

NOMINATION FORM

Please use this nomination form for all awards, except the mPower Award which uses a separate nomination form on next page. If necessary, please download additional copies of this form at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/annualconference.

AWARD FOR WHICH YOU ARE SUBMITTING A NOMINATION:

☐ Innovation in Programming Award

☐ Clifford W. Beers Award

☐ George Goodman and Ruth P. Brudney Social Work Award

☐ Media Award

NOMINEE

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

NOMINATING ORGANIZATION OR INDIVIDUAL

Name: _____

Organization: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Connection to Nominee: _____

CONSENT (FULL CONSENT OF NOMINEES FOR ALL AWARDS IS REQUIRED FOR CONSIDERATION)

I, (print name) _____, hereby consent to be nominated to receive the award indicated on this form and authorize the use of my name, brief bio and photograph in any publicity of the award.

Signature of Nominee: Bayan M. San Date: _____

IN ADDITION TO THIS FORM:

- Attach a statement of no more than three pages to your application. The statement should include relevant biographical information about the nominee, describe how the nominee meets the award criteria and include any additional support material.
- Your entire submission must not exceed seven pages in length. Do not send videos, audiotapes or CDs. Electronic submissions only.
- Submit your application by **March 31, 2017** using the information to the right.

SUBMIT MATERIALS:

Online: <http://bit.ly/MHA2017Awards>

Email: ewallace@mentalhealthamerica.net
Subject Line: Award Nomination
Please note: *Emailed submissions must have signature of consent*

DEADLINE: MARCH 31, 2017

QUESTIONS?

Contact Erin Wallace at ewallace@mentalhealthamerica.net



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mentalhealthamerica.net/annualconference

Nomination Statement for Ben Selkow and “Buried Above Ground for a Mental Health America Media Award

It is with great honor and privilege that I am writing to nominate Ben Selkow, and his documentary film, **Buried Above Ground**, for a Mental Health American Media Award.

Buried Above Ground is a feature-length documentary, shot over six years, which provides viewers with an unprecedented window on the intimate daily lives of three people struggling to live with, overcome, and recover from the crippling symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). We see them at home, at school, at work and in therapy, as they struggle with the powerful symptoms of PTSD, with the help and support of friends, family, and clinicians, working to overcome the debilitating effects of the disorder and reclaim their lives.

By doing so, the film offers the public a rare chance to witness first-hand the causes and nature of PTSD; that the disorder is treatable; and, by doing so, their stories send a powerful message of hope and recovery to those affected by PTSD and their families, thus educating the public. By doing so, the film and its related deep educational and community outreach campaign, have helped create a national dialogue on the illness and reduce the stigma of this most misunderstood disorder, which will affect between 7 to 8% of the U.S. population at some point in their lives, and approximately eight million American adults in a given year, according to the National Comorbidity Survey.

Ben Selkow’s **Buried Above Ground** follows the lives of three people who are each affected by PTSD due to a different type of trauma in their lives.

Luis Carlos Montalván is an Iraq War veteran, whose PTSD resulted from his exposure to the harsh realities of battle in Iraq; **Ashley Boudreaux** is a fifth-generation New Orleans native whose home was destroyed by Hurricane Katrina; and **Erundina López** is a survivor of child abuse and domestic violence, and who, as a result, has battled both the symptoms of PTSD and addiction for many years.

THE FILM’S IMPACT: As a five-time MHA Media Award winner (1996, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2007) and someone who has followed and sought to tell the stories of those affected by mental health issues, I know how difficult the process of making a film about a subject like this can be.

It’s a reason why I have been so moved by this film, from the time I first read about it and saw the early trailer, while Ben was working on it as a Mental Health Journalism Fellow at the Carter Center, a program for which I am an adviser, and I have followed it through its production and distribution since.

To specifically address MHA’s criteria for a Media Award, with regard to how an entry shows clear, factual data; utilizes a creative, innovative approach with a fresh, non-conventional, in-depth, or unique perspective; depicts people with lived experience in real, multi-dimensional ways; and the entry’s effect on reducing stigma, I offer the following:

- **Buried Above Ground** greatly advances the public’s understanding of PTSD by offering a clear, factual and accessible portrayal of the disorder, its causes and its impact on people, and particularly how treatment can help those affected and their families. Like many other psychiatric disorders, misunderstanding about PTSD abounds, leading those affected to be dismissed, marginalized and stigmatized by an uninformed public. The compelling stories of Luis, Ashley and Erundina put a human face on the disorder, including of three of its major causes, those being exposure to war or terrorism-related violence; domestic abuse; and natural disaster.

Viewers are able to witness for themselves the impact of the trauma and disorder on the three subjects, and their courageous efforts to recover and return to their everyday lives over an extraordinary six year period. The value of these powerful, dramatic and engaging stories in helping to create a national dialogue on PTSD, as a highly misunderstood illness, cannot be understated.

- As a filmmaker, I have struggled over the years with how to tell the stories of those affected by what can be difficult and disturbing psychiatric disorders and symptoms, in a manner that *does not sensationalize or stigmatize the illnesses*, but rather de-mystifies them and offers a window on the lives of people affected which helps engender empathy and compassion.

