



A BRIDGE LIFE

FINDING OUR WAY HOME



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Dear Reader,

I come to you now at the end of a five-year odyssey that saw my crew and I capture a unique story of courage, hope and humanity at a time when Americans confronted one of the most terrifying catastrophes to ever befall our country. Out of the chaos of those first few days following Hurricane Katrina came acts of heroism that revealed a different side of America; in my view, one that revived long-forgotten notions of fellowship between citizens. This was most vividly on display when we heard scattered reports of Good Samaritans too numerous to count who went to extraordinary lengths to aid survivors and do their part to correct the injustices they saw. This documentary chronicles the tale of one of these individuals I met personally at the Houston Astrodome in the storm's aftermath and helped him relocate evacuees. As director and producer, it's my aim that *A Bridge Life: Finding Our Way Home* serves as a human interest story that not only applies to Katrina, but all major disasters occurring around the globe that test the human spirit. Given that climate-related catastrophes are expected to rise by 50 percent by the year 2015, it's my hope that *A Bridge Life* will lift people up and encourage them to not only bridge the differences that divide us, but help build a better, more peaceful tomorrow.

Sincerely,
Joshua Grossberg
Director-Producer

"Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness."
-Martin Luther King Jr.



A Prelude From the Director

My reasons, as with many, for volunteering in Katrina relief were not unique. However, my connection to this story is. My name is Joshua Grossberg, senior entertainment journalist for E! Online, the web's top entertainment news source, as well as a New York-based independent filmmaker.

Like many others, I watched on television the power of Katrina as it decimated our gulf coast. Also, like many others, in its wake, I was compelled to do my part; to make a difference. For me, the true measure of a man is how he reacts in times of crisis, not only his behavior towards others but also the goals he sets for himself. Needless to say, I was en route to Houston to volunteer at the Astrodome where thousands of evacuees were transported after being rescued from the

floodwaters. During my four day stay in the Astrodome, I was conscious about not offending the sensibilities of the evacuees with my camera. But I quickly realized early on that people needed to tell their stories. In a way, it seemed therapeutic to be heard.

Though it wasn't my original purpose, I began documenting as much as possible while helping those in need, getting only three to four hours of sleep per night. In those first chaotic days, while almost all official news crews were prohibited from shooting in the Dome or were limited by a media representative, my associate producer Jill Goldstein and I were the only people recording at all hours for an extended period of time what it was like for thousands of people and volunteers, who found themselves in this historical mire.

Synopsis

I eventually would meet Dan Sheffer, a loan officer, husband and father of two from Plantation, Florida, as I struggled to help one evacuee couple. Cynthia Gaunichaux, an orderly at New Orleans' Charity hospital, and her soon-to-be husband, Edwin Pierre, a construction worker, were looking for a way out of the Astrodome. I subsequently introduced them to Dan who agreed to fly them to Florida and help them start over. Through great courage and sheer determination, Dan put his life on hold to build a temporary bridge leading from the cold, hard cement of the Astrodome to relative safety and the chance of a new life in Florida for not only Cynthia and Edwin, but five others evacuees as well. In essence, to provide them with a bridge life. What would become Dan's story is but one of many heartening and heart wrenching tales to come out of Katrina and subsequent disasters the world over.

Of course, Dan's act of Good Samaritanship turned out to be a much tougher road than either he or anyone else imagined. This group of strangers, bound by a common goal,

faced many human obstacles that would eventually drive them apart and back together again. While the story ends tragically for one evacuee, what rises above are inspiring portraits of kindness in the face of great adversity.

With over 60 hours of Astrodome footage to start in those first dire days, I stumbled upon a riveting story of hope, inspiration and hurdles encountered in this 21st century American catastrophe. But in the end it was meant for me to tell. It also gives me an opportunity to continue to pay-it-forward by contributing a percentage of future proceeds to a Katrina-related charity as well as to those evacuees in this story. Lastly, it enables me and every other citizen of the earth to provide those less fortunate than us with (as Heidi, Dan's friend, would say) "a bridge life" in the best way we know how.

