

THOUGHTFUL ROBOT & DOGGED PRODUCTIONS PRESENT



By My Side

IMAGINE THE POSSIBLE.

THOUGHTFUL ROBOT AND DOGGED PRODUCTIONS PRESENT "BY MY SIDE"
PRODUCERS MICHAEL COLLINS AND VICKI TOPAZ, EDITOR DANA LAMAN, CINEMATOGRAPHER WYNN PADULA AND KESTEN AMIGOAL, COMPOSER ANDREW DUST
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER VISHAL SOLANKI, STORY CONSULTANT ERIC DANIEL MEZGAR, CREATIVE CONSULTANT PATRICIA LEE STUTTER, DIRECTED BY VICKI TOPAZ AND WYNN PADULA



BYMYSIDEDOC.COM

30 MINUTES, DCP, PRORES 422, 1920X1080, STEREO
IN ENGLISH, AVAILABLE WITH OPEN AND CLOSED CAPTIONS



FILM FESTIVALS

JAN 2	Utah Film Festival, Taylorsville, UT	2026
OCT 25	YES! Film Festival, Columbus, IN	2025
SEP 27	Newburyport Documentary Film Festival, Newburyport, MA	
SEP 5 - 7	Tarzana International Film Festival, Sherman Oaks, CA	
AUG 16	Chain NYC Film Festival, New York City, NY	
JUNE 5 - 14	Clown International Film Festival Finalist, Paris, France	
MAY 16	Vermont Film & Folklore Festival, Manchester, VT	
APR 23 - 27	Indy Film Fest, Indianapolis, IN	
APR 17	Portland Panorama, Portland OR	
2025	London Director Awards, London, UK	
MAR 27 - 30	Salem Film Fest, Salem, MA	
MAR 7	Over-the-Rhine International Film Festival, Cincinnati, OH	2024
NOV 13 - 16	Weyauwega International Film Festival, Weyauwega, WI	
OCT 10 - 13	Tacoma Film Festival, Tacoma, WA	
OCT 4 - 6	Lake Tahoe Documentary Film Festival, Lake Tahoe, CA	
SEP 24 - 29	Richmond International Film Festival, Richmond, VA	
SEP 19 - 22	Montana International Film Festival, Billings, MT	
SEP 12 - 15	South Dakota Film Festival, Aberdeen, SD	
AUG 21 - 25	Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival, Middlebury, VA	
AUG 1 - 31	Los Angeles Lift-Off Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA	
MAY 4 - 6	Independent Film Festival Boston, Somerville, MA	
MAY 4	Lower East Side Film Festival, New York, NY	
APR 24 - 28	Julien Dubuque International Film Festival, Dubuque, IA	
APR 12 - 14	Kansas City Film Fest International, Kansas City, MO	
APR 14	Poppy Jasper Int'l Film Festival, Morgan Hill, CA	
APR 5 - 14	New Hope Film Festival, New Hope, PA	
MAR 14	IFSAK Short Film Festival, Istanbul, Turkey	
FEB 28 - MAR 3	Durango Independent Film Festival, Durango, CO	
JAN 11 - 29	Global Film Exhibition, Royal, AR	2023
NOV 10 - 12	Alexandria Film Festival, Alexandria, VA	
OCT 20 - 22	Utopia Film Festival Greenbelt, Maryland	
OCT 19 - 29	United Nations Association Film Festival, Stanford, CA	
OCT 12	San Francisco Short Film Festival, San Francisco, CA	
OCT 11 - 15	Social Justice Film Festival Seattle, WA	
OCT 7	Oregon Documentary Film Festival, The Dalles, OR	
OCT 7	Chagrin Documentary Film Festival, Chagrin Falls, OH	
OCT 7	Awareness Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA	
OCT 5	Veterans Film Festival, San Francisco, CA	
OCT 2 - 8	Chesapeake Film Festival, Easton, MD	
SEP 18 - 24	Global Peace Film Festival, Winter Park, FL	
AUG 3	San Antonio Film Festival, San Antonio, TX	
JULY 16	Oregon Short Film Festival, Portland, Oregon	
JULY 15	BraveMaker Film Festival, Redwood City, CA	
JUNE 24	Texas Short Film Festival, San Antonio, Texas	
MAY 19	GI Film Festival San Diego, World Premiere, San Diego, CA	
MAY 1	Alexander Valley Film Festival, Santa Rosa, CA, Sneak Preview	
JAN 30	Hispanic Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA, Sneak Preview	

