

## Author/Director's Statement

---

*We are shocked when a person is shaken to the core and just "snaps." But it can happen to anyone, man or woman, rich or poor, young or old. A relationship of many years goes to pieces, a child dies... and suddenly even the strongest and most level-headed among us can find themselves in a locked ward. When that happens, those close to the person usually feel helpless, and often afraid, as well. Yet when the crisis has passed, we tend to block it out and pretend that nothing happened.*

*Why are we at such a loss? Maybe it has something to do with the fact that we don't really know what happens when people "crack up" and even less about how they become "normal" again? While we have meanwhile learned quite a lot about the mechanics of the brain, we still know next to nothing about the human mind and how it works, how it behaves in extreme situations, or how we can bring it back when it has been "lost." Getting to the root of this uncertainty and general lack of knowledge was the challenge posed by this film.*

*This film tells of the human mind going through crisis. I was primarily interested in showing its gradual emergence from the state of mental breakdown rather than the process of disintegrating and spiraling into madness. This was possible by focusing on a visionary approach that draws on ancient knowledge to derive a new outlook and new ways of dealing with all kinds of extreme mental states – and that ultimately concerns every one of us..*

Edgar Hagen

## **Synopsis**

---

### **Someone Beside You**

#### **A Film by Edgar Hagen**

Along with several courageous psychiatrists and their clients, the author sets out to film a documentary road movie that takes him to Switzerland, Europe, and the U.S. On their travels in mobile homes, they explore the depths of the human psyche in search of answers to the question: What is the human mind and how does it behave in psychotic extreme situations? By the time Edgar Hagen meets the Buddhist monk and trained psychiatrist Edward Podvoll in the U.S., Podvoll has only a few more months to live. His vision – that courage and friendship have the power to make recovery from mental illness possible – is an inspiring legacy. In a dialogue between Western psychology and Eastern spirituality, a message of hope emerges: It is always possible to regain mental clarity no matter how severely confused a mind may have become.

## Main Characters in «Someone Beside You»

---

**Edward Podvoll / Lama Mingyur (1936-2003)**, was a physician, psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and Buddhist lama. One of his basic tenets was "If you have a mind, you can lose it." Much like Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (who served as the model for the doctor in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*), he becomes convinced early in his career as a psychiatrist that recovery from psychosis is possible. He regards psychosis as a spiritual crisis rather than as the incurable illness it is considered by most conventional schools of thought. Podvoll's encounter with the Tibetan Buddhist teacher Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in the 1970s and his deep involvement in Buddhist meditation practice reinforce his conviction that it is possible to recover even from the most extreme mental states. He becomes Director of the newly-established graduate program in Contemplative Psychotherapy at Naropa University, a private liberal arts institution founded by Trungpa in Boulder, Colorado in 1974.

His experiences with Tibetan Buddhism and systematic self-experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs convince Podvoll that a "healthy core" resides in every human being and that it is possible to connect with that healthy core even in the most extreme states of mental confusion. It is on this principle – which Podvoll believes is the key to recovery – on which Windhorse is based. Founded by Podvoll in Boulder in 1981, the Windhorse project has the goal of treating and fostering the recovery of individuals in extreme mental states. Central to the Windhorse approach is the willingness of therapists to explore the depths of their own mind and develop an authentic, sincere connection with their clients rather than maintaining the reserve that usually characterizes the doctor-patient relationship.

In 1990 Podvoll goes into strict retreat in a Buddhist monastery in France. Even during this time, Podvoll does not regard Buddhism as a religion, but rather as a form of depth psychology rooted in a 2500-year tradition of observing and contemplating the human mind.

In late 2002 Podvoll, meanwhile suffering from terminal cancer, decided to return to the U.S. and complete his life's work surrounded by his followers in the Windhorse project. When Edward Hagen visited Podvoll several weeks before his death in the fall of 2003, the two had a series of lengthy conversations. Hagen captured their encounters on film – recordings which in a sense constitute Podvoll's legacy.

