



Where

We've Been

Directed by Lucas Gonzalez



Logline

After 25 years of working in New York City, Maria Elena, an undocumented mother, and her son pursue the journey she once dreamed of: a series of day trips across the East Coast, a bittersweet farewell to their life together, as she prepares to start her life over in Colombia.

Synopsis

Where We've Been is a portrait of a mother and son reckoning with the passage of time, aging, and inevitable change.

The film opens in the final months of Maria Elena and Lucas's life in New York together. Catalyzed by Luca's new and long-awaited green card, Maria Elena has made the choice to retire and return to Medellín, Colombia. She's been working strenuously for the past 25 years and her health has taken a toll -- she's exhausted. For undocumented elders like her, retirement in the United States does not come with a safety net.

Grappling with closing this long chapter of their lives, they set out to make the best of their time together, day tripping to long-dreamed-of places. From tourist places they've never seen in New York City, to the shores of Boston, and as far as Niagara Falls. Grief, love and gratitude fill the in-between moments; on car rides, over shared meals, and in the stillness of unfamiliar beauty.

The final act captures the complexity of returning and reunions. They travel together to Medellín for the first time since she left in 1999. Lucas stays long enough to witness her transition; reconnecting with siblings, and settling back to Medellín after being away for so long. It is a full circle moment for Maria Elena as she embraced the courage to begin again.

Themes

Migration, aging, & the courage to begin again.



A photograph of a bridge over a river. The bridge has a blue-grey metal structure with a walkway on top. A tall, white, double-headed street lamp stands on the walkway. In the background, there are green trees and a tall building on the right. The text "Visual Approach" is overlaid in white, italicized font.

Visual Approach

Archive / Memory

The back of the photo reads: "Look at this, what a hard life Laura has, sunbathing. These are a few moments that I try to take her after work, but she loves it. Laura is tireless. This is in Rockaway, where I clean houses a lot."




*On the right, an old photo of Laura, a young child at the beach smiling into the camera.
The background, an image of Rockaway Beach.*

A family photos showing a mother and daughter during their early years in the U.S.—sharing a meal at a diner. The image captures warmth, love, and everyday moments of their life together.



Adventure / Roadtrip





Characters

Maria Elena is bold, funny, and fiercely resilient. A natural caregiver with a sharp sense of humor, she meets life's challenges with grace and grit.

She's always wanted to travel and see the world, a dream that was put on pause while living in the U.S undocumented. She's spent so much of her life surviving, she's now ready to begin to choose joy. On the road, we see her curiosity bloom, her laughter grow louder. She's not just returning to Colombia, she's returning to herself.

Maria Elena

Characters

Born in Medellín and raised in New York since the age of six, he is a trans man who came of age undocumented, learning to navigate the world with courage, humor, and softness.

Lucas is thoughtful, funny, and fiercely independent. Since migrating, he and Maria Elena have been each other's only family, at the heart of his life in New York City. Now that she's leaving, he's figuring out what it means to live apart from her. He also has to embrace all the change ahead.

Lucas

Directors Statement

I am drawn to stories that deepen our humanity, narratives that explore both the small, intimate choices and the larger, life-altering decisions. I am particularly interested in capturing the diverse landscapes, both physical and emotional, that shape our experiences.

This documentary is a deeply personal journey that places me both behind and in front of the camera. I am not just the filmmaker, but also a subject, documenting my mother's decision to start her life over after decades of sacrifice and the final chapter of our life together in New York.

My role is to navigate this transition with honesty, balancing the emotional weight of being her son with the responsibility of shaping our story. This project is my act of bearing witness to her resilience, our bond, and the complex truth that love sometimes means learning how to let go.

Team



Director

Lucas Gonzalez is a Colombian-born cinematographer and producer whose visual language lends itself to expanding cinematic narratives attuned to the nuances of queerness, the undocumented experience in the U.S, and working-class urban life. His cinematography work on *Visible*, *Beyond Across Over*, and *Isabel* have been screened at Tribeca, BlackStar, Inside Out, NewsFest, DC Black Film Festival, Jacob Burns, and Icaro Film Festival. He is currently developing his debut feature film “*Where We’ve Been*”, produced by Quinto Studios and Tierra Narrative.



Director of Photography

Thom McKenna is a New York-born director and cinematographer who began his career capturing Guinness World Record fireworks displays. He honed his craft shooting in studio and in the field at Thrillist and Group Nine Media, earning a Telly Award for the web series Food/Groups and serving as the DP for web-series and Amazon Prime Video show Instachef. Thom then took the role of in-house DP/Director at Skillshare before founding Sparkletone Pictures in 2022. He is currently directing Tommy Speed, a documentary following Tom Cush, a runner with achondroplasia dwarfism, in his pursuit of gold at the World Dwarf Games in Cologne, Germany.

Team



Producer

Keni Guillén is a film director and producer born in Chalatenango, El Salvador, and raised in Long Island, New York. Her cinematic practice threads across traces of rural life, themes of grief, and the human desire for connection. An Open Society Fellow and a Define American fellow, Keni's work has been exhibited in Rooftop Films, El Museo De Los Sures, Open Society Foundations, Ícaro Film Festival, amongst others. In 2022, she was selected to be a part of PlayLab Films' APICHATPONG WEERASETHAKUL LAB: FILMING IN THE AMAZON. She is a co-founder and producer at Tierra Narrative, and currently a community organizing co-lead at The Undocumented Filmmakers Collective.



Producer

Frisly Soberanis is a producer and video artist, from Queens, New York via Guatemala. His work has received support from the Tribeca Film Institute's New Media Prototype Fund, Center for Cultural Power, the Lotus Foundation, and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. He served as a producer on the narrative short, *Roots That Reach Toward The Sky* (directed by Jess X. Snow) received support from the Sundance Institute and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, as well as *The Beguiling* (directed by ishkwaaazhe Shane McSauby) which world premiered at the 2024 Toronto International Film Festival. Recently, two shorts have been distributed by the Criterion collection.

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