I hope this film encourages you to do your part.

-Joshua Grossberg
Director, A Bridge Life



Dan's Group



Dan Sheffer, a middle-class loan officer, husband, and father from Plantation, Florida and main focus of the documentary. Inspired by a Good Samaritan, who aided hurricane victims in his own state, Dan solicited pledges from friends and colleagues to help cover the cost of flying 10 evacuees from the Houston Astrodome, which he would recruit himself, back to Florida. His goal: to offer these 10 strangers a fresh start by helping them locate both temporary shelter and temporary jobs.



Cynthia and Edwin Pierre, were separated before the hurricane struck when she went to work in her job as an orderly at Charity Hospital. Edwin and her son, Robert, escaped the flood only to lose each other during the airlifts. Cynthia remained at the hospital, and continued helping patients survive with little food and next to no electricity until she was evacuated. By week's end, they were reunited at the Astrodome, in shock and homeless, with only a few meager belongings to their name.



Dionne Caulfield, a New Orleans resident who has worked an assortment of jobs including youth counselor, driver and tutor. She and boyfriend, Nolan Davis, a former Navy manturned- chef, lived in the Lower Ninth Ward where the rising water not only entered their bedroom, but quickly engulfed everything outside. They ended up being trapped in their attic for three days during the flood until they were finally rescued by guardsmen.



Leslie Legaux, auto mechanic, and his childhood sweetheart, Antoinette Wallace, were stranded for three days after the storm with no power, food or water. Luckily, on safe ground and away from the flooding, they began to walk to her sister's house in the next Parish, where they would be safe from looting. They were stopped at gun point by the National Guard and told they could not enter. After attempting to convince others to no avail that this was no place to stay, they managed to board a full bus not knowing where they were headed.



Rex Ditto a 29 year old grocery store clerk, originally from Mobile, Alabama. He moved to New Orleans not long before the hurricane hit. During Katrina's onslaught, he found shelter at the Superdome. After the storm passed, Rex and his 14 year old brother left the Superdome to find his car and it was then looters killed his brother, shooting him three times in the head. Rex fled and ended up on a bus to the Astrodome. He met Dan Sheffer at the Houston Astrodome and had not only agreed to join his group of evacuees but also eagerly helped in finding others to do the same.



Aaron Rothenberg, construction worker and painter, with his wife, Maria, a secretary, followed the mandatory evacuation and were in Tallahassee when Katrina struck. From there, they went to Florida in a rented car, where hopes of staying with family members, were short-lived. The Red Cross stepped in with a temporary hotel and connecting them with Dan Sheffer, Heidi Scott and the original group from the Astrodome.

One Person Can Make a Difference

At the center of *A Bridge Life* is a classic theme that continues to attract and fascinate both the young and the old and cuts across race and class lines. The theme is color blind and has no religious preference. To say it is solely a modern-day parable of the Good Samaritan does not do sufficient justice in illustrating its far-reaching effect. The theme of *A Bridge Life* is: One person can make a difference.

The reason why everyone can relate and are attracted to stories with such themes is that we all put ourselves in the shoes of the catalyst. We all remember that helpless feeling we had watching the terrible images of Katrina's aftermath on television. We all believe that at the right moment, we too, can-would-and-will do the right thing. This positive energy is so palpable that it compels people to either assist those like Dan who do take action or motivates them to lend a hand themselves, drawn to a feeling of community lost in our hectic, everyday world. However, these efforts are not without their trials, tribulations



and, even tragedy, which *A Bridge Life* chronicles intimately.

Through the journey of Dan Sheffer, we also detail the efforts of other volunteers and the extent to which Houston itself acted as a Good Samaritan and opened its doors to its tired,

weary neighbor—improvising a monumental response to the largest mass migration not seen in America since the Dust Bowl period in the 1930's and facing down the harsh realities of the greatest natural and man-made disaster in US history.

