

THE Weight THEY CARRY

Press Kit

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**DIRECTOR, PRODUCER,
CINEMATOGRAPHER, EDITOR** —
Grace Galletti & Zhiwei Feng

COUNTRY OF PRODUCTION — USA

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LOGLINE — A busy veterinarian practice is intense, with life and death decisions made constantly. But as seasoned veterinarian Kathy Gervais shows us, it's not just the pets whose lives are at stake.

SYNOPSIS — Kathy Gervais has wanted to be a vet since she was a little girl. She would rescue kittens, bottle-feed them, and even hide them in her backpack at school to take care of them throughout the day. After being a veterinarian for over 30 years, she still loves caring for animals, but she has discovered that the veterinary industry has been hiding a deep, dark secret.

It's not just the pets whose lives are at stake.

Through vérité scenes that immerse viewers in Kathy's day-to-day experiences, we bear witness to the complex struggles that veterinarians face on a daily basis. We see Kathy having difficult conversations with pet owners about a 13-year-old dog showing signs of cancer and another suffering from worsening dementia.

The most difficult one is having to discuss end-of-life decisions with pet owners and euthanizing their beloved animal friends. For some vets, the pressures can be too much to bear, and painless, life-ending medications are always within reach.

We learn about Kathy's friend who died by suicide and her own emotional struggle

after trying to save her friend's dog, which she eventually had to euthanize. Text onscreen reveals that veterinarians have a significantly higher suicide rate than the general population.

Through these experiences, Kathy realizes that something has be done about the dark secret of mental health among veterinarians. With the help of her friend and a psychologist, she starts the Veterinarian Mental Health Initiative, which provides weekly support groups for veterinary workers.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT —

I was drawn to this story because of my love for animals and my own struggles with mental health issues. During my time at UC Berkeley's Graduate Journalism School, I have focused my reporting and documentary filmmaking extensively on mental heath to raise awareness and overcome the stigma that has kept many, including me, in silence.

This topic in particular has been shrouded in silence both within and without the veterinary industry.

When you think about veterinarians what generally comes to mind? Some people might think about cute furry animals or maybe some people more familiar with the profession realize that it can be intense. But what most people don't know is how stressful this environment actually is and the real life consequences it can have. According to the CDC, those in veterinary medicine are more than twice as likely to die by suicide than the general population.

The veterinary industry is currently experiencing a nation-wide mental health crisis.

Overworked and understaffed, veterinary workers often find themselves struggling with long hours. The national shortage of veterinarians and technicians caused by the pandemic exacerbated the situation, leading to chronic stress and burnout. Although as Kathy and other veterinarians we interviewed mentioned, it's really the difficult conversations with owners about their beloved pets that take the most toll on them. Together with owners they often have to make heartbreaking decisions due to financial constraints and decide when to take a life. Meanwhile, very few veterinarians have spoken openly about the impact on their mental health due to lack of awareness and longstanding stigma.

Throughout our production process, we have been in communication with the Veterinary Mental Health Initiative which Kathy helped found and other organizations providing support to veterinary professionals. Our collaboration with these organizations has given us precious opportunities to speak with community members who are experiencing the mental health crisis firsthand. Their insights and stories have enriched our understanding and allowed us to accurately portray the challenges faced by veterinarians.

The style of our documentary was also very intentional to bring viewers behind the scenes and immerse them into the veterinarian world. Inspired by the documentary “The Waiting Room,” our short combines vérité-style filmmaking and intimate conversations to reveal the emotional toll Kathy faces. These difficult conversations with pet owners bring us into the decisions behind the life and death of their animal best friends.

Ultimately, we made this film to initiate much-needed conversations within the veterinary industry, highlight essential resources and raise awareness amongst the general population. Because they shouldn't have to carry this weight alone.

CREDITS —

Featuring

Kathy Gervais

Jane 🐾 and her dad

Lily 🐾 and her mom

The staff at the San Francisco Animal Medical Center

Director, Producer, Cinematographer, Editor

Grace Galletti

Zhiwei Feng

Supervising Producers

Cassandra Herrman

Andrés Cediel

Editing Advisor

Mike Shen

Technical Advisors

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Music from

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Made Possible in part by

Berkeley Film Foundation

Special Thanks:

Kathy Gervais

Evan Hendrickson

Katie Lawlor

Carrie Journey

Bree Montana
Karla Fernandez
Peter Bowie
Ken Gorczyca
Bri Golob
Trina J Wood
Karen Vernau

Everyone at the San Francisco Animal Medical Center

DIRECTOR BIOS —

Grace Galletti is a documentary filmmaker and journalist with a passion for mental health because of her own struggles with depression and anxiety. She has focused her work extensively on the subject to raise awareness and overcome the stigma that has kept many, including herself, in silence.

Some of her published work explores the barriers that different communities face with accessing mental health services, the aftermath of child sexual abuse by the Catholic Church and university tracking of student suicides. She uses her trauma informed lens and experience as a domestic violence support line counselor to tell these underrepresented stories with empathy and compassion.

Galletti was born and raised in France and graduated in 2023 from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism in the shortform video track. She also has a degree in environmental engineering from Brown University.

Zhiwei Feng is a video producer, journalist, and photographer from Beijing, China. He has produced short-form documentaries for Reuters News Agency's Beijing bureau and is currently the associate producer of feature-length documentary *Holder of the Sky*. He specializes in archival research, investigation, and social media outreach.

He also focuses strongly on animals and has previously done data-driven reporting on California's pet shelters. Feng graduated in 2023 from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism, with a focus on visual storytelling.