

MICHAEL AND DAMIAN

Directed by Gabe Van Lelyveld



USA, 2025, English
Running time: 85 minutes

Press Contact and Community Screenings:

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LOGLINE

A passionate advocate for recovery attempts to help an aspiring spiritual healer dealing with addiction and the stresses of homelessness, while also confronting the buried traumas of his own past.

SYNOPSIS

Michael is a passionate advocate for recovery fueled by decades of lived experience. Damian is an aspiring comic, musician, and spiritual healer battling addiction and the stresses of homelessness. Together, they struggle to overcome their demons and live lives of creativity, compassion and connection. Filmed over four years, this extremely intimate documentary aims to change the way audiences view those struggling with substance use disorder, mental health challenges, and homelessness. Character-driven and radically compassionate, it is a story of perseverance and the will to find enduring happiness despite one's circumstances.

You could say that Michael and Damian were dealt unfortunate hands in life. Michael experienced physical and emotional abuse at the boys home where he was raised from infancy to age 14. By 17 he was illiterate and living in an abandoned house in Van Nuys, California. Damian, a sensitive child, was subjected to years of neglect by his mother. At 17 he left home, and at 19 he lost his father to suicide.

Damian is not just surviving while living in a small tent year-round, he does tarot readings on the street, standup comedy and music at Open Mic nights, as well as writes poetry for a local independent arts and culture quarterly. Michael utilizes his decades of experience struggling with substance use disorder and homelessness to help those most in need. The longer Michael tries to help Damian the better he understands his psychological and emotional strengths as well as challenges. Damian comes to learn through Michael's actions that Michael truly cares about him, but as Damian becomes increasingly enmeshed in the criminal justice system, he pushes back against Michael's advice to submit to a court-ordered regime of jail time, psychological evaluations and medication.

Will Damian break under the enormous stress of his situation, or will he find his way into stability and healing? Will he be able to share his talents as a spiritual healer with the world, or will he remain stuck in a downward cycle of poverty, addiction, and mental health challenges. Will Michael continue to believe in his ability to help others? Can he strike the right balance between giving as generously as his heart desires, and not taking on too much of other people's pain and suffering.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Before ever picking up my camera, I spent months at the homeless encampment where Damian was living and Michael was doing outreach work. I got to know the folks living there, the social workers who came out almost daily, as well as some of the dynamics at play in the community. Burned by media in the past, some of the campers were distrustful. Some were outright hostile. Slowly, I earned their trust, and in doing so was able to capture footage that I believe represents something authentic about their lives, and about homelessness, substance use disorder, and related issues in the area.

As much as possible, I have chosen to let the subjects and situations in the film speak for themselves. The camerawork and editing prioritize spatial and temporal immersion over representation. Shot primarily on an iPhone 12 Pro Max, the film has a raw and extremely intimate quality to it. I want viewers to feel they have walked for a time in Michael and Damian's shoes.

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



Gabe Van Lelyveld – Co-writer/Director/DP/Producer

Gabe Van Lelyveld is a visual storyteller working primarily in documentary and commercial film. His 2013 Narrative feature, *Mandarose*, which he co-wrote, directed, edited and produced, screened at six film festivals in the U.S. and abroad, and won the Audience Choice Award for Best Narrative Feature at the NW Filmmaker’s Festival that year. He is also the Co-writer and Editor of *Dark and Tender* (2024), an award-winning short documentary that has screened at six film festivals.

Van Lelyveld’s film projects focus on interpersonal relationships, social justice, resilience, and service. He finds participants wrestling with these and other themes, and attempts to tell their stories in an unobtrusive, observational style that allows audiences space for self-reflection and drawing their own conclusions. He resides in Port Townsend, Washington, where he owns and operates [Whaleheart Productions](#), a video production company serving the greater Olympic Peninsula.

Olivier Matthon – Co-writer/Editor/Additional Camera

Olivier Matthon is a commercial mushroom picker and filmmaker who graduated with a B.A. in Ethnography, Political Ecology, and Nonfiction Writing from the Evergreen State College. He is the director, cinematographer, and editor of the feature-length documentary [Up on the Mountain](#).

His work has been published by Pioneers Press, the UTNE Reader, and High Country News Magazine, and exhibited at the Museum of Ethnography of Neuchâtel, Switzerland. Originally from Québec, he now lives in the Pacific Northwest.



Jessica Plumb – Story Consultant/Additional Camera

Jessica Plumb is an award-winning filmmaker and writer, and founder of Plumb Productions, a multi-media storytelling company specializing in films on the environment, people and place. She is the Producer and Co-Director of *Return of the River*, a feature documentary about the restoration of the Elwha River, recognized with over a dozen festival awards, including “Best Storytelling” by the International Wildlife Film Festival, and multiple awards by Jackson Wild.

She has produced and directed short films for HHMI Tangled Bank Studios, Nat Geo Learning, the Stanford Program on Water, Health & Development, the Clean Energy Transition Institute, and numerous non-profit institutions. For more, visit plumbproductions.com.



PROTAGONIST BIOGRAPHIES



Michael McCutcheon

Michael's traumas came early, and didn't stop until well into his adulthood. By age seven, he was already experimenting with different ways to alter his consciousness, including sniffing glue. At 14 he was sent against his will to a mental hospital where he was subjected to electroshock treatment. His first suicide attempt came at 16.

Eventually, Michael found his way into recovery, and began doing outreach work in Los Angeles as a way to make meaning out of the suffering he had endured. Things were going well, but when he relapsed he was swiftly ostracized from his community, causing him to move to Washington state, and start all over again. In 2025, he founded [Reach Out](#), a non-profit dedicated to serving those most in need. We meet Michael as he continues the important work of helping others find their way into recovery even though he is sometimes overwhelmed by their pain and suffering.

Damian A. Eldritch

Damian, a sensitive child, was subjected to years of neglect by his mother. At age 17 he left home, and at 19 he lost his father to suicide.

Warm, charismatic, and always ready to crack a joke, but also depressed from past traumas and current circumstances, Damian seeks stability, community and a chance to make a living following his passions, namely standup comedy, music, and performing tarot readings for those in need of spiritual guidance. We meet Damian one year after becoming unhoused, and just three months after a painful breakup.



TRAILER

<https://vimeo.com/1101371666?share=copy#t=0>

CREDITS

With

Michael McCutcheon
Damian A. Eldritch

Executive Producer

D.D. Wigley

Directed and Produced by

Gabe Van Lelyveld

Co-written by

Gabe Van Lelyveld
Olivier Matthon

Edited by

Olivier Matthon

Story Consultant

Jessica Plumb

Director of Photography

Gabe Van Lelyveld

Additional Camera

Olivier Matthon
Jessica Plumb
Dennis Daneau

Original Score by

Eric Phillips

Pedal Steel Guitar played by

Jonny Lam

Re-recording Mixer

Paul Eric Miller

Sound Designer

Mike McAuliffe

Audio Services Manager

Wendi Wills

Audio Post Production provided by

Bad Animals Seattle

Graphic Design

Sarah Peller, Fruition Design

Advisory Panel

Jon Davies
Jaymie Fowler
Eden Blooms

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