

Interview: Director James Redford on His Essential Film 'Resilience'

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- [ACE](#) [2]
- [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) [3]
- [Childhood](#) [4]
- [Education](#) [5]
- [Healthcare](#) [6]
- [HollywoodChicago.com Content](#) [7]
- [Interview](#) [8]
- [James Redford](#) [9]
- [Jen Bradwell](#) [10]
- [Karen Pritzker](#) [11]
- [KPRJ Films](#) [12]
- [Meditation](#) [13]
- [Mental Health](#) [14]
- [Patrick McDonald](#) [15]
- [Resilience](#) [16]
- [Robert Redford](#) [17]
- [Toxic Stress](#) [18]

CHICAGO – James “Jamie” Redford is on a righteous mission. Using the power of his latest documentary film, “Resilience,” he is informing all of society to something WE ALL can relate to – Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Why is this important? Because virtually everyone is affected by these traumas, and it may be the key to healing many mental AND physical health problems, as well as some societal ills.

The film is fully titled “Resilience: The Biology of Stress & the Science of Hope,” and it refers to the heroic efforts of pediatricians and mental health researchers who are working to stem the tide of ACE – especially in more unfavorable family, race and economic circumstances. The documentary is part of the Chicago Independent Film Critics Circle (CIFCC) Showcase, taking place this weekend (November 5th and 6th, 2016). For more information regarding screenings and events, [click here](#). [19] Jamie Redford, who has directed three documentaries and one narrative film (2003's “Spin”), will make an appearance on behalf of the film.



Director Jamie Redford of 'Resilience'

Photo credit: KPJR Films

Redford, inconsequentially, is the son of actor/director Robert Redford. He talked with HollywoodChicago.com about this remarkable documentary, and the vital insights it has to our own consequence as a society.

HollywoodChicago.com: You seem to be on a mission with this film, providing common sense information to a society that seems to think there are no solutions. What is different about the problem solving you portray in the film then other social programs?

James Redford: When you have really solid biology and medical science at the core of an issue, it makes it much easier to identify what potential solutions may be. It's also important that I, or [Producer] Karen Pritzker, also say that this film is not going to singlehandedly solve crime and poverty, or make big changes.

What it can do, and what my previous film 'Paper Tigers' [exploring the same topic] have proven, is that it can point toward helpful tools for change. And when you introduce these tools into the community, they can be adopted and implemented at the local level – and the results have been powerful. We have to ask the questions, how do people survive in poverty and other challenges of traumatic childhoods? And, until we fix this underlying problems, how do we help people in the meantime?

HollywoodChicago.com: The title of the film, 'Resilience,' refers to the survival instincts that a person develops to deal with trauma. What has been the simplest technique that you observed in working on the film, and how is it best applied?

Redford: The word 'resilience,' in our American culture is closely aligned with 'grit,' and that word implies a certain moral fiber that says you can survive and thrive in any adversity, because you are strong – but that message of strength is both disqualifying and problematic.

Resilience is not just a complimentary individual quality, but something that is built. And you build it through a number of things in your life, part of it being social fabric. There needs to be the support and help around you, even when you may have an unhealthy home environment. Many people have overcome that home situation simply by having at least one caring adult, whether a teacher, mentor or religious leader.

HollywoodChicago.com: How is that expressed in your film?

Redford: Our aim in the film is to make people understand that resilience is something you can create, build or develop, rather than just having as an inherent gift organically or thinking you are a special person. That's really important.

HollywoodChicago.com: One of the components that expresses itself in the film is the African American experience in this country, in association with Adverse Childhood Trauma. What solutions can be applied in that circumstance, especially in association with generations in the culture of poverty?

Redford: I think everyone understands when these cycles are disrupted, especially in terms of institutionalized poverty, it's always will be difficult – patterns are put into place, and certain behaviors keep getting repeated. But through what I have witnessed and documented, with proper interventions you can break those cycles. When I made the first film on this subject, 'Paper Tigers,' kids were going off the cliff. But then there was intervention, and they won't go off the cliff.

