



GINA

Director: Wendell Cooke Producer: Jeremy Macey

A woman suffering an extreme genetic disorder argues for her right to choose when and how she dies.

AVAILABLE ONLINE FROM 9 JULY 2015

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Gina is a powerful and emotive documentary about the circumstances that one woman lives with everyday. A cruel genetic illness has left Gina bed-bound for years; sound and light cause her body further damage, and she is unable to talk. Through the film, Gina expresses her belief that she should have the right to choose if, and when, and how she might die.

LONG SYNOPSIS

Gina visually represents the life of one woman with a debilitating genetic illness and no hope for recovery. She is fully bed-bound, basic functions like speaking are no longer available to her and she is only able to communicate through a letter chart process that is laborious and tiring. Gina thinks about voluntary euthanasia constantly, but because no one can legally assist her and she is unable to help herself, her only option is to refuse food and hydration - for her, a cruel and inhumane way to die. Through Gina's experience, the documentary questions what makes a life worth living and who should have the power to end a life. Gina believes that she should have the right to choose if, and when, and how she might die peacefully.

Director: Wendell Cooke

Wendell Cooke is a Wellington-based writer, producer and director with degrees in Chinese language and management, and an MA in screenwriting from Victoria University (2009). Wendell was a Script-to-Screen/Show Me Shorts Film Lab participant in 2012, and has completed two shorts films, *Maul* and *Loner*, which have screened at a variety of festivals, including the Melbourne and New Zealand International Film Festivals, Show Me Shorts, Wairoa Maori Film Festival, and Hof International Film Festival (Germany).

Producer: Jeremy Macey

Jeremy Macey studied Russian and German at Victoria University, and worked in theatre, short films and TVCs. From 1997 to 2001 he worked in Moscow in advertising, documentary and feature filmmaking. He produced and directed the documentary *Shpilt Mir (Play For Me)* about the revival of klezmer in the former Soviet Union, followed by a documentary about Russian immigrants in Christchurch and Highnote, covering the National Youth Choir tour to East Europe and Russia. Jeremy worked in development at the NZ Film Commission before returning to the industry as producer of the feature *Hook, Line and Sinker* (2011), and short films including *I'm Going to Mum's* (Berlinale 2013).



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Our motivation was to make a film that opened people's eyes to a movement in New Zealand that provides terminally ill and elderly people with information about end-of-life choice. We wanted to highlight the current gap in the law for people who may want to consider ending their lives because of illness, and the impact that this gap has on everyday people. We spent a lot of time talking to members of Exit International and the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand. We ended up filming two interviews with Exit members, after which we discovered that the three-minute format of Loading Docs and our complex subject matter did not coexist happily together! During this time, we were becoming aware of a woman with an extreme condition who, although she didn't want to appear on camera, offered the most compelling argument for why people should be allowed the choice of assisted dying if their everyday circumstances constitute cruel and unusual suffering. We continued to communicate with Gina by email via her sister, who would dictate Gina's responses to our questions. Through these exchanges we built up a picture of Gina's situation and position that she, and only she, should have the right to choose whether or not she goes on living. We felt that if we could just communicate this to an audience it would go right to the heart of why there needs to be a law change in New Zealand.

PRESS RELEASE

Gina has a rare incurable disease that affects her eyes, ears, larynx and all of her joints. Unable to participate in every day life, she lives in darkness and near silence, communicating only through the use of a touch alphabet system. She has a singular passion: getting voluntary euthanasia legalised in New Zealand.

Gina, who has chosen not to reveal her last name, is the subject of a very moving and beautifully realised 3-minute documentary by Jeremy Macey and Wendell Cooke, which has been made as part of the Loading Docs initiative and will be launched online this month.

The right to die is always a highly contested issue, inspiring heated debate by people on both sides of the argument. The filmmakers hope that their film will give people the opportunity to see what it is like for someone who is living with an incurable illness that leaves them almost completely debilitated. Their initial inspiration for the film was a Wellington-based group called Exit International where a group of retired people meet regularly to discuss the latest developments in voluntary euthanasia and their own 'exit plans'.

In the process of making the film, Cooke and Macey found that with the 3-minute time constraint of the documentary, a more effective way in to the real story of euthanasia was to explore the experience of one person in a creative way. They hope that people will be moved by Gina and her courage to share her story. They also hope, as strong supporters of legalising voluntary euthanasia, that the film will leave people "outraged" by the lack of choices available to Gina and other people in similar situations. One thing is certain, the film will certainly inspire strong opinions from both supporters and opposers of the right to die.

The Loading Docs initiative that *Gina* is a part of supports 10 filmmaking teams to experiment with the confines of a 3-minute timeframe to make innovative and creative documentaries that tell New Zealand stories, this year based around the theme of connection. You can view *Gina* online at www.loadingdocs.net and on **TVNZ OnDemand** from 9th July, 2015.

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