

I WAS THERE

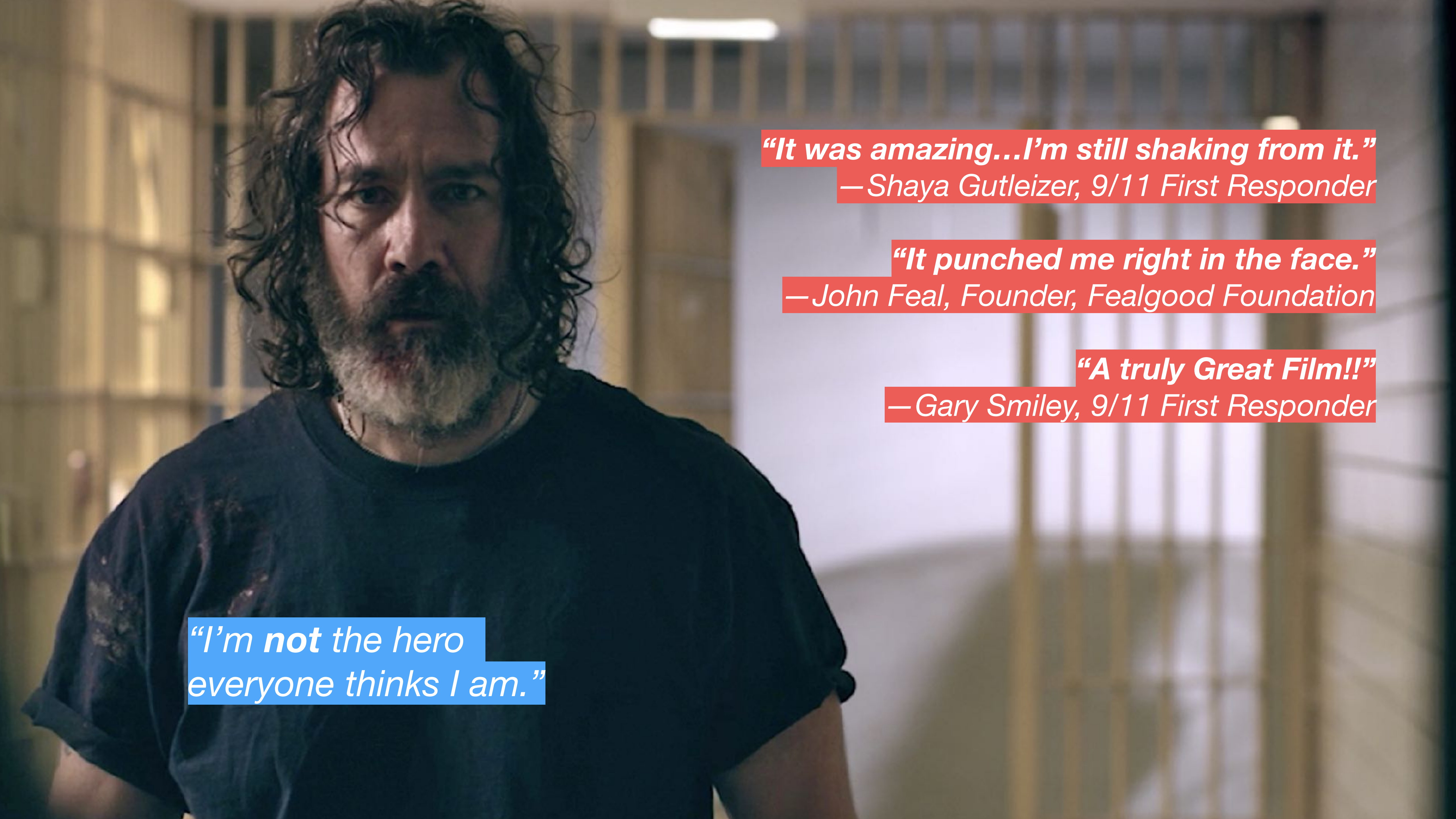
*When you hit bottom
the only way is up.*

