

THOUGHTFUL ROBOT PRODUCTIONS

A co-production of
ITVS & POV
Presents

ALMOST SUNRISE

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco
98 mins. DCP, ProRes 422, Blu-ray. In English



Press Contact:
Brian Geldin Public Relations
Brian Geldin
briangeldin@gmail.com
+1.917.549.2953

Filmmaker Contact:
Thoughtful Robot Productions
Michael Collins, Director/Producer
michael@thoughtfulrobot.com
+1.917.531.3887

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco



FESTIVALS & AWARDS

WORLD PREMIERE @ TELLURIDE MOUNTAINFILM FESTIVAL 2016

WINNER! MOVING MOUNTAINS AWARD @ MOUNTAINFILM

CENTERPIECE FILM @ MILWAUKEE FILM FESTIVAL

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH FILM FESTIVAL, NEW YORK CITY

AFI DOCS, WASHINGTON, DC

MOUNTAINSUMMIT FESTIVAL, ASPEN

GI FILM FESTIVAL, SAN DIEGO

PORT TOWNSEND FILM FESTIVAL

SOUTHERN CIRCUIT TOUR

MILWAUKEE FILM FESTIVAL

REELWORLD FILM FESTIVAL, TORONTO

WASHINGTON WEST FILM FESTIVAL, VA

WAIMEA OCEAN FILM FESTIVAL, HAWAII

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco



FILM SYNOPSIS

A rare, hopeful look at the life of a veteran, beyond his demons.

Almost Sunrise tells the inspiring story of two young men, Tom Voss and Anthony Anderson, who, in an attempt to put their haunting Iraq combat experiences behind them, embark on an extraordinary journey – a 2,700 mile trek on foot across America. Will this epic pilgrimage be enough to release them from their self-destructive impulses and give them the chance to begin life anew?

While the film exposes some of the brutality of war, it doesn't dwell there. It's ultimately a story of hope and potential solutions. Most importantly, the film reveals the promise of holistic practices for healing. When Tom signs up for a special breathing workshop for veterans, he must confront his deepest spiritual identity. He encounters Father Thomas Keating, a renowned Trappist monk who has counseled veterans for decades, who gently illuminates the need to turn inward to achieve true peace – and gives guidance that culminates in a remarkable inner transformation rarely depicted on screen.

Where the stereotypes of “the broken veteran” or “homecoming hero” leave off, the film continues onward, offering an unprecedented portrait of those who return from war; rich, complex, far more hopeful. *Almost Sunrise* allows us to connect with a universal human aspiration for happiness and through Tom and Anthony's genuine search for it, be reminded of our common soaring possibilities.

The film also acts as an urgent call for communities to better understand these deep-seated psychic wounds, and for the government to acknowledge and finally treat moral pain by using methods other than pills. *Almost Sunrise* deftly and movingly demonstrates the promise of holistic healing practices is on the horizon in a way that we cannot afford to ignore.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

BACKGROUND

It's a staggering statistic.

Twenty-two U.S. veterans take their own lives every day, which means, we lose more soldiers to suicide than to combat. Despite billions of dollars spent on veterans' mental health, the national crisis rages unabated. *Almost Sunrise* is a timely and groundbreaking look at what could be a missing piece of the puzzle—the true nature of the psychological wounds of returning soldiers known as “moral injury,” and the undeniable potential power of meditation and nature therapy in helping veterans to reclaim their lives.



MORAL INJURY

“LOVE IS THE OPPOSITE OF WAR... ‘I TERMINATED ALL THAT LOVE IN ALL THOSE PEOPLE’S LIVES’, THAT’S AN AWFUL THING TO LIVE WITH.”

While the physical trek across snowy mountains and vast deserts is punishing, the inner journey proves to be, by far, the most dangerous mission Tom and Anthony will ever undertake. Like many of their fellow returned servicemen and women, Tom and Anthony are tackling post traumatic stress disorder (or PTSD), but the pair are simultaneously dealing with an unseen battle scar called “moral injury” – often manifested as an extreme brand of guilt or shame that arises when one goes against one’s own moral code in the line of duty. The injury can arise in a variety of forms ranging from “....perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations,”

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

according to Dr. Brett Litz, a pioneer of the study of moral injury. It can be sustained from an action one takes or one believes he or she failed to take. “I didn’t sign up to terrorize people,” says Emmet Cullen, a veteran who completed military training with Tom, recalling an instance in which he was commanded to arrest a group of Iraqi men whom he knew in his conscience to be innocent of a serious crime. “To this day, I don’t know what happened to them.” While PTSD, characterized by fear, can be treated with drugs, therapists are finding that no amount of medication can alleviate the pain that comes from carrying a moral burden. *Almost Sunrise* is the first feature documentary film to introduce the emerging term “moral injury.” What PTSD is to the Vietnam War, some experts believe moral injury may soon become for today’s conflicts, eventually recognized as the signature war wound of our generation.

