

How to break



Out of Prison

HOW TO BREAK OUT OF PRISON

Under 25 minute | Documentary Short | July 2019

New Zealand

Logline

An unsung public speaking guru to prison inmates in the U.S. recounts his struggle with a debilitating stutter in his formative years, leading to a revelation that he's leveraged to break brutalized people out of their mental prison.



Short Synopsis

How To Break Out Of Prison depicts how a gifted kid fell from grace due to tragic circumstances and how he took his life back. Narrated with dramatic flairs by John Wareham, author, leadership consultant and Rikers Island prison inmates' public speaking teacher, the documentary utilizes dramatization to vividly show the effect John's stutter had on his childhood and early adulthood during 1940s and 1960s. Due to his foolhardy pursuit of personal responsibility, he eventually acquired self-confidence through the power of oratory art, as well as an insight of human nature that years later, stopped his inmate students from ever going back to prison.



Synopsis

How did a kiwi management coach and Pulitzer nominated author volunteering at New York's Rikers Island Prison in the 90s become a miracle worker, reducing the recidivism rate of his inmate students from 80% to single digits? Behind John Wareham's success lies a dark secret from his past - he'd been a juvenile delinquent and attempted his suicide, brought on by his serious speech impairment.

Combining John's articulate storytelling with dramatization of a multitude of, quite literally breathtaking moments, *How To Break Out Of Prison* takes the audience on an innermost journey from utter self-defeatism to courageously facing the tragedies of life head-on. Once John set his mind on the goals of becoming a great public speaker, he overcame his fear and discouragement from small-minded spectators. The discipline, craft and philosophy of articulating one's ideas transformed himself, ultimately to astounding successes.

It was the same discipline in prison classes that shed lights on the mystery of repeat offending and high recidivism rate. In the classroom where ideas are freely communicated, the truth of people's mental prison could reveal itself. Together with their articulate students, John was able to discover and share the mechanism of self-imprisoning and the key to break free.



John Wareham is a leadership psychologist, lecturer, prison reformer, novelist and poet. John draws upon vast experience, having counseled top business leaders on three continents, and, at the other end of the social spectrum, transformed the lives of prison inmates in New York's toughest prisons. He is the founder and chief executive of The Eagles Foundation of America, a non-profit organization dedicated to developing leaders within the prison population. He has published widely in non-fiction, fiction, and poetry and his bestselling works include the how-to *Secrets of a Corporate Headhunter*, the novel *The President's Therapist*, and the poetry anthology *Sonnets for Sinners*, a Pulitzer Prize nominee. After living in New York City for 45 years, he is back home in New Zealand and has recently published his memoir, *Exposed*.

DIRECTOR STATEMENT

During my interviews with John, his stories transported me to maximum security prisons, rival gangs' peace talk and to the dark recesses of a mental prison which lies in almost everyone. Split up parents, his crippling stutter, juvenile delinquency, brutalizing and pedophile teachers at school were just a few things that used to drive him to a corner and eventually, his attempt suicide. He spoke about them light-heartedly and never failed to find humor in the tragedies. He joked being a writer of traumatizing past, he's got a lot of capital to work with.

Not only did he generously share his capital with me, John is also amazing speaking on camera. Through Errol Morris "interrotron" setup during the interview (through a teleprompter glass on my camera's lens he monitored my live feed), his dramatic telling rendered a fable quality to the otherwise too bleak and too self-important a film. Such fable quality also guided the dramatisation, from acting's choices and the art direction

I often smile when people ask of the experience filming and listening to someone whose speak motivationally, though John disapproves of this label - motivational. He much preferred "Liberating". His stories inadvertently broke me out of my own mental prison. His resolve in not giving in and to see hopeless situations as a gift inspired me. He had been coping with his life-long stammer, reminiscent of my effort in expressing myself fully in English. The immediate effect on me from interview was that I signed back on to a local Toastmaster Club for my own public speaking chops, so that I shall no longer shirk a director's responsibility to pitch stories I believe in, such as this one.



The journey for John and his many inmate students would have been too big a corpus to include in this film. What I did include is how John used his inspiration from the ordeal to help his students to see the vicious cycle of criminality and incarceration. During John's public speaking classes, minds break free. Personally I can't conceive of any other subject that's more watchable, cathartic, or important.

CONTACT

HUANHUAN ZHANG

DIRECTOR

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HOW TO BREAK OUT OF PRISON

DURATION: 24min 34 second

CATEGORY: Documentary, Short

FILMING and PRODUCTION LOCATION

New Zealand

PICTURE FORMAT

Color + B/W

ASPECT RATIO

1.90 : 1

SHOOTING FORMAT

2K

EXHIBITION FORMAT

.MOV (Quicktime)

