



Allan Cole at mile 23 of the New York City Marathon. He started running after his diagnosis of early-onset Parkinson's two years earlier.

Wednesday, April 1
at 10 p.m. on CPTV

Empowered by Parkinson's

ROUGHLY ONE MILLION PEOPLE in the United States have Parkinson's disease, the second most common neurologic disease in the world. This neurodegenerative condition can affect motor (movement) skills, sleep and mood. But Parkinson's symptoms are different for different people. Currently, there is no cure.

Andre Costantini produced *Empowered by Parkinson's* with a goal of presenting a very personal perspective through the eyes of people who responded to their diagnosis with incredible fortitude. With everyone interviewed for the film, he says, "What I experienced was that they were really taking a proactive role in their lives with exercise and a vast array of other treatments to capture the best quality of life possible."

We know you'll find *Empowered by Parkinson's* to be not just informative, but also incredibly inspirational.

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An INTERVIEW with ANDRE COSTANTINI

Producer of Empowered by Parkinson's, Andre is a film maker, editor, photographer and musician with a BFA from Mason Gross School of the Arts. For the past 15 years he has created commissioned documentary and industrial films and an award-winning comedy.

Once you start the conversation with anyone about Parkinson's disease, you realize that they likely know someone or at the very least, someone who knows someone who has it. Because the topic is not often discussed, most people are unaware of how common it is. But once you start to breach the topic, you realize it's way less than six degrees of separation between yourself and someone with Parkinson's.

What interests me most when making films is how people interface with the world. I am constantly drawn to the idea of providing inspiration from others while showing how they deal with their lot in life. In this case, it wasn't so much about the illness but its consequences and how people with Parkinson's found resilience.

The common thread in the film is really how they and their families find ways to deal with the diagnosis in a positive way. I wanted to show how

they're taking a proactive role, helping to ensure a better quality of life and longevity.

The documentary was funded by Whelen Engineering and we had a really short turnaround from start to completion of just ten weeks. So at first I began finding subjects for the film by reaching out to people I knew and I couldn't believe how many suggestions I got for people to contact. We wound up interviewing five main subjects and then a few groups, from all over the country.

One thing people might find surprising about the film is how people really are taking an active role in their health. And the lesson I learned from that extends even beyond managing Parkinson's disease: whatever ailment you have, if you take an active role in working out and maintain a healthy lifestyle, you will benefit as a participant in your own health.

It is really my hope that people with Parkinson's who see the film will feel inspired. There are actually so many things they can do to make a difference in their own lives, and also inspire other people. For this film I felt it was important to conduct the main subjects' interviews at their homes, to give the audience some insight into their worlds.

To be honest, I probably had my own misconceptions about Parkinson's disease before making this film. Over the course of the project, the need to continue being active evolved as a real theme. One character told me he still skied and went fly fishing; so I asked if I could join him. He threads his own flies! It takes a while, but he does it. To me that showed real resilience.

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Another inspiring character I found by total happenstance. An acquaintance of mine is a musician who recently was on tour with Bobby McFerrin (who incidentally has Parkinson's). As it turns out, Bobby's former church choir director had worked to develop singing exercises for people with Parkinson's. She also participated in a study which tested the effects of singing on people with Parkinson's, which ultimately launched a group called The Parkinsingers. In addition to weekly rehearsals, they put on semiannual concerts. And one of their founding members still sings with them....at the age of 96.

I discovered lots of people worry how they will be perceived with Parkinson's. Some I spoke with still haven't told close friends, and guard the information from those they don't think can handle it. Because so many people don't know what it means to have a neurodegenerative disease, some worry it will define them in their relationships.

This film has definitely changed me. Emotionally, I still can't watch it without crying. But they're tears of joy. At the end of the film, one of the characters (Allan Cole, pictured on first page) is near the end of a marathon. His wife was a marathoner, and he had been diagnosed a week before the first time she ran the NYC marathon. Two years later, he ran that same marathon. At mile marker 23 he just runs up and hugs his wife and kids. The level of love and support they give..... well, it gets me every time.



ABOVE Mel Preusser (L) takes producer Andre Costantini on a fly fishing adventure.

MIDDLE Parkinsingers founder Marjorie Samoff.

BOTTOM Mary Beth Bartholomew, one of the characters in the film.

