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Celebrated Neurosurgeon Struggles With the Limits of His Healing Ability In POV's "The English Surgeon," Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009, on PBS

**Dr. Henry Marsh Faces Obstacles and Archaic Medical Conditions in Ukraine
As He Treats the Most Desperate Patients**

*A BBC/ITVS International Production;
Produced in Association with American Documentary / POV*

*"Enthralling. . . . astonishing. . . . these men perform miracles, but they are also agonizingly human."
— Manohla Dargis, The New York Times*

What is it like to have power over life and death, and yet to struggle with your own humanity? Dr. Henry Marsh is one of England's foremost brain surgeons, a pioneer in his field and respected throughout the world. Surprisingly modest despite all his achievements, he still rides an old bicycle to work and worries constantly about his patients and the potential damage of such delicate surgery. "When push comes to shove we can afford to lose an arm or a leg, but . . . if something goes wrong [in brain surgery] I can destroy that person's character — forever," he says.

When Marsh brings his surgical skills to less-developed countries such as Russia, Azerbaijan, Sudan or, as documented in **The English Surgeon**, Ukraine, the conflict between promise and failure becomes wrenchingly sharp. It is in Ukraine, with its decaying medical infrastructure and myriad obstacles, where he and a crusading colleague — a Marsh protégé — have done tremendous good, though Marsh is still ruminating over his failure to save one child.

Geoffrey Smith's **The English Surgeon** has its national broadcast premiere on **Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2009**, at 10 p.m. during the 22nd season of **POV (Point of View)** on PBS. (Check local listings.) American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV is the winner of a Special Emmy Award for Excellence in Television Documentary Filmmaking. The series continues on Tuesdays through Sept. 22 and returns with special presentations on Nov. 11 and Dec. 30.

Driven to help those who are least likely to receive the neurosurgery they need to survive, Marsh has been going to Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, for more than 17 years. He has built his own crates to send donated and scavenged medical supplies to Ukraine, where he is on a personal mission to help improve the primitive medical care available to those who need neurosurgery. Afflicted patients see him as a savior from the West; desperate parents travel great distances to bring him their children; and Marsh's Ukrainian colleague, Dr. Igor Kurilets, sees him as a benefactor and a mentor.

Devoted to his patients, Kurilets has to work within his country's logistical and political constraints. Instead of an expensive medical drill for boring into patients' skulls, he bought a cordless Bosch handyman drill from the local market; when he needed rooms to rent for his independent clinic, he found temporary refuge in the KGB hospital — the very place that for years housed people who tried to persecute him and Marsh for working outside of the state system.

Kurilets is a man of irrepressible cheer in the face of the numerous official investigations that have taken place since he teamed up with Marsh. The strong bond the men share is partly borne of their struggle simply to keep practicing medicine in a society undergoing great upheavals.

Shot over three chaotic weeks in the winter of 2007, **The English Surgeon** follows Marsh and Kurilets as they work endless hours in clinics full of desperately ill people. Selected by Kurilets because he believes they might benefit most from Marsh's expertise, these patients represent only a fraction of the people in Ukraine who need neurosurgery. But in harrowing scene after harrowing scene, Marsh agonizes over more doubtful cases and over those patients he knows are beyond help — and over how to deliver the news. For all the satisfaction Marsh gets from going to Kyiv, once there he must confront a lack of trained staff, equipment and basic supplies, as well as patients grossly misdiagnosed or too late in finding him. Most haunting for Marsh are the children he can't save.

"It's like selling your soul to the devil, but what can you do?" he says at one point. "My son had a brain tumor as a baby and I was desperate for someone to help me. I simply can't walk away from that need in others."

On a narrative level, **The English Surgeon** is the story of the fateful encounter of three men — Marsh, Kurilets and Marian Dolishny, a young and poor Ukrainian from the rural western part of the country. Dolishny has a brain tumor that causes extreme epilepsy and is slowly killing him, and his last hope is Marsh. The young man has been told that his tumor is inoperable, but Marsh believes he can save him. Doing so, however, requires that Dolishny be awake throughout the entire operation — a dramatic and unforgettable scene captured by three cameras inside the operating theater.

The emotional climax of the film is Marsh's journey to visit Katya, the mother of Tanya, the young girl he tried years ago to save and whose death haunts him most. Marsh shares an emotional meal with Katya and then visits the beautiful country cemetery where Tanya is buried. In this wrenching moment, with nothing but the wind and the crows around him, this highly accomplished and deeply reflective man confronts the pain that comes with failing as a doctor. Ultimately, Marsh treats this pain with the only antidote he knows — a renewed dedication to helping others with his special skills.

"Henry's dilemma is one of his own making; that is what's so interesting about his story," says director Smith. "It's what lets his troubled and compassionate humanity through, and moves him to continue an often painful struggle to do good things in this selfish and flawed world. This is ultimately *not* a medical film, nor is it a portrait of a saint. Rather, it is about a man who openly wrestles with moral and ethical issues that touch every one of us."

