

TRUE LIVES

A New Limited Series from the Producers of *P.O.V.*

For Immediate Release

Contacts:

Cynthia López, 212-989-7425, clopez@pov.org

Cathy Lehrfeld, 212-989-7425, clehrfeld@pov.org

IF I CAN'T DO IT

Arthur Campbell, Jr.'s unforgettable ride through life and the disability rights movement.

"... [this] film about a disabilities-rights activist is an inspiration. ...a must see."

– San Diego Union-Tribune

Documentary Distributed by American Public Television
Available for January – December 2005 Scheduling

Arthur Campbell, Jr. doesn't want your sympathy, he just wants what most people do: a living wage, a meaningful social life, a few good laughs and the means to get around. In **If I Can't Do It**, filmmaker Walter Brock offers an unflinching portrait of one cantankerous and courageous disabled man who, with many others, is pushing for independence and an equal slice of the American pie. From the remote hills of Kentucky to the hallowed halls of Congress, join Arthur on his own unforgettable ride through life and the disability rights movement. An intensely personal, deeply humanizing look at what it takes to live with a severely disabling condition, **If I Can't Do It** is the story of an ordinary man confronted by extraordinary circumstances.

If I Can't Do It airs on public television stations as part of *True Lives*, a series presented by American Public Television and American Documentary, Inc. *True Lives* is a new programming initiative from the producers of P.O.V.

In 1987, filmmaker Walter Brock was hired by the state of Kentucky to work on a series of films about disability issues. Several weeks into the project, he met Campbell. "Nothing in my life prepared me for my first sight of Arthur," Brock recalls. "There he sat in his wheelchair, drooling, arms flailing, making loud noises that I could not imagine made sense. My first thought was, 'What kind of life could this guy possibly have? Maybe the most merciful thing would be to put him out of his misery.' Years later, this initial reaction still haunts me. Where does such prejudice come from? I

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want viewers to experience the discomfort that I felt, to process and examine it, and come out on the other side of that discomfort with a greater sense of acceptance and tolerance and awareness of the barriers that affect people and prevent them from participating in the life that most of us able-bodied Americans take for granted."

Born with cerebral palsy in an isolated cabin in the Kentucky mountains in 1944, Campbell spent the first 38 years of his life at home, sheltered by his overprotective parents. Determined to leave home one way or another, he went on a hunger strike to push his parents into placing him in an institution, the only choice he thought existed. Campbell's parents panicked and brought him to a hospital where he was placed in the psychiatric ward, evaluated and found to be perfectly capable of independent living. Soon, aided by social service workers, Campbell got his first electric wheelchair, rented an apartment and began the difficult process of learning to fend for himself.

Brock and Campbell spent six years collaborating on ***If I Can't Do It***, and the two became good friends in the process. The film features intimate interviews with Campbell, his parents, siblings, therapists and first roommate, along with other disability rights activists, including members of ADAPT* (Americans Disabled for Accessible Public Transportation) where Campbell received his first training in civil disobedience. "Where would the blacks be if that poor, tired lady hadn't decided to fight back and not give up her seat on the bus?" asks Campbell. "It takes someone to make a stand, someone to say, 'I've had enough.' In our case, we can't even get on the bus, let alone ride in the back." Crashing their wheelchairs through police lines and manacled themselves to buses in acts of civil disobedience, Campbell and his fellow activists helped dramatize the need for access for people with disabilities. In one of the film's most stirring sequences, Campbell participates in a Washington, D.C. protest rally in which 70 disabled activists laboriously drag themselves up the steps of our nation's Capitol. Their efforts helped spur the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990.

"For most of my first 38 years, I had no life outside my parents' home and didn't know or believe any was possible," Campbell writes in his unpublished autobiography. "During this time, I watched a lot of television and I never saw a program about anyone whose life was like mine. Before I got out of my parents' house, I thought my problems were unique - that is, until I began to be around other disabled people, and I discovered how similar our stories were."

* *Currently, ADAPT stands for Americans Disabled for Attendant Programs Today.*

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"Our culture has a tendency to assign certain roles to people with disabilities; they're either heroes or pathetic, pitiable poster children," says Brock. "This film attempts to look at Arthur Campbell as a human being, to look at him not only through the lens of his accomplishments and his aspirations, but also through his foibles, his grandiosity and his many charming, endearing and infuriating qualities." During the course of the film, the witty, stubborn and often exasperating Campbell feuds with his sister, has a falling out with his radical activist pals and loses his job as a disabled rights advocate for the state of Kentucky. Neither a hero nor a saint, he emerges as a far more compelling character: a complex individual working to fulfill his dreams by seizing control of his own existence and living his life on his own terms. "Do you think I have delusions of grandeur?" Campbell asks at the film's end. "Maybe so. But where would I be without my ego?"

If I Can't Do It has received numerous awards and recognition, including an Emmy nomination for Brock's direction and the Alfred I. duPont-Columbia Award for Excellence in Broadcast Journalism.

If I Can't Do It was produced in association with the Independent Television Service (ITVS).

About the Filmmaker:

Walter Brock is a critically acclaimed documentary producer/director whose work has been screened and broadcast all over the world. His most recent film *LAND (AND HOW IT GETS THAT WAY)*, about preservation, property rights, people and the land, will be broadcast on PBS in the spring of 2005. An earlier film, *A SEASON IN HELL*, about a young Kentucky woman's struggle with eating disorders, was featured in P.O.V.'s 1992 season, won Best Documentary at the USA and Atlanta film festivals, and was screened at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. His other films include *OTHER PRISONERS* (1986) and *WRITING IN WATER* (1984), both directed by Stephen Roszell. Brock also currently teaches art at St. Francis High School in Louisville, Kentucky.

Credits:

Producer, Director:	Walter Brock
Director of Photography:	Peter Pearce
Writers:	Arthur Campbell, Jr. and Walter Brock
Voice-Over Narration:	Nick Stump
Editors:	Walter Brock, Jim Klein and Ben Daughtry

Cara Mertes is the Executive Producer of *True Lives*. The series is produced by American Documentary, Inc. Major funding for *True Lives* is provided by the Tides Foundation.

American Public Television

For 42 years, American Public Television (APT) has been a prime source of programming for the nation's public television stations. APT has more than 10,000 hours of available programming including *Discovering the Real World of Harry Potter*, *Globe Trekker*, *Muhammad Ali: Through the Eyes of the World*, *Nightly Business Report*, *Rick Steves' Europe*, *Julia and Jacques Cooking at Home*, *Ballykissangel*, *Brian Jacques' Redwall* and *Sinatra: The Classic Duets*. APT is known for identifying innovative programs and developing creative distribution techniques for producers. In more than four decades, it has established a tradition of providing public television stations

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nationwide with program choices that enable them to strengthen and customize their schedules. For more information about APT's programs and services, log on to **www.aptonline.org**.

***American Documentary, Inc.* (www.americandocumentary.org)**

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. Through two divisions, *P.O.V.* and *Active Voice*, and additional initiatives, AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, on-line and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

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