

# TRUST ME, I'M SICK



**ARLO PICTURES**

TRT| 35:46 mins | USA | English | Color

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## **LOGLINE**

A short documentary series on life with chronic illness.

## **SYNOPSIS**

*Trust Me I'm Sick* explores how chronic illness affects the everyday lives of five people living in Los Angeles, California. Ezra (18), Giuliani (29), Henriette (50), Matt (32) and Cassandra (28) share intimate stories about how Lupus, HIV and other conditions shape their relationships, careers and visions for the future.

TRAILER: [Facebook](#)

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## STORY OF TMIS



In 2015, right after graduating college, filmmaker Sarah Stewart, got sick for the first time. Like most people searching for a diagnosis, it triggered a series of life changing events that made her wonder how other people handled work, school and relationships while being sick. She decided to help tell the stories of those people - thus, *Trust Me, I'm Sick* was born.

In an effort to portray the chronic illness community as authentically as possible, Sarah approached a nonprofit organization, Suffering the Silence, with her concept for

*Trust Me, I'm Sick*. The series directly aligned with their mission to raise awareness and share the stories of those living with chronic conditions, so the organization signed on to partner with Sarah and Arlo Pictures on the film. STS co-founder, Erica Lupinacci, signed on as a producer and co-creator as well.

After interviewing over 40 people living with illness, the team began production with their five subjects, Henriette, Cassandra, Matt, Ezra, and Giuliani in February 2018. The subjects live with different illnesses, range in age from 18-50, and come from different walks of life.

Sarah and Erica set out to explore the emotional impact of illness, working to understand how it affects your life goals, relationships, choices, and how you learn to cope. As two women living with chronic conditions themselves, they realized that while diagnoses and life experiences may differ, feelings of being misunderstood, silenced, and dismissed are often shared across the chronic illness community as a whole.

Frustrated with the lack of illness and disability representation in front of and behind the camera, the team was committed to employing and involving people with direct, lived experience with illness in all aspects of the series. *Trust Me, I'm Sick* was made by an entirely female crew, all of whom have personal experiences with chronic illness. It was crucial that it was made for the community, by the community. *Trust Me, I'm Sick* was made while in the midst of a clinical trial, edited from infusion chairs in the hospital and developed while wearing heating pads in bed.

The goal of *Trust Me, I'm Sick* lies in the title. We need to trust people, their bodies, and their experiences. People living with chronic illness deserve to have their stories seen and heard, to have platforms to talk about the things so rarely discussed and often looked down upon. *Trust Me, I'm Sick* aims to challenge perceptions of what it looks like, feels like, and means to be chronically ill. This series hopes to inspire more people to share their stories and to find community and empowerment amongst others who have similar experiences. It will hopefully encourage people not living with illness to engage with those that do, ask questions, and try to better support and care for them.

The team is truly grateful for Henriette, Cassandra, Matt, Ezra, and Giuliani's vulnerability, openness, and honesty. Their stories will help to change the narrative around chronic illness, and remind people that their feelings and experiences are valid, and that there is a large community who understands them and is ready to support them, no matter what.

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

An Arlo Pictures Production  
In partnership with Suffering the Silence

Directed by Sarah Stewart

Created & produced by Erica Lupinacci & Sarah Stewart

Featuring

Giuliani Alvarenga

Henriette Ivanans-McIntyre

Cassandra Rush

Matthew Tarro

Ezra Wheeler

Kevin McIntyre

Forest Tarro

Johnny Valencia

Kate Wheeler

Director of Photography - Luisa Conlon

Editor - Carla Roda

Additional Editor - Julie Janata

Addition Camera- Kim Boden, Allison Stoney, Ryan Arroyo

Production Assistant - Tera Regan

Community Advisors - Allie Cashel & Amanda Crommett

Impact Consultant - Sarah Stoker

Original Music Composed by Starr Parrodi

Music produced by Starr Parrodi & Jeff Eden Fair

Music recorded & mixed by Jeff Eden Fair

TECHNICOLOR

Colorist- Jonah Braun

Associate colorist- Sushil Gangaraju

Graphic Designer- Levi Ahmu

Sound Mixer- Marcin Chojnowski

Senior Editor - Lehr Beidelschies

Junior Editor - Matthew Lyons

DI Producer- Marissa Krupen

Supervising Producer - Sean Ware

## **BIOS**

### SARAH STEWART Co-Creator & Director

British filmmaker Sarah was 21 and a recent graduate of University College London when she experienced chronic illness for the first time. She has since worked for HBO, VICE and Open City Docs Fest. In 2016 she moved to Los Angeles to work on *Curb Your Enthusiasm* and in 2017 she founded Arlo Pictures, an all-female run production company designed to share often overlooked stories that deserve to be told. After years of waiting for a diagnosis, she was diagnosed with the chronic stomach condition, SIBO, in 2019.

