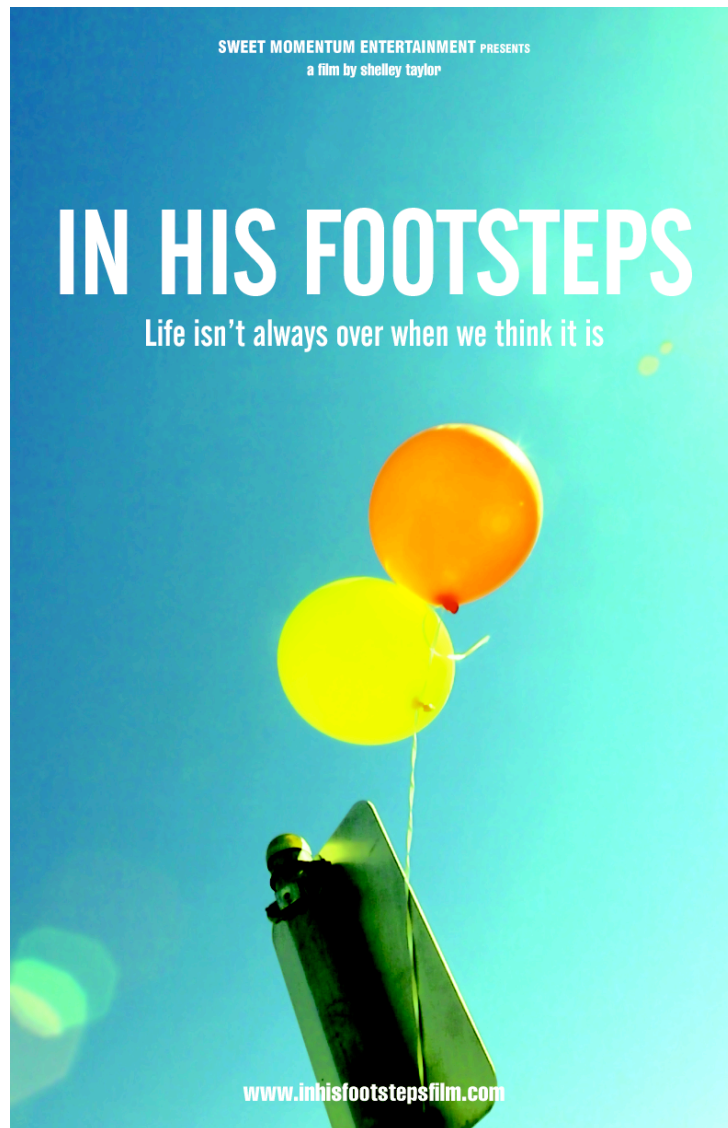


IN HIS FOOTSTEPS
a film by Shelley Taylor

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Sweet Momentum Entertainment



Running time: 55 minutes
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Tag Line

Life isn't always over when we think it is.

Capsule Synopsis

A woman who loses her child and then her business, takes a road trip and cooks and dances her way out of the darkness. Shelley Taylor's personal documentary ***In His Footsteps*** is an intimate look into grief, loss and failure, giving us hope that life isn't always over when we think it is.

Short Synopsis

In His Footsteps follows a successful entrepreneur and mother looking for her way into the light after losing her 32 year old son and only child-

Her emotional voyage moves from hopelessness to resilience over a six-month period as she travels from London to Berlin, New York, Beverly Hills and Silicon Valley tracing her son's steps where he was an actor, writer and chef.

By organizing impromptu restaurants in her own and other people's homes Shelley cooked her way out of the utter darkness of grieving and loss and into pockets of healing and happiness. ***In His Footsteps*** is a story about the transformative power of optimism, action and ultimately, a story about hope.

The road trip got off to a rocky when Shelley goes with a cameraman to Madrid to meet her traveling companion to plan the rest of the trip. A taxi drives off with all of the expensive equipment, never to be seen again. That's what insurance is for, Shelley reminds the heartbroken cameraman.

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Medium Synopsis

In His Footsteps tells the story of a woman who lost her only child when he was 32. It charts her emotional voyage as she goes from hopeless to hopeful. Organizing pop-up restaurants in peoples' homes and cooking for her son's friends, as well as complete strangers, she literally cooks and dances her way out of the darkness.

