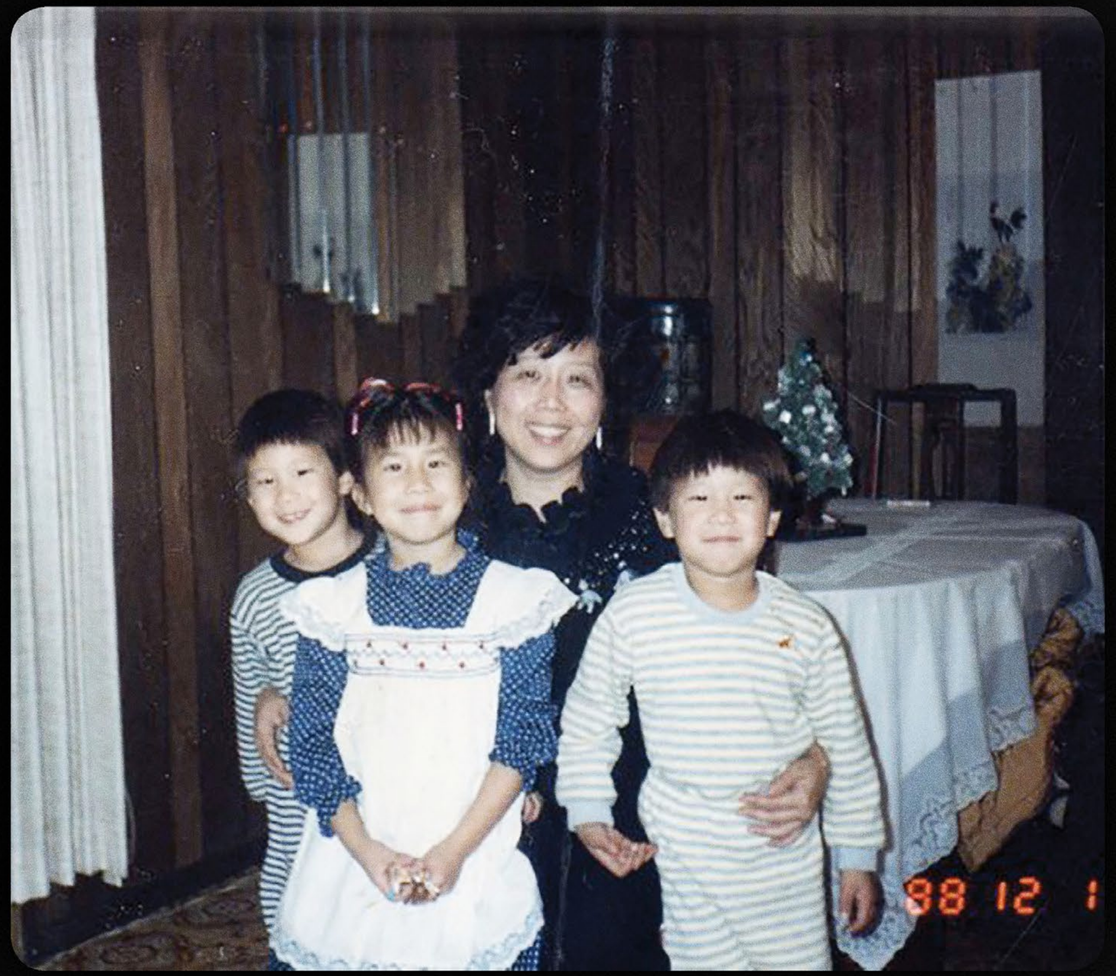
Keep Being You

REAL PEOPLE CAMPAIGN

TWINTAOERS (AARON & WINSTON TAO)

BIKTARVY®
bictegravir 50mg/emtricitabine 200mg/
tenofovir alafenamide 25mg tablets
SIMPLY POWERFUL™



We're with you.

On August 8th, 2011, our mom was rushed to the ER for trying to kill herself. She ingested over 16 oz. of rat poison - an entire bag. In order to save her life, the doctors gave her two blood transfusions. They told us they didn't think she was going to live. But, she did.

Our mom's been diagnosed with schizoaffective bipolar disorder and this was about the 7th suicide attempt we personally know of. Our entire lives, the moment someone finds out she has schizoaffective disorder they say something like: "Oh, so she's crazy?" and they automatically put a generic label on her - completely looking past the fact that she is a human being, like you and me, who is just trying to find her purpose in this life. We know, that deep down inside, there's a beautiful woman there - a wonderful woman who loves people and life and teeny tiny chihuahuas. So schizophrenia to us isn't a label like most people attribute it to. Yes, it's an illness that has unfortunately taken over our mom's mental health, but it doesn't define her. She's not crazy. She's our mom. She's the one who - despite her illness - would take all three of us children out to Burger King and cut one 99c whopper into 4 pieces because that's all she could afford. She's the one who - despite her illness - would vacuum the entire gymnasium every weekday at 5am in order to give us free gymnastic lessons. And she's the one who - despite her illness - sacrificed her entire doctorate career to work 2 jobs in order to raise 3 kids on her own.

