

PRESENTS

Cruel and Unusual

IMAGINE BEING A WOMAN IN A MEN'S PRISON

Approx. 60 Minutes

Color

High-Definition Video

Street Date: October 24, 2006

Suggested Retail Price: \$24.95

SKU: D1115

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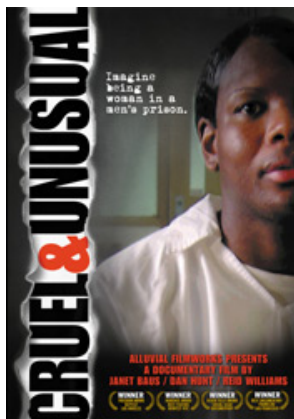
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Award-Winning Documentary Examining Transgender Women in Men's Prisons Soon Available From Alluvial Filmworks

“Groundbreaking! At times graceful, at times unflinching, *Cruel and Unusual* is haunting, urgent and intense.”
- M. J. Herrup, South by Southwest Film Festival



Los Angeles, California — September 18, 2006 — Critics and human rights advocates are raving about Alluvial Filmworks' newest release *Cruel and Unusual*. This award-winning documentary by seasoned filmmakers Janet Baus, Dan Hunt and Reid Williams confronts the realities male-to-female transgender prisoners in the United States face and questions whether their treatment violates their basic human rights afforded by the Constitution. The DVD will be available in stores on October 24, 2006.

“Cruel and Unusual’s gripping examination of transgender prisoners’ lives is overwhelming,” said Ron Miller, President of Village Lighthouse, Inc., the parent company of Alluvial Filmworks. *“It brilliantly illustrates how the transgender community can often be overlooked, misunderstood and discriminated against — even in our judicial system. We are honored to add Cruel and Unusual to the Alluvial Filmworks collection because it impressively and accurately reflects the lives of a often marginalized segment of our community.”*

Imagine being a woman in a men’s prison. For many transgender individuals serving prison sentences, their placement is a horrible mistake, because the U.S. prison system decides where to place inmates based on their genitalia, not their gender identity. Ashley, Linda, Anna, Yolanda and Ophelia describe their experiences including rape, violence, solitary confinement and denial of medical care in *Cruel and Unusual*. Shot over three years, this **high-definition documentary film** challenges the viewer’s basic ideas about gender and justice through braids of poignantly graphic stories, vibrant landscape portraits and stark prison footage from across the United States.

Ashley, an inmate detained in the Tucker Unit of the Arkansas Department of Corrections, explains, *“A lot of times I wake up, and I look around at my surroundings, and I see all these men. I think, ‘What am I doing here?’”*

This confusing existence can be torturous for inmates who started transsexual medical therapy before their imprisonment. Once an individual begins estrogen therapy, their body stops hormone production altogether, which is akin to denying a woman hormones after a hysterectomy. Coupled with the psychological effects of returning facial hair and losing breasts, transsexuality in prison becomes an untenable situation amidst the overall terror of prison.

Denied female hormone therapy, Ophelia felt she had no choice but to mutilate her genitals to force the system *“to finish what she started.”* She resides in a correctional facility in Virginia serving 67 years for a bank robbery with an unloaded gun.

Anna Connelly experienced her own similar desperation. Before prison, she lived successfully as a woman while raising her son and working toward sexual reassignment surgery. Once incarcerated, Anna was refused the hormone therapy she depended on for five years and was placed in solitary confinement. It caused her to attempt suicide and nearly destroyed her family.

The women in *Cruel and Unusual* don’t deny that they must serve their sentences, but their stories raise very important questions about their treatment. Are the human rights of these women and many others across the United States violated? If Gender Identity Disorder is a recognized condition by the American Psychiatric Association, should inmates receive therapy for it in prison? If therapy consists of counseling, female hormones, and in some cases, sexual reassignment surgery, how far should prisons go? Despite their crimes, *Cruel and Unusual* asks if the punishment these individuals receive is indeed *cruel and unusual* and a violation of their Eighth Amendment Constitutional protection.

“This moving and thoughtful documentary raises awareness about the abuse, isolation and poor medical care faced by transgender prisoners. We hope that the film’s insight will be a springboard for new policies that adequately protect this vulnerable community.”

- Elizabeth Alexander, Executive Director, ACLU National Prison Project

“Cruel and Unusual is a remarkable and essential work. At a time when torture has haltingly become part of the national conversation, *Cruel and Unusual* draws emotionally devastating attention to victims of violence who are persecuted for their stubborn visibility within the penal system — but remain invisible to an indifferent world outside. I can affirm that everyone needs to hear and see this film’s crucial, disturbing, and enthralling story.”

- Scott Long, Director, LGBT Rights Program, Human Rights Watch

“Masterful editing packs compelling punches of the brutal realities of life behind bars.”

- Kate X. Messer, Austin Chronicle

“*Cruel and Unusual* doesn’t just transport the viewer within prison walls, but more importantly, into the hearts and minds of an acutely marginalized and misunderstood community. These women are not criminals in the way the public understands them to be. They are strong, honest, multidimensional individuals with dignity, inner-strength and determination.”

