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POV's "Steam of Life" Reveals Naked Truth About the Inner Lives Of Modern Men, Tuesday, Aug. 2, 2011, on PBS

The Warm Mists of Finland's National Rite of the Sauna Open Up a Famously Reticent People

"Life at its most real. . . the small hot room becomes something sacred and transformative.

Reservations melt away, and a kind of joy rises up like steam from a bed of hot rocks."

– John Anderson, *Variety*

The fundamental need of humans to talk — to express themselves and try to make sense of their inner lives — is abundantly on display in a remarkable film from Finland, **Steam of Life**, that goes deep into the inner sanctum of Finnish life, the sauna. Both women and men engage in this ubiquitous ritual, but **Steam of Life** focuses on Finnish men. It turns out that the cleansing that takes place in Finnish saunas is as much emotional as physical. Amid the steam, even ordinary men not known for their way with words — and the Finnish people are famously taciturn — create everyday poetry as they struggle to articulate their innermost feelings. **Steam of Life** both informs viewers about Finnish life and provides a memorable look into the troubled and often reticent heart of contemporary Western man.

Joonas Berghäll and Mika Hotakainen's **Steam of Life** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, Aug. 2, 2011** at 10 p.m. on PBS as part of the 24th season of **POV (Point of View)**. The regular season of POV continues on Tuesdays at 10 p.m. through Sept. 27 and concludes with specials in November 2011 and winter/spring 2012. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the winner of a Special Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking, an IDA Award for Best Continuing Series and NALIP's 2011 Award for Corporate Commitment to Diversity.

The 12 men in **Steam of Life** open up with incredible candor about their families, children, marriages, divorces, love, loss, struggles and redemption. We hear from a soldier who served in Afghanistan as part of NATO forces and thinks of returning against his own best instincts and, in an unexpectedly hilarious moment, a man who rapturously describes his extraordinary best friend (who then makes his own boisterous appearance, which startled even the crew).

Among the interesting things we learn from **Steam of Life** is that portable saunas can appear anywhere in Finland — in trailers, tepees, cars, even phone booths — at a moment's notice. We also learn that Finnish men of all shapes, sizes and ages are not the least bit self-conscious about being nude, either in front of each other or in front of the filmmakers' cameras (or behind the cameras — the crew was naked, too). We also learn that Finnish men, despite their reputation for not being communicative, are almost unstoppable once they get talking in their quiet way about their lives. They speak from a deep emotional need to share their experiences, and from a special place, the sauna, where they shed social inhibitions and distinctions along with their clothes.

Alternating images of the cold and majestic Finnish landscape and the warm and intimate sauna explain the place of the steam bath in Finnish life with no need for voiceover. In fact, **Steam of Life** unfolds solely through the images and the talk of the men themselves. The men speak slowly in the meditative Nordic cadence that the sauna seems to inspire, and they speak with striking candor. They also listen to each other with great patience; they allow silences that provide time for things to sink in, and they do not pretend the irresolvable can be resolved.

Making **Steam of Life** was a feat in itself. The crew used old 16mm film cameras in rooms that were 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Prior to filming, the cameras had to be warmed slowly to the sauna's temperature. The resulting images have a richness and luminosity unique to the film medium.

There is a strong sense of loneliness among these men, but their stories are punctuated by moments of surprising humor and good feeling and given buoyancy by the belief that, as one of the men puts it, "knowing you are not alone is a relief." However tragic some of the stories, we feel better for having shared them.

"My reason for making this movie was very simple: I never met my father," says director Joonas Berghäll. "Because I've never had a father as a role model of a man, I thought that through this movie, there was the possibility to find a 'Finnish man' — my father, and also myself."

"I think it was the right time for Finnish men to speak openly about their emotions," adds co-director Mika Hotakainen. "They didn't even need any help or persuasion, just a chance to talk, knowing that somebody really wanted to listen. They were ready to open their hearts to us. For the last 10 years, Finnish society has focused a lot on women, and I feel that men have been left out of the equation. And now, through this film, they have gotten their chance to speak."

Steam of Life is a production of Oktober Oy in association with Nordisk Film and Films Transit International.

About the Filmmakers:

Joonas Berghäll (Co-director, Producer)

Joonas Berghäll studied film production at the Tampere University of Applied Sciences, School of Art and Media in Finland and founded the production company Oktober Oy in 2004 with fellow directors Katja Gauriloff and Mika Hotakainen. **Steam of Life** is his second film after "Freedom to Serve" (2004), also co-directed with Hotakainen. As a producer, Berghäll has seven films to his credit, including "The Smoking Room" (2007) and "A Shout Into the Wind" (2008). Among his latest projects as a producer is "Canned Dreams" by Katja Gauriloff, a lyrical and episodic documentary that paints a portrait of European workers through the journey of canned ravioli.

Mika Hotakainen (Co-director)

Mika Hotakainen graduated as a fiction director from Helsinki University of Applied Sciences in 2004. He has been working in the television and film industry since 1998 and is co-owner of the production company Oktober Oy. With Joonas Berghäll he co-directed the feature-length documentary "Freedom to Serve," released in 2004. His latest documentary, "Loose Wires," is about marginalization.

Credits:

Co-directors:	Joonas Berghäll, Mika Hotakainen
Producer:	Joonas Berghäll
Cinematographers:	Heikki Färm, Jani Kumpulainen
Editor:	Timo Peltola
Sound Design:	Christian Christensen
Original Music:	Jonas Bohlin

Running Time: 86:46

POV Series Credits:

Executive Producer: Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer: Cynthia López
Director of Production/Programming: Chris White
Series Producer: Yance Ford

Awards and Festivals:

- Nordic Film Council Prize, 2010
- Risto Jarva and Audience Awards, Tampere Film Festival, 2010
- Interreligious Jury Award, Visions du Réel, 2010
- Film Producer of the Year Award (Joonas Berghäll), Central Organization of Finnish Film Producers, 2010
- International Competition Award, DocAviv Film Festival, 2010
- Millennium Award, Planete Doc Review Film Festival, 2010
- Nominated for Distinguished Feature Documentary Award, International Documentary Association Awards, 2010
- Artistic Vision Award, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, 2011
- DocPoint Helsinki Documentary Film Festival, 2010
- International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam, 2010
- SilverDocs, 2010
- DocPoint NYC Finnish Documentary Film Event, 2011

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POV Digital (www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV films can be seen at more than 450 events across the country every year. Together with schools, organizations and local PBS stations, POV facilitates free community screenings and produces free resources to accompany our films, including discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

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