

The Collector of Bedford Street
A film by Alice Elliott

Press Kit



Crew Bios:

Producer/director **ALICE ELLIOTT** produced the award-winning documentaries *The Collector of Bedford Street* and *Diamonds in the Rough*. *The Collector of Bedford Street* was nominated for an Academy Award® in the short documentary category and won Best Documentary, the Audience Award, and The Horizon Award at its world premiere at the Aspen Short Film Festival. At the USA Festival it won the Family Award. At the Florida Film Festival, it won both the Audience Award for favorite short film and the Florida Forever Filmmaker Award honoring the film that best represents insights into the human condition. It is part of the National Council on Foundations touring festival and was awarded a Henry Hampton Award from the Council. At the Heartland Festival it received a Crystal Heart Award. At the Big Bear Lake Festival it won the Jury Prize for Best Documentary. In addition to these award-winning screenings, *The Collector of Bedford Street* has been shown at over 40 festivals and won 15 awards. In 2003 it screened on Cinemax. She co-produced *Grist for the Mill* that aired on Cinemax, June 1999. As a writer, she wrote for the Nickelodeon series, *Are You Afraid of the Dark?* and her three plays for young audiences have been published and produced in New York City and around the country. She teaches for NYU's School of Continuing Education in the Video and Broadcasting Department. She has produced radio commercials, CD-Roms, and played a role for 10 years on ABC's *Loving*. As an actress she appeared in two feature films, and over 100 TV commercials before going behind the cameras. She co-chaired the scholarship committee for New York Women in Film and Television and is the videographer for Judson Memorial Church.

Co-producer **VICKIE KENNY** recently worked as Consulting Producer on *Rocks With Wings*, a four-hour documentary series being produced by Shiprock Productions and Oregon Public Broadcasting. She was a Co-Producer on the ground-breaking, ten-hour documentary series *An American Love Story*, presented by American Playhouse and the Independent Television Service. The series, directed by Jennifer Fox, aired nationally on PBS in the fall of 1999. Kenny also served as Senior Associate Producer and Music Supervisor on *Grist for the Mill*, a personal documentary by Cynthia Wade, televised by HBO/Cinemax. She was Associate Producer on the documentaries *Jerusalem: The City Touched by God* and *Teddy Kollek: A life Story*; both distributed by The American Program Service. Her work as an Associate Producer at Yale Roe Films, Ltd., included sales, marketing, training and fund-raising videos for clients such as AT&T, Parade Magazine, the Elie Wiesel Foundation and The Abraham Fund. Kenny came to New York after studying Theater Arts at the North Carolina School of the Arts.

Editor **MELISSA HACKER** *The Endurance, Shackleton's Legendary Antarctic Expedition*, additional editor, Sundance Film Festival 2001. Produced by George Butler. PBS Broadcast. *My Knees Were Jumping, Remembering the Kindertransports*, director, editor Sundance Film Festival, January 1996. Selected by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences as an Outstanding Documentary 1996. Certificate of Merit Award Winner San Francisco International Film Festival. PBS Broadcast spring 1999. UK Film 4 Broadcast fall 1999. *Avalanche!* editor, A National Geographic Explorer documentary. Producer: Tom Casciato. Winner Best Mountain Environment Film, Banff Mountain Film Festival. aired August 1995. *Fight For Your Rights: Through My Eyes* editor. Producer Gini Sykes. Episode on young people and violence for documentary series, MTV News. Screened before members of Congress and aired nationally October 1999. *True Life: I Need Sex Rx* editor, producer Gini Sykes. Winner Planned Parenthood MAGGIE Award. Finalist: Time Life's international health film competition. Aired nationally October 1999. *Paramedics; Chaos Theory, New York City* editor, producer: Paco De Onis. New York Times Television documentary series for the Learning Channel. Aired nationally January 1999.

Cinematographer **CYNTHIA WADE** was co-producer and principal verite cinematographer for the Peabody Award-winning *Taken In: The Lives of America's Foster Children* broadcast on PBS. For *Out of My Mind*, winner of the IDA/David L. Woper Award, she was principal cinematographer. She is the producer, director, and writer of *Grist for the Mill*, presented on HBO/Cinemax. Currently she is shooting documentary for the new Oxygen Network. *Shelter Dogs* that she directed is being developed by HBO as part of their America Undercover Series.

