

Live Your Dream The Taylor Anderson Story

DIRECTED BY REGGE LIFE

90 MINUTES

DVD, GLOBAL FILM NETWORK, 2012

Reviewed by David Huebner



Screen capture from *Live Your Dream* trailer at <http://tiny.cc/e8j1yw>.

Nearly 20,000 lives were lost in the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami on March 11, 2011. With such devastating losses, including over US \$500 billion in property destruction, it is a challenge to sort out the many tributes to the many lives lost. However, *Live Your Dream: The Taylor Anderson Story* stands out as personal, reflective, honest, and richly filled with a sense of hope.

While there are several YouTube, Facebook, and written remembrances of the lives lost in the quake (and subsequent tsunami), American filmmaker Regge Life chose to honor the life of Taylor Anderson. Taylor was a highly energetic and vivacious 24-year-old American who moved to Japan in 2008 to teach English. A participant in JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching Program), Taylor was popular with Japanese students and faculty alike, leaving an indelible impression on the many lives she touched.

While the underlying events in this inspirational documentary are the quake and tsunami, these disasters are merely the backdrop to Taylor's short but vibrant life. The film is divided into ten chapters that take us from Taylor's earliest days as a cheerful, curious, and contagiously gregarious young girl to the highly committed and service-oriented woman she became. With numerous testimonies, captivating interviews, and intriguing conversations woven throughout the first half of the film, we discover the emerging story of how Taylor became so fascinated with Japan and its culture.

Upon graduating from college, Taylor chose to go to Japan as part of the JET Program. Her absorption of Japanese culture was so deep that her Japanese friends asserted that her personality was more like a Japanese than an American. Perhaps this is why Taylor believed that "everything is much more exciting and scary when you do it in another country."

The film briefly focuses on the other American lost in the triple disaster (quake, tsunami, and nuclear radiation), Monty Dickson. Both Taylor and Monty apparently survived the quake, but not the tsunami. While few details are provided in the film as to the exact events surrounding Taylor's

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death, it is apparent she drowned in the tsunami. The day of the quake, Taylor stayed at the elementary school with eighty students whose parents never showed up. When these students were moved to a junior high school, Taylor was last seen riding her bike on a major street, most likely heading to her apartment. Tragically, her body was not discovered until three weeks later.

A mother and father, Jean and Andy Anderson—torn by grief—and a brother, Jeff—anguished with sorrow—this family reveals resilience and purpose in their coping of the loss of Taylor. By visiting Japan and meeting many co-workers and students of Taylor, as well as establishing the Taylor Anderson Foundation, the Andersons have turned loss into hope.

One of the most stirring tributes to Taylor was by Japanese woodcraft artist Shinichi Endo, who lost all three of his children in the disaster. Two of his children were students of Taylor's. Inspired by the life of Taylor Anderson and saddened by the loss of his own children, Mr. Endo made bookshelves to commemorate their lives. Called Taylor's Bunko (Taylor's Reading Center), the shelves are part of the temporary location of Watonoha Elementary School.

This ninety-minute film serves as an encouragement to young people to pursue their dreams, find purpose in life, and discover that cultural diversities are not lampposts of division, but floodlights of unity. We encounter two different cultures in Japan and America, but we also discover significant relationships and friendships that no ocean can separate. Even when life is lost, passion and endurance survive!

The essential message of this amazingly personal and moving documentary is found in the opening quote from the late Howard Thurman. A significant African-American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader, Mr. Thurman's words direct us on the right path with this film's stirring purpose:

Ask not what the world needs. Find what makes you come alive and then go for it. Because what the world needs are people who have come alive.

If you are searching for inspiration and hope amidst geographical, national, and personal tragedy, you will be richly rewarded with *Live Your Dream: The Taylor Anderson Story*. ■

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