

# BEYOND HOARDING: From Disaster to Recovery

Directed by David C. Coffin

Distributed Worldwide by Gravitass Ventures

## Opens Digitally on Tuesday, May 28

**Digital Streaming:** Amazon, Google Play, iTunes, Vimeo, Vudu, Xbox, YouTube

**Cable Platforms:** Verizon, Frontier, Suddenlink, Mediacom, Telus, Shaw, EastlinkTV

Additional platforms to be added.

### Short Synopsis

*Beyond Hoarding* presents a fresh look at hoarding through the stories of five people caught in the destructive grip of this compulsion. Their experiences run the gamut from tragic death to courageous recovery. Top mental health experts share the latest insights into this psychiatric disorder which surprisingly affects millions.

### Longer Synopsis

As awareness of Hoarding Disorder (HD) grows throughout the world *Beyond Hoarding*, is set to premiere on May 28. Given the recent classification of HD as a psychiatric diagnosis, evolving treatments, and the exposure it has garnered in the mainstream media and popular culture, this new documentary film offers a fresh look at the affliction. The film offers a strong focus on the medical community's mobilization of care for individuals and their families suffering from HD. *Beyond Hoarding* is a passion project for filmmakers David C. Coffin and his brother Christopher L. Coffin. The brothers were inspired to team up with Alice Irene Pifer to make the film following their Great Uncle's battle with the disorder.

### Directors Statement

In 2007, a shocking tragedy occurred when my Great Uncle John, was involved in a terrible accident caused by hoarding. The incident came out of the blue as none of us in the family were aware of his struggle with the affliction. We would later learn that the home on Long Island in New York, which he shared with his sister-in-law Helen, was an extremely hoarded situation. I was the only family member living in the New York Metro area at the time so I was immediately on the front line of this situation. The matter at hand was taking charge of getting his house cleaned out but more importantly I wanted answers. "How did we get to this point?"

That desire for answers is what moved me to make *Beyond Hoarding*. Before immersing myself in the daunting task of cleaning out Uncle John's house, I had no idea what hoarding really was and gave it only a passing thought, if any. In the course of working on the film, I would learn that hoarding is a psychiatric disorder that afflicts between six and fifteen million people in the United States alone. It is a huge problem, that some health professionals call a silent epidemic. I was learning quickly that this is not just my Uncle John's quirky problem.

He was a well-groomed, kind, elderly man who looked & behaved normally at family get-togethers in Ohio. So when I arrived at his home, it was astonishing. His house looked as if someone had taken the contents of a landfill, pulled the roof off, dumped in the contents, and put the roof back on. Obviously, he went to great lengths to hide his hoarding, which I have since learned most people with the affliction often do.

Having worked in broadcast news most of my professional life, my instinct was to hire a camera crew to film the two-day clean-up. We needed to document what we found for legal reasons plus I thought that there was a compelling story here that I would follow-up on at some point.

In 2015, an opportunity presented itself to focus on this story again. I reached out to Alice Irene Pifer, an old colleague and award-winning producer to team with me. Once Alice and I dove into this issue, and learned about the many dimensions of hoarding disorder from leading mental health experts, we decided to expand the film to include more than the story of my Uncle.

Ultimately, *Beyond Hoarding* tells the stories of five people who are at different stages of hoarding disorder involving everything from disaster to recovery and the struggles in-between. It focusses on the impact on family, friends and loved ones — the intense ripple effect of hoarding with communities and neighbors causing stress, anger, and anguish.

I hope my experience with my Uncle and this film can be the starting point for other people and their families. A starting point to understanding that Hoarding Disorder is a mental health issue and that there is effective treatment out there that can help people reclaim their lives.

David C. Coffin

## **Key Bios**

### Filmmakers

#### DAVID C. COFFIN:

Dave Coffin is currently an independent video content producer/editor. He has produced, directed and edited content for Bloomberg.com and Businessweek.com for both news and advertiser custom content. He has been a producer/editor for ABC News, CBS Radio, NPR, PBS and BBC Radio. He has taught audio and video production, post-production and theory at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism and the Fashion Institute of Technology.

