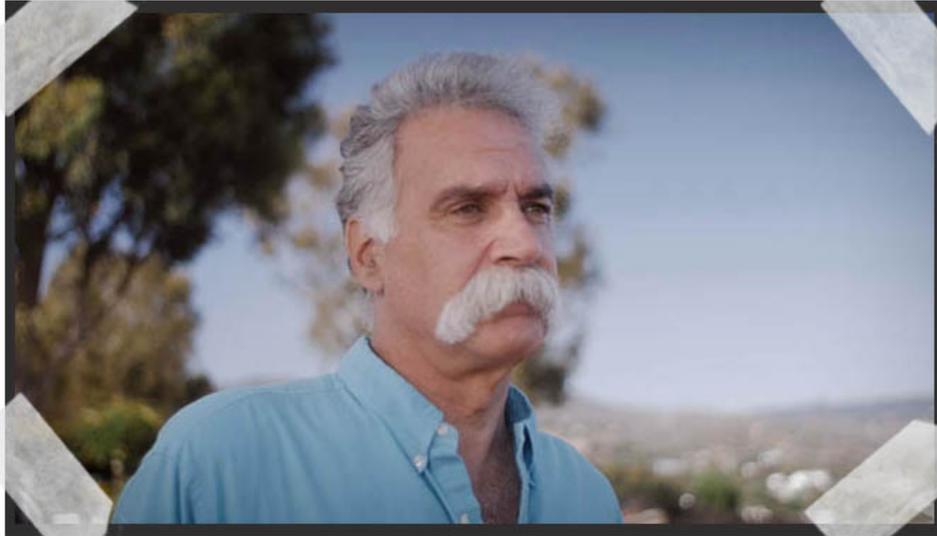


TELLURIDE

MOUNTAINFILM * ON * TOUR



1-800-GIVE-US-YOUR-KIDNEY

Directed by: Samantha Smith
2015 USA | Duration: 17 minutes

Film Summary

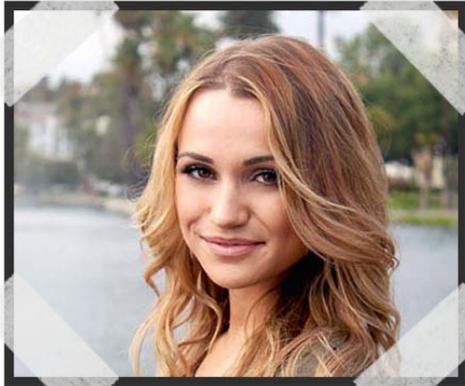
"If I don't give my kidney to somebody this week, will somebody die waiting for it?" The answer to this question, posed in Samantha Smith's film, is unequivocally "yes." Despite that, ethical and practical riddles surround the willingness of a living donor to undergo surgery and bodily mutilation to help a complete stranger. Smith doesn't delve deeply into these questions. She simply tells the story of a kidney donor and recipient — individuals strikingly different from one another — leaving the audience to ponder the conundrum of more people needing kidneys than kidneys available. As the final credits roll, the viewer may wonder: "What am I doing walking around with two healthy kidneys?"

Teachers: *This film could be helpful in studying ethics (especially medical ethics), biology, civic engagement, and connecting across differences.*

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Filmmaker Interview: Samantha Smith



“Despite differences in gender, race, religion, nationality, age and even personality – we are all made of the same parts. We’re just packaged differently.”

– **Samantha Smith** | Director

Tell us a little about yourself, Sam.

Where did you grow up? Las Vegas, Nevada

What is your favorite color? Red

What is your favorite food? Does ice cream count?

What is your favorite movie? This is the hardest question on this list! *The Wizard of Oz* is one. *Gimme Shelter* is up there for documentaries.

If you could have any super power, what would it be? Read the minds of animals. I’m so curious.

What is one thing you are afraid of? Giant waves in the ocean. A fear I am trying to face by more and more exposure. I’m getting there!

Q: Why did you become a filmmaker and how did you get started?

A: I believe films to be a highly impactful way to tell a story and get a message across. And I really enjoy it. I studied film production in college, made a bunch of friends who also wanted to make films, and started working for a filmmaker. So I’ve just kept soaking up as much information (and content!) as I can. Luckily Harold was open to making this film, which was a big adventure to make and has been so rewarding. I’m finding documentary is a very satisfying way to combine my passion for film with a purpose.

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Q: How did you meet Harold and Gennet and why did this story appeal to you?