It doesn't take billions of dollars or complex medical technologies, and there doesn't have to be a dramatic upending to the current order. It's trying to change the mindset of people who deal with youth to have less judgement and more curiosity. That's asking a lot, emotionally it's asking people to step up and engage more. But what I often heard was that is easier for them to engage emotionally, than to just be angry and judgmental.

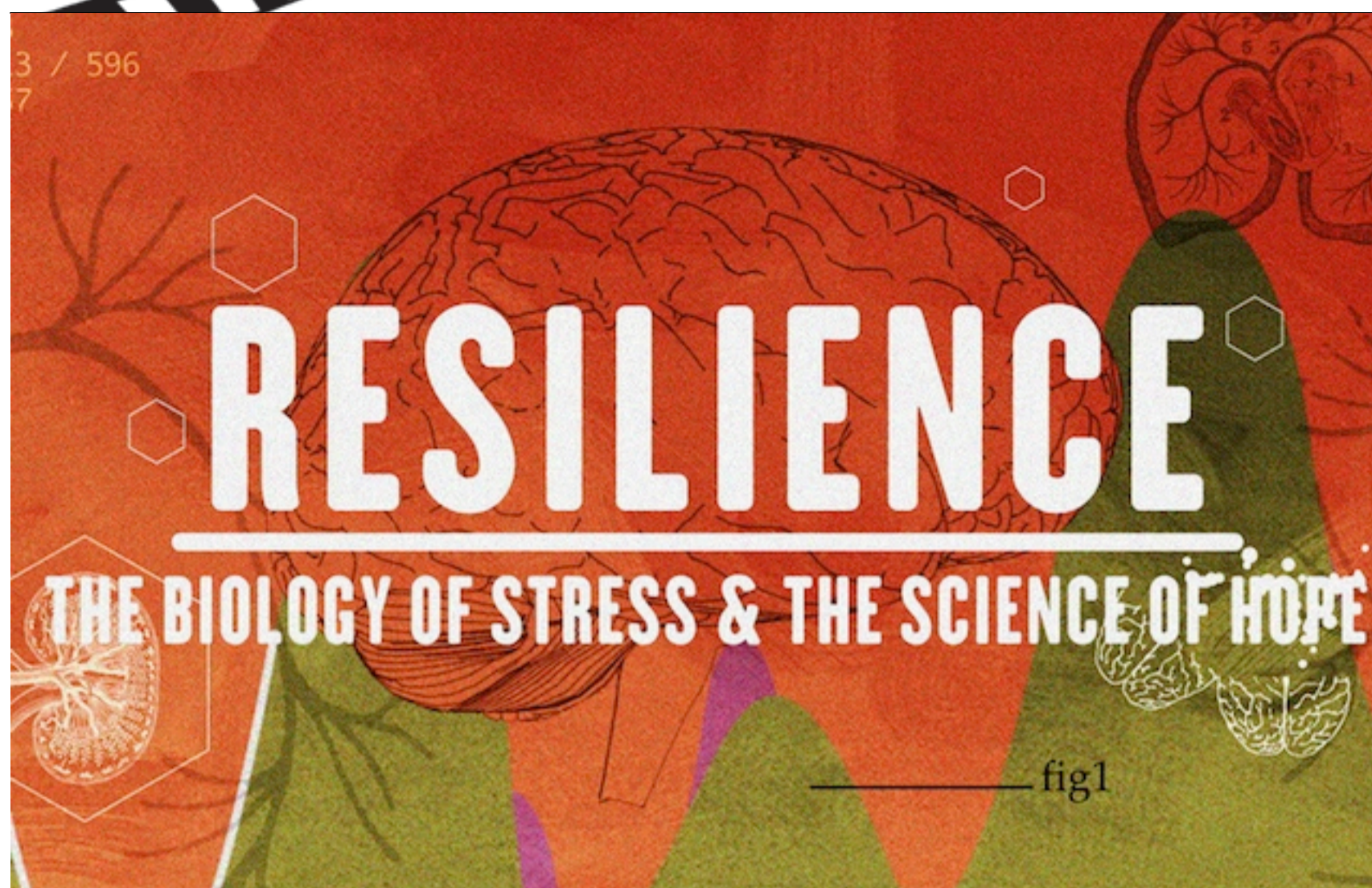
HollywoodChicago.com: Meditation in schools is a technique that is mentioned in your film, much like director David Lynch has done with Transcendental Meditation (TM) in a Detroit school. How is that a progressive method in stemming adverse childhood trauma?

