

LONG SHOT
FACTORY

Presents



ANONYMOUS SISTER

A Film By Two-Time Emmy® Winner **Jamie Boyle**
Produced by **Marilyn Ness** and **Elizabeth Westrate**
Produced by **Big Mouth Productions** and **Vulcan Productions**

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Release Date: Opens June 2, 2023 at IFC Center in New York City and June 16, 2023 at Laemmle Monica in Los Angeles

Run Time: 94 minutes

Rating: Unrated

Language: English

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

When a young woman turns to the camera for refuge, she ends up with a firsthand account of what will become the deadliest man-made epidemic in United States history. Thirty years in the making, *Anonymous Sister* is Emmy Award®-winning director, Jamie Boyle's chronicle of her family's collision with the opioid epidemic.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Anonymous Sister begins in the 1980s, as the close-knit Boyle family is introduced through home movie footage of their lives in the Colorado countryside. As the years tick by, the youngest family member, Jamie, is drawn to the camera in early childhood, begging to operate it at any opportunity while her older sister, Jordan, embarks on what will become a prodigious figure-skating career.

By the time she reaches her late teenage years Jamie is documenting, in excruciating detail, Jordan and her mom, Julie, as both simultaneously descend into opioid addiction while battling chronic pain. Unbeknownst to her at the time, Jamie was capturing the reality of the opioid epidemic long before it was acknowledged or named, when it entered your home under the guise of healthcare, when those to whom we entrust our lives became the greatest threat to it.

Thirteen years later finds both family members sober and Jordan newly pregnant with her first child. The pregnancy will mark her first major interaction with the medical community since getting off opioids. Jamie once again picks up the camera as her mom and sister face new hurdles in their hardwon sobriety. What she sees this time is not just a family, but an entire nation, in turmoil.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

"The camera makes you forget you're there. It gives you both a point of connection and a point of separation."

So begins *Anonymous Sister*—a visual memoir that chronicles a time in my life when a handheld Super 8 camera was the only thing that stood between me and the inconceivable reality on the other side of the lens, as I watched my loved ones succumb to an unknown, unnamed epidemic.

Anonymous Sister is a recounting of what the opioid crisis looked like before it was labeled as such, when it entered your home under the guise of standard healthcare, when those to whom we entrust our lives became the greatest threat to it, when there was nothing left to do but bear witness. *Anonymous Sister* began as a teenage girl's scream into the wind.

I was drawn to the camera at a very young age, unaware that it would become my sole weapon against a tidal wave of misinformation disseminated by some of the most powerful and corrupt forces in the world. To document the life going out of someone is an excruciating thing. To do it when it is your mother's life, your sister's life, may seem to be a form of self-torture. It certainly walks a tenuous line between preservation and destruction. What it did was offer me a way to look at something that I couldn't otherwise. That camera would accompany me on my darkest days and suspend time, holding them alive and breathing for one more moment.

A decade after she and my mom escaped the deadly, and horrifyingly common, toll of opioid addiction, my sister announced she was pregnant. It would be her first major interaction with the medical community since getting off opioids. The countless number of people we knew who'd relapsed at the hands of medical professionals immediately came to mind and I realized a number of things at once—that my sister and my mom's sobriety, and their lives, were on extremely fragile footing all of the time but especially when interacting with doctors, that medical practice in the U.S. had long ago been bought and paid for, and that the film I'd started ten years earlier was far from complete. I turned to the camera again, now an adult for whom documenting had become my life's work and primary coping mechanism—my own form of addiction.

This time, when I looked at life through a camera, what I saw was the unspeakable ramifications of human vice and corruption, staggering numbers of sisters and mothers gone, millions of lives irreparably altered, and sky-high rates of opioid prescribing. I saw a nation haunted by the ghosts of its needlessly dead, with no way to stop the destruction in the face of a system that consistently sacrifices lives at the altar of the almighty dollar. The end result speaks to the pull of escape, of refuge, and the various places we seek it—substances, money, work, family, art. It leaves us with unanswered, uncomfortable questions about what happens when those needs inevitably collide, when human life becomes a casualty of human greed.

