

OLI OTYA?

Life and Loss in Rural Uganda

A Journey into the Heart of Medicine



A DOCUMENTARY BY LUCY BRUELL

WORLD PREMIERE 26th Sedona International Film Festival (SIFF26)

February 22nd– March 1st 2020

Original Music by Samite, Directors of Photography Jarred Alterman and Ali Musoke,
Editors Jay Miracle and Pola Rapaport, Producers Jack Briggs and Lucy Bruell,
Executive Producers Christian J. and Eva Trefz

RUNTIME 75 min | **COUNTRY** USA, Uganda | **LANGUAGE** English, Luganda

OFFICIAL FILM WEBSITE oliotyafilm.com



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LOGLINE

Oli Otya? Life and Loss in Rural Uganda tells the story of a team of palliative care nurses from a small hospital and volunteer doctors from the U.S. who care for villagers with little access to medical treatment, where pain and suffering are often endured rather than relieved, and where people with life-threatening illnesses turn to traditional healers-herbalists, bone setters and witch doctors-hoping for a cure. The intimacy of medical care is a window into the lives of the villagers and the challenges of integrating Western medical practices with traditional beliefs.

SYNOPSIS

Oli Otya? Life and Loss in Rural Uganda tells the story of a team of nurses from a small hospital and volunteer doctors from the US who travel to the villages to care for people facing life -threatening illnesses. Naggalama, Uganda is less than 25 miles from Kampala, the capital, but it is, in many ways, a world away. Families depend on the harvest; children fill cans of water at the pump; and food simmers on open fires. With little access to healthcare, villagers frequently turn to traditional healers, herbalists and bone setters, hoping to ease their suffering. Nurse Prossy Nafula and her team bring medical supplies and liquid morphine to patients in the community. They are accompanied by Randi Diamond, a palliative care specialist at Weill Cornell Medical Center in New York, her husband, Howard Eison, an internist in private practice, and Jemella Raymore, a palliative care physician who trained with Randi. The intimacy of medical care is a window into the lives of the villagers and the challenges of integrating Western medical practices with traditional beliefs.

The team crowds into a hospital van to visit patients. Julius, a paralyzed man, is weaker since the team last saw him, but he believes that he will heal and leave his bed to feel the sun on his face. Robina, a woman with cervical cancer, has 11 children and worries what will happen when she is no longer there to care for them. A young man with Huntington's Disease, David, is cared for by his mother who believes his jerking motions and screams are caused by demons. And we meet Postiano, a man who decides not to sell his bicycle to pay for cancer treatment because his children would no longer have a way to get to school.

Moments of sadness are juxtaposed with hopeful ones. Asiya, a young girl who was bedridden, takes her first steps with a walker. Fatuma thanks the team with a gift of a chicken, and children play circle games outside the staff quarters. Despite the fragility of the patients' lives, there are moments to savor.

Evening reflection sessions with the U.S. team capture some of their difficulties in trying to adapt their ways to the culture of rural Uganda. "You are thinking too linearly," a Ugandan clinical officer tells them. "You have to think in stories, understand stories." Through the lens of their experience, ***Oli Otya?*** explores how faith, culture, and belief in traditional healers frame how people understand illness and how they care for each other when options are few. It is the story of a cross-cultural partnership in care, an example of global health on the ground level.





DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Oli Otya? is a journey into the heart of medicine, where compassion and comfort fill the gap left by the absence of accessible healthcare. The film illuminates a culture that is virtually invisible, a culture that relies on human kindness, spirituality, and tradition, and where suspicion of Western medicine is pervasive. Our focus is on the people of this community, about the ebb and flow of life touched by life threatening illnesses.

