




Electronic Press Kit

# Broken Places

a film by Roger Weisberg





"The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places."

Ernest Hemingway, [A Farewell to Arms](#)



# Synopsis

BROKEN PLACES explores why some children are permanently damaged by early adversity while others are able to thrive. By revisiting some of the abused and neglected children we profiled decades ago, we're able to dramatically illustrate how early trauma shaped their lives as adults. BROKEN PLACES interweaves these longitudinal narratives with commentary from a few nationally renowned experts to help viewers better understand the devastating impact of childhood adversity as well as the inspiring characteristics of resilience.



# Director's Statement

Having spent the better part of the past forty years making films about intergenerational poverty, child welfare, and health disparities, I've often wondered why some children are so damaged by early trauma while others are able to thrive. Ernest Hemingway had a powerful way of addressing this question in [A Farewell to Arms](#) where he wrote, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places." Hemingway's observation about adversity and resilience captured the key question I hoped to address in my 33rd documentary, **BROKEN PLACES**. While experts have long understood that there is a strong connection between early adversity and poor mental and physical health outcomes, I didn't want to rehash this statistical correlation. I realized that I was sitting on a unique film archive that could enable me to dramatically illustrate how the trauma experienced by the children we filmed decades ago ultimately shaped their lives as adults. After paying to keep my films and videos in a climate-controlled storage facility for four decades, I realized I finally had an opportunity to put some of my old footage to good use. I revisited about a dozen of the subjects I profiled as children and chose three of the most moving stories to update with my film crew. Ultimately, we were able to offer viewers a unique time-lapse perspective on how the troubled children we filmed decades ago evolved into the adults they are today. Although there have been other documentaries on this topic, none have been able to present the devastating impact of childhood adversity or the remarkable characteristics of resilience in the context of moving stories that span decades.



## ROGER WEISBERG Writer/Producer/Director

In **BROKEN PLACES** we interweave these longitudinal narratives with commentary from a few nationally renowned experts. Before my interviews with these experts, I asked them to screen the stories of our subjects, so instead of making broad, abstract, general comments, their observations are grounded in moving narratives. In addition to shedding light on exciting new developments in neuroscience, they also help explain the kind of life outcomes we reveal - why some of our subjects were able to make it while others were not. Along the way, they also help answer some far-reaching questions. How does early adversity affect the brain of young children? Why are some children resilient while others are not? Is resilience determined by genes, the environment, or some interaction between the two? Can we identify children who are likely to be resilient as well as children likely to experience bad mental and physical health outcomes down the road? What kinds of early childhood interventions strengthen resilience, and how can we make these interventions widely available to the children most at risk? I believe that the answers to these questions hold the keys to solving the greatest public health crisis we face today.



A woman with glasses is holding a baby. The woman is looking at the baby. The baby is looking towards the camera. The background is a plain wall.

# About The Film

BROKEN PLACES, our 33rd documentary, poses the complex question of why some children are permanently damaged by early adversity while others are able to thrive. To help answer this question, we dug into 40 years of our film archives to update a few of the stories of children growing up in difficult circumstances that we filmed decades ago. It turns out that some of these children were so scarred by abuse and neglect that they are now in mental institutions, correctional facilities, or drug rehabilitation centers. A few died prematurely. However, there are others who managed to overcome comparable childhood stress and are now healthy, self-sufficient adults. Viewers are given a unique time-lapse perspective, witnessing how a few of these troubled children evolved into the adults they are today. BROKEN PLACES is written, produced and directed by Roger Weisberg, whose previous productions have won over a hundred and fifty awards including Emmy, duPont-Columbia, and Peabody awards, as well as two Academy Award nominations.



# Character Spotlights



**Bobby Gross**

We profiled Bobby Gross in our 1988 film, *OUR CHILDREN AT RISK*, when he was an angry 5-year-old growing up in extreme poverty. Three decades later we discovered that he ended up spending his teenage years in mental institutions, juvenile detention centers, and jails. He's now 35 and collects Social Security disability while his own child languishes in the foster care system.



