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PUSH GIRLS

CAPTURING NEW PERSPECTIVES WITH
PANASONIC CAMERAS ON THE SUNDANCE SERIES



Auti Angel is an upbeat powerhouse, a rapper and the first hip-hop dancer to continue a professional career in a wheelchair.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS RAGAZZO

PUSH GIRLS

SHOOTING THE SUNDANCE CHANNEL SERIES WITH PANASONIC'S AJ-HDX900

BY JENNIFER WOLFE

Sundance Channel brings an unfettered, uncensored glimpse at what it means to be sexy, ambitious and living with paralysis in Hollywood with *Push Girls*, a new nonfiction series from producer Gay Rosenthal (*Behind the Music*, *Ruby* and *Little People, Big World*). The 14-episode half-hour docu-series premieres June 4, tracing the lives of four dynamic, outspoken and beautiful women who, by accident or illness, have been paralyzed from the neck or the waist down.

Jen Lane, show runner and series producer, comes with a long list of documentary and reality TV credits earned during her 25-year career, including *Joe Millionaire*, *The Osbournes*, *Laguna Beach* and PBS' *American Masters*. Lane was enthusiastic about the opportunity to work with *Push Girls* DP Jennifer Morton, whose resume as a reality denizen includes *Project Runway*, *The Real Housewives of D.C.* and reality classic *Flavor of Love*.

With one of the subjects, Angela, traveling to her hometown to celebrate her 10-year high school reunion, which coincided with the 11-year anniversary of the accident that left her paralyzed, production on *Push Girls* began almost immediately once the series was ordered. Using Panasonic AJ-HDX900 cameras, the production team opted to record to tape in order to leverage the postproduction infrastructure already in place at Gay Rosenthal Productions.

"It became the right technological choice for us," comments Lane, who has been with the company since beginning the series just over a year ago. "We would come back to our production offices at GRP and turn our tapes over to our night AE, who would digitize and group them for editing on the Avid Unity system. These guys are amazing. I'll arrive in the morning and it's like, 'What? The footage from yesterday is in already?' It's just awesome, and everybody has access to all footage for any project they're doing."

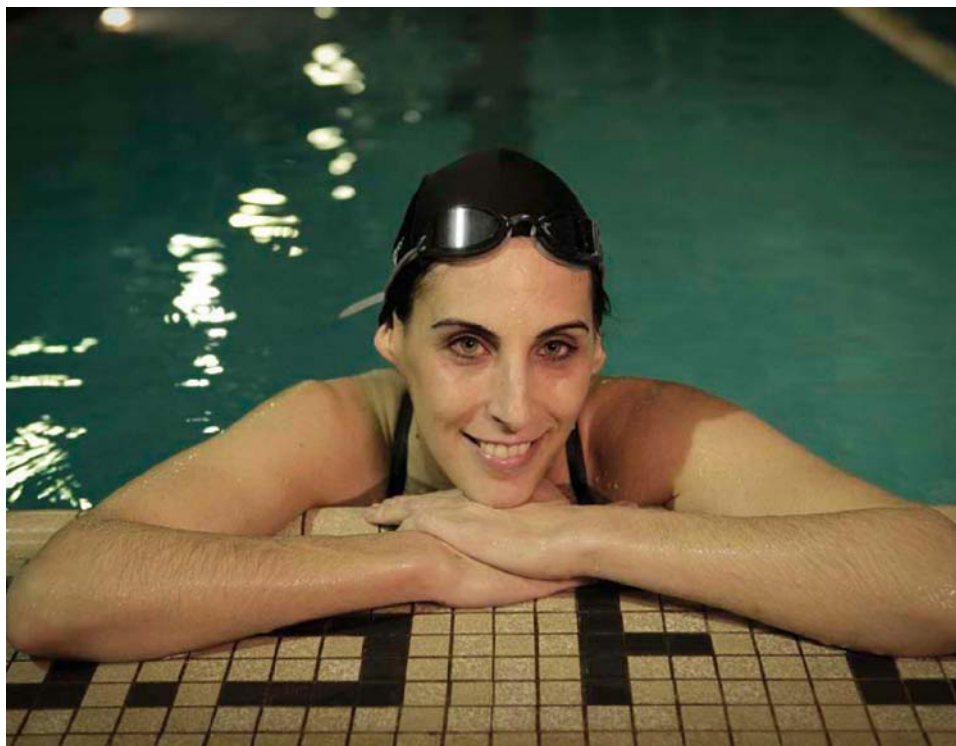
Principal shooting spanned a six-month period, with each episode spending roughly six weeks in post. "We took our time for the stories to evolve," Lane explains. "We were judicious about not just shooting a certain amount of time each week so we could say we did, but to make sure we were shooting the stories that mattered."

Morton, working with camera operator Matt Meyer, employed two cameras to capture material for the series. "There's always a trade-off when you decide to use a two-camera method for documentary filmmaking because you're automatically going to add to your crew, add human space and gear to wherever you are, but obviously there are other advantages," Lane details. "When you do it right, you can tag-team things so that someone's covering the girl getting out of her car while someone else is going around to the patio to capture her entrance, and you get things in a much more real way. We all want to get great stuff, so we have to use strategic methods to avoid having a heavy hand."



Above: Angela Rockwood. A quadriplegic since a 2001 auto accident, Angela is a prominent voice in the disabled community who works with a number of advocacy and outreach groups. She models, acts and holds regular acting workshops at her Los Angeles home.

Below: Mia Schaikewitz, a onetime competitive swimmer, works at a graphic design company and is a member of Auti's Colours 'n' Motion dance group.



A graduate of AFI's cinematography program, Lane credits her background with her light-handed approach to documentary material. "Ultimately it translates into trying not to force your hand too much, especially when you're dealing with real people in real situations," she says. "We definitely like to observe, and not be afraid of the wide shot, not be afraid of the silhouette, not be afraid of the profile if necessary. A lot of reality television is a very in-your-face type of cinematography, so we approach it using the *cinema vérité* model in terms of moving toward the subject instead of the other way around."

"You want to keep your footprint as small as possible, and that includes lighting equipment," Lane continues. "The Panasonic has been a stalwart of reality TV for the last 10 years, and one of the things that makes it such a great camera is that it's sensitive enough that, generally speaking, we were able to go anywhere and not have to augment with a lot of lighting. We had a set of 400-watt K5600 Jokers, a set of 2' Kinos, 1x1 light panels—any given Sunday, those were the lights that came out of the van."

In addition to filming the day-to-day lives of the Push Girls in Los Angeles, the production team made a trip to New York, where one of the girls had a job. The largest production challenge, however, was coordinating a Big Bear, Calif., ski trip for five cast members. The excursion was made possible with the help of the U.S. Adaptive Recreation Center, which urged the production team to bring everyone. "It was an amazing experience," says Lane. "One of our girls, a quad, probably never thought she'd ever be able to ski, and we did it." **dv**

Tiphany Adams is a bubbly actress and model with a sly, self-deprecating sense of humor.



(L-R) Mia, Tiphany, Angela and Auti



Tiphany and Auti