My approach to this project evolved over the two summers I spent in Naggalama. I arrived in July 2016 with Jarred Alterman, the DP, prepared to focus on the work of Drs. Randi Diamond and Howard Eison, a husband and wife team of palliative care physicians from New York. As I walked around the hospital grounds that first day, I saw that the world of the hospital- patients cared for by their families, women pumping water to wash bed linens, the nurses and staff- were characters as well, and it was this world that I wanted to convey in my film. In rural Uganda, I became a participant observer; the film reflects this immersive approach. ***Oli Otya?*** is told through the voices of the people we meet.

I was honored to work with Samite who composed the original soundtrack for the documentary. I first heard his music in Uganda. Samite is a Ugandan refugee now living with his wife on a farm in upstate New York. Samite is recognized internationally for his indigenous compositions and as the founder of Musicians for World Harmony which promotes music as a means of healing.

On the second trip, I traveled with my Ugandan crew to explore the world of traditional healers. We visited an herbalist and a bone setter and spoke with some of the villagers who sought care from them. The crew became my cultural guides, and as Luganda speakers, the families and health care workers we filmed welcomed them.

Oli Otya? is a story of collaboration across cultures. The patients and families who gave us permission to film have much to offer about how they care for one another as they experience illness, death and the limits chronic disease places on their lives. The documentary raises timely issues about our responsibilities to one another, access to healthcare, and relief from pain and suffering as a basic human right. The struggles are personal, but they resonate universally.

Ultimately, the essence of medicine, whether traditional or Western, is grounded in the personal connections between health workers- doctors, nurses and others on the team- and the people whose lives are in their care.

ABOUT THE TEAM

LUCY BRUELL: Director/Producer

Lucy Bruell, Producer/Director directed *Speaking with Music*, *Beyond the Practice Room*, and *On A Personal Note*, award-winning documentaries on young classical pianists that aired on PBS stations. *On A Personal Note* earned the Gold Medal for Excellence at the Park City Film Music Festival. A former producer/reporter for Newsweek Television, she directed segments in Egypt and Greece for China Central Television's series, *One World*. Her documentary short, *A Visit with the Big Apple Circus Clown Care Unit*, narrated by Paul Newman, received a Grand Award at the New York International Film and Video Festivals.

Lucy is a recipient of multiple grants including support from the National Institutes of Health, the 911 Children's Fund, and the Littauer Foundation. She received an M.S. in Journalism from Columbia University where she was the William Wood Research Fellow in Broadcast Journalism. She is an Instructor at the NYU School of Medicine in the Humanistic Aspects of Medical Education and is a frequent presenter on humanism at medical education conferences.



JARRED ALTERMAN: DP

Jarred Alterman is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and cinematographer. He was the DP on *Bisbee '17* which premiered at Sundance this year. His directorial debut, *Convento*, was featured at the Margaret Mead Film Festival and won a special jury prize at the Independent Film Festival in Boston. Alterman recently won best cinematography at the Tribeca Film Festival for *Contemporary Color*, a multi-camera concert doc featuring David Byrne, Dev Hynes, St Vincent and Ira Glass.

He is a cinematographer for the on-going public television series *Art:21*, filming artists who work in a variety of mediums. He recently worked with Laura Poitras and Field of Vision on *The Proposal*, a five-part documentary series in Mexico and Switzerland.



POLA RAPAPORT: Editor

Pola Rapaport is a writer, director, and editor of many award-winning films. Her work-in-progress is *CHAMPION: The Life and Death of Marieke Vervoort*, about a Belgian Paralympic athlete planning euthanasia. Recent work includes *Nadia Comaneci: The Gymnast and the Dictator*, *Hair: Let the Sun Shine In*, *Family Secret*, the story of the discovery of the filmmaker's secret Romanian brother, and *Blind Light*, a hybrid documentary/drama of a photographer's peak experience in an Italian villa, starring Edie Falco.

She is the editor of several feature documentaries, including *Museum Town*, which premiered in 2019 at SxSW and SxSW Winner, *A Woman Like Me*, about facing a terminal disease.



