

**Film Proposal**

Written by Michael Schilf

In Association with Lunar Door, LLC

**The SINS of My Father**

Written by

Michael Schilf

Based on his memoir

*The Sins of My Father*

**A Lunar Door Production**

Directed by Michael Schilf

Produced by Michael Schilf & Chase Kuker

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## OVERVIEW

### LOGLINE

*The Sins of My Father* is a biographical, drama about an estranged middle-aged only son, who after learning of the death of his alcoholic, mentally ill father, embarks upon a physical and spiritual journey to discover and understand the multifaceted, afflicted father he never knew.

### CONCEPT

*The Sins of My Father* is the story of my childhood as I struggled to grow up with an absentee, PTSD, alcoholic, mentally ill father in southeastern Wisconsin, yet at the center of this narrative is me as a 37-year-old husband and father on a physical and spiritual journey, traveling from Los Angeles to Niles, Michigan and back again to ultimately discover and understand the multifaceted, afflicted father I never knew: an impulsive, risk-seeking Vietnam Veteran with a superficial demeanor—just as endearing as he was odious—who used alcohol to appease feeling misunderstood and relied on humor and demonstrative actions to cope with his fear of intimacy.

### THEME

Both haunting and humorous, *The Sins of My Father* captures the pain and the joy that lies at the heart of every family confronted by alcoholism and mental illness, but it's the journey I take toward understanding and forgiveness that ultimately transforms and heals me.

## FORMAT & SYNOPSIS

### Structure

*The Sins of My Father* follows three act structure over a period of six months, starting with the news of my father's death, culminating as I delve into his "life" files, which sparks an introspective journey of personal discovery and true understanding about the man I called Dad.

### Flashbacks

The linear story is juxtaposed with flashbacks from my childhood into my adolescence and early adulthood. Flashbacks are crafted with visual transitions that move seamlessly from the linear narrative into a revealing anecdote from the past that sheds light on the present narrative.

### Act One

Act One chronicles one week in early November, 2012, beginning with the news of my father's death and through my apprehensive departure from Los Angeles to Niles, Michigan.

Flashbacks include the horror of meeting my father in a run down motel room on my 18th birthday to his claim of \$20,000 of "blood money" in a Swiss Bank account; the humiliation of his three car pile up outside my grade school the only time he ever picked me up from school; the shock of visiting him with my college sweetheart, who he gifted his dentures since she was studying to be a dental hygienist; and the three times he met our girls, once telling off-color jokes at my wedding reception, later in Wisconsin, offering them, along with my son, replica hunting knives and samurai swords, and a final time, a few hours sober, only months before he died.

## **Act Two**

Act Two records the next exhausting week as my wife and I arrive in Niles to sort out my father's affairs, plan his memorial, and clear out his house consumed by decades of hoarding.

Flashbacks contain farcical Vietnam stories, most notably Kevin Moran and The Luck of the Irish; drinking with my father, from passing out on a 260 foot sand dune to being stranded at the American Legion because he refused to hand over his car keys; jovial memories of playing Monopoly with him in my grandpa's basement; the shame of him arriving late to a Christmas Eve party in a mud stained Santa suit with whiskey on his breath; even some of my own antics, like taking a cab from Los Angeles to a Tijuana whore house on Thanksgiving.

## **Act Three**

Act Three begins six months later when I open my father's "life" files. I experience agony and delight reading letters he wrote me, yet never sent; I find compassion perusing through his self-destructive relationship files; I'm grateful to learn of his three stints in rehab; I empathize when studying his discharge report, which labeled him a decompensated personality, borderline, with histrionic and narcissistic features; I even discover I have a sister! These files—the ultimate gift—allow me to finally understand and forgive the sins of my father.

## EVIDENCE OF NEED

### 1. Alcoholism

One of the central conflicts in *The Sins of My Father* is illustrated through my father's alcohol abuse, which not only destroyed him physically, emotionally, and psychologically, but also became a contributing factor in shattering the relationships he held most dear. Certainly, highlighting the horrors of alcohol abuse is nothing new; however, *The Sins of My Father* takes a refreshing and introspective look at alcohol addiction through a different lens: the eyes of an addict's child. This perspective shines more light on such a societal epidemic, increasing needed awareness and better understanding regarding alcohol addiction, not just with the abuser, but the collateral damage it causes the entire family.