We say all this because we understand how stigma, discrimination, and marginalization - internalized - affect mental health. And how it can cripple the individuals and family members trying to fight it. The enthusiasm we heard in your voices during the call was contagious, and we are truly excited to partner with you in creating a powerful, memorable, and emotional film. Together, let's help eradicate this stigma and show the world that those afflicted with this illness can live long, healthy, and flourishing lives like everyone else. Jeremy mentioned on the call that you guys want to create a new cultural touchpoint. So, let's do that. ***Together, let's show everyone who our heroes are.***

We heard you, Jeremy, when you said,

"Every single one of us deserves to feel loved; to be loved; to have that experience and to be able to share who they are. And to be proud of who they are."

These films will follow our heroes through their stories of struggle to receive love and self-acceptance.

Why We're Your Filmmakers

Honestly, telling stories that matter is who we are. This isn't just a job to us. It's our life's mission to do films for causes we genuinely believe in because this is what we stand for - it's part of our values. And no, this isn't some cliche phrase we're throwing around.

We made SuperMaarko to combat cyber-sex trafficking in the Philippines in order to rescue both little boys and girls. We made "Sleep Well, My Baby," to bring awareness to the plight of refugees and help them escape a life of tyranny from North Korea. We made Ford's "Cowgirls of Color" to highlight the Cowgirls' unique everyday challenges they face in riding rodeo and in turn, champion diversity. On top of all this, the films we've made for causes have collectively raised over $22 million dollars. So, we're not in filmmaking to make "cool films". We're in it to make a difference; to change lives; and in doing so, to change the world.

We have a unique ability to create heartfelt emotion in all of the stories we tell, and we want to use those talents to partner with you in order to create a compelling film that humanizes those affected with HIV.

Our Heroes' Journeys

We couldn't help but laugh when Joseph Campbell was mentioned because we love Joseph's books and have used his principles in our narrative films. Anyone who's read 'The Hero with a Thousand Faces' or 'The Hero's Journey' knows that certain rules need to be followed in order to craft the most emotionally compelling stories.

And for us, finding the right hero is literally everything. It will make or break our stories. We don't care if the person is just cool, good looking, or popular. We care about how honest and vulnerable they are and how they'll translate this emotional honesty on screen. For all our films we've strived incredibly hard to preserve this emotional honesty and integrity and that's why they're as powerful as they are. And for this film, we'll implement the same strategy.