Redford: There is a wonderful documentary called 'A Room to Breathe,' where a school brought in a TM instructor, to try and establish a better classroom environment, and the results and transformations were profound. It's impossible to ignore, and we make some passing references in my film, but 'A Room to Breathe' is a closer look at just how powerful meditation can be. I'm in full support of that technique, and what David Lynch is doing. It's very important.

HollywoodChicago.com: Did you yourself take the Adverse Childhood Experience test that is described in the film, and what did those results tell you?

Redford: The interesting thing about the ACE study, as it began in the 1990s, is that it was based on a very strict set of ten questions. But what is evolving from that is a better understanding what kind of experiences are beyond the ten questions, and what kind of stressors it generates, there are so many ways that children can be exposed to ongoing stress.

And while my personal ACE score might be quite low, compared to others answering that questionnaire, I look back and see all kinds of things that probably had a negative effect on me, and I have a strong awareness of that. Therefore, in middle age I've begun to embrace stress reducing behaviors. Just in doing yoga, for example, my health has improved dramatically.



Saturday, November 5th, 2016, at the CIFCC Showcase

Photo credit: KPJR Films

HollywoodChicago.com: You are mostly a documentary maker, but you did do one narrative film in 2003. What do you observe about the film business that makes it difficult to maneuver, and has your name been more helpful than hindering in your career?

Redford: There can be no argument that I'm in a unique situation, at the very least. But I think the name, for every time it has proved to be helpful, it has also proved to be a challenge – I tend to think that cancels each other out. At the end of the day, the task I have is just like anyone else, to prove myself through my product or work. I've really found this to be true, the name advantage is a zero sum gain.

HollywoodChicago.com: Would you like to try a narrative film again?

Redford: I would never say never, but it would take the right kind of opportunity, script and team. In documentary films, being able to be a storytelling and embrace film as an art form – while being very clearly connected in trying to help make the world a better place – is really important to me. It would be hard after doing this type of filmmaking, as I have for the past eight years, and imagine myself going back to the world of entertainment. But I can't presume that there would never be another narrative opportunity, especially if I came across something that knocked me out of my chair.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your grandfather, Charles Redford, lived to a ripe old age. What can you say about him that people would be surprised about, given your father's image?

Redford: My grandfather was a prominent executive at Chevron (oil), and of course my father is a fairly radical and progressive environmentalist. But he was also a very active Democrat and pacifist. More importantly, he was one of the best storytellers I've ever met. I think that trait has been passed down the line, even to my kids.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your father was born one year before my father, and you were born two years after me. What do you observe as different about men in their generation than ours?

Redford: I think the macho mystique was far more a guiding principle in our Dad's generation than ours, the 'strong silent type' was much more common. But I also think there is a wisdom and strength in that generation, in terms of getting through difficult times, and there is a stoicism in the face of challenges that I greatly admire. There is also a philosophy of less-is-more, and a little dignity that never hurt anybody. There are many qualities to admire about our father's generation.

"Resilience: The Biology of Stress & the Science of Hope" is spotlighted at the Chicago Independent Film Critics Circle (CIFCC) Showcase on Saturday, November 5th, 2016 – at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 North State Street, Chicago. The Showcase runs through Sunday, November 6th. [Click here](#) [20] for more screenings and information.



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Links:

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- [3] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/adverse-childhood-experiences>
- [4] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/childhood>
- [5] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/education>
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- [16] <http://www.hollywoodchicago.com/news/resilience>
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