



ROCHESTER'S COMMUNITY MEDIA CENTER

The Last Stop: A Documentary That Is Making a Difference



Little did Laurie Kash know, when her mother walked into a nursing home for rehab care, it would be the beginning of a journey for both of them. Within three weeks of entering, and shortly before she was expected to be released, her mother became a paraplegic because of error and neglect, catalyzing Laurie to become an activist and advocate for nursing home reform and patient rights. Laurie's Mom was paralyzed from the chest down for the next three years of her life, until her death.

During the time before her mother's death, Laurie kept a journal of the experience and videotaped her mother, to capture her loving and indomitable mother's essence and spirit. But the things that went into her journal covered more than her feelings about her Mom or what she discovered during the lawsuit her family brought against the nursing home. It also covered her observations about how the elderly and ill are often treated. Those observations

spawned a website to document the tragedy that can happen to those we love who can no longer advocate for themselves. As the project evolved, it morphed into a 6 minute documentary.

"During the process, it was important to me not to be silenced, *never* to be silenced. People are silenced all the time about these issues," she explained.

When individuals start documentaries, they often do not know the true purpose behind their creation. They know only that a particular story or a particular situation drives them. Such is certainly true in Laurie's case with *The Last Stop* (<http://laststopmovie.com/>).

What happened as a result of Laurie's dedication and advocacy, her website and her documentary, is truly amazing. It goes beyond what many large and well-funded organizations have been able to achieve. Although it took two years of trying, she was finally able to get an audience with the Comptroller of New York State to push for an audit of the Department of Health...something that had not happened during the prior 16 years. It opened doors...to get the audit done, to have her editorial published in the Albany Times Union, (<http://www.timesunion.com/opinion/article/Reform-at-nursing-homes-key-6859602.php>) the Democrat & Chronicle, and to initiate further investigations. (<http://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/blogs/vote-up/2016/02/22/ny-struggles-fine-nursing-homes-audit-says/80770594/>) It shed light on the fact that few changes have taken place in nursing home reform in the past 30 years, that for the past 15 years, unsuccessful attempts have been made to increase minimum staffing, and that a blind eye has often been turned toward proven transgressions in nursing home care and staffing.

This project, which has essentially been Laurie's unpaid job for more than the last eight years, has also brought letters and notes, phone calls and emails filled with stories and thanks from people across the U.S., and as far away as the U.K.

Laurie is modest about her achievements.

"There have been many people – wonderful human beings – who have helped along the way," she said. "It has been a long journey, and sometimes I felt like Sisyphus pushing a boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down."

On her website, Laurie uses the metaphor of the movie *A Wonderful Life* (<http://laststopmovie.com/about-my-mom/>) about her Mother, Gertrude Kash, acknowledging the contributions her mother made to those around her and the difference she made in the world.

Laurie shared that she recently had an experience showing what a difference she and her project have made.

"A woman contacted me to say that, without the information I provided, she wouldn't have known what to ask when she had to put her mother in a nursing home, and that because she was armed with the right questions, she chose a different one. That woman adamantly insists, 'You saved my mother'."

Laurie invites readers to visit her website, watch her documentary (<http://laststopmovie.com/>), share a story (<http://laststopmovie.com/personal-stories/>) or donate (<http://laststopmovie.com/donate/>). She is making plans to raise funds for a longer documentary that takes a more in-depth look at the situation in nursing homes and more thoroughly investigates the need for nursing home reform.

"I believe a movement is congealing," she asserts, affirming that action needs to take place *now*, before we have to put our parents in nursing homes or go there ourselves.

Photo: Laurie Kash (in red) at Comptroller DiNapoli's press conference

Documentary Making a Difference (<http://www.rctvmediacenter.org/tag/documentary-making-a-difference/>), Laurie Kash (<http://www.rctvmediacenter.org/tag/laurie-kash/>), *The Last Stop Movie* (<http://www.rctvmediacenter.org/tag/the-last-stop-movie/>)

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