

Green Renaissance by The Gratefulness Team

Here in our feature “Grateful Changemakers,” we celebrate programs and projects that serve as beacons of gratefulness. These efforts elevate the values of grateful living and illuminate their potential to transform both individuals and communities. Join us in appreciating the inspiring and catalyzing contribution these Changemakers offer to shaping a more grateful world.

Green Renaissance

Justine of Green Renaissance.

The creative project of a couple from South Africa, Green Renaissance works to spread positive stories that reflect the wonder of the world. With the goal of sharing ideas and inspiring change, Green Renaissance produces gorgeous short films that are posted online and available for anyone, anywhere, to watch and share freely. Their films explore a range of themes, capturing a sense of gratefulness through meaningful conversation with ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Producer Justine du Toit tells us more about Green Renaissance.

What sparked the founding/creation of Green Renaissance?

Click on the icon... scroll through the feed...

Michael of Green Renaissance.

This has become a pattern in our daily lives as we spend more and more time on social media. But have you ever noticed how much of the content that fills your feed is bad news? News that drags you down? Stories that don't inspire?

We became frustrated with the bombardment of negative content that was being shared online. And when we were seeing good news stories, there was often a corporate brand or organization behind it all, trying to sell us something that we didn't want or didn't need.

So instead of continuing to complain about it, we realized that we could use our skills as filmmakers to try and change that in our own small way. In June 2017, we made a commitment to make and share one new short film every week - free of any advertising or corporate sponsorship - that serves as a powerful story for positive change without any

agenda. Fast forward to August 2019, and we have released 116 films so far. We haven't missed a week yet. And we don't plan on stopping anytime soon.

How does Green Renaissance fill a need for its audience?

Through our films, we explore what it means to be human. We touch on topics that can often be difficult for people to discuss - from loss of a loved one to aging and retirement to friendship to love and courage - universal themes that we ALL deal with at some stage in our lives, regardless of our religion or culture. We've always said that if each film touches just one person, fills them with a bit more hope, or leaves them feeling more inspired, then it has achieved its goal.

How do you see Green Renaissance as embodying/being related to grateful living?

Over the last two years, we have had the privilege of having many people share their stories with us. Sometimes it's just a light-hearted conversation with an elderly couple about their secret to a marriage that has lasted 60 years. Sometimes the subject is more difficult - about how someone has had to deal with depression and thoughts of suicide, for example. Each and every story has helped to remind us of what is really important in life and that there is so much to be grateful for in the simple pleasures of everyday living. This filmmaking journey fills us with a sense of gratitude for life and the beautiful people that surround us every day. We hope that our audience feels it too. And we're sure that they do when we receive messages like these:

"I seriously don't have words for the joy I feel when discovering that filmmakers like you are using your lives for such a worthy cause. What could be better than shining a light on these beautiful people and sharing them with the world!"

"You are making the world a better place with each and every film you create."

"His words went right into my soul and it felt like a small explosion... like miniature fireworks. I am near tears. Thank you."

"I want to thank you for your films. Each one shows me something about myself."

"The authenticity, intentionality and integrity of your films translates directly to the screen and into my heart."

How does Green Renaissance inspire gratefulness and related actions (love, kindness, compassion, etc.)?

No matter where you live, what language you speak, or how much money you have, we all grapple with similar human challenges. Why are we here? What is our purpose in life? How do we find meaning? What brings us happiness? By sharing stories that touch on these themes, we hope to remind our audience of one simple truth - that we are all human - that inside our hearts and minds, we are all facing similar challenges. We have so much to learn from each other, and our connections run so much deeper and stronger than we think.

There is no better way to start the day than an early morning sea swim. It's physical, mental, spiritual, communal - all wrapped up in a simple dip in the sea.

What inspires the stories of Green Renaissance? How do connections with possible stories — and the people behind them — arise?

What we came to realize through our filmmaking journey over the years is that the world is filled with ordinary people who have extraordinary stories to share. But we have all become so wrapped up with our own lives and daily routines that we don't have the time to sit and listen, to ask questions, to dig deeper and understand more. And that's what we've started to do.

