

[upbeat theme music]

JOAN MILLER: Welcome to the program. My name is Joan Miller, and our guest today is Cheryl Green. Cheryl and I met years ago at a brain injury support group. Cheryl's a filmmaker, and she makes documentaries. Welcome to the program, Cheryl.

CHERYL GREEN: Thank you, Joan. It's a pleasure to be here.

JOAN: Having a traumatic brain injury myself, I quickly discovered how the media focuses on how a person got an injury, their rehabilitation, and their aftermath. Your DVD, *Who Am I To Stop It*, focuses on something completely different. Why did you want your film to be so different?

CHERYL: Oh, that's a great question. So, my Co-director and Co-Producer, Cynthia Lopez, and I looked at a lot of media, and we really wanted to make something that we weren't seeing anywhere else. So, a lot of brain injury-related media, whether it's news or fiction or documentary, most of it focuses—like you said—on this very sensational moment of the wreck and ooh, what's wrong with you?

JOAN: Right.

CHERYL: And there's also often a lot of focus on doctors and clinicians and rehab. And we found that, in the media and in the science research and the rehab research, we really only get stories of people in that first 12 months after the brain injury. So, when it comes to research, it's really hard to organize research and expensive, and it's hard to get funding to be able to follow people for years and years to see what their life becomes afterward.

JOAN: Oh.

CHERYL: And then you know, with media, I think a lot of audiences really believe that what they want is that sensational wreck story.

JOAN: Sure.

CHERYL: They wanna see something gruesome and then feel better: oh, the person lived.

JOAN: If it bleeds, it leads.

CHERYL: Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And those stories are valuable and need to be out there, but I think that sometimes telling a story of trauma just to tell it, I don't know that that really serves a bigger purpose.

So, we wanted to look at what is life like years down the road, outside of rehab. Because when we only have these rehab-related stories in that first 12 months, people tend to think of us as lifelong patients. I have been, I've spoken at events where I was introduced as a "TBI patient," and I'm not in rehab anymore.

JOAN: A TBI?

CHERYL: Oh, traumatic brain injury.

JOAN: Oh, oh, yeah.

CHERYL: But I was introduced as a patient.

JOAN: Oh.

CHERYL: At an event that was media-related. And even if I was a patient, nobody in that room was my doctor, but I'm still introduced as a patient. And I think it's because we don't see the full, complex, well-rounded picture of people's lives way down the road. So, we think of them as patients forever.

JOAN: That makes sense.

CHERYL: Yeah. But it's unfortunate, and it's limiting. And I've had people say, "Why would you make a documentary about people with brain injury? They can't do anything."

JOAN: Wow!

CHERYL: And I've had people ask me, "Did you really make that film?" So, either they think that people with brain injuries can't make a film—and by the way, I didn't make it alone; Cynthia was my partner on it. We had a whole crew and a team—or they think I couldn't really have possibly had a brain injury, or else how could I do something as clever as make a film?

So, we wanna get past these stereotypes. We wanna get past this stigma that we're just patients, and all we care about is medical stuff.

JOAN: I like it.

CHERYL: Yeah. The other thing that this documentary does is we show— It's very realistic. It's not about inspiring people. It's not about just looking for the story of triumph. There is triumph in the film. There's a lot of self-determination and empowerment.

JOAN: Ah.

CHERYL: But there's struggle. There's isolation.

JOAN: So, it's a real story. [chuckles]

CHERYL: It's a very real story, yes. There's isolation, there's stigma, poverty. We look at education, work, sexuality, relationships, family. It's very complex because I want people to see that people with brain injuries are complex people still.

JOAN: Sure, that makes a lot of sense.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JOAN: If people don't know, they don't know. So, to bring awareness to this that's going on, that's wonderful.

Well, how can people see your DVD, *Who Am I To Stop It*?

CHERYL: Yeah. So, *Who Am I To Stop It* has educational distribution through New Day Films, and it is a film distribution company focused on social issue-related documentaries. And what that means, educational distribution, is that anybody at a school— And by the way, this is really for high school and up.

JOAN: OK. That's good to know.

CHERYL: Yeah. I wouldn't recommend it for middle school or below.

But anybody at a school, university, hospital, non-profit, brain injury support organization, any of them can buy the DVD or a license to watch it streaming through their organization. And all of that information is at the New Day Films website: NewDay.com. I suddenly realized I can't remember if it's NewDayFilms or NewDay. Let me grab this DVD and find out what the address is.

Oh, here you go. For the people who say they can't believe I had a brain injury, here's your proof.

JOAN: They we go.

CHERYL: It's not on here, and I can't remember it.

BOTH: [laugh]

CHERYL: But New Day Films is the company where people can look up how to get the DVD or purchase a streaming license for their organization or their university.

JOAN: I've gotta ask you too: where did you come up with the name, *Who Am I To Stop It?* And I betcha people think it's a question, and it's not really a question, is it?

CHERYL: I'm so glad you asked that. Yes, there's no question mark on it, and I am regularly having people add that question mark on there. Everybody wants it to be a question.

Where the name came from is a very interesting story. So, I had a very cheeseball working title when we started.

JOAN: Cheeseball?! [laughs]

CHERYL: It was so cheeseball. I didn't think it was cheeseball, but Cynthia— This is my first film. Cynthia was a very experienced filmmaker at the time, and she kept saying, "Cheryl. You gotta, this name is terrible! It's your film, but let me just share my wisdom. This is a terrible title. Let's get something less cheesy." And so, the commitment I made was that I would pay such close attention to the people I interviewed that one of them would say something that could become the title.