AWARDS

Jury Prize Best Short | Yes! Film Festival
 Finalist | Clown International Film Festival
 Best Director Documentary Film | Film Life Fest Film Festival
 Best Cinematographer Documentary | Film Life Fest Film Festival
 Best Senior Director | London Director Awards
 Winner Kate Hearst Prize for Human Connectivity | Middlebury New Filmmakers Festival
 Best Documentary Short | Kansas City FilmFest International
 Best Service to Humanity Achievement in Filmmaking | Alexandria Film Festival
 Best Short Documentary | United Nations Association Film Festival
 Best U.S. Documentary | San Francisco Short Film Festival
 Best Short Documentary | Global Film Exhibition
 Best Documentary Film | Oregon Short Film Festival
 Most Inspirational Film | Oregon Documentary Film Festival
 Best Documentary Short Film | Hispanic Film Festival
 Semi-Finalist | Dumbo Film Festival
 Finalist Award Best Director and Best Documentary Film | Texas Short Film Festival
 Silver Prize Documentary Featurette | Social Justice Film Festival
 Honorable Mention | Founders' Choice Award, GI Film Festival San Diego
 Honorable Mention | Outstanding Short Film | Utopia Film Festival
 Award of Recognition | Senator John Laird, Senate District 17, California





SYNOPSIS

BY MY SIDE is an intimate portrait of three veterans suffering from the “invisible wound,” PTSD, the most prevalent and unhealed wound suffered by veterans. Approximately 20% of those who served in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars are still haunted by visions, chased by enemies they can never outrun, and tortured by the fear that the enemy is them. The three veterans and their families bravely share their pain, fear, and the difficult realization that they've lost time and love that they may never get back again. All three found hope where no one had looked—in the heart of a faithful service dog. Through intimate interviews with the veterans' families and revealing footage of the soldiers bonding with their service animals, the film demonstrates how wo/man's best friend may be one of the best ways to mitigate the psychic scars imprinted on those who have been in service to our country.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Back in 2010, I heard Gloria Gilbert Stoga, Founder of Puppies Behind Bars, being interviewed on Fresh Air about partnering inmate-trained dogs with veterans suffering from PTSD. It was life changing. I realized three things: I didn't know the meaning of PTSD nor what a service dog was, and I didn't know anyone who had served in the Iraq or Afghanistan wars. For my generation, the draft brought the Vietnam War into our homes. There was no talk of post-combat trauma then and no dogs to help heal those wounds. Had we, I wondered, finally learned something about the psychic cost of war? I was intrigued enough to travel to New York City to attend a Puppies Behind Bars graduation ceremony. As prisoner-trained dogs were partnered with veterans in need, the sense of gratitude and hope was palpable and at times, overwhelming. Profound forces were being unleashed. I knew immediately, this would be my next journey.



A couple of years later, I met professional dog trainer, Mary Cortani. As a veteran, Mary knew there were thousands of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq with debilitating mental health wounds that were not responding to standard treatment. She also knew those “invisible wounds” were the cause of 22 veterans to take their lives every day. Mary founded Operation Freedom Paws to teach veterans how to train a dog that could help them navigate the dark times and find joy again. With Mary’s go-ahead, I began photographing veterans on this interspecies recovery path for my multimedia project called HEAL that chronicles the healing journeys of veterans living with post-traumatic stress and other disabilities who seek to cope day-to-day with the help of their highly trained service dogs.

Every veterans’ story and struggle is compounded by collateral damage suffered by their family. Over time, I recognized my childhood being reflected in their stories. My father was a U.S. Army Veteran who flew missions as a tail gunner during WWII. He too arrived home with deep invisible wounds that had no name or treatment. As I listened to veterans, their spouses, and their kids talk about life after combat, I came to understand that, like them, my Dad was wrestling with PTSD and that is what led to his anger and alcoholism. I also realized this is an essential facet of the Veteran experience that needed to be told: the role of the family.

BY MY SIDE*, unveils another invisible truth—military veterans account for less than 1% of the American population, throwing a spotlight on the valor and sacrifice that so few have made for so many. BY MY SIDE celebrates our veterans and their love of country and family. It celebrates their beautiful families that love them. And shows how and why service dogs--who match their loyalty and commitment—can heal broken hearts and quiet the wars within. That is the message our veterans and their families want others to know. There is hope and it can be found on the end of a leash.

*BY MY SIDE is made possible with support from California Humanities, a non-profit partner of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Yellow Chair Foundation. The fiscal sponsor is the International Documentary Association (IDA).



IMPACT CAMPAIGN

The mission of our Service Dog Awareness Campaign is to empower veterans to learn more about and seek out service dogs, an evidence-based therapeutic option for PTSD helping them to live fuller lives, revitalize family relationships and restore their independence. For details, please visit [our website](#).

MEDIA



ABC 7 News



KUSI TV "Good Morning San Diego"



Angel Force Event



By My Side Teaser

FILM TEAM

VICKI TOPAZ | CO-DIRECTOR, PRODUCER

Vicki Topaz, a photographer and filmmaker with over 25 years of experience, delves into the stories of veterans and their families affected by PTSD. Inspired by her father, a WWII tail-gunner with PTSD, she embarked on the multimedia project "HEAL" in 2010, shedding light on their experiences. Topaz's documentary short, "Veterans Speak About PTSD," was showcased at 17 film festivals nationwide. Her latest film, "BY MY SIDE," intimately profiles three veterans, their traumas, and the life-saving service dogs. Completed in January 2023, the film has received acclaim, earning awards and screenings at various festivals. Through her work, Topaz compassionately portrays the unseen struggles of those connected to military service.