#### ALICE IRENE PIFER:

Alice Irene Pifer is a journalist and filmmaker. She was a Producer at the ABC News program, *20/20* for twenty years. There she reported on a variety of topics including health, science, human rights, and social & racial issues. Pifer received over twenty awards for her reporting at *20/20* including two Emmy Awards. She's also Co-Editor of *The Authentic Voice: The Best Reporting on Race and Ethnicity* (Columbia University Press, 2006), a teaching tool consisting of a textbook, DVD and website ([www.theauthenticvoice.org](http://www.theauthenticvoice.org)). She has worked as an Adjunct Professor of Journalism at The Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and was a Nieman fellow at Harvard University in 1995-96.

#### CHRISTOPHER L. COFFIN:

Christopher Coffin is a partner in a major law firm in Louisiana. He has a deep knowledge and wide breadth of experience in the health field particularly litigating cases involving defective pharmaceuticals and medical devices, environmental contamination, product liability and consumer fraud claims. He has participated in multiple class action lawsuits and has represented thousands of individuals all over the country.

### Film Subjects

RANDY O. FROST, PhD - Smith College

Randy O. Frost received his doctorate from the University of Kansas in 1977 and is the Harold and Elsa Siipola Israel Professor of Psychology at Smith College. He has published more than 160 scientific articles and book chapters on hoarding and related topics. His work has been funded by the Obsessive Compulsive Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health. Frost serves on the Scientific Advisory Board of the International OCD Foundation. He has co-authored several best-selling books on hoarding, and his research has been featured on a variety of television and radio news shows, including *20/20 Downtown*, *Good Morning America*, *The Today Show*, *Dateline*, National Public Radio (general news as well as the award-winning program *The Infinite Mind*), CBS Sunday Morning, BBC News, and the Canadian Broadcasting Company's *The Nature of Things*. He has also consulted with various hoarding task forces around the world and has given hundreds of lectures and workshops on the topic in the U.S. and internationally.

GAIL STEKETEE, PhD, Boston University

Dr. Steketee, a member of the faculty since 1986, was appointed Dean of the Boston University School of Social Work in 2008 after serving as Dean ad interim for three years. Her practice and scholarly focus is on the Symptoms and treatment of hoarding disorder including difficulty discarding, clutter, and excessive acquiring; community interventions for hoarding; cognitive and behavioral treatments for OCD and OC spectrum conditions; family aspects of OCD and hoarding. From 1996 to 1999, she served as the School's Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Dr. Steketee has conducted research and taught on cognitive and behavioral treatments for anxiety disorders. She has conducted NIMH-funded research on behavioral and cognitive treatments for obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) with colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania and Mass General Hospital. Her current research focuses on assessment and treatment of hoarding disorder in adults with colleagues at Smith College and Hartford Hospital. She has published extensively in these areas, including over a dozen books and numerous articles and chapters. She serves on the scientific advisory board of the International OCD Foundation and has been a board member of the National Association of Deans and Directors of MSW programs. She is an elected Fellow and current Vice President of the American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare (AASWSW) and was elected president of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) for 2016-17. Her practice and scholarly focus is on the Symptoms and treatment of hoarding disorder including difficulty discarding, clutter, and excessive acquiring; community interventions for hoarding; cognitive and behavioral treatments for OCD and OC spectrum conditions; family aspects of OCD and hoarding.

JESSE EDSSELL-VETTER - Intervention Coordinator, Metro Housing Boston

Jesse Edsell-Vetter heads up Metro Housing Boston's hoarding training program. The program started in 2006 and has assisted residents throughout Greater Boston, from those who are homeless to homeowners, to address their hoarding behaviors and sanitation concerns. They take a unique case management approach to hoarding intervention. Edsell-Vetter and his team serves multiple roles: one, as a coach for the person with hoarding, helping them to adjust their behavior and live in a safer, more sanitary home; and two, as a convener of all parties who need to be involved to make that happen, including the person's landlord, representatives from the municipality, and local courts, if the client is being evicted. The result is a comprehensive plan to ensure that the client has everything they need to succeed in the program.

