

LUST FOR LIFE

Syrian teen Hazim literally carries his wounded friend Saaed to Europe, where they become caretakers for German teen Marius—and during ten years, they all gradually learn the meaning of family, the diversity of abilities, and the complexities of who carries whom.

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Producers:	Mario Adamson, Ashley J. Smith, Viktor Nordenskiöld, Dirk Manthey, Paulina Knobloch
Production Company:	Sisyfos Film / Sweden, Freetown Films / Sweden
Co-Production Companies:	Dirk Manthey Film / Germany, Al Jazeera Documentary / Qatar
Cinematographer:	Viktor Nordenskiöld
Editors:	Maria Hemmleb, Viktor Nordenskiöld
Music:	Lisa Montan
Sound Design:	Janis Grossmann-Alhambra
Participants:	Hazim Atia, Saeed Al Salama, Marius Ruppelt, Astrid Ruppelt

PRODUCTION INFO

Genre:	Creative Documentary
Production Year:	2026
Length:	88 min
Languages:	Arabic, German, English
Production Countries:	Sweden, Germany, Qatar
Format:	HD, color, DCP, 5.1
World Premiere:	Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival 2026
Swedish Premiere:	Tempo Documentary Festival 2026





SHORT SYNOPSIS (145 words)

In 2015, Syrian teen Hazim literally carries his friend Saeed to Europe after they had to leave behind Saeed's wheelchair. In Germany, they find a new home with Marius, a teenager with cerebral palsy, and his mother. Friendship and trust start to grow but adjusting to a new life is challenging, and the ongoing war in Syria means they can hardly communicate with relatives back home. Hazim feels guilty for leaving his family behind and gets caught up in a spiral of negative thoughts. Saeed cannot walk, but now it is his turn to carry—if Hazim lets him. Spanning ten years, *Lust for Life* chronicles the journey of three young men who never give up to create joy in the lives despite the darkness they are facing at times. Together, they discover what family means, how abilities vary, and who is actually carrying whom.

LONG SYNOPSIS (279 words)

In October 2015, two Syrian teenagers arrive on a beach in Greece. Saeed, wounded from a bomb raid and paralyzed, is literally carried by his friend Hazim after they had to leave the wheelchair behind. Exhausted but grateful to have survived, they vow that they will never separate. Their journey takes them to Hamburg, Germany, where they find a new home with Marius, a teenager with cerebral palsy, and his mother, Astrid.

Friendship and trust start to grow. Hazim and Saeed bring new energy into this new family and receive the same in return. They even become official caretakers for Marius while he shows them around their new home. Hazim and Saeed are slowly settling into their new lives: learning the language, going to school, and finding jobs.

But not everything is easy. Adjusting to a new world is challenging, and the worsening war in their Syrian homeland means they can hardly communicate with relatives living under ISIS control. Saeed is worried, Hazim feels guilty for leaving his family behind. He opens up to Marius, and when they spend time together, the daunting thoughts inside him seem to quiet down for a while. Nevertheless, cracks start to appear. Although Hazim and Saeed once vowed never to separate, Hazim prepares to move out of their shared flat. Saeed cannot walk, but now it is his turn to carry—if Hazim lets him.

Spanning ten years, *Lust for Life* chronicles the journey of three young men who never give up on creating joy and purpose in their lives despite the darkness they are facing at times. Together, they discover what family means, how abilities vary, and who is actually carrying whom.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

When you're behind the camera and see something that connects with both your heart and your brain, you know you want to continue filming and share this experience with others. In a way, *Lust for Life* explores the concept of interdependence—why and how we carry each other—through the story of three teenagers growing up. Fun, sad, intimate, caring, surprising.

Ten years ago, when I met Saeed and Hazim on a Greek beach during their first minutes in Europe, I could never have imagined how long this journey would be. Two weeks before we met, Russia launched extensive air strikes across Syria at the Assad regime's request, resulting in more people fleeing. Ten years later, Assad himself fled to Moscow. The Syrian conflict was complicated, but this marked an end of a cycle of authoritarian terror. This story takes place within that timeframe.

