

THE MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION PRESENTS

A YELLOWBRICK ROAD PRODUCTION

Remote Control

Children, Media Consumption & the Changing American Family

When a child born today turns 30 years old, he or she will have spent almost ten years of their life in front of a screen – a full decade spent watching life instead of living one.

Running Time: 38 minutes

For further information about this film, please contact:

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FILM SYNOPSIS

The average American child spends over 40 hours per week consuming media, the equivalent of a full-time job. This means that by the time children born today turn 30, they will have spent an entire decade of their lives in front of some type of screen. *Remote Control*, based on the findings of the Kaiser Family Foundation's landmark study *Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8 to 18-year-olds*, examines the implications of this unprecedented level of exposure. Putting a human face on the report's statistical findings, filmmaker Bob McKinnon explores the media habits of two families, supplementing their powerful personal insights with testimony from media experts, educators, and policymakers. *Remote Control* offers a fascinating look at the centrality of media in our lives, revealing far-reaching effects that we are only beginning to understand, and suggesting ways we might begin to help our children live a life instead of watching one.

CREDITS

A film by Bob McKinnon
A Yellowbrickroad Production
Associate Producer: Marci Lacenere
Director of Photography: James Arbona
Cameraman: Eddison Santos
Illustrations: Pat Giles
Editorial Consultant: Jeremy Kessler
Talent: Tina Spurber
Research Assistant: Annette Young, Nicole Lefkowitz, Katy Fitzpatrick
Special thanks to "The Families" Matthew, Averie and Betty & Jacob, Sarah, Jerry and Debbie
Music by Will Platt-Higgins

UNITED STATES • 2007 • 38 mins • Shot in Mini-DV • Color • BETA/DVD/DVCAM •
NTSC • Aspect Ratio 4:3 • Stereo • In English/English subtitles

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Bob McKinnon | Director, Producer

Bob McKinnon began a career in advertising at one of the world's most prestigious advertising agencies, Saatchi & Saatchi. There he rose in the ranks to become the company's youngest Executive Vice President by the age of 30. In this capacity, he served as director of various departments from Media to Business Development working with over thirty Fortune 500 Companies, while also serving on the New York Board. While director of Business Development he led teams that brought over fifteen new clients and \$100MM of new revenue into the agency. He led campaigns for the International Olympic Committee and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

He also was one of the primary architects in creating the most successful youth-based government health campaign of all time: VERB (the Center for Disease Control Youth Media Campaign promoting physical activity to fight childhood obesity). This program is producing increases in physical activity of over 30% amongst the most inactive and at risk adolescents. Key to this program was leading negotiations of over \$200MM in cross media platform deals with Viacom, Time Warner, ABC/Disney, Channel One and Gruner & Jahr. In addition, as one of the primary spokespersons for the campaign, he testified regularly to key members of U.S. Congress and U.S. Department of Health & Human Services regarding campaign status and success in order to maintain congressional funding.

The combination of these experiences compelled Bob to seek more opportunities where communication could contribute to creating a better environment for today's youth.

The first step was pursuing an advanced Master's degree in Media Studies at the New School University. There he concentrated in Children's Media Issues and Documentary film. During this time, he was also a regular speaker on the industry circuit and developed media content that addressed issues regarding children and their families.

Armed with this combination of professional and academic experience, Bob McKinnon decided to leave Saatchi & Saatchi after fifteen years and open YELLOWBRICKROAD in February of 2005.

MEDIA EDUCATION FOUNDATION | Distributor & Sales Rep

The non-profit Media Education Foundation (MEF) is the nation's leading producer and distributor of documentary films and other educational resources designed to inspire critical reflection on the social, political, and cultural impact of American mass media. Founded in 1991, MEF's mission is to answer the challenge posed by the radical and accelerating corporate threat to democracy.

BIOGRAPHIES

Todd Gitlin is the author of twelve books, including, most recently, *The Bulldozer and the Big Tent: Blind Republicans, Lame Democrats, and the Recovery of American Ideals*. He also edited *Watching Television* and *Campfires of the Resistance*. In September 2010, Simon & Schuster will publish his book, co-authored by Liel Leibovitz, *The Chosen Peoples: America, Israel, and the Ordeals of Divine Election*. In March 2011, Counterpoint will publish his novel, *Undying*. He has contributed to many books and published widely in general periodicals (*The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *Boston Globe*, *Dissent*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *Wilson Quarterly*, *Harper's*, *American Journalism Review*, *Columbia Journalism Review*, *The American Prospect*, et al.), online magazines (*tnr.com*, *prospect.org*, *openDemocracy.net*), and scholarly journals (*Theory and Society*, *Journal of Communication*, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, et al.). He is on the editorial board of *Dissent*, a contributing writer to *Mother Jones*, a member of the board of trustees of *openDemocracy.net* and the editorial board of the Progressive Book Club. He is a regular contributor to the blog TPMcafe.com. Dr. Gitlin holds degrees from Harvard University (mathematics), the University of Michigan (political science), and the University of California, Berkeley (sociology). He is now a professor of journalism and sociology and chair of the Ph. D. program in Communications at Columbia University. For sixteen years, he was a professor of sociology and director of the mass communications program at the University of California, Berkeley, and then for seven years a professor of culture, journalism and sociology at New York University. During 1994-95, he held the chair in American Civilization at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. He has been a resident at the Bellagio Study Center in Italy and the Djerassi Foundation in Woodside, California, a fellow at the Media Studies Center in New York, and a visiting professor at Yale University, the University of Oslo, the University of Toronto, East China Normal University in Shanghai, and the Institut Supérieur des Langues de Tunis in Tunisia.