Composer **JOEL GOODMAN** is a full-time composer for features and documentaries. Most recently he composed music for the 2002 Sundance entry *American Standoff*, produced by Barbara Koppel. Other documentaries include, *Children Underground*, winner of the Special Jury Award, Sundance Film Festival 2001, *The Children of Chabannes*, seen on HBO, *Green Chimneys*, *My Knees Were Jumping Remembering the Kindertransport*, *Dwarfs: Not a Fairytale*, and other productions for PBS.

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SYNOPSIS:

The Collector of Bedford Street is a documentary short film that takes an intimate look at Larry Selman, the film maker's 60 year old, neighbor who has an intellectual disability. It was seen on Cinemax in 2003 and nominated for an Academy Award® in the short documentary category. A tale of personal persistence overcoming crushing odds, the film humanizes the story behind the abstract statistics of intellectual disability, shedding light on how a community built tolerance and understanding.

This unique portrait was created by a collaboration between the filmmaker and the subject. The narrative uses scenes of Larry interacting with people within his West Village, Manhattan neighborhood, candid conversations, and his voice-over from recorded interviews. The film makes transitions with voice-over messages that were recorded from the filmmaker's answering machine during the five years of production. The shooting style is hand held and spontaneous, with a subjective point of view. The focus is on telling the story. Ultimately the portrait normalizes "the other", showing that Larry's fears and loves are universal.

Larry is a fundraiser and a community activist. He is an intrinsic part of this West Village community. In *The Collector of Bedford Street* we see Larry making his unique contribution to the area by soliciting money for local and national charities. Largely because of Larry's efforts during the last 25 years, the block association has given over \$200,000 in contributions to local non-profit organizations. For Muscular Dystrophy, Larry raised the largest amount in the New York metro area during their "Be a Star" campaign. When he was offered a watch as a prize, he chose a woman's watch to give to a friend. His other efforts include \$1522 for the AIDS Walk and \$600 for a Pediatric AIDS clinic.

Despite his success at fund-raising, Larry, like many other people with disabilities, confronts a time of crises. He is experiencing life on the front lines of government assistance. Citizens with intellectual disabilities are often faced with housing emergencies, prejudice and rejection. The acronym NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) is the rallying cry for those who want to exclude and isolate people with disabilities. According to Kathleen McGinley, director of advocacy for The National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems, a national organization that advocates for people with disabilities, the greatest difficulties facing individuals with disabilities today are community acceptance and housing needs.

During the movie we see the members of the Block Association create a supplemental needs Adult Trust Fund for Larry. This fund allows Larry to continue to live independently after his 87 year-old uncle is no longer able to help care for him. Thematically *The Collector of Bedford Street* helps us examine the issues of community and service. What makes a community strong? What pulls us apart? How do we include and exclude? How do we grow? When do we become responsible for each other? Is diversity worth the cost? This West Village community provides a model. In *The Collector of Bedford Street* we see how a community how embraces rather than excludes.

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Director's Statement:

The Collector of Bedford Street is half-hour long documentary film about the journey on which Larry Selman has taken me. He is a community activists and fundraiser. He is also an individual with an intellectual disability who lives at the poverty level on federal disability payments. Larry's story absorbed me as a film maker, when I discovered that every year he raises thousands of dollars for charities. At first, I thought the film would show an intimate exploration of his constant fundraising. I was curious what made him ask hundreds of people every year to make donations to the AIDS Walk, Muscular Dystrophy, and the local Block Association. The answers I found have turned the film making into a life-changing personal voyage.

Some people might say that Larry has three strikes against him; he's poor, diabetic and he has an intellectual disability. Yet despite his poverty, failing health, and limited abilities, his efforts, during the last 25 years, have made it possible for the West Village block association where we live to make contributions to local nonprofit organizations totaling over \$125,000. Last summer Larry raised the largest individual amount in the NY metro area for the "Be a Star" solicitation for the New York Area Muscular Dystrophy campaign. When he was offered a watch as a prize, he chose a woman's watch to give to a friend. His other efforts this year include \$1522 for the AIDS Walk and \$600 for a Pediatric AIDS clinic.

This is a time of crises for people like Larry in our country. People living with intellectual disabilities are often faced with housing crises, prejudice and rejection. The acronym NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard) is the rallying cry for those who want to exclude and isolate people with disabilities. According to Kathleen McGinley, assistant director of public relations for The ARC, a national organization on intellectual disability, the greatest difficulties facing individuals with disabilities today are community acceptance and housing needs. The ARC has 920 national branches, and would like to use the finished film for community discussion groups.