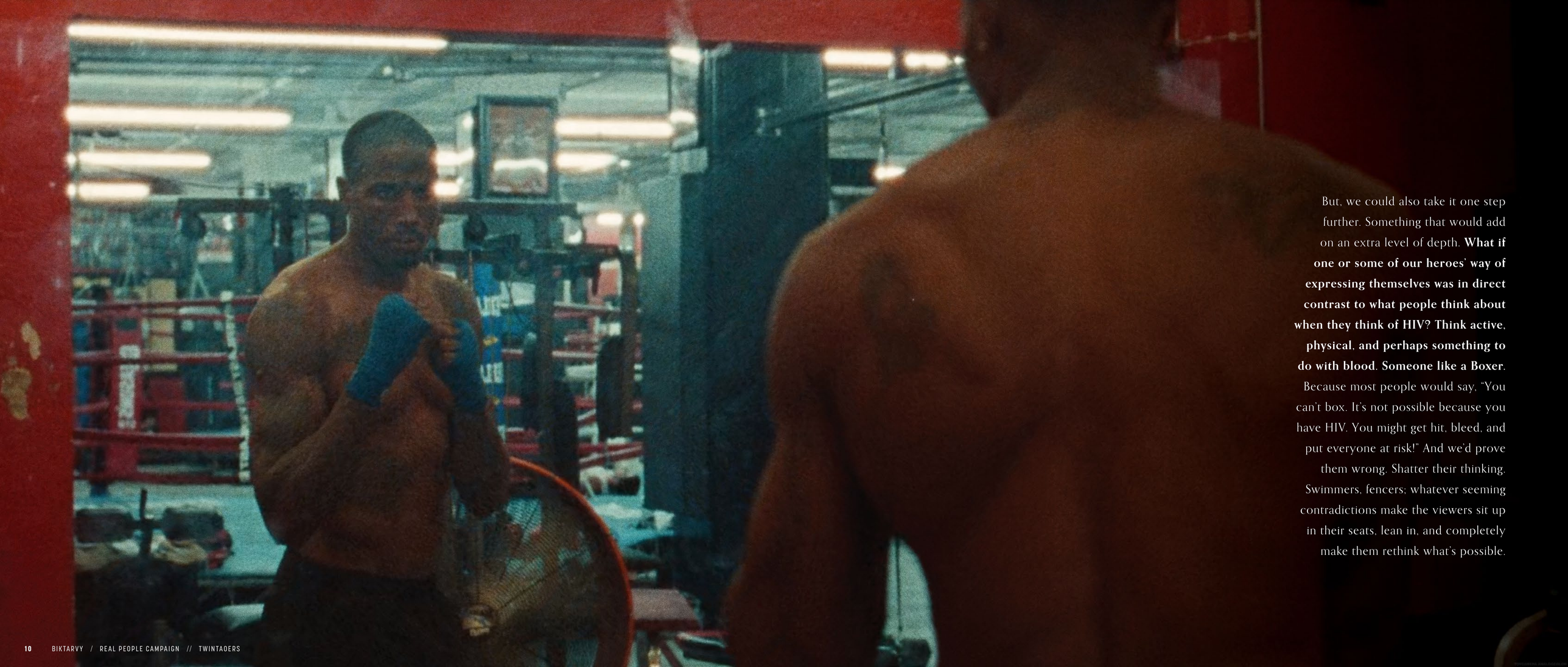
Choosing Our Heroes

The 5 characters who are being considered are individually compelling and have a certain level of depth we can mine further.

There are a few important things we feel worth mentioning here. With our heroes, we'd love to go after some characters who are physically active with HIV and have interesting ways of expressing themselves. Two of the characters we were personally really drawn to in the brief were Tyler and Chase. There's so much opportunity to pull out some real emotion in their stories.

Tyler's story caught our attention not only because of his adventurous spirit, but also his dream to marry his long-time girlfriend. There's so much heart and conflict here and we'd love to get the chance to talk to him to see how we can develop his story.

Chase's drive and passion for dancing are a very strong story option. Dancing translates incredibly well on screen and it's physical, active, and passionate (We'll go more in detail about these two characters later).



But, we could also take it one step further. Something that would add on an extra level of depth. **What if one or some of our heroes' way of expressing themselves was in direct contrast to what people think about when they think of HIV? Think active, physical, and perhaps something to do with blood. Someone like a Boxer.** Because most people would say, "You can't box. It's not possible because you have HIV. You might get hit, bleed, and put everyone at risk!" And we'd prove them wrong. Shatter their thinking. Swimmers, fencers; whatever seeming contradictions make the viewers sit up in their seats, lean in, and completely make them rethink what's possible.

Another option we think could be very powerful story-wise, is a parent who's been diagnosed with HIV and they're trying to raise their child. Or, the scenario could be reversed - their child has been diagnosed with HIV.

Telling Their Stories

As narrative directors with a specialty in shaping emotionally compelling stories, we work hard to ensure that all of the story pieces fit together in order to create a dramatic experience that resonates and lingers with viewers long after the film is over.

In other words, it doesn't just happen by chance or by documenting a series of random events and then finding the edit in post. It takes deep care and skill to create an emotionally engaging story from the beginning. And this is what we're best at. Over the years, there's a few key elements we've learned that we've consistently implemented over and over to every story we tell. Some of these principles are the same ones in The Hero's Journey. Here are 3 crucial elements we'll need in order to guarantee our stories have strong emotional investment from the audience.

1. THE OBJECTIVE

When we asked you on the call about your process and what was important to you in finding the right heroes for this film, we were so relieved at your response because we felt like we were immediately on the same page. It was important for you to find heroes who have strong dreams and goals. And for us, this is always our number one priority. Story-wise, it's what drives our films and makes audiences resonate and connect with our characters. Strong goals mean big stakes and big stakes mean more emotional investment with our heroes. We connect with them; we root for them; we resonate with them. We'll explain below how we'll ensure we'll find this in our talent, but making sure our heroes have strong objectives/wants/goals will definitely be one of our chief priorities.

2. THE OBSTACLES

Since we've first identified their goals, we're already cheering with them as an audience to see them achieve their goals. But when we see what they're facing - their setbacks, internal/external opposition, etc., and then we see them push through those obstacles in order to still pursue their dreams, then the audience can't help but root for them even more.

What kind of opposition will they face from their friends? Critics? What about their brother, sister? Father or mother? And what kind of internal opposition is coming from themselves as well? What lies are they telling themselves because of their disease? How do they view themselves in terms of self-worth? And do they ever believe they can be accepted for who they truly are? We'll really take the time to go deeper with our heroes - their own views on stigma and how battling their own personal thoughts has been challenging to them - both external and internal.

As Danny mentioned:

"The stigma just doesn't come from around you - it's internal too."

3. THE RELATIONSHIPS

This is one of the strongest emotional story elements that many individuals overlook. Many times, our deepest motivations come from strong relationships, whether we are aware of them or not. So, it's crucial for us to try and identify these as much as possible.

The people closest to our heroes will be able to pull out more emotion from them more than any of us can, so our goal would be to find ways to utilize the families/friends as best we can.