**Daniella Rin Hover**

While it's sad to see the toll that childhood adversity can take, it's tremendously uplifting to see the remarkable display of resilience shown by people like Daniella Rin Hover. When we first filmed Daniella 16 years ago in *AGING OUT*, a film about teenagers leaving foster care, she was a teen mother bouncing around the foster care system after being severely abused and neglected as a child. When we caught up with her in 2018, we discovered that she was able to attend college, gain meaningful employment, and raise a healthy family of her own.



# Character Spotlights Cont'd

## Danny & Raymond Jacob

To further explore how childhood trauma impacts children differently, we revisit Danny and Raymond Jacob who were the principal subjects 20 years ago in our Academy Award-nominated film *WHY CAN'T WE BE A FAMILY AGAIN*. We chronicled the struggle of these brothers after their mother abandoned them at a young age when she became addicted to crack cocaine. Fast-forward twenty years, and we see that Danny went on to attend college, host a radio talk show, and coach a basketball team for at-risk youth. His younger brother, Raymond, had a tougher time overcoming his traumatic childhood. He suffered a mental breakdown in his teens, was hospitalized over a dozen times, and currently draws social security disability.



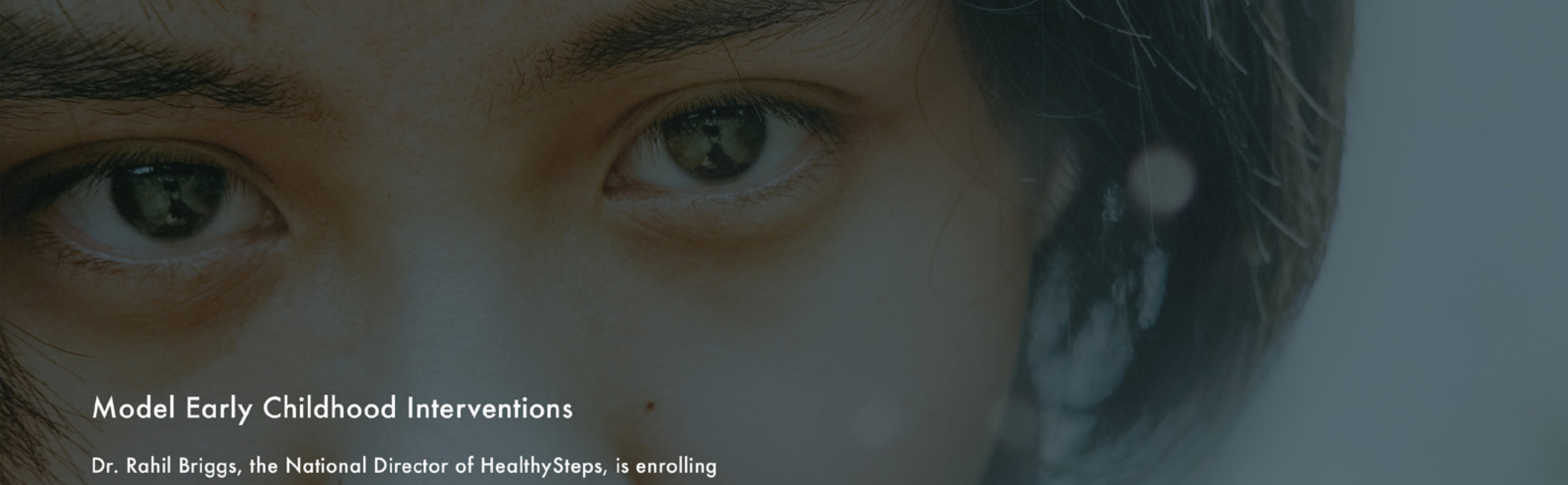
# Experts

BROKEN PLACES interweaves these poignant longitudinal narratives with commentary from a few nationally renowned experts in the fields of neurobiology and child development. These experts weigh in on the far-reaching impact of childhood adversity as well as the key relationships and interventions that either failed our subjects or helped them overcome the obstacles they faced. Viewers hear from Dr. Jack Shonkoff, the Director of Harvard's Center on the Developing Child, who explains how exciting new developments in imaging, neurobiology, and genetics now offer a clearer picture of the myriad ways that childhood adversity affects brain architecture, early development, and later-life outcomes. We interview another visionary pediatrician, Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, who oversees a clinic for at-risk youth and leads a national research and advocacy organization called the Center for Youth Wellness. We also interview Dr. Thomas Boyce, the Chief of the Division of Developmental Medicine at UCSF, who explains that children have different genetic susceptibility to adversity. Dr. Boyce labeled resilient kids dandelions, because like the flower, they are able to survive and even thrive in a harsh environment. In contrast, Dr. Boyce described highly sensitive kids as orchids, because they need a great deal of nurturing in order to thrive.



