



WRETCHES & JABBERERS

A FILM BY GERARDINE WURZBURG
wretchesandjabberers.org

NEWS RELEASE

“Banishes the myths about autism and reveals its global face.” – Parade

“An eye-opening and most entertaining doc... nearly perfect” – The Hollywood Reporter

“Autism finds its voice.” – Newsweek

“Ingenious documentary about real autistics” – Wall Street Journal

WRETCHES & JABBERERS

ROADTRIP FILM SHEDS PERSONAL LIGHT ON THE GLOBAL FACE OF AUTISM

Oscar® winner and twice Academy Award®-nominated filmmaker, Gerardine Wurzburg, has completed a compelling new feature documentary called *Wretches & Jabberers*. Wurzburg's inspiring documentary chronicles the world travels of disability rights advocates, Tracy Thresher and Larry Bissonnette, in a bold quest to change attitudes about the intelligence and abilities of people with autism.

The documentary opened its theatrical run in AMC Theaters with a premiere in New York City on April 1st, 2011 and a West Coast run in Los Angeles on April 15th, 2011. *Wretches & Jabberers* launched a 40-city U.S. tour in partnership with AMC Theatres and the Autism Society during April as part of Autism Awareness Month. In response to the tremendous success of the 40-city tour, the “100 CITIES. ONE NIGHT FOR AUTISM.” *movievent* took place on Thursday, May 12th, 2011 in 100 theaters, in nearly every major U.S. city, from New York to Honolulu, and was sponsored by the John P. Hussman Foundation again in partnership with the Autism Society. The film is slated for DVD and VOD release July 1, 2011. For more information, please visit our website, www.wretchesandjabberers.org.

“Our goal was to shine a light on autism internationally. Larry and Tracy’s journey allowed us to portray the global face of autism through the personal stories of six men and women throughout the world,” explains Producer and Director Gerardine Wurzburg. The result is a provocative mixture of advocacy, personal portrait and travel adventure film - seasoned with liberal doses of humor.

Until the 1980s, most children and young adults with autism in the US were excluded from normal schooling. Some were placed in mental institutions. Like many children with autism, Tracy and Larry grew up unable to speak. They faced a future of social isolation in adult disability centers. When Tracy was 23 and Larry 34, their lives changed when they learned to communicate by typing. Larry notes, “nothing I did...convinced people I had an inner life until I started typing.”

In the film, Tracy and Larry take to the road to promote awareness of the hidden intelligence in those who face speech and communication challenges, connecting with others like them across the globe who struggle to find a means of expression. Tracy, Larry and their support team, Harvey Lavoy and Pascal Cheng, visit Sri Lanka, Japan and Finland, giving interviews and presentations and learning about the lives of people with autism in these countries. Viewers share

in their eye-opening experiences as the men negotiate the terrain of travel, culture and new friendships on what they aptly named The World Intelligence Magnified Tour.

The first stop is Sri Lanka, where they visit old friend Chammi Rajapatirana, 35, who they have met at conferences in the US. Together, the group meets with parents of children with autism to demonstrate their communication skills, answer their urgent questions, and appeal to the parents to believe in their children's innate intelligence. "You will be surprised how often we make wrong assumptions about ability," Chammi tells the group.

In Japan, Tracy and Larry meet 16-year-old Naoki Higashida. Naoki is an accomplished artist who has published more than ten books of his stories and drawings but is denied access to public school. Meeting Tracy and Larry is a revelation to him. He says, "I never had a conversation like this with people that communicate the way I do." He eagerly joins the men in presenting at a national autism conference at Tokyo University.

Their final trip is to Helsinki, Finland where they are interviewed by a Finnish filmmaker and present at the Autism Foundation Conference. Here, they meet Antti Lappalainen, 21, and Henna Laulainen, 23. Both are accomplished in their ability to communicate through typing and yet, spend their days doing meaningless chores in adult disabilities centers. Antti says, "Language is everything I am. Completely different than my misunderstood appearance."

