

T H E R E ' S O N E C H I L D H E M U S T F I N D



"VISUAL POETRY"
SFFILM

THE RESCUE LIST

A FILM BY
ALYSSA FEDELE & ZACHARY FINK

A COLLECTIVE HUNCH PRODUCTION
THE RESCUE LIST DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **ZACHARY FINK** MUSIC BY **WILLIAM RYAN FRITCH** EDITED BY **ALYSSA FEDELE** AND **DAVIS COOMBE**
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **JOHN DEGRAFT SAM** CONSULTING PRODUCER **SARA DOSA** CO-PRODUCER **ALISON GREENBERG MILLICE** CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **JOHN CAULKINS**
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER **STEVE JAMES** PRODUCED BY **DAVIS COOMBE** EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS FOR AMERICAN DOCUMENTARY - POV **JUSTINE NAGAN** AND **CHRIS WHITE**
PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY **ALYSSA FEDELE** AND **ZACHARY FINK**



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THE RESCUE LIST

EMMY® AWARD WINNER OUTSTANDING SOCIAL ISSUE DOCUMENTARY

PRESS
KIT



Directed By
Alyssa Fedele & Zachary Fink

79 min - USA - 2020

Subtitled in English (Twi, Fante, Effutu, Ewe, Ada, Ga)

WEB

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OFFICIAL SELECTION

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Big Sky Documentary Film Festival
Greater Farmington Film Festival
Sebastopol Documentary Film Festival
Ashland Independent Film Festival

AWARDS

Outstanding Social Issue Documentary - 2021 News & Documentary Emmy Awards
Best Documentary Award - BendFilm Festival
Richard D. Propes Social Impact Award - Heartland International Film Festival
James Blue Award - Ashland Independent Film Festival

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LOGLINE

In a hidden safehouse in Ghana, social workers help two children recover from a childhood enslaved to fishermen. But their story takes an unexpected turn when their rescuer embarks on another rescue mission and asks the children for help.

SYNOPSIS

In a hidden safe-house in Ghana, two children recover from a childhood spent enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta. Their story takes an unexpected turn when their rescuer embarks on another rescue mission and asks the children for help. This Emmy Award–winning documentary depicts a moving story of friendship and courage that transcends the trope of victimhood, exploring what it means to love and to survive.

STORY

In a hidden safehouse in the Ghanaian forest, social workers help two children recover from a childhood enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta - the largest man-made lake on Earth. But their story takes an unexpected turn when their rescuer embarks on another rescue mission and asks the children for help.

Haunted by the memory of his friend who disappeared on the lake, twelve year old Edem is reluctant to talk about his experience. Meanwhile, seventeen year old Peter is burdened by a sense of responsibility to help his best friend, who is still enslaved to their master on the lake. When Kwame, their rescuer, announces that his team is setting off on another rescue mission and needs the children's help, Peter seizes the opportunity, setting in motion a journey that will change the boys' lives forever.

The Rescue List charts the unfolding drama of these rescue operations alongside a stirring portrait of the boys' recoveries as they prepare to return to their families. The film depicts a moving story of friendship and courage that transcends the trope of victimhood, exploring what it means to love and to survive.



FILMMAKER STATEMENT

There are more than 45 million people living in modern slavery worldwide today, including over 18,000 children enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta in Ghana - where our film takes place. Despite its prevalence, the personal stories of those affected by modern slavery mostly go untold.

THE RESCUE LIST follows two young survivors of modern slavery, Peter and Edem, as they work to heal from their trauma and reunite with their families. For Peter, the path to recovery includes aiding in the rescue of his best friend who is still enslaved on the lake, while Edem grapples with grief surrounding the disappearance of his best friend. Helping these boys is former child slave turned rescuer, Kwame Addo, and a team of social workers at a rehabilitation shelter where the boys attend school and receive therapy along with 50 other rescued children.

Our goal as filmmakers was to shine a light on modern slavery in a way that connected audiences to the humanity and dignity of the film's participants, rather than dwelling in their suffering. We also wanted to empower the children in our film by telling the story from their perspectives, but it was of critical importance to us that their recoveries be paramount. We decided to make the film observationally, intimately portraying our protagonists' day-to-day lives in recovery, rather than focusing on their past. Edem's opening monologue grew out of our observational approach; his powerful testimony was a direct result of completing the shelter's therapy program, which we depicted in the film, and it set the stage for the observational story that unfolds. By bearing witness to their daily lives, we sought to provide the children with a forum to tell their own stories through their words and actions, as and when they were ready. This observational process of discovery revealed facets of the story we did not anticipate, for example, the deep bonds of friendship formed by the children on the lake. By following the action, authentic themes emerged: friendship, belonging, survival. These themes are human universals: behaviors that we all share and that connect us. We believe that character-driven stories humanize issues of global importance, moving audiences through the power of this universal connection.