### ERICA LUPINACCI Co-Creator & Producer

Erica is the co-founder of Suffering the Silence, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit dedicated to raising awareness for people living with chronic illness & disability. She is an actor and producer. Erica was diagnosed with lupus at the age of 18 and is dedicated to elevating the voices of those who have felt silenced or alone because of their differences. Erica graduated from Hampshire College in 2013, where she studied Public Health & Theater.

### LUISA CONLON Cinematographer

Luisa is an award-winning documentary director and cinematographer in Los Angeles. Her most recent documentary *We Became Fragments* was released by the New York Times Op-Docs and nominated for a 2019 International Documentary Association Award. Luisa's work has been supported by the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting, the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, and The Filmmaker Fund. As a cinematographer, Luisa collaborates frequently with The New York Times, The Atlantic, VICE, PBS NewsHour, Vogue, and NPR.

### CARLA RODA Editor

Carla was born in Barcelona, Spain and has worked as a Producer and Editor in Spain, France, Canada, and Australia. In 2014, Carla moved to Los Angeles and received her Masters of Arts & Film Media Production from New York Film Academy. Her short film "Camila" which she Produced, Directed and Edited was Official Selection at Cannes Film Festival in 2016. She has edited for Fox Television, X- Treme Video, and more.

### STARR PARODI Composer

Starr Parodi was part of the house band on the Arsenio Hall Show. Since then she has created scores for numerous films, television series, and iconic movie trailers. Her production/arrangement of the JAMES BOND Theme (RIAA Gold Record) was credited by Forbes magazine as "reinventing the modern action movie trailer." As a multi award-winning composer, Starr is the first woman to have her orchestral works performed in the 85-year history of the Laguna Pageant Of The Masters, where she is currently a featured composer. Starr is the current president of the Alliance for Women Film Composers and is widely recognized as a leader in expanding the reach of women in the arts as a composer, producer, performer and cultural visionary.

### SUFFERING THE SILENCE Non-profit Partner

Suffering the Silence is a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to leveraging the power of art, media, and storytelling to raise awareness for people living with chronic illness and disability. STS works to decrease stigma and empower patients and loved ones to share their stories. In addition to providing support online, STS designs awareness campaigns, events, and retreats specifically designed for community. The founders have spoken at Yale Nursing School, Weill Cornell Medical College, CUNY, and a variety of conferences and workshops. Their work has been featured in Huffington Post, PBS Newshour, Cosmopolitan, Business Insider, Refinery 29, and more.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE FILMMAKERS

SARAH STEWART - DIRECTOR, CO-CREATOR, & PRODUCER

How did you get the idea for *Trust Me, I'm Sick*?

I first came up with the idea for what would become *Trust Me, I'm Sick* in 2015. I had just graduated college and almost overnight I felt the start of what would become my first six-month episode of an undiagnosed stomach condition. Feeling isolated and struggling to find stories which accurately reflected what I was going through, I decided to do something about it.

Getting sick with an illness that the doctors had neither a name nor a cure for was a massive eye opener for me. It was a window into the world of millions of other people who are also living with chronic conditions. It showed me that the complications of illness lie far beyond any physical symptoms. It showed me that illness affects every part of your life, from how you relate to your friends and family, to your ability to pursue the career you want. *Trust Me, I'm Sick* is our attempt to share some of those experiences with the world.

Why was representation behind the camera so important to you? / Why did you assemble crew the way you did?

One of the first decisions we made when *Suffering the Silence* came on board was that our crew would be as inclusive of people with personal experiences of illness and disability as possible. The lack of disability representation in the media - both on and off-screen - is both unjust and undoubtedly affecting the ability of filmmakers to accurately portray and involve the stories of those they depict. We decided to hire as many people as we could who could relate to and provide shared experiences of the stories around illness we wanted to show on screen. The results were magical: despite how challenging a given shoot day was, having a room full of people - all of whom had direct personal experiences of illness themselves - discussing complex themes and ideas around illness was palpable. I'm immensely proud of the fact that *Trust Me, I'm Sick* was made by an all-female crew all of whom have illness experiences, from our producers to our DP and Editors. I learned an immense amount from my crew and am I absolutely certain that the quality and sensitivity of the films we made are transformed by the experiences we shared both on and off set as a team.