Can the positive effects of breathing meditation last?

Yes. According to Stanford research published in the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, breathing meditation is a powerful ally for military veterans recovering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Emma Seppala, associate director of Stanford’s Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, is the lead author of the article. Seppala says, “This is the first randomized controlled study on a form of meditation or yoga for veterans with PTSD, that has shown such long-term, lasting effects.”

Seppala and her colleagues examined 21 American veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan as they participated in a breathing-based meditation practice known as Sudarshan Kriya yoga. The 21 participants met for three-hour sessions over seven days. Researchers measured eye-blink responses to loud noises, respiration rates and self-reported descriptions of participants’ PTSD symptoms. Assessments were taken at four intervals—before, during, one month later and one year after treatment. One year after the study, the participants’ PTSD scores still remained low, suggesting that there had been long-lasting improvement. “It’s unusual to find the benefits of a very short intervention (still) lasting one year later,” she said.

Read more:

<http://news.stanford.edu/news/2014/september/meditation-helps-ptsd-090514.html>

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

A few years ago, as part of a video project I'd volunteered for, I had the opportunity to interview veterans and hear about their lives and struggles. One particular day, my interview subject casually mentioned, "Twenty-two veterans kill themselves every day." It stopped me dead in my tracks. I thought I had misheard. I didn't. That was a pivotal moment for me in this journey to make this film. I realized right then and there that there was a crisis in this country, taking place right in front of our eyes, one to which many of us, including myself, were blind. In some deep silent corner of that realization, I felt utterly compelled to do something, to act, to serve, to help these people who had sacrificed so much.

Once I had passed the "sniff test" with them, these vets opened up and shared with me some of their most intimate, harrowing experiences, usually those found on the extreme end of the human spectrum. The connection we shared through these exchanges was of an intensity that would knock me off my feet. It often felt as if time itself had stopped. At some fundamental level, I wanted to create a film that would give others a chance to experience that stunning reciprocity, that unbelievable, profound connection. I believe that hearing stories can lead to empathy, which can lead to action.

There's tremendous work yet to be done to help properly care for our returning warriors and all servicemen and women. One of the most important and, indeed, hopeful aspects of the story is the wider acknowledgement that there is such a thing as a "moral injury," a wound that has no outward physical traits but yet can act as the primary unseen force that can destroy a person's life. Veterans and their families are sometimes all too familiar with some of the possible symptoms; substance abuse, alcohol addiction, estrangement, failed marriages, low self esteem, depression, rage, helplessness and botched suicide attempts. But just by identifying the nature of this injury, we can take the seminal steps toward healing it in appropriate and effective ways. It's clear; we cannot merely medicate our way out of a pain stemming from inner conflict. The only remedy that makes sense is to treat it at the source, which requires one to turn within.

My sincere hope is that, in the midst of this urgent crisis, the film will stir people to consider the significance of including holistic practices, such as proven ancient breath techniques and meditation, in the overall approach to our veterans' wellness. One vet whom I had encountered had reluctantly, skeptically tried a powerful breathing exercise. After a period of time, he was able to come off of his regimen of numbing meds. He says it was like waking up for the first time in 40 years. He advised other younger veterans not to wait so long.

The making of the film has created a tremendous opening for me. I can more deeply appreciate and, hopefully, as a consequence, more deeply convey an understanding: that in embracing the struggles of these men and women, and their families—these very human pillars who endeavor to keep the home together—we are not only helping to lift whole communities, but, in essence, we are lifting ourselves. Truly, there is no "other."

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco



IMPACT CAMPAIGN

The *Almost Sunrise Impact Campaign* is a two-year initiative designed to educate and engage target audiences. The campaign will include the nationally broadcast feature film *Almost Sunrise* as well as a web series, an interactive multimedia exhibit including a photo essay, videos, audio, articles, educational curricula and more.

Our vision for the *Almost Sunrise Impact Campaign* is to empower veterans and their families to pursue holistic paths towards healing, and to spark a national conversation about “Moral Injury”.