### 2. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

One of the many afflictions my father carried with him was the horror of war, his PTSD resulting from his experience as a combat soldier in the jungles of Vietnam. The emotional baggage he carried after his tours of duty continued to rage a second war inside him. After Vietnam, my father felt misunderstood, unappreciated, resentful, and disillusioned with life, leaving him with a poorly defined sense of self, which are symptoms not unlike many of our present day veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq. *The Sins of My Father*, therefore, can help increase awareness and societal acceptance of PTSD, specific to returning combat veterans, while helping to create a better understanding for the families of those veterans.

### **3. Mental Illness**

My father was tested and interviewed in July, 1992 at Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital. His discharge report documents he suffered from borderline personality disorder, characterized by histrionic, narcissistic, and passive-aggressive features. A failure to maintain defense mechanisms in response to stress caused psychological disorganization, signs of delusions and hallucinations, along with desperate or inappropriate defenses. Toss in “histrionic, narcissistic, and passive-aggressive features,” and my father was in psychological shambles. *The Sins of My Father* takes an introspective look at his psychological imbalance, helping increase awareness and understanding for people, along with their families, who suffer from mental illness.

### **4. Absentee Fathers**

My father’s sins were not qualified only through alcoholism, PTSD, and mental illness. His greatest failure was not being there, and this absenteeism, especially with fathers, physically and emotionally, is the core of *The Sins of My Father*. All I ever wanted was to know my dad, and even though he wasn’t able to share himself in life, I’m grateful that in death, he left me the clues I needed to piece his story together. I have no doubt *The Sins of My Father* will help to illustrate challenges children face when raised in absent-father families as well as the importance of cultivating positive parent and child relationships, especially between fathers and sons.

## TARGET AUDIENCES

### 1. Films Based on Memoirs

From J.D. Vance's memoir *Hillbilly Elegy* to Janeatte Wall's *The Glass Castle* to Augusten Burroughs' *Running with Scissors* to Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: Lost to Found on the Pacific Coast Trail*—all New York Times Bestsellers and Major Motion Pictures—the popularity of memoirs is on the rise. Jerry Waxler, author of *Memoir Revolution* explains that exploring our lives through memory helps us come together as a global community.

### 2. Alcoholism and the Family

One of the central conflicts in *The Sins of My Father* is illustrated through my father's alcohol abuse, which not only destroyed him physically, emotionally, and psychologically, but also became a contributing factor in shattering the relationships he held most dear. *The Sins of My Father* takes a refreshing and introspective look at alcohol addiction through the eyes of an addict's child, and this perspective helps shine more light on such a societal epidemic.

### 3. Families of Combat Veterans

My father carried the horror of war from two tours as a combat soldier in Vietnam, and this emotional baggage continued to rage a second war inside him. After Vietnam, my father felt misunderstood, unappreciated, resentful, and disillusioned with life, leaving him with a poorly defined sense of self, which are symptoms not unlike many of our present day veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq. *The Sins of My Father* will increase awareness and acceptance of PTSD.

#### **4. Mental Illness Awareness**

Edward Hines, Jr. VA Hospital diagnosed my father with mental illnesses, including borderline and histrionic personality disorders, narcissism, and passive-aggressiveness. Failure to cope with stress caused psychological disorganization, delusions, and desperate, inappropriate defenses. Addressing his psychological imbalances with empathy, *The Sins of My Father* will help increase awareness and understanding towards those who suffer from mental illness.

#### **5. Single Parent Families**

My father's absenteeism, both physically and emotionally, is the core of *The Sins of My Father*. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 24 million children in America—one out of every three—live in biological father-absent homes. This is an epidemic. I believe *The Sins of My Father* will be key in illustrating the challenges children face when raised in absent-father families as well as the critical importance of cultivating positive parent and child relationships.

#### **6. Cultural Decade of the 60's & 70's**

My father—in large part—was defined by his experiences throughout the “cultural decade” of the ‘60s and ‘70s: facing the taboo of pregnancy out of wedlock, dropping out of University because of it, enlisting in the U.S. Army to escape it, experiencing the horrors of war in Vietnam, feeling misunderstood upon his return, later crossing racial divides by loving a black woman, and suffering from PTSD, yet always identifying himself as a patriot and soldier.