**Jakob Litschig**, (55) a physician, psychiatrist, and psychotherapist in Zurich, has experienced psychotic episodes himself. In 1997 his license is revoked when a psychiatric evaluation determines him unfit to practice medicine. He is personally committed to seeking alternative approaches in psychiatry that have the potential to radically improve the chances of recovery. Among other things, Litschig is a cofounder of *Verband Psychose- und Psychiatrie-Erfahrene Schweiz* (VPECH), an association for "veterans" of psychosis and institutionalized psychiatry, and

*Psychose-Seminar Zurich*, a self-help group in which sufferers can speak of their traumatic experiences. Edward Podvoll's work is a major source of inspiration to Litschig in his quest to find new approaches to therapy and treatment.

In the film, an RV (motor home) serves as a mobile research and therapy station in which Litschig accompanies **Kaspar**, 49, **Andrea**, 27, and **Anonymous**, 38 – each of whom been committed to psychiatric clinics repeatedly over a period of many years – to the places where their psychoses first struck. Together, they attempt to make sense of a phenomenon that is commonly regarded as completely incomprehensible and irrational – as madness. On their journey through Switzerland and Italy they come to realize that both the extreme behavior of self-directed violence and violence towards others are at root desperate cries for help from human beings who have been pushed to the breaking point.

**Karen** (54) lives in Colorado. She experienced her first psychotic episodes in college. When she was twenty-one, her family committed her to a prestigious private clinic in Kansas, where she remained confined for three years. When her doctors attest that there is no chance she will ever recover, she concludes that her only way out of the situation is to run away. She jumps from the tenth story of a high-rise building – and survives. Later she goes to Boulder, Colorado and seeks professional help from Edward Podvoll, an encounter that prompts him to start the Windhorse project. The first "Windhorse therapeutic home" is established with Karen and Naropa students. Karen recovered after a few months and has since lived a self-determined life without antipsychotic medication.

Podvoll devoted an important chapter of his book *The Seduction of Madness* to Karen, an inspiring and fascinating account of their shared journey on the road to recovery.

During Edgar Hagen's stay with Podvoll in the fall of 2003, Karen and Podvoll met again for the first time in many years. Karen decided to allow the director to accompany her on a film journey that would take her back to the sites of her traumatic experiences.

**Lama Lhundrup / Dr. Tilman Borghardt** (47) is a physician and head of the retreat center at the Tibetan Buddhist monastery Dhagpo Kundreul Ling in France's Auvergne region. He spent three years here with Edward Podvoll in a strict group retreat. Both in his work as a doctor and as the leader of the retreat center, Lhundrup has witnessed individuals experience psychosis in the course of their spiritual quest. Like Podvoll, he defines psychosis as *one* extreme state of the mind. He believes that awareness and understanding of one's own extremes can open the door to recovery even in cases of severe psychosis and so-called chronic schizophrenia. As Lhundrup says, "This ancient knowledge has been lost in the Western tradition; we are profoundly estranged from it."

In the film Lhundrup acquaints us with Podvoll's quest for self-awareness and elucidates the novel perspective Podvoll opened up: the synthesis of Western and Eastern psychology. This approach is not concerned with pathologizing, but with

helping people develop the healthy aspects of their personality even during severe mental crises.

**Eric Chapin** (51) is a psychotherapist at the Windhorse project in Boulder, Colorado. In the thirteen years he worked as a forensic psychiatrist in El Paso, Texas, he was confronted with incredible suffering. In the mid-1980s, he came across an article by Edward Podvoll in a magazine and decided to go to Boulder and study with Podvoll, hoping to learn from him how severe mental suffering – or psychosis – can be transformed. He later taught the psychosis class at Naropa University for many years as Edward Podvoll's successor, and today he is one of the most experienced psychotherapists in the Windhorse project. The film includes a scene in which Chapin and Podvoll elaborate on their new approach to psychotherapy.