“An important film.”
— Good Day New York

“Not your typical heroic 9/11 movie.”
— Metro NY

“A new take on 9/11.”
— Newsweek





“It was amazing...I’m still shaking from it.”
— Shaya Gutleizer, 9/11 First Responder

“It punched me right in the face.”
— John Feal, Founder, Fealgood Foundation

“A truly Great Film!!”
— Gary Smiley, 9/11 First Responder

***“I’m **not** the hero
everyone thinks I am.”***

STORY

*A 9/11 firefighter
struggling with **PTSD**
is blackmailed into a journey
of **redemption** by a
photographer who can prove
he survived only because
he ran away.*

[Watch Trailer](#)

*"I'm not a good person. Not
anymore... All the good in me
died that day."*

SYNOPSIS

Gus Johnson (James A. Lee) is a New York City firefighter who barely escaped the World Trade Center on 9/11 and instantly became a hero. Except the only reason he survived was because he panicked and ran away, a secret he kept hidden under PTSD and survivor's guilt. Years later, Samuel Lyons (Carl Ford), a photographer who crossed paths with Gus on 9/11, confronts Gus with a photo that proves Gus was a coward. Samuel blackmails Gus into telling the truth to his family, forcing him into a journey of self-discovery and acceptance which reunites him with his son Frankie (Sebastián Zurita) who enlisted in the military to fight for him.



Movies

‘I Was There’ is not your typical heroic 9/11 movie

It’s a story of survivor’s guilt, blackmail and redemption of a hero who’s not so heroic.

By Nikki M. MascaliPublished : January 26, 2017

“I Was There” is not the first movie to be made about 9/11, but it may be the first to center on a first responder who, in the end, is not a first thought.

Directed and co-written by Jorge Valdes-Iga, the film will be shown at [Firehouse Space](#) in Brooklyn. The screening is free for the public for a donation that will benefit the [FealGood Foundation](#) for first responders.

“[I Was There](#)” tells the tale of New York firefighter Guadalupe who secretly fled the South Tower of the World Trade Center on 9/11. A photographer, who was also escaping, captured him.

“He lived the lie of being a hero, but in living this lie, he became an alcoholic,” Valdes-Iga told Metro. “The photographer blackmails him, saying he’ll tell the world the truth and blackmail him.”

Lee developed an early draft of the script as a one-act play. Valdes-Iga after the two met at a New York acting class, they began to write the course of a weekend.

“By Monday we had an outline of the whole film,” the director said. “We went back and forth improvising every role and writing scenes as we went.”



New film focuses on how PTSD affects 9/11 first responders

January 23, 2017 By Maria Alvarez Special to Newsday



The film is a twist to the 9/11 story by digging into post-traumatic stress disorder of first responders and survivors.

“I Was There” is a fictional account of an FDNY fireman who succumbs to his fears on 9/11.

James Lee, an actor and script writer, stars in “I Was There,” a fictional account of an FDNY fireman who succumbs to his fears on 9/11. The film digs into post-traumatic stress disorder to show the guilt felt by survivors and first responders. (Credit: Craig Ruttle)

Sometimes it takes an outsider to tell the inside story of 9/11.

A new independent filmmaker and stage actor, Valdes-Iga, debuts in New York City with this film.



PRESS LINKS

[Good Day New York](#)

[Newsday Article](#)

[Metro NY Article](#)

[Popcorn Talk](#)



SCREENING FOR 9/11 FIRST RESPONDERS

We hosted a special FREE screening for 9/11 first responders. All donations would go to the Fealgood Foundation, founded by John Feal, which helps people injured on 9/11 or who have developed 9/11 related illnesses.

