

THE *lulus*
SESSIONS

A feature documentary by S. Casper Wong

P R E S S K I T

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Reviews

“A Must-see Documentary... LuLu will absolutely charm you precisely because she is not trying to.”

- *LA Weekly*



“Unexpected humor and self reflection... are recorded with raw immediacy. Asian and LGBT fests will line up for this audience puller.”

- *Variety*



“Wong is not only a sensitive and perceptive filmmaker...this film is a story you won't soon forget.”

- *DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival*

- *WINNER George C. Lin Emerging Filmmaker Award*

- *WINNER Best Documentary Feature*

“It's hard to think of a fiction film without death or love. Yet when it comes to documentary, these are perhaps the uncanniest, most tenuous topics of all, ones that defy the genre of realism precisely because we have such a hard time believing that they are real to begin with.

A piercing work of personal documentary, THE LULU SESSIONS has no illusions about such topics, yet brings us to the brink of grasping both.”

- *San Diego Asian Film Festival*

- *WINNER Special Jury Award*

" Something intensely magical is captured on screen... *The LuLu Sessions* is a magnificent, emotional film that refuses to shy away from the sad, unsightly realities of death and, specifically, death by cancer. But there is far more to this moving documentary than sadness and death. Tenderly revealed is the inexplicable beauty, calmness, clarity and truth that can emerge from the depths of something so painful. In all things dark, so there is light, and The LuLu Sessions masters a strong depiction of both.”

- *Toronto LGBT Film Festival*

- *WINNER Second Place in Audience Award Competition for Best Documentary*

"It earned this distinction (of Opening Night Film) entirely on its own merits. This is a film that will get under your skin and you will wear this out of the theater and take it home with you... This is a film that I experienced frame by frame. I watch films to make a connection. The films that mean the most to me are ones that feel real and compelling. This one touched me in ways that are difficult to describe in mere words."

- *Austin GLBT International Film Festival*

- *Opening Night Film*

"*The LuLu Sessions* offers us insight not only into a deeply connected relationship but the beginning of an intimacy between two women that outgrows our understanding of friendship and partnership – and maybe even life. *The LuLu Sessions* is not only a work about limits, but, at least for many moments, their very suspension."

- *LA Asian Pacific Film Festival*

- *Nominated for the Grand Jury Award for Best Documentary*

"LuLu is one of the greatest documentary subjects I've ever seen on film. The film reminds me a lot of Silverlake Life."

- *Doug Block, Director of 51 Birch Street, The Kids Grow Up*

"Lulu is an unforgettable character! Full of passion and spitfire. I couldn't stop watching even though I had a mountain of films to screen."

- *Debra Zimmerman, Executive Director, Women Make Movies*

Awards and Nominations

WINNER of *Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature* – Chicago LGBT Film Festival

WINNER of *Best Documentary Feature* - DC Asian Pacific Film Festival

WINNER of *the George E. Lin Emerging Director Award* – DC Asian Pacific Film Festival

WINNER of *Emerging Director Award* – Asian American International Film Festival

WINNER of *Special Jury Award* – San Diego Asian Film Festival

WINNER of *Audience Award for Best Feature Documentary, 2nd Place* – Toronto LGBT Film Festival

Opening Night Film – Austin LGBT Film Festival

NOMINEE of *Best Documentary Feature* – Copenhagen LGBT Film Festival – MIX Copenhagen

NOMINEE of *Best Documentary Feature* - Boston LGBT Film Festival

NOMINEE of *Best Documentary Feature* – LA Asian American International Film Festival

Title The LuLu Sessions
Genre Feature documentary
Producer / Director S. Casper Wong
Running time 86 min
Format Digibeta, 4:3, stereo
Color and B&W, English
Completion date April 2011
Production Company OO Media, LLC, USA
Website www.thelulusessionsfilm.com
Contact oo@oomedia.com
+1.212.766.8868
Production photos available at www.thelulusessionsfilm.com

I Logline

Two best friends taking on life's ultimate adventure.

They say love knows no bleeping boundaries.