For SuperMaarko, we were tasked with creating an emotionally powerful film about these kids who were cyber-sex trafficked - all in five minutes. We knew if we just wrote this kid in this terrible situation, it would border on being melodramatic - so after reviewing a bunch of case files, we wrote a sister into the script - his closest friend and confidant - and made him her protector. By strengthening their relationship, it increased the film's emotional payoff. We implemented the same technique for Sleep Well, My Baby. And in Cowgirls of Color, we made sure we filmed them in connection with other Cowgirls - never alone - because we wanted to showcase their unity and solidarity.

We've gone ahead and created a sample Hero story of how this would practically look like when we put all the elements together. Keep in mind that it's just a starting point for conversation as we don't have the talent just yet, but we're excited to at least describe to you how we plan on tackling this together.

The Anthem Story

COLD OPEN

We start the film by having our heroes share common negative phrases they hear regarding HIV stigma. For example, "You must deserve it because of your choices." We can also have their close friends and family members share common phrases they hear as well. We hear a culmination of these negative phrases as they start to increase - everything building over images of our heroes in different environments and different emotions - so, it'll feel like all these sayings are coming at us faster and faster, hardly allowing us any time to really process what they're saying - and slowly overtaking us. The music picks up - climaxing with the images and phrases as we then quickly cut out, seeing one of our heroes by themselves in some isolated environment. The last phrase we hear has to deal with the fact that they can't do certain things in life because, "You have HIV." Our opening is powerful, quick, and immediately sets up the story that all our characters are connected through HIV and immediately sets up the story that all our characters are connected through the challenges of having HIV.

What's important in this cold open is that we set-up the film with stigma. Since it's a large part of the issue we're tackling, we'll want to address it as quickly and hard-hitting as possible.

ACT I

Once our cold open has been set-up, we'll then show various shots of our 3 heroes' different lives and environments. All daily life - eating, hanging out with friends, dancing, training, playing music - whatever it is they do. We'll capture all these things naturally, so the moments won't feel contrived or fake.

For our interview portion, this is where we'll get the backstory of our characters - who they are - how long they've had HIV; how it's affected their relationships, etc. (please reference the interview portion of this treatment to see how we plan on approaching this). We'll also want to hear about the pressures they put on themselves; what their stressors are; when they feel like they're most vulnerable; what's the most emotionally taxing time for them, etc.

Then, we'll bring the stigma back around again, intercutting our heroes addressing various questions they're asked regarding HIV. Sample questions like, "So, does HIV mean you're going to die", "I thought only certain groups of people could get HIV?" "Can HIV be transferred through kissing?" Or, "HIV's the same thing as AIDS, right?" Again, the way we're envisioning tying our heroes together is through the stigma - so we'll ask all characters the same questions regarding stigma - and in the edit, we'll intercut their answers so that the stigma is actually tying everything together - from common sayings to common beliefs to common thoughts about themselves.

So, this is our Act I - getting into who our different characters are and what they're facing. We're also showing them in their individual specific environments doing what they're passionate about doing.

23A

ACT II

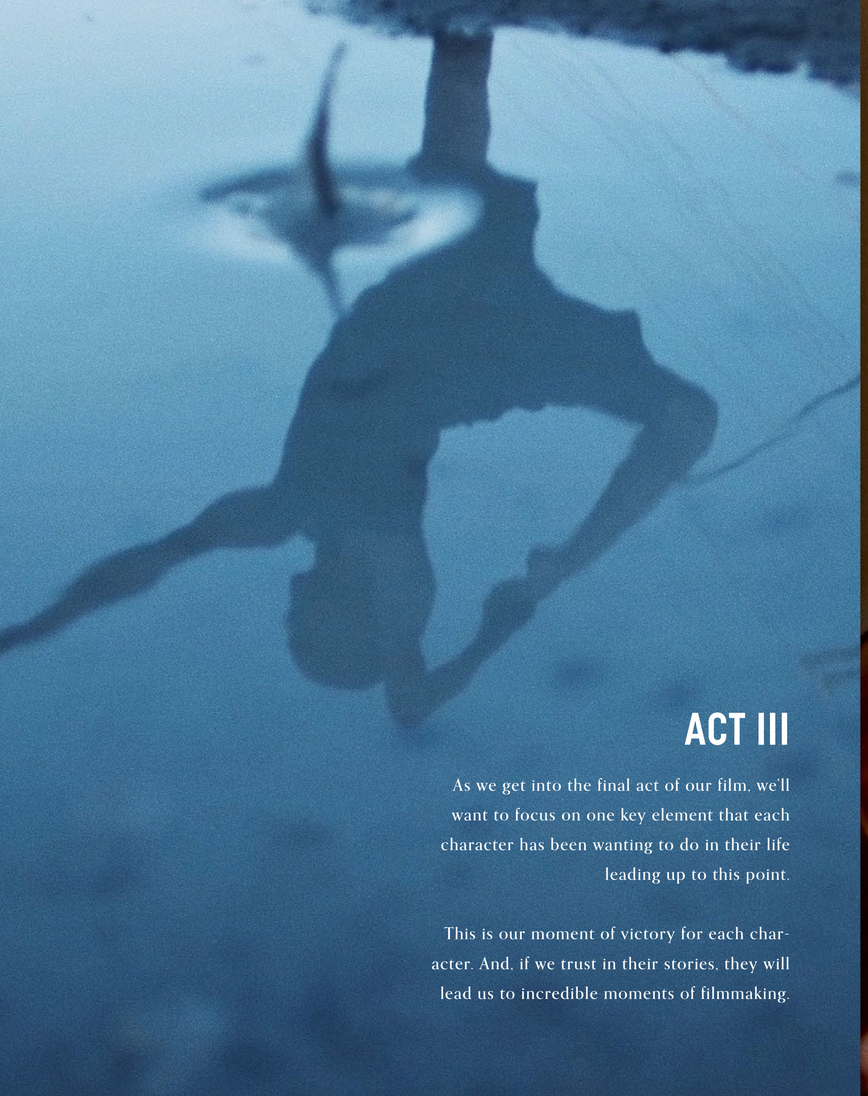
This is the meat of the story. In Act II we'll get to know our characters a bit more - and have them really drive our story here. We'll go into their histories and possibly have their parents or close friends describe what they were like as kids and any relevant memories they have. Then, what they noticed changed in our heroes when they were diagnosed - what their current battles are, both internal and external, from their point of view, and how they're pushing past what others think.