A: I met Harold in Malibu a few years ago. He spoke in one of my college classes about his donation, and I was surprised to learn that he voluntarily gave a kidney! This kind of extreme altruism is just fascinating, and inspiring! I was interested to find out what compelled Harold to donate at that time in his life, and then the more I dove into the story, the more I loved it. You have these two polar-opposite people who've literally shared a body part. What a great reminder that we're all the same inside! It's an uplifting story, and Harold tells it in such an entertaining way.

Q: When editing the film, was there anything you wished you could have included in the final cut?

A: Yeah, there were some additional twists and turns with the story that I left out due to time constraints and to avoid over-complicating it. But, I wish I could have included because they show how high the stakes were for this donation. At some point before the donation, Gennet was diagnosed with cancer. She was not able to undergo chemotherapy because of her kidney failure. Then, because of the cancer, she was removed from the "waiting list" for a kidney. Miraculously, with radiation pills she beat the cancer and they put her back on the list. But when she finally got the call that there was a donor (Harold), it was still a complicated decision to even accept the kidney, because with all of her health complications, there was a chance the surgery would not be successful. It was a very brave decision for her to undergo the surgery for a new kidney. It's easy to see that Harold had a difficult decision to make whether or not to donate, but Gennet had a difficult decision to make to accept the donation as well. Luckily, they both proceeded with the donation, and the story has a happy ending!

Q: Is there an action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

A: My personal hope is that people feel inspired to help people unlike themselves. Despite differences in gender, race, religion, nationality, age and even personality — we are all made of the same parts. We're just packaged differently. I'd love for that to be the takeaway. We also encourage people to consider signing their driver's license to be an organ donor. If we all did that, the waiting list would be much shorter!

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Q: When you made this film, did you have a specific audience in mind?

A: We made the film hoping to spread the story to as many different people as possible. I didn't tailor the cut to a particular age group, but the story is particularly applicable for teenagers who are about to get their driver's license. We are excited to be able to share it with Mountainfilm for Students. It's our ideal audience!

Q: What are some of the challenges you encountered in the making of this film?

A: I did the film with incredibly limited resources, and it was my first film, so challenges were plentiful! The biggest challenge was probably the lack of footage from the actual time of the donation, and time leading up to the donation. The donation happened 15 years ago, so I didn't have a film crew there. It was a challenge to work with such little material, but I learned a lot in the process. The second biggest challenge was playing the role of director, producer and editor. It's a lot of responsibility, and a tough balance. But again, I learned a lot and I'm grateful for the journey!

Q: Has working with Harold and Gennet changed any of your outlooks on life or human nature?

A: I had never met someone who had done such an extreme altruistic act before Harold. His attitude toward life is inspiring. He is always following where his heart leads him. Likewise, Gennet's resiliency is a huge inspiration. She has faced incredible adversity, and remains such a positive person. Her faith is her source of strength, and it's very inspiring to witness.

Q: Why did you decide to include this film in Mountainfilm for Students?

A: Mountainfilm for Students is exactly the kind of program we want to be a part of! Young people are generally the most open to new ideas and hopeful about changing the world. Also, many of them have not gotten their driver's license yet, and hopefully will consider checking the "organ donor" box when they do.

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Q: What's the next big adventure or film project on the horizon for you?

A: I have a few film projects brewing. But all in research/developmental stages right now and too soon to announce. I'll hopefully come back to Mountainfilm with one of them!

Q: What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

A: Get as much experience as you can! The best way to learn is by doing.

Subject Interview: Harold Mintz



"We don't know how much time we have. Take full advantage of what you've got."

- Harold Mintz | Subject

Tell us a little about yourself, Harold.

Where did you grow up? Falls Church, Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C.

What is your favorite color? Orange

What is your favorite food? Chinese! No, wait... Ethiopian. No, no... make it my wife's seafood stew! Ah! I LOVE FOOD!

What is your favorite movie? Trick question! And tough. But for today, I'm going to give three answers, a feature and two documentaries. Feature: *All the President's Men*. Documentaries: *Alive Inside* and *Buck*.

If you could have any super power, what would it be? Well flying, of course. Duh.

What is one thing you are afraid of? Just one, huh? Bugs crawling on me. I'm not a good camper.

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Q: Why did you decide to share your story?