Filmed over 6 months in three countries, it begins when Shelley Taylor, an American living in London, takes a "road trip," to visit some of the places her dead son lived and worked: New York becomes Shelley's new world, Los Angeles is her land of dreams and Silicon Valley represents the spirit of bouncing back. Two and a half years into this new life, the trip becomes the beginning of her healing. In the following months we see her traveling, starting new projects, taking her pop-up restaurant on the road, coming to terms with her losses and beginning to dream.

The film explores one woman's approach to re-invention after loss and failure. Visiting the places her son once lived she begins to see that having lost her legacy, she must become her son's. Her son's one-man show, written when he was 21, strangely foreshadows the journey Shelley must now take. The daughter and grand-daughter of Seattle jazz musicians, Shelley shows how improvisation is life's greatest art.

Upon arrival in Los Angeles Shelley organizes a dinner for 40 people in a rented house she has never seen, while directing the filming of dinner prep, the actual dinner and interviews. The dinner brings together many of her son's friends, most of whom are filmmakers which proves to be very emotional for everyone. The next morning the cameraman announced he has accidentally erased all the footage of the dinner. Thankfully Shelley's traveling companion Susana had captured everything on her pocket video camera!

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Long synopsis

In His Footsteps, a documentary, tells the story of a woman who lost her only child when he was 32 and then, less than one year later, the Internet start-up where they both worked. It charts her emotional voyage as she goes from hopeless to hopeful. Beginning with a road trip, we see her starting new projects, taking her pop-up restaurant on the road, coming to terms with her losses and beginning to dream. During the 6 months of filming the documentary, Shelley Taylor literally cooks and dances her way out of the darkness.

Shelley is a 4th generation single mom who brought her baby to class with her at an all women's university when she was 19. The product of a therapist mother and absent musician father, the beginning of the film charts the closeness of her relationship with her son; they grew up together.

Coming from a long line of entertainers it is not surprising that Shelley's son became an actor and filmmaker. Without realizing it, he passed his mother his baton. Barely 7 days after his death Shelley instinctually filmed several memorial services, just as her son has photographed and filmed most of his life.

The film explores one woman's approach to re-invention after loss and failure. Visiting the places her son once lived she begins to see that having lost her legacy, she must become her son's. Scenes from her son's one-man show, a coming of age story, written when he was 21, strangely foreshadow the journey Shelley must now take. Taking a closer look at her own roots, the daughter and grand-daughter of Seattle jazz musicians, the film shows how our past contains the seeds of our future and how we each become our own legacies.

Filmed over 6 months in three countries, it begins when Shelley, an American living in London, decides to take a "road trip," to visit some of the places her dead son lived and worked: New York becomes Shelley's new world, Los Angeles is her land of dreams and Silicon Valley represents the spirit of bouncing back. Two and a half years into this new life, the trip becomes the beginning of her healing.

The film is about the loss of identity that comes from being a mom and successful entrepreneur and then losing it all. But it is much more than that as it challenges us all to look at who we really are and to ask if perhaps we remain who we are even after losing the artifacts we have come to know as ourselves. We see how traveling, cooking, dancing and story telling are the elements of any healing journey. Filled with beautiful food, a riot of colorful characters and loads of humor, this film shows how just doing it is the only way back into the sunlight.

In His Footsteps seamlessly weaves a story of growth and hope using archival footage, footage shot on mobile phones and professional video cameras to create a tapestry of experiences spanning generations---a journey of survival, creativity and hope.

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Filmmaker/Crew bios

Shelley Taylor (writer, director, producer) is the daughter of a hippie father and therapist mother. Her pendulum swung to business – what her parents considered the dark side – when a neighbor encouraged her early entrepreneurial leanings. Although she comes from a long line of Seattle jazz musicians, her own musical activities stopped when she went to college at 16 and then had her son at 19. Whatever creative talents were in her genes she channeled into pioneering innovative business practices and supporting her son in his passions: dancing, acting and filmmaking.