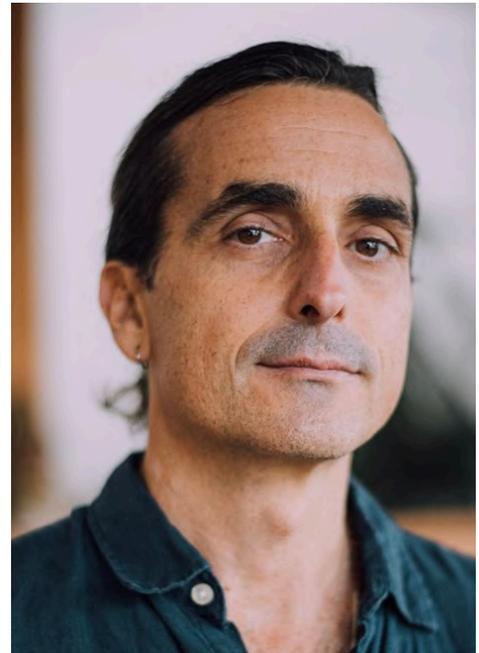
IN MEMORY OF WYNN PADULA | CO-DIRECTOR, CINEMATOGRAPHER



Wynn Padula, who tragically passed away from a sudden heart attack on August 15, 2021, at the age of 42, leaves behind his wife Carey and their newborn daughter Diana. His untimely loss is deeply felt by all. Wynn's creative contributions will forever illuminate our project. He co-directed and shot the Netflix documentary "RESURFACE" and served as the cinematographer for the critically acclaimed film "SLOMO." "SLOMO" received numerous accolades, including Best Short Documentary from the International Documentary Association (IDA), SXSW, and Big Sky Documentary Festival, as well as awards at Sheffield Doc Fest/Sheffield International Documentary Festival and AFI Docs.

MICHAEL COLLINS | PRODUCER

Michael Collins is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker and founder of Thoughtful Robot, a production company that tells transformative stories. His film "**Beirut Dreams in Color**" highlights Middle Eastern queer activists and the band Mashrou' Leila, and has been nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Short Documentary. Collins furthermore produced "**Delikado**," a feature about environmental heroes protecting the Philippines' last ecological frontier, which has been nominated for an Emmy for Outstanding Investigative Documentary. His documentary "Almost Sunrise" explores moral injury and veteran suicide, premiering at Telluride Mountainfilm and Human Rights Watch Film Festival NY, also earning an Emmy nomination. His debut film "Give Up Tomorrow" won the Audience Award and Special Jury Prize at Tribeca, receiving an Emmy nomination and Doc Society Impact Award.



ANDREW DOST | COMPOSER

Andrew Dost is a Grammy-winning songwriter, composer, and multi-instrumentalist. With a career spanning 20+ years, he excels in trumpet, piano, and guitar. While at Central Michigan University, Dost developed a passion for arranging, writing a full-length musical, and joining the experimental indie band Anathallo. Later, he formed the band Fun, which garnered global multi-platinum success. Besides touring, he has composed music for films, documentaries, video games, TV series, and podcasts. Dost performed alongside icons like Queen, Beach Boys, and Bruce Springsteen, on diverse stages ranging from house shows to SNL, Coachella, and The White House. Active in social justice, he co-founded The Ally Coalition, supporting LGBTQ+ youth through grassroots nonprofits.



DANA LAMAN | EDITOR

Dana is a highly skilled video editor based in Los Angeles, specialized in documentary films, branded content, and broadcast spots. Her work has been featured at renowned festivals like SXSW, DOC NYC, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, and SF Indie Fest. Currently, she is immersed in editing a feature documentary about the 1990 International Trans-Antarctica Expedition, a record-breaking dogsled traverse led by National Geographic explorer and climate activist Will Steger. With an impressive client roster including Adobe, Facebook, Levi's, Apple, Stephen Curry's PressPlay, The Berkeley Art Museum, and Pacific Film Archive, Dana's talent and versatility shine through her diverse projects.



ERIC DANIEL METZGAR | STORY CONSULTANT



Eric Daniel Metzgar is an Emmy-winning filmmaker based in Pacifica, California. A two-time Sundance Documentary Lab Fellow, he directed, shot, and edited "Reporter," chronicling New York Times journalist Nicholas Kristof's journey through war-torn Congo. The film premiered at Sundance, earned an Emmy nomination, and received Cinema for Peace's International Film Award. Metzgar's works include "Life. Support. Music." and "The Chances of the World Changing," featured on POV and nominated for an Independent Spirit Award. He has also edited and produced acclaimed films including "Crime + Punishment" (Emmy winner) and edited "Give Up Tomorrow," "Almost Sunrise," and "Mayor" (Peabody nominee).

View our entire team, full bios and Film Advisors on the [TEAM page](#) on our website.

FILM STILLS



For high-resolution stills, visit [our website](#) to download.

CONTACT

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"There are times that I like to push people away especially when it gets close to anniversary dates of certain events that happened in Iraq. But Huey won't let me."

-Ramon Reyes

