

BRENT RENAUD OBITUARY

Brent Renaud a loving son, brother, uncle, friend and an award-winning documentary filmmaker was killed March 13, 2022.

In a personal letter to the Renaud family, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote: "A talented and brave journalist, Brent lost his life while documenting human tragedy, devastation and suffering of the millions of Ukrainians".

Renaud, 50, was born on Oct. 2, 1971, in Memphis and grew up in Little Rock, AR where he graduated from Hall High School. His years growing up in Arkansas developed his love and appreciation for Arkansas and the history of the state. He wanted to maintain his presence in Little Rock to be close to family, so Brent decided the best solution was to have an office in both Little Rock and New York. Renaud received his undergraduate degree from Southern Methodist University and a master's degree from Columbia University. While in New York in the late 1990s, he began working with John Alpert at the Downtown Community Television Center where he learned the art of filmmaking and began producing documentaries.

Brent was a low-key man with a wry smile, passionate about his work but very devoted to his family. He became a father-figure to his two nephews after their father died. He took them on college tours, paid for their summer programs, attended their sporting events and school graduations, and even invited them on filming trips.

"Brent used to say: 'Everyone has to have at least one cool uncle and one creepy uncle,'" said his nephew Taylor Adams, a Navy helicopter pilot who recently returned from a deployment. "So, naturally, he tried to stake his claim as creepy uncle by sending us pictures of his face much too close to the camera with his hair resembling Einstein's. But he couldn't ever shake the fact that he was truly cool, caring, loving, and devoted. On off-road trucking trips, he let my brother and I sit in the front seat when we weren't old enough yet (and told us not to let Mom know)...There will always be a hole in my heart." Nephew Peyton Adams, now enrolled in the Navy Rescue Swimmers School, accompanied his uncle on a film trip to the mountains of Peru where Renaud stole a pair of Peyton's socks to use as gloves after insisting it wouldn't be very cold on the trip.

Brent was funny, generous, curious, playful and humble with a heart as big as his passions. He had an innate ability to communicate with anyone and everyone. Although a man of few words, he would open his heart and mind to help others. Craig and Mami Renaud remember Brent as an incredible uncle to their son Tai Renaud. "Their bond was special, he would do anything for Tai." Craig added, "He will undoubtedly be remembered as one of the best documentary filmmakers to ever pick up a camera. But I'll remember him most as my brother and best friend. I will miss him terribly."

To unwind, Renaud enjoyed seeing live bands and even caught a show at The Brooklyn Bowl the night before he left for Ukraine. A childhood friend, Jeremy Levy said, "It was 'typical Brent style' to catch a favorite band the night before he left for a war zone, thinking nothing of it."

Brent had been working for more than a year on a film about refugees and migrants fleeing violence. He was shot while filming Ukrainians trying to escape the Russian attacks.

Juan Arredondo, a video journalist traveling with Renaud, a native of Columbia, was severely wounded in the attack. From his hospital bed in Lviv, Arredondo told Brent's mother in Little Rock, AR: "Brent was professionally demanding, and as a friend, he was kind and encouraging, and he pushed me to become a better professional." He also recalled that when they met in 2018 Brent "shows up at my apartment one night and says, 'I lost my keys. Can I crash with you? And by the way, I have my dog, Chai, with me.' It was classic Brent, and his family said he always had Chai with him. He had a soft spot for animals, especially Chai who was his constant companion. When Brent was hiking, camping or working on his vintage motorcycles, Chai was there. He would drive to Little Rock from New York, so Chai did not have to endure an airplane ride. Brent rescued Chai, or shall we say, Chai rescued Brent.

Brent, with his younger brother Craig, co-founded Renaud Brothers, a small film company that won many national and international awards for their documentaries about human suffering around the world. They also co-founded 501 Films, the Little Rock Film Festival and the Arkansas Motion Picture Institute. They made films for HBO, NBC, Discovery, PBS, The New York Times, VICE News and others. "Last Chance High," an eight-part series for VICE Media won a Peabody Award, the most prestigious prize filmmakers can achieve.

Through John Alpert, the brothers formed a lasting bond with another young reporter, Christof Putzel, who frequently was the face and voice of their projects exploring the lives of the least fortunate. Together they won a DuPont-Columbia Award for "Arming the Cartels". When Putzel learned of his close friend's death, he told GBH Boston: "Brent had courage like nobody I've ever seen, yet at the same time had this heart to go in where he knew he was needed, and he was so incredibly careful and focused...I don't know many people who can do that."

Jeff Newton, another close friend and colleague of Brent said, "Brent was a quiet, humble, brilliant, kind and a hardworking filmmaker. His life's body of work shone a spotlight on the people who needed it most. He did it with a relentless passion, driven by his genuine love for humanity. The work is less without him."

Newton captured the essence of Brent on PBS. He said that Brent's reaction to all the attention would be, "Thank you, that is enough, please turn the camera back on the people".

Renaud is survived by his parents Georgann Freasier (Ben Freasier), Louis Renaud; brother Craig Renaud (Mami Renaud); sister Michele Renaud Purifoy (Phil Purifoy); step-sisters: Leslie Stolzer (Mike Stolzer), Leesa Freasier, Laura McCarty (Melissa Christopher); nephews: Taylor Adams (Taylor Walker-Adams), Peyton Adams, Taiyo Renaud; step-nephews: Philip Purifoy, William Purifoy, Landon Friend, Hayden McCarty, Zach Stolzer and Jacob Stolzer ; step-nieces: Katlee Taylor-Freasier, Caylann Stolzer.

The family asks that memorial donations be made to The Brent Renaud Journalism Foundation: P.O. Box 7788, Little Rock, AR 72217. Arrangements are under the direction of RuebelFuneralHome.com