“It punched me right in the face.”
—John Feal, Founder, Fealgood Foundation

“A truly Great Film!!”
—Gary Smiley, 9/11 First Responder

“It was amazing...I’m still shaking from it.”
—Shai Gee, 9/11 First Responder



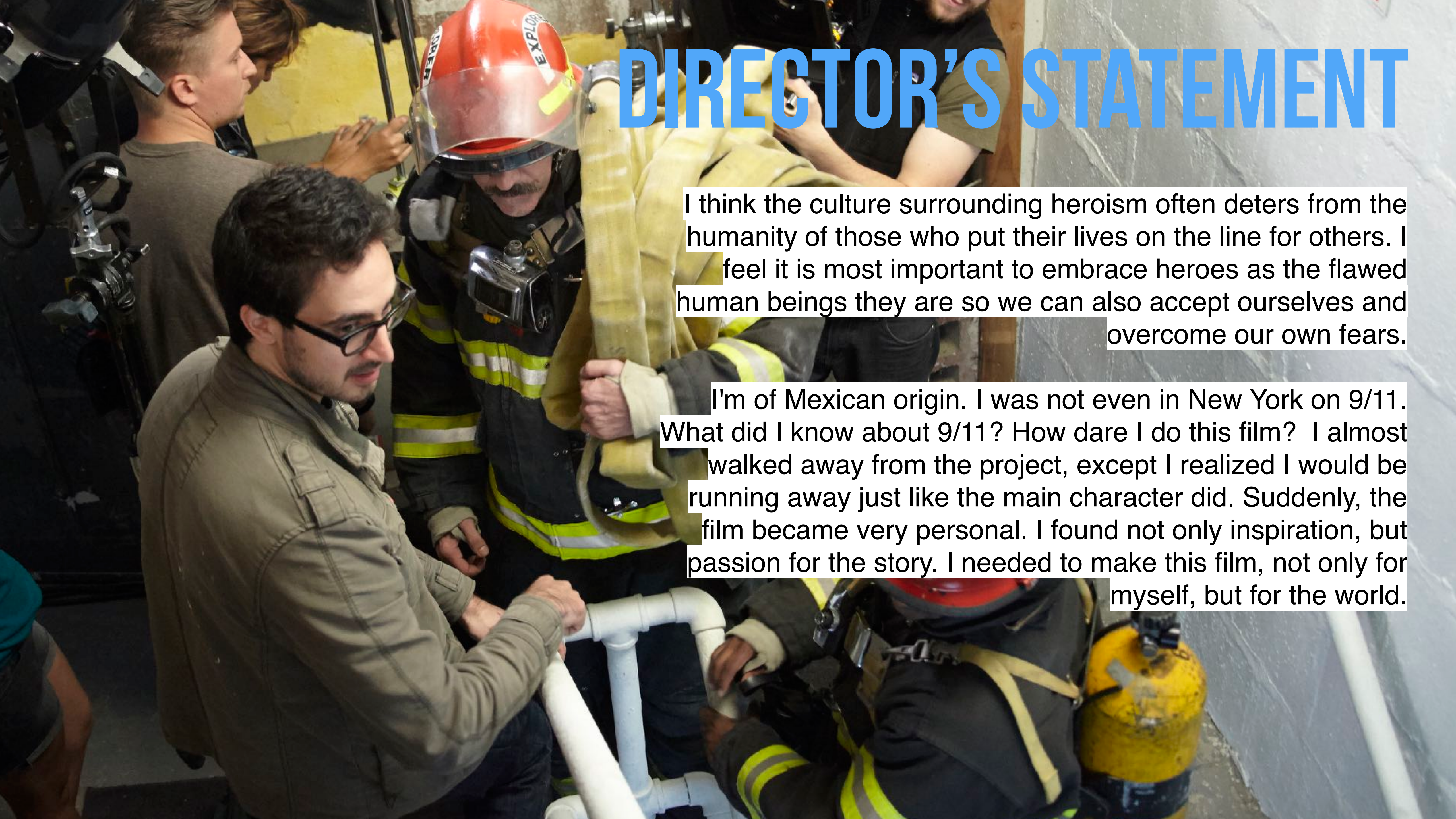
REACTIONS ON FB

42 shares

28 Comments

-  **John Feal** F-ing amazing! I needed a good cry!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  3 · January 29 at 8:20pm
↳  Jorge Valdés-Iga replied · 1 Reply
-  **Gary Smiley** Outstanding Job Jorge and Crew !! A truly Great Film !!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 29 at 9:10pm
↳  Jorge Valdés-Iga replied · 1 Reply
-  **Valarie Merillo** I would love to see this movie, how ?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · February 14 at 1:53am
-  **Jane Bourroughs** I needed a good cry too.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · February 14 at 8:16am
-  **Paula Caldwell** will this ever go nation wide soon! than later?
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 25 at 6:49pm
↳  Jorge Valdés-Iga replied · 1 Reply
-  **Shai Gee** It was amazing. Thank you [Jorge Valdés-Iga](#) and all those who helped make it. I am still shaking from it
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 29 at 7:59pm

