

LOGLINE

Filmmaker Jason DaSilva has been living with a severe form of multiple sclerosis for over 10 years. When his son moves 1700 miles away to Austin Texas he is unable to cope with this loss. He attempts to relocate to Austin which reveals to him the extent of the broken Medicaid system. He discovers that state-run Medicaid would require him to live in a nursing home.

When We Walk documents a devoted father and filmmaker with an indestructible drive to keep the cameras rolling no matter what, and to show his son what it means to never give up.

SYNOPSIS (Short)

When We Walk chronicles the life of disability activist and filmmaker Jason DaSilva as he confronts the next chapter of his life. Picking up where his critically acclaimed documentary, When I Walk, left off, DaSilva finds himself faced with a multitude of challenges that will define the rest of his life. The personal struggles we witnessed in his first film are only getting more complex.

After 15 years of multiple sclerosis, the disease paralyzes him from the neck down. His 7-year-long relationship with his son Jase's mother falls apart. Making matters worse, she packs up their SUV and moves to Texas, taking Jase with her. Instead of folding to the circumstance, Jason straps his camera bag to his wheelchair; this time setting off for Texas on a journey that leads him through the inconsistencies of America's broken Medicaid system. When We Walk chronicles the issues of a system that is not working for DaSilva, and shows him and his audience the plight that people in his type of situation and community are facing in America.

SYNOPSIS (Long)

When We Walk chronicles the life of disability activist and filmmaker Jason DaSilva as he confronts the next chapter of his life. Picking up where his critically acclaimed documentary, When I Walk, left off--DaSilva finds himself faced with a multitude of challenges that will define the rest of his life. The personal struggles we witnessed in his first film are only getting more complex.

When We Walk begins with the birth of his child, Jase, as we witness DaSilva quickly move from the burgeoning excitement of fatherhood to the struggle of a man with multiple sclerosis attempting to be in his son's life. When the idyllic marriage fans adored from When I Walk falls apart, everything in Jason's life goes awry. Now alone, with his condition worsening, DaSilva is left to contemplate his future as a father, filmmaker, and activist within the confines of his NYC residence. Instead of folding to the circumstance, Jason straps his camera bag to his wheelchair--this time setting off for

Texas on a journey that leads him through the inconsistencies of America's broken Medicaid system.

After 12 years of multiple sclerosis, Jason is still determined to not give up. He is undergoing experimental stem cell therapy to maintain and possibly recover some of what he's lost with his physical body. When the disease starts attacking his voice, he fights back with speech therapy determined to keep his voice heard for as long as he can. His voice is necessary to keep working as a filmmaker. But more than that, he wants his son to be able to hear him, to be able to talk to him, and to know him better. Life for Jason is extremely difficult, but it becomes even worse. Shortly after the disease paralyzes him from the neck down, his seven-year-long relationship with Jase's mother, Alice, falls apart. Making matters worse, Alice packs up their SUV and moves to Texas, taking Jase with her. Jason is left in New York City to deal with his many challenges on his own. He recruits a revolving door of caregivers that function as his hands and eyes, as well as his creative collaborators. They work together with him as he orchestrates this documentary of his life in *When We Walk*. Jason wants to pass on to his son the importance of an unquenchable creative spirit to stave off any pressure life may bring him. He is brokenhearted, devastated, and getting worse. Missing his son dearly, he attempts to relocate to Texas, but soon discovers that moving anywhere outside of New York is an impossibility.

DaSilva's gripping story as a microcosm of the disabled community's struggle to gain equality. *When We Walk* uses a collage of video diaries, Skype calls, journalistic interviews, visits with his son, and animation to document issues of accessibility. As we navigate through his many achievements and obstacles, we're given an intimate portrait of the hopes, aspirations, sadness, and isolation that many people with disabilities face, through the lens of one acutely ambitious filmmaker. It is heartbreaking not being around his son, but the question Dasilva is left with is: How can he continue his passion for his career as a disability rights activist while simultaneously living in a nursing home in order to be close to his son? Dasilva's parents separated when he was in high school. He sees much of what his experience as a young person coming true in his son's own life. Dasilva shoots interviews with his father talking about the experience of being divorced. This is injected throughout interviews with his father and the piece in *When We Walk*. This film is not just about Dasilva slowly succumbing to an incurable illness, it is also a film that shows Dasilva stumbling upon a civil rights issue. He set out to try and be with his son but realizes that as an activist, he needs to also pursue the larger systemic issue that is the broken Medicaid system of America. There are 74 million people on Medicaid in the USA. This statistic depicts the total Medicaid enrollment in the United States from 1966 to 2017. In 2009, approximately 50.9 million U.S. citizens were enrolled for Medicaid. Thus, this figure almost doubled since 1990. Medicaid is a joint federal and state program supporting low-income individuals and families with costs associated with medical and long-term care. Dasilva requires long term care and thus if the system is not working and not consistent across states, this is a serious human rights conundrum-the right to affordable healthcare. *When We Walk* explores this issue of a system that is not

working for Dasilva, and shows him and his audience the plight that people in his type of situation and community are facing in America.

Over 10 million people qualify for Medicaid based on a disability. Although many are dually eligible for Medicare and Medicaid, most (6.2 million) do not have Medicare coverage. Those under age 65 qualifying for Medicaid on the basis of a disability include adults and children with lifelong disabilities that they have had since birth and others who have disabling conditions acquired through illness, injury, or trauma. Medicaid beneficiaries enrolled through disability pathways include those with physical conditions (such as quadriplegia -in which DaSilva firmly fits, traumatic brain injuries); intellectual or developmental disabilities (for example, cerebral palsy, autism, Down syndrome); and serious behavioral disorders or mental illness (such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder). Over one-third of Medicaid beneficiaries who qualify on the basis of a disability do so through receipt of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), the federal cash assistance program for the elderly and people with disabilities who have low levels of income and assets. When We Walk begins as a film that highlights DaSilva's personal struggles and goes on to show systemic struggles that come up as a result of his desire to be close to his son.

Indeed, Dasilva wants Jase to grow up strong and to know him. He wants Jase to learn how to live his life to the fullest, just like he did, despite whatever challenges or future he might face. But he also wants Jase to realize that he as an activist for people with disabilities, cannot just pursue his own personal interests especially given the findings he stumbles upon; but must also speak for the people he represents. He highlights to his son Jase when on his visit to Texas while staying in a nursing home that 'he would die a slow death' if he were to stay next to him because the Medicaid system does not provide him with any other better alternatives. It is a complex situation- made more difficult by the fact that it should never be this way. Everyone has the right to equal and affordable health care regardless of race, class, social status or disability among other factors. It is a matter of life and longevity as much as it is about him being with his son Jase. When We Walk covers this journey and brings to light the serious social and medical disparities of healthcare in America.

Dasilva has also been hired by the New York times to do an OP Doc Documentary to specifically relate to and highlight these serious inconsistencies in the Medicaid program on a state to state basis.