Although this film is not about that kind of politics, we all have to deal with politics somehow, whether we like it or not. Everything is connected. Some people have to escape; some see it as an opportunity. Some people—and countries—must decide whether to welcome those on the run; some see it as an opportunity.

In another sense, *Lust for Life* explores the concept of inclusion. Some people require more assistance than others, but one type of disability can manifest as another type of ability. For example, it can act as a catalyst for creating a bigger family and help others to see the complexities of who carries whom, both on an individual and an international level.

Ultimately, it all comes down to personal choices. What can you do to improve your own life or that of others? What can you achieve as part of a group or family? What is a family? When a film starts with two people saying that they will never separate, they will inevitably end up doing just that. It might not last forever—sometimes we need time to ourselves, but perhaps that's some of the most precious moments in life, when we carry each other simultaneously, when that buoyancy works.

It has been a privilege to observe and to get to know Saeed, Hazim, Marius, Astrid, Marek, and Gazi, as well as their unique community in Hamburg. I'm delighted to now share this experience with you and ask: *What did you dream about ten years ago?*

PRODUCERS' NOTE

We have all seen the pictures from 2015 when refugees landed on the shores of Europe, hoping to find a better life. But what we haven't seen is the process of how these people built a new life in the years to come. *Lust for Life* covers this period in all its light and darkness. The film places human stories at the front and center as we are experiencing the politics and history through the very personal lens of two Syrian teenagers and their German counterpart. It is not a film about refugees. Just as it isn't a film about disability. It is simply a human story. It is a story of friendship and cooperation. And it is a story that questions, on an individual level and a societal level, who really carries whom.

Lust for Life challenges the conventional narrative of dependency by inverting and twisting the expected relationship between those perceived as "in need" and those perceived as caretakers. It is not a one-sided relation but a multi-way connection. In this way, the film is a celebration of interdependency that sees strength in vulnerability.

Just as no human being is an island, our globalized world is also interconnected. Wars, natural disasters, pandemics, or economic recessions might happen long distances from one's own reality, but the reverberations nevertheless make their way into our daily lives—sometimes in small ways...sometimes in ways that are impossible to ignore. The film tackles one such situation head-on. And when, after ten years in Germany, our protagonists hear about the fall of the Syrian regime, it doesn't just affect their future; it affects us all.

At its core, *Lust for Life* is a feel-good documentary with an upbeat tone. At the same time, it is a film that doesn't shy away from the darker themes of trauma, loss, and struggles with mental health. These moments of darkness are necessary to the story, as they give depth and nuance to the joy our characters find. Still, our intention is for viewers to leave the cinema with a sense of hope and a renewed faith in humanity, reminded that we are stronger together and that our differences and varying abilities are our biggest wealth. This message is even more urgent today as far-right parties enter national parliaments. The film is a rallying cry that we as a society must move closer together instead of letting extremist views drive a wedge between us.

NOTES ON THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In 2011, peaceful protests broke out across Syria as part of the wider Arab Spring. What began as calls for political reform was met with violent repression by the government of Bashar al-Assad, spiralling into a devastating civil war. Over the following years, hundreds of thousands were killed, cities were destroyed, and more than half of the population was displaced. The extreme violence used by the Assad regime against Syrian civilians sparked widespread international outrage and drew strong condemnation from organizations such as the Arab League, United Nations, and European Union.

By 2015, the conflict had created one of the largest refugee crises since the Second World War. Millions of Syrians fled to neighboring countries, and as living conditions deteriorated and prospects for return faded, many sought safety and a future in Europe. Images of overcrowded boats crossing the Mediterranean went around the world, defining a summer that would later be known as “refugee wave.”

Germany became a central destination. The federal government under Chancellor Angela Merkel made the decision not to close the borders to asylum seekers. Merkel’s phrase “Wir schaffen das” (“We can do this”) became both a symbol of humanitarian commitment and the focus of a heated political debate. More than one million people applied for asylum in 2015 and 2016, reshaping Germany’s society and politics. A remarkable wave of civil solidarity was met with the rise of anti-immigrant and far-right movements, a trend occurring in many other European countries as well, that reverberates to this day.

