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Living Downstream

A new documentary film details the life and work of biologist and cancer survivor, Sandra Steingraber

(08/01/10) ***Living Downstream*** is an eloquent feature-length documentary that charts the life and work of biologist, author, cancer survivor and cancer prevention advocate, Sandra Steingraber.

Living Downstream is based on Sandra's book of the same name, and, like the book, documents the growing body of scientific evidence that links human health with the health of our environment. Part scientific exploration, part personal journey, the film follows Sandra during a pivotal year in her life: as a biologist and author, speaking to groups across North America about cancer prevention; and as a cancer survivor, when she receives ambiguous results from a cancer screening test. The film captures this movement between the scientific and the personal, which is also a hallmark of Sandra's work.

Raised in small-town Illinois, cancer seems to run in Sandra's family. Sandra was diagnosed with bladder cancer when she was just 20 years old. Her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when Sandra was in high school. Many of her close family members have also struggled with the disease, and her aunt died of the same form of cancer that Sandra had. But while cancer runs in her family, she cannot say that it runs in her genes. Sandra is adopted. Thus, Sandra asks what else families have in common besides DNA. The answer is all around us: our environment.

The film closely follows the trajectory of Sandra's life and work, but it also tracks the important progress of scientific investigation on environmental links to cancer and other health ailments. Several experts in the fields of toxicology and cancer research make important cameo appearances in the film, highlighting their own findings on such pervasive chemicals as atrazine, one of the most widely used herbicides in the world, and industrial compounds, such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). Their work further illuminates the significant connection between a healthy environment and human health.

The film is directed by Chanda Chevannes of The People's Picture Company (The PPC). "The film follows Sandra who is on a journey," says Chanda, "but the chemicals against which she is fighting are also on the move. We follow these invisible toxins as they migrate to some of the most beautiful places in North America. We see how these chemicals enter our bodies, and how, once inside, scientists believe they may be working to cause cancer."

The People's Picture Company is an award-winning independent production company based in Toronto, Canada. The PPC aims to entertain, educate and inspire audiences with documentary films and believes in the power of media and art to create positive change in our world.

To coincide with the documentary adaptation of *Living Downstream*, Da Capo Press will publish an updated second edition of the book in April 2010.

Certainly, the original book inspired Chanda's documentary, but as Sandra says, the making of the documentary also influenced her recasting of the second edition: "In a wonderful and unexpected way, Chanda's creative decisions as a filmmaker gave me new ideas for organizing the story and scientific argument of the book as I updated its various chapters for the second edition. There was a lot of reciprocity between us. Chanda inspires me."

Advanced public screenings of *Living Downstream* are currently being held in select North American cities. Sandra Steingraber and Chanda Chevannes have been touring with the film over the past several months to these screenings. Based on initial reviews and attendance, the producers are confident that the film will soon achieve wider theatrical release and television broadcast. The World Premiere in Ithaca, NY was sold out and people were turned away at the door. The Canadian Premiere in Toronto, ON played to a packed house in an 850-seat theater. A screening in Washington, DC was attended by many notable individuals, including Senator John Kerry and Teresa Heinz. The film and its makers received standing ovations in Toronto, Boston, Missoula, MT and several cities in central Illinois.

For more information on *Living Downstream* and public screenings, visit:
<http://www.livingdownstream.com>

For more information on **The People's Picture Company**, visit:
<http://www.theppcinc.com>

For DVD screeners or media interviews with Chanda or Sandra contact:

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