

A South Milwaukee native just won an Emmy. His next project will be a Milwaukee murder mystery podcast.

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South Milwaukee native Kyle Olson won an Emmy award from the Mid America Emmy Awards held on Oct. 5 in Branson, Missouri for the documentary "The Last Signal." (Photo: Submitted)

After graduating from South Milwaukee High School in 2007, Kyle Olson moved to Los Angeles to pursue a filmmaking career.

He said it was hard to leave and he still misses family, friends, the change of seasons and [Culver's custard](#), but he knew that's where he needed to go to follow his dreams.

The effort paid off recently when Olson won an Emmy for best historical documentary for his film "[The Last Signal](#)" at the Mid America Emmy Awards on Oct. 5 in Branson, Missouri.

Olson served as executive producer and director for the documentary, which focuses on two veterans from World War II that were reunited for the first time after 70 years. One of them, Raymond "DeVere" Johnson, believed he was the last surviving member of LST-208.

Johnson's daughter made a Facebook post searching for a fellow shipmate and it went viral. Olson said he was traveling for work when he first saw the post and he reached out to Johnson's daughter asking if he could document the story if another member was found.

She agreed and a few weeks later she contacted him that another shipmate, John Heimsoth, had been located. Reunions for LST-208 had been held but Heimsoth had lived a secluded life and hadn't heard of them.

“They agreed to let us come and be a fly on the wall for this incredible historic reunion,” Olson said.

“We watched them reminisce and take us almost through a time machine in a way through their memories and their stories,” Olson said. “The memories were endless, and they fed off each other’s stories. They remembered so many incredible things from their time in the war.”

The documentary took Olson and crew to Joliet, Illinois and Stover, Missouri. After several positive premieres, Olson said he wondered if things could get any better.

It did — when he got a call that the documentary was nominated for an Emmy award stemming from a premiere in Los Angeles.

When “The Last Signal” was announced as the winner, Olson said his table at the awards ceremony got a little loud.

“It was the only time during the entire award ceremony where we saw a standing ovation and it was for our World War II vets,” Olson said.

Becoming a visual storyteller

Olson said he enjoyed telling stories through “visual means” and he started in high school making short films with friends. Those fun weekends led to a full-blown commitment to filmmaking in high school.

Olson revived South Milwaukee High School’s audio/visual club from the 1980s and, during his senior year the club created its first feature film "[SMHS: 007](#)" — a spoof on James Bond, in celebration of his graduating class of 2007 (or 007). Teachers and students were the stars and local professionals helped and mentored the club.

That film premiered at the South Milwaukee Performing Arts Center to a sold-out crowd.

“We had a bigger and better audience than prom,” Olson said.

After graduating, he moved to Los Angeles and went to Columbia College Hollywood in Los Angeles. There he formed relationships that led to internships on television shows including “According to Jim” and “Last Call with Carson Daly.”

“That was kinda cool,” Olson said.

Olson also worked on “America’s Next Top Model” for multiple seasons, “Dancing with the Stars” and “The Bachelor.”

For aspiring filmmakers, “dreams don’t work unless you do,” Olson said. And work he did, steadily taking on larger roles behind the camera until he became a producer.

“Surround yourself with the right people, hard-working and trustworthy people that believe in you and the project,” he said. “Anyone these days can film a movie, but it takes a lot of special ingredients to make that move stand out.”

Next project

For his next documentary project, Olson said he’ll be working on a local story — the unsolved Milwaukee murder of 19-year-old [Ashleigh Love](#). In 2009, Love was fatally shot by an intruder while she was sleeping. The killer was never found.

A few years ago, Olson produced a documentary called “Letters to Ashleigh”, which recounts how the community reacted to the tragic event. He said the documentary sparked some good conversation and the story stuck with him.

Olson said the crew felt good about what they’d done, but that more of the story needs to be told. Currently, he’s working on an interactive podcast series, which will take place primarily in Milwaukee, to try and figure out what happened.

“It will pick up where the documentary left off,” he said. “There are many successful [murder mystery podcasts](#) out there and some have helped to solve these murders. This is a topic that’s near and dear to so many of our hearts.”

The podcast will be available on iTunes, Spotify and other platforms. Olson said the goal is to make it interactive so the community can “listen, explore, learn and work to put the pieces together to find some well-deserved justice.”

The project is currently in production and recording has started. Olson expects the project to make the air in early 2020.