Meanwhile, the war in Syria evolved. Assad, backed by Iran and Russia, regained power over rebel strongholds while the Islamic State, winning battles against both the rebel forces and the Assad regime, expanded rapidly across eastern Syria and western Iraq, prompting international intervention. Through major campaigns culminating in an offensive in Deir ez-Zor – the very city our protagonists are from – the Islamic State was territorially defeated by late 2017.

In 2024, after years of war, foreign intervention, and economic collapse, the Syrian regime fell after a major offensive by opposition forces. This marks a historic turning point with consequences still unfolding. For Syrians in exile, the overthrow of Assad reopened long-suppressed questions of return, justice, and belonging.

Additional reading:

- [Syria’s Civil War: The Descent Into Horror](#)
- [Human Rights Council debates situation of human rights in Syrian Arab Republic in Special Session](#)
- [Syria Refugee Crisis](#)

BIOGRAPHIES

Viktor Nordenskiöld – Director, Producer, Editor

Viktor Nordenskiöld is an award-winning Swedish director, producer, and journalist. He has since 2001 made films for Swedish TV; his short *Out of This World* premiered at Berlinale, his first released feature *The Feminister* premiered at CPH:DOX, the second *Behind The Swedish Model* at GIFF Gothenburg Film Festival and CPH:DOX, third *Hemligheten* at Tempo FF, the fourth *The Eukrainian* at CPH:DOX. *The Eukrainian* has so far been translated into 15 languages. Viktor has a Master of Arts from Stockholm University of the Dramatic Arts (2017) and a Bachelor in Journalism from the Netherlands and Denmark (1994). He has been on the jury of several film festivals, on the board of the B2B Documentary Network, and a member of the Artistic Commission for Film at the Swedish Arts Grants Committee (2020-2023).



Filmography

Lust for Life (2026), documentary

The Eukrainian (2025), documentary

The Secret (Hemligheten) (2023), documentary

Behind the Swedish Model (2022), documentary

The Feminister (2019), documentary

Out of This World (2014), short documentary

Mario Adamson, Ashley J. Smith – Producers

Mario Adamson & Ashley J. Smith are the creative-producing team at the helm of Sisyfos Film in Stockholm, Sweden. Together, they have cultivated a diverse portfolio that includes the acclaimed *Motherland* (DOX: Award at CPH:DOX 2023 and an EFA nomination), *How to Save a Dead Friend* (Grand Jury Award, Doc NYC; EFA Documentary Film Selection; ACID Cannes, 2022), and *The Scars of Ali Boulala* (WP Tribeca Film Festival 2021, Tempo Documentary Award in 2022, Swedish Academy Award nomination). Currently, Mario and Ashley are producing a slate of projects, including the documentary features *Elevated*, *Bachman: The Story of Stephen King's Pseudonym*, *Violent Skin*, and the narrative feature *Demands of a Teenage Heart*. As Managing Directors of Sisyfos Film, Mario and Ashley strive for collaborative and inclusive approaches to filmmaking.



Filmography

Lust for Life (2026), directed by Viktor Nordenskiöld, documentary

Motherland (2023), directed by Hanna Badziaka & Alexander Mihalkovich, documentary

How To Save a Dead Friend (2022), directed by Marusya Syroechkovskaya, documentary

The Scars of Ali Boulala (2021), directed by Max Eriksson, documentary

Scheme Birds (2019), directed by Ellen Fiske & Ellinor Hallin, documentary

Dirk Manthey – Producer

Dirk Manthey is a German producer and founder of the production company Dirk Manthey Gilm UG based in Hamburg. Since 1996, he has worked as a director and producer focusing on the development and production of national and international documentaries and fiction films that have social as well as artistic relevance. He is a member of PROG (Producers of Germany) and since 2019 a decision maker at Visions du Réel. His films have been shown at renowned national and international film festivals, including Settimana della critica (Venedig), Berlinale, IDFA, Karlovy Vary, Visions du Réel, CPH:DOX, Sundance, and Thessaloniki.



