

Treatment Written By: bill habeeb

T 310.475.0810

billhabeeb@mac.com

billhabeeb.com

Movantik

Living with chronic pain — especially pain so intense that it can only be relieved by opioids — is enough of a burden for anyone. But for so many of these people, the suffering is more than just physical. Yes, the opioids have helped them regain control of their lives. But sadly, they now have to deal with the very common and discomforting side effect of constipation. The fact that someone might feel isolated or embarrassed about this is perfectly natural. Unfortunately, those feelings are not only unnecessary, but they can also make matters worse.

Thankfully, there is some good news, and that's what we have the opportunity of delivering in the spots that make up this campaign. We're reaching out to these people by sharing the success stories of individuals like themselves who have wrestled with, and overcome, these same issues. Like so many problems, acknowledging it is the first step toward solving it, and in many ways that's the message we want to convey.

We're telling people, it's okay, you're not alone, and there is a positive path forward. It has helped these people, and it can help you. But in order for this message to resonate, it's paramount for it to come from a place of complete honesty and authenticity. We don't want these people to feel as if they are being taken advantage of, or "sold to." We want them to feel as if they are witnessing the stories of people they can relate to and identify with. That's the key to the success of this campaign, and my goal is to bring that to the storytelling by combining great casting and naturalistic performances with a photographic approach that lends these stories a look that is filmic, and unquestionably real.

The Casting & Performances

This is without a doubt one of the most important components of this campaign. We're setting out to showcase people whose stories must connect with our audience in the most intimate and honest of ways. We want these three people, Frank, Erica, and Jim to act as role models for other patients who are currently suffering from OIC. They are living, breathing, rays of hope, and because of that it's absolutely essential for them to deliver performances that are authentic in every way.

That being said, the obvious challenge we were presented with is that rather than working with real people who are actually struggling with these issues, we're casting actors. But I don't see this as an obstacle. It's simply one of the many pieces of the filmmaking puzzle that, as a director, you always have to deal with. I've worked with both real people and actors. I've shot dramatic stories and testimonials, and from those experiences I found that the same rules always apply. During the casting, callbacks, and

the shoot you must concentrate on finding ways to bring a personal understanding and an emotional connection to the stories being told. It can't be about "acting." I want the people we work with to inhabit these roles. I want their performances to be informed by the pain and insecurity they themselves have felt. That deep visceral understanding and that subtle but undeniable subtext, has to be present in every moment we see, and every line we hear. That's what will create the connection between these people and the audience. And that's what I want to focus on in the casting and performances.

To gain that we need to search for talented actors in their mid 40s who are real, relatable, and aspirational — but still approachable. In addition to that, I would also look for actors who have the talent and willingness to be a bit innovative with their performances. I want them to embrace the idea of approaching these roles in the same way they would approach a dramatic role for a feature film. They're not doing this to sell a product. It's not about delivering lines for another Pharma commercial. They're job and their art is to tell a human story. They're leveling with the audience. They're coming to terms with the stigma that worries people who use opioids, and they are saying that there is a way forward. They don't need to be overwrought. They simply need to make these moments ring true by connecting with an honest emotion — and out of that, will come empathy.

The Visual Style

In support of our effort to present the viewer with personalized stories that are honest as opposed to being overtly commercial, I feel an observational style of filmmaking is called for. Borrowing from the language of documentary film, the camera will have somewhat of a hand-held, fly-on-wall quality. We'll use subtle drifts of movement, interesting angles and perspectives, occasional shifts in focus, and a mix of focal lengths to keep the viewer's eye engaged.

In some instances we'll get on the longer end of the lens, and use soft focus foregrounds, or employ wide frames that enable us to peer in through doorways or down hallways. At other times I might compose shots in which our subjects are partially obscured, framed slightly off-center, or seen in profile or silhouette. These moments that have more of a portrait like quality will be balanced by intimate close-ups — shots of hands, eyes, and other details that enrich the imagery with touches of humanity.

Instead of presenting the viewer with information that lacks emotion or feels "manufactured" for commercial consumption, we'll be creating the sense of witnessing things from a slight remove that allows our audience to discover things a bit on their own. Ultimately, I think this will elevate the campaign by offering it a very contemporary look that respects the intelligence of our viewers, while also giving the brand a distinctive look that is own-able and much more honest than what we're used to seeing in the category.

The Lighting

There is a definite feeling of optimism in these stories, and I think we can extend that sense of hope to the film by imbuing the images with sunlight and beautifully bright skies. The light should be somewhat blown-out and milky, which can add a textural quality to the film that is quite filmic. When appropriate, we might integrate a few sun flares kicking off the lens — just to increase the feeling of authenticity and observed realism. And when we're shooting inside, we can achieve this same look by searching for interiors with a natural light source, and positioning our subject near an exterior wall or window. This would enable us to take full advantage of warm natural light filtering in and bringing a positive feeling of healthfulness to the moments.

