

and see what it is like to go from an idea in your head to reality?

In your own words, can you describe what makes Dean extraordinary?

I've met very few people in my life that I would compare to Dean Kamen. He is a remarkable human being who is quirky as anybody of his stature might be. What makes him so unique is that he will look at things that most people look at and he will have a completely different response. It's his way of perceiving the world that separates him and makes him the inventor that he is. Take, for example, how he approaches a wheelchair. Everybody else is trying to get disabled people a way to move around, and Dean says, what disabled people really need is dignity, so they need to be [at] eye level with the people they are talking to. How do I get a disabled person to be [at] eye level? Dean asks different questions and sees the world differently. He also has the technological know-how to tackle these problems.

In what way is Dean's attitude and approach to life reflected in the film?

People wanted the movie to be either a biography about him or a linear approach to his technology. Dean just isn't like that. He is all over the map; his mind jumps from one subject to another; he is endlessly on the move. Dean takes a vacation by switching from one of his projects to another. He goes from his SlingShot device to his dialysis machine to his wheelchair to his energy machine. I wanted the movie to be reflective of that. So the movie jumps around and purposefully puts you on your heels. You never quite know what's coming next and whether it's going to be about the machine, about him, or about science and technology in general. By allowing it to be unexpectedly connected, the movie is hopefully interesting and more like Dean.

As a director, what were the challenges of taking on this project?

There were so many, but the funding of it, getting people to recognize it had value, was extremely difficult. It was challenging to figure out how to tell the story without it being boring. We got tons of advice that we were approaching it incorrectly. I didn't agree with most of the helpful suggestions that were coming at me, so that made it very difficult because I had to keep going. Dean is always very concerned with how he spends his time, so getting access to him was tough too. This movie was challenging on almost every front.

SLINGSHOT CONTINUED ON PAGE 12



IN PRINT + MEDIA

TOM MOORE'S THE FLIGHT FANTASTIC



Tom Moore + Richie Gaona

Tom Moore's *The Flight Fantastic* follows one of the most prominent families of trapeze artists ever, the Flying Gaonas. The documentary chronicles their success in the circus in the latter half of the 20th century and their current work with children, highlighting their passion and dedication to their art, as well as their legacy in the trapeze world that lives on today.

How did you get involved with this documentary? What drew you to the Flying Gaonas?

I was introduced to them through the sport of trapeze. During a time of turmoil with my career and wanting some new passion, I discovered the flying trapeze and started participating in it as a flyer. I was taught by Richie Gaona, who is the youngest flying son of the Flying Gaona family, and it developed from there. It was inspiring, exciting, and thrilling, and it became a huge part of my life. I got to meet not only the Gaona family but a number of the other famous flying families. I was so thrilled by the warmth and generosity of those groups that I felt I needed to combine my passions and my skills and put this to film.

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What is the difference between directing a play or TV show versus directing a documentary?

There are so many differences, but ultimately, I think it all boils down to storytelling and communicating your story to an audience. Whether you're in the theatre, you're doing a TV show, or you're doing a documentary, you still have to communicate with an audience and tell a story. The challenges of all three are to engage, entertain, and elevate while at the same time finding that really rich storyline. A documentary on some level is maybe the hardest because there's no script. You are flying without a net half of the time, and the script is happening as you're doing it.

What do you hope people learn or do after seeing this documentary?

We have three clear goals, and we adhered to them and tried to realize them from the beginning. One: help disseminate and make people aware of the technology itself, understand what SlingShot does, is, and why it's necessary. Two: promote the notion of science education, the value of science, technology, engineering, and math in society and in the world, particularly among kids. We think that when anyone encounters Dean Kamen, that happens. Three: perhaps the most important goal on some level is to make people aware of what is really going on with water in the world and spread awareness of how large the actual crisis really is. I think the movie fires on all those goals.

Is there anything else you want readers to know about you, about Dean, or about the film?

We really want people to see it. Change comes from awareness, and you don't have any change until people are aware that there's a need for it. It starts with people. We take it for granted. We go to our sinks, our bathrooms, our laundries, or our toilets, and we don't have any idea what potable water means. We don't care that that same water could sustain life in other parts of the world. I think it's hard to understand until you see something like *SlingShot*. It's not the only one, but it's a good start. So the main thing I want to do is to get people to see it.

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In your own words, can you describe what makes this family extraordinary?

They are extraordinary in terms of their skill and the beauty of their work. The thing that has always amazed me about circus families is their generosity and their desire to help you accomplish something. I don't think, in our world, we always find that to be the case. They will go out of their way without ego to help you achieve your goals. A number of years ago, I also met the mother of this clan, Teresa. She was one of the most fascinating people I've ever met, and I began to understand how the warmth of this family was created. The skill of this family was created because of their demanding but skillful and entrepreneurial father, Victor.

Having experience as a trapeze artist yourself, why do the Flying Gaonas stand out? What is their "legend and legacy on the flying trapeze"?

They were superheroes during a period of time in the 1970s and '80s when trapeze artists and the circus itself were national obsessions. They were immediate darlings, especially because of the charisma and performance level of the superstar at their center, Tito Gaona. The *New York Times* and all television outlets in New York used to cover the circus every time they came to town. Personality was paramount, and people came to see them perform. No performing group on the trapeze or in the circus, perhaps, had ever been any greater than the Flying Gaonas.

How did the work of these individuals influence your work?

Their attention to detail, to craft, and to form influences me in every way. It's their philosophy that if you're not having fun, there is no point in doing it at all. That is the way they were taught, that is the way they still teach, and that was the way they live their lives. Their first act, their superstar career, is dazzling, but what is even more important to me is their second act, that point in life where you move beyond the center ring and start living another life. They have done that by teaching, coaching, and working with kids with cancer, kids with drug abuse problems, using the trapeze as an empowerment tool. I find that inspiring because they bring the same energy and joy to that as they did when they were working with 20,000 people at a clip.

As a director, what were the challenges of taking on this project?

There were so many. I decided to make this documentary without full understanding of the implications that lay ahead. If I do a work of film or television, I'm used to having a crew of 100 at the minimum. This would end up

sometimes being three and sometimes being one. It was a very lonely process. Because it's a passionate project, it's something you have to keep pushing forward at all times yourself. One of my favorite parts of the process is working with the editor. That took over a year because we had so much archival film. The only way to find the story was to edit all scenes we shot and only by that point did I understand what the full story would be.

What is the difference between directing a play or TV show versus directing a documentary?

First of all, you start with the difference between fiction and documentary. With fiction, whether it is film, television, or a play, I've always started with the script. The script is the crucial starting point. In this case, we had to create that script as we went. When you're working in fiction, you're also working with trained actors who, with the right direction and the right words, will give you something pretty phenomenal. In this case, you're working with real life, which is totally unpredictable and sometimes chaotic. It's thrilling because you never know what you're going to find until you find it. Sometimes the miracle was that something extraordinary would happen as you are working that would make the scene. In drama you know the dramatic moment, you know the important characters, you know all of the conflicts and how it goes together. The same thing is true in documentary except it is happening by chance rather than by plan.

What do you hope people learn or do after seeing this documentary?

I hope it inspires people to take new chances, to do what they want to do with their life, and to always feel that there are new possibilities. Reinvention is the name of the game. I've always tried to reinvent myself in my career and for me that means doing things I've not done before, and this was certainly a big step in that direction.

Is there anything else you want readers to know about you or about the film?

One of the things I've loved about my career is that it's been very eclectic. It's hard to put me in a category. I've done Broadway, I've done comedy and tragedy, and I've done television and film; there is simply no easy place to put me. I would hope that this film complicates that even more because it doesn't make a whole lot of sense in a linear progression, but it makes all the sense in the world in terms of my life.

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