Filmography

The Arctic Circle of Lust (2026), directed by M. Heikkinen, documentary

Cooking Up Democracy (2026), directed by Monika Treut, documentary

Lust for Life (2026), directed by Viktor Nordenskiöld, documentary,

Where Is My Mind (2026), directed by C. Mansuroglu & I. Hansen, documentary

The Last Misfits by the Golden River (2025), directed by Juho Tanskanen, documentary

Becoming Roosi (2025), directed by M. Lillak, documentary

Malqueridas (2023), directed by T. Gilbert, documentary

La Casa (2023), directed by B. Perut & I. Osnovikoff, documentary

The Mechanics of Things (2023), directed by A. Celesia, documentary

Dreamers (2023), directed by S. Barbey & L. Peter, documentary

The Mission (2022), directed by T. Moilanen, documentary

Los Reyes (2018), directed by B. Perut & I. Osnokoff, documentary

The Hidden City (2018), directed by Víctor Moreno, documentary

Small Planets (2018), directed by Dirk Manthey, documentary

Into The Inner Circle (2017) directed by Obens/Morar, documentary

Paulina Knobloch – Producer

Based in Stockholm, Sweden, Paulina Knobloch is a producer with a background that bridges creative development and strategic production. She has worked across multiple production roles, including line producer, associate producer, and production assistant, contributing to both short and feature-length films. Her experience also includes roles at international film festivals in Germany and Sweden. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Media and Communication and a Master of Science in Media Management. Most recently, she produced the short film *Isblink*, which celebrated its world premiere at the International Film Festival Rotterdam, and the feature documentary *Lust for Life*, premiering at the Thessaloniki International Documentary Festival.



Filmography

2026, *Lust for Life*, directed by Viktor Nordenskiöld, documentary

2024, *Isblink*, directed by Olga Krüssenberg, short documentary

Maria Hemmleb – Editor

Maria Hemmleb lives and works in Hamburg. She studied fine arts and film at the Hornsey College of Art in London and at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts. She is a co-founder of the documentary film group "die thede" in Hamburg and has worked as a director, editor, and dramaturge specializing in documentary film since 1991. From 2018 until 2023, she was a lecturer in Documentary Film Editing at the Filmakademie Baden-Württemberg. She is a member of the German Federal Association of Film Editors (BFS) and the Freie Akademie der Künste (Free Academy of Arts), Hamburg.



Filmography

2026, *Lust For Life*, directed by Viktor Nordenskiöld, documentary

2023, *Who, if not us? – The Fight for Democracy in Belarus*, directed by Juliane Tutein, documentary

2021, *Yes She Can: Junge Politikerinnen*, directed by Carolin Genreith, documentary

2019, *Max Pechstein. Geschichte eines Malers*, directed by Wilfried Hauke, documentary

2014, *Das verschwundene M*, directed by Maria Hemmleb, documentary

2011, *20 Geigen auf St. Pauli*, directed by Alexandra Gramatke & Barbara Metzloff, documentary

Lisa Montan – Composer

Lisa Montan is a Stockholm-based composer and artist, recognized for her ability to craft film scores that delve into emotional depth while unveiling parallel narratives. Her work often carries sacred, ceremonious qualities, seamlessly integrating with the film's fabric to uncover hidden layers of meaning. Montan marked her entrance to film scoring by being the first female to be awarded a Swedish Guldbagge Award for Best Score for her 2015 score to the film *Flocking*. In 2025, she was again awarded a Guldbagge for her work scoring the film *LasseMajas Detektivbyrå*. Recent works include scores for Abbe Hassan's political drama feature *Exodus*, Malou Reymann's period drama *Unruly*, and the children's saga *LasseMajas Detektivebyrå*.