The goals for our impact campaign are three-fold:

1. Changing the narrative. The campaign will seek to challenge stereotypes through public education, engage communities through the use of visual and performance arts, and partner with targeted NGO’s to use the film to support and promote their missions.
2. Promoting wellness. The campaign will challenge the current view of vets as ‘sick’ or ‘disordered’ and promote and support the growing body of research and experience around alternative, live-changing ‘treatments’ that are being proven to address the issue of moral injury, such as meditation and outdoor, adventure experience therapy.
3. Support current national strategies. There are current efforts led by federal policymakers and legislators to improve Veteran Service Organizations’ ability to promote good psychological health through increased holistic practices. Using existing veteran’s centers, federal resources would help transform facilities into places of comfort, familiarity and health for thousands of men and women and their families.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

THE MAIN CHARACTERS



ANTHONY ANDERSON

Anthony Anderson served 6 years in the infantry including two tours of duty in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. While there, Anderson participated in several actions ranging from combat patrols to humanitarian missions. After leaving the military, Anderson began working with Veterans as a peer mentor assisting Veterans with the host of issues that impact reintegrating into post-service life. Anthony and his wife, Holly, live with their daughter, Madeline, in Wisconsin. Anderson continues to be a mentor for Veterans seeking healthy, peer-to-peer help dealing with PTSD.

TOM VOSS

Tom served on active duty in the United States Army for three years, from 2003 to 2006. Tom served with the 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry Regiment, an element of the 1st Brigade, 25th Infantry Division. October 2004 Tom was deployed to Mosul, Iraq to support Operation Iraqi Freedom. While in Iraq, Tom was proud to participate in hundreds of combat missions, convoys, security patrols, raids, area clearance operations, and humanitarian relief operations including providing security for the first democratic elections Iraq since the invasion. Currently, Tom serves as the National Veteran Liaison for Project Welcome Home Troops, a program of the International Association for Human Values, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. Tom travels around the country giving intro talks, organizing, and assisting in teaching the Power Breath Meditation Workshop for veterans, their families, and active duty military.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

THE FILMMAKERS

MICHAEL COLLINS, Director

Michael is an Emmy® nominated filmmaker and the founder of Thoughtful Robot. In 2005 he directed *Caught in an Injustice*, a one-hour documentary broadcast on Spanish national television that received Special Mention at the 15th International TV3 Actual Awards. In 2010 Michael's short film, *Gerthy's Roots*, won the Belief Matters Award and was selected for the Media that Matters collection. In 2011 *Give Up Tomorrow* premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and won the Audience Award and a Special Jury Prize for Best New Director. The film went on to screen in over 75 festivals in 40+ countries, winning 18 major awards including seven Audience Awards, four Human Rights Awards and the Activism Award at Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. Recently *Give Up Tomorrow* was selected for the Puma Impact Award and was nominated for an Emmy® Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism.



MARTY SYJUCO, Producer

Originally from the Philippines, Marty moved to New York City in 2000 and worked in film distribution at Focus Features, booking the theatrical releases of independent, commercial and Academy Award-winning films. In 2004 he took a leap of faith to pursue his passion: documentary filmmaking. In 2005, he produced the one-hour film *Atrapado en la injusticia* broadcast on Spanish national television. He developed it into the feature-length documentary, *Give Up Tomorrow*. The film was an ITVS co-production and commissioned by BBC Storyville, with support from the Sundance Documentary Film Program, CAAM, Tribeca Film Institute, The

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

Fledgling Fund, Bertha Foundation and BRITDOC, among others. To date it has broadcast in over 10 territories, including BBC, DR, SVT, Canal+ and as part of POV's 25th anniversary season. In addition to being nominated for an Emmy® Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism, Give Up Tomorrow received recognition from the Grierson British Awards, Cinema Eye Honors, Amnesty International's Media Awards, and the Puma Impact Award. Recently, in March 2015, the film had a global broadcast on the BBC World News, and had over 30 million viewers worldwide.

ERIC DANIEL METZGAR, Editor

Eric is a filmmaker based in Brooklyn. His documentary titled Reporter (2009) chronicles New York Times journalist Nick Kristof's voyage to the Congo and premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. It was broadcast on HBO and nominated for an Emmy Award. His other feature films include Life. Support. Music. and The Chances of the World Changing, which were both broadcast on POV. Metzgar edited Give Up Tomorrow, which won the Editing Award at the Salem Film Fest in 2012.

CLARISSA DE LOS REYES, Director of Photography

Clarissa is an award-winning filmmaker born and raised in Manila, Philippines who migrated to New York City where she attended NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. When not working on her own projects, she collaborates extensively as a Director of Photography for narrative and documentary films and has worked in China, Taiwan, Philippines and the US. She has also served as a camera operator for Oscar nominated filmmaker John Sayles on his feature film "Amigo", and most recently shot and co-produced "Documented," a groundbreaking documentary on immigration that was in competition at IDFA in Amsterdam, among others, and was later acquired by CNN Films. She is currently developing her first narrative feature script "Johnny Loves Dolores."

