



Contact:

Cathy Fisher, 212-989-7425, [cfisher@pov.org](mailto:cfisher@pov.org)

Karen Reynolds, 212-989-7425, [kreynolds@pov.org](mailto:kreynolds@pov.org)

Online Pressroom: [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom)

**P.O.V.'s "FREEDOM MACHINES"  
By Jamie Stobie and Janet Cole  
Airs Tuesday, September 9\* on PBS**

***MEDIA ALERT – FACT SHEET***

National Air

Date:

**Tuesday, September 9, 2008** at 10 p.m. on PBS. (\*Check local listings.)

The **P.O.V.** series (a cinema term for "point of view"), now in its 21st year on PBS, is broadcast June through October, with primetime specials in the fall and winter.

Summary:

**Freedom Machines** is an unprecedented look at disability in the age of technology, presenting intimate stories of adults and children, ages 8-93 whose independence and talents are being unleashed by access to modern, enabling tools. Nearly twenty years after the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act, the film reflects on the gaps between its promise and the realities for our largest minority group, 54 million Americans with disabilities. Whether mainstream technology or extraordinary inventions such as stair-climbing wheelchairs, **Freedom Machines** reveals the power and limitations of technology to change lives.

Narrated by actor Peter Dinklage, star of the acclaimed film *The Station Agent*.  
*An Independent Television Service (ITVS) co-presentation.*

Filmmakers'  
Statements:

**Jamie Stobie**

"This film looks at the intersection of technology and human ability. There are so many people who are dependent on technology for the most basic things: to speak, to hear, to pick something up, to go from here to there. People with disabilities are the ones who are really pushing the envelope and saying, 'This is good, but it can really be a lot better.' Their experiences are key to the refinement and development of new tools that all people will use in their everyday lives.

"The most shocking thing I realized in making the film is how difficult we make it in our society for disabled people to secure their most basic-needs. The purpose of this film is to let people know that there is technology out there that can change their lives, and we are talking about a huge percentage of our country: 54 million people and growing."

**Janet Cole**

"As a longtime producer of social-issue films, I became interested in the civil rights issues for Americans with disabilities when I began to find out how little I really knew. Like many people, I thought the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990 had taken care of things! What a revelation it has been to learn that the status of life for most people with disabilities is a far cry from the promise of the ADA and other legislation of the past 25 years. While the laws appear to be based on the goals of independence and inclusion, the funding streams and our basic cultural attitudes still stigmatize people with disabilities as being 'ill' or 'other,' and not part of the normal fabric of life.

"Access to technology makes it possible to engage in education, employment, and the basic activities of life. Lack of access remands millions of people to lives of dependence and isolation. This begs the question: 'what is really disabled here?' The people in **Freedom Machines** give us a small glimpse into the enormous talent pool that is going unnoticed and unused in this country and throughout the world."

People Featured in

**Freedom Machines: Shoshana and Jackie Brand**

A native of the San Francisco Bay Area, Shoshana Brand has been utilizing technology to achieve her goals since she was young, with the strong and continuous advocacy efforts of her parents, Steve and Jackie. Since Shoshana was a child, her mother saw the potential for newly emerging technologies to help her communicate and interact with the rest of the world. Jackie and Shoshana have been partnering with engineers, people with disabilities, and parents, through their grassroots organization – the Alliance for Technology Access – dedicated to providing training and access to technology for people with disabilities. Currently, Shoshana has her own company, Blue Rose Videos with a Voice, a video-rental service designed especially for people with visual impairments. She rents films with audio description to people across the country, using her technology skills and the Internet.

**Dr. Kent Cullers**

Born premature in a small hospital in Oklahoma, Kent Cullers received too much oxygen by doctors and as a result, lost his eyesight hours soon after birth. Fully integrated into a sighted school system as a child, Dr. Cullers was encouraged to do all the activities other children participated in, such as riding a bicycle and playing baseball.

As a physicist, Dr. Cullers is the Director of Research and Development at the SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence) Institute in Palo Alto, Calif. He designs computer programs to look for intelligent forms of life in the universe. Using computer technology such as a Braille Display keyboard, he created computer programs that can "hear" better than the human ear by a factor of a thousand. Simultaneously, the technology he created looks at trillions of signals of incoming data from other planets and stars.

**Bonita Dearmond**

A blind single mother of two in Etheridge, Tenn., Bonita Dearmond recalls a time when the institutionalization of people with disabilities was the norm. Even though both have been blind from birth, Bonita had a very dissimilar experience to Dr. Cullers. Bonita recounts how limited expectations were for her when she was in school. She recalls 1975 as the year her life changed: when public schools had to provide an equal education setting for all because the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed. She states, "That was the ultimate achievement in my life – to come back to the community and a public school, and to say, 'I can do it.'"

Despite a college degree in special education and advanced training in specialized technology, Bonita remains among the 70% of working-aged adults with disabilities who are unemployed. Bonita currently has a gospel radio show.

**LaToya Nesmith**

LaToya, a 17-year old high school student from upstate New York, has found that getting the technology she needs has been hard at every public school. LaToya and her mother, Felicia Smalls, are working hard to get her the computer applications she needs, but find themselves dealing with school systems and state bureaucracies that limit their choices. Currently, LaToya uses a keyboard with enlarged keys that mitigate her limited dexterity to complete her classroom assignments. She plans on one day being a translator at the United Nations. Fascinated with languages, she hopes to create an opera in Polish or Dutch.