His unwavering faith in the essential sanity and intelligence of even his most severely disturbed clients is nourished by regular periods of retreat he undergoes in an old school bus in the remote wilderness of the Rocky Mountains, inspired by Podvoll's example. The film accompanies Chapin on his fascinating daily rounds. We see him visit **Susan** (51) in her home, a client who had refused to speak to him for many years. Now we hear the two of them reflect on the purpose of their sessions together. We accompany him as he visits another client, **Jonathan** (47). Hospitalized and sentenced to jail repeatedly over a period of twenty years, Jonathan is now able to speak about his experiences with self-awareness and confidence.

Finally, the film takes us back to Eric Chapin's school bus, where Podvoll's ashes have rested in a small orange urn since his death in December 2003.

## Film Locations in *Someone Beside You*

---

### **Switzerland**

Zurich and environs:

Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Burghölzli, Zurich; various other locations

### **Italy**

Reggio nell Emilia:

Ex-Ospedale Psichiatrico Giudiziario

Genoa and Ligurian coast:

various locations

### **France**

Biollet, Auvergne:

monastery and retreat center Dhagpo Kundreul Ling

### **USA**

Boulder, Colorado and environs:

therapeutic homes run by Windhorse Community Services;

Naropa University, Department of Contemplative Psychology; various other locations

Rocky Mountains, Colorado:

meditation rooms at the Shambala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes;

various other locations

Interstate 70 between Boulder, Colorado and Topeka, Kansas

Topeka, Kansas:

grounds of a former private mental hospital; Jayhawk Tower

## Background Information

---

### Psychosis: The Acceleration of Thought Processes

There are many ways to describe psychosis. In the film *Someone Beside You* Andrea, who has suffered from psychotic episodes herself for many years, compares it to "a dream in a waking state." The mind associates freely, as it does in dreams or nightmares. When people are under extreme pressure, their mind often seeks refuge in alternative realities. Voices frequently play a part; the influence of these "inner" voices can go so far that how people perceive themselves diverges completely from how others perceive them. Researchers today estimate that five to ten percent of all people hear voices. Most hardly confide their experience to anyone, but are able to lead completely normal lives. Only one percent of the population overall are committed to psychiatric clinics and diagnosed as schizophrenic.

The film is not interested in such diagnoses, but rather in the mental processes that take place during these enigmatic moments. In the film Eric Chapin describes how in this kind of state a person's thoughts can accelerate or proliferate to such a degree that he or she is overwhelmed and "swept away." Following Henri Michaux, Podvoll believes a subconscious level of lightning-quick thoughts and associations is present in all of us that can get out of control suddenly for all sorts of reasons. In the film Kaspar compares this process to nuclear fission, in which incredible amounts of energy are released. The opposite side of people's nature often seems to surface at such moments: A quiet, unassuming person can suddenly go berserk and run amok. The shock people feel when things like this happen can tear families and entire communities apart.

### Fear and Responsibility

The main problem does not lie in these processes themselves, but rather in our collective fear of them. It is this fear that prevents us from truly exploring and coming to terms with all dimensions of our being and thus keeps us from realizing the simplest solutions. According to Podvoll, treating a problem such as psychosis, which is largely rooted in the mind or simply in the fact of being human with the methods of somatic medicine is an approach that is bound to fail. Today the focus is generally placed on the "biological causes" of extreme mental states. A person entering such a state becomes a victim of these biological processes. Podvoll's primary concern was drawing individuals out of the role of victim into which they are thrust and encouraging patients to take responsibility for their own experiences and actions in order to achieve recovery. Prof. Daniel Hell of Psychiatrische Universitätsklinik Burghölzli in Zurich confirmed in an interview that appealing to clients to take responsibility for themselves – and thus, ultimately, recovery – is largely "taboo" in most mental clinics.

