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## **POV's 'Herman's House' Is a Moving Story of Resilience in Prison and the Transformative Power of Art, Monday, July 8, 2013 on PBS**

**Man in Solitary Confinement for More Than 40 Years Builds a Life-changing Relationship  
With a New York Artist**

*A Co-presentation With the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM)*

"A portrait of an invisible man, 'Herman's House' is a raised voice in the constitutional debate over solitary confinement, as well as a film about art. . . . equal parts social protest, conceptual cinema and criminal-justice critique."—John Anderson, *Variety*

New Orleans native and former Black Panther activist Herman Wallace went to jail in 1967 at age 25 for a robbery he admits committing. In 1972, he was accused of the murder of a prison guard, a crime he vehemently denies, and placed in solitary confinement in a 6-foot-by-9-foot cell in the Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as Angola. Wallace was subsequently convicted and given a life sentence. Fellow Black Panther Albert Woodfox was also placed in solitary and then convicted of the same guard's murder. A third Panther activist, Robert King, was placed in solitary at that time though eventually convicted of a different murder. Together the three men became famous as the "Angola Three."

Except for a brief period, Wallace has remained in solitary confinement 23 hours a day for 40 years, and he has never stopped protesting and appealing his murder conviction. Over the years, as doubts about the men's guilt accumulated—King was freed in 2001, and in February of this year a judge ordered the release of Woodfox—concern has also grown that Wallace and an estimated 80,000 other prisoners in the United States<sup>1</sup> are being subjected to solitary confinement. In 2002, Wallace received a letter that asked an extraordinary question. Jackie Sumell, a young New York artist, wrote, "What kind of house does a man who has lived in a 6-foot-by-9-foot cell for over 30 years dream of?"

Angad Singh Bhalla's **Herman's House** has its national broadcast premiere on **Monday, July 8, 2013** at 10 p.m. (check local listings), as part of the 26th season of the award-winning PBS series **POV (Point of View)**. American television's longest-running independent documentary series, POV was recently honored with a 25-year retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art and a MacArthur Foundation Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

**Herman's House** is a portrait of a man who won't give up fighting for his freedom and, inevitably, a critique of a justice system that has confined him for decades in solitary—a condition that some decry as torture. The film is even more the story of an unlikely artistic collaboration that brought thousands of Americans face-to-face with the harsh reality of Wallace's confinement and went on to change profoundly the lives of both the Louisiana prisoner and the New York artist.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Solitary Watch, <http://solitarywatch.com/faq/>

Sumell's initial query led to hundreds of letters and phone calls between her and Wallace. The first result was the art installation "The House That Herman Built," which made its debut in Germany in 2006. It featured a full-scale wooden model of Wallace's cell, in which gallery attendees were encouraged to spend time, and detailed plans for Wallace's dream home, which showed that his spirit remained strong. When the show hit London in 2008, Robert King, the former Black Panther, asked Sumell if she had thought her communications with Wallace would lead to such a celebrated art project. "No way. . . . It was just a game between me and Herman . . . my way of getting Herman out of Angola." Introducing that exhibit, she says, "I'm not a lawyer and I'm not rich and I'm not powerful, but I'm an artist . . . and I knew the only way I could get (Herman) out of prison was to get him to dream."

But as **Herman's House** recounts, the exhibition is only the first step in an unpredictable, inspiring, stressful and life-changing 12-year journey. Throughout the film, we hear audio of the phone calls between Wallace and Sumell, a riveting record of a prisoner's remarkable resilience after decades of solitude and of a young artist's determination to tell that man's story. Wallace finds a new friend and new hope, expressed in his growing, imaginative engagement with his dream house. Things take a dramatic turn when Wallace asks Sumell to make his dream a reality. Against the odds and with few resources, Sumell upends her life in New York to move to New Orleans, where she starts scouting land and planning to build a real Herman's house. The hope is that it will serve as Wallace's home when and if he's released, and that in any case it will be used as a center for troubled youth.