SCREENER FORMAT

<https://vimeo.com/350298360>

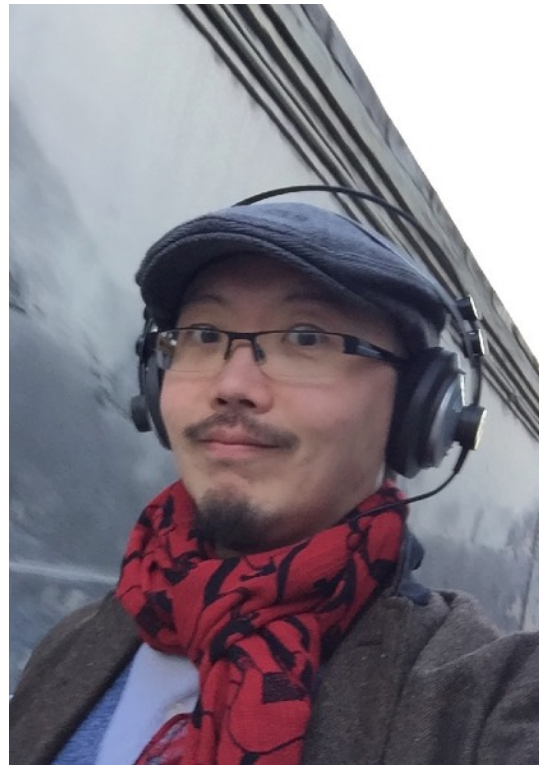
(contact director for password)

PRODUCTION TEAM BIOS

HUANHUAN ZHANG
Director / Co-producer

Beijing-born Huanhuan Zhang is a bilingual screenwriter with extensive experience in NZ-China coproduction. His writing credits include studio tentpole *Zhong Kui Fu Mo*(2015), *Candle In the Tomb - Wrath of Time* (2018) currently streaming on Tencent pay-video website to great reviews.

Prior to Huanhuan's screenwriting career, he has worked on a variety of roles in cable TV documentaries including development (Ice Vegas, Shaolin Inc for NatGeo), production fixer (Jurassic CSI) and post directing (Tough Rides China).



ALEX CLARK
Producer



Alex Clark has 20 years' experience directing and producing ambitious, high-rating and critically acclaimed screen productions. In the past he's been a staff producer at internationally renowned production company NHNZ, and at leading domestic production company Gibson Group. He co-owned production company IBC Films for 5 years and has been a freelance producer/director. For the past 7 years Alex has been the principal of Picture Start Films.

Alex has co-produced two independently-financed feature films, both of which have sold in to numerous international territories. He has produced award-winning short films and co-produced telefeatures which have been critically acclaimed and ratings successes. He thrives on working with creative teams on challenging, creatively satisfying screen projects that reach audiences and enrich lives.



GREG JENNINGS
Director of Photography

Greg is a freelance filmmaker, director of photography and photographer who is at home both behind the camera and in post production. With a sensitive style and a passionate approach to storytelling, he lives to create narratives which are both visually engaging and emotionally charged. Originally from the UK, Greg has spent half his life in New Zealand, and currently calls Wellington home. This fusion of identities and the inherent travel that comes with it has resulted in an adventurous and unique cinematic voice.

GAO PING
Composer

Composer Gao Ping hails from Chengdu, Sichuan province. Receiving commissions and performances from around the world. A leading member of the "sixth generation" of Chinese composers after the "fifth generation" composers such as Tan Dun and Qu Xiaosong.

In New Zealand Gao was the recipient of the 2010 CANZ (Composers Association of NZ) Trust Fund Award. As a pianist, Gao Ping has performed to acclaim all over the world, including with the NZSO and, below, with the Forbidden City Chamber Orchestra.



SHREYAS BELTANGDY
Editor

Shreyas Beltangdy worked in the bustling film industry of Mumbai, India since 2008 as a film editor, working on projects as diverse as the acclaimed music travelogue "The Dewarists" (Cannes Lion Bronze Branded Entertainment, 2012), French auteur Pan Nalin's comedy-drama "Angry Indian Goddesses" (People's Choice Award at Toronto International Film Festival 2015) and "99 Songs," an upcoming musical fantasy produced by Academy-award composer AR Rahman.

In 2018, he moved to New Zealand to study a Master of Fine Arts focusing on cinematography currently based in Wellington.

CREDIT CAST AND CREW

EXECUTIVE PRODUCER Paul Wolfram

DIRECTOR Huanhuan Zhang

PRODUCER Alex Clark, Huanhuan Zhang

ACTOR Mark Nicholas, Catherine Mercer, Rohan McCarthy, Hilary Norris

FIRST ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Alex Clark

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY Greg Jennings

EDITOR Shreyas Beltangdy

COMPOSER Gao Ping

MUSIC PRODUCER Hu Yong, Nathaniel Wolkstein

SOUND MIXER Bernard Blackburn

INTERVIEW CAMERA AND SOUND OPERATOR Huanhuan Zhang

SECOND ASSISTANT DIRECTOR Graeme Ford

FIRST CAMERA ASSISTANT Francesca Logan

GAFFER Adam Browne

GRIP Taylor Nixon

ART DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR Paul Irving

WARDROBE, HAIR AND MAKE-UP ARTIST Jessica Ink-pen

ADDITIONAL HAIRSTYLING Wanda Menchi, John Stewart Jakeman, Black and Blonde Salon

EXTRAS COORDINATOR Sarah Munn, Chantal Chevailler

COLORIST Huanhuan Zhang

GRAPHIC ARTIST Kungyang Ji, Ziyi Wei