- Kate Black, The Soros Foundation

Cruel and Unusual has earned multiple awards including:

Audience Award - Best Feature, NewFest (June, 2006)

Jury Award - Best Documentary, Frameline (June, 2006)

Freedom Award, Outfest (July, 2006)

Silver Telly Award - Best Social Issue Documentary (August, 2006)

The *Cruel and Unusual* DVD includes never-before-seen bonus footage including more stories from the women and additional thoughts from experts. It also includes transgender resources. The running time of the film is approximately 60 minutes. **High-resolution imagery and an extensive press kit containing additional information about the film are available at www.villagelighthouse.com/cruelandunusual.** The press kit includes a list of accolades, film festival screenings, filmmaker biographies, full credits and contact information for organizations familiar with transgender issues. Screeners are available upon request. *Cruel and Unusual*’s suggested retail price is \$24.95. The DVD is available for prebooking online at 10percent.com and Amazon.com or by calling 888-910-7372. *Cruel and Unusual* will also be available at local community retailers.

Alluvial Filmworks recognizes the accomplishments of talented individuals in the realm of gay and lesbian independent cinema by licensing or purchasing, marketing and distributing evergreen, unlimited-run films of gay interest. This film division also produces its own material and ultimately prides itself in making movies available that gays and lesbians can relate to and others can enjoy as well.

Village Lighthouse, Inc. is a leading manufacturer, distributor and retailer of gay and lesbian oriented merchandise. Its wholesale divisions, including **Alluvial Filmworks** and **10% Consumer Products**, distribute greeting cards, calendars, movies, magnets, cologne, lotion, male pheromones and other paper products internationally to over 500 accounts. Village Lighthouse’s retail divisions include **10percent.com**, the leading online shopping destination for the gay community, and **10percentGIRL.com**, a retail shopping website devoted to the interests of lesbian women. For more information about Village Lighthouse and its divisions, visit its corporate website at www.villagelighthouse.com.



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Contact: Julian P. Hobson, 323-460-4661 (x125), jhobson@villagelighthouse.com

Film Synopsis (Short)

This award-winning documentary examines the realities faced by transgender women in men’s prisons. Ashley, Linda, Anna, Yolanda and Ophelia describe their experiences including rape, violence, solitary confinement and denial of medical care. Their difficult and revealing stories challenge our most basic notions of gender and justice while raising an important question: Is their treatment indeed cruel and unusual — a violation of the Eighth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution?

Film Synopsis (Long)

Imagine being a woman in a men’s prison. For many individuals, this is a grim reality because the U.S. prison system decides where to place inmates based on their genitalia, not their gender identity.

This award-winning documentary makes an unflinching examination of transgender women in men’s prisons. Ashley, Linda, Anna, Yolanda and Ophelia describe their experiences undergoing inhumane and humiliating treatment including rape, violence, solitary confinement and denial of medical care.

One interviewee explains. “A lot of times I wake up, and I look around at my surroundings, and I see all these men. I think, ‘What am I doing here?’”

The women in *Cruel and Unusual* don’t deny that they must serve their sentences, but their stories raise very important questions about their treatment. Are the human rights of these women and many others across the United States violated? If Gender Identity Disorder is a recognized condition by the American Psychiatric Association, should inmates receive therapy for it in prison? If therapy consists of counseling, female hormones, and in some cases, sexual reassignment surgery, how far should prisons go? Despite their crimes, *Cruel and Unusual* asks if the punishment these individuals receive is indeed *cruel and unusual* and a violation of their Eighth Amendment Constitutional protection.

Filmmaker Biographies

JANET W. BAUS, producer/director of *Cruel and Unusual*, is a producer and editor for PBS, cable television, and independent productions. She was a Producer for *Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World*, which broadcast on Here! TV in June 2005. She was editor and supervising editor on the 2000 and 2001 seasons of *Trauma: Life in the ER* for New York Times Television, broadcast on The Learning Channel, and Series Editor for the 2002 *Trauma* season. Previously, she was Co-Producer with John Scagliotti and Dan Hunt, for the PBS documentary, *After Stonewall: From the Riots to the Millennium*, which was broadcast nationally in June of 1999. From 1993 to the present, Baus was a Producer and Editor for the award-winning PBS series, *In The Life*, producing more than 30 segments. In 1998, she was co-producer and editor of the documentary, *Some Ground To Stand On*, which was awarded the National Educational Media Bronze Apple, and the Director's Choice Award in the Black Maria Festival, and aired on public television. Her work has been broadcast on Lifetime, PBS and The Learning Channel. Other awards include: Cine Golden Eagle, The Vito Russo Award, the Chicago International Television Award, the Gold Aurora Award and many festival audience awards. Baus is a 2006 Soros Media Fellow.