BROKEN PLACES illustrates how neuroscientists are now able to identify children who are at high risk for suffering from what the experts call "toxic stress" - stress that is extreme, frequent, or extended in the absence of a supportive adult relationship. We see pediatricians screening for toxic stress in their offices the way they screen for other diseases by collecting samples of urine, saliva, or hair. The ultimate goal of all these studies is to identify the most vulnerable children in order to target early interventions to those at greatest risk.



A close-up, high-angle shot of a young child's face, focusing on their large, dark, expressive eyes. The child's skin is light, and their hair is dark and slightly messy. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light blue.

## Model Early Childhood Interventions

Dr. Rahil Briggs, the National Director of HealthySteps, is enrolling at-risk families into a model program which provides intensive mental health and parenting interventions for young mothers and their children during routine pediatric visits. This early intervention model now operates in 120 pediatric clinics in 15 states.

Another program that has successfully demonstrated that early childhood interventions can be brought to scale is the Harlem Children's Zone. We interview Geoffrey Canada, who achieved such impressive results over the past 30 years that other cities, like Minneapolis, have eagerly adapted the Harlem Children's Zone model. We travel to the north side of Minneapolis, where we meet Sondra Samuels, who runs NAZ, the Northside Achievement Zone. We illustrate how NAZ's two-generation approach uses family and academic coaches to promote healthy child development and school readiness. We also capture an emotional scene as proud parents come forward with their 3-year-old babies to receive their graduation certificates during a stirring College-Bound Babies ceremony.

# Experts Cont'd

In Minneapolis, viewers also meet economist Art Rolnick, a Senior Fellow at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, whose data shows that every dollar invested in high-quality early childhood intervention for disadvantaged children pays an inflation-adjusted 18 percent annual rate of return. The goal of BROKEN PLACES is to reveal what we know works so that children facing difficult circumstances can thrive. Ultimately, viewers who meet Bobby Gross, Daniella Rin Hover, and Danny and Raymond Jacob will understand why investing in children at risk is far less costly than paying for the downstream costs of inaction.





**ROGER WEISBERG**  
Writer/Producer/Director

Roger Weisberg joined public television station WNET as a staff Producer in 1976. Since 1982 when he founded an independent production company, Public Policy Productions, Weisberg has written, produced and directed 32 documentaries. These films aired in primetime on PBS in the U.S., and many were released theatrically and broadcast around the world. Weisberg's documentaries have won over 150 awards including Peabody, Emmy, and duPont-Columbia awards. He received an Academy Award nomination in 2001 for *Sound and Fury* and in 2003 for *Why Can't We Be a Family Again?* Additional information about Weisberg's previous productions can be found [here](#).



