

SO MUCH | SO FAST

a film by
Steven Ascher & Jeanne Jordan
directors of
TROUBLESOME CREEK
(Sundance Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award
Academy Award nominee)

87 minutes
www.SoMuchSoFast.com
A West City Films production

West City Films
Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan
30 Wiltshire Road
Newton, MA 02458
(617) 969-3133
cell 617-803-3917
SAscher@westcityfilms.com

Premiered in competition at Sundance 2006.
Winner, Audience Award, Independent Film Festival Boston.
Screenings at selected festivals incl. Melbourne, Hot Docs, Nashville and Vancouver.
Released theatrically in the United States. Broadcasts worldwide.

**BALCONY
RELEASING**



Short Description

From the Academy Award-nominated directors of **Troublesome Creek**, Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan, comes a new documentary film, **So Much So Fast**. A black-humored cliffhanger of romance, guerrilla science and the meaning of time.

What would you do if you were 29 and found you may only have a few years to live? **So Much So Fast** is about the remarkable events set in motion when Stephen Heywood discovers he has ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) and his brother Jamie becomes obsessed with finding a cure.

Synopsis

When asked what he would do differently in the five years since his ALS diagnosis, Stephen Heywood replied, "Have more sex on film."

What would *you* do if you were 29 and found you may only have a few years to live? **So Much So Fast** is about the remarkable events set in motion when Stephen Heywood discovered he had the paralyzing neural disorder ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease).

Made over 5 years, **So Much So Fast** tracks one family's ferocious response to an orphan disease: the kind of disease drug companies ignore because there's not enough profit in curing it.

In reaction, and with no medical background, Stephen's brother Jamie creates a guerilla-science research group and in two years builds it from three people in a basement to a multi-million dollar ALS mouse facility, the largest anywhere. Finding a drug in time becomes Jamie's all-consuming obsession.

Stephen's position is you can't live every day like it's your last (since you'd be hung over every morning). Instead, he gets married, has a son and rebuilds two houses. He and his wife Wendy's laser-like observations of the world and their predicament go to the heart of the fragility of being alive.

Filmmakers Ascher and Jordan were inducted into the stunning world of ALS when Jeanne's mother, who is featured in their film **Troublesome Creek**, came down with the disease. Like the Jordan family of **Troublesome Creek**, the Heywoods are smart, acerbic and capable of upending the clichés of their situation with black humor and real insight.

So Much So Fast makes tangible the bonds between parents and children, husbands and wives, and siblings who are also best friends. We watch as some of these bonds withstand unimaginable pressure and others break. Audiences get an inside view of scientific discovery and what happens when a group of researchers goes up against the scientific establishment.

In **So Much So Fast**, there's a lot going on under the surface. It's about the biggest questions of life. The answers are never what you'd expect.

Directors' Statement

The first film we collaborated on was **Troublesome Creek**, released in 1996, about Jeannie's family and their struggle to hold onto their Iowa farm. It was the most personal of subjects, but we blended Jeannie's insider's perspective and Steve's view as an outsider. Our hope was that the very specific details of the Jordans' lives could be made to resonate with universal themes about family, American history, economics, impermanence. We set out to overturn audience expectations about the cliches of Rural Americana, and tell a story people anywhere could see as their own.

As bad luck would have it, **So Much So Fast** is a logical extension of **Troublesome Creek**. It begins with Jeannie's mother, Mary Jane Jordan, who was diagnosed with ALS just as we were finishing the editing of **Troublesome Creek**. At that time there were no drugs or treatments for ALS, and no reason to harbor even a shred of hope. The fact that ALS (one of many orphan diseases) is still fatal represents a deep failure of the profit-driven pharmaceutical industry.

We had been looking for a way to express the jaw-dropping impossibility of ALS through film, and in 2000 we came across the Heywoods' story in a **New Yorker** profile by Pulitzer Prize winner Jon Weiner (Jon then published **My Brother's Keeper**, a full-length book about the Heywoods and the early research of their ALS Therapy Development Foundation.)

In the Heywoods we saw another chance to explicate universals in the particulars of one family's story. There is tremendous vitality in the multiple threads of their experience. Robert Warshow's essays on the gangster and the westerner capture something of the duality between Jamie and Stephen. Jamie is a provocateur, whose enormous ambition and brash, in-your-face style make it possible build the foundation up from nothing to the small empire it becomes. But he pays a price for it. Meanwhile Stephen's artistic, self-contained charisma gives him an acceptance of his situation and a kind of moral force reminiscent of a reluctant gunslinger. In **Troublesome Creek**, westerns were a kind of touchstone for Russ Jordan. For the Heywood brothers, the constant in their lives is video games – like Diablo II and Starcraft.

For us, one of the most powerful aspects of documentary filmmaking is the ability to capture the passage of time, and reveal how real life plays out in its complexity over a span of years. We look for the layers of meaning in big moments and everyday events.

As filmmakers we share a love for the inherent drama of documentary and the lucid, documentary-like moments in dramas. **So Much So Fast** is a documentary, but we hope audiences will experience it in some ways as a nonfiction novel.

-- Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan

Filmmaker Biographies

STEVEN ASCHER AND JEANNE JORDAN have been making documentary and fiction films for over 20 years. Their first collaboration, **Troublesome Creek: a Midwestern**, won the Grand Jury Prize and Audience Award at Sundance, the Prix Italia, Peabody and IDA awards and was nominated for an Academy Award. They have collaborated on Emmy-winning portraits of artists, including Chuck Close and Shimon Attie. Jordan's work includes **Eyes on the Prize**, films for **American Playhouse** and she is currently series producer of PBS's **Postcards From Buster**. Ascher's directing credits include many films for PBS, commercials and the drama, **Del and Alex**. He is author of **The Filmmaker's Handbook**, a bestselling text.

Composer **SHELDON MIROWITZ** has scored more than fifty film and TV projects and hundreds of commercials. He's a three-time Emmy Award nominee for best music, including the seven-part series **Columbus and The Age of Discovery**, the six-part series **Evolution**, and the A&E movie **The Nazi Officer's Wife**. Steve and Jeannie have had an ongoing collaboration with Sheldon since his brilliant work on the score for **Troublesome Creek**.

Appearing in the film:

STEPHEN HEYWOOD

A designer-builder and video game fanatic once described as "a hunky, poet-carpenter guy." Diagnosed with ALS at 29. Moved back to his hometown near Boston (Newton, MA), married Wendy and became father of Alex at 30.

JAMIE HEYWOOD

Stephen's two-year older brother. Entrepreneur with no training in biology who quit his job to start the ALS Therapy Development Foundation. Married to Melinda and father of Zoe.

BEN HEYWOOD

Youngest and tallest Heywood brother. Built a house with Stephen and then went to Los Angeles to be a producer. Torn between his west-coast life and being with Stephen back in Boston. Marries Sherie Yearton during the making of the film.

WENDY STACY HEYWOOD

Stephen's wife and mother of Alex. Born and raised in Missouri, she had her first date with Stephen after his early symptoms had appeared. A great mimic who can find the humor in almost anything.

MELINDA HEYWOOD

Jamie's wife and mother of Zoe. A belly dancer and circus performer with a doctorate in medieval French literature. Star of the Heywood's annual Bellydance Fundraiser.

PEGGY HEYWOOD

Mother of the Heywood boys. Works with Stephen on construction projects and keeps things running with childcare and anything that needs doing. Queen of multi-tasking and power naps.

JOHN HEYWOOD

Father, born in England. Teaches automotive engineering at MIT and passed down a love of engineering to his sons. Takes on all the work he can to pay for things insurance doesn't.

ROBERT BONAZOLI

He and Stephen were friends in high school and, as co-founder, he signed on to build the Foundation up from zero. As Deputy Director, Robert manages the people side of the Foundation.

KEN THOMPSON

Lab manager. Stephen's best friend from childhood who came to work in the mouse lab when Stephen got sick. Ken's a key part of video game night. He and Stephen regularly go out to the movies and raise their kids together.

THE STAFF OF THE ALS THERAPY DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION

ALS TDF began with a bold attempt at using gene therapy to cure ALS. Remaining focused on ALS patients alive today (and the time pressure implied by that) they created a streamlined process to test potential ALS drugs in mice on a large scale, and a public information program on cutting-edge therapies. Their drug testing has focused primarily on FDA approved drugs (that can be given to patients immediately if found to be effective) and they remain committed to an open science model of sharing results directly through the web with patients and researchers. As of 2006, they are now the largest drug development program in ALS and have tested over 200 compounds. The foundation is now the ALS Therapy Development Institute and has begun a major new research initiative with the MDA - ALS Division. More information can be found at www.ALS.net.

ALS (LOU GEHRIG'S DISEASE)

Also known as Motor Neuron Disease (MND). ALS is a neurodegenerative disease that causes paralysis by killing the nerves cells that control motion and movement. A few hundred thousand people worldwide have it at any time (including physicist Stephen Hawking). Average life expectancy after diagnosis is 2-5 years, which may be extended for patients choosing to go on a respirator. Stephen, like 90% of people with ALS, has the sporadic form, for which no cause or cure is known (this form is *not* inheritable).

Credits

Produced, Directed and Written by: Steven Ascher and Jeanne Jordan

Cinematography: Steven Ascher

Editing: Jeanne Jordan

Music: Sheldon Mirowitz

A production of West City Films in association with WGBH/FRONTLINE, ZDF/ARTE, BBC Storyville with support from TV2/Danmark.

Produced with support from: Michael W. McCarthy Foundation, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, LEF Foundation, Shelby Cullom Davis Foundation, Wellspring Foundation.

Unrated. 87 minutes. Released by Balcony Releasing.

All photos available for download at www.somuchsofast.com