The Locations

The settings for each of these stories need to add to the reality in ways that feel organic to the personalities of our characters. Ideally, I would also want these spaces to provide us with available light sources that offer the images an open and airy look and feel — just to suggest that our people are getting out and leading active lives. Then, once we find these locations I would want to search for fresh ways of filming them, and interesting opportunities that can be used for B-Roll and the fair balance.

The construction site we find Frank in could be a renovation project of some type. The exterior walls have been stripped to bare brick and the interior walls are exposed studs. Perhaps even the windows have been removed, which would create some great lighting opportunities as well as chances to shoot through geometric layers of framing. If the sun is in the right location, we might be able to see it flaring through an open window at one side of the frame while Frank is standing on the other. Within this space there could be a makeshift worktable set up, raw materials stacked, and maybe some vintage moldings or light fixtures either still in place or taken down and being refurbished. In some observational moments we could see him quality checking some work, lifting his hard hat from his head and wiping sweat off his brow, or interacting with some of the other workers in a friendly way.

Erica can be photographed in an interesting boutique specialty shop of some kind. Perhaps this could be a beautiful space that provides us with an eclectic mix of contrasts. The interior might be modern, but the wares being sold have a very classic appeal — opera glasses, vintage jewelry, ornate antique mirrors hung on the wall, and maybe some retro things like old radios, turntables, tableware, and ceramics. Rather than have her confined to an indoor space, we might shoot through the shop window from the inside to see her standing on the walk sizing up the window display, we could also consider seeing her arranging a window display of some type, lifting curtains or shades up to let in the sunshine, unboxing some new items in a stock room, or wrapping an item that's been purchased for a customer.

Jim's situation is perfectly conducive to the outdoors. We can see him arranging potted plants for a landscape project, or directing a dump truck as it backs up to unload. Maybe we could see him testing sprinklers as water sprays upward in a fine mist — refracting sunlight beautifully as he stands nearby. He might be putting a sculpture or birdbath in place, or putting the final touches on a coy pond or fountain. In detailed shots we can see his hands digging into the dirt, or holding the rootball of a plant that he's placing into a hole. From a low angle we can shoot past well-worn boots standing on a patch of grass with the ground stretching out in the distance, or in a quiet moment just capture him backlit by the sun and sitting on a wood box and taking a break.

These are just a few ideas. The locations themselves will inspire more, and along with coming up with a list of shots, we should also stay open to ideas that might occur to us during the day — just to make sure that you have all you need to tell these stories — and more.

The Slates

The more I think about this, the more I like using this device to open each story. It immediately establishes the idea that we are filming documentary-like testimonials, and it offers us the artistic license to use that style in our storytelling. It communicates the idea that the story the audience is about to see in one of many personal profiles, and it personalizes the story by providing us with the name of the person speaking. As far as I'm concerned, that's all good. There's no need to re-invent it. I would prefer to just mold it a bit, so that it feels organic to the introduction of these films.

Similar to what you've boarded, we can use a digital slate, and frame it in a way that allows us to see a hint of the person in the background. Another option might be to use a camera monitor in place of the slate. This would convey the idea that this is being filmed, and rather than have the person's name and story number on the slate, it could be written on a length of tape attached to the top of the monitor. Either way, I think the best and smartest choice is to keep it as simple as possible. We just want something that reads quickly, and that establishes our concept efficiently, while giving it a look that is unique and own-able to the brand.

The Stories

I want our viewers to feel as if they are involved in a conversation with each of our people. I might even go so far as to say that these testimonials should feel a bit like something you might hear shared in a support group. There is a sense of openness, trust, and empathy. These people have gone through the same problems that others are struggling with. Their intentions are sincere and altruistic. They know better than anyone how difficult this was for them, and they are using their own experiences, their own journeys, as a way of helping ease another person's pain.

That's the emotional place that these stories come from. These aren't talking-heads. They mustn't feel like rehearsed speeches. Each and every word, each and every line, needs to be delivered with a level of deep understanding and sincerity. That's what I feel this campaign needs and deserves. The question is: how do we achieve it? How do we bring this feeling of authenticity to our films?

It's comes from a combinations of things. Once we've cast our people, I like to spend a little time getting to know them so that they feel comfortable while we're shooting. I encourage them to take some ownership of their roles, and to personalize their performances. After that, I like to find ways to help their lines feel more natural by asking them a question that illicit a response.