Filmography

The Black Prince (2025), directed by Henrik Hellström, documentary

LasseMajas Detektivebyrå (2024), directed by Tina Mackic, feature film

Bye Bye Boredom (2024), directed by Elina Sahlin, documentry

Persona Non Grata (2024), directed by Antonin Svoboda, feature film

Älskade Samir (2023), directed by Abbe Hassan, TV series

Unruly (2023), directed Malou Reymann, feature film

Exodus (2023), directed by Abbe Hassan, feature film

LasseMajas Detektivebyrå – Skorpionsgata (2022), directed by Tina Mackic, feature film

LasseMajas Detektivebyrå – Tågrånarens Hemlighet (2020), directed by Moa Gammal, feature film

Allt Jag Inte Mins (2019), directed by Beata Gårdeller, TV series

Guld (2018), directed by Abbe Hassan, short

Euphoria (2017), directed by Lisa Langseth, feature film

Dröm Vidare (2017), directed by Rojda Sekersöz, feature film

Fallet Kevin (2017), directed by Dan Josefsson, documentary series

Vi bara lyder (2017), directed by Fredrik Wenzel, documentary

Regissören Mai Zetterling (2015), directed by Lena Jordebo, documentary

SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES

Production Companies

Sisyfos Film: @sisyfosfilm (Facebook and Instagram)

Freetown Films: #freetownfilms

Dirk Manthey Film: #dirkmantheyfilm

Co-Producer

Al Jazeera Documentary: @aljazeera documentary (Instagram)

Funders

Swedish Film Institute: @svenskafilminstitutet (Instagram & Facebook), @swedishfilm (Instagram), @swedishfilm institute (Facebook)

MOIN Filmförderung: @moinfilmfoerderung (Instagram & Facebook)

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Hashtags

#lustforlife

#swedishfilm

CREDITS

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Freetown Films
Dirk Manthey Film
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In co-production with
Al Jazeera Documentary

With support from
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Moin Film Fund Hamburg Schleswig-Holstein
Film Stockholm
Stockholm University of the Arts
Swedish Arts Grants Committee

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Viktor Nordenskiöld

Music by
Lisa Montan

Produced by
Mario Adamson & Ashley J. Smith
Viktor Nordenskiöld
Dirk Manthey
Paulina Knobloch

Directed by
Viktor Nordenskiöld

LUST FOR LIFE

Closing credits

LUST FOR LIFE

Featuring

Saeed Al Salama Hazim Atia
Marius Ruppelt Astrid Ruppelt

With

(in order of appearance)

Patric Mansour
Chasa Chaine
Marek Eisinger
Mohammed Al Maradny
Frank Gasiorek
Florian Ruppelt
Christoph Ruppelt
Marion Blankenburg
Annika Woydack
Gazi Albarni

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Dialogue Editing

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Cinema Stage

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Foleys

Stefan Köster / Superhearo Audio

Colorist

Jochen Hinrichs-Stöldt / Optical Arts

Music by

Lisa Montan

Musicians

Niklas Korsell - Drums
Nils Berg- Saxophone
Anders af Klintberg - Electric Guitar, Pedal Steel
Laura Michelin - Flute
Thora Torslund - Trumpet
Leo Svensson Sander - Cello

Score Producer

Jacob Snavelly / OONA

Title Design

Georg Krefeld

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The Producers Thank

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Petter Brundell

Karl-Heinz Dellwo

Kajsa Dines

Julia Dinome

Johan Forslind

Gerald Gräupner

Orsolya Groenewold

Karl-Oscar Gustavsson

Amra Heco

Henrik Hellström

Beate Hofseth

Tinna Jone

Lena Kempe

Boris Kloppenburg

Martina Knobloch

Anna-Karin Moden

Gustaf Nordenskiöld

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Ella Rollnik

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Olle Strandberg

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Chrisdian Wittenburg

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Those who strive to carry each other simultaneously

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A

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**In Co-Production with
Dirk Manthey Film**

Al Jazeera Documentary / Commissioning Editor Mohamed ELMongy

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Film Stockholm
Swedish Arts Grants Committee
Stockholm University of the Arts

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