MAREN GRAINGER-MONSEN ON HOW FILM CAN WAKE PEOPLE UP TO REALITIES IN MEDICINE

I t figures that Dr. Maren Grainger-Monsen would become a documentarian. Her parents, Joseph and Elaine Monsen, have built one of the largest collections of photographs in private hands. But their daughter put up a fight, first devoting herself to the Japanese tea ceremony and then going to medical school before she started making films. Grainger-Monsen, 44, lives in Portola Valley.

"I WAS A RESIDENT in emergency medicine at Stanford hospital. In the emergency department I found that the staff would all lead resuscitations and we'd all say, 'I never want that done to myself.' I thought, 'I need to make a film about that.' The public doesn't understand what a resuscitation is like.

THE LIGHTBULB: Medical school is this relentless series of lectures eight hours a day and then studying all night. The best part, by far, is when they bring in patients to tell their stories. I realized if I could make a film that would share these patients' stories, it would have tremendous impact.

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I'M JUST FINISHING this big project on health care disparities in the U.S. There are four short films I made for medical education, called 'Worlds Apart,' that are being used in 40 percent of the medical schools in the country. There is also a feature film called 'Hold Your Breath.'

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I WOULD LOVE to make a film about the tea ceremony. The issue in making documentary films though, is finding a topic that I'm willing to dedicate five years to and also something that's fundable. I don't know how fundable the tea ceremony would be.

I'VE GONE BACK and forth between clinical practice and making films. There are probably no two other jobs where you can ask whatever you want and people will answer you. I run the program in bioethics in film at the Stanford Center for Biomedical Ethics. I don't know of any other ethics center that has a filmmaker in residence. It's very strange. My hobby became my career, I guess."

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