



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT

Tanya Leverault, ITVS 415-356-8383 tanya.leverault@itvs.org
Adrianna Paidas 646-762-8704 adrianna.paidas@beckmedia.com

For downloadable images, visit pbs.org/pressroom

BILL HANEY'S *JIM ALLISON: BREAKTHROUGH* PREMIERES ON INDEPENDENT LENS MONDAY, APRIL 27 ON PBS AND PBS.ORG

What Does it Take to Deliver Revolutionary New Medicines Against Life-Threatening Disease? Acclaimed Documentary Chronicles the Path of the Nobel Prize-Winning Immunologist, from His Small-Town Texas Roots, to Taking on the Medical Establishment, and Delivering Revolutionary New Drugs

"We are facing a global health challenge that knows no boundaries or race or religion, and we are all relying on gifted and passionate scientists and healthcare workers to contain and ultimately beat this thing. Jim Allison and the unrelenting scientists like him are my heroes – and I'll bet they become yours!"

– Director, Bill Haney



Credit: LeAnne Mueller

(San Francisco, CA) Tuesday, March 24, 2020
—The story of one warmhearted, stubborn man's visionary quest to find a cure for cancer, ***Jim Allison: Breakthrough*** from filmmaker Bill Haney is an homage to an unconventional superhero — a pioneering, harmonica-playing scientist who triumphed over a doubtful medical establishment to save innumerable lives around the world. In 2018, Jim Allison won the Nobel Prize for discovering the immune system's role in defeating cancer, but his lengthy journey to get there was filled with barriers and criticism.

Praised as not only "the most cheering film of the year" but also as "absorbing, gracefully constructed and [a] deeply moving documentary" by the *Washington Post*, ***Jim Allison: Breakthrough*** premieres on *Independent Lens*

Monday, April 27, 2020, 10:00-11:30 PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS, PBS.org and the PBS Video App.

With the help of narrator Woody Harrelson, Haney spotlights the perseverance of Allison starting with his days as a young, curious boy growing up in Texas whose life is shattered when he loses his mother to cancer. He grows into a headstrong, shaggy-haired, music-loving college student fascinated by immunotherapy, and he starts on a



1435 Folsom Street
San Francisco CA 94103
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
pbs.org/independentlens

path to find a cure for the disease that so profoundly impacted his life. His research leads him to the discovery of the T-cell receptor, and its role in fighting cancer.

Allison's seminal discovery put him at odds with the entire medical community at the time, as he endured repeated setbacks, personal and professional, from a system not built to encourage breakthrough innovation. His vision was wildly creative and unconventional for someone in the medical profession in the 1980s. *Jim Allison: Breakthrough* chronicles a hero's triumph over incessant skepticism and resistance from the powerful pharmaceutical companies and the medical establishment.

"We're delighted to champion films that celebrate the perseverance of trailblazers and world changers like Jim Allison," said *Independent Lens* Executive Producer Lois Vossen. "*Jim Allison: Breakthrough* reminds us all to keep pushing and fighting if we believe in something, despite adversity. It is a vivid reminder that the path to greatness is seldom easy, but always worthwhile."

Featuring interviews with family, Allison's colleagues and past students, immunology experts, and patients, the film paints a colorful portrait of Allison; not just of a strong-willed and passionate scientist, but a humble man, a talented musician and dedicated Willie Nelson fan who just wanted to do some good in the world. Haney expertly interweaves Allison's personal story with the medical case of Sharon Belvin, a patient diagnosed with melanoma who enrolled in Allison's trials in 2006. Since then, she has been entirely cancer-free.

Visit the [Jim Allison: Breakthrough](#) page on *Independent Lens* for more information about the film.

About the Filmmaker

Bill Haney (Director/Producer)

Bill is a filmmaker, inventor and entrepreneur. As a writer, director and producer of both narrative and documentary films, he has won The Gabriel Prize, a Silver Hugo, and IDA's Pare Lorentz Award. Additional awards include a Marine Conservation Award, Genesis Award and awards from Amnesty International and Earthwatch. Bill's portfolio as a filmmaker includes award-winning documentaries on socially important subjects such as coal mining (*The Last Mountain*, 2011) and worker exploitation (*The Price of Sugar*, 2007) and his work as writer/producer on Tim Disney's civil rights drama, *American Violet*.

CREDITS

| | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Written by | Bill Haney |
| Directed by | Bill Haney |
| Produced by | Bill Haney Jennifer Pearce |
| Editor | Peter Rhodes |
| Music | Mark Orton Mickey Raphael |



Animation Molly Schwartz
Executive Producers Tim Disney
R.J. Cutler
Maura McCarthy
Michael Eisenson
Sean E. Reilly

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series, with Lois Vossen as executive producer, features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by ITVS, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Wyncote Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. For more visit pbs.org/independentlens. Join the conversation: facebook.com/independentlens and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

About PBS Health Programming

Throughout April and May 2020, PBS shines a light on human health with a special programming line-up featuring new specials and documentaries. **THE GENE: AN INTIMATE HISTORY** (Tuesdays, April 7 & 14), a two-part documentary, focuses on efforts to understand and control the fundamental building block of life. Programs will also examine health issues that are often stigmatized, such as body weight, diabetes, mental illness and opioid addiction with **NOVA “The Truth About Fat”** (Wednesday, April 8), **BLOOD SUGAR RISING** (Wednesday, April 15), **INDEPENDENT LENS “Bedlam”** (Monday, April 13) and **FRONTLINE “Merchants of Pain” (w.t.)** (Tuesday, April 21), respectively. In addition, the line-up explores the lives of individuals affected by, as well as doctors and philanthropists committed to solving, various health crises, including **BROKEN PLACES** (Monday, April 6), **AMERICAN EXPERIENCE “The Man Who Tried to Feed the World”** (Tuesday, April 21) and **INDEPENDENT LENS “Jim Allison: Breakthrough”** (Monday, April 27). Popular series **ANTIQUES ROADSHOW** will also unearth surprising medical artifacts, shedding light on the history of healthcare with **“Treasure Fever”** (Monday, April 6).

###



1435 Folsom Street
San Francisco CA 94103
T. 415 356 8383
F. 415 356 8391
pbs.org/independentlens