My feeling about this is informed by the great journalist and mental health advocate Mike Wallace, who said he didn't believe when it came to mental health that people were hard of heart or mean-spirited – they just didn't know. And if they *did know* they would certainly ask, "What can I do to help?" It is precisely this mission served by **Buried Above Ground**, as a media production that helps educate the public, and by doing so, it helps de-stigmatize PTSD and open up empathy, compassion and support for those affected.

- From the first time I saw the opening few minutes of Ben's film, featuring Luis in his room discussing his life and illness, I was struck by the brilliant approach Ben took as a filmmaker to telling the story, by engaging and pulling the viewer into Luis's life and story. At the same time, Ben skillfully relays the feeling of uneasiness related to PTSD for the viewer, using the tools of his trade – camerawork, audio, the dialogue, editing – allowing the viewer to climb into the worlds of **Luis, Ashley** and **Erundina**, and to experience first-hand their struggles to live with and recover from PTSD. This approach, according to Ben Selkow, not only helps promote compassion for the subjects, but also disrupts the crisis of connection of PTSD survivors, while validating the experience of audience members who care for someone with PTSD.

DISTRIBUTION/EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH: The power of **Buried Above Ground** has been both as a documentary and the impact the film has had through a deep and ongoing educational outreach campaign organized and spearheaded by Selkow. As is often the case, the true test of a great documentary is how well it can take the emotion engendered in viewers at the end of the film and translate that into positive action. The film's distribution and community and educational outreach included:

FESTIVALS AND SCREENINGS: The film was featured at over 15 film festivals in the U.S. and internationally. It premiered at the prestigious **Woodstock Film Festival** in fall of 2015 where it was a Finalist for Best Documentary and Best Editing, and the screening was accompanied by a public discussion about PTSD co-hosted by NAMI Mid-Hudson Valley. The documentary was also screened at the **Carmel International Film Festival**; in San Francisco in observance of Domestic Violence Awareness Month, where Selkow organized community screenings with leading mental health advocates, clinicians, and homeless care experts; the **San Francisco Indie Festival** at the famed Roxie Theatre, which included a panel discussion with leading mental health advocates and clinicians from the Bay Area. **Buried Above Ground** was also screened in **San Antonio, TX** for Mental Health Awareness Month at a Children's Mental Health Summit; at the **Fargo Film Festival**; **Vail Film Festival**, **Athens (OH) International Film & Video Festival**, **Ft. Myers Film Festival**, and **Picture This: International Disability Film Festival**, where it received an Honorable Mention.

The film was also screened as part of the **Cleveland International Film Festival** Global Health Competition, where it packed two houses and the filmmakers hosted evocative conversations with local mental health advocates and leading clinicians. The film has also been seen internationally, at the **First Fortnight Festival** in Dublin, Ireland, where it played to a sold-out audience, and featured a discussion with Selkow and a clinician skilled in treating PTSD.

Buried Above Ground was featured at the **Mental Health America's National Conference & Inaugural Film Festival** where Ben Selkow and film subject Captain Luis Carlos Montalván, were panelists for two breakout sessions.

THEATRICAL AND BROADCAST: The film had its New York City theatrical premiere at the **IFC Center**, which was attended by mental health advocates and the service dog organization that brought Luis Montalván's dog Tuesday into his life. The screening included a resource table for National PTSD Awareness Month, and audience discussion with Selkow and Montalván.

The film's U.S. broadcast premiere was on PBS' **America Reframed** series. During the broadcast, a Mental Health America co-hosted chat on Twitter reportedly reached 455,000 Twitter accounts and had over 4.4 million social impressions from its 1-hour online conversation. And the film received the SAMHSA VOICE Award for Best Documentary in August 2016.

Among those praising the film are:

Former First Lady Rosalynn Carter: *"Powerful. Buried Above Ground will contribute to reshaping the way our society thinks about mental health issues. It will help move viewers and help dispel the myths and misconceptions about PTSD."*

Kevin Hines, Author, Advocate, Filmmaker: *"Ben is clearly an artist. His storytelling style is quite powerful. The film will surely pull on your heartstrings. But most importantly, It will give you hope. The kind of hope you will never forget, or leave behind. "*

Edwin Martincorena, U.S. Army Veteran, Dept. Executive Director Veterans Transition Center: *"Buried Above Ground brings to light PTSD in a real and powerful way, helps dispel stigmas associated with trauma, and allows the audience to see the humanity of those suffering from PTSD."*

SUMMARY: In summary, I offer my strongest support and praise for this film and the work Ben has done to use it to create a national dialogue on PTSD, which remains widely ignored, marginalized and misunderstood, despite being eminently treatable.

Finally, it needs to be noted that the stakes in this area couldn't be higher or clearer. In the film, Luis discusses the difficulty many veterans have in overcoming PTSD which in many cases results in the tragedy of suicide – according to the most recent figures from the Veterans Admonition, 20 veterans died from suicide each day, with nearly 7,500 annually. Sadly, Luis, who after attending Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, and writing his memoirs that became a New York Times best-seller died in November 2016. The cause of death according to the Medical Examiner was suicide.

Luis' story and passing only underscores the need for more efforts like Buried Above Ground, which is most deserving of a Mental Health America Media Award.

-- Bill Lichtenstein