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CONTACT

Donna Hardwick, ITVS 415-356-8383 donna.hardwick@itvs.org
Mary Lugo 770-623-8190 lugo@negia.net
Cara White 843-881-1480 cara.white@mac.com

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***Unrest* Premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, January 8, 2018 on PBS**

Online Streaming Begins January 9

A Filmmaker Chronicles Her Harrowing Journey with a Mysterious and Debilitating Illness



Credit: Jason Frank Rothenberg

(San Francisco, CA) — Filmmaker Jennifer Brea was a Harvard PhD student soon to be engaged when she was struck down by a mysterious fever that left her bedridden. As her illness progressed she lost even the ability to sit in a wheelchair, yet her doctors insisted it was "all in her head." Unable to convey the seriousness and depth of her symptoms to her doctor, Jennifer began a video diary on her phone that eventually became the powerful and intimate documentary, *Unrest*. Written, directed, and produced by Brea, *Unrest* premieres on *Independent Lens* Monday, January 8, 2018, 10:00-11:30 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

Once Jennifer was diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME), commonly known as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS), she and her new husband, Omar, were left to grapple with how to shape a future together in the face of a lifelong illness. Refusing to accept the limitations of life in bed, Jennifer embarks on an online voyage around the world where she finds a hidden community of millions who have disappeared from their own lives, confined to their homes and bedrooms by ME. Using the internet, Skype, and Facebook, these disparate people connect with each other, finding a much-needed sanctuary of support and understanding.

At its core, *Unrest* is a love story. Though Jennifer and Omar may never live the life they originally dreamed about, together they find resilience, strength, and meaning in each other and their new-found community. Says Brea: "It's my hope that in sharing this world and these people I have come to profoundly love, that we can build a movement to transform the lives of patients with ME, accelerate the search for a cure, and bring a greater level of compassion, awareness, and empathy to millions upon millions of patients and their loved ones wrestling with chronic illness or invisible disabilities."

"As experts struggle to figure out what causes chronic fatigue syndrome, Jennifer's film opens a window into what it's like to live with this devastating illness," said Lois Vossen, Executive Producer of *Independent Lens*. "This brave and fearless film introduces us to this community of millions of 'missing' people who have lost all normal functions to ME, and is a powerful demand



1435 Folsom Street
San Francisco CA 94103
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
pbs.org/independentlens

that more be done to understand and cure a terrible disease.”

Unrest made its world premiere at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival and has been independently distributed with the support of Sundance Institute’s Creative Distribution Fellowship. Visit the *Unrest* page on [Independent Lens](#) for more information about the film, which will be available for online viewing on the site beginning January 9.

About the Filmmaker

Jennifer Brea (Director/Writer/Producer) is an independent documentary filmmaker based in Los Angeles. She has an AB from Princeton University and was a PhD student at Harvard until a sudden illness left her bedridden. In the aftermath, she rediscovered her first love, film. Her feature documentary, *Unrest*, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January, where it won a Special Jury Prize. She is also co-creator of *Unrest VR*, winner of the Sheffield Doc/Fest Alternate Realities Award. An activist for invisible disabilities and chronic illness, she co-founded a global advocacy network, #MEAction, and is a TED Talker.

About Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME)

A condition characterized by post-exertional malaise (a severe worsening of symptoms after even minimal exertion), ME causes dysregulation of both the immune system and the nervous system. The effects are devastating enough to leave 25% of patients homebound or bedbound. An estimated 15-30 million people around the world suffer from ME, approximately 75-85% of them women, and 80-90% of them undiagnosed.

CREDITS

Director	Jennifer Brea
Producers	Jennifer Brea Lindsey Dryden Patricia E. Gillespie Alysa Nahmias
Co-Producer	Anne Troldtoft Hjorth
Executive Producer & Creative Advisor	Deborah Hoffmann
Executive Producers	Ruth Ann Harnisch Lisa Gunn Donna Fairman Wilson Dan Cogan Ian Darling Regina K. Scully
Editors	Lynda Weinman Kim Roberts, Emiliano Battista

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About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://www.facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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