### Windhorse: Deceleration and Recovery

His experience with meditation and experimentation with hallucinogenic drugs taught Podvoll that there are intervals of serenity or lucidity even when the plane of accelerated thought processes breaks through into normal consciousness and threatens to plunge us into chaos. Recognizing and nurturing these "islands of clarity," as Podvoll called them, is the key to the Windhorse approach. The therapists must first learn how to recognize this core of sanity in themselves before they can work with people in extreme mental states and get in touch with their "sane core." Thus mental processes can be decelerated by involving patients in simple, everyday activities that "ground" them in the here-and-now. In order for this approach to work, it is crucial that therapists "let down their guard," that is, relinquish the fear and self-protective barriers that stand in the way of true communication and meet their clients at "eye level." Ideally, someone in an extreme mental state is ultimately integrated into a group of "sane" individuals within the framework of a therapeutic home, as Karen describes in the film.



## Initial Statements on «Someone Beside You»

---

"A film that is really worth seeing! Profound and moving. It deals with basic human experiences that will be familiar to almost anyone who practices meditation. This film deserves an audience that is open to looking beyond the limits of mere understanding."

**Peter Hofmann**, *Pastor of the Reformed Protestant Church in Fällanden; member of the regional psychiatry commission at the Burghölzli clinic, Zurich*

"Edgar Hagen's film offers a more intimate and authentic look at the essence of psychosis and thus leads us to a more profound and compassionate understanding of life with psychosis than any other film documentary I have seen so far. The film an important contribution to de-stigmatizing the mentally ill, and I can only warmly recommend it to everyone, even those viewers who have no prior knowledge of the topic. "

**Dr. med. Andreas Andreae**, *Medical Director, ipw (Integrierte Psychiatrie, Winterthur)*

"*Someone Beside You* opens a door to the very heart of the psychotic experience. It allows us to witness what severe mental illness can mean to those directly affected and those close to them. The film demonstrates compellingly how differently individuals experience and deal with mental disorders and how important it is both to take these individual differences into account and involve members of the patients' family and social network in their treatment and care."

**Vereinigung der Angehörigen von Schizophrenie- und Psychisch-Kranken, VASK Zurich (Association of Family Members of Schizophrenics and the Mentally Ill)**

In the film *Someone Beside You*, Edgar Hagen's poetic depiction of the human experience of psychosis captures the raw, brutal, and often torturous quality of the disorder. In balance, he also shows the brilliance and reality of the possibility of recovery, stunningly embodied by "Karen," the first Windhorse project client. A thread that weaves throughout the movie is that we are all fundamentally sane, and that mental disorders exist in a secondary position to the sanity. In very poignant footage taken just months before his death, Dr. Edward Podvoll embodies the gentle confidence in people's intrinsic sanity and that they can achieve genuine recovery through basic human respect and relationships. It is clear that Edgar Hagen has a deep and accurate feeling for the widely misunderstood subject of the movie. Given the unnecessary suffering created by that misunderstanding, this is a profoundly important movie.

**Chuck Knapp**, *Co-Director Windhorse Community Services, Boulder Colorado, USA*

My name is Jeffrey Fortuna and I am co-founder of the Windhorse Project, which is featured in Edgar Hagen's superb new film. I have known and worked with many of the persons portrayed here for many years, and I feel that Edgar has portrayed all of them in very deep and realistic way. The essence of each person clearly comes to us

through the lens of the relationship Mr. Hagen shares with each person. It is Mr. Hagen's intimate relationship with each person in the context of his deeply probing artistic vision that gives this film its power. This is the power to show the true face of mental illness and to equally show the lonely ravages and the courage to recover. Here is a film that invites us to look directly at this true face of mental illness and not turn away. Who could turn away from such compelling people portrayed in such a deeply felt way? Mr. Hagen bears faithful witness to these persons and yet is totally immersed in a relationship with them; hence he is not neutral, but a fully participating witness. He generously shares with us what he has seen and lived through in the making of this film, which is nothing less than the pathos and promise of mental illness fully lived. I wish to express my gratitude to Mr. Hagen for devoting himself to such an arduous task, and to acknowledge the penetrating beauty and poignancy that his remarkable film offers to us.