Our observational approach is guided by our backgrounds in ethnographic filmmaking and our commitment to cross-cultural understanding. As outsiders to this community, we endeavored to understand the complexity of this human rights issue from a culturally relative point of view and to reflect that in the film by prioritizing our participants' lived experiences. It was not our intention to villainize anyone, but rather to reveal the circumstances that create an environment in which children are exploited. At the same time, it was important for us to show the hope and solutions that survivors and social workers are enacting through their rescue and rehabilitation work.

We worked as a small three person team, embedded in the community, and immersed in our participants' daily lives. Collaboration, reciprocity, and trust lay at the heart of our process. Our local associate producer, John Degraft Sam, was a key part of this intimate team. He grew up in the community where the rescue team is based and, in addition to translating for us, he helped us understand the culture and connect to the participants in our film. This allowed us to build strong relationships with our participants and create a film grounded in respect and understanding. By



taking this approach, we witnessed a moving story of friendship, courage, and belonging that rises above the trope of victimhood, and shows us what it truly means to love and survive.

THE RESCUE LIST had its national broadcast debut on the PBS documentary series POV on March 23, 2020. It aired on ARTE in France and Germany, and in many other countries internationally. We have also launched an extensive outreach campaign for education and awareness in the US, including lesson plans developed in partnership with PBS, to bring the film into middle and highschool classrooms. In Ghana, the film is being screened in communities targeted by traffickers. Each screening enables the rescue team to add more names to their rescue list.

- Alyssa Fedele & Zachary Fink, Co-Directors, The Rescue List

CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

KWAME

Kwame, a commanding and charismatic man in his thirties, surveys the horizon from the bow of a large wooden canoe, navigating the vast waters of Ghana's Lake Volta – the largest man-made lake on Earth. He directs the captain past a swath of ancient trees rising from the lake's surface, and towards a small canoe paddled by two young boys. As they draw near, Kwame begins his practiced and patient line of investigation: *Where are your parents? Do you go to school? Would you feel safer if I took you away from here?* Kwame is part of a local team dedicated to rescuing and rehabilitating children who have been trafficked and enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta. As the story progresses from rescue operation to rehabilitation shelter, Kwame reveals his deeply personal connection to this work.

PETER

Peter, a kind and courageous seventeen year old, joins his new friends at the shelter to do laundry by hand in five-gallon buckets. As they wash and chat, Peter says he's happy to be rescued, but admits he is worried about his friends who are still enslaved on the lake, especially his best friend Teye. "I want the rescuers to go back and bring him here," Peter says. When their rescuer, Kwame, shows up at the shelter to ask the children for the names of other enslaved children, Peter seizes the opportunity, setting in motion a journey that changes the boys' lives forever.

EDEM

In the shelter's classroom, children eagerly recite their ABCs; all except one. Edem, chin tucked and face solemn, is too distracted to participate. Despite being rescued from slavery months earlier, Edem is overcome with grief. For years, Edem worked with another enslaved child who became his protector and best friend. But one day, the child disappeared. Without him, Edem was terrified and heartbroken. Social workers believe that Edem's shyness and lack of focus in school are signs that he is wrestling deeply with the disappearance of his friend. As they coax him to reveal the truth of his friend's fate, they also search for a way for Edem to come to terms with this trauma in order to heal and move forward - which he must do in order to be reunited with his mother.



FILMMAKER BIOS

ALYSSA FEDELE – DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, EDITOR

Alyssa Fedele is an Emmy Award–winning documentary filmmaker and anthropologist based in San Francisco. She co-directed and edited *The Rescue List*, an observational documentary film that follows two children who were trafficked into modern slavery on Lake Volta in Ghana. *The Rescue List* won the 2021 Emmy Award for Outstanding Social Issue Documentary, Best Documentary at Bend Film Festival, the Social Impact Award at Heartland International Film Festival, and the James Blue Award at Ashland Independent Film Festival. *The Rescue List* premiered on PBS's series POV in 2020. It was supported by SFFILM's Documentary Film Fund and the FilmHouse Residency Program, and screened at Full Frame, DOC NYC, and Telluride Mountain Film.

