

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT - #chicagoGirl

I faced two major challenges when I set out in early 2011 to make #chicagoGirl. The first was overcoming background. I write talking-animal movies. That's my niche in Hollywood. I had to jump from an imaginary world of talking dogs into a very real world where my subjects were facing death on a daily basis, where I had to orchestrate smuggling cameras into war-torn Syria and coordinate smuggling out hard drives of footage. The second challenge was to make difficult subject matter accessible to an audience. In a world of 24-hour news, Facebook newsfeeds, YouTube and Twitter feeds, we're inundated with graphic images coming out of places like Syria. I wanted to find stories that put a human face on the narrative. In searching for subjects to follow, I came across a blurb in a small American newspaper about a 19-year-old American girl in Chicago, Ala'a Basatneh, who had received a death threat from the Syrian regime on her Facebook wall for online work she had done for the revolution. I found Ala'a on Facebook and in our initial phone call, she abruptly said, "You're asking me all the wrong questions." I was taken aback. I was the director of this film. How would she know what questions I should be asking? Then she told me that from her childhood bedroom in suburban Chicago, she was one of the major coordinators of the Syrian revolution. Two days later, my producer, Mark Rinehart, and I flew to Chicago and watched her in action. Using Facebook, Twitter and Google Maps, she organized a protest for her social network in Damascus. I knew we had our core story. Through Ala'a, I connected with people "on the ground" in her social network. I was floored by their passion and their innovativeness. I used social media and the Internet to look up old friends and get the best deal on sneakers. Ala'a and her social network were using these tools to overthrow a government. #chicagoGirl is about more than the new tools of revolution. It's about the people who are now enabled by the new tools to make a difference in the world. --Joe Piscatella