II Short Synopsis

LuLu is unlike anyone you've ever met. A hard-living, chain-smoking rebel with a tender heart. A poet with a potty mouth. Farm girl. Former cheerleader. World-class cancer researcher. Beloved professor. Dr. Louise Nutter, or LuLu has just discovered a new anti-cancer drug when she finds out she is dying of breast cancer herself at 42. Shot during those last 15 months of LuLu's life, *The LuLu Sessions* is a raw, intimate, yet surprisingly humorous story about the filmmaker showing up for her best friend and ex-something, and together, testing the limits of their bond while taking on life's ultimate adventure.

III Synopsis

LuLu is unlike anyone you'll ever meet.

LuLu gathers friends like a dog gathers fleas. Meet her for a Bud Lite, and you'll end up snorting beer through your nose, swaying to the jukebox, feeling the inner rebel in you bubbling up. Her cussing puts sailors to shame. She inhales Marlboros like an unsupervised six-year-old devours M&Ms. She downs Double White Russians and Dewar's straight up.

You wouldn't guess LuLu, or Dr. Louise Nutter, discovered a groundbreaking antibiotic /anti-cancer drug, the kind of achievement that wins you a Nobel Prize. Or that she started college when she was 15, whizzed through grad school and got her Ph.D in biochem in 3-1/2 years.

She's a pioneering cancer scientist. Demanding and beloved professor. Amateur poet and

novelist. A farm girl. Former cheerleader. Her nicknames include “The Bull” and “Passion Pot.” At her prime at age 42, LuLu gets a phone call: She has end-stage breast cancer. She’ll die 15 months later.

Shot during those last 15 months of LuLu’s life, *The LuLu Sessions* is a raw, intimate, yet surprisingly humorous story about the filmmaker showing up for her best friend, and together, testing the limits of their bond while taking on life’s ultimate adventure – death.

Despite all of her knowing and bravado, LuLu’s last months are filled with the unexpected. At last, she’s forced to admit her frailties and limitations. A retreat to her childhood farm in Vermont to seek stability and solace explodes into a confrontation with resurrected ghosts. Dying becomes a surprising process of shedding - old presumptions, values and ties and urgently adopting different ones. The quiet and arduous work of making peace in her life has only just begun.

Forcefully vocal and deeply reflective, LuLu makes this last journey accessible and heartfelt in a way that has rarely been seen on screen.

IV Director’s Statement

I’ve been called brave twice in my life. The first time, I left a comfortable, cushy lawyer job and followed my dream of becoming a filmmaker. The second time is after people watch this film.

I certainly never set out to be brave. In the first instance, I was propelled by naivete and a freakish tolerance for uncertainty. In the second, I found myself with footage of the most profound experience of my life. While I had a sense that my story will resonate with others, the biggest hurdle turned out to be me.

Personal documentaries are for some reason, suspect. As Doug Block, one of my heroes in the genre cautions in his Rule Number One on personal doc filmmaking - be prepared to answer: “who the fuck are you to be putting your life up there on screen?!?” It took me seven years to get over myself, and decided that despite humiliation and ridicule lurking ahead, this is a story I had to share. Nonetheless, by the time I started to edit this film, I was still kicking and screaming. Just ask my editor.

Ten years ago, LuLu was my best friend and my ex-something – it’s still hard to say exactly what she was to me. LuLu was like no one you’ve ever met. A hard-living, chain-smoking rebel with a tender heart. A farm girl, a former cheerleader and a master of profanity. A world-class cancer researcher and beloved professor. LuLu -- Dr. Louise Nutter -- had just discovered a new anti-cancer drug when she found out she was dying of breast cancer herself at 42. Shot during the last 15 months of LuLu’s life, *The LuLu Sessions* is a raw, intimate, at times humorous story about me showing up for her, and both of us together, testing the limits of our bond while taking on life’s end.

I wasn't even supposed to be there. I had just started film school in New York. I was headed to shoot a friend's wedding in San Francisco when LuLu asked me to stop in Minneapolis and go with her to her biopsy. When the bride got cold feet and cancelled the wedding, I ended up staying with LuLu's and started filming. I caught the moment the oncologist told LuLu her cancer was malignant. Just like that I was in the thick of a crisis, and the footage I'd just shot became the opening sequence of the film.