The English Surgeon is an Eyeline Films and Bungalow Town production for BBC and ITVS International.

About the Filmmaker:

Geoffrey Smith, Director/Producer

Born in Melbourne, Australia, Geoffrey Smith began traveling early, discovering a twin love for movies and storytelling along the way. In 1987 he found himself in Haiti, helping to make a documentary about the country's first election in 31 years. Following the discovery of a massacre of 21 voters in a schoolyard, Smith was himself shot and wounded. After struggling to recover in London, he decided to journey back to Haiti to find the man who had nearly killed him — and to film the whole thing. The resulting film, "Searching for a Killer," won wide acclaim and was aired on the BBC. Smith discovered that the camera can be a powerful, cathartic tool in helping people through difficult periods and went on to build his subsequent work around that concept. The winner of numerous awards, he has made more than 22 films and has worked for all the major U.K. broadcasters.

About Dr. Henry Marsh:

Since 1988, Dr. Henry Marsh has been the senior consultant neurosurgeon at Atkinson Morley's/ St. George's hospital in London, one of the city's largest neurosurgical departments, where he specializes in the surgical treatment of brain tumors. He is also a clinical professor of neurosurgery at the University of Washington, Seattle, and Honorary Consultant Neurosurgeon to the Royal Marsden Hospital, London and the University of Wales, Cardiff.

In the U.K., Marsh pioneered the use of "awake" brain surgery and cortical mapping in such surgery; he has conducted the largest personal series of these operations in the U.K. and one of the largest in Europe. He has written more than 80 peer-reviewed articles on neurosurgical subjects. With a particular interest in the impact of the built environment on hospital staff and patient outcomes, Marsh has written and lectured widely on this subject. In addition, he has delivered lectures on the neuroscientific aspects of consciousness and criminal responsibility.

Credits:

Director/Producer:	Geoffrey Smith
Co-producer:	Rachel Wexler
BBC Executive Producer:	Greg Sanderson/Nick Fraser
Cinematographer:	Graham Day
Editor:	Kathy O'Shea
Original Music:	Nick Cave and Warren Ellis

Running Time: 86:46

Awards & Festivals:

- Sheffield Film Festival, 2007 – *Most Popular Audience Film*
- Hot Docs, 2008 – *Best International Feature Documentary*
- SILVERDOCS, 2008 – *Best International Feature Documentary*
- Zagreb Docs, 2008 – *Audience Award*
- Expression en Corto, 2008 – *Best International Feature Documentary*
- 4 Screens European Festival, 2008 – *Golden Screen Best Documentary*
- Shanghai TV Festival, 2009 – *Best International Feature Documentary*
- Docudays Kharkiv, 2009 – *Grand Jury prize*
- Docudays Kyiv, 2009 – *Audience Award*
- Screened at over 80 film festivals around the world.



ITVS International is a division of the Independent Television Service that promotes an international exchange of documentary films made by independent producers, bringing international voices to U.S. audiences, and American stories to audiences abroad. Through a unique public-private partnership called the Global Perspectives Project, ITVS International administers the International Media Development Fund (IMDF) and *True Stories: Life in the USA*. The IMDF funds international producers and supports the American broadcast of their programs. *True Stories: Life in the USA* promotes a series of American independent films to audiences around the world. ITVS created the Global Perspectives Project in 2005 with support from The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Ford Foundation, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the U.S. Department of State. More information is available at www.itvs.org/international.



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 22nd season on PBS, the award-winning POV series is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. Airing June through September, with primetime specials during the year, POV has brought more than 275 acclaimed films to millions nationwide and has a Webby Award-winning online series, *POV's Borders*. Since 1988,

POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. More information is available at www.pbs.org/pov.

POV Interactive (www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning Web department produces special features for every POV presentation, extending the life of our films through filmmaker interviews, story updates, podcasts, streaming video and community-based and educational content that involves viewers in activities and feedback. POV Interactive also produces our Web-only showcase for interactive storytelling, *POV's Borders*. In addition, the *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss and debate their favorite films, get the latest news and link to further resources. The POV website, blog and film archives form a unique and extensive online resource for documentary storytelling.

POV Community Engagement and Education

POV works with local PBS stations, educators and community organizations to present free screenings and discussion events to inspire and engage communities in vital conversations about our world. As a leading provider of quality nonfiction programming for use in public life, POV offers an extensive menu of resources, including free discussion guides and curriculum-based lesson plans. In addition, POV's *Youth Views* works with youth organizers and students to provide them with resources and training so they may use independent documentaries as a catalyst for social change.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, The Educational Foundation of America, JPMorgan Chase Foundation, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, New York State Council on the Arts, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, The September 11th Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's *Diverse Voices Project* is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Special support provided by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KCET Los Angeles, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

American Documentary, Inc. (www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation. Simon Kilmurry is executive director of American Documentary | POV.

DVD REQUESTS: Please note that a broadcast version of this film is available upon request, as the film may be edited to comply with new FCC regulations.



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