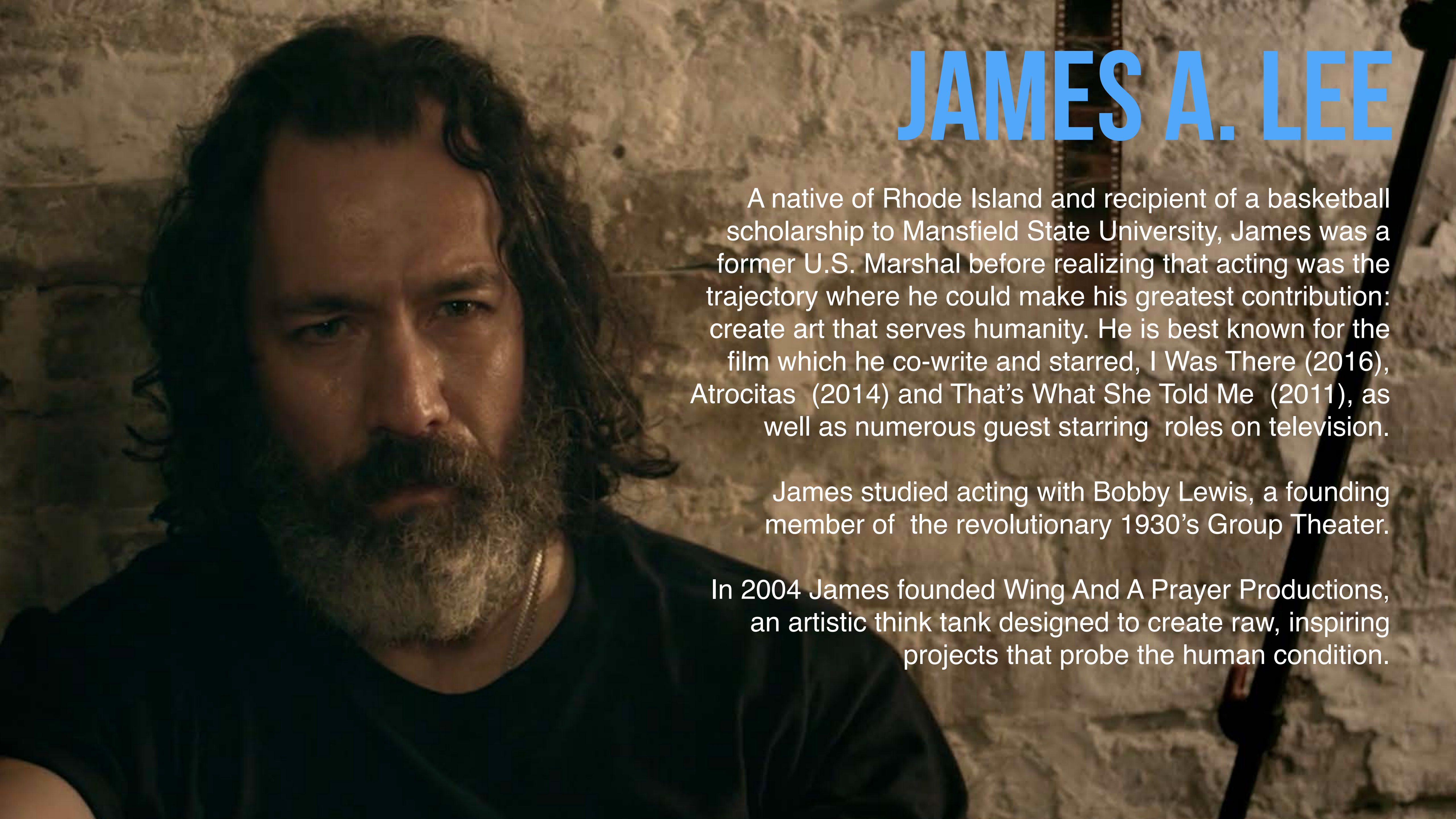
-  **Susan Ryan** Wow!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  2 · January 16 at 4:11pm
-  **Elaine Kelly** I hope it gets seen by many people...
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 16 at 4:13pm
-  **Jane Bourroughs** I just lost it. Not sure I'd stop crying enough to watch. It looks amazing.
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  4 · January 16 at 4:16pm
-  **Robert Berl** Wow looks very good. I'm not a morning a movie goer but I will have to go see this movie! Thanks again for sharing [John Feal](#)!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  2 · January 16 at 4:32pm · Edited
-  **Nancy Newsome Frederick** Thank you!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 16 at 4:30pm
-  **Jim Jenca** Wow...Powerful
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 16 at 4:47pm
-  **Jim Jenca** Smacked me right in the face
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  1 · January 16 at 4:47pm
-  **Ron Shpiller** John is there any way we can purchase a copy of this movie, I would love to have a copy
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  2 · January 16 at 4:53pm
↳  Ron Shpiller replied · 2 Replies
-  **Gary Smiley** It looks like a terrific film. I have spoken with Jorge the Director and he was kind enough to personally invite Sal Turturici FDNY Stage 4 Cancer Warrior to the screening and its Outstanding that the Donations will be going to the FealGood Foundation !!
[Like](#) · [Reply](#) ·  4 · January 16 at 6:21pm



