting, Tony and Brian began the editing process, and the four of us started to form the film's story. We were beginning an intensive, collaborative, and moving two-plus years of editing, working with what would eventually be over 300 hours of footage. Deeply compelled to honor Clark's wish and see his story told, we ultimately came to realize that certain story lines and statistics would have to move aside to make room for the intimacy that had been shared with us, and that it felt more appropriate and inspiring for the film to represent the idea of green burial through the scenes of Clark's life.

For all of us, one of the core motivations in making *A Will for the Woods* was to shed light on this profound environmental and social movement. At first, we were primarily fascinated with green burial as a strategy for land conservation and the reduction of environmental impacts, but as we continued working on the film, and particularly through witnessing Clark's journey, we saw what a powerful spiritual experience green burial can be. For many, including Clark, green burial offers the unexpected gift of a deeper understanding of our connection to the natural world — of what it means to die, but also *live*, sustainably and in harmony with nature. We hope that the film will provide this comfort for others.

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Awards and Recognition

AUDIENCE AWARD — Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD — Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

AUDIENCE AWARD — New Orleans Film Festival

PROGRAMMER'S AWARD — Virginia Film Festival

AUDIENCE AWARD — San Francisco IndieFest

JURY AWARD — San Francisco IndieFest

BEST US/INTERNATIONAL FEATURE DOCUMENTARY — Kansas City FilmFest

AUDIENCE AWARD — Rhode Island Film Festival

"FORK IN THE ROAD" AWARD — Greentopia Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION —

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival

AFI Docs

Camden International Film Festival

DOC NYC

Virginia Film Festival

New Orleans Film Festival

Cleveland International Film Festival

Atlanta Film Festival

Big Sky Documentary Film Festival

Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival

San Francisco IndieFest

Sidewalk Film Festival

Newport Beach Film Festival

Rhode Island International Film Festival

Kansas City FilmFest

DocuWest International Film Festival

San Francisco Green Film Festival

Green Mountain Film Festival

Environmental Film Festival in the Nation's Capital

Greentopia Film Festival

Princeton Environmental Film Festival

Tales from Planet Earth

Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival

Cinema Verde Film Festival

Green Lens Environmental Film Festival

Natural Transitions Film Festival

Festival Internacional de Cinema e Vídeo Ambiental

Knoxville Film Festival

"The Art of Death" Festival

Kansas International Film Festival

IndieMemphis Film Festival

CPH:DOX Market

Planeta Doc Festival

Santa Cruz Film Festival

Lorne Film Festival

Planet in Focus

ReFrame Film Festival

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Press

"Moving and inspiring ... The film is about a life of purpose and a death with meaning." Nell Minow, [The Huffington Post](#)

"★★★★ A Beautiful Ruminaton on Life, Death and Burial Choice ... Advocating without preachiness and emotional without exploitation, this film is a lovely piece of work." Dan Schindel, [Nonfics](#)

"[One of] nine documentaries that you need to see this year ... which no documentary fan should miss." "Has the potential to affect not just individual viewers but the American way of death ... Must-see." Marianna Torgovnick, [TED](#)

"A truly moving experience, and a testimony to the difference that a single life can make in the lives of others." - Jen Chaney, [The Dissolve](#)

"An immersive, heartwarming tale." Elias Savada, [Film Threat](#)

"Big-hearted and thought-provoking." "A Will for the Woods is more contemplative than preachy ... that generosity makes for a finer film." Chris Barsanti, [Film Journal International](#)

"Far more impactful emotionally than just an issue documentary ... what we have here is, thankfully, something far more emotionally engrossing and ultimately intellectually rewarding." "A gorgeous, haunting, and lushly crafted meditation on one man's coming to terms with death ... another great documentary in a year that has become as chock full of resonant pieces of non-fiction cinema as we've seen in ages." Joshua Brunsting, [CriterionCast](#)

"The film has hit a cultural nerve." Glenn McDonald, [Discovery News](#)

"A powerful, personal testament to the 'green burial' movement ... with humor, eloquence, anguish and reflection." Sylvia Pfeifferberger, [Indy Week - Indy Pick](#)

"A Will for the Woods uplifts and inspires" in covering a subject that is "relevant in a profound way to each and every one of us." "One felt the joy of a new beginning as deeply as the sadness of an ending. There was ample space for laughter along with the tears." Bill Chameides, dean of Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, [THEGREENGROK](#)

"A unique and unflinching examination." John Esther, [Jesther Entertainment](#)

"This movie will open your eyes to a new way of thinking." John Angelico, [San Francisco Gate](#)

"Will make you reconsider how you want to die." [Indiewire](#)

"An information-packed documentary ... But more than that, it's an intimate and unflinching look at the journey a couple takes in planning for imminent death." Melissa Barber, [Death with Dignity](#)