JOAN: Oh.

CHERYL: Because I just couldn't think of anything on my own.

JOAN: Sure.

CHERYL: So, I said, "OK, this is gonna be a team effort. Y'all are gonna name it." So, one day, we were meeting with Kris, who's on the cover of the DVD, and we weren't filming that day. This was the first time for Kris to meet the other people on the team, and we were just chatting. Kris was telling a story about this artist who wrote a letter to another artist to motivate that second artist. And she said, you're an artist. You have to create. If you don't follow your drive to create and to express yourself, the world will suffer from the loss. So, please see yourself as a gift, see your art as a gift, and give that gift. Don't stop yourself. Who are you to stop your own creativity?

JOAN: Wise words.

CHERYL: Yes! Wise words! And I thought, oh my gosh! I think the title is in there. And I ran into the living room, and I scribbled down, "Who are you to stop your own creativity?" Because this is a film about artists. There are three people in the film. They're all artists with disabilities from traumatic brain injury or TBI. And it's not art therapy. It's not art rehab. But it's art for all the reasons that people do art.

JOAN: Sure.

CHERYL: Self-expression, social protest, telling the stories that people won't listen to just in conversation.

JOAN: Right. There you go. Whatever they need to get out.

CHERYL: Yes, the deep stuff. So, when she said, you know, "Who are you to stop your own creativity," I thought this is what I'm going for. Because there is so much stigma. Because I am one person, and I get these garbage stereotypes remarks like, "People with brain injuries don't do anything, can't do anything."

JOAN: Mmhmm, right.

CHERYL: If I took those messages in, I could shut down, and a lotta people do shut down.

JOAN: Sure.

CHERYL: Because they hear these terrible messages: oh, you can't work anymore, so you're not productive. Oh, you're weird now. I don't like the way you communicate.

You know, I lost most of my friends, and if I had taken that completely personally and thought I'm a terrible person, you shut down, you stop your creativity, you stop striving. And the world is gonna put barriers up.

JOAN: Sure, yeah.

CHERYL: Right? It just is.

JOAN: I've lived through them, yes. I understand that totally. Right.

CHERYL: Yes. And it's enough to have these impairments that you never had before and learn to get used to them or learn to try to improve your situation. Meanwhile, people are still being really discriminatory and putting these negative stereotypes on you. And so, the title, *Who Am I To Stop It* is like, no, this stuff is going on around me, but who am I to stop seeing myself as valuable and worthwhile, with something to contribute? Maybe I can't work for pay anymore. Fine.

JOAN: Right.

CHERYL: I can still contribute to society. I'm still valuable.

JOAN: Absolutely. That's beautiful.

CHERYL: Yeah. But it doesn't have a question mark because it's rhetorical.

JOAN: Mmhmm, sure.

CHERYL: It's just supposed to be motivating like, I'm gonna get out there.

JOAN: Right.

CHERYL: I'm not gonna be judged by the things that I judged myself before. I may not be a perfectionist anymore. But I think that when people lose the ability to work for pay or to be able to maintain relationships, they get trashed.

JOAN: I think you're right. Yeah, and people don't realize their own distinct abilities.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JOAN: They focus on disability.

CHERYL: You know, I have no problem with people focusing on disability. I have no problem with that whatsoever.

JOAN: Oh, that's good.

CHERYL: If you have a disability, great.

JOAN: Yeah.

CHERYL: You are still valuable.

JOAN: That's very true. That's right. You're so right.

CHERYL: Yeah. So, the who am I to stop it? I'm not gonna get in my own way.

JOAN: That's good.

CHERYL: I'm gonna keep moving at whatever I do. I'll keep moving.

JOAN: That's great. That's absolutely great.

Well, thank you so much for coming to our program.

CHERYL: Yeah, thank you for having me.

Should I let you know my website and social media?

JOAN: Oh, yes. Absolutely! Absolutely.

CHERYL: I tried to make it easy. Everything's Who Am I To Stop It. So, the website is WhoAmIToStop— The website is WhoAmIToStopIt.com. Facebook, [@WhoAmIToStopIt](https://www.facebook.com/WhoAmIToStopIt). Twitter, which as you know, Joan, I really don't know how to use, but [@WhoAmIToStopIt](https://twitter.com/WhoAmIToStopIt) on Twitter.

JOAN: We can learn that together.

CHERYL: Yes! You can show me. Thank you. Yeah.

JOAN: [laughs]

Well, tell me. Have you done any other documentaries and any other films, and how can people see them?

CHERYL: Oh yeah. So, I do short films. I've done quite a few projects. I also have a podcast. Everything lives on the blog at WhoAmIToStopIt.com.

JOAN: OK. That's the best place to go to.

CHERYL: It is. And it's got links to my YouTube and to my Vimeo.

JOAN: Fabulous.

CHERYL: I can't remember my Vimeo name or my YouTube name, and so I just tell people to click on the icon on the website.

JOAN: There you go. That's the best way to do it: make it easy.

CHERYL: Yeah.

JOAN: Keep it simple.

Well, thank you so much for being our guest tonight.

CHERYL: It was a pleasure. Thanks for having me on.

JOAN: I enjoyed being with you.

My name is Joan Miller, and I'm with Civil Tongues Toastmasters. We'd love to have you as a guest sometime. We meet on Wednesdays at the State Office Building from 12:00 – 1:00. Come see us! We're a lot of fun. Have a great evening.