

Core Issue Productions Presents



*"A brutally honest film of courage and loyalty above and beyond the call of duty."
-Hal Donahue, Huffington Post*

BEST OF FEST Award, Alexandria Film Festival 2017

THE WEIGHT OF HONOR

A documentary by Stephanie Seldin Howard

Release Date: November 2017

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Website: <http://www.theweightofhonormovie.com>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/WeightOfHonorDocumentary>

Twitter: @coreissuefilms

Instagram: @coreissuefilms

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtldHsqjXRJwJbdsysUnw9A>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1E0ycjT-7KM&t=6s>

Technical Details:

Picture Format: Color

Aspect Ratio: 1.78 (16x9 Video)

Shooting Format: HDV
Exhibition Format: DCP, Sony HDCAM
Screener Format: Secure Online Screener
Running Time: 56 minutes

FESTIVALS and SCREENINGS

August, 2020

National Association of State Workforce Agencies (virtual)

March, 2020

Whittier College, CA

November, 2019

National War College, DC

University of Maryland (educational license)

Stockton University, NJ (educational license)

Park University, MO

Missouri State University

University of Pittsburgh

October, 2019

University of Washington (educational license)

July, 2019

California Women's Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA (winner, Best Documentary)

May, 2019

Caregivers on the Homefront, Independence, MO

February, 2019

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX (educational license)

January, 2019

Caregivers on the Homefront, Kansas City, CA

November, 2018

MITRE Corporation, Alexandria, VA

National Infantry Museum (educational license)

Rocky Mountain Women's Film Festival, Colorado Springs, CO

October, 2018

Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY (educational license)

Rosalynn Carter Annual Caregiver Summit, Americus, GA

September, 2018

GI Film Festival, San Diego, CA

August, 2018

Atlas Corporation, Washington, DC

April 2018

Beyond the Lens Film Festival, Los Angeles, CA

March 2018

Army Heritage Center, Carlisle, PA (educational license)

December 2017

San Francisco Veterans' Film Festival, San Francisco, CA

November 2017

Kansas International Film Festival, Overland Park, KS

Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, Simi Valley, CA

Alexandria Film Festival, Alexandria, VA (winner, Best of Fest)

University of Nebraska, Omaha NE (educational license)

National Council of Jewish Women Omaha, NE

July 2017

Disabled American Veterans National Convention, New Orleans, LA

San Antonio Film Festival, San Antonio, TX (winner, Audience Award)

REVIEWS

"An impressive film depicting the real world struggles and challenges faced by post 9/11 veterans and their caregivers as they adjust to a new normal life post deployment with visible and invisible wounds."

Leisa Easom, PhD, RN, Pope Eminent Scholar, Executive Director of the [Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving at Georgia Southwestern State University](#).

*"It's a difficult, yet important, film to watch as **The Weight of Honor** reminds us that the costs of war extend well beyond "blood and treasure". By following these wounded warrior families for several years we get a sense of how unique, non-linear and isolating their journeys can be. Spotlighting the family member caregiver, allows us to bear witness to these remarkable Americans who so often remain below society's radar. "*

Colonel John Lowry III USMCR (Ret)

"THE WEIGHT OF HONOR tells heartbreaking, compelling stories, offering entry points for students, faculty and staff from across the town and gown communities and spurring urgent, informed discussions of a sophisticated, interdisciplinary nature."

*Robert Moses Peaslee, PhD, Texas Tech University Associate Professor & Chair,
Department of Journalism & Creative Media Industries*

THE WEIGHT OF HONOR

Six strong, inspiring women tell their stories in THE WEIGHT OF HONOR, a documentary about the caregivers of veterans who have been catastrophically wounded

in America's longest war. These inspirational women are transformed overnight to 24/7 caregivers responsible for keeping their war-wounded ALIVE. The film reveals the family dynamic, their relationships before the wounds of war, and now, the uncertainties that lie ahead.

Synopsis

THE WEIGHT OF HONOR is the first comprehensive documentary to chronicle the lives of caregivers and families of veterans who have been catastrophically wounded in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The film's subjects are five spouses and one mother who give a rare glimpse into their lives, as everyone grapples with finding a 'new normal' after the devastating effects of war time injuries. Filmed over five years, in many states, this journey reveals the thoughts and struggles of the caregivers tasked with the 24/7 care of once able-bodied and self-assured sons and husbands, but are now dependent on others. The life of the caregiver is often unsung and hidden. THE WEIGHT OF HONOR reveals disrupted lives, ongoing uncertainties, and the courage and strength of these women as they make a new home during the most calamitous time of their lives. Included are key interviews with veterans who are now serving in congress and experts who give their insight into the new reality of what it means for a wounded warrior to come home.

