

WE HAVE A DREAM



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5 TRUE STORIES OF EXTRAORDINARY CHILDREN

WE HAVE A DREAM

A FILM BY
PASCAL PLISSON

2023 - 2.35 - 5.1 - 96 minutes - Documentary - France

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Synopsis

Who said living with a disability means giving up on your biggest dreams? Pascal Plisson travelled the world to meet Xavier, Charles, Antonio, Maud, Nirmala, and Khendo, children who prove that love, inclusive education, humor, and courage can move mountains, and that destiny is sometimes full of surprises.



Interview with Pascal Plisson

Tell us how this film came about...

It was while meeting Samuel in India, one of the young protagonists in *ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL*, that I first had the desire to devote a project entirely to disabled children. I was deeply moved by the efforts made by his two brothers to ensure that Samuel, paralyzed in both legs, could have the same access to education as them. Born into a poor family, they cobbled together a wheelchair for him that they would push for four kilometers to get to school. In their home, everything was guided by love.

I wanted to capture that energy that enables disabled children to overcome their difficulties and succeed in building lives of their own. Disability is a complicated subject; there are a thousand different ways to talk about it. What do you say about it? How? What do you show? ...The last thing I wanted it to be was a tearjerker; on the contrary, I wanted it to give hope.

I got the chance to meet Xavier du Crest, the President of Handicap International, while filming *ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL*. We thought long and hard about what this film could be. Then, I began to write a bible and find characters.

How did you find these children?

Handicap International's website has numerous portraits of children – incredible children! I went through those portraits with the help of two members of Handicap International. In all, we ended up with thirty potential stories. A lot of those children wore prostheses; however, it was important that not all have the same disability – their stories couldn't be the same. So, we had to keep looking, and that took some time. I was keen, for example, to show a child suffering from an invisible disability.



The case of Antonio, the young, autistic Brazilian boy...

We stumbled upon him purely by chance while discovering his family's incredible story. The father has been wheelchair-bound since he was twenty-three. He met his wife at a party where the two fell madly in love. They took up wheelchair dancing, taking part in competitions in Europe and South America, until the moment when, unable to have children due to his disability, the couple decided to adopt. Since their conditions made the process complex, they inherited a premature, four-month-old black baby whom no one wanted and took him in. A few months later, they realized that little Antonio was suffering from a pronounced form of autism combined with an attention deficit, hyperactivity, and a hearing impairment. Since then, Cabral, and Anète, the parents, have devoted their lives to the little boy, who is now eight years old. They call him their "box of surprises".

What about the other children?

Thanks to the help of correspondents provided by Handicap International, we found Xavier, who suffers from albinism. A characteristic that's very difficult to bear in Africa, and more precisely in Rwanda where he lives. Since his birth, his mother, Florence, has striven to protect him from others and especially from the rest of her family who see him as a monster and wanted to sell him to the highest bidder – most likely for witchcraft. It was also through

Handicap International that we were able to meet Nirmala and Khendo, two thirteen-year-old girls who had legs amputated following a terrible earthquake that struck Nepal in 2015. We also met Maud, the fourteen-year-old French girl whose leg was amputated at birth and who is completely deaf, through them via Para-Olympic committees. I personally discovered Charles, a little boy who has been blind since birth.

It's no easy task to convince young disabled people and their parents to expose themselves in a film. How do you do that?

On site, the correspondents from Handicap International were able to begin initial discussion with them if only to film videos that they then sent to me. Next, I went to see them and give them a precise explanation of what I wanted to do with the film and how the filming process would go. For most people, cinema is very abstract; they don't necessarily know what it represents. But having spent a good part of my life in the farthest corners of the earth, I know how to approach them. As was the case for my previous documentaries, I gained their trust fairly quickly. I become sort of a friend of the family. For example, it took several months and numerous discussions between Maud's parents and me before they accepted the idea of their (P6) daughters taking part in this film project. Since Maud had always been raised as normal, this project went against their educational philosophy. It was the



children (Maud, Romy, and Malo) who convinced Corinne and Patrice, their parents, to do this film – and namely Maud who hoped to use the film as a means of talking about her disability and disability in general. For Xavier, too: the leader of his village convinced Florence, his mother, not to receive us because he thought we wanted to buy the child. When he realized – and the mother along with him – that, on the contrary, it was about showing how it is possible to overcome difficulties linked to disability and how much it could help other albino children to fight, they were totally onboard with the project.

Did any of the young protagonists show reservations?