Alyssa produced and edited *Steve James'* short documentary film, *The Ride of Their Lives*, for Amazon's documentary series, *The New Yorker Presents*. The film follows two children who ride bulls in youth rodeo competitions. It premiered at Sundance and screened at IDFA. Alyssa's work has appeared on National Geographic Channel, PBS, HBO, and ARTE. Alyssa has an MA in visual anthropology from the University of Manchester. Her background in ethnographic filmmaking gives her a unique skill-set to connect with subjects and build cross-cultural understanding in her films.

ZACHARY FINK – DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, DP

Zachary is an Emmy Award–winning director and cinematographer. He shot and co-directed *The Rescue List*, the story of three boys escape from modern slavery in Ghana. The film was acquired and broadcast by PBS's acclaimed series POV in March of 2020 and won an Emmy Award for Outstanding Social Issue Documentary in 2021.

He recently spent a month in Antarctica where he field-directed and lensed a series for PBS's NOVA called Polar Extremes about life and science at McMurdo Station. Prior to that, he shot *State of Pride*, a 2019 YouTube Original documentary in which activist Raymond Braun, along with Academy Award winning directors Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman, explore the LGBT rights movement 50 years after Stonewall. In 2016, Zachary developed, produced, and shot *The Ride of Their Lives*, a short documentary film directed by *Steve James* about children who compete in youth bull riding rodeos. The film is featured in Amazon Studio's documentary series, *The New Yorker Presents* and premiered at Sundance.

His masters degree in cultural anthropology gives him a unique ability to understand and connect with diverse audiences and communities. And his experience directing large teams while managing extensive projects means that he always has the big picture in mind. Whether he's hanging out of a helicopter over the Pacific ocean, trekking with a caving team through a Mexican cloud forest, bunking with tuna fishermen on a commercial longliner, or tracking reindeer migration with indigenous Arctic herdsman, Zachary follows the story, manages ever-changing logistics, crafts beautiful images, and makes friends along the way. Through it all, he sees story and structure, breaking complex narratives down to manageable productions and beautiful imagery. The results are compelling human stories told in the most delightful way.



DAVIS COOMBE – PRODUCER, EDITOR

Davis Coombe is an award winning editor, producer, and writer. His two most recent films, *Casting JonBenet* and *Chasing Coral* premiered at Sundance in 2017, where *Chasing Coral* won the audience award for best documentary. Both films were acquired by NETFLIX. Davis produced and edited *Saving Face*, which won the Oscar for Best Short Documentary in 2012. He also edited *Chasing Ice*, which premiered at Sundance in 2012 and was shortlisted for an Academy award. He co-produced, co-wrote, and edited *Being Evel*, which premiered at Sundance and broadcast on History Channel. Davis co-wrote and edited *Keep On Keepin' On* and *Beyond the Brick: A Lego Brickumentary*, both films premiered at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival. In 2013 he won two national Emmys for Editing and Best Documentary at the News and Documentary Emmys. In 2009 he shot, edited and produced *The Last Campaign of Governor Booth Gardner* which was nominated for an Academy Award and broadcast on HBO. Coombe also edited *Iron Ladies of Liberia* (Toronto Film Festival 2007, Winner AFI-Dallas, Independent Lens, BBC), *They Killed Sister Dorothy* (Winner Audience Award and Grand Jury Prize at SXSW 2008, HBO, shortlisted for an Academy Award).

WILLIAM RYAN FRITCH - COMPOSER

William Ryan Fritch is a composer, multi-instrumentalist and producer based in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has scored and contributed music to numerous award-winning documentary and narrative films; including recently the 2016 Academy Award nominated documentary "4.1 Miles." His music has been featured in films, shows and miniseries for Netflix, HBO, Amazon, AMC, CBS, IFC, Showtime, Discovery, and PBS as well as for numerous dance and theatre productions, art installations and in national ad campaigns and PSA's. In addition to his commissioned multimedia work, he has an active recording career, releasing more than 30 albums of his unique amalgam of Folk, Contemporary Classical, and Experimental music. His distinct, organic sound is the product of his diverse talents as an instrumentalist and recordist, utilizing a vast and varied arsenal of live, acoustic instrumentation to fully realize his compositions and scores as a solo endeavor.

