



“he feels the bike and the trail in a way that I never thought about before.”  
— JASON ON BOBBY

“i was scared to be riding downieville, but knowing that Bobby was kind of paving the way made me tell myself that I could do it and I might fall and it's okay.”  
— WENDY ON BOBBY

Bobby McMullen (middle) catches up with *The Way Bobby Sees It* producers Jason Watkins and Wendy Todd.

# WENDY TODD AND JASON WATKINS TALK ABOUT THEIR LATEST MOVIE, *THE WAY BOBBY SEES IT*, A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT A BLIND DOWNHILL MOUNTAIN BIKE RACER

**W**ANTING TO MAKE A MOVIE THAT DOCUMENTED THE LIFE OF A MOUNTAIN BIKER AS IT UNFOLDED, WENDY TODD AND JASON WATKINS OF POISON OAK PRODUCTIONS FOLLOW BOBBY McMULLEN, A LEGALLY BLIND DOWNHILL RACER, IN THEIR LATEST RELEASE, *THE WAY BOBBY SEES IT*.

While living with Type 1 diabetes, Bobby McMullen was diagnosed with proliferative diabetic retinopathy when he was 26 years old and within a year, he was blind. In order to survive, he has had two double organ transplants and takes 32 pills a day so that his body doesn't reject the organs. He not only relies on the sight of others to complete daily tasks, but also to participate in the one thing that he loves the most, riding mountain bikes.

*The Way Bobby Sees It* is a powerful documentary that follows Bobby as he focuses on racing the longest downhill in the nation, The Downieville Classic. Full of anticipation, tension and inspiration, the movie captures Bobby's spirit and drive to compete despite his limitations.

We checked in with producers, Wendy Todd and Jason Watkins, to talk about what it was like to be in Bobby's world. They say that this experience was not only inspirational, they also learned a lot about themselves and how to ride a bike better.

**DECLINE:** How did you guys decide to do this movie?

**WENDY:** We were coming off of *Singletrack MINDS*, our first documentary, and we wanted to do a story in which we were following somebody's life as it was unfolding rather than looking back into the past. We had read a couple of articles about Bobby and liked the message that he was putting out about overcoming challenges and how he's managed life and had really good experiences through mountain biking. That message resonated with us so we contacted him to see if he would be willing to let us document some of that. I believe that was in 2006.

**In the beginning, did you know that his main goal was the Downieville Downhill?**

**JASON:** Bobby has a lot of goals and does a lot of races, but the Downieville Classic is a race that is long enough — it's a 17-mile course — and difficult enough that we thought it would be a great venue to follow him on. We had other options but nothing really had the terrain and a venue that was as prolific.

**You guys ended up acting as his guide on the trail. Was that planned?**

**WENDY:** When we approached this project, we really approached it as documentarians. The line between being Bobby's friend and being a documentarian

became blurry, in a sense, because he needed us in a way that other people would not. A lot of time we found ourselves being Bobby's guide not just on the bike but off the bike, going to a restaurant. In order to hang out with him, you end up needing to guide him a little bit. That was a surprise to both of us. In retrospect, we must have been pretty naive to think we wouldn't be his guide. In the beginning, when we first started shooting, we were careful to not be in the movie, so we didn't talk to him while he was on camera, we didn't come into the shot. But then we quickly realized that there was no way we could not be in this movie because we were heavily involved with him.

**Did you have an idea of what it took to be Bobby's guide?**

**JASON:** We understood how it worked. We had followed him and watched him and his guide. Bobby is really good at memorizing courses and knowing when turns are coming so on courses that he had done before, he could really let go. When we went to Downieville and guided him, they had just added two miles of trail to the top of the racecourse that he had never ridden. That was different. That changed the whole dynamic of what we thought. We thought it was fairly easy to guide him from what we had seen before but it was a different story once we were on a trail that he had never ridden before, so the combination was pretty interesting.

**Does Bobby have a special relationship with his usual guides?**

**WENDY:** From what I can tell, Bobby has a different relationship with each of his guides. You can see from the movie that Bobby has to adapt to varying strengths and weaknesses of each person that guides him. He does an incredible job of adapting, but how great would it be for Bobby to have one consistent, paid guide for each race and practice run? I think if bike companies are committed to sponsoring and supporting Bobby then they would provide the most important resource for him to race competitively. The skill of Bobby's guide is as important as wearing a helmet and armor and having the appropriate bike. This is just my own opinion after learning more about Bobby's struggle to secure guides and then being a guide myself. I don't know if Bobby has the same perspective on this issue.

**Is there anything in particular that you learned from this experience?**

**WENDY:** We've talked about this a little bit. When you watch yourself on camera, you learn about yourself in a different way than how you think you are. I realized that the struggle that Bobby has around being dependent and yet wanting to be independent is something that