**Jeffrey Fortuna**, *Cofounder of the Windhorse-Project, Co-director Windhorse Community Services, Boulder, Colorado, USA*

"...Edgar came to Boulder and I viewed the finished movie with him... I was very moved and impressed by the film's sophistication and artistry. Its message is deep, yet subtle, and it speaks for itself. Edgar seems to have found the 'heart' of each person and brought it out in the film... And he was able to skillfully direct the camera to get to the heart of my story... This experiment with the filming, and sharing my secrets has been healing for me."

**Karen** *on her relationship to the film*

## Conversation with Edgar Hagen on «Someone Beside You»

---

### Unconditional Acceptance

*There's nothing in the least didactic about Someone Beside You: There's no voiceover commentary, when we learn the names of the protagonists, it's really more in passing, and there's no explanation of the institution Windhorse. Why?*

I wasn't interested in narrating individual biographies, I wanted to tell a universal story about the existential dimension of being human. This dimension goes beyond religious creeds. The protagonists are people who are constantly torn between life and death. I wanted to shed light on different aspects of this condition, following the logic developed by Edward Podvoll. All the issues and questions that come up are brought to life by the characters. One possible answer to these questions is provided by the work and thinking of Podvoll. He conducted a kind of life-long experiment in which he explored the mind. What am I? What happens when someone loses their mind? Podvoll looked into all these questions, using himself as his subject, and he covered a lot of ground. His quest, his vision is the main thread running through the film. The characters along the way show us individual aspects of psychotic states: losing oneself, the racing mind, endangering oneself and others – i.e., suicide attempts and violent behavior towards others – to name just a few. Always present, as a connecting element that holds everything together, is the question of what possibilities exist that enable people to come to grips with these states themselves. Thus everyone has a very specific function in the fabric of the film. Names no longer matter; the only thing that counts is authenticity.

*The film is also somewhat unconventional in terms of structure: It evolves slowly around the topic, and all the pieces of the puzzle only come together at the end. In this respect, the montage is more reminiscent of an Atom Egoyan film than a documentary in the classic sense. What was the idea behind that?*

Documentaries often limit themselves to showing an excerpt of a whole. What a feature film wants to do is quite different. A story well told is something universal, it transcends the personal. It aims to show something complete, something everyone can relate to. Documentaries are most powerful when they go for that, when they go "the whole hog," so to speak. But the universality that I was after is in itself a fictional element. You can only achieve that when you get very close. The closer you get to something or someone, the more universal the story becomes.

That's why I spent a long time getting to know the people I portrayed before I even started shooting – otherwise it wouldn't have been possible to make the film I did. I had to know exactly what I wanted from people. You can't afford to be unclear about what you want even for a minute – otherwise the situation can become very charged and is likely to explode.

*Is it a coincidence that almost all the protagonists are "on the road" in mobile homes?*

Losing one's mind is roaming, in a sense. You're not at home, you're swept away – and indeed, many psychotics "wake up" and find themselves in public space. One of the protagonists, Kaspar, describes that very vividly with his image of body, mind, and soul, with

the soul holding it all together, and says how he had the feeling that his soul was driven out of his body when he was psychotic.

When you're under enormous pressure, you try to run from that and seek refuge somewhere else. Psychosis is ultimately a way of seeking a better life. In this context, the automobile is a visual metaphor for this search, while the helicopter flights represent stepping back from it all for a moment so you can get the big picture...

## **«Psychosis is ultimately a way of seeking a better life»**

*What is "your" topic as a filmmaker?*

In this film it is crisis. I could hardly imagine a more riveting subject than people going through a major crisis and finding a way to pull themselves out of it again. That is one of the greatest moments of the human experience.

