

## Film Review – Everlasting Steps: The Path to Healing

December 17, 2024



Review by Jeanne Ferris

Directed by Arthur James

*Editor's note: Potentially triggering content.*

Whatever path one may seek, be it spiritual, physical, or emotional, the enduring pillars of courage, self-respect, and profound prayer are the tools to finding the way.

Believing in this system, bolstered by the knowledge that others are on the same journey, can empower one to take the first step toward seeking treatment and recovery.

*Everlasting Steps* is not just a documentary, but a powerful public health service reminder. It carries the endorsement of the Southern Indian Health Council, Inc. (SIHC), a well-respected organization that provides comprehensive health services to Southern California tribal communities.

The strong support of the SIHC for this film underscores its vital role in addressing substance abuse and promoting mental wellness within Native communities.

The film's message is a comforting reassurance that the journey to balance and wholeness does not have to be a solitary one.

Communities like the Southern Indian Health Council stand ready to support those seeking mental health, medical, or pharmaceutical resources—they can provide a reassuring safety net.

“There is a lot of stigma with substance abuse,” Director of SIHC Cassandra Mason and an LMFT Behavior Health Specialist stated, “It can be difficult to ask for help. It’s important for

[mental health professionals] to provide that information if you know someone who uses — if and when they're ready to get clean.”

Bobby Wallace of the Barona Band of Mission Indians, a respected cultural practitioner and elder, is one of the three California Natives interviewed who shared details that come with suffering as a child at risk.

He survived the foster care system and both parents who were users that “exposed him to dangerous places,” and decided at 40 years of age to reframe his thought patterns and take steps toward recovery.

“I knew that things weren't working out the way they should be. Learning about the Creator and pursuing our traditional value system played a huge role in not drinking. The Creator told me that I was going to die. He also told me he had plans for me.”

He shares, “With this transformation, I found reconnection with the Creator and our traditional values. My primary support system is within me, and I hold myself accountable to the Creator.”

Mr. Wallace has walked thousands of literal footsteps across state lines in the U.S., seeking wellness and finding self-respect with others on the same path.

Erica Pinto, Chairwoman of the Jamul Indian Village, shares her journey to clean living with gratitude and valor.

She works hard to serve her community in tribal governance and leads by example.

As a victimized young child of the ultimate betrayal for many years, she stated, “Internalizing the shame and anesthetizing it with alcohol as a teen—I kept my addiction private. No one ever knew.”

She credits her mother and visiting her ancestors' resting place as primary resources for finding spiritual strength in resisting temptations.

“I pray daily –and nightly,” Ms. Pinto stated. “Relapse is always one step away.”

Changing bad habits with new healthy habits are the everlasting steps for anyone retraining their brain to think differently.

Blue Eagle Vigil of the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians serves as a cultural practitioner and found healing as a musician.

His trauma began in childhood, “Watching my uncles go in and out of prison.”

“My breaking point was the power of addiction was crippling to my mind, my body, my health, and my mentality,” Blue Eagle shared. “I [chose] to fight and stand up for my sobriety.

My support systems [for recovery] were N.A., A.A., sweat lodges, and traditional bird singing. I was able to find myself again –and recreate who I was meant to be. It’s a struggle every day to meet life’s challenges.”

“Prevention is about education and teaching coping skills,” Ms. Mason stated. “Trauma is one of the main reasons for addiction as well as depression and anxiety.”

Other harm reduction strategies are about looking at MAT, which is “medication-assisted treatment. So instead of focusing on just stopping what you’re using, let’s look at some other medications that can help come into play.”

Ms. Mason describes how offering Fentanyl Test Strips and Narcan in the community can help reverse accidental overdosing.

“My recommendation for someone who is dealing with substance abuse is — ***are you ready?***”

This recommendation also applies to family members who may not be ready to face the truth about their loved ones.

This writer respectfully understands the reality of tough love. It was painful not being able to save a family member’s spiral into the black abyss of lost memories, which ended in fatality.

Depression is a 50-pound blanket of no hope that requires more than physical strength to push away. It requires a clean environment and supportive medical help to balance mental instability.

In Indian Country, the elders can offer traditional wisdom to supplement Western approaches, as evidenced by all three testimonies.

If someone is not ready to accept that help, there is only so much that one can do,” Ms. Mason stated. “A lot of folks do push away a good support system.”

The resounding message regarding seeking treatment and getting clean is that recovery meetings contribute to 75% of the success rate. [SIHC attributes this data to Addiction.com]

Ms. Mason emphasizes, “The most valuable thing is to be patient with yourself, loving yourself, and knowing that you are precious, and knowing that you deserve a good life.”

In reviewing the technical aspects, Kumeyaay ancestral land plays a supporting role in aerial cinematography.

The images of two hundred-year-old oak trees lend themselves to the prevailing peace of the area.

One can smell the dank Earth and feel the oak leaves crunching underfoot.

The soundtrack was soothing, primarily Native American flutes with a string instrument in the beginning, and an occasional jarring unidentifiable sound like cymbals crashing or a door slamming to accentuate specific points stated.

Close-ups of these interviews provided brave insights and encouragement to seek help.

It is not an easy film to watch, but its message is meaningful and crucial. It's a call to action for those struggling with substance abuse issues.

“Every step you take matters because not only are you creating an alternate future not just for yourself, but for everything that happens after you.” —Bobby Wallace

*Everlasting Steps: The Path of Healing* is now available on YouTube: [Click Here](#)

*If you or somebody you know needs assistance, please call 1-800-662-4357.*