

Lives Worth Living airs in October Show explores disability movement history

by [Luther Granquist](#) // September 10th, 2011

While there are close to 50 million Americans living with disabilities, *Lives Worth Living* is the first television history of their decades-long struggle for equal rights. Produced and directed by Eric Neudel, *Lives Worth Living* is a window into a world inhabited by people with an unwavering determination to live their lives like everyone else, and a look back into a past when millions of Americans lived without access to schools, apartment buildings, and public transportation—a way of life unimaginable today. *Lives Worth Living* premieres on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, at 10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 27. Check local television listings for details.

Lives Worth Living traces the development of the disability rights movement from its beginning following World War II, when thousands of disabled veterans returned home, through its burgeoning in the 1960s and 1970s, when it began to adopt the tactics of other social movements. Told through interviews with the movement's pioneers, legislators, and others, *Lives Worth Living* explores how Americans with a wide variety of disabilities – including the blind and deaf, mentally and physically challenged – banded together to change public perception and policy. Through demonstrations and legislative battles, the disability rights community finally secured equal civil rights with the 1990 passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act, one of the most transformative pieces of civil rights legislation in America's history.

To learn more about the film, and the issues involved, visit the companion website at www.pbs.org/independentlens/ Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmaker, and explore the subject in depth with links and resources.

The site also features a Talkback section where viewers can share their ideas and opinions.

Many prominent people in the disability movement appear in this documentary. They are, in order of appearance: Fred Fay, early leader in the disability rights movement; Ann Ford, director of the Illinois National Council on Independent Living; Judy Heumann, leading disability rights activist; Judi Chamberlin, Mental Patients Liberation Front, a movement for the rights and dignity of people with mental illness (1944-2010); Dr. William Bronston, former staff physician at the notorious Willowbrook State School who was dismissed after agitating for change; Bob Kafka, established ADAPT of Texas, a disability rights advocacy organization; Zona Roberts, Counselor, UC Berkeley's Physically Disabled Students' Program and Center for Independent Living, Berkeley; mother of disability rights pioneer Ed Roberts; Pat Wright, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund; John Wodatch, Chief, Disability Rights Section, Civil Rights Division, U. S. Department of Justice; Jack Duncan, Former Counsel, U.S. House of Representatives; Mary Jane Owen, disability rights activist, philosopher, policy expert and writer; Marca Bristo, CEO, Access Living and leader in the disability rights movement; Michael Winter, former director, Berkeley Center for Independent Living; Lex Frieden, former director, National Council on the Handicapped; Dr. I. King Jordan, President Emeritus, Gallaudet

University; Jeff Rosen, alumni leader, Gallaudet University Sen. Tom Harkin, (D-Iowa); Bobby Silverstein, Chief Counsel, Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy; Richard Thornburgh, US Attorney General, 1988-1991; Tony Coelho, former Congressman, House Majority Whip, 1986-1989.

The documentary producer/director, Eric Neudel, has produced, directed and edited numerous awardwinning films for public television. His many credits include *Eyes on the Prize*, *AIDS: Chapter One*, *LBJ Goes to War*, *Tet 1968*, *Steps*, *After the Crash*, *The Philippines and The US: In Our Image*, *Body and Soul*, and more. He was a Visiting Senior Critic and Lecturer in film at Yale University and served as producer, director and editor for Harvard University's Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning, and Spectrum Media's program series on the art and craft of teaching. Neudel was also a photographer and video production consultant, teaching video production to a team working for the Compass Project in Malawi. Photographs from his two years in Malawi were exhibited in the Sandra and Phillip Gordon Gallery at The Boston Arts Academy in October 2007.

He also served as story consultant for *Row Hard No Excuses*, an award-winning documentary about two middle aged American men who set out to cross the Atlantic in a rowboat. Most recently he served as a photographer in Rwanda for the Boston Globe where he directed, produced and edited a companion documentary about the Maranyundo Middle School built on the site of one of the worst concentration camps and killing fields in Rwanda.

Independent Lens is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. Independent Lens features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by the Independent Television Service (ITVS), the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns.

Independent Lens is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

Would you like to make history? Access Press is interested in reader submissions for the monthly History Note column, to complement the articles written by Luther Granquist and other contributors. Submissions must center on events, people and places in the history of Minnesota's disability community. We are interested in history that focuses on all types of physical and cognitive disabilities, so long as the history has a tie to Minnesota. We are especially interested in stories from Greater Minnesota.

Please submit ideas prior to submitting full stories, as we may have covered the topic before. Past History Note articles can be found on www.accesspress.org Contact us at access@accesspress.org or 651-644-2133 if you have questions.

The History Note is a monthly column sponsored by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, www.mncdd.org and www.partnersinpolicymaking.com