DAN HUNT, producer/director of *Cruel and Unusual*, has been creating award-winning programming for Public Television since the late 1980s. As Producer, he recently completed *Dangerous Living: Coming Out in the Developing World*, which is currently screening in festivals in the United States and abroad and broadcast nationally on Here! TV last June. Hunt also produced *Oliver Button is a STAR*, a documentary about bullying and gender, which aired nationally on PBS in June 2002. *Oliver Button* won the Silver Angel Award given by Excellence in Media, NAME Video Award and screened at film festivals in the United States and Europe. Hunt co-produced the award-winning PBS documentary *After Stonewall* (broadcast nationally, June 1999) with John Scagliotti and Janet Baus. While a producer at WGBY his docu-drama, *Her Place in History* (1998), won both the Gracie Allen Award for Drama (American Women in Radio & TV) and Best Documentary at the Hometown Film Festival. An early national PBS documentary on rural communities responding to AIDS, *Names... from home* (1992), won awards at the Chicago International and New England Film Festivals. Hunt is a 2006 Soros Media Fellow.

SLAWOMIR GRÜNBERG, Director of Photography of *Cruel and Unusual*, born in Lublin, Poland is a graduate of the Polish Film School in Lodz, where he studied cinematography and directing. Between 1974 and 1976, he worked as a cinematographer for the Polish Television Network in Warsaw, Poland. He emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1981 and has since shot and produced over 35 television documentaries. His independent works focus on critical social and political issues and have won him international recognition. Grünberg has been a contributing director of photography and editor for the PBS series: *Frontline*, *American Masters*, *NOVA*, *AIDS Quarterly* and *Health Quarterly*. He has also shot for ABC, NBC, HBO, Lifetime and Discovery networks. In 2000 Grünberg won the Emmy Award for a documentary he photographed, directed and co-produced called *School Prayer: A Community at War*. His directing of photography credits include *Legacy*, which received an Academy Award Nomination for the best documentary feature in 2001. In 1997, Grünberg was named a Fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship in Documentary Filmmaking. In 2002, he received a New York Artist's Fellowship. And in 2003, he received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship.

Awards

Audience Award - Best Feature, NewFest (June, 2006)
Jury Award - Best Documentary, Frameline (June, 2006)
Freedom Award, Outfest (July, 2006)
Silver Telly Award - Best Social Issue Documentary (August, 2006)

Festival Screenings

South by Southwest Film Festival (World Premier of *Cruel and Unusual* – March, 2006)
North Carolina Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Philadelphia International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Vancouver Queer Film Festival
Hamburg International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
Copenhagen Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Barcelona International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Austin Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
The Neon - Dayton, Ohio
Milwaukee LGBT Film/Video Festival
Lisbon International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Tampa International Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Out Takes Dallas – Annual Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
Image Out – Rochester Lesbian and Gay Film and Video Festival
Seattle Lesbian and Gay Film Festival
NGLTF Creating Change Conference, Kansas City
Frameline – San Francisco LBBT Film Festival
Outfest – Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Film Festival
NewFest – New York LGBT Film Festival

What People Are Saying

“Groundbreaking! At times graceful, at times unflinching, *Cruel and Unusual* is haunting, urgent and intense.”

- M. J. Herrup, **South by Southwest Film Festival**

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- Elizabeth Alexander, Executive Director, **ACLU National Prison Project**

“*Cruel and Unusual* is a remarkable and essential work. At a time when torture has haltingly become part of the national conversation, *Cruel and Unusual* draws emotionally devastating attention to victims of violence who are persecuted for their stubborn visibility within the penal system—but remain invisible to an indifferent world outside. I can affirm that everyone needs to hear and see this film's crucial, disturbing, and enthralling story.”

- Scott Long, Director, **LGBT Rights Program, Human Rights Watch**

“Masterful editing packs compelling punches of the brutal realities of life behind bars.”

- Kate X. Messer, **Austin Chronicle**

“Eye-opening and caustic in its depiction of the blatant discrimination transgender people endure, this documentary will leave you with much to think about.”

- Erin Cullerton, **Frameline International LGBT Film Festival**

“It takes a lot of courage to stand up and be different and this documentary gives these women a voice to tell their stories.”

- Cheryl Dawson, **TheMovieChicks.com**

“Most of all, it is about five women who will break your heart with their courage, their stories, and their painful desire to just be themselves.”

- Diana Welch, **Austin Chronicle**



Resources

The Sylvia River Law Project
www.srlp.org

Stop Prisoner Rape
www.spr.org

The TIP Journal (Transgender People in Prison)
www.gicofcolo.org

The Transgender Law Center
www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Gender Identity Center of Colorado
www.gicofcolo.org

National Transgender Advocacy Coalition
www.ntac.org

Gender PAC (Public Advocacy Coalition)
www.gpac.org

Credits

Produced and Directed by	Janet W. Baus, Dan Hunt, Reid Williams
Executive Producer	Reid Williams
Director of Photography	Slawomir Grunberg
Editor	Janet Baus, Dan Hunt, Mark Juergens
Original Music	Amy Linten – The Aisler Set
Additional Photography	Janet Baus, Dan Hunt, Primalux
Additional Editing	Erin Greenwell, Elizabeth Meister, Christina Kelly, Mary Patierno, Anat Salomon
Research	Isabelle de Rezende, Megan Gaffney, Cassidy Dimon
Production Assistant	Cleudy Cappelano
Graphic Design	Devin Grosz
Transcription	Abby Laspia
Archival Material	Getty Images, WGGB – TV 40