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press release

THIRTEEN/WNET NEW YORK PRESENTS **ROLLING**, AN INTIMATE LOOK AT THE WORLD FROM THE WHEELS UP, PREMIERING IN JANUARY ON PUBLIC TELEVISION

Three People In Wheelchairs Film Their Lives, Challenges And Triumphs

“Something as small as getting back into my chair can be a pretty big victory. I’m not always sure people can see that. That’s why I took the camera.”

– Vicki Elman

When Dr. Gretchen Berland gave video cameras to three Los Angeles residents in wheelchairs and asked them to film their daily lives, she wasn’t sure what they would capture. In the end –after nearly two years and 212 hours of tape – Galen Buckwalter, Ernie Wallengren and Vicki Elman did far more than accomplish Berland’s goal of providing care givers, policy makers and health care professionals insight into life on wheels for 1.6 million Americans. The resulting one-hour documentary provides frank and dignified self-portraits of three wildly divergent people using wit and humor to fight their way in a world that is often cruelly unaccommodating. “Even though the film started out as a way of understanding the experience of being in a wheelchair, in the end, it’s really about life,” says Berland. “It’s not about feeling sorry for someone with a disability.”

Produced, written and directed by Gretchen Berland, an assistant professor of medicine at Yale University, **ROLLING** is presented on public television by Thirteen/WNET New York and distributed by American Public Television. Executive-in-charge for Thirteen/WNET is William R. Grant. **ROLLING** premieres in January (check local listings).

“If we want to create a patient-centered health care system, we need to better understand the perspective of the patient,” says Berland, a former producer for public television. “How do you really understand someone’s viewpoint? One option is to give them a camera.”

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ROLLING was named best documentary at the Independent Film Project conference for works in progress, held in New York City. The film was also one of 14 new American films chosen by the Independent Film Project for screening at the European Film Market, which was held in conjunction with the Berlin Film Festival.

While Berland and her cinematographer both shot footage for **ROLLING**, the documentary is primarily filmed by the three participants via video cameras mounted on their chairs: Buckwalter, a clinical psychologist paralyzed at 17; Wallengren, a TV writer with five children who suffered from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), which stole his mobility and, finally, his ability to speak and breathe; and Elman, who was the business manager for a department at the UCLA School of Medicine until multiple sclerosis put her in a chair.

In the film, Buckwalter calls himself a "proud gimp" and says, "My blessings don't stop it from hurting." Each participant captures the joy of living as well as the pain. Buckwalter films himself practicing with his band, Siggy, camping with his wife and friends, stressing aching shoulders by repeatedly lifting himself in and out of his car, and during a frustrating doctor's visit. Wallengren is seen deftly coaching his sons' basketball team, dealing with awkward comments from well-meaning people at a birthday party, and using dry humor to deflect difficult situations.

"This is a tape about what it's like to have ALS, what it's like to live in a wheelchair, what it's like to live inside the walls of my house," Wallengren says in the film. "With a son who plays the drums."

Elman, the divorced mother of a daughter in medical school, is seen advocating for Californians for Disability Rights and a bill called the "V. Elman Community Living Act," which would make it easier for the disabled to live at home.

ROLLING shows first-hand the importance of preserving dignity and independence, and how easy it is for the healthcare system to ignore those needs. When the power wheelchair Elman depends on breaks down, her doctor asks her, "What are we going to do with you in the

meantime?” Although Elman and her doctor decide a brief stay in a nursing home is the safest option, she ends up spending a month there, during which time her camera records an aide refusing to take her to the bathroom and instructing her to use a bedpan or a diaper instead. After that, the nursing home takes away the camera, citing patient privacy concerns.

“Because most people can walk and run and climb, and since I can’t, I’m defined as disabled,” Buckwalter says in **ROLLING**. “Not only defined as disabled, I’m expected to act and feel disabled. For many years I did the same, but what they don’t see now is that I’m a survivor.”

To extend the reach and impact of **ROLLING** beyond the broadcast, Thirteen/WNET will launch an accompanying community outreach campaign in cooperation with five public television stations across the country. Participating stations will hold panel discussions, community forums and screening events to spark community dialogue focused on the themes and content of the film. In addition, stations will partner with a local health care, education or advocacy group to maximize local opportunities and reach key community stakeholders.

An accompanying Web site will answer basic questions viewers may have about the program, and feature updates on the film’s participants and original content, such as video diaries and a syndication of YouTube content. Educational and outreach materials will also be available, either online or downloadable.

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Thirteen/WNET New York

Thirteen/WNET New York is one of the key program providers for public television, bringing such acclaimed series as *Nature*, *Great Performances*, *American Masters*, *Charlie Rose*, *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, *Wide Angle*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *NOW With David Brancaccio*, and *Cyberchase* – as well as the work of Bill Moyers – to audiences nationwide. As the flagship public broadcaster in the New York, New Jersey and Connecticut metro area, Thirteen reaches millions

of viewers each week, airing the best of American public television along with its own local productions such as The Ethnic Heritage Specials, The Thirteen Walking Tours, *New York Voices*, and *Reel New York*. Thirteen extends the impact of its television productions through educational and community outreach projects – including the Celebration of Teaching and Learning – as well as Web sites and other digital media platforms. More information can be found at: www.thirteen.org.

American Public Television

For 45 years, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation's public television stations. APT is known for its leadership in identifying innovative, worthwhile and viewer-friendly programming. It has established a tradition of providing public television stations with program choices that strengthen and customize their schedules, such as *America's Test Kitchen From Cook's Illustrated*, *Battlefield Britain*, *The Big Comfy Couch*, *Globe Trekker*, *Great Museums*, *Lidia's Family Table*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *P. Allen Smith's Garden Home*, and other prominent documentaries, dramatic series, how-to programs, and classic movies. For more information about APT's programs and services, visit APTonline.org.

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