Richard Louv is an author and journalist focused on nature, family, and community. He serves as chairman of the [Children & Nature Network](#), an organization helping to build the international movement to connect children with nature. Richard has written for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and many other newspapers and magazines. He has appeared on the *CBS Morning Show*, *Good Morning America*, the *Today Show*, *CBS Evening News*, *NBC Nightly News*, NPR's *Talk of the Nation*, and many other programs. He speaks frequently to audiences in the United States and abroad. In 2008, he was awarded the Audubon Medal by the National Audubon Society. Past recipients have included Rachel Carson, E.O. Wilson, Robert Redford, and Jimmy Carter. He is

also the 2007 recipient of Clemson University's Cox Award for "sustained achievement in public service." His most recent book is *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*.

Vicky Rideout is a vice president at the Kaiser Family Foundation and director of the Foundation's *Program for the Study of Media and Health*. She has directed numerous studies on media and health, including topics such as trends in media consumption; news coverage of health issues; food advertising on television and the Internet; the health content of entertainment television; and teens' use of the Internet for health information. Her research has been published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, *Health Affairs*, *The Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *American Behavioral Scientist*, and *Pediatrics*, and has been widely reported on in the popular press, including front page stories in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. She has testified on media and health at the U.S. Congress, the Institute of Medicine, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Federal Communications Commission, and has appeared on television and radio programs including *Nightline*, *The Today Show*, *Talk of the Nation*, *Good Morning America*, and *The Early Show*. Ms. Rideout graduated with honors from Harvard University and received her Master of Arts degree from Syracuse University.

Mary Winn was born in Prague and grew up in New York City. She attended Radcliffe College and Columbia University. Winn is the author of thirteen books, among them *Children Without Childhood*, *Unplugging the Plug-In Drug*, and *Red-Tails in Love*. She currently writes a column about nature for the *Wall Street Journal*. She has two grown children and four grandchildren who are growing up without television.

NOTABLE QUOTES FROM *REMOTE CONTROL*

MARIE WINN: If you were going to watch a family today ..., you'd pretty much be watching people on the screen watching television. So you've got people today watching pre-television families as if this were some kind of ideal sort of thing. It is ironic and it's kind of sad and people who are happily watching these things don't quite realize that if they would just stop watching and turn off, they could have something approximating that kind of life themselves in their family.

RICHARD LOUV: Increasingly kids seem to prefer the virtual reality. There was a story recently in the *New York Times* about the fact that kids tend to want to play video basketball games rather than going out and having real basketball games. ...It's not that video games are evil. It's a sense of balance in our lives and that's been lost.

HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON: I asked a veteran teacher, "What's the difference between teaching today and teaching 35 years ago when you started?" And she said, "Well, today even the youngest children come into the classroom, and they have a mental remote controller in their heads, and if I don't capture their attention within the first five seconds, they change the channel. And it's very difficult to get them to focus on a single task that is frustrating or difficult for them to master, because there is always the out that they have learned to expect in their daily interaction with media."

MARIE WINN: I think that one of the most important things for people to consider about television is not so much what it makes the child do – whether it makes the child more violent or whether it makes the child greedy and want to buy things – but the very simple idea that the hours that you spend watching television displace other life activities.

RICHARD LOUV: There has happened this vast disconnect between children and actual physical involvement with nature, direct experience as opposed to secondary experience. Now much of childhood is comprised of secondary experience, sitting in front of a tube playing a video game, being on the Internet or watching television. That's a remarkable change in human history.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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FACTS FROM THE FILM

- The average American child spends over 40 hours a week with media.
- He or she also:
 - sits in front of a screen for 4 ½ hours a day
 - has a television set in his or her bedroom
 - eats the majority of his or her meals in front of a television
 - has no rules regarding his or her media consumption
- A typical child's home contains:
 - 3 TV sets, 3 CD players
 - 3 VCR or DVD players
 - 2 video game systems
 - and a home computer
- 60% of American families watch TV while eating dinner.
- 72% of parents wish their child played outside more.
- There is a direct correlation between hours spent watching TV and childhood obesity.
- Over 80% of 9 year-olds play organized sports. By the time they're 13, only 20% do.
- Over 6 million children are medicated for attention deficit disorder, a 600% increase from 1981.
- The two top words that children use to describe school are "boring" and "tired".
- Watching 10 or more hours of TV has been shown to negatively impact academic achievement.
- Time spent by children on unstructured free play has declined by 25% between 1981 and 1997.
- 64% of parents wish their children spent less time watching TV and playing video games.
- 1 hour each day of quality conversation between parents and children improves academic performance.
- Fewer than 5% of US schools teach media education.
- When a child born today turns 30, they will have spent almost 10 years of their life in front of a screen.