Because of his disability, Charles was very reserved. At the time, he was living in a boarding school established during the Second World War by the Salvation Army to help soldiers who came back from the war with burnt eyes, and which has since become Africa's largest school for the blind. Four hundred and fifty children with varying degrees of disability live there. Some who were abandoned by their parents never leave. Others don't go back home or, like Charles whose parents are very present, only return every three months because of the distance. He's since changed schools and now goes home every evening. It's really his parents and the presence of his idol, Wanyoïké, the long-distance runner who went blind at twenty and became

an Olympic champion three years later in Sydney, who convinced him to take part in this adventure.

How do you prepare for a shoot like this?

After an initial trip, I went back to spend ten days with the families before the crew arrived: to see the children, prepare them, and most importantly observe how they live. They're people who lead very simple lives: once I knew how they functioned, I could adapt and anticipate what was going to happen. I knew that so-and-so took their shower at such-and-such time, and where each member of the family sat at the dinner table. That allowed me to set things up and decide on a direction for my story... Nothing is written: when it came time to film, whatever they say is always their own words. I have a translator, of course, who summarizes what they say, but I sometimes discover little nuggets while editing when subtitling what was said word by word.

How many people are on set?

Four: a cinematographer, a first assistant, a sound engineer, and me, who is directing – plus around fifteen people recruited on-site – (P7) translators, people to carry the equipment, and sometimes a head electrician. We know we can't redo certain things, so sometimes, like with Antonio, we film with two cameras. Each shoot took twelve days, and only three for Maud.



When you start filming, you don't know how the children will react in front of the camera. How do you anticipate and adapt to the unexpected?

You have to give yourself the freedom to question everything on an almost daily basis while remaining very structured. We're in a relationship of trust with these children and their parents and we also need to be very precise about what we intend to do with them.

You mentioned using two cameras to film Antonio...

Before filming, I'd seen Antonio with his parents and by himself. He liked me a lot and gave me hugs. But what was going to happen when we fit him with an HF microphone, shone lights on him, and put a camera twenty centimeters away from his face? Would he grab it? Look at us constantly? There's always the famous piece to camera we sometimes accept while others disturb us... Ultimately, it went very well because the parents had done a fantastic job of working with him beforehand. We were very lucky that he agreed to have us beside him. Antonio is highly social and very affectionate. However, we were never able to put a microphone on the child, who is also autistic, with whom he watches shadows in the small music school he attends. It was impossible with the other boy. There are scenes we filmed with Antonio that we chose not to show – for example, putting him to bed was too hard.

Some, like Xavier, the young albino, seem to open up over time.

When we first started filming, we could tell he was thinking: "What are these people doing in my house?". He was extremely reserved, and we had a hard time getting him to talk. We played soccer with him and did loads of things together. He gradually loosened as we got to know each other.

In his case, we can see the crucial role played by his mother and by Mooses the middle school principal...

While preparing for this film, I admit I hadn't assessed the role of the parents and certain adults like Mooses in the development of these children. It is essential. If there was a word to define WE HAVE A DREAM, it's the crazy love (P8) that these parents and people like Mooses give these children. The incredible resilience of these children, and the crazy love of these adults... Xavier owes a lot to these two people: he is well integrated, a very good student, and can dream of becoming a doctor.

The scenes at the school are very surprising: each correct answer sets off enthusiastic cheers!

Even we were very surprised. We didn't know that it was so participative. It isn't at all like it is here – it's very communal.

"I keep up with all of them by phone. I now have twelve children in addition to two of my own."

Another surprise was the way the other children accept difference. None of the film's young heroes are ostracized...

In countries like Rwanda, Nepal, and Kenya, disability is much more easily accepted than it is here. People are united and there is no such thing as harassment. Over the course of my travels and after visiting a lot of schools, I never saw children fighting or mistreating others, neither in the cities nor the countryside. They always tend to help the weakest. This comes from education, and also the fact that they come from the same social background. It's completely different from the child violence of Western societies.

Tell us about Nirmala and Khendo, the two young girls whose legs were amputated in Nepal.

They didn't know each other before the earthquake that cost each of them a leg. After the tragedy struck, they woke up next to one another in the same hospital room following their amputations. Nirmala and Khendo rebuilt themselves together and became inseparable. Handicap International, who has followed them since 2015, entrusted us with archive footage showing them at the age of seven. Today, the two young girls still live at boarding school. They have incredible energy.

But destiny wasn't kind to them: after the amputations came Covid, which forced them to wear prostheses that weren't in any way adapted to their growth. Beyond the destinies of all these children, the film says a lot about the state of the world: wars, drought, epidemics...

It's loaded with messages.

This time, you don't film their parents.

It was complicated to incorporate them into the narration. Khendo's parents live in the mountains, and those of Nirmala in the suburbs of Katmandu. They seldom see them. Their family is really the one the two have formed themselves.

