

Lift the Mask

PORTRAITS OF LIFE WITH MENTAL ILLNESS

Information about the Quell Foundation and documentary, *Lift the Mask*

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THE FILM AND ITS GOALS

Our documentary is a primary way The Foundation is opening up the conversation and raising awareness about mental health. Will you join the movement?



2018 SCREENING AT NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

The film & its goals

See our trailer online here:
vimeopro.com/user12034463/lift-the-mask-trailer

Through vivid storytelling and direct testimony, *Lift the Mask* takes us into the lives of a diverse group of people living with mental illness and the people who provide much of their care.

The film focuses on the lived experiences of each subject, some of whom are "lifting the mask" by telling their stories publicly for the first time. Stories like these are so often hidden due to the social stigma that labels people as "crazy" or "scary," and the film intends to open up and normalize a dialog about mental health.

The stories reveal systemic problems facing people who struggle with mental health. They discuss how the criminal justice system is ill-prepared and under-resourced to help those who end up in court or incarcerated primarily due to mental illness. They tell of the difficulty of finding and maintaining medications that work and getting access to proper and timely treatment, often due to a severe shortage of mental health providers. They tell of how family and friends struggled to understand and finally came to understand them.

As you begin to learn more about this film and its goals, consider the following:

- The suicide rate in the U.S. increased by over 28 percent in the past two decades, and today it is the second leading cause of death for Americans 13 to 34 years old.
- Since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, the rate has risen by 16 percent.¹
- From 2007 to 2015 alone, suicide rates *doubled* among teen girls (CDC report here: www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6630a6.htm).
- In the U.S. there are currently 5,042 designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas; that is 77 percent of all counties in the country.²
- Only 25 percent of people living with mental health issues feel like others are caring or sympathetic about their condition.³

1. (CDC, 2018)

2. (Bureau of Health Workforce, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, December 2017)

3. (Disparities in Health Care Utilization and Functional Limitations Among Adults With Serious Psychological Distress, 2006–2014 Judith Weissman, David Russell, Melanie Jay, Jeannette M. Beasley, Dolores Malaspina, and Cheryl Pegus Psychiatric Services 2017;68:7, 653–659)



DIRECTOR MARC D'AGOSTINO AND CINEMA-
TOGRAPHER CLAY HERETH LINE UP A SHOT

Director's Note

As we began making *Lift the Mask*, it struck me that it's rare in popular film to see those of us who struggle with mental health be the agents of our own stories. Mental illness is a well-worn subject in films, both in fiction and documentary, and while there are many nuanced portrayals of it, it is often portrayed in one of four ways:

1. It is a dark affliction creating, as Dennis in our film describes, "the scary bad guys in psych units in horror movies," as in *The Silence of the Lambs*.
2. It is the source of misunderstood but attractive individuality in the minds of iconoclastic heroes fighting an oppressive regime of the status quo, as in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*.
3. It is the direct result of trauma, with resulting behaviors having some metaphorical or Freudian logic such that the illness may be cured by the proper analysis of its roots and a change in behavior by the hero, as in *Good Will Hunting*.
4. It is a sad demise — it's faded beauty, lost wealth or tragically wasted potential as in *Grey Gardens*.

Director's Note

As well-made as those Oscar-winning films may be (I chose movies I love), these dominant representations mythologize in ways that make for satisfying stories but can contribute to stigmatization, minimization, and misunderstanding of the real nature of mental illness. Depression and many other mental struggles are often physiological, with no traumatic causes; mania and hallucination do not always reveal the hidden truth or artistic genius; and almost never does a mentally ill person become a diabolical killer.

Michaela developed PTSD as a result of a traumatic experience; Dennis was diagnosed with OCD before he was ten, with no apparent cause; Kevin's depression was triggered by the trauma he experienced with his son's mental illness. ADHD seems to run in families, as does alcoholism and many cases of depression. The causes can sometimes be pinned to experience; many other times, the affliction is likely physiological, but no matter what the origin, no one asked to suffer from mental anguish. Just as no one asked for cancer or Parkinson's disease, no one volunteered to be ostracized, shunned, shamed and feared because of their mental health.

Roger Ebert said, "The movies are like a machine that generates empathy." We agree and hope our documentary lives up to that standard. This film is a record of the way hopelessness, terror and joy manifest on the face of someone who has been, almost literally, through hell. It captures the way love and determination appear on the face of a mother fighting for her kid's life. It reveals the truth by recording the look of a person who grinds out every day in anguish, struggling to see the slim possibility that they might come to know the peace that many others may consider banal, everyday life.

Putting those moments on screen for audiences is why we made *Lift the Mask*. We see it as one of the best tools we have to destigmatize mental health, and we hope you agree.



MARC D'AGOSTINO
DIRECTOR

Testimonials

"I attended the Life the Mask viewing and discussion last night and I was so moved that I felt compelled to reach out to you.