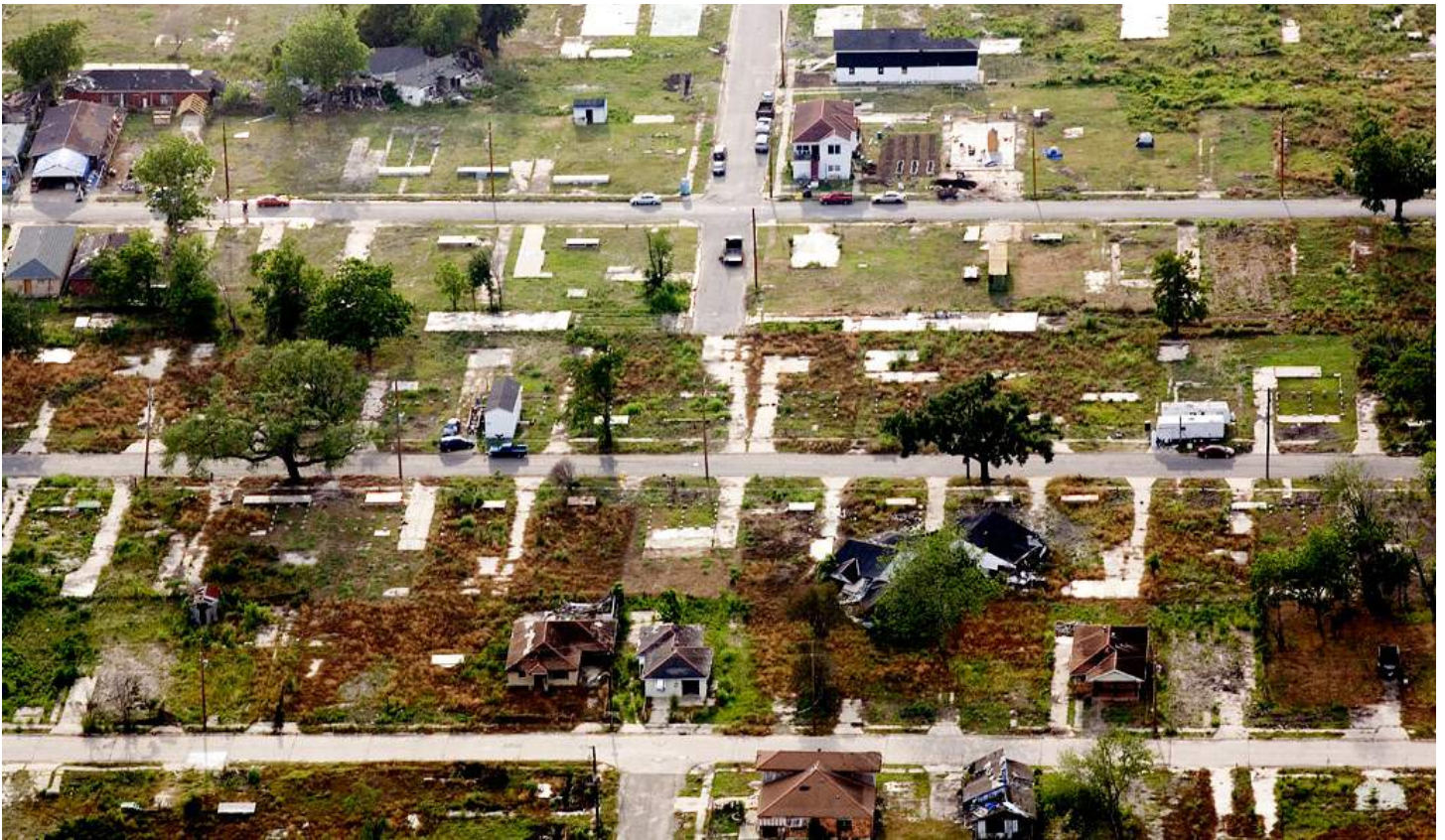




Format, Style & POV

As a volunteer, Grossberg was literally the only person on the floor of the Astrodome capturing those first chaotic days with his compact Sony TRV-900 digital camera, whereas regular news crews were escorted onto the premises and only allowed a few minutes with each evacuees. Hence the grainy guerilla style footage shot during that period lends a real time feel to the flashbacks at the Astrodome. This enables the audience to experience first hand the same trauma the evacuees did, finding themselves lost, confused and with almost nothing.

The unique historical material is balanced out by more formal follow up interviews shot a year and half after Katrina using a DVX-100 24P camera on letterbox that differentiate the periods. Photographer, Noah Gilbert, accompanied Grossberg in the follow up interviews shooting over 45 gigabytes of photos, not only of the evacuees but also of locations in Florida, New Orleans and Houston, including the Lower Ninth Ward and the Astrodome. These images are stylistically incorporated into *A Bridge Life*, contributing another fluid visual component.



Audience

The demographic appeal of *A Bridge Life* is broad because at its heart it is not another Katrina story. It's the story of a single man struggling to make a difference and succeeding despite the obstacles. Moviegoers and TV viewers love to see these 'lone hero' stories, especially in the key 18-34 demographic. Separately, the sense that people are seeking out a larger purpose than their own narrow self-interest rings particularly true in the current calls for political change as evidenced by Barack Obama's historic presidency and the largest increase in voter turnout in a generation. This new politically aware block of Americans are willing to step up and take appropriate action when government fails to fulfill its duty to serve and protect the people.

Dan's representation as the everyman brings *A Bridge Life's* strong message of hope to the forefront, also attracting both the 35-49 demographic as well as the 50-64 demographic. The

film becomes something to be shared by grandparents with their grandchildren, fathers with their daughters, and mothers with their sons—important lesson about values. It also serves as the perfect pilot that will launch a one-hour documentary series the producers are planning, which will focus on the theme of hope, the inspirational tales of survival after disasters and the people who quietly go about helping those who can't help themselves. That spirit was reflected in President Obama's campaign chant of "Yes We Can" and his call for Americans to increase their civic participation and give back to their country.

Stepping beyond the young and the old, *A Bridge Life's* classic colorblind story cuts across racial and class lines because at its core it's about community. Not to mention, the altruistic, Good Samaritan aspect also appeals to hearts and souls of all religious preferences.

In terms of genre, the film attracts

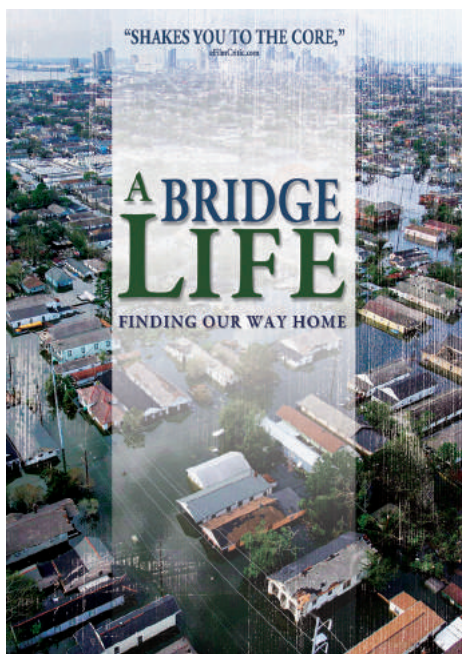
those who love mystery because of one unfortunate event that elevates the story beyond your typical man-against-the-odds scenario—that is, an interloper within the group who deceives Dan with tragic results (See Spoiler page in this packet).

But perhaps the most primal reason why we all are drawn to such stories in books, television and film is the unalterable belief that ONE PERSON CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. This powerful notion enables us to put ourselves in the shoes of the hero. We all want to believe that at the right moment during crisis, when all hope seems lost, we too can take up the call to action and do the right thing. No one ever tires of these stories.

A Bridge Life is a documentary that bridges all genders, all races, and all religions as well as the disaster itself in hopes of creating a better life and future for all of us.

