

Elia Saikaly

Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Email: eliasaikaly@gmail.com • Web: eliasaikaly.com

PROFILE

An award-winning filmmaker, high-altitude mountaineer and keynote speaker with over two decades in some of the world's most extreme environments. A Canadian Screen Award-winning director of photography, Elia brings the world's tallest peaks to global audiences and is the founder of adventure-media and education ventures rooted in education, humanitarian storytelling and human performance.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS

- Only Canadian to summit Everest five times — 25+ expeditions across two decades.
- Canadian Screen Award- and CINE Golden Eagle Award-winning director of photography, with credits ranging from a five-camera shoot with His Holiness the Dalai Lama to work aired by the world's major broadcasters.
- Organized and led the 2021 K2 search-and-recovery expedition, locating lost teammates and bringing answers to their families.
- Founder of FindingLife — connected 20,000+ K-12 students to live expeditions through technology-driven, real-time classroom education.

HIGH-ALTITUDE EXPEDITIONS & FILMMAKING

Expedition Filmmaker & High-Altitude Mountaineer | *Founder, FindingLife Films* **2005 – Present**

- Two decades and 25+ world-class expeditions, anchored by 20 years and 12 journeys on Mt. Everest with five summits, culminating in a 2025 unsupported attempt without supplemental oxygen.
- Climbed six of the world's Seven Summits, some more than once: Everest (×5), Kilimanjaro (×3), Elbrus (×2), Aconcagua (×2), Denali (2008, alone) and Carstensz Pyramid; also Cho Oyu, Tibet (2011) and Ama Dablam twice (2019, 2020).
- 2021: first Lebanese and Arab to summit K2 — led, filmed and summited within weeks — organized and led the K2 search-and-recovery expedition, locating missing teammates and documenting the controversial winter K2 tragedy from inside the climb.
- Filmed through four of the deadliest seasons in Everest history (2014, 2015, 2019, 2023); in 2023 flew a drone and captured 8K IMAX footage from 8,700m.
- Runs FindingLife Films, a production company delivering high-altitude storytelling where most crews cannot operate; footage helped shape Netflix's "Aftershock."
- Consults on Everest productions, including "Everest Dark" (high-altitude camera operator), which won multiple awards and a Canadian Screen Award nomination.
- Collaborated with brands and platforms including Under Armour and Google Street View; a skilled drone pilot fluent in gimbals, mirrorless and RED cameras, 8K and IMAX framing. Selected credits: Drop Zone Everest (2023), Aftershock (2022), Everest Dark (2026).
- In 2024, led a Kilimanjaro expedition that included a climber with albinism who has no arms.

Founder | *Adventure Stock Media Licensing — licensing.eliasaikaly.com* **2020 – Present**

- Built a royalty-free library of Mt. Everest and high-altitude footage; broadcast on PBS, ESPN, BBC, Netflix, NBC, CNN, CTV, HBO, National Geographic and Men's Journal, with clients including Discovery, Channel 4, CBC and Forces TV.
- Footage licensed for theatrical and festival projects including "Mountain" (narrated by Willem Dafoe), Reel Rock's "High Tension" and the PBS biopic "Hillary"; three Vimeo Staff Pick films went viral, the "Everest - The Summit Climb" film surpassing 18 million views.
- Provides high-touch consulting to major productions, including the Apple film "Tenzing" and the "Everest" feature film and its Icelandic VFX team, supplying footage to producers worldwide including BBC Films.