## COMPARATIVE TITLES

### **Memoirs Illustrating Difficult Childhoods**

*Hillbilly Elegy*, J.D. Vance (2016) / Film: *Hillbilly Elegy* (2020)

*Fun Home: A Tragicomic*, Alison Bechdel (2006) / *Fun Home* (2020)

*Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*, Frank McCourt (1996) / Film: *Angela's Ashes* (1999)

*This Boy's Life*, Tobias Wolff (1989) / Film: *This Boy's Life* (1993)

*Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003), Marjane Satrapi / Film: *Persepolis* (2007)

### **Memoirs Involving Alcohol Abuse and Addiction**

*Hillbilly Elegy*, J.D. Vance (2016) / Film: *Hillbilly Elegy* (2020)

*The Glass Castle: A Memoir*, Jeanette Walls (2005) / Film: *The Glass Castle* (2017)

*Running with Scissors*, Augusten Burroughs (2003) / Film: *Running with Scissors* (2006)

### **Memoirs Exploring Mental Illness**

*Running with Scissors*, Augusten Burroughs (2003) / Film: *Running with Scissors* (2006)

*Prozac Nation*, Elizabeth Wurtzel (1994) / Film: *Prozac Nation* (2001)

*Girl, Interrupted*, Susanna Kaysen (1993) / Film: *Girl, Interrupted* (1999)

### **Memoirs Centering on Parent/Child Relationships**

*The Glass Castle: A Memoir*, Jeanette Walls (2005) / Film: *The Glass Castle* (2017)

*Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, Cheryl Strayed (2012) / Film: *Wild* (2014)

*Running with Scissors*, Augusten Burroughs (2003) / Film: *Running with Scissors* (2006)

## BIOS

### MICHAL SCHILF — WRITER / DIRECTOR

Co-Founder and Producer at *Lunar Door*, Michael Schilf is a graduate of the USC's School of Cinematic Arts (MFA in Screenwriting). He has penned twelve features, eight TV pilots, numerous shorts, and well over 100 advertising campaigns (including *Nike*, *American Express*, *Volvo*, *Walmart*, *Ford*, *Target*, *Chrysler*, *Lexus*, *BMW*, and *Mercedes Benz*), working with directors such as Jesse Dylan (*American Wedding*, *Kicking & Screaming*), James Frost (*Radiohead's* "House of Cards", *OK Go's* "This Too Shall Pass"), and Steven Tsuchida (*Community*, *New Girl*, *Sirens*).

In 2010, Schilf co-founded *The Script Lab*, a screenwriting resource and entertainment news outlet, designed for writers, filmmakers, and creators. As President and Editorial Director, he developed content that helped *The Script Lab* gain brand recognition as an industry leader, providing high-quality E-learning and industry education to millions worldwide. In 2014, *The Script Lab* was acquired by *TSL Media, Inc.*, and Schilf stayed on as an Educational Consultant.

Schilf is author of *The Sins of My Father*, which takes an introspective look at growing up with an absentee, alcoholic, mentally ill father; co-creator/writer of *LIGHT*, a sci-fi, action, crime series; co-creator/writer of *SWORN*, a fantasy, action, adventure series; and writer/director/producer of the award-winning short *The Fixer*, co-starring Danny Trejo.

## BIOS

### CHASE KUKER — PRODUCER

Co-Founder and Producer at *Lunar Door*, Chase Kuker is a producer and composer with experience in songwriting, music production, audio mixing, art directing, and film production.

In 2008, Kuker and his twin brother were signed as recording artists to Rodney "Darkchild" Jerkins, forming the band *ChaseJordan*. In 2010, *ChaseJordan* won KIIS FM's Wango Tango Breakout Star competition, opening for Katy Perry and Justin Bieber. *ChaseJordan* went on to do a Los Angeles tour, playing shows at *The House of Blues*, *The Roxy*, and *The Viper Room*. Their hit song "Lose Control (Take A Sip)" is still a cult classic.

Kuker produced five films in two years with *American Film Productions*, features including *Tell*, *Echoes of War*, and *Helicopter Mom*. In 2015, Kuker co-founded *Chromosomes*, composing music for films including *Among The Shadows*, *Death Pool* and *Mad Genius*. Kuker has also composed for commercial clients, including *NBC Sports*, *CBS*, and *TNT*.

In 2016, Kuker began working with *Think Up Anger*, creating music on movie trailers, including *Godzilla: King of Monsters*, *X-Men: Dark Phoenix*, *Bright*, and *War For the Planet of the Apes*. Kuker is co-creator with Schilf for their *SWORN* and *LIGHT* series and producer of *The Fixer*.