"I could not feel more confident in my major and career path than I do now after viewing Kevin Lynch's film. I would like to thank you for not just showing poise and knowledge when you spoke, but for exuding passion. The stories in the film and the candid anecdotes from our guest panel have inspired me beyond words. Last night, I believe, was the most influential educational experience I've had here at Penn State.

"Thank you, the entire HPA department, and Kevin Lynch and his colleagues for inspiring me and the rest of the next generation of health care professionals to do good. To be good. To lift the mask. It's up to us now to create a world where no health topic is too taboo to talk about. We're all humans, and we must embrace every single beautiful, ugly, complicated, mundane aspect of our humanity."

PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY 4/11

Natalie Crosson

"Each story was powerful and compelling, and allowed you to see their illnesses in a very different light. After the movie, there was a panel with some of the movie participants. It was incredible to see these people in person. I felt like I knew them so well. I found the movie to be a great educational tool, and I hope that it reaches many, many people and accomplishes what it is intended to, lifting the mask and assumptions of mental illness."

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN 4/2

Anonymous Student

Featured Subjects

The subjects "lift their masks" to reveal their inner, hidden experiences and open themselves up to the world by telling in raw detail the day-to-day reality of living with mental illness.



A portrait of a young man with dark, wavy hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt under a dark grey cardigan. He is looking slightly upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression, his hands clasped together in front of him. The background is a dark, textured grey. To the left of the portrait is a solid dark blue vertical bar.

Abdul

Abdul, a college student from Yemen, diagnosed with ADHD, navigates the cultural forces both at home and in the U.S. that had discouraged him from acknowledging his behavioral health and the help needed to manage his condition.



Carrah

A successful executive with depression and anxiety, partially resulting from family trauma, Carrah relates why she has chosen to open up to her colleagues.



Claire

Diagnosed with bipolar disorder as a young teen living with psychosis and mixed episodes, Claire tells her story of being one of the youngest people to receive modern electroconvulsive therapy as a treatment.

Dennis

Dennis and his mom Liz tell the story of managing Dennis' multiple diagnoses since he was a very young child, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, and schizoaffective disorder.



Kevin

Founder, president, and CEO of The Quell Foundation, tells his story of being diagnosed with clinical depression after his son spent eight years incarcerated, six of which were in solitary confinement.

Michaela

A newly graduated psychiatric nurse practitioner, suffered from PTSD for the last decade due to a traumatic experience in her early teens.

About us

We are The Quell Foundation, and by telling one story at a time, we can create a paradigm shift around the way to talk about our mental health.



THE QUELL FOUNDATION + MOD STAFF 2018



QUELL FOUNDER KEVIN LYNCH

Our mission

The Quell Foundation's mission is to reduce the number of suicides, overdoses, and incarcerations of people with mental illness. We accomplish this by:

- Encouraging people to share their stories of living with mental illness
- Increasing access to mental health services
- Providing future mental health care professionals with scholarships

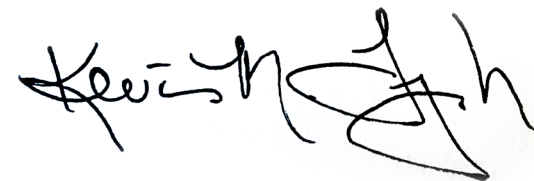
We promote open, judgment-free dialogue so we can shatter the stigma and normalize the conversation around mental health, together.

CEO's Note

The Quell Foundation was created essentially from a dare, an unknowing challenge from my son. After experiencing limited access, poor treatment, subpar handoff protocols, and near death experience, He said, "Dad, you are never going to be able to do anything about this. People don't care about people like you and me."

Since 2015, time and time again I have witnessed people from every socioeconomic class, every age group, and gender, resoundingly refute what Nicholas had believed to be true. People are indeed ready to lift the mask and remove the stigma on mental health, and The Quell Foundation is prepared to take the lead. We have the ability to reduce the number of suicides, overdoses, and the incarceration of people who live daily with the struggles that come with have a mental health illness.

Join us in normalizing the conversation. The task is immense, but the solution is simple: "Lift the Mask."

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Lynch", with a stylized flourish at the end.

KEVIN M. LYNCH
PRESIDENT/CEO

Join the
movement.
Screen
the film.

Be a part of the paradigm shift and promote open, judgement-free dialogue to remove the stigma and normalize the conversation around mental health.

Next Steps

1. Fill out the feasibility questionnaire below and a member of The Quell Foundation staff will be in touch with you shortly: <http://bit.ly/LTMFeasibilitySurvey>
2. Connect with The Quell Foundation on social media to stay up-to-date with new and upcoming information regarding the film.
 - Twitter: @quellfoundation
 - Facebook: @TheQuellFoundation
 - Instagram: quellfoundation
 - LinkedIn: [linkedin.com/company/the-quell-foundation/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/the-quell-foundation/)
3. Reach out to Executive Director Renee Wilk at rwilk@thequellfoundation.org if you have any pressing questions or concerns.