What do the titles of the episodes mean?

Honesty, inclusivity and a little satirical humor is at the heart of everything we've tried to do with *Trust Me, I'm Sick*. Extending that thesis to our episode titles felt like an important fit. Each of our episodes titles are a playful nod to things that our subjects and crew have heard in reference to their own illnesses. From '*Just Try Harder*' to '*It's All in Your Head*' to '*But You Look Great*', we wanted the titles to showcase the themes discussed in each film while also acknowledging some of the problematic (even when said with good intention) language that surrounds illness today.

ERICA LUPINACCI - CO-CREATOR & PRODUCER, CO-FOUNDER OF SUFFERING THE SILENCE

Why did this feel like the right project for STS to be involved in?

When Sarah approached us with the idea for *Trust Me, I'm Sick*, I knew immediately that it was a perfect fit for our work with Suffering the Silence. Our goal as a nonprofit is to use the power of art, media, and storytelling to share the stories of people living with chronic illness and disability. We've always wanted to tell these stories on film, especially since the chronic illness experience is so rarely represented in that medium. When illness is discussed in the media, it's usually focused on terminal illness or something acute that goes away. What about those who fall somewhere in the middle? Sarah wanted to feature people living with different conditions, focusing on the emotional impact of illness rather than the medical and physical impacts, which has always been the basis of our work. Through my personal experience with illness and the Suffering the Silence community, I know how difficult it is for people to understand how deeply illness impacts all aspects of your life. We wanted to give our subjects an opportunity to talk about those things.

What was it like on set?

It's incredibly rare that you are surrounded by a group of people, especially in a work setting, that can all relate to your experience with illness. Because our entire crew was affected by chronic illness themselves, we were able to truly support each other and our subjects emotionally and physically. During production, I was going through the worst lupus flare I'd had since my diagnosis ten years ago. I essentially only left the house to make *Trust Me, I'm Sick*. Chronic illness can feel so isolating and I was in such a difficult place that I feel like making this series saved me emotionally. I cried throughout the entirety of our subject's interviews. Hearing our subjects say things that I thought only I felt was vital to my own healing and reinforced the importance and necessity of the project. I feel eternally connected to Henriette, Ezra, Cassandra, Matt, and Giuliani and could not feel more grateful that they were willing to share these parts of their lives with us.

What do you hope people walk away with?

There are so many people, especially young people, who are at home behind a computer screen and feel like no one understands them. When [6 out of 10 adults](#) in the U.S. are living with chronic illness, why aren't our stories in the media? Why don't we get to tell our own stories? People deserve to see they are not alone. They deserve to watch someone say things that they may not be able to articulate themselves. So often the illness experience is reduced to absolute tragedy or used as inspiration for "overcoming" hurdles. I want people to understand the complexities of living with illness. It is heartbreaking that along with physical pain, financial struggles, insurance battles, so many people don't feel heard or understood in our day-to-day lives. We cannot cure many of these illnesses right now but I believe we have the power to change how we treat each other, and that feels just as important to me.

## QUOTES FROM THE SERIES



*CASSANDRA (she/her)*

“I didn't care if someone told me that I was dying. I just wanted someone to tell me something.”

*EZRA (they/them)*

“Illness - and especially illness that is incurable and lifelong - is really hard to talk about because we've been trained not to talk about it. We've been trained and told to be ashamed of it.”

*HENRIETTE (she/her)*

“I've walked a really long journey to understanding that is part of my identity to be chronically ill, but that's not everything that I am. “

*GIULIANI (they/them)*

“I am aware that I have HIV but I'm also aware that I can give so much more to someone, I know the value of my worth.”

*MATT (he/him)*

“I wish all the time that I didn't have to go through the steps that I have to just to seem 'normal' to everybody else.”

**FULL SCRIPT:** [Google Doc](#)

If interested in interviewing any of the subjects, please **contact** [erica@sufferingthesilence.org](mailto:erica@sufferingthesilence.org)