"A documentary not to be missed ... [a] gem of a movie." "I don't remember ever so highly recommending a documentary ... a powerful testimonial for why you should seriously consider green burial." Fran Sorin (author of *Digging Deep*), [Gardening Gone Wild](#) and [FranSorin.com](#)

"Explores the dimensions of life, terminal illness, loss of control, premature death, legacy, burial, and letting go in a moving and profound way ... it's an important discussion that we need to address." Melanie Votaw, [Reel Life With Jane](#)

"A profound statement ... a touching film and a very important one." Nell Minow, [BeliefNet](#)

"Up-close-and-personal ... a documentary that environmentally conscious men and women will want to see." Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, [Spirituality & Practice](#)

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Additional press coverage:

[Nonfics – 20 Necessary Docs About Death & Dying](#)

[Hyperallergic](#)

[Grist](#)

[Indiewire – Project of the Day](#)

[Filmwax Radio/Rooftop Films](#)

[NY Daily News](#)

[Vocativ](#)

[Film School Radio](#)

[Green Divas](#)

[Indiewood/Hollywoodn't](#)

[The Screen Feed/The Tribeca Trib](#)

[NCflix](#)

[The Herald Sun, Durham](#)

[90.9 WBUR Boston](#)

[The News & Observer](#)

Educational Reviews:

"An intriguing portrait of American life in the search for the authentic and alternative in the maelstrom of modern life." "Rich and multifaceted ... I will use this in my teaching." Dr. Liv Nilsson Stutz, Lecturer, Director of Undergraduate Studies, Department of Anthropology, Emory University

"A must see: A Will for the Woods is a moving and consciousness-raising film about green burial. It promotes a way of bodily disposal that is spiritually enriching, environmentally friendly and helps to protect areas of natural beauty. The beginning of a funeral reform in the U.S.A. that gives new meaning to death." Dr. Eric Venbrux, Director of the Centre for Thanatology, Radboud University Nijmegen, Co-editor, *Changing European Death Ways*

"An impressive, captivating, and powerful film. It is both an intimate portrait of the burgeoning green burial movement and a philosophical reflection on human mortality in a time of environmental crisis." Gary Laderman, Chair of Department of Religion, Professor of American Religious History and Cultures, Emory University, Author, *The Sacred Remains* and *Rest in Peace*

"The potential for the end of life ... to promote conservation and renewal is profound, in this ultimately life-affirming portrayal. Highly recommended." The Midwest Book Review

"A tender, honest, and compelling portrait of dying on one's own terms. The film affords a touching and inspirational experience to sojourn with someone who lives fully, throughout the dying trajectory. The film captures a beautiful aesthetic, the lessons of which are as instructive for living as they are for dying." Dr. Nate Hinerman, Lecturer of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Francisco, Chair of the San Francisco Bay Area Network for End-of-Life Care

*"It took four credited filmmakers – Amy Browne, Jeremy Kaplan, Tony Hale and Brian Wilson – to bring us the news that a majority of Americans are not aware of the option of "green" burials ... A fine compliment to Mark Harris's 2008 book *Grave Matters*, which covers some of the same ground (no pun intended), this thought-provoking documentary on end-of-life issues is highly recommended."* C.Cassady, Video Librarian

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Key Creative Personnel

Amy Browne (Co-Director/Producer) grew up in Australia and moved to New York City to study theater at The American Academy of Dramatic Arts, and film at The New School University. Her film credits include Associate Producer for *Crazy & Thief* (LA Film Festival 2012) and *I Used to be Darker* (Sundance 2013), as well as work on *The Ballad of Genesis and Lady Jaye* (Berlinale & Tribeca 2011). She also recently commenced work as the Producer on upcoming documentary *As Worlds Divide*. When her sister Sophie introduced her to the concept of green burial, which connects the profundity and beauty of nature with the cycle of death and life, Amy was inspired to explore the idea through film.

Jeremy Kaplan (Co-Director/Cinematographer) received his B.A. from Boston College in Film and Philosophy and his M.A. in Documentary/Media Studies at The New School. His documentary work has brought him across the globe to Costa Rica, Egypt, and South Korea with topics ranging from the environmental impact of American corporations in Costa Rica to a portrait of a progressive New York orthodox Jewish community. The years spent on *A Will for the Woods* have been his most gratifying work yet, due to the moving subject matter and the collaborative nature of the project.

Tony Hale (Co-Director/Editor) first discovered digital editing through recording loops of his drum kit. Later, while studying Mathematics at Boston College and working at a Harvard University media lab, he rediscovered this passion in filmmaking. Now a freelance editor based in Brooklyn, he has worked on a number of non-fiction and narrative projects, many with an environmental focus, including *Do the Math* and a series of documentaries in Central America with the non-profit CAVU. *A Will for the Woods* marks his first feature and combines his love of environmental documentary and character-based stories.