Director's Statement

It took five years for me to film and craft a documentary representative of military families who experience the devastating effects that caring for their severely wounded has on relationships with spouses and children. THE WEIGHT OF HONOR was made to challenge conventional notions of caregivers, and to ignite change. - Stephanie Seldin Howard, Filmmaker

CORE ISSUE PRODUCTIONS

Core Issue Productions tells intriguing stories on a wide range of subjects --from documentaries about social issues, to films that illuminate a lighter side of our world. We are committed to being creative, thorough and most importantly, ethical in our filmmaking and production. Core Issue Productions was founded by Stephanie Seldin Howard and Rodger Howard.

Q&A with Filmmaker Stephanie Seldin Howard

How did you come across this particular subject? Why did it appeal to you?

I met a number of catastrophically wounded vets who were speaking at local schools in my community. I was looking for my next project idea and the coordinator of the event said nothing had been done about the family caregivers of these wounded. So here

were stories that had never been heard! I felt compelled to tell them.

How did you find the families in your film?

Veteran caregivers are very private, but often look to the internet to connect with other caregivers. They're on Facebook primarily, as are supporting groups and nonprofits. I sent messages asking how to connect with leaders in the community who could then contact caregivers on my behalf. It was a long process and often took several "levels" of leads to get permission to contact even a single caregiver who would be willing to share his or her personal story for a film about military caregivers.

What was the response of the military and veteran community when they found out about the subject of your film?

The veteran community is very supportive because they want military caregivers to enjoy recognition for THEIR service. So many of our returning troops receive a warm welcome when they come home, but their families don't get the same kind of attention and respect. Every member of the military knows they stand on the shoulders of the families behind them. It's only fitting they support our film and the stories of those who care for the war wounded.

Did you go in with any assumptions that were dispelled? Were there any surprises?

Originally, I intended to make a documentary about the military caregiver community to inform the civilian audience that it even exists. The focus changed as the circumstances of these families changed. I realized the "wow" moments were happening over the course of a few years. I needed to continue production to include those moments. That's when the film became a story of how caregiving impacts family relationships and, most importantly, the resiliency of the women we met to deal with adversity AND change.

What kind of dynamic developed between you and the caregivers?

I'm honored to say the women in my film are now my friends. They invited me into their homes, let me ask personal questions and talked about things they'd never told anyone before. They want to share their stories so our communities can understand what challenges are faced by military caregivers. The women in this film have bared their souls. We cried together in those interviews. We've stayed in touch. That's what friends do.

After being with them for five years, and observing their ups and downs, are there any policies that might be enacted to make their lives more tenable?

What I hear most is that caregivers need as much financial support as possible. Remember, these are people who often gave up their jobs and careers to care full time for their war-wounded. That means the only source of income might be a military pension. There is a caregiver stipend, but it takes a lot of paperwork to get and to keep. There are mounds of red tape to go through to qualify for money and services they deserve from the Veterans Administration. I'd say what they need most is a more direct

way to get what they need to take care of their families.

In one scene, a spouse talks about her career prior to her husband being injured. What else have caregivers given up?

Military caregivers give up the future they expected with the strong, vital loved one who went to war. The troops returning with catastrophic wounds are a shadow of what they were before their injuries. Relationships are never going to be the same. Life will never be the same. Some caregivers have to give up the hope of ever having children. All of them give up time. They can't go for coffee, see a friend or go away for a weekend. They need to be ready 24/7 to care for their wounded. They are giving up their emotional and personal health because they are caregiving all the time.

What are some of the long term concerns of these caregivers, who are all relatively young?

The young women— who make up the majority of this population— are looking at a lifetime of coping with emotional and mental health issues for themselves, their wounded and their children. They have to watch for changes in their vet's injuries. Are the original wounds creating new physical problems? Is their loved one suicidal? If there are children, then what will they have to do as caregivers and how will that translate into their behavior now and as adults? Many caregivers suffer emotional and physical problems because they don't get around to taking care of themselves. Most of all relationships suffer: parents, spouses and children have to find their own way to keep their families together, and often, they can't.

What do you want people to take away from this film?

I'd like this film to let our civilian audience know that the longest war in American history is creating a unique, underserved population. I don't think most people outside of the military understand what these families do to care for their catastrophically wounded. They need our attention and our respect. Even more importantly the audience needs to see the resilience and bravery of the women they meet in our film. I want people to walk out of the theater inspired by these stories on a personal level and as a community.

Filmmaker Biographies

Stephanie Seldin Howard - Executive Producer, Director, Writer

Stephanie is the creator of the award-winning documentary **THE WEIGHT OF HONOR**. The film about military families caring for their catastrophically war-wounded is being seen across the United States by a variety of audiences including universities, museums and conferences. It has been recognized by the Alexandria Film Festival as "Best of Fest," and received the "Audience Award" at the San Antonio Film Festival, among other honors.