We'll also go into a deeper description of what HIV actually is and properly address the various misconceptions of it. This isn't a biology or history lesson, so the description here will be brief - we don't want to interview doctors or professors on this matter either as we always want to be with our characters. We just need to describe what it is briefly to the viewer so we can educate them here a bit.

Then, we'll have our heroes describe how they emotionally feel about living with HIV. And we'll also touch upon some deeper emotional pain points about what it means to live with it. Like what they wish other people would understand about them; their deepest fears, how it affects relationships, if they have any regrets, whether or not others think they deserve it or not, etc. We'll also explore shameful discrimination that results from the stigma. For example, have they ever been denied access to healthcare, or been isolated in certain social environments? Then, we'll dive a little deeper into their ambitions, goals, and dreams. There's a lot of potential for some truly emotional moments here and we'll want to make sure we're paying attention to and capturing these moments.

Also, it's here that we'll really want to take the audience more on a visual journey of how our heroes feel. If they feel alone, isolated, attacked, ostracized, incomplete, whatever they end up sharing with us, this will be the part in our film where we'll want to visually portray these feelings as best as we can in a somewhat more artistic way. Whether it's through our lighting or shooting inserts, we'll really want to capture these negative feelings here - to get into our characters' heads; to really feel what they're feeling. So, not only just hearing their struggle, but seeing it too.

To summarize, this is the act in which we truly humanize our heroes in ways where the audience feels close to them. The only way this can happen is if we capture moments of emotional vulnerability throughout Act II.



ACT III

As we get into the final act of our film, we'll want to focus on one key element that each character has been wanting to do in their life leading up to this point.

This is our moment of victory for each character. And, if we trust in their stories, they will lead us to incredible moments of filmmaking.

For example, if we use Tyler as a subject, we'd love to see if he is willing to actually propose and allow us to capture it on screen to his girlfriend. If she's willing to be a key part in this documentary, she'll think the final scene will just be another scene with her and Tyler at sunset on top of the mountain so she'll have no clue what he's really about to do.

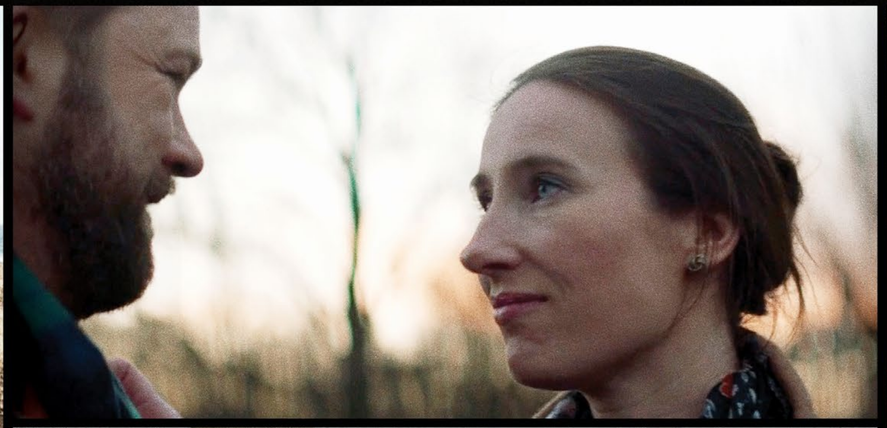
If it's Chase as one of our subjects, let's have him choreograph a dance that allows him to express himself in an artistic way. We'll scout the most cinematic locations, and film this choreographed dance in a beautiful and dramatic way to enhance the emotional elements found within this space.

If it's a martial artist, like a boxer, or kickboxer, let's see if they'd be willing to play a part in a small exhibition match.

By doing this, we have the opportunity to really address the stigma through a physically demanding sport that most people would deem impossible.