Shelley studied economics at Mills College, where she stretched the limits of this liberal arts school to give herself the tools to become an international business-woman.

In 2005 Shelley started a digital entertainment company, launching one of the first sites to support the rights of musicians, writers and filmmakers while offering unique opportunities for artists to monetize their content in this new world of piracy. Before this Shelley advised US and UK companies on interactive television. Little did she know how useful these experiences would be in her new career as a filmmaker, developing content and creating multi-platform music and film projects.

Shelley's first film ***In His Footsteps***, a personal documentary, was born out of tragedy and a dramatic professional turning point. In 2008 her son and only child died and 10 months later she lost her company in the wake of the banking crisis. Unable to find a model for re-invention as a way to overcome such a devastating personal loss, Shelley began to document her journey. She wrote, produced and directed ***In His Footsteps***, documenting the road trip through which she cooks and dances her way out of the darkness.

Shelley now has a feature length drama, ***Putting Food on the Table***, and a reality TV series in pre-production.

Ann Stein (editor) has been working as an editor both in New York and Los Angeles for the past 25 years, editing both narrative and documentary films. Her films have been invited to Sundance (Love Liza with Philip Seymour Hoffman and Kathy Bates, Wrestling with Angels about the playwright Tony Kushner, and Death By Unnatural Causes, an independent art film), the Cannes Film Festival (Sidewalk Stories), and the Golden Globes (In the House, about three teenagers at Bronx Psychiatric Center). Her films have won numerous awards. The short documentary Sing!, about the Los Angeles Children's Chorus, was nominated for an Academy Award.

She has also worked extensively in television, on such shows as NBC's reality-based series Crime & Punishment, MTV's reality-based series Road Rules, and several TV documentaries such as Gene Hackman Biography (Van Ness Documentary, A&E), The Dreyfus Affair (Film Roos Documentary, The History Channel), and Cinema Combat: War in the Movies (Van Nees Documentary, AMC).

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Director's Statement

Two and a half years after my son's death I was spending most of my time sitting on the couch, getting through the day with a few weekly rituals I'd managed to put into place, one of which included my writing group. The carrot for finishing our latest scripts: a trip to Hollywood. And we'd all just finished one!

I needed something really big to give my full attention to. That's when I got the idea to film the trip I was about to take. I had no idea where the journey would take me, but it was the start of the making of ***In His Footsteps***.

When my son died I read every book on the subject and watched every film. I didn't find anything that gave me proof that it was possible to go on, or to ever find happy moments, after the loss of an only child. But I knew if I could prove to myself that it was possible, then I might be able to make a film showing what I'd hoped to find – proof that life isn't always over when we think it is.

One of the subjects I've explored as an entrepreneur is that of failure. It is a critical element of success. The company I created went under 10 months after my son died. It was my biggest professional failure. I figured that if I visited Silicon Valley on this trip I just might find what it takes to get back up again. I have.

In His Footsteps was my first film. A personal documentary is challenging enough in itself, but sharing my loss with others was extremely uncomfortable. I had the added challenge of presenting my dead son to the world so I could make my loss real to those who would watch the film. I hadn't been able to look at his photo since he died and suddenly I needed to not only look at his photos, but hours and hours of video of him. I thought I would die from this new pain as I sifted through the incredible archive of his life. One year to the day after I began filming I finished the final cut of the film. That was an unimaginable relief! I am not sure if I will ever be happy to watch it, but I'm sure my writer/filmmaker/chef son has had a big hand in it. It feels as if we made it together across the grand divide that now separates us.

I had a lot of fun making this film. I needed proof that fun could exist again for me. Making ***In His Footsteps*** has started me on a new career, and re-started me on others. I've been encouraged on this new journey by my son's words (from an interview when he was about 24 years old):

"I've discovered that when you actually go through some challenge in your life, through the whole process of it, at first you're really upset about what's happened to you. And then you face up to it and deal with it. When you come out at the end of the arc you have that inspiration. But you don't control when it happens. It comes though when you've actually gone through something. Like in a movie, a character goes through an arc; and at the end the audience feels inspired because they see him go through the whole process."

