



## MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: Michael Kusek  
for Florentine Films/Hott Productions  
cell phone: 413.575.1435  
email: mtk@michaelkusek.com

### IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL.

Northampton, Massachusetts – *IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL*, a new one-hour film by the award-winning filmmaking team of Lawrence Hott and Diane Garey of FLORENTINE FILMS/HOTT PRODUCTIONS, is a story of two brothers, one who has suffered the horrors and sadness of mental illness for thirty-eight years--the other, a prize-winning novelist who has been his brother's primary caretaker through those years.

*IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL*, based on the book by Jay Neugeboren, is a true story – true, not only for the protagonists, but also for millions of other Americans. It tells the story of Robert Neugeboren, who has suffered from schizophrenia his entire adult life and his brother Jay, novelist and retired University of Massachusetts writing professor, who has been his guardian for the past twenty-five years.

Robert, who is now fifty-eight years old, experienced his first episode of mental illness during his freshman year at the City College of New York. Since then he has been hospitalized and re-hospitalized for mental illness (with diagnoses of schizophrenia and manic depression) more than fifty times. For thirty-eight years he has lived within the mental health system, his treatment and prognosis changing with each new doctor and each new "cure." Jay often refers to his brother as a walking archaeological dig of mental health treatment in the twentieth century.

"The very history of the ways in which our mental health system has dealt with the mentally ill has been passing through my brother's mind and body," Jay says.

"I have heard parts of this story for a long time," says Hott, producer and director. "Jay is a friend and neighbor, and occasionally he would tell me about his brother Robert and how much time and energy he had to devote to him. When the book came out I heard Jay give a reading and saw the impact the story had on the audience. I was convinced that this would be wonderful material for a film."

*IMAGINING ROBERT* looks very different from all the other films in the FLORENTINE FILMS/HOTT PRODUCTIONS portfolio. A distinct difference is Hott serving as the camera person removing the interposition of the camera man between him and the subject. Hott interacts very directly with Robert and Jay as they look and speak directly to him through out the film. The effect is that Hott unintentionally becomes a character resulting in a film where the audience sees not just two people on the screen talking about their lives but instead sees two people and the filmmaker together.

Diane Garey brings sensitivity to the editing of *IMAGINING ROBERT* infusing it with a combination of clarity, motion and humor. Garey avoids mellifluous, flowing cutting, which would burden the work with overwrought sentimentality. Instead she uses very sharp and rapid cuts matched with unexpected soundtrack choices – such as the bongo music in the opening scenes. As an example, during the scene in the halfway house where Robert is almost bouncing off the walls having a bad day, the editing is almost bouncing off the walls as well. Garey skillfully brings a rhythm to the scene that fits the emotions that Robert's going through.

Hott says, "We have often chosen films that on the surface people might think are downers, like the history of tuberculosis, for example, or even the ACLU film, which is full of people's rights being crushed. But we put a lot of effort into making the films funny. Entertaining. And here's a film about mental illness that could be very depressing, handled in a certain way, but I think most people who see it, they laugh every other minute in this film because something funny is happening. Even if it is ironically, sadly funny, it's still funny. And it holds your attention."

*IMAGINING ROBERT* was premiered at Smith College in April of 2002 and was recently awarded an Honorable Mention in the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Media Awards Competition of the National Council on Family Relations and has received notice by as a "exemplary film" by the Council on Foundations in Washington, DC. *IMAGINING ROBERT* has been screened at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Woods Hole Film Festival and the Northampton (Massachusetts) Independent Film Festival.

The Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities is working in tandem with FLORENTINE FILMS/HOTT PRODUCTIONS to use the completed film to prompt dialogue about mental illness on a local, state and national level. Each public screening is designed to bring people from different backgrounds – patients, families, police, social workers, lawyers, and health-care providers – together with Hott and Jay and Robert Neugeboren to discuss the topics raised in the film.

*IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL* is funded by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, a state program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Animating Democracy Initiative of Americans for the Arts, funded by the Ford Foundation, the Rosalynn Carter Fellowship for Mental Health Journalism, and the Massachusetts Media Merit Award a program of the Boston Film and Video Foundation and the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

More information about the film and dialogue series is available at [www.imaginingrobert.org](http://www.imaginingrobert.org). The film is available through its distributor, Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 800-257-5126, [www.films.com](http://www.films.com).