This film is our story. It belongs to all of us. Because when all is said and done, my family's story is unique in only one respect—we lived to tell it.

-- Jamie Boyle, Director

FILMMAKERS

Directed By JAMIE BOYLE

Produced By MARILYN NESS
ELIZABETH WESTRATE
JAMIE BOYLE

Produced By BIG MOUTH PRODUCTIONS
VULCAN PRODUCTIONS

Executive Producers JODY ALLEN
RUTH JOHNSTON
ROCKY COLLINS
JANNAT GARGI
KATY DRAKE BETTNER
TIGER TALE PRODUCTIONS
DANA DICARLO
JULIE STAMPLER

Edited By JAMIE BOYLE

Director of Photography JAMIE BOYLE

Original Music By SAUL SIMON MACWILLIAMS

Archival Producer TIRZAH BROTT

Co-Editor RICHARD MIRON

Consulting Editors DON BERNIER
RICHARD HANKIN

Investigative Reporter NICK VERBITSKI

Motion Design BLUE SPILL

Music Supervisor DOUG BERNHEIM

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THE REALITY OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Despite being in the midst of a severe epidemic of opioid use disorder and overdose deaths that has spanned more than two decades, the United States continues to prescribe more opioids than any other country in the world. Since 1999, following Purdue's creation of OxyContin and mass marketing of opioids for all manner of pain, [more than 648,000 American lives have been lost to opioid overdoses](#). While overdoses outpaced the death toll from car accidents back in 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the highest single-year increase in opioid deaths, increasing 30% over the past three years. Americans are now more likely to die from an overdose than homicide, suicide, and motor vehicle crash combined. Without drastic intervention, the crisis will continue unabated with increasingly devastating consequences for our communities and nation.

This prescribing trend followed the launch of OxyContin in the late 1990s, driven by a pharmaceutical industry-funded campaign reliant on minimizing and even eliminating the risks of opioid use and fabricating the benefits. The CDC has been crystal clear in identifying the cause of the opioid epidemic: the overprescribing of opioids. Increased opioid addiction has also led to rising rates of heroin use along with a vast number of other health and social problems.

Re-education of the medical community, and the public, is the key to stripping away the lethal stigma associated with opioid use disorder and combating the dangerous misinformation that continues to dictate prescribing and treatment practices in the U.S. The more we understand about opioids as a class of drug, how the U.S. epidemic came about, substance use disorder, and effective modes of treatment, the greater reduction we'll see in rates of substance use disorder, overdoses, and the myriad of personal and social problems that coincide with both.

STATISTICS OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

THE SCALE OF THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Nearly one third of Americans know someone who has opioid use disorder. ([Source](#)) Approx. 40 million Americans are currently struggling with substance use disorder. ([Source](#))

187 people die every day of an opioid overdose. Fentanyl is now the leading cause of death for Americans aged 18 to 45. ([Source](#))

In 2020, an average of 44 people died each day from overdoses involving prescription opioids, totaling more than 16,000 deaths. ([Source](#))

OPIOIDS AS A CLASS OF DRUG

Anyone who takes opioids is at risk of becoming addicted. Opioids can lead to physical dependency in 5 days, followed quickly by addiction. ([Source](#))

Opioids are not safe or effective long-term when taken daily and can make pain worse. ([Source](#))

Opioids should only be used for end-of-life care or for a few days after major surgery or serious accident if no other options exist. ([Source](#))

LACK OF EFFECTIVE TREATMENT

A 2019 federal survey found that only 1 in 4 Americans with opioid use disorder receives treatment of any kind. ([Source](#))

Many doctors say they lack the confidence to treat addiction because they don't have enough training or access to specialists who could help guide them. ([Source](#))

About 100,000 people in the US in 2018 needed treatment but couldn't get it because their insurance either didn't cover treatment at all or didn't cover the full costs. ([Source](#))