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Credits

Produced and directed by:
Shelley Taylor

Camera:

Shaka Taylor
Susana Egea
Fernando Ruiz
James Millman
Nuna Sandy
Geoff Grunfeld

Offline editors:
Ann Stein
Libby Cuenin

Online Editors:
Libby Cuenin
Nick Mason

Sound Mixer:
Damian Volpe

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10 FAQs

1) You've never made a film before. What made you think you would be able to do it?

For some reason I wasn't daunted by the undertaking, even though now in retrospect I should have been. I think producing a film is very much like building a company from scratch, which I have done several times. I needed to find the right people for the jobs I couldn't do. And then, I figured my understanding of storytelling would serve me after I gathered enough footage.

2) Why did you make this film?

I needed a project to engage in, to take my mind off of things. I've written many screenplays but suddenly realized that making a documentary put the power of seeing a finished product in my own hands, that I could do it on my own. But more than that, I was motivated to show others who think they just can't get through something, that we are all built for survival. I hoped this film would show one person's way through a black tunnel into the light.

3) What was it like for you to try to put such a personal loss into a one-hour story?

I had about 150 hours of film, of which about 40 hours were of my son. And I had 32 years of memories. I couldn't bear looking at my son's photos or videos of him so I asked my editor just pull out some for me to look at later. But I did have to go through piles of tapes and albums to even get them to her. I spent a whole weekend in my office curled up in a ball crying. Two and a half years after my son died, I heard his voice and saw his moving image. It was probably even harder that weekend then when I first got the news that I'd never see him again. I had to detach in order to see the story that could be told, and I think that sealing myself off from my feelings for a while was actually a good thing.

4) How did you finance your film?

I used nearly all of my savings to finance the travel and filming. But when it came to getting to a final cut, paying for post-production and sound, I'd run out of money. So I decided to do a Kickstarter campaign for what I needed next. That was a great way to feel the support and encouragement of other people.

5) How did you pull your team together to make your film?

I started by buying the camera equipment (that is after the first camera man I hired lost his equipment in a taxi) and then hired or used whoever was around me to film. I found Ann Stein, an experienced editor while I was traveling through LA and we worked together at a distance for many months. My traveling companion Susana Egea picked up the camera for half of our road trip and sometimes we took turns. Then on one of my trips to New York I met the amazing Damian Volpe in New York who did the sound mix. And I got a lot of help from a lot of people at various stages. The funny thing is how my

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son Shaka became an unwitting member of the crew when he began documenting his life on video. It sometimes seems as if his whole life was about creating an archive of him that would eventually make its way into this film.

6) How did making the film help you deal with your grief and loss?

In some ways the fact of documenting my life, my son's life and the loss made it all more real. There is a kind of numb state of dis-belief that happens after something so traumatic, probably nature's way of protecting us. Making the film made me see the reality of my situation. That has to be a good thing. But maybe the most important thing was that it kept me busy making it and that took my mind away from the big hole in my life.

7) What kind of relationship do you now see between art and suffering?

My son always said that it was his dark side that motivated his writing and acting, his art. I was always a happy, sunny person and figured that is why I was so practical and focused on making a living to support myself and my son, that I wasn't tortured enough to be a 'real' artist. I don't think I will ever consider myself an artist; I'm more a producer in everything I do. But I think that pain sharpens the mind in some way if it doesn't kill you. It creates a very clear view of who we are and who are those around us. Seeing clearly must be part of the link between suffering and art.

8) What was your biggest challenge in making the film?

Since I'd never made a film before I didn't know all of the steps required, so I had to learn everything on the fly. I made a lot of mistakes when deciding how to get things done. I'm impatient and sometimes settled with things I wouldn't now, just to keep the ball moving. I wanted a team but couldn't really convince people at the beginning of the film that this was something other than an homage to my son, that I wanted to make a real film with a real audience.

9) What was the most rewarding part of making the film?

I would have to say the rewards came in two forms: 1) working with the various people who helped move the film from one stage to another, and 2) screening it for my friends and family 3 days after it was finished. Both of these experiences are social. Now, more than ever, I need social interaction. Anything that brings me together with people is rewarding. I look forward to sharing the film with more people. We have all had painful experiences and it somehow makes it better when they are shared.