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Stylistically *The Collector of Bedford Street* takes a risky yet rewarding approach. This first person, intimate portrait of a man with an intellectual disability, allows Larry to speak for himself almost completely, without a narrator interpreting his experience. The form takes its cue from the subject - straightforward, funny, truthful, raw, and candid in its intimacy.

When I started this film, I had a singular mission: I wanted to know why Larry did his good deeds. During the shooting I realized I was no longer a documentarian that could step away when the film was finished. Our community began to guide me to what we hope will be long term care for Larry. The Block Association is starting a Trust Fund for Larry. I have discovered that more importantly than why someone does good, is the transformation that acts of generosity inspire. In *The Collector of Bedford Street* we see how Larry's community activism has changed me and our community.

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The Making of " *The Collector of Bedford Street* "

Alice Elliott and Larry Selman had been neighbors for nearly thirty years. They knew each other from participating in their neighborhood block association (the Bedford-Barrow-Commerce Block Association). Over the years Alice would see Larry raising money for a variety of causes. She admired his tenacity and boldness. Larry always had the determination to raise as much money as possible, and was willing to ask anyone who crossed his path. However, she wondered where all of the money went. She asked a few members of the Bedford-Barrow-Commerce Block Association (BBC) in passing if they knew what Larry did with all of the money he raised. Everyone told Alice that Larry never took any of the money for himself.



After learning of Larry's generosity, Alice became intrigued with her neighbor. Larry's need for the money was apparent. Yet, he devoted much of his time to collecting money for various charities on the local and national level, and never expected any of the money to go to himself. Larry defied Alice's notion of a philanthropist, and she wanted to find out what compelled him to be so generous. As she learned more about her neighbor across the street, Alice realized Larry's life could be a compelling documentary. Using a neighbor's camera, Alice conducted her first interview with Larry, or what she likes to call Larry's screen test. She wanted to determine if Larry would be a suitable on-camera subject. Larry's ease in front of the camera surpassed Alice's expectations, and she knew they would be able to work together. With this kernel of inspiration, she asked the president of the BBC, Kathryn Donaldson, if the organization would be interested in helping her make a movie about Larry's life. Kathryn responded, "I have been waiting ten years for someone to ask me this."

With the BBC's support Alice had access to Larry's closest friends, and a community network of people who wanted to help her with the movie. The BBC raised money; they served as one of her fiscal sponsors and helped create a support system for Larry as the documentary was being made. Their activism and civic responsibility are intertwined with the production of *The Collector of Bedford Street*, and of course, Larry's life.

After six years of production, a rough-cut of *The Collector of Bedford Street* (then titled *I'm a Collector!*) found its way into the office of Lisa Heller, a senior producer at HBO. By this time Alice had run out of funding and was looking for a broadcaster or a distributor to help her finish *The Collector of Bedford Street*. When Lisa Heller called to offer Alice the chance to work with HBO, Alice's answer was yes. Working with producers from HBO, Alice was able to complete her directorial debut in December of 2001.

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Radio Interviews:

James Sims conducted a recent interview on the Bedford-Barrow-Commerce Block Association with Kathryn Donaldson and Larry Selman. You can download the interview as an mp3 here:

[James Sims BBC Interview: "Greenwich Village Volunteer"](#)

You can also listen to the interview online by going to James Sims' official website: <http://www.simsscoop.com/>. To listen to the interview, click "More Clips" - "Columbia University" - "Greenwich Village Volunteer".

"An Actress Turns to Documentaries" on *Weekend Edition*
National Public Radio, 1/16/05

"Housing First" on *All Things Considered*
National Public Radio, 3/16/03

Funding:

- The Bedford-Barrow-Commerce Block Association
- The Lucius and Eva Eastman Foundation
- The Hilton Foundation
- The Jerome Foundation
- The Laybourne Family
- The Manhattan Community Art Fund/New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, administered by Lower Manhattan Cultural Council
- New York State Council on the Arts – Distribution Grant
- New York University, Office of Community Service, Community Service Project Fund
- North Star Foundation
- The Puffin Foundation
- The Wasily Family Foundation

Fiscal Sponsors

- Film/Video Arts
- The Bedford-Barrow-Commerce Block Association
- Visiting Neighbors Inc.

Outreach Partners:

- American Association of Mental Retardation (AAMR)
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
- The Arc
- National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities (NACDD)
- National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS)