

States of Grace

SYNOPSSES

Logline (22)

An intimate look at the profound transformation of a revered Buddhist physician and her family in the wake of a life-changing accident.

Alternate Logline (15)

A revered Buddhist physician survives a devastating accident and travels a transformative path to recovery.

Short (100)

For Dr. Grace Dammann, a routine commute across the Golden Gate Bridge turned tragic when another driver crashed head on into her car. After miraculously surviving, she spent more than a year in rehabilitation hospitals. *States of Grace* follows her return home to the Buddhist community where she lives with her partner Nancy “Fu” Schroeder and their daughter Sabrina. Family dynamics are turned upside down as each of them must negotiate new roles and responsibilities. With humor and candor, the film captures their inspiring story as Grace embarks on a journey to discover new purpose in her radically altered life.

Medium (223)

Winner of multiple audience awards, *States of Grace* intimately captures the profound transformation of a revered physician and her family in the wake of a life-changing accident. For Dr. Grace Dammann, a pioneering AIDS specialist who was honored by the Dalai Lama, a routine commute across the Golden Gate Bridge turned tragic when another driver crashed head on into her car. After seven weeks in a coma and a dozen surgeries, Grace miraculously awakened with her cognitive abilities intact, though her body was left shattered. *States of Grace* follows her return home to the Buddhist community where she and her partner Nancy “Fu” Schroeder live with their teenage daughter Sabrina, who was born with cerebral palsy.

Family dynamics are turned upside down as each of them must negotiate new roles and responsibilities. As the only able-bodied person in their household, Fu becomes the primary caregiver to Grace while also taking on a more active role as parent. Grace, meanwhile, must reconcile her joy at still being alive with the frustration of being so dependent on others. With dry humor and brave candor, the three of them slowly recalibrate their lives together and apart.

Through verité footage and interviews with doctors, family, and friends, the film paints an inspiring portrait of devotion and trust as it delicately documents one woman’s fight to reinvent herself.

Long (839)

The profound transformation of a Bay Area family lies at the heart of this poignant documentary about resilience and the healing power of community and spiritual practice.

For Dr. Grace Dammann, a routine commute across the Golden Gate Bridge turned tragic when a driver passed out at the wheel and veered across the divide on the Golden Gate Bridge, crashing head on into her car. While her daughter and dog suffered only minor injuries, Grace was airlifted to a nearby trauma hospital where she clung to life in the intensive care unit. After seven weeks in a coma and a dozen surgeries, Grace miraculously awoke with her cognitive abilities intact, though her body was left shattered and severely disabled.

Prior to the accident, Grace worked as a physician at Laguna Honda Hospital, where she co-founded one of the first HIV/AIDS clinics for poor people in San Francisco and signed more than 1,000 death certificates in the six-year period that marked the disease's deadliest era. For her compassionate care with these patients, Grace was honored by the Dalai Lama in 2005. She was also the primary parent and breadwinner in her family with Nancy "Fu" Schroeder and their adopted daughter Sabrina, who was born with cerebral palsy as well as HIV and a drug addiction passed on from her birth mother.

Family dynamics are turned upside down as each of them must negotiate new roles and responsibilities in the wake of the accident. Now Fu is the only able-bodied person in their household, tending to both Grace and Sabrina plus the family pets. A formidable presence, Fu draws on her training as a Buddhist priest, her dry sense of humor, and her own inner strength to care for Grace when she finally comes home from rehabilitation hospitals, more than a year after the accident.

Home is Green Gulch Farm, a Buddhist community and meditation center north of San Francisco, where Grace and Fu have lived for twenty years. Though they stopped being intimate partners many years ago, the two women continued to live together to adopt and raise Sabrina. While Grace was still in a coma, the question arose about how much responsibility Fu was willing to take on. She made a commitment to be Grace's primary caregiver for the next five years.

In a talk to the community soon after coming home, Grace emphasizes the importance of her spiritual practice in dealing with the pain and frustration of her recovery. Still, she bristles at being so dependent on Fu and others for even the simplest of daily tasks. Grace's feeling that she can't be of service to others—such a central part of her identity as a physician, Buddhist, and mother—starts to eat away at her. She feels left out of the closeness that Fu and Sabrina have developed during

the time she was in the hospital and unsure of her purpose now that she requires around-the-clock care.

Fu quickly grasps the magnitude of the task she has taken on in managing Grace's care. While her Buddhist teachings give her a remarkable ability to be present in each moment, Fu acknowledges she is used to more solitary, "monastic" pursuits. Eventually, she comes to understand she must find ways to sustain herself, and we see her as she takes time out to make art, practice calligraphy, and row on the open water.

During her first year at home, Grace decides to undergo two additional surgeries in hopes of being able to dress herself and walk again. The recoveries are long and painful, and she suffers a major setback when she falls twice in the course of a few days. Making matters worse, she learns that Medicare may stop covering her rehabilitation expenses if she doesn't show signs of improvement. Angry and frustrated, Grace argues with Fu about her right to take her life if she remains this dependent.

Against this backdrop, Grace and Fu must continue to raise Sabrina, who—despite early predictions by doctors that she might not live beyond infancy—is thriving as a typical teenager. We see her playing wheelchair basketball, struggling with homework, and counting down until she can go away to college. She, too, has to adjust to become more independent after many years of relying on Grace to care for her.

Grace's resilience ultimately prevails over her bouts of despair, and she draws on her experience as a patient to forge a remarkable new path as the first wheelchair-bound doctor at Laguna Honda Hospital. Once again Grace is leading the way in compassionate medical care as she designs and directs an innovative pain clinic.

As the five year anniversary of the crash approaches, the film closes with Sabrina preparing to leave for college and Fu wanting to renegotiate her level of responsibility for Grace's care. Grace—already having persevered against great odds—is ready to put her old life to rest. "I'll just keep putting one foot in front of the other," she says. "On with the show...on to whatever comes my way."

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