ADAM CRYSTAL, Composer

Adam is a composer and musician based out of both coasts, New York City and Los Angeles. His versatile work spans scoring films, documentaries, modern dance and ballet pieces, commercials and videos. He has composed music for films by Academy Award winning filmmakers Errol Morris and Cynthia Wade. classically trained violinist, Adam has also performed piano and keyboards for various bands including Fischerspooner, My Chemical Romance, The Citizens Band, The Pierces, among many others.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

YUKA HONDA, Musician

Yuka is a Japanese musician who resides in New York City. She is a multi-instrumentalist musician, composer, record producer, and co-founder of the band Cibo Matto. Throughout her career, she has collaborated with a diverse array of musicians, including Petra Haden, Sean Lennon, Beastie Boys, Marc Ribot, Edie Brickell, Vincent Gallo and Luscious Jackson.

NELS CLINE, Musician

Nels is an American guitarist and composer. He first came to prominence in the 1980s playing jazz, often in collaboration with his identical twin brother Alex Cline, a drummer. Since then, Nels has worked with a wide range of musicians in punk and alternative rock, notably Mike Watt, Thurston Moore and Wilco (the latter as a full-time member since 2004). He also leads the groups the Nels Cline Singers and Nels Cline Trio. Cline was named the 82nd greatest guitarist of all time by Rolling Stone magazine in November 2011.

CHRIS SHERIDAN, Executive Producer

Chris is an award-winning co-director and co-producer of “ABDUCTION: The Megumi Yokota Story,” produced in association with the BBC, and executive produced by Academy Award winner, Jane Campion. The film, which was broadcast nationally on PBS, and on major international networks, won multiple honors, including the prestigious DuPont-Columbia University award, honoring the best in documentary journalism. Chris served as consulting producer on the Emmy-nominated feature documentary “Give Up Tomorrow.” Chris has produced works for a variety of broadcast media outlets, including National Geographic Channel, NBC, CBS, among others.

PATTY KIM, Executive Producer

Patty is the writer, co-director and co-producer of the award-winning feature documentary “ABDUCTION: The Megumi Yokota Story” produced in association with BBC Storyville and executive produced by Oscar-winning filmmaker Jane Campion. The film was broadcast nationally on PBS and aired on major networks around the world. The film, which centers around the kidnapping of a child by North Korean secret agents, was screened at the United Nations in Geneva and New York, for audiences including the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as part of a movement supporting an international treaty to outlaw enforced disappearances. Patty also acted as consulting producer on “Give Up Tomorrow,” which won two top prizes at the 2011 Tribeca Film Festival.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

ERIN SORENSON, Impact Producer

Erin Sorenson is an impact strategist and producer and the founder of Third Stage Consulting providing strategic planning and project management of social-justice themed documentary film projects. With a focus on films that are domestic with subject-driven narratives, Erin's projects have addressed: interpersonal violence, women's issues, poverty, homelessness, disabilities, and climate change. Prior to founding Third Stage Consulting, Erin spent 5 years as the Chief Programs Officer for the BeCause Foundation, a foundation dedicated to the power of documentary filmmaking and its fusion with creative outreach and engagement projects. Erin graduated with her Masters Degree in Social Service Administration at the University of Chicago. In 1995 she was awarded "Chicagoan of the Year" for her work with Chicago's Mayor Daley in developing one of the nations largest programs for abused children.

KATINKA HOOYER, PhD, Research & Evaluation Director

Katinka is a medical anthropologist with 15 years experience working in community programming and ethnographic research. Currently, she is a postdoctoral fellow in Family and Community Medicine at the Medical College of Wisconsin and doing research in collaboration with the Veterans Health Administration on emerging holistic therapies. Katinka's work focuses on alternative health interventions for Veterans with post-traumatic stress and moral injury, specifically nature-based and animal-assisted therapies. As a community-engaged scholar, Katinka uses interactive art as a way to translate and share Veterans experiences of war and coming home with the public. Her role as a content expert with Almost Sunrise is to co-design and evaluate educational programming and the social impact campaign.

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco



CREDITS

DIRECTED BY
Michael Collins

PRODUCED BY
Marty Syjuco

EDITED BY
Eric Daniel Metzgar

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS
Peter Cooper & Suparna Bhasin
Chris Sheridan & Patty Kim

CO-PRODUCER
Claire Ratinon

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY
Clarissa de los Reyes

CINEMATOGRAPHER, 2ND UNIT
Gideon de Villiers

d

Almost Sunrise

A feature documentary by Michael Collins & Marty Syjuco

COMPOSER

Adam Crystal

ADDITIONAL MUSIC

Yuka Honda

Nels Cline

WRITERS

Michael Collins

Eric Daniel Metzgar

CO-PRODUCTION COMPANIES

ITVS (Independent Television Services), POV / American Documentary

SPONSORS

Bertha Foundation, Chicago Media Project, Derek Freese Documentary Fund,
The Fledgling Fund, Good Pitch, IDA Pare Lorentz Documentary Fund, IFP,
New York State Council on the Arts, Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute.