



Photo credit: Caitlin Lisa, courtesy 'For Grace Film'

Directed By
Kevin Pang & Mark Helenowski

Press Notes

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For Grace

The kitchen became Curtis Duffy's refuge after an unimaginable tragedy. Now as one of the country's most renowned chefs, he's building his dream restaurant — but at another point of personal crisis. A documentary about food, family and sacrifice.

CREDITS

Directors	Kevin Pang & Mark Helenowski
Additional Production	Matt Krueger Scott Kaser Matt Knutson
Featuring Music By	The Hudson Branch
Post Production Audio	Robert Aguilar
Graphics	Tim Weidelman
Archival Media	Chicago Tribune WBNS-TV Columbus Dispatch Windy City Live WLS-TV Nick Kokonas Curtis Duffy Michael Muser Johnstown-Monroe Local School District
Technical Info	TRT: 92 minutes Exhibition Format: DCP, Blu-Ray, DVD, Quicktime Aspect Ratio: 16:9 Shooting Format: HD Color, English
Distribution	Filmbuff: VOD (iTunes, Google Play, Amazon), Feb. 2, 2016 Negotiated by Adam Galen + Abby Davis of Preferred Content

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LOGLINE

An acclaimed chef emerging from a tragic childhood now finds himself at a crossroads: Opening the best restaurant in the world, or saving what remains of his crumbling family.

SYNOPSIS

(Long synopsis provided below)

Curtis Duffy, a teen who fought and stole for the thrill, discovered his place in the kitchen after a home economics teacher nurtured his talents. After an unimaginable tragedy involving his parents, Duffy doubled down on his cooking career. Soon, his intense drive earned him accolades as one of the country's most renowned chefs. But as he began building his dream restaurant in Chicago, called Grace, Duffy found himself in another point of personal crisis: His laser focus cost him his marriage and two young daughters.

For Grace is a documentary about food, family, sacrifice, and the journey from concrete box to opening night of one of the world's most acclaimed restaurants.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

The original premise of FOR GRACE was a 20-minute short film for the Chicago Tribune website about the mechanics of opening a fine-dining establishment. Curtis Duffy, who worked in some of the country's most important kitchens, was building his own restaurant and allowed us to film the process. But as is the case with most restaurant build-outs, delays reared its ugly head. What was intended for eight months of construction took 18. Eventually, we got tired of filming blueprints and electrical wiring, so we started asking about his upbringing. That's when the film took a 90-degree turn. Where he came from, his childhood turmoil, and the irony of how it ripped apart his current family — forgive the cliché, but there was something Shakespearean in its tragedy. At the same time, there were hopeful qualities in his quest to become the best chef in the country. Bingo: Right then, we knew we couldn't tell the story in just 20 minutes.

We both agreed early on that focusing strictly about food was the wrong approach. This couldn't be a documentary directed solely at foodies; we wanted a film that would resonate with our mothers. That meant relating to people through shared human experiences rather than highlighting high-end dishes and rare ingredients. There were a number of these we wanted to capture: the drive for perfection; the sacrifice required to achieve a dream; the Sisyphean strive for balance. We find the most compelling stories are usually about people with a lot at stake. Curtis Duffy fits the bill.

On a fundamental level, we wanted to give viewers a behind-the-scenes peek into the world of luxury dining, where dinner for two cost upward of \$700. The restaurant's attention to detail can be mind-boggling (spending nearly \$100,000 on chairs; their NSA-like background research on every customer). As movie lovers who enjoy a good narrative yarn, we wanted to tell the story of a character who emerges from unimaginable tragedy to find grace — literally — in the kitchen ... albeit at a price. As directors, we wanted to show fellow journalists, filmmakers and storytellers that two underdogs with DSLR cameras and no previous documentary experience can, indeed, make a movie that premieres at South by Southwest.

FILMMAKERS

Kevin Pang | Co-Director, Producer

Kevin Pang is a filmmaker and features writer. He spent the last decade as a food writer at the Chicago Tribune. He is a four-time nominee for the James Beard Foundation Award, including a 2010 win for his television series *My Dinner with a Chef*. He has worked for two cost upward of \$700. He has been featured in *Fair, Saveur*, *Lucky Peach* magazine, and has contributed to "This American Life."

Mark Helenowski | Co-Director, Producer

Mark Helenowski is a Chicago-based documentary and commercial filmmaker. He received a Student Emmy from the National Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, and he has created commercial content for Gatorade, Nike, Virgin and United Way. This is his first feature-length film.

PRAISE FOR THE FILM

"...An impressively slick and surprisingly captivating piece of work."

—Joe Leydon, *Variety*

Named one of "13 Breakout Movies at the SXSW Film Festival"

"One of the best movies about the restaurant industry I've seen ... I can't stop thinking about it."

—Marcus Leshock, *WGN-TV*

"An elegant, moving film about the healing power of art, in this case, art you can eat."

—Peter Sagal, host of NPR's 'Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!'

"Go see this movie."

—Steve Cavendish, *The Nashville Scene*

"'For Grace' tells an incredible and incredibly moving tale."

—Bethany Jean Clement, *The Seattle Times*

"In the already overcrowded subgenre of documentaries about foodies and restaurants, 'For Grace' stands heads and shoulders above even its closest of comparable films."

—Andrew Parker, *Toronto Film Scene*

"'For Grace' is sweet and brutal and smart and beautiful. If ever a movie made you root for a chef, a restaurant, and a human being, this is the one — but the film manages that trick without a single false step or maudlin frame. Every emotion it provokes, from devastating sadness to supreme euphoria, is earned the old-fashioned way: through great storytelling."

—Jeff Ruby, *Chicago magazine*

SUBJECTS

Curtis Duffy

Born and raised in Columbus, Ohio, Curtis Duffy knew at a young age that he had a passion for cooking. After completing culinary school, he relocated to Chicago to pursue a career in fine dining at the esteemed Charlie Trotter's. Duffy spent three years at Charlie Trotter's before leaving to work at Trio, where he met Chef Grant Achatz; A few years later both chefs left to open Alinea. Duffy later took his skill set to Avenues, where he garnered many accolades including Two Michelin Stars.

In mid-2011, he left Avenues to begin working on his own restaurant, Grace, which opened in late 2012. At Grace, Duffy's culinary style — elegant, graceful cuisine — is showcased. He puts ingredients at the forefront and draws on his wealth of experience in a way that employs technique to enhance flavor.

Since opening Grace on December 11, 2012, Duffy and the restaurant have been awarded many accolades, including Three Michelin Stars in the Chicago 2015 and 2016 Guides, AAA's Five Diamond Rating, Forbes Travel Guide's 5 Star Rating, Robb Report's Best Restaurant in the World 2013, Chicago Magazine's Best New Restaurant, and Eater National's Chef of the Year.

Michael Muser

Originally from Chicago, Michael Muser moved to California at a young age. While studying at California State University - Chico, Muser worked in restaurants to support himself and took the opportunity to learn more about wine. After graduation, he devoted his life to oenology. He took a hands-on approach to his studies and spent time traveling throughout Europe. There he worked harvest in Burgundy and Champagne, learning first-hand the winemaking process before coming to Chicago to join The Peninsula Chicago, as Wine Director and Sommelier. He built the beverage lists for the hotel's three restaurants, its bar, and for all catering functions and private events. At Avenues, Muser met Chef Curtis Duffy, and in 2011 the two began plans to open Grace.

Since opening Grace on December 11, 2012, Muser and the restaurant have been awarded many accolades, Three Michelin Stars in the Chicago 2015 Guide, AAA's Five Diamond Rating, Forbes Travel Guide's 5 Star Rating, Robb Report's Best Restaurant in the World 2013, Chicago Magazine's Best New Restaurant, and one of Food and Wine's 2014 Sommeliers of the Year.



LONG SYNOPSIS

On the surface, it's a film about the building of a restaurant, from an ambitious chef named Curtis Duffy who has aspirations of becoming the best in the country. He was the number two chef at Alinea, the Chicago restaurant once named by Gourmet magazine as 'the best restaurant in the country.' When he set out on his own at The Peninsula Chicago hotel, Duffy garnered two coveted stars from the international Michelin dining guide. Now he wants that elusive third and final star, a designation Alinea has already earned, and Duffy believes he can only achieve this by building his own restaurant from the ground up.

'For Grace' is about Curtis Duffy building his dream restaurant at the worst time of his personal life. His 11-year marriage has crumbled from his devotion to cooking. He works 18-hour days, on nights and weekends, and only sees his young daughters walking them to school each morning. 'This will be the first Christmas I won't wake up to see them running around the house, opening up their presents. It's going to be painful,' says Duffy about his divorce. 'This lifestyle, there is no balance. You can't be great at something and put 100% into it without sacrificing something else.'

It's not the first time Duffy experienced the trauma of divorce. His father abused his mother, and that violent streak seeped into Curtis himself. Growing up in Central Ohio, Curtis got in fights with neighborhood kids, and he would steal for the thrill. It wasn't until he entered middle school and enrolled in home economics that his life changed. There, he met a teacher named Ruth Snider, who recognized a cooking talent in the boy and nurtured him. Meanwhile, the fighting continued at home. Duffy found a job at a local diner peeling potatoes and washing dishes, and the kitchen became a refuge from his violent family.

On the day their divorce would become finalized, Robert Duffy pleaded to his wife Jan to reconsider. She said no. Robert Duffy returned hours later with a shotgun and kidnapped Jan at her workplace. He held her hostage at his home for 10-plus hours until the Licking County Sheriff's Department entered with a SWAT team. But it was too late. Robert Duffy shot his wife, and then himself. The next day, Curtis discovered a suicide note in his father's home. It was addressed to Curtis only. The note was prescient. 'If you ever get married, take time to love your wife,' Robert Duffy wrote to his son. 'She will be the most important person in your life.'

The murder-suicide of his parents emboldened Curtis Duffy to double down on his cooking career. Every night, he dreaded the end of his kitchen shift, when he had to return to his new reality. But one person was there to be his crying shoulder. His home economics teacher, Ruth Snider, grew closer to Duffy. She became a surrogate mother to him. On the night before Duffy left for his new career in Chicago, she said, 'I love you,' and he replied the same, natural as an exhale.

Curtis Duffy would become one of Chicago's most renowned chefs. When he set out to build his own restaurant, he named it Grace after his daughter Eden Grace. Duffy and his business partner and best friend Michael Muser thought the restaurant would take nine months to construct. 'For Grace' tracks the mechanics of opening a luxury restaurant, where dinner for two costs upward of \$700. No detail is overlooked. Chairs cost \$1,000 each, the custom kitchen \$500,000 and each of the four bathrooms were designed to reflect the four seasons. But unexpected cost overruns delayed the opening by a year. Frustrations mounted for Duffy and his team.

The impending divorce also weighed on Duffy. The workout fanatic began gaining weight and gray hairs sprouted behind his ears. He averaged four hours of sleep a night. As opening day of Grace inched closer and closer, Duffy realized his soon-to-be ex-wife, daughters, sister and brother wouldn't be present to celebrate. There was only one person who would be there. His home economics teacher Ruth Snider would fly in from Ohio. The film culminates in the emotional reunion of Duffy and Snider on the grand opening night of Grace.

'For Grace' is about relationships, family, sacrifice and food. It reveals how Duffy, named Chicago Tribune's 2013 Chef of the Year, composes the intricate dishes that have garnered him multiple James Beard Foundation Award nominations. It's about how cooking rescued Curtis Duffy, and how cooking ultimately exacted a price.

The documentary was produced by filmmakers Kevin Pang and Mark Helenowski. Musical scoring was composed by Chicago indie-rock band The Hudson Branch.

PRODUCTION TIMELINE

June 2011	Pre-production begins
June 2011	Principal photography begins
July 2012	Post-production begins
November 2014	Last scene filmed
March 2015	World premiere at SXSW Film Conference & Festival
April 2015	International premiere at Hot Docs Canadian International Documentary Festival
October 2015	Chicago premiere at Chicago International Film Festival, named “Best of the Fest: Audience Favorite.”
October 2015	Announced digital distribution deal with Filmbuff. Film will be available on VOD platforms, including iTunes/Google Play/Amazon starting Feb. 2, 2016

PRODUCTION NOTES

Kevin Pang and Mark Helenowski followed Curtis Duffy between June 2011 and December 2012. In total, the documentary took 3 years, 4 months to produce. As a 2-man operation, Kevin and Mark shot every scene in the movie, edited, mixed sound and color corrected.

The film is based on the front page Chicago Tribune profile on Curtis Duffy by Kevin Pang. The story was included in the 2013 “Best Food Writing.” Read the story at chicagotribune.com/curtisduffy

On November 11, 2014, Grace was awarded three stars from the renowned Michelin Guide, the highest honor bestowed on a chef. They are one of 12 American restaurants and 115 worldwide to receive the coveted designation. A new epilogue was filmed capturing the moment they received the news.

Filmed on Canon DSLR cameras

Edited on Adobe Premiere Pro 6.0, iMac

Graphics created with Adobe After Effects

FILM FESTIVAL SELECTIONS

March 2015	South by Southwest Film Conference & Festival	<i>World Premiere</i>
April 2015	Minneapolis-St. Paul International Film Festival	
April 2015	Nashville Film Festival	<i>Best of Fest</i>
April 2015	Hot Docs (Toronto)	<i>International Premiere</i>
May 2015	Bentonville Film Festival	
May 2015	Seattle International Film Festival	
May-June 2015	Documentary Edge Festival (New Zealand)	<i>Best of Fest</i>
June 2015	SF DocFest (San Francisco)	
June 2015	Best of Hot Docs (Vancouver)	
June 2015	Niagara Integrated Film Festival	<i>Best Documentary</i>
July 2015	Indy Film Fest (Indianapolis)	<i>Best Documentary</i>
August 2015	Melbourne International Film Festival (Australia)	
August 2015	Destiny City Film Festival (Tacoma, WA)	
September 2015	Long Beach International Film Festival	
October 2015	Edmonton International Film Festival	
October 2015	Doctober (Bellingham, WA)	
October 2015	Tallgrass Film Festival (Wichita)	
October 2015	Chicago International Film Festival	<i>Best of Fest</i>
November 2015	Grand River Film Festival (St. Catherine, ON)	
November 2015	Devour! The Food Film Fest (Wolfville, NS)	
November 2015	Napa Valley Film Festival	
November 2015	DOC NYC	