

INTERVIEW WITH EMMA MICHALAK '17, WRITER AND DIRECTOR OF "BUT FOR THE GRACE", CO-WINNER UCHV SHORT MOVIE PRIZE 2016

UCHV: Where are you from, and what is your major?

EM: I am from Chicago, IL, and am a junior in the Comparative Literature department.

UCHV: When did you start making movies and how did you come to make "But for the Grace"?

EM: *But for the Grace* is my first documentary short film. I was inspired by my brother Austin, who features in the film, and who had begun his transition less than a year earlier and had become very involved in LGBT+ issues in his community. He felt that people were still very unsure about the "T" of LGBT+, and wished that he could elucidate beyond what was being shared by the sensationalized Caitlyn Jenner story. So he sent me a few videos documenting his first injections, and though we didn't end up using any of this footage, I was inspired by the idea.

UCHV: What was your budget?

EM: We were kindly funded by the Mary Quantance Award, granted to us by the Lewis Center for the Arts. This provides each recipient with \$3,500.

UCHV: Part of the success of the movie was the balance struck between what is said or shown and what viewers are led to conclude or construct for themselves. Can you say something about when and how you strike that balance as a movie-maker?

EM: Part of what drew me to the project was the multi-faceted portrait of transgenders in the United States today. I wanted each of my subjects to be a bit different—be it in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, or otherwise. I wanted to provide some of the most poignant perspectives that these subjects shared, and then let the audience begin to develop their own understanding of the tremendously complex web that is the transgender experience. I think the role of the filmmaker is to leave a trail of crumbs for the viewer, and the beautiful thing is, you can never know what kind of movie you made. It's a bit different for each person who watches, and it changes with every viewing.

UCHV: Any final thoughts?

EM: I'm very honored that this film, this thing that was little more than an idea less than a year ago, resonated with others! I learned a lot in the process of making it, and am very excited about learning more on future projects!