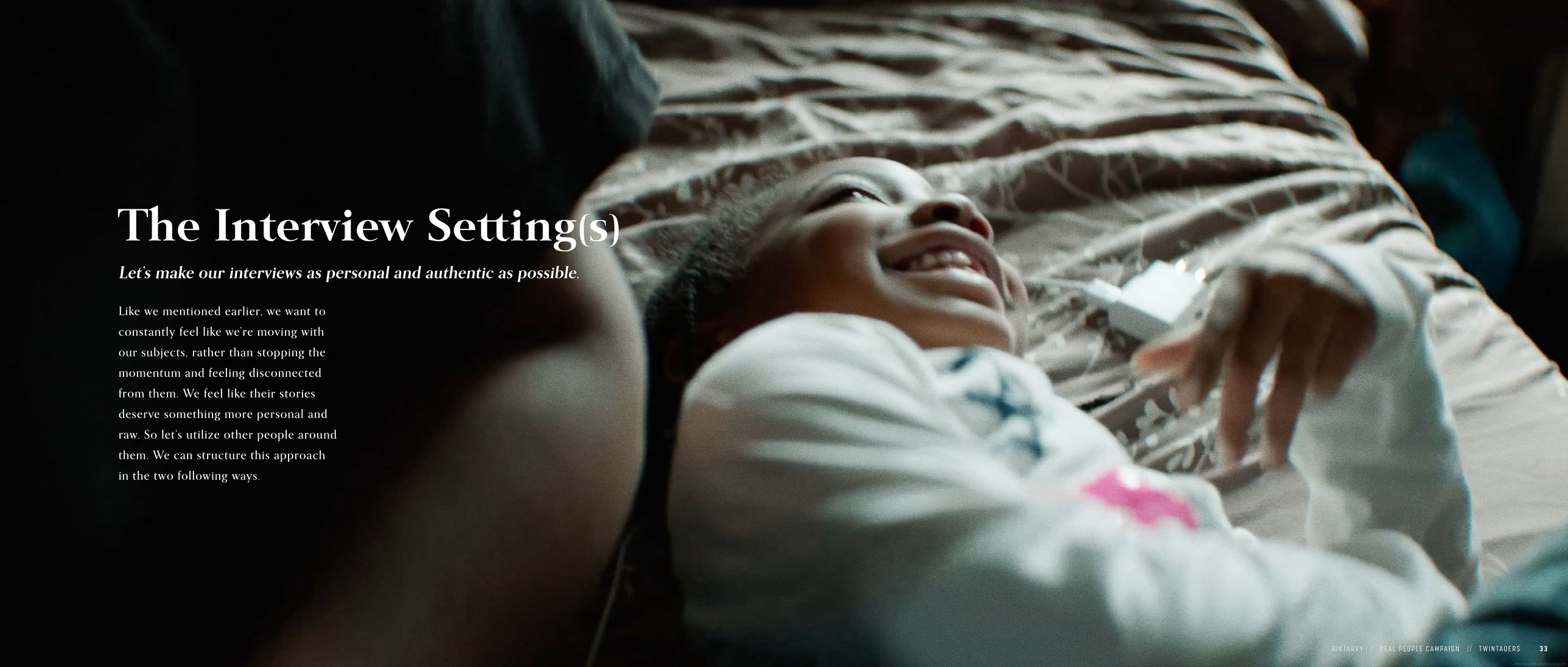
So, whatever our subjects personal dreams are, we'll use that for their climax.

And however they want to artistically express themselves in breaking HIV stigma - we let them. It's fair game and the sky's the limit for creativity. It's the added bonus that gives our story clear, visual, and artistic direction. And for our heroes, what better way to express themselves about how they feel?



THE :60 VERSIONS

While the longer form film has a more cinematic tone to it, we also completely understand the needs of the client for their TVC deliverables. Our mood/tone for these will feel considerably brighter, with a more positive through-line. We're envisioning most of the highlighted moments will be taken from Act III of our stories, which are the hopeful, more inspiring images that showcase our heroes' personal victories. Here's the feelings we'll evoke with these :60 TVC's.



The Interview Setting(s)

Let's make our interviews as personal and authentic as possible.

Like we mentioned earlier, we want to constantly feel like we're moving with our subjects, rather than stopping the momentum and feeling disconnected from them. We feel like their stories deserve something more personal and raw. So let's utilize other people around them. We can structure this approach in the two following ways.

INTERVIEW STYLE I: **CONVERSATIONS**

We can do this by having the people closest to them reveal truths about our characters condition, struggles, and triumphs in intimate conversation type scenarios with them. By opening up our revelatory moments with a conversational based stylistic approach, we allow ourselves to capture raw, organic moments that will allow the audience to feel like they are partaking in our subjects day-to-day lifestyle. We'll capture conversations with a couple as they wake up and lay in bed in the morning. Or before they fall asleep at night. Or we can capture it over a meal or just laying in a hammock holding each other close. Whatever our environmental settings are, we'll continue to use our characters and the characters around them to push the stories forward, rather than having isolated interview moments with them.