Lawrence R. Hott and Diane Garey have been producers with FLORENTINE FILMS/HOTT PRODUCTIONS since 1979. Almost 25 years later they have received an Emmy, two Academy Award nominations, five American Film Festival Blue Ribbons, ten CINE Golden Eagles, a George Foster Peabody Award and over one hundred national and international awards. Their work has been screened at a variety of major film festivals, including the New York Film Festival, Telluride, and Women in the Director's Chair. See [www.florentinefilms.com](http://www.florentinefilms.com) for more information.

- END -

## IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL

---

DIRECTOR	LAWRENCE HOTT
PRODUCER	LAWRENCE HOTT
CO-PRODUCER	DIANE GAREY
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER	LAWRENCE HOTT
WRITER	BASED ON THE BOOK BY JAY
NEUGEBOREN	

### PRINCIPAL CREW

CINEMATOGRAPHER	LAWRENCE HOTT
ORIGINAL MUSIC/COMPOSER	RICHARD EINHORN
PICTURE EDITOR	DIANE GAREY
SOUND EDITOR	RIKK DESGRES

## FILM FESTIVAL APPEARANCES

---

Northampton Independent Film Festival  
Northampton, MA, U S A  
November 2002

11th Wood Hole Film Festival  
Woods Hole, MA, U S A  
July 2002

Premiere Screening, Smith College  
Northampton, MA, U S A  
March 2002

LAWRENCE R. HOTT on  
IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER, MADNESS AND SURVIVAL

---

There are a lot of reasons that I came to this story. I've known Jay Neugeboren for a long time and he had always told me stories about his brother Robert. When his book came out I read it and I realized that it was a compelling story with a social issue. As a documentary filmmaker, you're looking for many things to make a film good -- you want it to be visual, something that you can look at, to sustain at least a half hour if not an hour, for the characters to be strong and charismatic. You want it to be important.

When I went down with Jay to meet with Robert for the first time, I was very nervous. I wasn't nervous about Robert as a patient with mental illness because I had worked three summers as an aide in mental hospitals. I was nervous about whether or not I would like him as a subject, whether Jay would be disappointed or whether I would come away saying something like, "Jay, it was a nice idea, but I'm sorry . . . you know, Robert's just not going to make it on film."

When we arrived to meet Robert I gave him a gift -- a pair of flip-up sunglasses with the price tag still on them. Robert puts them on, refuses to take off the price tag, starts singing, dancing, reciting poems and telling stories. One of the first things he did was grab the copy of Jay's book and draw a self-portrait and write a dedication to me in it. I was charmed and I was absolutely convinced that he was going to be a great subject for a great film.

There are two reasons that make this film look very different from the others we've done. I'm the cameraperson, removing the interposition of the cameraman between the subject and me. I'm directly with Robert and Jay with them looking and talking to me resulting in my unintentionally becoming a character in the film. My partner, Diane Garey, worked closely with me and brought a whole new sensitivity to the editing. She uses a rhythm to the film that is different from our other productions. It was her idea to use bongo music at the beginning for the film, which is completely out of context. The cuts are not standard; it's not a very mellifluous, flowing editing, but instead, very sharp. In the scene in the halfway house where Robert is almost bouncing off the walls having a bad day, the pace of the film almost bounces off the walls as well with a rhythm that matches the emotions Robert is going through.

We have often chosen films that, on the surface, people might think are downers; the history of tuberculosis or even the ACLU film, which is full of people's rights being crushed. Diane's great expertise in the editing brings a combination of clarity, motion and humor to the film. This is a film about mental illness that could be very depressing handled in a certain way. I think most people who see it find themselves laughing -- even if it is ironic and sadly funny -- it is still funny.

Jay and Robert both react very positively to themselves on film. For Jay I think it is just a great relief to think that other people will have a sense of what he's been through. For Robert it's very good for his ego. Here's a guy who did have a strong ego, who liked to perform and is given a chance to perform and entertain people again. For somebody who has had severe mental illness to be able to like yourself is very important.

At the conclusion of the film, Robert says that he's been happy with his life; that he hasn't had a bad life. Think about it, the guy's been locked up for nearly 40 years and then he says, "I haven't had a bad life." For someone with mental illness that's a very positive attitude and it gives the story the strength and charisma to make it a good film.