A: I ended up on that surgeon's table at Georgetown University Hospital because a critical number of stories — personal, odd, touching, heartbreaking — came within my line of sight. At the time, individually, these stories were merely interesting to me. But without knowing it at the time, they were adding more and more weight to an internal scale that I had inside of me. Eventually, when that last piece of information — a story I read about — was placed on to my "scale," the weight shifted and the scale dropped down. I knew what I wanted to do. I explain it to others as dominoes that fall and bump into other dominoes. A chain reaction. One thing causes another, which causes another ... Why did I want to share my story? Easy ... I felt that it might just be a domino in someone else's chain reaction.

Q: Is there an action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

A: Yes. Contrary to what many people might think, I do not want others to see this story and decide to give away body parts. Well, that might be nice, but it's not my intention or goal. I simply want people to CONSIDER the idea of signing their driver's license to give their organs away after they're done with them. I think that most people quickly check that box without giving it much thought. I'd love for them to see that question the next time they renew their driver's license and actually stop for a moment to consider whether or not they want to check that box and what it means. Secondly, if it encourages people to discuss the topic around their own dinner tables, that would be fantastic. It's best to have that conversation tonight while everyone is good and healthy, NOT after a family member is in the hospital after a tragic accident.

Q: What have you learned about human nature by going through this process?

A: We might look different on the outside, but inside, we're all the same.

Q: What are some of the challenges you encountered during the making of this film?

A: Ha! Not much. Since I was one of the folks being filmed, I had nothing to do other than talk. Easy peasy.

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Q: Do you ever worry that one day you will need the kidney you gave away? Why or why not?

A: I call this question (which I get asked a lot) the "what if" question. What if my child needs it down the road? What if my brother the diabetic needs it? What if ... What if none of that ever happens? I asked a question when I first went in to discuss the opportunity with the doctors. I asked, "Will someone die today waiting for a kidney that doesn't show up?" And the answer was, "Yes. Many." So I decided, why wait for a "what if" to happen while people, real people, are dying waiting for it now? If my child, my wife, my brother ever needs a kidney, I have no problem asking the many, many friends I have to see if one of them would consider raising their hand as a potential donor. None whatsoever.

Q: What's the next adventure on the horizon for you?

A: This coming November (Nov. 6, 2016) my mustache is turning 40. I know EXACTLY how old my mustache is because the last time I shaved it was at my grandfather's funeral. I was a freshman in college and looking raggedy at best and I didn't want to embarrass my dad at his father's funeral. Anyway, since we know the exact day, my wife (my PATIENT wife) is allowing me to throw a birthday party for my mustache on Nov. 6. It's going to be great.

Q: What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

A: Don't settle for the easy pathway. Try taking the path that you think looks like the most fun, the most joyous. If that doesn't work out, try a different path. We don't know how much time we have. Take full advantage of what you've got. For me, I choose the fun path. I love my life.

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Tags

Ethics

Health

Kidney Transplants

Living Donors

Medicine

Organ Donation

Pre-screening Activity

It's likely that your students will soon be getting their driver's licenses. Show an application form and point out the place that asks if they want to be an organ donor. Invite students to briefly discuss how they think they'll answer that question. If students already have their licenses, ask how they answered and why.

Introducing the Film

1. Ask students what they already know about the function of the kidney in preserving their health. Fill in any gaps and provide a brief overview of how the transplant waiting list works. You may also want to help students locate Ethiopia — Gennet's country of origin — on the map.
2. Review vocabulary: dialysis, donor, kidney function, recipient, transplant
3. If students aren't already familiar with documentary films, review the characteristics that differentiate documentaries from other genres.
4. Give students an assignment for viewing. Be sure they know why you are sharing with them this particular film and how it connects to other work they are doing or topics they are studying



Discussion Question Categories

General/Open Prompts

1. What are the main messages of this film? Do you agree, disagree or have more questions before you decide?
2. Name one thing you saw in the film that inspired you, one thing that made you mad or sad, and one thing you want to know more about.
3. What did you learn from this film about (fill in curriculum connection) ?
4. If you could ask Harold or Gennet one question, what would you ask?

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5. What's one lesson from this film that you wish everyone in your family or community knew?
6. Would you recommend this film to a friend? Explain your reasons.