BROADCAST, MEDIA & ON-AIR TALENT

Director of Photography | *Rogers Sportsnet*

2014 – 2025

- Director of photography on 24-minute broadcast documentary specials for Rogers Sportsnet, including “Aaron Sanchez: Limitless” (MLB), “Namesake: The Vladimir Guerrero Jr. Story” (MLB), “Edwin Encarnación: On Home Turf” (MLB), “The Road: The Marco Estrada Story” (MLB), “The Secret Life of Bobby Ryan” (NHL) and “Home and Really Far Away” (shot in Nunavut, Canada — filmed the Whale Cove section with the Inuit Youth Team) — plus “Anything Is Possible: A Serge Ibaka Story” (NBA — for Uninterrupted Canada, filmed in the Congo).
- Shot 30+ short sports features for Hockey Night in Canada — NHL stars Evgeni Malkin, Matt Duchene, Andrew Ference and Nicklas Bäckström, broadcaster Bob Cole, MLB’s Kevin Pillar, the Ottawa Senators and the Montreal Canadiens.

Founder | *Reel Concepts — production company, Ottawa*

2002 – 2005

- Founded and ran a production company providing video production of live events and post-production services, including corporate and educational content.

Entertainment Correspondent & Videographer | *MuchMusic — “Rapid Fax”*

early 2000s

- Finalist in the 1999 MuchMusic VJ Search; reported and shot entertainment segments for MuchMusic’s “Rapid Fax,” filmed hundreds of live events and produced music videos and short films before turning to adventure filmmaking.

News Cameraman | *The New RO — CHUM Television, Ottawa*

1998 – 2001

- Began shooting at 15; by 19 was filming daily news in the field — fires, accidents and police operations — for the regional CHUM broadcaster.

Featured Adventurer | *“La Part du Monde” — Les Productions Rivard / TFO*

2009 – 2010

- Featured adventurer in a 15-episode documentary series presenting Canada’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites through first-person travels across the country.

Co-Star & Concept Co-Creator | *“Unclimbed: Reaching the Summit” — Discovery Canada*

- Co-created the concept for — and co-starred in — this 8-part adventure web series, training with alpinist Gabriel Filippi and Sherpa Pasang Kaji to scale unclimbed Himalayan peaks in Nepal; broadcast on Discovery Canada, sponsored by Jeep Canada and Bell Media.

Actor | *Television*

1990s – 2000s

- Appeared as an actor in MTV’s “Undressed” and the “Live Through This” series.

EDUCATION, SPEAKING & HUMAN PERFORMANCE

Founder | *FindingLife Educational Adventures — FindingLife.ca*

2007 – 2014

- Founded an interactive K-12 learning platform combining adventure, technology, education and charitable initiatives to inspire positive change in youth. Motto: Educate. Inspire. Empower.
- Connected 20,000+ Canadian schoolchildren to live expeditions in real time, broadcasting directly into classrooms and sharing them worldwide via ePals and WIGUP, then among the fastest-growing K-12 social networks.
- Led fundraising campaigns that built a well in Kathmandu, classrooms in Kenya, an orphanage in India and a new school in Banakhu, Nepal after the 2015 earthquake.

Signature projects:

- FindingLife (2008) — debut documentary of a first Everest expedition, undertaken to honour late mentor Dr. Sean Egan, a University of Ottawa professor.
- Return to Everest (2010) — FindingLife campaign broadcast live into classrooms.
- Cho Oyu Challenge (2011).
- Garnier FindingLife Expedition to Africa (2011) — campaign in partnership with the University of Ottawa and the Moving Mountains Trust, including a classroom-building project in Solio, Kenya.

Keynote & TEDx Speaker | *Represented by Speakers’ Spotlight*

2012 – Present

- Inspires leaders and teams to rise above pressure, elevate performance and thrive through disruption, combining lived insight with performance science and depth psychology in multimedia, immersive presentations that put audiences on the mountain.
- Represented by Speakers’ Spotlight since 2012, with keynotes delivered for 50+ organizations.
- Selected clients include the Bank of Canada, RCMP, Health Canada, the Department of National Defence, Scotiabank iTrade, the Smithsonian Institution and several universities and law firms.
- Spoke to over 75 schools between 2007 and 2015 as part of FindingLife.

