

States of Grace

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WORLD PREMIERE OF DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FILM

'STATES OF GRACE'

37TH MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 5, 5:15 PM | CINÉARTS SEQUOIA THEATER

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2:00 PM | RAFAEL FILM CENTER

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 9, 11:30 AM | CINÉARTS SEQUOIA THEATER



"States of Grace transcends the story of one woman's injury and recovery. A beautifully honest movie that neither pities nor panders, it made me revisit what is essential about being human."

-BJ Miller, MD, Executive Director, Zen Hospice Project

"States of Grace is a deeply moving documentary. A must-see for anyone who has had to deal with issues of survival, recovery, and loss."

**-Kaethe Weingarten, PhD, Founder and Director, The Witnessing Project;
Associate Clinical Professor of Psychology, Harvard Medical School, 1981-2013**

San Francisco - Tuesday, Sept. 9, 2014 - Internationally recognized for showcasing the best in independent and world cinema, the **Mill Valley Film Festival** presents the world premiere of ***States of Grace***, directed by **Helen S. Cohen** and **Mark Lipman**. *States of Grace* intimately captures the profound transformation of a revered physician and her family in the wake of a life-changing accident. The world premiere takes place on Oct. 5, 2014, at Cinéarts Sequoia Theater (5:15 p.m.) in Mill Valley; Dammann, her partner **Nancy "Fu" Schroeder**, and the filmmakers will be on hand for a

post-screening Q&A and reception. Additional screenings will take place on Oct. 7, 2014, at the Rafael Film Center in San Rafael (2 p.m.) and Oct. 9, 2014, at the Sequoia (11:30 a.m.). **San Francisco Zen Center** has served as the film's fiscal sponsor throughout production and is the proud sponsor of its world premiere. For more information, visit www.statesofgracefilm.com.

For Dr. Grace Dammann, a pioneering AIDS specialist who was honored for her work 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 and severely disabled. *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.

Cohen and Lipman, longtime friends of the family, were as unobtrusive and observational as possible in recording this heartrending journey. "We had a unique opportunity to capture the experience in an extremely personal and intimate way, given our history and closeness with the family," says Cohen. "They gave us uncensored access to their lives, and we showed up to bear witness to their unfolding new reality."

The film offers a rare view of both caregiver and care receiver as they face triumphs and setbacks over a five-year period. 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 while Fu quickly grasps the magnitude of the task she has taken on in managing Grace's care. Against this backdrop, they must continue to raise Sabrina, who — despite early predictions by doctors that she might not live beyond infancy — is thriving as a typical teenager.

As Grace returns home, the community embraces her and her family with extraordinary compassion. **Tova Green, vice president, San Francisco Zen Center**, says: "The residents of Green Gulch Farm were honored to be able to support Grace and her family emotionally and in material ways during their inspiring journey together. *States of Grace* offers a beautiful tribute to the power of community and spiritual practice in the recovery process."

Dammann says she hoped participating in the film would lead to something positive coming from the accident. "What I wanted was a teaching tool for medical students, physicians, physical therapists, and family members who are dealing with caregiver and care-receiver issues. I was thinking that this could ultimately be of service because I wanted something good to come out of my accident — not just for me, but for everybody."

About the Filmmakers

Helen S. Cohen (Producer/Director) is an award-winning producer and painter. Her producing credits include *It's Elementary: Talking About Gay Issues in School* (1996), the groundbreaking documentary that addresses anti-gay prejudice and explores how teachers can include discussions about LGBT people in their classrooms; *That's a Family!* (2000), where elementary school-age kids describe in their own words the many shapes that families take in today's diverse world; and *Let's Get Real* (2003), an in-depth look at name-calling and bullying in middle schools, told entirely from

a youth perspective. Cohen has also directed, produced, and/or executive produced documentaries for public interest organizations, including *Homes & Hands: Community Land Trusts in Action* (1998) and *Street of Dreams: Development Without Displacement in Communities of Color* (2013).

Mark Lipman (Producer/Director/Cinematographer) is an award-winning filmmaker whose films have been broadcast nationally on public television. His producing credits include *To Have and To Hold* (1981), the first documentary to look at domestic violence through the experiences of men; *Holding Ground: The Rebirth of Dudley Street* (1996), a film about the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative's successful efforts to revitalize a Boston neighborhood devastated by redlining, arson, and illegal dumping; *Father's Day* (2003), an experimental documentary about the death of his father; *Gaining Ground* (2012), a sequel to *Holding Ground* that explores Dudley Street's success in preventing foreclosures and fostering youth leadership; and *Street of Dreams: Development Without Displacement in Communities of Color* (2013).

About the San Francisco Zen Center

San Francisco Zen Center was established in 1962 by **Shunryu Suzuki Roshi** and his American students. Suzuki Roshi is known to countless readers as the author of the modern spiritual classic, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Today, San Francisco Zen Center is one of the largest Buddhist sanghas outside Asia. It has three practice places: **City Center**, in the vibrant heart of San Francisco; **Green Gulch Farm**, whose organic fields meet the ocean in Marin County; and **Tassajara Zen Mountain Center** — the first Zen training monastery in the West — in the Ventana Wilderness inland from Big Sur. These three complementary practice centers offer daily meditation, regular monastic retreats and practice periods, classes, lectures, and workshops. Zen Center programs also reach out to the community, helping prisoners, the homeless, and those in recovery; protecting the environment; and working for peace. Suzuki Roshi's disciples and students of his disciples now lead dharma groups around the country.

In the spirit of *Beginner's Mind*, Zen Center has long been a quiet force of cultural dynamism and change, with a dedicated history of reconsidering conventional wisdom and pushing the boundaries of cultural traditions and modes of thinking.

About the 37th Mill Valley Film Festival

Presented by the California Film Institute, the 37th Mill Valley Film Festival runs October 2–12, 2014, at the CinéArts Sequoia (25 Throckmorton Ave., Mill Valley), Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center (1118 Fourth St., San Rafael), and other venues throughout the Bay Area. With a reputation for launching new films and creating awards season buzz, MVFF has earned a reputation as a “filmmakers’ festival” by celebrating the best in American independent and world cinema, alongside high-profile and prestigious award contenders. MVFF welcomes more than two hundred filmmakers representing more than fifty countries. For tickets and additional information, please visit www.mvff.com or call 877.874.MVFF (6833).

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