It is Antti who humorously declares the world divided into "Wretches" - those with limited speech - and "Jabberers" - those who can speak freely. He tells the group, "We poor wretches are better than jabberers. They don't know it yet, but we will tell it to them [at the conference]." At the end of that conference, Antti strikes a more serious note, asking the audience to "dispel the darkness around us poor wretches. Take us for real people. Don't sideline us."

Throughout the film, Tracy, Larry and their compatriots inspire parents, educators and others with autism through their poignant narratives of personal struggle that always ring with intelligence, humor, hope and courage. Of his experience working on the film, Tracy reflects, "It has had a cathartic learning explosive effect on my life with good movement of ideas, thoughts and feelings. I was feeling less autistic and felt I had purpose in life." Larry adds, "I get proud thoughts thinking Tracy and I can fasten our perspectives on the public's consciousness."

Gerardine Wurzburg Produced and Directed *Wretches & Jabberers*. She received the Academy Award® for Best Documentary Short Subject in 1993 for her HBO film, *Educating Peter*. For HBO, she also produced the feature documentary, *Graduating Peter*. In 2004, her film *Autism is a World* was also nominated for the Academy Award®. It was broadcast worldwide on CNN. She is the Founder and President of State of the Art, Inc., a communications company in Washington, DC whose work focuses on the use of media to promote change in education and health. For more information, visit www.stateart.com.

Douglas Biklen, Producer of *Wretches & Jabberers*, is the Dean of the School of Education and founder of the Inclusion Institutes at Syracuse University. He is also the author of *Autism and the Myth of the Person Alone* (NYU Press, 2005). He previously collaborated with Gerardine Wurzburg as the co-producer on *Autism is a World* and served as an advisor on Wurzburg's films *Educating Peter* and *Graduating Peter*.

Wretches & Jabberers features original music by composer J. Ralph (*The Cove*, *Man on Wire*) with a soundtrack featuring original songs written and produced by J. Ralph in collaboration with Antony, Devendra Banhart, Paul Brady, Bonnie Bramlett, Vashti Bunyan, Martin Carthy, Judy Collins, Lila Downs, Vincent Gallo, David Garza, Ben Harper, Scarlett Johansson, Nic Jones, Norah Jones, Leah Siegel, Carly Simon, Stephen Stills, Ben Taylor and Bob Weir. The *Wretches & Jabberers* album was released on January 11, 2011, and a share of the profits are donated to

the Autism Society and the Wretches & Jabberers Fund of the Institute on Communication and Inclusion at Syracuse University.

John P. Hussman, Executive Producer of *Wretches and Jabberers*, is the director of the John P. Hussman Foundation, which provides life-changing assistance to vulnerable individuals with urgent needs or significant disabilities, through global funding for medical research, education, and direct intervention. He has authored and co-authored research on the neurology and genetics of autism in several leading academic journals.

About State of the Art, Inc.: The film is a production of State of the Art, an Academy Award®-winning communications company that creates programs, materials and campaigns in education and health that make the leap between good ideas and change. www.stateart.com

About Area 23a: Area23a is a bi-coastal, independently owned "event" based theatrical distribution company, co-founded by distribution guru Richard Abramowitz and Ocule Films founder, Kirt Eftekhari. The company focuses on event driven films, providing value-added distribution through alternative ways to reach audiences across the country, releasing films in libraries, museums, community centers, and college campuses, in addition to traditional venues like theaters, cinematheques and festivals. Area23a distributes award-winning films such as Bill Guttentag's SOUNDTRACK FOR A REVOLUTION, Michael Paul Stephenson's BEST WORST MOVIE and Alex Rotaru's THEY CAME TO PLAY, as well as the upcoming TO CATCH A DOLLAR directed by Gayle Ferraro. www.area23a.com

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Executive Producer John P. Hussman
Produced by Douglas Biklen and Gerardine Wurzburg
Directed by Gerardine Wurzburg
Music by J. Ralph
Director of Photography Gary Griffin
A Production of State of the Art, Inc.
Running Time: 94 minutes
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