We meet people through chance random conversations with strangers on street corners, while walking through the park, or while waiting in line at the supermarket. Other people are suggested to us by friends, fans, or followers. By simply keeping an open mind and a true desire to listen, it's amazing what people will share with you. We trust our instincts, and we don't have a set formula when going into a new project. We just allow it to flow, for it to go where it wants to go. And each story finds its own unique audience who need to connect with that specific story at that point in time.

What is the lasting impact of Green Renaissance and its offerings?

We are working to create a collection of films that are universal and timeless. These films can be shared by anyone and shown anywhere, at no cost. The aim is simply to spread messages of positivity, hope, and inspiration, shining a light on the beautiful people in this world for many years to come.

What are some of the common challenges associated with your work?

Time! Because people lead busy lives, we try to limit the amount of time that we spend with each person that we feature in our films. We typically spend one day filming, during which we need to capture a conversation in order to create the narrative of the story, as well as gather visual imagery to complement - all while making sure that we are being authentic and true to the nature and character of that specific person. We constantly remind ourselves that it is just a brief toe-dip into the life of that person, just an intimate moment of sharing, and we do what we can with the time available to us.

Trust can be another challenge. We have often met each person only once or twice before we start filming, so we're not old friends. The topics that we discuss can get very deep and personal quickly. So it is important that there is a strong element of trust between us and the person who is the subject of the film so that they feel comfortable enough to open up and share their story with us. Creating an atmosphere that allows the person to feel relaxed at all times during the filming process is something that we pay a lot of attention to.

Since having started this project two years ago, we have created a small network of dedicated folks around the world who believe strongly in the work that we do. They each contribute in whatever small way they can to support the creation of our films through our crowd-funding platform on Patreon, which currently helps to cover about 20 percent of the project costs. So while we still largely self-fund this work, we hope to see our community growing into the future.

What inspires you personally about this work? What inspires you to continue growing this project?

Listening to people's stories and getting a glimpse into their lives is our idea of a good

time. In each meeting, we get to share a beautiful conversation with a new person that ALWAYS has an impact on us personally - it challenges how we think and it shapes how we live. We get to explore topics that have been racing around in our minds and have conversations that are close to our hearts. And best of all, many of these people have become close friends. Even if we won the lottery tomorrow, this is a project that we would continue to pursue. It gives us meaning and purpose. It makes us smile.

Severs Jooste has come to realise the meaning of true beauty, particularly after a terrible accident left him scarred for life. One's authentic beauty comes from the power within.

How does gratefulness inspire you to make change in the world?

We are incredibly grateful that we have a skill and a passion that we are able to use to make films that we can share for free with our audience. We are grateful to every single person that we have filmed for sharing their time and experiences with us with such openness, honesty, and authenticity. And we're grateful to the community of people across the world who find meaning in our work and who encourage and support us to continue making these weekly films.

How does Green Renaissance plan to expand?

We live just outside of Cape Town in South Africa, on the tip of Africa. But we have a global audience of people around the world who tune in to watch our weekly films. Because we largely self-fund this project, we do not have a budget to spend on travel costs. So for now, many of our stories are based in South Africa. But we'd love to start filming and featuring people from a wider diversity of countries and cultures. We hope that with time, as our crowd-funding platform grows, we will be able to tell more stories from across the world.

If you could encapsulate one message for people who help bring the stories of Green Renaissance to life and the audiences who benefit, what would that be?

It might sound clichè, but do what makes you happy, do what makes your heart sing - be authentic and true to what drives you.

And use this passion to do good for the people, places, and spaces around you.

If Green Renaissance could share one message about living gratefully, what would it be?

We believe that it is through service that one receives the most joy and fulfillment. We feel privileged that we are able to use our skills as filmmakers to make films that change not only how we personally see the world, but also how our audience sees the world. And we encourage all people to use their skill, no matter what it might be, in service of some greater good.

To read more about the inspiring work of the Global Oneness Project, visit the website: [Green Renaissance](#)

To learn about other Grateful Changemakers, visit: [Grateful News](#)