Status of A Bridge Life

After being reviewed by various consultants including filmmakers Jonathan Demme (The Silence of the Lambs, Stop Making Sense), Ellen Kuras (Betrayal), Louie Psihoyos (The Cove) and Chris Smith (American Movie, Yes Men) for comments, the filmmakers completed a 70-minute cut which made its world premiere at the Newport Beach International Film Festival in California on April 29, 2009. This version made the festival rounds, racking up top awards at the Ft. Lauderdale International Film Festival, the Naples International Film Festival, the Columbus International Film & Video Festival, the Canada International Film Festival, and Worldfest Houston Film Festival. *A Bridge Life* had its international premiere at the Victoria Film Festival in Vancouver in February, 2010. It screened at the 2010 edition of the Peace on Earth Film Festival in Chicago and made its Texas debut at Worldfest Houston in April. In May, the DOC Channel purchased domestic TV rights to a one-hour version of *A Bridge Life* and has set an August 29, 2010 airdate for the film's



U.S. television premiere to coincide with Hurricane Katrina's 5th anniversary.

Simultaneously, producers have been meeting with various television networks pitching *A Bridge Life: Finding Our Way Home* as the inaugural episode in a series of dramatic one-hour documentaries that will chronicle the struggles of disaster victims and the countless,

everyday heroes who come to their aid and help them get back on their feet.

After telling the tale of Dan's group after Katrina, Grossberg and his team have several installments on the drawing board. Such subjects include the complete, never-before-told story of Houston's response to both Katrina and Hurricane Rita; a look at San Francisco's non-profit Swords to Plowshares which helps veterans re-integrate into society; and an exploration of volunteer health care professionals in Washington D.C.'s National Association of Free Clinics who struggle to meet the needs of patients from all walks of life. These are people who devote their free time to helping others, and by doing so, not only do they help themselves, but strengthen the fabric of society and the common bonds of humanity.

By weaving the "pay it forward" premise with three stories within each 60-minute segment, the ten-episode, reality series, *A Bridge Life*, pursues the absorbing approach of every day struggles suggestive of *Jon & Kate Plus Eight*, *Little People Big World*, and *Hoarders*.

Spoiler Alert

The most unique aspect of the *A Bridge Life* is also one of its most tragic. Though not a central driving plot point, it's the twist you hope for only in fiction and dread in real life. One of the evacuees, is not who he says he is. As a matter of fact, nearly everything he tells Dan and the others turns out to be the fabrication of a convicted felon. Once in Florida, matters take a turn from bad to worse, as friction between he and other members of the group begins to materialize.

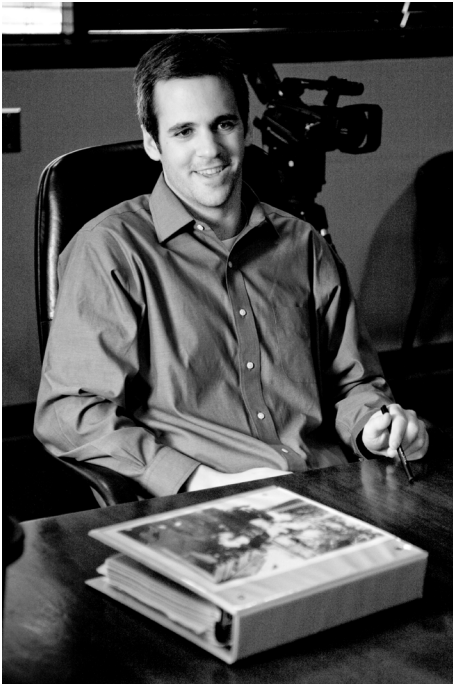
In her efforts to help him, Dan's friend, Heidi Scott, began to suspect this individual wasn't telling the truth about his past when she discovered more and more holes in his story. When pressed, the evacuee in question became more agitated and, trapped in his deceit, he became suicidal and had to be hospitalized.