INTERVIEW STYLE II: **PHONE CALLS**

In any documentary production, the process always begins with phone calls as a way of getting to know each other. Typically we'll arrange for a call with each subject several weeks in advance of the shoot, to hear their story first hand and begin to identify the most compelling elements. Often the emotional quality of a subject telling their story for the first time is hard to match in a second interview, so we'll do well to capture the initial call as professional audio. We've had success scheduling time with subjects at recording studios close to their homes, which allow them to take the call in a studio environment with low pressure (no cameras) and professional quality audio. Even the physicality of wearing headphones sends them deeper into their own heads and disarms them emotionally.

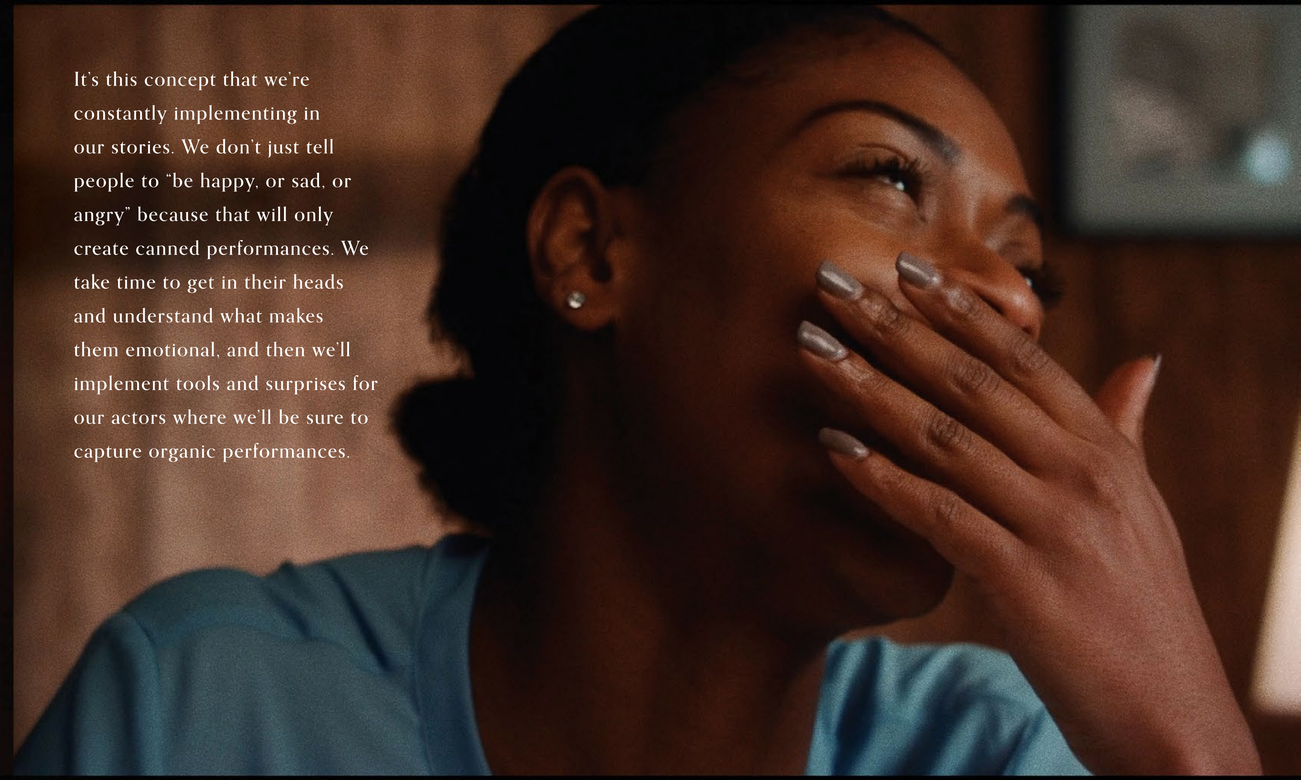
Having a professional quality audio interview in advance of the shoot allows us to be more intentional about our shoot days, crafting meaningful visual setups to illuminate the profound soundbites that we have already captured and experimented it with editorially. In addition to just the in-studio phone call, we would recommend recording all of the other phone conversations throughout the process too, regardless of quality. Voicemails and phone calls can add a moving layer of texture to the audio of our films.

Ensuring Authenticity

Firstly, all our moments are carefully planned for. We get close to our heroes - asking them specific questions so we can gather necessary information that we'll be able to use in the future.

For example, for one of our latest films we needed our father actor to be genuinely happy. So, in an off-hand conversation, we picked his brain to see what his favorite past-times were. He mentioned singing, with his favorite bands being Sting and Rush. So, during a retirement party scene, we coordinated a surprise Karaoke session and informed all the other actors in the room besides him. We loaded a home karaoke set with songs from both Sting and Rush on the TV and during the party, we had one of our actors bust out the microphone and spill the surprise. Our father actor was so happy he started tearing up in the scene - and then sung his lungs out. Needless to say, we captured some pretty powerful and emotional moments.