Despite their disability, they're very confident about the present and future. They don't ask themselves questions. They're radiant in that way.



Unlike the other children, Maud, who opens the film, lives in France with a severe disability that she seems to cope with happily. She rides a scooter, plays the violin, and even takes the same dance classes as her twin sister, Romy. It's all apparently so normal that, at the beginning of the film, we doubt she might be suffering from any kind of disability.

She's so good, so at ease, that at the beginning, we're wondering, "But, where is she?". Maud doesn't shy away from any challenge or any limit. From the moment she was born, her parents chose to integrate her into the world of the able-bodied. She sails, does track and field, plays the cello, and does contemporary dance. Last year, she sailed across the Mediterranean with her parents... and all that with prostheses!

Basically, she leads exactly the same life as her sister and brother.

She and her sister Romy are inseparable and have built their lives together. With Malo, their brother, they lead a perfectly normal existence. Maud attends a mainstream school with her sister, her parents having always resisted any pressure to send her to a special school. Hence, their long hesitation to shake up this approach with a film that emphasizes difference.

In fact, Maud herself admits she has no desire to trade in her disabilities for a more normal life.

Her disability is part of her personality. Today, she no longer hesitates to show her prosthesis. She likes her disability and doesn't try to hide it.



The final scene of the film, when we see her dancing at the barre with her prosthesis, is as moving as it is beautiful...

Yes. The disability disappears completely in the presence of the grace of the dance.

As in all your films and despite its dramatic nature, WE HAVE A DREAM carries an extremely positive message.

It's sort of in my DNA. I couldn't build a story without hope.

A hope on which the staging sheds even more light...

I began my career as a director of photography and have spent my life in nature, in complicated countries, with complicated lighting, and particular types of skin... So, it's true, I assign a lot of importance to the lighting, framing, and optics that I use. I use a lot of light – I'm a little obsessive about it. Simon Watel, who is the DP on this film and with whom I've been working for fifteen years, knows my requirements: we work so that the film will be seen in the movie

theaters, and just because we're filming a documentary doesn't mean we shouldn't be doing image work. Each shot should bring something to the table: there must be life in it. That's why I prefer sequence shots.

What were the most difficult sequences to make?

The ones where we're filming Charles at boarding school. That was very hard. The children there move around using routes they've spent months, if not years, learning; so, any unexpected obstacle in the way is potentially dangerous. If we left a crate lying around, they could easily trip over it.

Charles is one of the children we worry about most...

His disability is a heavy one, especially in Kenya where being poor is already a problem in and of itself. But his parents are there; he likes sports, running, wants to race at high-level, and Wanyoïké is going to coach him. We'll see if he manages. Changing schools has already transformed him. He's much more open.

The Children



Maud, 14 ans, France

Maud didn't only have a leg amputated at birth; she is also profoundly deaf. Despite her disabilities, music and dance are among her passions. Today, surrounded by her family and with the support and understanding of her twin sister Romy, who was born able-bodied, this determined and optimistic young girl doesn't shy away from any challenge and sets no limits for herself. She shares her thoughts on her disabilities, her parents' steadfast choice to integrate her in the world of the able-bodied, and her life.



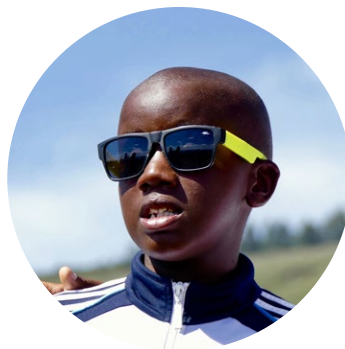
Xavier, 14 ans, Rwanda

Xavier was born with albinism, a unique characteristic that is very difficult to live with in Africa. Since his birth, Florence, his mother, has worked hard to protect him from others, especially the rest of her family who saw him as a monster and wanted to sell him to the highest bidder. Today, thanks to his mother's dedication and his own strength of character, he handles sometimes curious and other times hostile gazes on a daily basis with confidence and a sense of humor. Supported by the kindness of Mooses, the school principal who follows him closely, Xavier is integrated, a very good student, and can dream of becoming a doctor.



Nirmala and Khendo, 13 ans, Népal

Nirmala and Khendo didn't know each other before the terrible earthquake in 2015 that cost each of them a leg. Seven years after the tragedy, on the brink of adolescence, the two friends are inseparable and support each other through whatever comes their way. We follow their lives now, filmed in 2022, as well as their reconstruction in 2015, just after the drama, thanks to archive footage. Due to the COVID epidemic, they were unable to change their old, second-hand prostheses and impatiently waited for the new ones that would enable them to dance on both legs in the end of year show.