STEVE JAMES – EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Steve James produced and directed *Hoop Dreams*, winner of every major critics prize including a Peabody and Robert F. Kennedy Award. Other award-winning films include *Stevie*, winner of the IDFA Grand Jury Prize and the Yamagata Mayor's Prize, among others; the Independent Documentary Association Award-winning miniseries *The New Americans*; Tribeca Grand Prize winner *The War Tapes*, which James produced and edited; *At the Death House Door*, co-directed with Peter Gilbert, and winner of numerous festival awards; *No Crossover: The Trial of Allen Iverson* for ESPN's Peabody winning "30 for 30" series; and *The Interrupters*, which won an Emmy, Independent Spirit Award, and the DuPont Columbia Journalism Award, among many others. James recent documentary on film critic Roger Ebert, *Life Itself*, premiered to critical acclaim at Sundance and was named the best documentary of the year by over a dozen critics associations, and won the Rotten Tomatoes Golden Apple Award as the best reviewed documentary of 2014. It also won the best documentary award from the Critic's Choice Awards, The National Board of Review, and The Producers Guild of America. James' most recent documentary *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail* was nominated for a 2018 Academy Award for best feature documentary.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

MODERN SLAVERY

Despite the fact that slavery was abolished by most countries 150 years ago, there are more than 45 million people trapped in modern slavery today. One in four of these is a child. *Modern slavery is a human rights violation that is defined as the recruitment, movement, harboring or receiving of children, women or men through the use of force, coercion, abuse of vulnerability, deception or other means for the purpose of exploitation.* Farming, fishing, mining, domestic servitude, sex work, manual labor, and factory work are among the most prevalent forms of modern slavery.

In Ghana, where *The Rescue List* takes place, there are 100,000 people living in modern slavery. Of these, 18,000 are children enslaved to fishermen on Lake Volta. Many of the children are trafficked into modern slavery by families living in extreme poverty who believe they are sending their children to a better life.

LAKE VOLTA

In 1965, shortly after Ghana's independence from Great Britain, the World Bank, the UK, and the United States (including the American corporations Kaiser Aluminum and Reynolds Aluminum) funded the construction of the Akosombo Hydroelectric Dam on the Volta River in Ghana. The main goal of the dam was to power the aluminum industry and spur economic growth. The dam created Lake Volta. Spanning 3,000 square miles in the central region of Ghana, Lake Volta is the largest man-made lake on Earth.

While the Akosombo Hydroelectric Dam Project was sold as "the largest single investment in the economic plans of Ghana," the flooding of the Volta River Basin forced the relocation of 80,000 people from 700 villages. This loss of land resulted in the dismantling of the region's primary economic practices from riparian fishing and agriculture.

Meanwhile, coastal fishermen began moving inland to the lake to fish for tilapia, establishing a direct connection between southern seaside communities and remote villages forming on the shores of Lake Volta. It is through these connections that traffickers now move children from seaside towns, inland to the lake, where they are sold to fishermen for slave labor.

Traffickers target economically disadvantaged families, often single mothers struggling to meet their family's basic needs, and coerce them to send their children to the lake where they say they will receive food and clothing, and attend school in exchange for helping out with fishing activities. The traffickers offer a small sum of money in exchange for the child, typically around \$20 US dollars. They are often deceptive about how long the child will be away, promising that the child will return home in a few month's time.

In fact, these children are separated from their families and enslaved indefinitely on the lake, far from their hometowns, with no means of communication or escape. They are fed and clothed minimally, withheld from school, and forced to work long days on fishing boats, setting and pulling in nets. Many children endure physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. It is in this socio-political context that *The Rescue List* is set.



CREDITS (abbreviated)

directors

ALYSSA FEDELE
ZACHARY FINK

producers

ALYSSA FEDELE
ZACHARY FINK
DAVIS COOMBE

executive producer

STEVE JAMES

co-executive producer

JOHN CAULKINS

cinematographer

ZACHARY FINK

editors

ALYSSA FEDELE
DAVIS COOMBE

composer

WILLIAM RYAN FRITCH

co-producer

ALISON GREENBERG MILLICE

consulting producer

SARA DOSA

associate producer

JOHN DEGRAFT SAM

field sound recording

ALYSSA FEDELE

additional sound recording

PATRICK KOLLMAN

fixer and field translator

JOHN DEGRAFT SAM

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BEN ZWEIG

assistant editor

SARAH CANNON

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ZACHARY FINK
DAVE KRAHLING

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MILKHAUS

colorist

DAVE KRAHLING

title

CHAD HERSCHBERGER

compositing and graphics

JAMES DURÉE

post coordinator

CATHY TREKLOFF

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SOUNDSPACE STUDIO

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sound designer and mixer

MATTHEW POLIS