

Moving Pictures

An award-winning still photographer mixes media to make a very personal statement.

When Samuel Habib was diagnosed with cerebral palsy as a baby, his parents went through all the grief and fear you might imagine, then they got busy making changes in their hearts and their home to fully include him, disabilities and all, into their lives. Samuel's condition would make speech difficult and necessitate wheelchairs to get around. They tackled these challenges with enthusiasm that was fueled by Samuel's own persistence — his desire to keep up with his older brother, Isaiah, and his obvious love of life.

Soon the challenge enlarged. School beckoned. Would the community outside be able to make a place for Samuel?

Dan Habib, Samuel's father knew a lot about that community — he had chronicled it in detail as an acclaimed photojournalist and as photo editor for the *Concord Monitor*. Twenty years ago, as a new staff photographer for the Monitor, he had shot a story on Beaver Meadow Elementary School — one of the first in the state to include kids with disabilities in mainstream classes.



Samuel Habib looks up as his brother blows a bubble.

Habib and his wife Betsy immersed themselves in the effort, assisting Samuel in T-ball and community activities and providing state of the art tools for mobility and communication.

More dismaying than Samuel's disability was the number of hospital stays it required. It was during one of those dire times that a friendly physician gave Dan some therapeutic advice. "You should document this," the doctor said.

Dan took those words to heart. He had produced award-winning photo studies before, but he also knew that the most compelling language of media was not still photography but moving images. He began learning the techniques of videography, allying himself with disability rights groups to better raise funds and finding the best collaborators. He tapped Ken Burns' studio in Walpole to locate the best freelance editor in New England. He mixed his own still photography and some home movies with fresh footage.

To chronicle the family's experience with Samuel necessitated a study of the

greater question of inclusion, in school, society, and the future. This required an even greater depth of field, so Habib involved four other subjects, each with a unique point of view on the subject.

For four years the film has been in production, a creative thread woven into the life of a family and a community and outlining both the bonds and the boundaries. Now it's ready to unveil: a 55-minute documentary titled "Including Samuel."

Dan Habib's first film has been accepted to compete in the N.H. Film Festival in October and the Concord premiere will take place on November 6 at the Concord City Auditorium. Details on the movie and other ways to see and acquire it are available at www.includingsamuel.com.