Brian Wilson (Co-Director/Editor) graduated from Brown University with a degree in Comparative Literature and History, and works as an editor in New York. Passionate about the natural world and its protection and restoration, he is pleased to be exploring and raising awareness about green burial with *A Will for the Woods*. He became interested in developing deeper insight into death after his mother died in 2008, and has been grateful to find it through working on this project, which he hopes will offer similar comfort and understanding to many viewers.

T. Griffin (Composer) is a songwriter, composer, and producer based in Brooklyn, New York. He has composed music for over 20 feature films and dozens of live multidisciplinary projects. He was one of six composers selected as a fellow at the Sundance Composer's lab in 2008 and has been nominated twice for Cinema Eye Honors for original music score. www.tgriffinmusic.com

Tom Paul (Sound Design), an Emmy Award winning re-recording mixer and highly regarded sound designer, is one of New York City's most sought after talents in the field of post production audio. Some highlights of his sound design and re-recording credits include the Academy Award winning films *The Fog of War* and *Born Into Brothels*. Other notable films include: *Junebug*, *Palindromes*, *The Baxter*, *The King*, and *U2 360*, the largest selling concert DVD of all time. Tom won a Primetime Emmy for outstanding mixing on Joe Berlinger's *Under African Skies*.

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Main Subjects



Clark Wang grew up in Ann Arbor, Michigan and came to Durham, North Carolina to attend Duke University, staying for medical school, then working his entire career in community psychiatry. His love of music led him to become an accomplished cellist, pianist, folk dancer, and accordionist. In 2004, Clark was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, which initiated a transformation of his thinking on food and the environment, and ultimately, on the impact of burial and cremation. Clark became an advocate for green burial and expressed a passionate hope for a better and cleaner future for all.



Jane Ezzard met Clark while working with him at Dorothea Dix Psychiatric Hospital. A New Yorker who found her way to Durham, Jane was not your average psychiatric nurse. She went against strict hospital conventions and became friends with her patients, making them laugh and dressing up in costumes. She and Clark each saw in the other a caring person who was dedicated to making a positive change in the lives of everyone on the ward. It was not long before the two went on their first date, to Clark's folk dancing group. After Clark's diagnosis, Jane was there to take care of him through it all.



Dyanne Matzkevich is the manager at Pine Forest Memorial Gardens in Wake Forest, North Carolina, where she opened the first green burial ground in the Triangle Area. When Clark approached Dyanne about initiating a green burial garden in their community, Dyanne had already been thinking about it and was enthusiastic to begin planning. It took a lot of hard work and persistence on her part, but now the green burial forest stands and a portion is deed restricted in perpetuity. (www.pineforestmemorial.com)



Joe Sehee is the founder of the Green Burial Council, a nonprofit that established the world's first standards for green burial. A Senior Fellow with the Environmental Leadership Program, Joe has been working in the green burial field since 2002 and has consulted for land trusts, park service agencies, and funeral organizations. He was the driving force behind a project in the Galisteo Basin Preserve, New Mexico to use burial as part of protecting 13,000 acres. Joe is working on spreading this concept of conservation burial throughout the US and internationally. (www.greenburialcouncil.org)



Dr. Billy and Kimberley Campbell opened the Ramsey Creek Preserve in South Carolina in 1998. It was here that Billy developed most of the standards for what is now known as conservation burial. Since opening Ramsey Creek, the Campbells have participated in the development of multiple other functioning projects. Ramsey Creek is currently 72 acres, which they hope to expand to 300 acres as part of their larger goal of conserving one million acres through green burial and other conservation initiatives. (www.memorialecosystems.com)



Kelly Lennon Weaver, a mother of two and North Carolina native, met Clark and Jane at a cancer support group after having been diagnosed with breast cancer. She introduced Clark to holistic alternatives to conventional medicine, which she credited with enabling her to outlive her doctors' prognosis despite avoiding conventional treatment, and Clark introduced her to the concept of green burial. The three of them remained close friends — and even purchased neighboring plots in the green burial woods at Pine Forest.