Exploring Self

1. Did you see anything in the film that made an especially strong impression on you? What was it about that moment that moved you?
2. What life lessons can be learned from this story? How can you apply the lessons of the film to your own life?
3. Before viewing, what did you say about checking "yes" next to organ donor on your driver's license application? Did the film change or affirm your decision in any way?
4. Were you surprised that Harold was reluctant to meet the recipient of his kidney? Can you relate to his fear of being judged for his race, religion or physical appearance?
5. What questions would you ask before agreeing to donate a kidney? How did they compare to Harold's questions?
6. In addition to questions about the potential impact on his own health, Harold asked, "If I don't give my kidney to somebody this week, will somebody die waiting for it?" Why was that an important question for Harold to ask? What would the world be like if we asked that question about all of our priorities (e.g., Will somebody die if I don't ... do my homework, go to that party, get 100 "likes" on my latest post, vote, conserve water, interrupt bullying when I see it, etc.)?
7. Harold concluded that for him, organ donation "wasn't a choice, it was an opportunity." What's the difference? Think about an important decision you had to make. How did you frame the issue? How else might the issue have been framed? How does perspective influence our decisions?

Exploring the World

1. Before viewing the film, what did you know about organ donation? What were the major sources of your ideas? Did the film challenge any of your ideas, and if so, how?

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2. What do you think Harold means when he talks about being “open”?
3. How did Harold’s experience with his father’s death open him up to the idea of trying to help somebody else? What other sorts of experiences open people to new possibilities or coming to the aid of others?
4. What did you notice about the sources of Gennet’s strength and determination to stay alive?
5. Before making a final decision, Harold consults his wife. Why was it important for him to ask his family? If you were Harold’s spouse or child, would you have given the okay? Why or why not?
6. Why do you think the first step in the assessment of Harold’s suitability was seeing a psychiatrist? Why was that an important part of the screening?
7. Describing the Belays, Harold says, “We’re just opposite, opposite people, physically, spiritually, everything ... and yet, we’re as close family as I am with my family.” What did you learn from the film about how to create “family” and broaden the circle that counts as “us” (as opposed to focusing on the differences that typically separate people into “us” and “them”)?

Exploring Filmmaking

1. What questions do you think the filmmaker was trying to answer? How do you know?
2. In one word, how did the film make you feel? What techniques did the filmmaker use to make you feel that way?
3. Are there any important perspectives that are missing in the film? If so, what/who would you have added and why?
4. Harold was first prompted to investigate organ donation by something he saw in a movie. Have you ever been inspired to action by a film or video? If so, what was it about that production that made it powerful enough to influence you? Are the media you typically watch (or create) likely to inspire people to make the world better or worse (or neither)?

Exploring Social Issues

1. When Harold first calls to inquire, he is told that living donation to a stranger is illegal. Why was living donation illegal?

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2. Harold observes, "You couldn't find two more opposite people if you tried." List all the ways that Harold and Gennet are different. If students need help, you could offer one or two suggestions (e.g., Jew/Christian; U.S. born/immigrant; white/person of color; man/woman; West Coast/East Coast; tall/short; talkative/quiet, etc.). Do you think it would have changed Harold's decision if he had known about these differences before the transplant? What was it about these people in this circumstance that seemed to make the differences unimportant?

Sense of Wonder

1. Harold doesn't think of himself as selfless or heroic: "I'm normal, and I think normal people can do outstanding things ... And that's the best part of the story: I'm human, and the human with all my faults and everything was able to open myself up and give somebody else to help save them. We all have the capability of doing that." How would the world (or your community or family) change if everyone was willing to open themselves to the possibility that we all have the capacity to do extraordinary things? How would your life change?
2. When they meet, Gennet and Harold talk about how they got to this point and how it came to be that their lives intersected. What do you think would happen if people in conflict sat down and had that conversation?

Extensions



Watch

Made Possible: 6-year-old Caitlin | HRSA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExPIEn10Wn8>

Printing a Human Kidney | Anthony Atala, TED

http://www.ted.com/talks/anthony_atala_printing_a_human_kidney

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Read

Types of Donation | Donate Life America

<https://www.donatelife.net/types-of-donation/>

Learn More About Organ Donation | U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

<http://www.organdonor.gov/home.html>



Do

Listen to the podcast "Gray's Donation" | Radiolab

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/grays-donation/>

Register to Become an Organ Donor | U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

<http://www.organdonor.gov/becomingdonor/stateregistries.html>



Book Recommendations (NF: Nonfiction, F: Fiction)

F | Grades 7–12

Pieces of Me, by Amber Kizer

https://www.amazon.com/Pieces-Me-Amber-Kizer/dp/0385741162/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1471020711&sr=8-1&keywords=pieces+of+me

NF | Grades 9–12

The Kidney Sellers, by Sigrid Fry-Revere

https://www.amazon.com/Kidney-Sellers-Journey-Discovery-Iran/dp/1611635128/157-6459240-4530009?ie=UTF8&*Version*=1&*entries*=0