

BELLA ONLINE



“Film and Funding on Behalf of Coffee Workers” by Gayle Santana,
BELLAONLINE, April 2008

Gayle E. Santana
BellaOnline's Coffee Editor

Film and Funding on Behalf of the Coffee Workers

We all enjoy a great cup of coffee, and much like our food, we rarely give thought as to how it arrived. I had the pleasure of meeting two women at the [Coffee and Tea Festival](#) in New York City who not only can tell you first-hand in great detail as to how it arrived, they are also taking that information and doing something with it to help make the lives of the people who sacrifice to bring it to you just a bit better.

Su Friedrich—“From The Ground Up”

Su Friedrich is an award-winning filmmaker, having produced and directed 18 films to date. Ms. Friedrich has used her gift as a film-maker of merit to bring us “From The Ground Up”, a beautifully done film that shows the startling differences along the way in the journey of coffee from the ground to your cup.

Beginning in Southwestern Guatemala, Su Friedrich gives an observers point of view of the rudimentary beginnings of your cup of coffee. The film opens with the coffee workers, which includes men, women (often carrying their babies), and children riding in crowded trucks out to the hilly coffee fields in the wee hours for a full day of picking. At the end of the day, carrying bags that can reach a weight of 110 lbs. on their backs, they go to an area where the sacks are measured. Not yet free of their burdens, it is their responsibility to climb up into the trucks on awkward steps and empty those bags--only to receive \$3 a day for their efforts.

Ms. Friedrich does not try to lead you with heavy commentary. She just lets you observe and draw your own conclusions. With the striking contrast between the workers' labor-intensive days and their housing and living conditions on the farm against the farm owner's stables with specially-made initialed saddles, it won't take you long. Moving forward in the journey to the people who call the shots, setting the price of the most coveted beans, the cupping sessions of the buyers, the differences are surely striking. Ms. Friedrich does not stop with the coffee growers. She also highlights the hard work of the coffee vendors that you often see on the streets of New York City, selling coffee for under a dollar, a far cry from the average \$4 coffees in the coffee chains but not quite so fancy either.

The booklet that comes with the DVD, “Notes From the Ground Up”, provides a wealth of sobering information and statistics, including some eye-opening information about discrepancies in the actual figures paid to Starbucks' Fair Trade workers as opposed to the figure quoted to the public.

<http://www.bellaonline.com/articles/art56925.asp>