The next 15 months - LuLu's last - became an adventure that rattled her assumptions and values and shined a spotlight on the bond between LuLu and me, and its boundaries. Our friendship and our intimacy continued to morph to uncharted places. Later, when LuLu returned to her family farm in Vermont for stability and solace, she had to battle resurrected ghosts instead. Dying became a process of shedding long-held but stale presumptions, obligations and relationships and forging new ones.

In *The LuLu Sessions*, I've tried to explore the transformations that death can hasten. Shooting in the style of cinema verite, I was at once the filmmaker and a character. We tried to live life "normally," but hardly any of it was normal. The camera became the watchful third pair of eyes, chronicling our characters and our frailties. It exposed us in ways that are uncomfortable and punishing.

In a culture where death equals failure and is talked about in hushed voices, dying remains deeply private and involuntary – often lonely and frightening. This experience with LuLu has made it less frightening for me, and made me keenly aware of the unfinished business in my own life. I hope *The LuLu Sessions* helps change our perceptions and sparks loud, passionate dialogues. I hope you use this film as an impetus to start your own no holds barred "turkey talks" with someone you love. Tell them you love them. Tell them you forgive them. Tell them thank you. Just tell them!

Ten years in the making, *The LuLu Sessions* is finally making its way through the film festival circuit. This film is my testimony about the sometimes annoying tenacity of love and our surprising capacity for pushing past limits - in love, friendship, forgiveness and life itself, in the face of impending mortality. This film is one of the first ever personal documentaries seen through the lens of a Chinese American, queer woman. Yet, at its heart, I believe LuLu binds audiences - straight or gay, Asian or not, man or woman, young or old - to the most universal of stories, that of love and death.

I hope this modern day "Thelma and Louise" meets "Tuesdays with Morrie", will prod all of us to wonder what our own final adventure will look like, and with whom we will we share this last ride.

V Director's / Producers' Bio

S. CASPER WONG

Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer

S. Casper Wong is a New York based writer, director and producer of both narrative and documentary films. Her narrative feature screenplay, *OO 1*, a sci-fi love story has won the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Screenwriting Grant; the Grand Jury Prize for Best Screenplay at Urbanworld Film Festival and the Sloan Fellowship at the Hamptons International Film Festival Screenwriter's Lab and is slated for production in China winter 2012. Her award-winning narrative short film, *Shirts & Skins*, had been screened internationally and was licensed to the Independent Film Channel for national broadcast from 2004 to 2007. It is now part of the Tribeca Film Institute's curated Reframe Collection. Her screenplay, *Lucy in the Sky*, a feature animation space adventure, an Alfred P. Sloan Finalist, is in development.

She has served as Roger Corman's representative on his first co-production in China, and continues to work on his co-productions, including producing and directing. Also in production is *Staying Well*, a feature documentary on Integrative East-West Medicine and the global health crisis. This collaboration with UCLA, is also being developed as a three-part television series. In post-production, is *Becoming*, a longitudinal documentary of Chinese adoptees in contemporary American families. The project began in 1999 when the subjects were three-years old. They were revisited in 2009 as they entered adolescence.

Prior to receiving her MFA in Film Directing from NYU, Tisch School of the Arts, she was Senior Attorney for IBM, specializing in international intellectual property and antitrust law. Casper also holds a J.D. from New York Law School and a B.S. in Bio-medical Engineering from Columbia University. She is a reiki master and an award-winning cartoonist. The LuLu Sessions marks her feature documentary debut.

LAURA MINNEAR

Editor, Co-writer, Co-producer

Laura is an award-winning editor and producer who began her work in documentaries for series such as PBS-Frontline, Nova and The History Channel, after a diverse background in field biology/zoology, fine arts and one of her great passions, dance. Her recent credits include *GIRL WITH BLACK BALLOONS* (editor, co-producer), which premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival 2010 to sold out screenings, and was named one of the "Best of the Fest". Directed by Corinne Van der Borch it tells the story of one of New York's last true eccentrics, an undiscovered 87 year-old artist named Bettina who's lived in the Chelsea Hotel for 40 years. *BLAST!* (co-editor) with director Paul Devlin premiered at Hot Docs 2009 and on BBC Storyville, and continues to air internationally and on

PBS. She is currently a producer/editor for Dan Rather Reports and was recently honored as the first person to win two Front Page awards in the same year from the Newswomen's Club of New York. The stories we tell, whether on-screen or in how we choose to live our daily lives, still seem to her to be about the dance.