As president of *Core Issue Productions*, Stephanie believes empathy is the driving force behind storytelling, something she attributes to her 25-year career as a broadcast news

producer. The Omaha, Nebraska native is the recipient of a Los Angeles News Emmy Award coupled with two additional Los Angeles News Emmy nominations. She was the co-producer of “Refusenik,” another award-winning documentary about the decades-long movement to free Jews held against their will by the Soviet Union.

In 2014 Stephanie was awarded the Roy W. Dean Grant from From the Heart Productions making her documentary **THE WEIGHT OF HONOR** possible. She is a member of the International Documentary Association, Film Fatales, and Film Independent.

Stephanie can be contacted via email: Stephanie@CoreIssueFilms.com or via the documentary website at www.TheWeightofHonorMovie.com.

Rodger Howard – Co-Producer, Camera

Rodger is an award-winning television photojournalist in Los Angeles. Rodger won multiple Los Angeles Area Emmy and Los Angeles Press Club Golden Mike Awards as a news cameraman at KTTV News (Fox, Inc.). He is also the recipient of the National Association of Television Programming Executives (NATPE) *Iris Award*.

Alejandro Valdes-Rochin – Editor, Writer

Alejandro is an editor of award-winning investigative and intimate character-driven documentaries, covering relevant issues such as immigration, the opiate epidemic, free speech, radicalism. An editor and producer with extensive experience in post-production with studio and independent films, Alejandro Valdes-Rochin is uniquely qualified to collaborate in the creation of the powerful message in **THE WEIGHT OF HONOR**. Valdes-Rochin’s work has been shown theatrically in the U.S. and on Fusion, PBS and Al Jazeera America.

Kanani Fong - Associate Producer

Kanani Fong is a writer and editor, and has worked as an outreach specialist for documentaries and books on war, humanity, and the aftermath. Past projects include the Academy Award® nominated films *Restrepo* and *A War*, and award-winning documentaries *Korengal* and *High Ground*.

Patricia Stotter – Composer

Patricia Stotter’s work as a film and television composer includes *Unchained Memories* (HBO), *Spirit to Spirit* (PBS), *Discovering Women* (PBS), *Reading from the Heart* (HBO), *Three Sisters* (HBO) and *Sesame Street*. Stotter’s documentary film *Service: When Women Come Marching Home* won an Emmy after being broadcast on PBS.

Don Rebic - Composer

Don Rebic is a New York City-based musical director, conductor, composer, and pianist whose distinguished, four-decade career has spanned the worlds of Broadway, jazz, cabaret, and classical music. Don’s music has appeared in HBO documentaries and the feature film *Night Catches Us* starring Kerry Washington.

Credit music, "The Hero" written and performed by **Micaela Bensko**

Featuring: The Caregivers

Kathreyn Harris Portis, (formerly Kathreyn Harris, wife of SSG Shilo Harris, US Army, Ret.)

Kathreyn left her job with the US Department of Agriculture in 2007 to be a full time caregiver to her husband, Shilo, after his vehicle ran over an IED in Iraq. She focused for years on his treatment and recovery, but they divorced in 2016. Kathreyn and her children moved into her own place, although it was difficult finding work due to the lack of consistent employment during her caregiving years.

In 2018, Kathreyn moved back to her hometown of Coleman, Texas. The move has given her the chance to reconnect with many of the people who have known her for her entire life. As Kathreyn says, "the roots in Coleman run deep." Her grandmother's family helped settle the county! Kathreyn married Troy Portis in early 2019. Troy is a Marine veteran, a firefighter/EMT in south Texas and, of course, helps out on the family ranch. Kathreyn stays in touch with the caregivers and veterans she met through the Army saying, "those are relationships forged to last a lifetime."

Ashley Toppin, wife of SPC Andy Toppin, US Army, Ret.

Spring, TX

In 2009, Ashley was only 19 when she became a caregiver. Ashley had been planning to study early childhood education in college, when her husband, Andy, was in an IED explosion, causing extensive burns and damage to his legs in Iraq. Even though she was pregnant, Ashley was flown to Germany to say her final goodbye. Fortunately, her husband survived. One of his legs has been amputated, while the other requires a special brace. Ashley not only had to learn the details of being a caregiver, but also grapple with the realities of being a new mother and a young wife. During her initial years as a caregiver, school was put on hold. However, today, she has her Associate's Degree. She and Andy are now the proud parents of three young children. Ashley's time is currently filled with the challenges of being a mother and full time caregiver to Andy, but she would like to continue her education to become a physical therapist, with the hopes of being able to help her husband with his recovery.

Kelly Stephenson, former wife of SSG Scott Stephenson, US Army, Ret.

