

NEW DOCUMENTARY PUTS A HUMAN FACE ON THE STEM CELL CONTROVERSY

From Kartemquin Films (“Hoop Dreams,” “The New Americans”), Filmmakers Visit Lyric for Films/Panel Discussions

Stem cell research is one of the most controversial, hotly debated issues of the new century. The new documentary **“Mapping Stem Cell Research: Terra Incognita”** puts a human face on the issue and starts a reasoned discussion of the scientific and ethical implications for research that stirs strong emotions.

“Mapping Stem Cell Research: Terra Incognita” will be screened at the Lyric Theatre Monday, April 14, at 3 p.m. followed by a panel discussion featuring the film’s producer/director, Maria Finitzo of Kartemquin Films. Gordon Quinn, president and co-founder of Kartemquin and the film’s executive producer, will also attend the event.

“Terra Incognita” is a feature-length documentary film that highlights the story of Dr. Jack Kessler, the current chair of Northwestern University's Department of Neurology and Clinical Neurological Sciences, and his daughter, Allison, an undergraduate student at Harvard University. When Kessler was invited to head up the Neurology Department at Northwestern, his focus was on using stem cells to help cure diabetes. However, soon after his move to Chicago, Allison – then age 15, was injured in a skiing accident and paralyzed from the waist down. In the moments following the accident, Dr. Kessler made the decision to change the focus of his research to begin looking for a cure for spinal cord injuries using embryonic stem cells.

Through Kessler's story, Kartemquin brings the stem cell debate to the public for discussion. The film, which premiered on the PBS series *Independent Lens* in January 2008, follows the constantly evolving interplay between the promise of new discoveries, the controversy of modern science and the resilience and courage of people living every day with devastating disease and injury.

The **panel discussion**, which will immediately follow the screening, features Maria Finitzo (producer and director of “Terra Incognita”), Dr. William FitzPatrick (Philosophy), Dr. Bernice Hausman (English), Dr. Thomas Sitz (Biochemistry) and Dr. Doris Zallen (Science & Technology Studies). The panelists will invite questions on the film and topics ranging from cloning to curing disease to ethics. Panelists will also discuss how recent developments in stem cell research – particularly reprogramming skin cells to behave like embryonic stem cells – are changing the discourse around these topics.

Sponsors for this event include the Center for the Study of Rhetoric in Society, the Virginia Tech Department of English, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, and Science and Technology Studies.

About Kartemquin Films: For 40 years, Kartemquin Films has been making documentaries that examine and critique society through the stories of real people. Kartemquin’s films, including the theatrically released “Hoop Dreams,” have been broadcast nationally (on PBS, NBC, Cinemax, The Sundance Channel, The Learning Channel and other outlets), continue to be distributed both nationally and internationally, and include ambitious outreach and education campaigns. By engaging the larger public and policy-makers in the process of genuine learning and understanding, Kartemquin continues to make films that can lead to real social change.

About the Filmmakers: **Maria Finitzo** has been an award-winning filmmaker for 25 years and an associate of Kartemquin Films for 10 years. Her work as a filmmaker has taken her from the Galapagos

Islands to Russia and has involved subjects ranging from the command and control of nuclear weapons to the psychology of adolescent girls. Her most well-known film, “5 Girls,” is a feature-length documentary film that delves into the hearts and minds of five remarkable young women. The film was a special presentation of the PBS series “P.O.V.” and premiered on national public television in the fall of 2001. “5 Girls” was also awarded the Henry Hampton Award for Excellence from The Council on Foundations, The Silver Award from The Chicago Film & Television Competition and an award for Outstanding Achievement from the Parent's Guide to Children's Media.

Maria has been a producer and writer for the award-winning PBS science series “The New Explorers.” Under the banner of her own production company, Maria has produced and directed a variety of educational and broadcast programs including “Whales,” an episode of the National Audubon Society's “Audubon's Animal Adventures,” a children's nature series for the Disney Channel. The series was awarded the Ace Cable Award for Best Children's Series. Maria has also directed and produced a two-part special titled “On the Brink...Doomsday” for The Learning Channel and Towers Productions. Produced all over the world, this documentary examines episodes in history in which political tensions brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

President and founding member of Kartemquin Films, **Gordon Quinn** has been making documentaries for over 40 years. At Kartemquin, Quinn created a legacy that is an inspiration for young filmmakers and a home where they can make high-quality, social-issue documentaries. Kartemquin's best-known film, “Hoop Dreams” (1994), executive produced by Quinn, was released theatrically to unprecedented critical acclaim, including the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival and an Academy Award Nomination, among others.

For more information about Kartemquin Films, Maria Finitzo or Gordon Quinn, visit <http://www.kartemquin.com>.

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