PETER MCINTYRE

New England based resident battling with disorder and in recovery.

### **Facts about HD**

There is tremendous ignorance about hoarding. It's typically seen as mere sloppiness and laziness but it's actually a psychiatric disorder that can be treated.

Hoarding Disorder (HD) is surprisingly common. An estimated six to fifteen million people suffer from HD at a diagnosable level—2-5% of the U.S. population.

*Beyond Hoarding* illustrates just how distressed family and friends often become due to the “ripple effect” of HD. They try to keep their loved ones who are caught in the hoarding vortex of stuff, squalor and danger, safe from injury, eviction, and worse.

Genetics, brain dysfunction, and life experiences all contribute to Hoarding Disorder, according to leading mental health experts on HD. The causes are complex and particular to each person.

People who hoard often hide their problem by keeping people out of their homes. They often feel ashamed and fear disapproval. One expert says HD is “probably a hidden epidemic.”

Hoarding does not always result in filth. Some people with HD keep clean homes – but they are overfilled with stuff to the point of dysfunction and danger.

### **Key Subjects in the Film**

Catherine Ayers, PhD

Division Director, Mental Health Clinics, University of California, San Diego

Helen Chiarello

Family Member

David Coffin

Family Member

Jesse Edsell-Vetter

Hoarding Intervention Coordinator

Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership

Alan and Hillary Estner

Neighbors of People with Hoarding Disorder

Randy Frost, PhD  
Co-Author of “Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things”

Bob Green  
Struggles with Hoarding Disorder

Peter McIntyre  
Struggles with Hoarding Disorder

Terri Parks  
In Recovery from Hoarding Disorder

Jennifer Sampson, PhD  
Co-Founder & Executive Director of The Hoarding Project

Sanjaya Saxena, MD  
Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Diego

Gail Steketee, PhD  
Co-Author of “Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things”

Cindy Stevens  
Family Member

### **Quotes from the Film**

*“I think the number one most important message that any of us can get out to the public is that hoarding disorder is, in fact, a neuro-psychiatric disorder and secondly that it’s treatable. What it is not is laziness! What it is not is an unwillingness to get with the program and live correctly and clean up your house. It’s that these folks really can’t do that without the proper treatment. And the approach of simply trying not to have it, doesn’t work anymore than trying not to have a broken leg.”*

*“So people tend to put the focus on clutter and one thing we’re trying to de-emphasize is clutter. Clutter is the external manifestation of the disorder. You can go into someone’s house with a cleaning crew clean out all the clutter make their home spotless, immaculate. You haven’t change their disorder at all.”*

*“We should be all thinking of hoarding disorder in very much the same way as we think of, quote, neurological disorders, such as epilepsy or Parkinson’s disease. And for hoarding disorder, about 50% of the risk appears to be due to genetic factors. So hoarding tends to run in families very strongly.”*

Sanjaya Saxena, MD  
(Professor of Psychiatry, University of California, San Diego)

*“Most of the people that we meet in middle-age who have it, remember that it started in their teenage years. And by the time you're in your late age you have collected quite a number of things and if you can't get rid of any of them, then you're certainly going to be in trouble.”*

Gail Steketee, PhD  
(Co-Author of “Stuff: Compulsive Hoarding and the Meaning of Things”)

*“For decades I have wanted desperately to have this place the way it was when I first moved in and could invite friends over and broil fish for dinner and play mine host, and haven't been able to do that for many years.”*

Peter McIntyre  
(Struggling with Hoarding Disorder)

*“My bedroom was definitely a health hazard. I had a lot of stuff that was stacking up and so I put boxes on my bed and then it got to where at nighttime I'd just move the boxes to the side 'cause I didn't have anywhere else to put them.”*

*“I felt that I was living a double life by -- I had a great job, uh, very involved n my community. But I had to come home to eat and sleep in my home. Sometimes it was unbearable when you had the feeling of everything was caving in on you.”*

*“For the first year uh, that I started in therapy for hoarding, I did not go into a single thrift store. I was afraid to. At first, we didn't say okay this week, we're going to clean out stuff. We started out with -- what kind of stuff do I have and what does this stuff mean to me? And you know, who am I? Who am I without my stuff?”*

*“I am totally amazed where I'm at right now in my life.”*

Terri Parks  
(In Recovery from Hoarding Disorder)

*“Looking from my Dad's point of view, everything has value to him. Everything can be reused, repurposed or something.” I think the stuff and the clutter has hindered him because he's always saying, “I need to sort and I need to organize.” But it seems like that's all he says he does.”*

Cindy Stevens  
(Family Member)

*“At some point in time you realize that you have a problem. It screws up your relationships with your family. I feel that I've hurt them through my hoarding.”*

Bob Green  
(Struggling with Hoarding Disorder)

*“It was surreal...the idea that he died of suffocation under a pile of garbage. God, that’s not a way for anybody to go.”*

David Coffin  
(Family Member)

*“I knew there was stuff in that house but never to the extent that it was.”*

*“So it was, it’s very emotional thinking: ‘Did you do the right thing? Didn’t you do the right thing? Do you have to feel guilty about this because it’s a human being that needed help?’ ”*

Hillary Estner  
(Neighbor to People Who Hoard)

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### **Credits**

For More Information on Hoarding Disorder:

International OCD Foundation – <https://hoarding.iocdf.org/>

Director	-	David C. Coffin
Writer	-	Alice Irene Pifer
Producer	-	David C. Coffin
Producer	-	Alice Irene Pifer

Music by Chris Hajian

Editor	-	David C. Coffin
Executive Producer	-	Christopher L. Coffin

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Colorist	-	Leo Fallas
Graphic Design	-	Ian Robinson
Field Producer	-	Janet Dalton
Illustrator	-	Christiana Sandoval Woodard

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Brian Henderson

Clayton Hereth  
Ronn Kilby  
Brian Robertshaw  
Howard Shack  
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Accounting - Aaron J. LaGraize, CPA (Kushner LaGraize, LLC)

#### Featuring

(In Order of Appearance)

- Hillary Estner
- John Tikson
- Helen Chiarello
- David Coffin
- Helen Bushwick

- Alan Estner
- Catherine Ayers, PhD
- Randy O. Frost, PhD
- Gail Steketee, PhD
- Sanjaya Saxena, MD
- Cindy Stevens
- Bob Green
- Danielle Stevens
- Jennifer Sampson, PhD
- Janet Yeats, MSW
- Peter McIntyre
- Jesse Edsell-Vetter
- Terri Parks
- Barb Abel

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Donald C. Coffin  
Monica R. Coffin  
Theresa Coffin  
Pete Connell  
Alexandra Deis-Lauby  
Tanya Dmitruk

Katharine Edmonds  
Eduard Freisler  
Florence Friedman  
Barbara Gilin  
John Giugliano  
Jeff Greenberg  
Chrissanth Gross  
Mike Hacker  
Anthony Ighani  
Liam Johnson  
Tami Kapule  
Michael Kelly  
Karl Lauby  
Daniel Andres Leon  
Jerome Lindauer  
Joseph Lovett  
Andrew Mapp  
Reverend Mike Matson  
Paul Messing  
Cynthia Millman  
Tim Moyle  
Ozier Muhammad  
Steven Pepe  
Pilar Muhammad  
The Pifer Family  
Michele L. Plorde, MPH  
Lisa Redd  
Rebecca Reitz  
Emily Rucker  
Kieran Sabin  
Stephen Sabin  
Irene Scaramazza  
Leslie Shapiro  
The Stevens Family  
Brian Tario  
Susan Tikson  
The Tikson Family  
Catie Wilkinson

...And Itty Bitty (The Cat)

Associated Press  
Bethany Lutheran Church, Minneapolis  
Citizens Bank & Trust (Plaquemine, LA)  
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Town of Hempstead, NY, Department of Sanitation  
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