Before she met Scott, Kelly was a store manager and freelance portrait photographer. Unlike the other caregivers in our film, Kelly met and married her husband after he was already injured. For two years, she focused solely on being a wife and caregiver to Scott, which necessitated that she quit her job and close her photography business. Even though Scott's disabilities required 24/7 assistance, the Veterans' Administration compensated Kelly at the lowest allowance tier for caregivers. The VA also denied the installation of a stair lift for Scott, and his frequent falls were a source of anxiety. The shortfall of funds to meet basic living expenses necessitated she return to work at her

former job, while getting her photography business going again. Kelly told us her biggest struggle was finding balance juggling two jobs, caregiving, being a wife as well as a mother to two teenage boys-- one hers, the other Scott's.

Kelly and Scott are no longer married. Their reasons are personal, and we respect their privacy.

Gina Hill, wife of SSG Allen Hill, US Army, Ret.

Gina was an elementary and middle school teacher before leaving to become a stay-at-home mom. In 2007, Allen was injured in Iraq when his Humvee hit an IED. Gina was thrust into caregiving, administering to her husband's TBI and severe emotional wounds. The biggest challenge was the planning it took to do 'normal' things, such as going to church, or out to eat. In the early days, having to develop a 'plan B' in case things didn't work out was very stressful. She says it led to a feeling of isolation, 'as though you're in a room full of people, but you're all alone.' Today, the Hill's are in a much better spot. Gina works for an organization whose primary focus is helping veterans who are homeless. Allen helps with one of the projects, building a tiny house village for the homeless vets. Gina credits her faith, and her close family relations (especially her sister) for giving her strength.

Linzi Andersen, wife of CPT Micah Andersen, US Army

Linzi finished her Bachelor in Communications from Boise State University and worked as a marketing and communications coordinator in Idaho shortly before she and Micah were married. She left her career to move to Ft Benning, Georgia, followed by another move to Ft Bliss, Texas, where she was adjusting to military life when Micah deployed to Afghanistan.

While serving in Afghanistan, Micah was injured by an IED on June 1, 2013, while on patrol. He lost both legs above the knee and sustained other extensive injuries. With their one-month-old baby in tow, Linzi moved once again to be near Micah at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio, Texas. Micah underwent more than 100 operations, procedures, and battles with deadly fungal infections. The biggest challenge for Linzi was being so far away from their families, leaving her short of extra help as she balanced being a caregiver and mother.

Now retired from the Army and stable enough to leave San Antonio, Micah, Linzi, and their two children have been able to move back to Idaho to be near their families. Linzi started working part time helping nonprofits in Idaho, and was recently selected as a fellow representing the state of Idaho by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. She still remains Micah's full time caregiver while being a mother for their two young children, and maintains a "mini-farm," complete with long horn cows, llamas and chickens.

Luana Schneider, mother of Scott Stephenson

Luana was an interior decorator and artist when her son Scott was severely injured in 2006. Scott sustained catastrophic wounds when his Humvee hit an IED while deployed

to Iraq. Luana moved to be with him for two years at Brooke Army Medical Center, leaving her husband and other children at home in Kansas. In between visiting hours at the hospital Luana attempted to remotely run her business out of her hotel room. She fought for Scott to receive a prosthetic leg after they were told he would never be able to receive one due to the severity of his burns. Luana was Scott's advocate between the military and the VA, ensuring he would receive the highest rating for medical retirement and an easier transition to the VA health system. After their return to Kansas, she started a nonprofit to continue educating the public about our country's most severely injured, which she continues to run today, Luana has restarted her career as an artist. She and Scott are currently estranged.

Additional interviews

- **Congressman Jim McDermott**, D-Washington, Ret., US Navy
- **Congressman Ruben Gallego**, D-Arizona, USMC
- **Nathan Graeser**, MSW, MDiv, USC School of Social Work, Center of Innovation of Research on Veterans & Military Families, US Army National Guard
- **Meg Kabat**, National Director, Caregiver Support Program, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
- **Rajeev Ramchand**, Senior Behavioral Scientist, RAND Corporation
- **Carissa Tourtelot**, Recovery Care Coordinator, USMC Wounded Warrior Battalion, West Coast
- **Steve Johnson**, Chief Warrant Officer III, US Army
- **Stuart Campbell**, Program Manager, Center for the Intrepid

Locations and Crews

Kansas City, MO and Surrounding Areas

Camera: Anthony Ladeisch, Kevin McKinney
Sound: Andre Wegst, DeVonte Brown

San Antonio

Camera: Israel Cardoza; Rodger Howard
Sound: John Bentley

Houston

Camera: Rodger Howard
Sound: John Bentley

Washington, DC

Camera: Tom Kaufman
Sound: Rick Patterson

Southern California

Camera: Ed Riley, Rodger Howard
Sound: Marc Stewart

Advisors

Carole Dean, Peter Broderick, Sam Dlugach, Morrie Warshawski