Only 1 naloxone (overdose reversal medication) prescription is dispensed for every 70 high-dose opioid prescriptions. ([Source](#))

Most Americans are unwilling to associate closely with people experiencing substance use disorder, further isolating those individuals from their social support systems. ([Source](#))

FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES



JAMIE BOYLE | Director, Producer, Editor

Jamie Boyle is a two-time Emmy®-winning documentary filmmaker. Her work has played at Sundance, SXSW, DOC NYC, Full Frame, Hot Docs, LA Film Festival, Human Rights Watch, and others. She was a recipient of DOC NYC's prestigious 40 Under 40 list in 2019. She is the director, cinematographer, and editor of ANONYMOUS SISTER. Most recently, she wrote and edited the feature documentary BREAKING THE NEWS, which premiered at the 2023 Tribeca Film Festival. She was the Editor, Producer, and Cinematographer for JACKSON (Showtime), winner of the 2018 News & Documentary Emmy® Award. JACKSON premiered at the LA Film Festival and was awarded Best Documentary at over fifteen festivals nationwide. She edited TRANS IN AMERICA: TEXAS STRONG, winner of the 2019 News & Documentary Emmy® for Outstanding Short Documentary and two Webby Awards. TEXAS STRONG was the first of a three-part series she edited that premiered at SXSW and launched on them. She was the Associate Editor and Production Manager on E-TEAM (Netflix), which won the 2014 Sundance Film Festival Cinematography Award and was nominated for two News & Documentary Emmys®, including Best Documentary. She was the Director, Cinematographer, and Editor of the short documentary TAKE A VOTE, which highlighted the fight against voter suppression and premiered at DOC NYC in 2020. She was the in-house editor for the American Civil Liberties Union and Human Rights Watch. She taught at the Bronx Documentary Center, as a guest lecturer at Columbia University, and served as a judge for the News & Documentary Emmy Awards.



MARILYN NESS | Producer

Marilyn Ness is a two-time Emmy, Peabody, and DuPont Award-winning filmmaker and works as a director and producer. Most recently, she produced ANONYMOUS SISTER about one family's fall into opioid addiction. She produced the Netflix Original documentaries BECOMING, about former First Lady Michelle Obama, which was nominated for four Primetime Emmy Awards as well as DICK JOHNSON IS DEAD, which premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and won the Special Jury Award for Innovation in Non-fiction Storytelling, was nominated for a PGA Award, an Indie Spirit Award, and later earned 3 Primetime Emmy® nominations winning one. Marilyn directed the Emmy®-nominated documentary CHARM CITY which premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival and was shortlisted for the 2019 Academy Award® - Best Documentary Feature. The film was broadcast on PBS' Independent Lens. She produced CAMERAPERSON, which premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, was released by the Criterion Collection and was shortlisted for the 2017 Academy Awards®. TRAPPED (dir. Dawn Porter) premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, received the Jury Prize for Social Impact Filmmaking, broadcast on PBS' Independent Lens, and was awarded a Peabody. She produced the feature documentary E-TEAM, which premiered at Sundance in 2014, was bought by Netflix Originals, and earned two Emmy nominations. She directed the documentary feature BAD BLOOD: A CAUTIONARY TALE that broadcast

nationally on PBS in 2011. She is currently at work on a multi-disciplinary theater and documentary project entitled POSTMORTEM. Ness is a partner in Big Mouth Productions, a women-owned, women-led award-winning documentary film and theater production company. Marilyn is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, the Television Academy, the Producers Guild of America, and the International Documentary Association.



