

Cory Pressl
FAMS 420- Capstone
Professor Sikand
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Tom

Logline: *Tom* is a 10-15 minute documentary film that explores the notion of positivity and dealing with loss through one college student's incredible story. Tom follows Tom Strand, a sophomore at Lafayette College, whose unbeatable alacrity excites and inspires all those around him. After losing his older brother Alex, Tom turned the tables on his own story and set out to live his life like he wanted to and like he was meant to: with an uncontrollable smile and infectiously positive energy.

Synopsis: This film is a documentary about Tom and those around him, including his friends and his family. I wanted to make this film because I did not completely understand how and why Tom was such a relentlessly positive person despite any stresses or worries in his life. I ended up learning so much about Tom after he agreed to work with me on this film, as I learned about his life growing up and his life at Lafayette outside of the world we share. I'm lucky to have access to Tom and his friends on campus, and the Strand family has been very inviting in terms of giving me access to their lives and personal family photos and home-movies.

The film starts by introducing Tom as the young man I thought he was: a lively and personable spirit who everyone loves. As the story continues, we learn more of Tom's undying determination to accomplish whatever he sets out to do, and we learn of the obstacles he has overcome. During his senior year in high school, Tom's older brother died unexpectedly. This proved to be a jolting hit on Tom, and left him questioning a lot about himself and his role and

life without his older brother and role model.

Topic Summary: It may sound cliché, but we are living in a world [today](#) that is constantly exposed to negative stories and sound bites about divisive subjects. Our American election is drawing so much hatred from the depths of American history and spewing it out to the public. The everyday United States is not something without its problems, however, sometimes a light needs to be shined on something that will leave viewers feeling pleased rather than pissed. It is true, Tom's story is not one that is barred from sadness and loss. But rather than dwelling on this pain and letting it consume him and the viewers, I am trying to shine a light on the sweeter side of a sour story. It is important to understand that this is not a story about death or substance abuse or exploitation, but rather about overcoming such loss and maintaining positivity.

This is a personal story about a personable young man, as I am trying to have viewers get to know Tom and admire him. Themes of positivity, loss, family, and determination are present throughout the film. Obviously no other films focus on Tom's story specifically, but I was surely inspired by other documentary films I've seen and the personal elements that made me want to approach my capstone in this way. I've always loved documentary films that told a personal story, one I couldn't read in an encyclopedia or learn about in the classroom. Connections are something I value, and finding connections with people through personal stories is the most effective way to move somebody. My favorite film that follows this mode is *Dear Zachary: A Letter to a Son about his Father*. Filmmaker Kurt Kuenne had a personal connection to the subjects in this film, as the star was his childhood friend. This film

was made nearly entirely by Kuenne, who directed, wrote, narrated, edited and lived it. This film feels personal, and after watching it, I was almost compelled to buy a \$100 novel written by one of the subjects in the film because I wanted to support them and their cause. I want viewers to feel like they know Tom and want them to introduce themselves to him if they see him around campus - I want them to trust my judgment.

Artistic Approach: I have a fairly extensive history of interviewing on camera, and this will prove to be incredibly useful for me, as I plan on interviewing many of Tom's closest friends. The film will start by introducing Tom through home footage, then will include a narrative from me about why I am making the film. Before hearing from Tom, I will introduce his friends and some of the things they have to say about him. The film will include random clips of Tom from his childhood that prove to be relevant to the story.

Finally, we will be introduced to Tom, and let him speak in his own words, before learning of his brother's untimely passing and the process of moving on from that tragedy. The climax of the film will be when we learn of Alex's passing and Tom's response, and will end with him overcoming these hard feelings with positivity and unmatched energy. Tom will then address the viewers and give his words of wisdom for how he lives his life. I'm using a combination of home footage, interviews, staged and unstaged b-roll, and two sit-down interviews with Tom.

Project Stage: I've conducted 7 full interviews so far, and have created a schedule that will hopefully stay on track for the rest of the semester. I have a rough cut and a basic outline for how the film will play out, and anticipate the film to be about 12-13 minutes in length. Below is a schedule for the rest of the semester that I am trying to adhere to.

10/24 – Rough Cut due

10/25 – Interview Tom for last time

10/26 – Collect staged b-roll of Tom

10/27:On – Edit and change voiceover

Audience and Distribution Strategies: My audience is really anyone, any age. Because this film tells a personal story, many will be able to relate, and I am hoping that I can successfully tell this story all while sharing the importance of positivity in your own life and in others' lives. I plan on sharing this story through social media, on YouTube and Facebook. At this time I do not have any plans to share this with any Festivals.

Visual Sample:

A link to the rough cut: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=394U8QOUKHA>

Prior Work: I've done a lot of work with short documentaries or webisodes that focus on interviews and their distinctions or stories. The link I am providing below is for a short web series I worked on titled *Go East*, and shares the stories of west coast students at Lafayette and their transitions to the east coast. I created the title sequence, interviewed the subjects, and was

responsible for much of the aesthetic look to the pieces. I've also worked on several video essays focusing on the spectre of race in Hollywood and film.

A link to *Go East // Episode 1*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVI4Ax2Is2s>

A link to *Dual Fear* (third video essay): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKZw5p5a2mM>

A link to my complete works on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZOMAKhXbFsrInlg7GeuhcQ>