### **Floyd Stewart**

A disability-rights advocate in Nashville, Tenn., Floyd Stewart became a quadriplegic after a car accident in his mid-30s. He spent five and half years in a nursing home after his accident before attending Middle Tennessee State University in Murfreesboro. He graduated with a major in psychology in 1989. He now uses assistive technologies to run Middle Tennessee's Center for Independent Living. He lives in Nashville independently with the aid of family and personal care assistants. As a mentor and an advocate he asks, "Why pay \$65,000 a year to keep someone in a nursing home when \$25,000 would allow them to live independently?"

### **Susanna Sweeney-Martini and Sue Sweeney**

A first-year student at the University of Washington in Seattle, Susanna uses a voice input program to allow her to speak to her computer to complete her class assignments. She acknowledges that technology has had an enormous effect on her life, saying her voice input software is "probably the best thing they ever came up with for me – well, aside from a wheelchair."

Her mother, Sue Sweeney, is a special-education teacher who has been a tireless advocate for her daughter's needs. She expresses her frustration at the lack of public funding for those with disabilities. "Where is the money and why isn't it used here? Because they don't think these people will be out voting. They don't consider that Susanna is going to make a difference, but they're really in for a big surprise."

### **Gladys Wang**

At 93, Gladys, like 40% of Americans 65 years and older, has a disability. Her profound hearing loss has inspired her to look for anything that might help, so that she can participate in family and community events, possibly doing some volunteer work. She needs an advanced hearing aid with a special T-switch for the telephone and is considering a telephone relay service. Originally from Chicago, Mrs. Wang currently lives in San Francisco.

Filmmakers'  
Biographies:

### **Jamie Stobie**

#### **Producer/Director**

Jamie Stobie's career spans a quarter century, 12 films and several film series for PBS. Her credits include **Cadillac Desert**, Jon Else's acclaimed series about water and the west based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book; **Life Beyond Earth**, the PBS special on astronomy and the search for extraterrestrial life with author Tim Ferris, the WGBH series **Evolution**, and Carl Sagan's **Cosmos**.

### **Janet Cole**

#### **Executive Producer**

Janet Cole's recent credits, **Promises**, **Paragraph 175**, **Heart of the Sea** and **Regret to Inform** garnered her Oscar® and Emmy nominations, two Emmy awards and a Peabody Award. All had primetime broadcasts and extensive outreach programs. Cole has specialized in the strategic distribution of social-issue films for over 20 years and has been a consultant for PBS, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the MacArthur Foundation, the Sundance Institute, and many filmmakers.

#### **Credits:**

Producer/ Director: Jamie Stobie  
Executive Producer: Janet Cole  
Editor: Ken Schneider  
Co-Producer: Sharon Wood  
Senior Associate Producer: Betsy Bayha

Director of  
Photography: Robert Elfstrom  
Project Director: Richard Cox

On P.O.V. Interactive: Access the **Freedom Machines** website at [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov) to find out more about the assistive technology shown in the film, the future of assistive technology, the current state of accessibility legislation and the differences and shared goals of universal design.

### **What is Assistive Technology?**

Find out more about the assistive technology shown in the film, including magnification aids, JAWS, the IBOT, IntelliKeys and other IntelliTools, and links to resources to search databases of over 25,000 AT devices available today.

### **Inaccessible Web**

The promise of the Web as a universal source of information for all has not been realized. Judy Brewer, the director of the World Wide Web Consortium's Accessibility Initiative, talks about the current status of accessibility online. Surf along with Myrna Votta, the chief website evaluator for Lighthouse International, a leading worldwide resource that helps people overcome vision impairment through rehabilitation, education, research and advocacy.

### **Universal Design and Assistive Technology**

Though coming from quite different histories and directions, the purpose of universal design and assistive technology is the same: to reduce the physical and attitudinal barriers between people with and without disabilities. Learn more about the six principles of universal design with examples from around the world in a pop-up photo gallery.

### **Resources**

Hear from Susanna and her mom about the inaccessibility of voting booths, Bonita about the special challenges that rural areas present to people dealing with disabilities, and Floyd's advice about independent living, plus links to helpful websites, organizations and much more.

About P.O.V.:

Now in its 17th season on PBS, P.O.V. is the first and longest-running series on television to feature the work of America's most innovative documentary storytellers. Bringing over 200 award-winning films to millions nationwide, and now a new Web-only series, *P.O.V.'s Borders*, P.O.V. has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent non-fiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues.

Major funding for P.O.V. is provided by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Educational Foundation of America, PBS and public television viewers. Funding for *Talking Back* and *P.O.V.'s Borders: Environment* ([www.pbs.org/pov/borders](http://www.pbs.org/pov/borders)) is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Support for P.O.V. is provided by Starbucks Coffee Company. P.O.V. is presented by a consortium of public television stations including KCET/Los Angeles, WGBH/Boston, and WNET/New York. Cara Mertes is executive director of P.O.V., which is a division of American Documentary, Inc.

**To download additional press materials, transcripts and color art visit P.O.V.'s online pressroom at [www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pressroom).**