Performance Coach & Transformative Guide | *Leaders, teams and high performers*

2024 – Present

- Guides high performers and leaders to sustainable excellence by aligning performance science with human depth, mindset mastery and embodied recovery — integrating Flow Science, Polyvagal Theory, NLP, Gestalt, Conscious Connected Breathwork and the neuroscience of recovery and focus.
- Helps clients uncover and rewire the patterns that shape performance, presence and wellbeing, and is developing immersive, experiential workshops that use nature as both mirror and catalyst for deep personal work.

NON-PROFIT & ACTIVISM

Founder & Campaign Creator | *“Climb for Albinism”*

2018

- Created the campaign and led it end to end — fundraising, filming, partnerships and operations — working with activist Jane Waithera and survivor Mariam Bandabu to support six women with albinism attempting Mt. Kilimanjaro to challenge stigma and elevate their voices.
- Climbers came from Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Senegal and Nigeria; delivered in partnership with the Canadian NGO Under The Same Sun and the Open Society Foundations.

Humanitarian Storyteller | *NGO & non-profit partnerships*

- Partnered with Generations for Peace on peace-building storytelling across South Sudan, Jordan and Lebanon.
- Created storytelling projects for the Inti Raymi Foundation (IRF) in Uganda, Kenya and South Sudan, in dual partnership with Generations for Peace.
- Field work across South Sudan, Lebanon and Jordan, capturing stories of resilience, dignity and cultural identity — including telling the story of a Syrian refugee’s fight against impossible odds.

Board Member | *Sir Edmund Hillary Foundation of Canada*

2015 – 2025

- Board member and supporter of the foundation’s mission to help the Sherpa people through health, education and environmental initiatives; speaks at fundraising galas as a storyteller, social activist and entrepreneur.

AWARDS & RECOGNITION

- Canadian Screen Award (formerly the Gemini Award) — won by the Sportsnet team, with Elia as director of photography, for “Limitless,” the Aaron Sanchez story.
- CINE Golden Eagle Award — high-altitude director of photography on “On the Top,” MediaDante’s documentary series following pioneering Everest climbers including the first Saudi woman, Raha Moharrak, and Qatari royal Mohammed AlThani (six episodes, 2013).
- Canadian Screen Award nomination as part of the camera team for the feature documentary “Everest Dark” (two-time CSA nominee overall).
- Published photographer in National Geographic Magazine (twice).

EDUCATION

Television Broadcasting Diploma | *Algonquin College of Applied Arts & Technology*

1997 – 1999

PROFESSIONAL TRAINING & CERTIFICATIONS

- Certified Breathwork Facilitator — 400-hour Conscious Connected Breathwork (CCB); Breathwork Master course; Breath Science Practitioner (in training).
- Mind-Body Practitioner — 400-hour MBFI Institute; Oxygen Advantage Advanced Instructor (120 hours).
- Functional Coaching — Mastin Kipp (200 hours); Hypnosis Foundations — Marisa Peer.
- Neuroscience of Flow & High Performance — Flow Research Collective.
- Gestalt, Polyvagal Theory & Reichian Character Structures — Art of Instinct & Intuition (Duey Freeman & Kimberly Rose).

SKILLS & TOOLS

- Video & photo: Adobe Premiere (30 years as a video editor) and Lightroom; drone, gimbal, mirrorless, RED, 8K and IMAX workflows.
- AI tools: Claude, ChatGPT, Midjourney and Grok.
- Productivity & web: Google Workspace and WordPress.
- Languages: fully bilingual in English and French.

OTHER PURSUITS & INTERESTS

- Paragliding pilot (2013–2014).
- 2018: lived out of a 1975 pistachio-green Dodge Tradesman van — drove from Ottawa to California, shipped it to the UK and drove to Turkey exploring Europe, and toured the northwestern United States.
- Snowboarding enthusiast and rides a vintage Triumph Street Twin motorcycle.
- And — just for fun — lead singer, guitarist and songwriter for the punk rock band The Fairy Boys (ages 15–21).