JAY MIRACLE: Editor

Jay Miracle, Editor, won a Primetime Emmy and the American Cinema Editors' Award for *Hearts of Darkness, A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*. He was an Editor/Writer on such projects as: *20 Feet from Stardom* and *Spirit Game*, and he was an additional Editor on the ITVS program: *Meet the Patels*. Jay co-directed and edited a feature on Norman Cousins: *The Healing Force*, and has written and/or edited several TV Specials, including *Diamonds* on New York diamond dealers, and *The Colonel Comes to Japan*, on Kentucky Fried Chicken in Japan, which won an Emmy for Best Documentary. Jay produced, directed and wrote *The Imposters*, the Discovery Channel documentary which was nominated for a Primetime Emmy. He co-produced and was the sound recordist on the feature documentary *The Gates of Heaven* with Errol Morris.



SAMITE MULONDO Composer

Samite is a world- renowned musician, performer and humanist. Now living on a farm in upstate New York, Samite is a Ugandan refugee who travels the world to spread the healing power of music. His eleventh CD, "Resilience," was released in September 2018. Samite is the subject of the documentary, *Song of the Refugee*, distributed by PBS in 1998. In 2009, the film *Taking Root: The Vision of Wangari Maathai*, which features his original score, premiered nationally on PBS. More recently Samite collaborated with the filmmakers of *Alive Inside*, an award-winning documentary on the power of music to awaken the memories locked away in patients with Alzheimer's disease and dementia.



UGANDA CREW

ALI MUSOKE: Director of Photography

Ali Musoke is a feature and documentary DP based in Kampala, Uganda. He was the DP and a Producer on *N.G.O. Nothing Going On* which won best feature film at the Mashariki African Film Festival and earned a special jury mention at the Cartage Film Festival in Tunisia. His documentary portfolio includes projects for HBO, National Geographic, Vitamin Angels, and Save the Children. He was also a camera assistant on Mira Nair's feature *Queen of Katwe*.



MOSES BWAYO: Sound Recordist

Moses attended Kampala Film School. He worked in the sound department of the Disney film *Queen of Katwe*, directed by Mira Nair, and was the sound mixer for *Kyenvu* (Kemiyondo Coutinou, 2017). In 2015 he produced the feature film *N.G.O. Nothing Going On* (Arnold Aganze, 2015). Moses was also a production coordinator for Peripheral Vision International.

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ADVISORS

ALICE HERB Esq

Alice Herb is an attorney, journalist, and medical ethicist. She has been Assistant Clinical Professor of Family Practice and Associate at Law, Division of Humanities in Medicine at State University of New York, Downstate Medical Center and a visiting professor at Sarah Lawrence College. Prior to her current role as attorney-ethicist, Herb was a producer, director, and writer for ABC News as well as independent news and cultural affairs cable programs from 1966 through 1988. After receiving her JD from NYU School of Law in 1955, she practiced law for eleven years

STEVEN FIELD, MD

Steven Field is a Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine in the NYU Grossman School of Medicine where he serves as Clinical Ethics Consultant at NYU Langone Health and is the Physician Leader for the Schwartz Rounds program. Dr. Field is also a facilitator for the School's Humanistic Aspects of Medical Education program. He received his B.A. in History from Yale University in 1973 and his M.D. from New York University School of Medicine four years later. Following Gastroenterology training at Mount Sinai Hospital, he returned to clinical practice and teaching at NYU, where he has remained, though retired from practice.

SUSAN SALZ, RN

Susan Salz is a registered nurse with certifications in hospice and palliative care nursing (CHPN) and case management (CCM) at NYU Langone Medical Center. Ms. Salz volunteered at Kisoro District Hospital in Uganda through Doctors for Global Health.

SABINE KRAYENBÜHL Editorial Consultant

Sabine Krayenbühl is an award-winning filmmaker and editor. Among her editorial credits are *My Architect*, *Mad Hot Ballroom*, *The Bridge*, and most recently, *The Price of Everything*. Krayenbühl earned a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and is a long-term member of New York Women in Film and Television.



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