ELIZABETH WESTRATE | Producer

Elizabeth Westrate is a filmmaker with over twenty years of production experience, leading complex international projects for a broad range of clients. Her work has been broadcast widely on PBS, HBO, Amazon, NBC, Sundance Channel, Public Radio International and at major film festivals and museums around the world. Westrate is currently developing a ten-part documentary series for children featuring musical artist, Ben Folds, for Fred Rogers Productions and also consulting on documentary projects for Consequential Films, Clin d’oeil Films and Room 608. She recently acted as Producer on Jamie Boyle’s feature documentary, ANONYMOUS SISTER, along with Marilyn Ness of Big Mouth Productions. Westrate was the Director and Producer of the critically acclaimed documentary A FAMILY UNDERTAKING (PBS/POV), as well as THE JAMES WOLFENSOHN TRIBUTE PROJECT, PASSING ON THE GIFT and many other films. She is was Series Producer of I CONTAIN MULTITUDES, a twelve part science series for PBS Digital and HHMI, and also thirty episodes of the innovative ecological PBS series, E²: E² DESIGN, E² ENERGY and E² TRANSPORT. She has acted as Line Producer for high-profile documentary projects such as Dror Moreh’s THE HUMAN FACTOR (Telluride 2019), Roger Ross Williams’ AMERICAN JAIL (CNN Films 2018), and multiple projects for BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN and Thrill Hill with director Thom Zimny.



DR. ANDREW KOLODNY | Scientific Advisor

Dr. Andrew Kolodny is the Medical Director of Opioid Policy Research at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. His primary area of focus is the prescription opioid and heroin crisis devastating communities across the country. He is also the executive director of Physicians for Responsible Opioid Prescribing, an organization with a mission to reduce morbidity and mortality caused by overprescribing of opioid analgesics. Dr. Kolodny previously served as Chief Medical Officer for Phoenix House, a national nonprofit addiction treatment agency and Chair of Psychiatry at Maimonides Medical Center in New York City. Dr. Kolodny has a long-standing interest in public health. He began his career working for the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the Office of the Executive Deputy Commissioner. For New York City, he helped develop and implement multiple programs to improve the health of New Yorkers and save lives, including city-wide buprenorphine programs, naloxone overdose prevention programs and emergency room-based screening, brief intervention and referral to treatment (SBIRT) programs for drug and alcohol misuse.



SAUL SIMON MACWILLIAMS | Composer

Saul Simon MacWilliams is an Emmy nominated, Los Angeles based film composer. MacWilliams has worked closely and extensively with composer and producer Dan Romer on films including his Oscar nominated feature BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD, DIGGING FOR FIRE, FINDERS KEEPERS, MEDITERRANIA, BEASTS OF NO NATION and ABC's *The Good Doctor*. Saul co-scored HBO's Emmy winning documentary JIM: THE JAMES FOLEY STORY as well as Amazon's GLEASON, which won the 2016 Sundance Audience Award. In 2017, Saul scored HBO's BECOMING WARREN BUFFETT as well as co-scoring the Netflix documentary CHASING CORAL

which won the Sundance Audience Award and earned him and Romer an Emmy nomination. In 2018 MacWilliams scored HBO's Martin Luther King Jr. biopic, KING IN THE WILDERNESS, directed by Peter Kunhardt and Co-Scored Clay Tweel's award winning documentary OUT OF OMAHA. MacWilliams scored the Anton Yelchin biopic, LOVE, ANTOSHA which premiered at Sundance 2019.



ELIZA LICHT | Impact Strategist and Producer

Eliza has been working in the social-issue documentary field for 20 years as an impact strategist, producer, and television executive. She is the founder and managing partner of Red Owl, an impact strategy and production company where she creates and executes all aspects of campaigns including overall strategy, partnership development, the production of educational resources, and tracking, measuring, and evaluating impact. Recent campaigns include "[Battleground](#)," 'Disclosure', and 'Belly of the Beast." Prior to founding Red Owl, Eliza served as Vice President of Content Strategy and Engagement at the PBS documentary series POV, leading the Community Engagement, Communication and Programs departments. Eliza has served on juries for DOC

NYC, Hot Springs Film Festival, and Brooklyn Film Festival, and on funding panels for the National Endowment of the Arts, Black Public Media, and the Pew Center for Arts and Heritage.