After discovering the truth about his background, Dan and Heidi cut ties with the evacuee in early January. Three weeks later, this person was arrested for the murder of

76-year-old Boynton Beach resident, Alan J. Shalleck, who had won partial fame as the collaborator of the Curious George books and helped work on the famed character's short films. After stabbing Shalleck to death in his trailer, the evacuee took the retired artist's jewelry and accessed his bank accounts. Police later found Shalleck's body wrapped in a garbage bag in his driveway. They were able to trace the murder and this individual was arrested and subsequently confessed to the killing. Prosecutors are now seeking the death penalty, as he sits in Palm Beach County jail. Dan and Heidi refuse to visit him.

The evacuee in question is Rex Ditto. As it happened, Rex never had a younger brother who was shot by looters at the Super Dome. He had made the whole story up during a schizophrenic episode. A revealing jailhouse interview has been recorded and is set to be part of the DVD special features.

Producers



JOSHUA GROSSBERG
DIRECTOR/EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Joshua Grossberg, CEO-Founder of Two Cousins Entertainment and Senior Entertainment Journalist for E! Entertainment Online. As a filmmaker, recipient of the Platinum Award for Best Short at the WorldFest Houston Film Festival, for *LIFE IS ELSEWHERE*; a semi-finalist for the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences' prestigious Nicholls Fellowship in Screenwriting For *THE ASCENDANCE* (top 30 out of 4,250 entries); a finalist for the New Century Writer Awards, a Special Honorable Recognition for *THE NUMBER YOU HAVE REACHED* and *THE ASCENDANCE*. As a graduate of Northwestern University, he's also the recipient of The Steven Spielberg Award for Best Student Production at the WorldFest Charleston International Film festival, for *NOWHERE TOWN*.

In 2005, Joshua completed *LOOKING FOR HARRISON*, a 30-minute comedy parodying the films of Harrison Ford, featuring his *Raiders of the Lost Ark* costar John Rhys-Davies. His latest film is a 9-minute mystery thriller entitled *BE-TRAYED*, starring Seth Gilliam (*The Wire*), PJ Sosko (*Royal Pains*) and Cara Buono (*The Sopranos*).



KEVIN WILSON
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Kevin Wilson has worked as a sound engineer since graduating from New York University's School of Visual Arts, for Matlin Recording and Duart Film & Video. He is currently a postproduction supervisor heading up the audio department at Prime Focus in New York. Kevin's credits as a sound mixer and editor include such films as *POKEMON*, *DAY ZERO*, and *VIDAL SASSOON: THE MOVIE*.



MICHAEL ADAM KIER
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Michael Adam Kier, is the East Coast Director of Operations for the organic luxury body treatment company, Red Flower. Theatrically produced, adapted and directed off-off Broadway productions of Shakespeare's *MACBETH* and Chekhov's *A SEAGULL*. Makeup talents can be seen in HBO's *ANGELS IN AMERICA*. Acting credits include *LAW & ORDER*, *DAMAGES*, *LET'S EXPLORE*, Time Life's *GUITAR ROCK* and *LOOKING FOR HARRISON*.

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a large stadium, likely for sports or events. The seating is arranged in curved tiers, with the majority of seats being blue. There are sections of red seats visible in the upper right. The stadium is mostly empty. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime. The perspective is from above, looking down at the seating area.

AWARDS

GOLD REMI AWARD, 2010
Worldfest Houston Film Festival

RISING STAR EXCELLENCE IN FILMMAKING AWARD, 2010
Canada International Film Festival

NEAPOLITAN AWARD, 2009
Naples International Film Festival

THE BRONZE PLAQUE, 2009
Columbus International Film & Video Festival

SPIRIT OF THE INDEPENDENTS AWARD, 2009
Fort Lauderdale International Film Festival

OFFICIAL SELECTION

Peace on Earth Film Festival, Chicago Illinois – 2010

Newport Beach International Film Festival, 2009 - World Premiere
Newport Beach California

Wexner Center For the Arts, Columbus Ohio, 2009
presented by Ohio State University's prestigious WexnerCenter for the Arts as part of its documentary programming.

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