**JOHN HAZARD**  
Cinematographer

John Hazard is a cinematographer with a long resume of documentary films and a special passion for cinema vérité. John has traveled the world shooting documentaries for Discovery, National Geographic, and the New York Times. Recent productions include *NOVA*, *History Detectives*, and biographies about Richard Nixon, the Kennedys, and George Wallace for PBS; *King Tut's Final Secrets* for National Geographic; and *Triangle: Remembering the Fire* for HBO. John also shot five of Roger Weisberg's documentaries over the past decade.

# Key Personnel





**PASCAL AKESSON**  
Editor

Pascal Akesson has been a film editor for over twenty-five years. His award-winning documentaries have appeared on PBS, HBO, Discovery Channel, History Channel, ABC, Canal+, Arte, NHK and Lifetime, as well as at numerous international film festivals, including Cannes, Berlin, Sundance and Miami. Recent productions include *Women, War and Peace* for PBS, a five part series on women's role in war and peace building; *Dirty Business*, a documentary about the myth of clean coal; and *Fire in the Blood*, the story of how Western countries condemned millions of people in the developing world to death by blocking access to AIDS drugs. Pascal also was the Editor for Public Policy Production's *Money and Medicine*, an investigation of the dangers of over-treatment and runaway healthcare spending, and *Dream On*, a road trip in search of the vanishing American Dream.



**MARK SUOZZO**  
Composer

Mark Suozzo has composed music for many PBS and HBO documentaries. He has supplied scores for American Experience, POV and Independent Lens, working with award winning directors Thomas Lennon, Chana Gazit, Michael Camerini & Shari Robertson and Cynthia Wade. Mark composed music for Roger Weisberg's and Josh Aronson's *Sound & Fury* as well as Roger Weisberg's and Murray Nossel's *Why Can't We Be A Family Again?*, both of which garnered Oscar nominations. Mark also scored Whit Stillman's films *Metropolitan*, *Barcelona*, *Last Days of Disco*, *Damsels in Distress*, *The Cosmopolitans* and *Love & Friendship*. His other film credits include Mary Harron's *The Notorious Bettie Page*, and Shari Springer-Berman and Bob Pulcini's *American Splendor* and *The Nanny Diaries*. Mark is currently the Co-Director of the Graduate Film Scoring Program at NYU/Steinhardt.



# Testimonials

"I was amazed by the life trajectories documented here.  
Very impressive work."

— Dr. Takao K. Hensch, Professor, Molecular & Cellular Biology Professor, Neurology  
(Children's Hospital), Center for Brain Science, Harvard University

"The message of Broken Places is clear. It says that toxic stress and its downstream consequences are costly. It calls us all to create better interventions based on this understanding. And for this reason, it is a powerful tool for good in strengthening the work of my organization and our partners."