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Principal Credits

Directed by: Amy Browne, Jeremy Kaplan, Tony Hale, and Brian Wilson

Produced by: Amy Browne

Director of Photography: Jeremy Kaplan

Edited by: Tony Hale and Brian Wilson

Original Score by: T. Griffin

Sound Designer & Re-Recording Mixer: Tom Paul

DI Facility: Nice Dissolve

DI Supervisor: Pierce Varous

Color Grading: Brian Boyd & Ari Rothschild

Associate Producer: Jeremy Kaplan

Post-Production Supervisor: Tony Hale

Sound Editors: Allison Casey and Eric Milano

Audio Post-Production Facility: Gigantic Post

Editing Consultant: Shannon Kennedy

Legal Services: Karen Shatzkin

Featuring:

Clark Wang

Jane Ezzard

Randall Best

Katherine Register

Jenny Bingham

Dr. Anne Beaven

Dyanne Matzkevich

Joe Sehee

Kimberly Campbell

Dr. Billy Campbell

Jim Wang

Lydia Wang

Kelly Lennon Weaver

Gail Atwater

Raymond Ubinger

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For: Clark Wang, Kelly Lennon Weaver, Meghan Murphy, Pete Sehee, and James Wang

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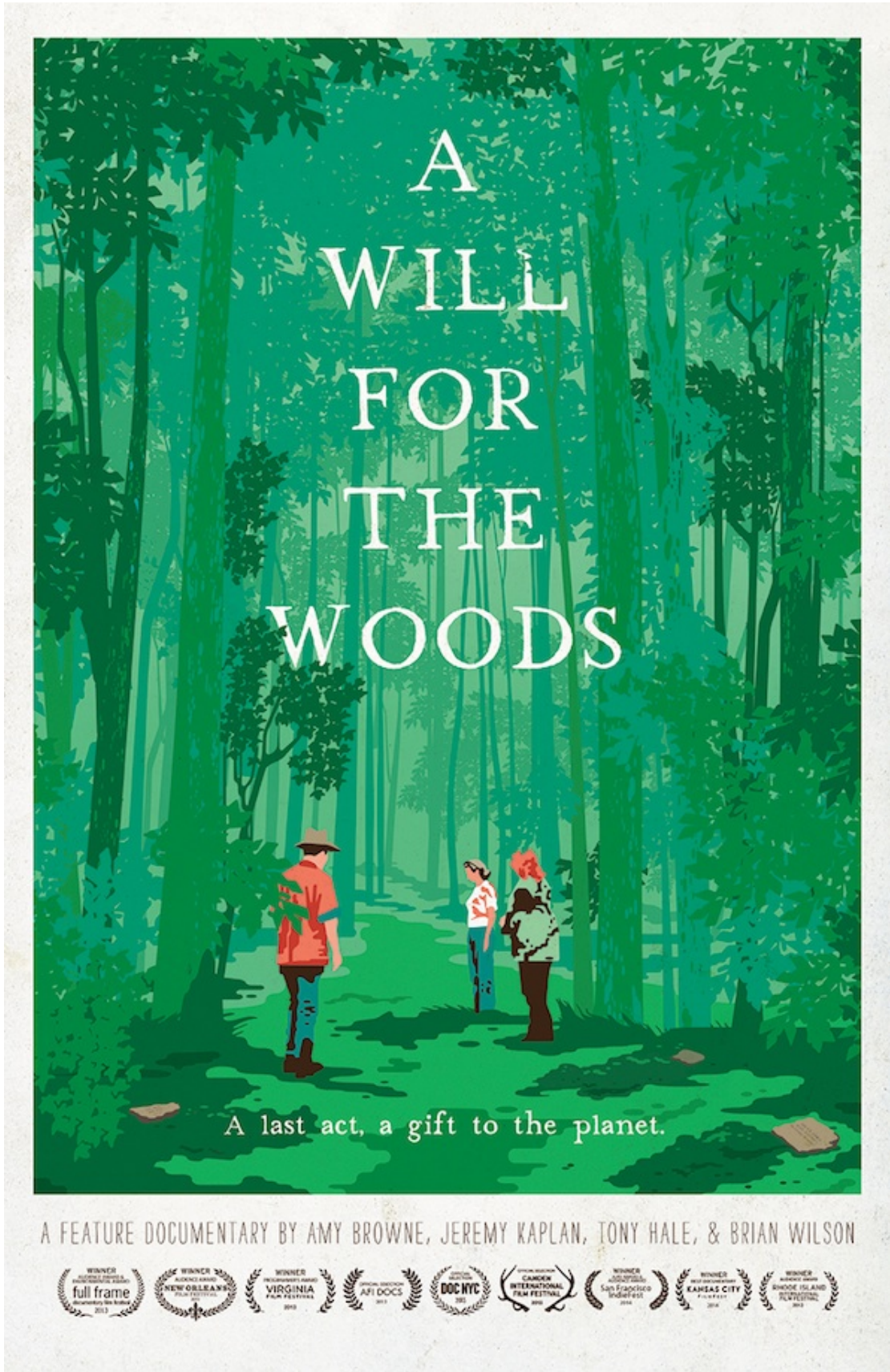


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A last act, a gift to the planet.

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY BY AMY BROWNE, JEREMY KAPLAN, TONY HALE, & BRIAN WILSON