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I think the culture surrounding heroism often deters from the humanity of those who put their lives on the line for others. I feel it is most important to embrace heroes as the flawed human beings they are so we can also accept ourselves and overcome our own fears.

I'm of Mexican origin. I was not even in New York on 9/11. What did I know about 9/11? How dare I do this film? I almost walked away from the project, except I realized I would be running away just like the main character did. Suddenly, the film became very personal. I found not only inspiration, but passion for the story. I needed to make this film, not only for myself, but for the world.

A portrait of James A. Lee, a man with long, dark, wavy hair and a full, grey-streaked beard. He is wearing a dark t-shirt and a thin chain necklace. The background is a textured, light-colored wall. The text "JAMES A. LEE" is overlaid in the top right corner in a large, blue, sans-serif font.

JAMES A. LEE

A native of Rhode Island and recipient of a basketball scholarship to Mansfield State University, James was a former U.S. Marshal before realizing that acting was the trajectory where he could make his greatest contribution: create art that serves humanity. He is best known for the film which he co-wrote and starred in, *I Was There* (2016), *Atrocitas* (2014) and *That's What She Told Me* (2011), as well as numerous guest starring roles on television.

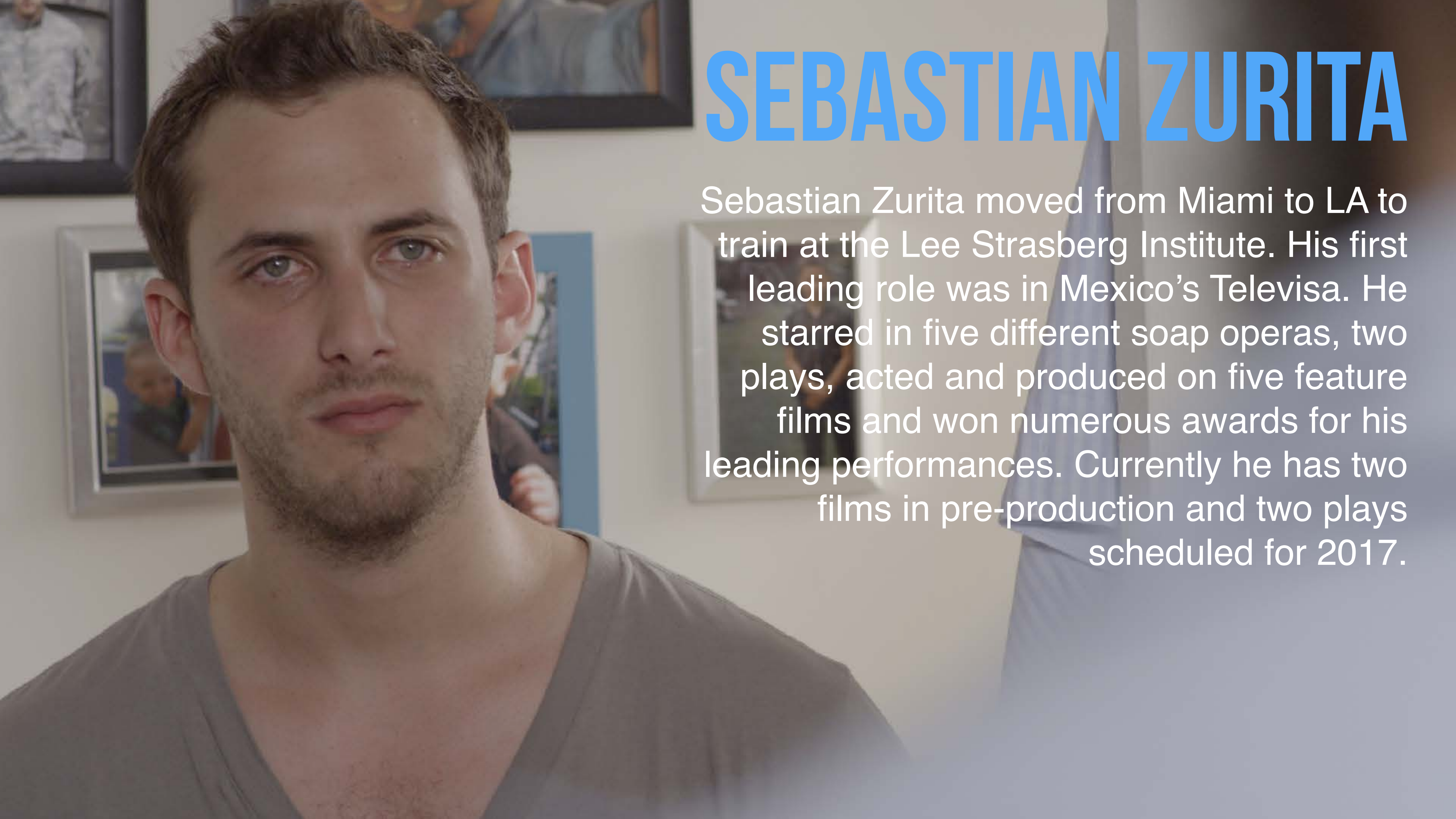
James studied acting with Bobby Lewis, a founding member of the revolutionary 1930's Group Theater.

In 2004 James founded Wing And A Prayer Productions, an artistic think tank designed to create raw, inspiring projects that probe the human condition.

CARL FORD

Carl Ford is a writer, filmmaker and acting teacher. After graduating Williams College, Ford was Founder and CEO of Black Nexxus Inc from 1996 to 2008. His latest production work "30 Beats" is distributed by Lionsgate. He had the honor of working with talents as Anthony Minghella, Jill Scott, Sean Combs, Q-Tip, Laverne Cox, Adepero Oduye, Ice-T and many others.



A portrait of Sebastian Zurita, a man with short brown hair and a light beard, wearing a grey V-neck shirt. He is looking directly at the camera. The background is a wall with several framed pictures and a blue flag partially visible on the right.

SEBASTIAN ZURITA

Sebastian Zurita moved from Miami to LA to train at the Lee Strasberg Institute. His first leading role was in Mexico's Televisa. He starred in five different soap operas, two plays, acted and produced on five feature films and won numerous awards for his leading performances. Currently he has two films in pre-production and two plays scheduled for 2017.