For instance, I might ask something like, "What caused the pain? Did the opioids help? Were you embarrassed to speak to someone about being constipated? Why would you be embarrassed? Did you try to solve the problem on your own?" The idea is to try to make this feel more like a conversation between people — by actually having a conversation. As a result, viewers begin to pick up subtle cues in the person's tonality, attitude, and body language that create these moments of interpersonal communication.

To push that a bit, I like to give our actors the freedom to punctuate their lines by occasionally glancing away, taking a breath, or pausing for a moment to reflect on a memory they've just shared. That's the process people actually go through when speaking to you, and I want to bring a hint of that to these performances.

In addition to asking them question that are on topic — I also like to throw them a few curves by asking them questions that have nothing to do with the lines at all. Talking about their lives, hopes, dreams, hobbies, wishes, etc., can often take them to a place that is more personal and honest. They become more relaxed, more friendly and approachable, and when they return to the scripted lines, their delivery tends to feel more natural.

For projects like this, I also think it's a good idea to search for people who have some experience or training in improvisation. Actors like that tend to have a very good understanding of how to stay on story, while still putting things in their own words. Once we have the scripts covered thoroughly as they're written, this would give us an opportunity to loosen things up a bit, and bring a more causal feel to the pieces. Ultimately, it's about bringing a filmmaking aesthetic, a documentary sensibility, and an understanding of human nature together to produce conversations that feel intimate, honest, and natural. Those are some of the things that I bring to my work, and I think they will be critical to the success of these stories.

The Recreations

At some point during each of these testimonials, we'll take a moment to cut away to a past scene that coincides with our subjects explanation of what caused the pain. In each of the moments we can find a simple filmic way of visually distinguishing the past from the present. We could drain the color out a bit and shoot at a higher frame rate to suggest that we're seeing something lifted from their memory. But, the thing I want to avoid is having these moments look in any way similar to the artificial "re-enactments" that we're so used to seeing.

The obviously staged falls, the over-acted moments of someone wincing and reaching for their back after lifting something, or stopping in the middle of an action to rub their knee while wearing an big expression of pain... Those are all the types of things that will immediately undermine our credibility by screaming "television commercial."

Instead, I would like to explore ways of grounding these moments in a cinematic reality. One way to achieve this would be to take a slightly more abstracted approach their creation. For example, in Frank's case, instead of filming this from an objective angle, we could be a bit more subjective, and film the moment in a way that captures the fall from his POV. This would allow us to create the action of him falling, the sudden helplessness and vulnerability, and the severity of the impact when he lands in a way that is immersive for the viewer. We could even support that by capturing the reaction of another worker to the fall. The concern we see on that person's face, the urgency with which they stop what they're doing to help — all can speak to the severity of the accident — without actually needing to see it literally played out in front of the lens.

In Erica's case, the problem began with knee pain caused by running, which is fairly straightforward. Maintaining the same photographic style we're using for the body of the story, we can track along with her as she's running. Using a handheld camera, we could shoot from her POV, and support that with low angle shots of her legs impacting the pavement.

Jim's problems came from the lifting, carrying, and digging, and for these moments we could take an approach similar to Frank. We see hands reach out to lift a large bag of soil from the back of a truck before transferring it to the ground. We could see a shovel pierce a mound of mulch or soil before lifting it and tossing it into a wheelbarrow. Or, similar to what you have boarded, we could see his hands reach out to take a large crate of plants from someone he's working with. The key is to search for ways of making these moments both filmic and real.

The Conversations With the Doctors

In these moments we want to establish a rapport between the doctors and our people that tells us their fears were natural — but unwarranted. Those interactions then lead to that "Aha" moment — that instant when our people experience a sense of emotional relief in knowing that they're problem is common and solvable.

This isn't a moment that needs to lingered on. It doesn't need to be a major beat in the story. It simply needs to be captured in way that is clear, human, real, and very relatable.

During the filming, I would explore different ways of communicating this sense of relief through something like a subtle shift in body language. One of the people might relax a bit and lean back in their chair, or uncross their legs or arms as they let out a little sigh of relief. Another might smile ever-so-slightly and nod. Or, after finally being able to get these worries off their mind, we might see the tension leave someones shoulders as they let out a breath and relax. What we're after is a physical reaction to being free of something they've been carrying around with them for all too long, and for the sake of offering you some options, I'll go into each of these scenes with the idea of covering off a mix of different reactions, just so that you have some choice in the edit.

Conclusion...

These ideas are all intended as food for thought. They are, what I hope will be the beginning of an ongoing conversation, and for a project like this, that's quite important. I always approach films as an open and active collaboration, and I think that type of creative give-and-take is key to telling these stories, and delivering our message, in way that is respectful, believable, and helpful to the people we're setting out to reach.

That's the way I enjoy working. It's an exciting project, and I look forward to discussing any and all details with you further.