Charles, 11ans, Kenya

Charles has been blind since birth, but he's given himself very ambitious goals: he wants to become a long-distance runner. To ensure he doesn't give up on his dreams, Wilson and Lucie, his parents, support him with immense love. As a boarder at the Thika school for the blind, Charles met the legendary Henry Wanyoiké, blind like himself, and a Para-Olympic gold medalist in the 5,000 meters and holder of numerous marathon records. Building on his experience, Henry will try to convince Charles' parents to change transfer him to an inclusive establishment among seeing children.



Antônio, 8 ans, Brésil

Antonio Luis Cardoso Cruz is a lively, curly-haired little boy interested in dance, surfing, and music... but he is autistic and suffers from hyperactivity (ADHD) and a hearing impairment. He entered his parents lives in July 2014 at the age of 3-4 months and, due to his biological mother's difficult pregnancy, has suffered health complications throughout his development. He has already attended more than 4 schools because there is no truly inclusive structure in Salvador. His father, Cabral, is also disabled. He has been unable to walk since being in a car accident at the age of twenty-three. He and Anète, his wife, have devoted their entire lives to Antonio, the son they always dreamed of having. An unpredictable son who is their "box of surprises" ...



Crew

Director	Pascal Plisson
Screenwriter	Pascal Plisson
Director of Photography	Simon Watel
Editor	Erika Barroché
Sound	Michel Adamik
Music	Sylvain Goldberg and Matteo Locasciulli
Management	Raphaël Launay, Karim Lagati
Production	Eady East Prod
Executive Producer	Marie Tauzia Ladybirds
Producers	Louise and Eddie Vingataramin
Coproduction	Jour2Fête (Sarah Chazelle and Etienne Ollagnier)
International sales	The Party Film Sales



Pascal Plisson Filmography

- 2023: We Have a dream
- 2019: Gogo
- 2015: The Big Day
- 2013: On the Way to School
- 2005: Les Mystères de Clipperton
- 2004: Massai
- 1996: Australie 50° de solitude



Handicap International

40 years of helping disabled people and vulnerable populations

Ten years after *ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL*, winner of a César for Best Documentary, the new film by director Pascal Plisson looks at disability through the interwoven and touching portraits of five children around the world in pursuit of their dreams. The idea for the film arose from a meeting between Pascal and Xavier Du Crest, now President of Handicap International, on the set of the film *ON THE WAY TO SCHOOL*. To find these young, everyday heroes, Pascal Plisson and producer Eddy Vingataramin worked with teams from Handicap International, who spent several months looking for beneficiary families around the world. During the search, Khendo, Nirmla, and Xavier were identified. During the initial scouting phase, the director took the time needed to meet the families, gain their acceptance, and forge trusting relationships. This phase is very important for creating the necessary relationship before filming. The director then began filming with his crew.

Handicap International is also committed to promoting the film among its supporters, sympathizers, and partner schools, with the same ambition as that of the director: to change the way people look at disability.

For nearly 40 years, Handicap International has been helping vulnerable populations, especially people with disabilities in areas where conflict, natural disasters, poverty, and exclusion are rife. In 2022, 466 projects were carried out in 60 countries.



CNP Assurances

**A responsible insurer committed to a more inclusive society,
CNP Assurances supports "We have a Dream"**

Present in 19 countries around the world, CNP Assurances is a major insurance company with over 6,500 employees. A subsidiary of La Banque Postale, CNP Assurances is a member of the major public finance group. As a responsible investor and insurer, CNP Assurances acts in accordance with its *raison d'être* for an inclusive, sustainable society by delivering solutions that protect and facilitate the lives of as many people as possible.

An employer committed to integrating and retaining disabled people in employment (1st agreement in 1995) for nearly 30 years, CNP Assurance is partner to associations working to promote inclusion and make life easier for people with disabilities. CNP Assurances has also supported over 40 projects proposed by its employees on the theme of disability.

As part of its effort to change the way people see disability, CNP Assurances has been a key supporter of "We Have a Dream". To promote its message as many as possible, CNP Assurances intends to mobilize its ecosystem and related associations and will continue its action through awareness campaigns aimed at young people and the general public. For example, with FAGE (Fédération des Associations Générales Etudiantes/ Federation of General Student Unions), a partner of its Foundation, CNP Assurances is committed to raising awareness among a network of students, future actors of inclusion in society, by offering them tickets to see the film. The Group is also mobilizing its employees through the Let's Move challenge, which will provide concrete support for Handicap International's action in favor of inclusive education.