VI Key Personnel

S. Casper Wong	Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer
Laura Minnear	Editor, Co-writer, Co-producer
Tiffany Peckosh	Associate Producer
Wendy Blackstone	Composer
Michael Feuser	Sound Editor
Andrea Bella	Sound Designer
Jeremiah Morehead	Motion Graphics
Emma Morris	Consulting Editor
Jean Tsien	Consulting Editor
Robert Hawk	Story Consultant
Doug Block	Story Consultant
Cynthia Wade	Story Consultant

Advisory Team

Dr. Brookes Cowan	University of Vermont
Linda Kahn	Linda Kahn, LLC
Dr. Deborah Axelrod	New York University Medical Center
Dr. David Muller	Mount Sinai School of Medicine
Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum	Congregation Beit Simchat Torah
Dr. Mary Bryson	University of British Columbia

Grants and Funds

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VII Festival Screening History and Awards

(as of 3/13, for up-to-date listing, please visit official film website, www.thelulusectionsfilm.com)

Brattleboro	Women's Film Festival, Vermont, March 2013
Paris	Theatre de Menilmontant, France - October 2012 Festival International du Film Lesbien & Feministe de Paris
Taipei	Shin Kong Cineplex Taipei, Taiwan - October 2012 Women Make Waves Film Festival
Vancouver	Empire Granville Theatre, Canada - August 2012 Vancouver Queer Film Festival
Chennai	InKo Centre, India - July 2012 Samsung Women's International Film Festival
Auckland	Rialto Cinema New Market, New Zealand - June 2012 Out Takes A Reel Queer Film Festival
Wellington	
Portland	McMenamins Kennedy School Theater - May 2012 Q Doc Portland Queer Documentary Film Festival
Chicago	Landmark Century Centre Cinemas - November 2011 Reeling 30, The Chicago Lesbian and Gay Film Festival <i>WINNER Audience Award for Best Documentary Feature</i>
Burlington	Fleming 101 - October 2011 Vermont International Film Festival
San Diego	Mission Valley UltraStar Cinemas - October 2011 San Diego Asian Film Festival <i>WINNER Special Jury Prize</i>
Copenhagen	Cinematheque, Denmark - October 2011 MIX COPENHAGEN LesbianGayBiTrans Film Festival <i>Nominated for Best Documentary</i>
Seattle	Northwest Film Forum - October 2011 Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
Washington DC	Goethe Institut – October 2011 DC Asian Pacific American Film Festival <i>WINNER Best Documentary</i>

WINNER George C. Lin Emerging Director Award

- Atlanta** Landmark Midtown Art Cinema – September 2011
Out on Film, Atlanta LGBT Film Festival
- Cambridge** Arts Picturehouse, Queen’s Theatre at Emmanuel College -
September 2011
Cambridge Film Festival, UK
- Austin** Alamo Drafthouse South Lamar, Sept 2011
Austin International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Opening Night Film
- New York** Clearview Chelsea – August 2011
Asian American International Film Festival
WINNER Emerging Director Award for Documentary Feature
- Toronto** TIFF Bell Lightbox – May 2011
Inside Out, Toronto LGBT Film Festival, Canada
*WINNER Second Place in Audience Award Competition for
Documentary Prize*
- Boston** Museum of Fine Arts – May 2011
Boston LGBT Film Festival
Nominated for Grand Jury Award
- Los Angeles** Director’s Guild of America – April 2011
Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival
Nominated for Grand Jury Award
- Nyon** DOC Outlook International Market April 2011
Vision du Reel, Switzerland
- New York** DocuClub Screening, Work-in-progress July 2010