In New Orleans, Sumell finds a new life and an unexpected sense of community. She acquires her own little house, friendly neighbors and a dog. She grows close to Wallace's sister, Vickie, who has tirelessly supported her brother's efforts to be exonerated. But Sumell's imaginative leap of faith begins to take its toll, with a nerve-wracking hunt for land in a city still recovering from Hurricane Katrina and pressure to raise funds for the house as her own finances dwindle. She and Wallace's supporters feel the strain of knowing that he remains locked in a cell in the Elayn Hunt Correctional Center, where he sweats out the decision of the Louisiana Court of Appeals on whether to grant his last appeal.

**Herman's House** is a moving account of Wallace's unending struggle for freedom and the powerful expression it found in Sumell's project, which began as a game and turned into an interrogation of justice and punishment in America. It is also a testament to the transformative powers of art and imagination.

"There are 2.3 million people in jail in the United States," says filmmaker Angad Singh Bhalla. "More than 80,000 of those are in solitary confinement. Herman Wallace has probably been there longer than anyone—40 years and counting.

"**Herman's House** is an effort to humanize at least one person behind bars. Herman Wallace is a brother, a mentor, an artistic collaborator and, most importantly for Jackie Sumell, a friend. Their art project creates a safe space for us to examine the racial and class divisions that underlie American justice."

**Herman's House** is a production of Storyline Entertainment and Time of Day Productions in association with the Ford Foundation/JustFilms.

#### **About the Filmmaker:**

##### **Angad Singh Bhalla, Director, Producer, Writer, Cinematographer**

Angad Singh Bhalla specializes in film projects that highlight rarely heard voices. After spending months with Indian villagers who had been resisting a mining project backed by the Canadian company Alcan, he produced his first independent project, *U.A.I.L. Go Back*, which was used widely as an organizing tool in

the campaign against the project. Bhalla has since worked on videos for such organizations as Human Rights Watch and several labor unions. His short documentary on the lives of Indian street artists, *Writings on the Wall*, garnered awards at the WorldFest-Houston International Film Festival and the Columbus Film + Video Festival. It was broadcast nationally on Canada's Bravo network and India's NDTV and internationally on Al Jazeera English. **Herman's House** is Bhalla's first feature documentary. When not making films, he works as a community organizer within faith communities.

Bhalla was born in Toronto to Punjabi immigrants and studied at Stanford University, where he received a bachelor of arts degree in cultural and social anthropology. He lives in Brooklyn, N.Y., with his wife, Lavanya Chekuru, a physician.

**Credits:**

Director:	Angad Singh Bhalla
Producers:	Lisa Valencia-Svensson, Angad Singh Bhalla
Executive Producers:	Ed Barreveld, Loring McAlpin
Cinematographers:	Iris Ng, Angad Singh Bhalla
Editor:	Ricardo Acosta
Original Music:	Ken Myhr
Animation:	Nicolas Brault, Dan Hatch

Running Time: 86:46

**POV Series Credits:**

Executive Producer:	Simon Kilmurry
Co-Executive Producer:	Cynthia López
Vice President, Programming and Production:	Chris White
Coordinating Producer:	Andrew Catauro

**Awards and Festivals:**

- Winner, Magnus Isacson Award, RIDM, 2012
- Winner, Best Documentary Award, Harlem International Film Festival, 2012
- Winner, Inspiration Award, Cinema on the Bayou, 2013
- Official Selection, Hot Docs, 2012
- Official Selection, Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, 2012
- Official Selection, True/False Film Fest, 2012
- Official Selection, San Francisco Documentary Festival, 2012
- Official Selection, United Nations Association Film Festival, 2012
- Official Selection, New Orleans Film Festival, 2012
- Official Selection, Hamptons International Film Festival, 2012
- Official Selection, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, 2013

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The Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to presenting stories that convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences to the broadest audience possible. We do this by funding, producing, distributing and exhibiting works in film, television and digital media. For more information, visit [www.caamedia.org](http://www.caamedia.org).



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and now in its 26th season on PBS in 2013, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. In 2012, POV achieved a new milestone, winning five News & Documentary Emmy® Awards. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. Visit [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

**POV Digital** ([www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov))

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, plus listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

**POV Community Engagement and Education** ([www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach))

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 600 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

**American Documentary, Inc.** ([www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org))

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

POV has the honor of receiving a 2013 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the desJardins/Blachman Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Special support provided by The Fledgling Fund and the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.



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