Before I started making *Someone Beside You*, I myself went through a situation where I was on the brink between life and death. When I had finished my last film, *Time of the Titans*, I went straight to the hospital for major heart surgery. The surgeon actually told me, "Go home, get your affairs in order, tie up the loose ends in your life; then I can work with you." So that's what I did – and it was very liberating.

The dimension of spiritual renewal has always interested me, but after that experience I wanted to go deeper into the issue and explore it some more. That's ultimately why I decided to play an active part in the film myself, rather than just being a detached observer.

*Crises are often accompanied by anxieties...*

During the preparations for the film, I initially was very anxious that something might happen to someone during the shoot. That's why the process of getting close to the various people was such a lengthy one. I would ask myself things like what I would do if somebody really did jump from a building, or what I'd do if someone went into a full-blown psychosis and started shooting people at random. At any given moment, anything was conceivable. But thanks to the many months I spent preparing, I was able to get over that, that fear of the state another person might fall into. Actually, it is precisely that fear that is the problem, because it deters us from communicating with certain people. In that sense, overcoming fear is a major issue, and in the film I deliberately carry it to extremes. Going with Karen into the hotel room where she jumped out the window – that was really going quite far. We had discussed it a zillion times beforehand and gone through all the eventualities of what might happen. Karen struggled with herself for a long time, but in the end she decided to do it. I'm very grateful to her for being so brave, because she brings the fact that recovery really is possible alive to us.

*You actually embarked on a similar journey in one of your earlier films when you accompanied Dorothea Buck when she returned to the "place of madness." In that sequence she says that everyone has to decide for themselves how to deal with their own "place of madness" and whether they can handle returning there or not...*

I had also known Dorothea Buck for a very long time before making the film portrait of her. If it hadn't been for her, I never would have made *Someone Beside You*. It was through her that I realized what it means to get caught in the machinery of institutionalized psychiatry. It was also thanks to her that I came to understand what it means to experience psychosis and the stigmatization and ostracism that go along with it – which are only a symptom of a collective state of denial, of our unwillingness to face the fact that any one of us can be thrown into a situation of major crisis at any time. You lose your job, a long relationship unexpectedly comes to an end, a child dies... and suddenly even the most rational, stable person can land in the locked ward of a mental hospital. When that happens, the people close to that person are usually utterly stunned – and once the crisis has passed, they block the whole thing out completely.

Dorothea Buck pondered the issue of collective denial for many years. That opened a door for me onto the question: What actually happens to someone who loses his mind? That, in turn, led me to the next question: Is it possible to make a film with people who are in a state of acute psychosis?

**«The stigmatization is a symptom of denial that any one of us can be thrown into a situation of major crisis at any time»**

*How did you find out about Edward Podvoll's work?*

From a psychiatrist in Zurich named Jakob Litschig. I met him at a screening of the film about Dorothea Buck. By that time I had sort of tucked the question of what happens to someone whose mind goes over the edge into a corner somewhere in the back of my brain. But when I met Jakob, I sensed immediately that he was the right person to help me realize my project. He's not afraid of the confrontation with people who have experienced psychosis; he establishes a connection with them right away and is unafraid to face the issue. He was the one who acquainted me with Podvoll's approach and the logic behind it.

At the time Podvoll was still in a Buddhist monastery, in a retreat that had been going on for twelve years. Terminally ill, he left the monastery late in the year 2002 – to seek treatment in the hope of conquering his illness, but ultimately to die. As it turned out, he died only a year after he came out of retreat. The keen awareness that time was running out lent a special sense of urgency to our work. Our first meeting took place three months before his death, and the last footage was filmed a mere two weeks before he succumbed to his illness. Due to the special situation, I decided to approach the story from two different angles. The European part of the film is more about looking at the problem, while the American part is more about trying to show possible ways out of it.

*One scene in the film demonstrates is quite impressive, in which Podvoll and his former disciple Eric Chapin are talking to a group of students. Chapin tells them about how he was making lentil soup with a patient who was drifting into a state of what Chapin calls "metaphysical implosion" – and whose racing mind is brought back "down to earth" by the smell of the lentils cooking. One of the students doesn't quite grasp the practical aspect of the situation and asks hesitantly how one would go about incorporating lentil soup in a therapy session – thus comically underlining the clash of the psychoanalytic understanding of*

*therapist and patient with a radically different concept. Thinking the scene through to its logical consequence would mean the end of psychoanalysis...*

Edward Podvoll was both a psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst in the tradition of Frieda Fromm-Reichmann – on whom Joanne Greenberg based the character of the doctor in her book *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. Fromm-Reichmann treated psychoses and schizophrenia with the methods of psychoanalysis. Podvoll went through this school and practiced this route successfully, but his encounter with Buddhism led him to go in a completely different direction in his work. He ceased searching for causes. In the film, the Buddhist monk Lama Lhundrup explains the differences by saying that a psychiatrist treats the symptoms, an analyst tries to determine the causes, and the practitioner of Dharma seeks the healthy qualities and tries to tap the potential buried by suffering. This approach is also therapeutic, but in practice it might be expressed in the therapist's cleaning the patient's apartment, for example. This vision is actually a paradigm shift, entailing the dissolution of the hierarchical structure of the therapist-client relationship.

### **«The vision is the dissolution of the hierarchical structure of the therapist-client relationship»**

*How did Windhorse originate, and in what way is it special?*

Windhorse is one possible model for treating extreme states of mind; it isn't very well-known yet. There are only a few centers. Two of these are in the U.S., one is in Vienna, and one is currently being established in Germany. The model in Zurich is more a pragmatic adaptation of the Windhorse approach.

A central pillar of its approach to treatment is meditation, and therapists undergo extensive training in meditation practices. For Windhorse practitioners, exploring the depths of their own mind – or, in other words, retreat – is what training analysis is for psychoanalysts. It's about being comfortable with yourself and learning to bear solitude – in other words, a kind of self-awareness that results from certain physical practices and that has a long tradition in Buddhism.

It has nothing in the least to do with idealizing Buddhism. Podvoll recognized that he wouldn't have been able to try something radically new within the system of institutionalized psychiatry. In Buddhism he found an established context in which he could realize his vision. It was Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, a Tibetan master of Buddhism and founder of the Naropa Institute (later Naropa University) in Boulder, Colorado, who taught Podvoll about Buddhism and encouraged him to take that road. At the time, Naropa was a gathering place for intellectuals interested in Eastern philosophy, and Chögyam Trungpa, whose books have since been translated into numerous languages, asked Podvoll to establish the department of psychiatry at Naropa University in the 1970's. It was along with some of his students from Naropa University that Podvoll later founded Windhorse, which found a receptive environment in Boulder. It was in this context that Podvoll encountered the clients that enabled him to develop his approach: Wealthy families seeking more humane treatment options for their children supported his work. Meanwhile Windhorse is firmly established in Colorado and New England, and the outpatient services of conventional psychiatric institutions regularly refer some of their patients there.

## **«How do you resist the seduction of madness?»**

*How is the Buddhist philosophy of devotion and humility reflected in the treatment of psychotic patients?*

All the psychiatrists I spoke to in the course of my research advised me not to allow myself to be drawn into discussions with psychotics dealing with the content of their delusional thoughts. When the mind is under pressure it begins to race – one thought, two thoughts, a thousand. The process is so swift that it pulls the rug out from under the patients, and if you're inexperienced and not trained in dealing with that, it can pull you down, too. The Buddhist approach believes that it is possible to connect with people without being drawn into the specific content of their thoughts. It's a matter of responding to someone as a complete human being without following them in every detail. Or, to put it in different terms, how do you resist what Podvoll called "the seduction of madness"? It's about accepting someone completely without being sucked into every twist and turn taken by a racing mind.

The remedy to this dilemma offered by Podvoll and Windhorse includes things like going for walks and cooking together or cleaning up the patient's apartment. The disorder of a messy apartment can be enough to trigger psychotic thought processes. It's really about very mundane, everyday things, about helping people become grounded.

*The interview with Edgar Hagen was conducted by the film journalist Franziska K. Trefzer*

## Bio- and Filmography

---

**Edgar Hagen** was born in Basel, Switzerland, in 1958. He works as an independent filmmaker. *Someone Beside You* is his third documentary feature, after *Markus Jura Suisse* and *Time of the Titans*. After studying philosophy at the Free University in Berlin in the 1980s, he directed numerous documentaries in which he turned an unflinching eye on socially suppressed realities. In his films, he reveals mechanisms of society through the radical self-exploration and uncompromising life strategies of the protagonists. After the short television documentary *Dorothea Buck – vom Wahn zum Sinn*, the idea for the feature documentary *Someone Beside You*, an emotional journey to the depths of the human mind, gradually took shape over a period of years.

### Films

1991, *KLEINE LIEBEN*, 24 minutes; author and director  
Production: Edgar Hagen/Videogenossenschaft Basel

1993, *FAXENMACHER*, 29 minutes; author and director  
With excerpts from the play *Der Theatermacher* by Thomas Bernhard  
Production: Edgar Hagen/bilderwaren, Aachen  
Awards: Film- und Videotage Basel

1994, *GEWITTER IM GEHIRN*, 29 minutes; author and director  
Production: Lichtblick Film- & FernsehProduction GmbH, Cologne  
Awards: Festival International du Film d'Art, UNESCO Paris /1995

1996, *MARKUS JURA SUISSE - Der verlorene Sohn / Le fils prodigue*, 81 minutes  
Production: Hagen-Linder FilmProduction; Sales: Edgar Hagen Film  
Awards: Grant, Federal Department of Home Affairs DHA, 1998;  
Kulturpreis Basel-Land, 1998

1998, *DOROTHEA BUCK - VOM WAHN ZUM SINN*, 29 minutes; author and director  
Production: ZINNOBER FernsehProduction, Aachen

2001, *ZEIT DER TITANEN*, documentary feature, 80 minutes; author and director  
Production: Maximage GmbH, Zurich  
Distributor Switzerland: Look Now!, Zurich; Word Sales: Accent Films International  
Awards: Alstom Prize 2003

2006, *SOMEONE BESIDE YOU*, documentary feature, 98 minutes; author and director  
Production: Maximage GmbH, Zurich; Distributor Switzerland: Look Now!, Zurich

Edgar Hagen, Jungstrasse 36, CH - 4056 Basel  
Tel: +41 61 3830955 Mobile: +41 79 6159755 E-mail: mail@edgarhagen.com  
[www.edgarhagen.com](http://www.edgarhagen.com)



## Further Reading

---

### Edward Podvoll's main work:

*The Seduction of Madness*, 1990 (German title: "Die Verlockung des Wahnsinns", 1994)

New edition:

*Recovering Sanity*, 2003 (German title: "Aus entrückten Welten – Psychosen verstehen und behandeln," 2004)

### Additional Information on Windhorse:

Michael Herrick, Anne Marie DiGiacomo, Scott Welsch: "Windhorse"  
In: Peter Lehmann / Peter Stastny (eds.), *Alternatives Beyond Psychiatry*, Peter Lehmann Publishing, Berlin, March 2007

### Addresses / Contacts

**For information on alternative treatment options in Switzerland**

<http://www.promentesana.ch/>

**Windhorse in the U.S.**

<http://www.windhorsecommunityservices.com/>

<http://www.windhorseassociates.org/>

**Naropa University, Boulder, Colorado**

<http://www.naropa.edu/>

**Windhorse in Austria**

<http://www.windhorse.at/>

**Windhorse in Germany**

<http://www.windhorse.de/>