It's this concept that we're constantly implementing in our stories. We don't just tell people to "be happy, or sad, or angry" because that will only create canned performances. We take time to get in their heads and understand what makes them emotional, and then we'll implement tools and surprises for our actors where we'll be sure to capture organic performances.



Secondly, we'll always write scenes around their own personal stories to create scenarios in the environments they're already comfortable with. We'll also find their motivations and use that to push the story forward. We do this to get the focus off of their illness, and on to their ambitions as human beings.

Locations

We need to ensure we capture moments where our heroes are able to feel the most comfortable with themselves - in their own homes, friends' and relatives homes, etc

At the same time, we need to ensure our locations will look cinematic. So, since we want this to be both cinematic and real, we'll be using a mix of real locations within our heroes' lives, and more cinematic locations that we'll be able to scout.

Cinematography

We like to use our cinematography in a motivational way to push our stories forward.

One thing that remains consistent with our work visually, is that we like it to reflect the internal state of our characters, and their perspective of where they're at in this world. For example, if our character is going through a hard time in his/her life, we'll tend to light that in a more dramatic fashion. Soft lighting, underexposed, will convey a more depressing and overcast feeling, whereas backlighting a character and using light as separation and flares will communicate a more hopeful imagery.

We'll also want to bring out the most emotion possible so we'd love to incorporate using past photos and archival videos - anything that can help illuminate some backstory with our characters and bring us into their world a little bit more.

Camera

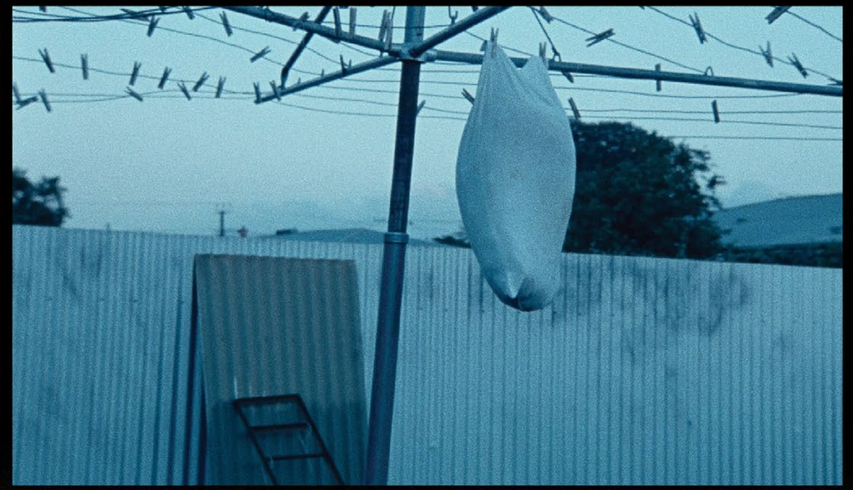
We love the idea of using subtle handheld camera work to enhance specific moments.

We truly believe capturing docu-esque moments in a cinematic way will be beneficial to this spot in enhancing the campaign and making our audience take notice. So we will be extremely intentional, but will always leave room to embrace the unexpected moments.

Enhanced Visuals

It's incredibly important for us to capture the negative self-image our heroes can put on themselves when they internalize the stigma. So, we'd love to enhance the emotion of our stories by shooting complementary visuals that really captures the mood and tone of what our characters are going through internally.

Isolating our characters with lighting, using different color hues, and macro close-ups of abstract visuals that really encapsulate how they're feeling inside. We envision shooting these images so that they can be used for any one of our characters during the edit - and also as transitional elements.



Music & Sound

We envision the music to be extremely organic, dense, and delicate at the same time.

They should speak to our heroes' journeys in a raw and emotive way, all while instilling a sense of hope into them. They would need to appeal to the different stages and journeys, but overall, they should have the same emotive layer behind them and all come to an inspirational conclusion. We picture a lot of strings, mixed with light piano notes, driving this forward. Instead of describing in words what we're hearing for this, we've curated a couple of songs to let you listen for yourselves.

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/27CZnMl1NBUARg5TwdG4Ik

Jeremy, Danny, Sarah, Josh, and Jeff -

We just wanted to let you all know how excited we were in meeting everyone over the phone (albeit a tough phone call on our part from Thailand hahaha). We're even more excited at the prospect of meeting you all in person hopefully soon.

Every once in awhile a project comes across our desk that aligns with our morals, values, and vision. They're not only deeply meaningful projects, they're also backed by collaborators who want to truly affect and change the world.

This is that project for us. And we couldn't be more excited and humbled at the opportunity to make these films a reality for the individuals that are involved - and shed some hope on our heroes with HIV.

So truly, from the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for considering us to partner with you in this campaign of a lifetime.

-Aaron & Winston

Thank You