

Wisdom Life Productions
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TOMORROW NEVER KNOWS



A film by Adam Sekuler
Featuring Shar Jones and Cynthia Vitale

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Tomorrow Never Knows

Documentary Feature, United States, 2018
93 minutes, DCP
Director: Adam Sekuler
Produced by: Darci Meyers
Assistance From: Kim Shively,
Benjamin McQuillan, Samantha Pollak
Supervising Sound Mixer: Larry Blake

- LOGLINE -

A couple struggles as one person pursues a conscious death amidst the chaotic decline of Alzheimer's.

- SYNOPSIS -

A sensitively rendered documentary looking at the life and death of Shar Jones, a transgender person living with early onset Alzheimer's Disease, and the difficult choice he and his wife Cynthia Vitale faced as the couple struggled to figure out how to proceed amidst his chaotic decline. Instead of letting his memory slip away and burdening Cynthia with years of care, the film highlights the couple's journey as Shar pursues a conscious death. With an intimate visual style, Shar's tale of gender identity gives his choice in death an especially telling element. He is a person who gets the importance of choosing life on his own terms and implicitly the right-to-die movement comes front and center, expanding on notions of authorship over our own lives. Departing from a linear depiction of Shar's story, instead Tomorrow Never Knows explores slippages in time, consciousness, and the process of letting go, Engrossing, rich, multi-layered and stunning to watch, this first feature is a tragic love story offering profound implications for increasing awareness about choice in living and in dying.

- Director's Statement -

I met Shar and Cynthia one year into Shar's diagnosis with early onset Alzheimer's. Their Buddhist chaplain introduced us after she learned of a short film I made about the only open-air cremation ceremony in the US. I spent the first few visits getting to know the couple; no cameras, no audio gear, just spending time talking in their home outside of Denver, CO. Learning about Shar's condition, the couple's wishes for his future, and about his extraordinary decision to have a conscious death.

Over the next twelve months I'd visit Shar and Cynthia weekly, sometimes at home, others in doctor visits, out on hikes, jaunts to the store, walks with their dog, and all the while observing as Shar's cognitive state slowly declined. When he chose the arduous process of not eating or drinking as his path to end his life, I initially wasn't sure how to respond. Through continued dialog with Shar and Cynthia I realized this decision was the most humane option they had available to them. In the US assisted suicide isn't available to anyone who is suffering from Alzheimer's disease because the disease isn't considered terminal. In making this decision I realized Shar would have the support he needed to go through with this process. The decision was sustained through a spiritual practice of Buddhism, supported by a team of hospice and palliative care doctors, and held through the process by his love for Cynthia.

My memories of making this film are mostly of the fifty weeks prior to Shar's death. Memories of relationships developed over these weekly visits, relationships with caregivers, family members, friends, doctors, hospice workers, social workers, and of course with Shar and Cynthia. Yet, in my editing nearly all of them are lost. I instead chose to focus primarily on the final two weeks of Shar's life. The moment he chose to stop eating and drinking. The reconstituting of these images, all in service of presenting a rationale and path towards his final breath. Creating an argument for conscious dying.

Perhaps this was because I had no idea when his death would come, or whether he might recognize me when I returned each time to film. Whether there would be a measurable decline in his cognitive ability, and how that would affect his ability to remember who I was? Whether the Alzheimer's would cause a sudden slip? And then, in those final two weeks, I wondered, how would things change as these forces were working there way from the inside, to the outside? A period when his body was trying to let it all go.

There's so much to be grateful for in this film, and in this experience I shared with Shar and Cynthia. Being brought into their lives, their visible courage in the face of so much difficulty, their seemingly endless supply of love, their sharing of this great tragedy and their tremendous strength, and most certainly their enthusiasm for the film itself. All of this allowed me to make the film I did. For that and for so much more, I'm forever in Shar and Cynthia's debt, forever grateful to have known them, to have the great fortune of sharing so much.

- Film Team -

Adam Sekuler, Director

A filmmaker, curator, educator and editor based in New Orleans. Screening in forums and film festivals throughout the US and internationally, his many alternative films strike a delicate balance between stylization and naturalism, creating a poetic and lyrical form of visual storytelling. He holds an MFA in Studio Arts from the University of Colorado, Boulder, is Founder and Programmer of Radar: Exchanges in Dance Film Frequencies, Associate Director of Zeitgeist Multi-disciplinary Arts Center and was Program Director for Northwest Film Forum (Seattle) for 8 years. His work has screened at International Film Festival Rotterdam, Locarno Film Festival, Film Society of Lincoln Center, Anthology Film Archives, Walker Art Center, Seattle Art Museum, Northwest Filmmakers Festival, Museum of the Moving Image, and dozens of other venues around the globe.

Darci Meyers, Producer

Founder of WisdomLife Productions, LLC. Darci has extensive experience working in hospice and end-of-life care in a variety of capacities since 2000. She worked as a chaplain, bereavement manager and director of hospice services in both Utah and Colorado. Darci also served as the founding director of Dechen Shying Spiritual Care Centre in southwest Ireland, a Buddhist-based palliative care center for terminally ill people and their families. She has been a Buddhist practitioner for over 20 years and currently works in private practice in spiritual direction in Golden, Colorado. <http://www.darcimeyers.com/>

- Credits -

Featuring
Shar Jones
Cynthia Vitale

Director: Adam Sekuler

Producer: Darci Meyers

Associate Producer: Bonnie Pollak
Ellen Schall
Frank Vitale
Jennifer Ballentine
Marianne Patrick Fugeman
Rachel Becker
Stephen Fisher

Assistance From: Kimberly Shively
Benjamin McQuillan
Samantha Pollak

Sound Mixing: Larry Blake

Color Correction: Bradley Greer