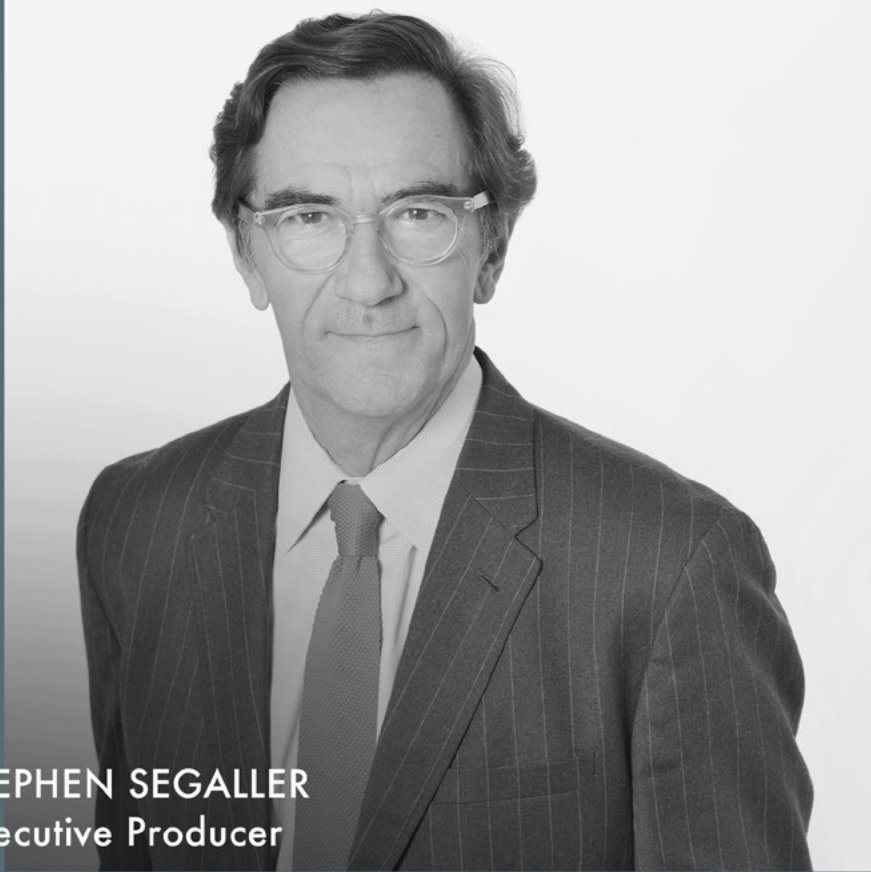
— Elisabeth D. Babcock, MCRP, PhD, President and CEO EMPATH - Economic Mobility Pathways

"It's a beautiful film and I hope it gets A LOT of public attention...The stories are powerful and moving and the contrast in seeing people as children and then as adults is very powerful. There is enough hope in it to inspire change while not soft pedaling the enormity of the problem...Well done and congratulations."

— Sandra Bloom, Co-Director, Center for Nonviolence and Social Justice, Drexel University

"It's a magnificent film. Hearty congratulations for completing it and for the great message it will deliver to audiences around the world."

— W. Thomas Boyce, Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry,  
University of California, San Francisco



**STEPHEN SEGALLER**  
Executive Producer

Stephen Segaller oversees all national programming from WNET's producing entities - THIRTEEN, WLIW21, Creative News Group and NJTV. These productions include *Great Performances*, *Nature*, *American Masters*, *Secrets of the Dead*, *PBS NewsHour Weekend*, and *Cyberchase*; documentary series featuring Henry Louis Gates Jr., Niall Ferguson, and Simon Schama; *Shakespeare Uncovered*, about to air its third season, and *Women, War & Peace*, airing in 2019. In September 2018, Segaller's portfolio as executive in charge will include Amanpour & Company - the nightly news and conversation program featuring CNN's Christiane Amanpour and four New York-based contributing correspondents: Walter Isaacson, Michel Martin, Alicia Menendez, and Hari Sreenivasan.



# Testimonials Cont'd

"I think you've produced one of the best documentaries on early childhood adversity that I've seen. The incredible quality of what people shared with you on camera about their personal struggles over a period of more than two decades is a remarkable tribute to your professional skills and to the authentic personal commitment you brought to this project.

— Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D. Director, *Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University*

"How truly unique and very special to have the opportunity to follow alongside these families and their life stories as they have unfolded over so many years...Congratulations on this exceptional documentary. So moving to hear the voices of the children now as adults."

— Renée Boynton-Jarrett, MD, ScD, Associate Professor, *Boston University School of Medicine/Boston Medical Center*

"This is a powerful and informative documentary - congratulations!...I'll be happy to recommend it to others."

— Brian Smedley, Co-founder and Executive Director, *National Collaborative for Health Equity*

"...you did a splendid job laying out the ACEs framework - better than I've seen anywhere. And your protagonists and their stories were remarkable - telling, eloquent and heart-breaking...I was delighted you spotlighted some of the successful trauma-informed interventions which work!"

— Larry Adelman, Co-director & Head of Production, *California Newsreel, Producer, The Raising of America*



# Broken Places

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