JORGE VALDES-IGA

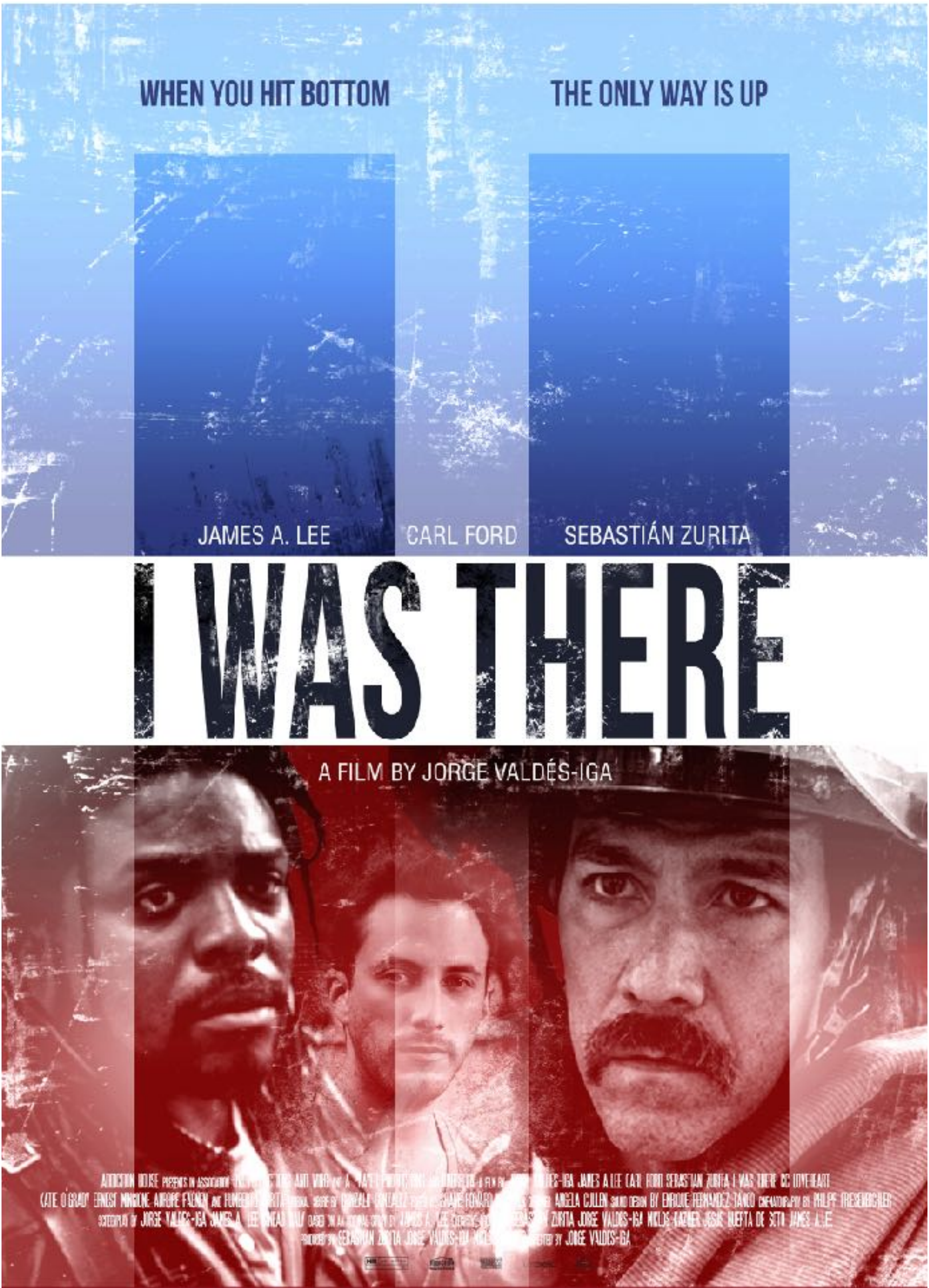
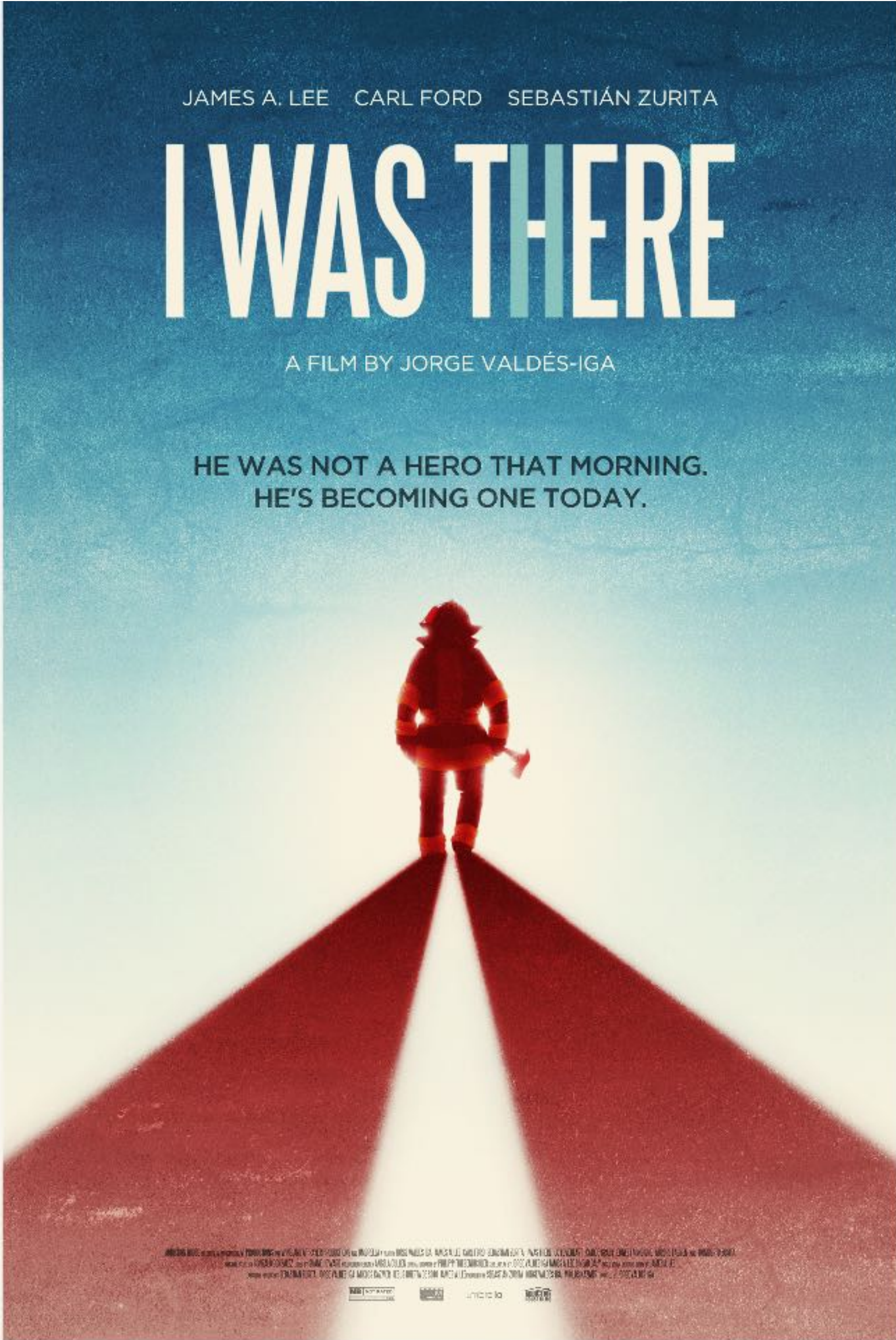
Jorge Valdés-Iga is a Mexican-American filmmaker and photographer. In 2008 Jorge was recognized by American Cinematographer magazine for his short film *Milia*, and shot the documentary “Cocaine Cowboys 2”.

In 2009 Jorge was hired to direct the Japanese feature film *Hotel Chelsea*, and in 2011 he was hired to co-direct the horror-comedy *You Can't Kill Stephen King*.

"I Was There" is Jorge's first film as a writer / director. It is currently touring the festival circuit. Jorge also produces and directs advertising under his agency VALDESIGA. His work can be seen at www.valdesiga.com



POSTERS





I WAS THERE

Title: **I Was There**

Year of Completion: 2016

TRT: 82 minutes

Genre: Drama

Rights Available: Worldwide

iwastherefilm.com

[IMDb Page](#)

[Facebook page](#)

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C: 323.229.1888

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