## FILMOGRAPHY

### FLORENTINE FILMS/HOTT PRODUCTIONS

---

Lawrence R. Hott and Diane Garey have been producers with Florentine Films since 1978. In the past ten years they have received an Emmy, two Academy Award nominations, five American Film Festival Blue Ribbons, ten CINE Golden Eagles, a George Foster Peabody Award and over one hundred national and international awards. Their work has been screened at a variety of major film festivals, including the New York Film Festival, Telluride, and Women in the Director's Chair. See [www.florentinefilms.com](http://www.florentinefilms.com) for more information.

Hott and Garey hold principal creative credits for the following productions:

#### THE WILDERNESS IDEA SERIES

PART I: JOHN MUIR, GIFFORD PINCHOT AND THE FIRST GREAT BATTLE FOR WILDERNESS, released 1989. Awards from San Francisco International Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival, American Film Festival, National Educational Film Festival, Outdoor Writers Association, CINE Golden Eagle. PBS national broadcast on THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, PBS, January, 1990. 58 minutes.

PART II: WILD BY LAW: THE REDEFINITION OF AMERICAN PROGRESS, released 1991. A one-hour film about the people and events that influenced the passage of The Wilderness Act. Academy Award Nominee, Telluride Film Festival, San Francisco International Film Festival, CINE Golden Eagle, National Educational Film Festival, American Film Festival, Birmingham International Film Festival, U.S. Environmental Film Festival, Booklist's "Best of the Best." Broadcast on THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, PBS, January, 1992. 53 minutes.

#### THE PEOPLE'S PLAGUE SERIES

PART I: THE CAPTAIN OF ALL THESE MEN OF DEATH

PART II: THE GOSPEL OF HEALTH

THE PEOPLE'S PLAGUE is a two-part, two-hour series about tuberculosis in America. Funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the NEH, Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, Potts Memorial Fund, and the Arizona, Massachusetts, New York, Wisconsin and Colorado Endowments For the Humanities. National broadcast on PBS, October, 1995. Gold Apple, National Educational Film Festival.

DIVIDED HIGHWAYS, a ninety-minute film about the building of the Interstate Highway System and its impact on American culture. Produced in association with Tom Lewis and WETA. Funded by the NEH, Roadway Express, The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations and the Oregon and Texas Councils for the Humanities. George Foster Peabody Award. Emmy Award, Outstanding Historical Programming. Best Documentary, New England Film Festival. Awards from San Francisco, Chicago and National Educational Media Film Festivals. PBS national broadcast, 1997.

THE BOYHOOD OF JOHN MUIR, a one-hour dramatic film about the boyhood of John Muir, who emigrated to America from Scotland in the 1850s. Muir is known today as the founder of both the Sierra Club and Yosemite National Park and is considered America's first wilderness preservationist. Sponsored by the National Endowment for Children's Educational Television, the Town Creek Foundation, and the Wisconsin Sesquicentennial Commission. Released 1997. Gold Hugo, Chicago Television Film Festival. Gold Award, Parents' Choice. Silver Award, Worldfest, Charleston, CINE Gold Eagle. The Chris Award, Columbus Int'l Film Festival. Screenings at New York, Denver, Breckenridge, SciFest, Tahoe, D.C. Festivals. Christmas Day Special, PBS, 1998.

THE A.C.L.U. – A HISTORY, a one-hour film about the history of the American Civil Liberties Union and changes in civil liberties in the 20th century. A co-production with KCTS-TV, Seattle. Sponsored by the Floyd and Delores Jones Foundation, Playboy Foundation, Open Society Institute, and the Massachusetts and Illinois Humanities Councils. Gold Apple, National Educational Media Festival. CINE Golden Eagle. Hot Springs International Documentary Festival. Windy City Festival. PBS national broadcast, 1998.

KNUTE ROCKNE AND HIS FIGHTING IRISH, released January, 1993. A one-hour film for THE

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE about the famous Notre Dame coach and his influence on sports and popular culture. Gold Apple, National Educational Film Festival. Broadcast on THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE, PBS, January, 1993.

TELL ME SOMETHING I CAN'T FORGET, released September, 1992. A one-half hour film about a group of eight low-income women who have changed their lives through their poetry and prose. Sponsored, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts. CINE Golden Eagle, Gold Apple, National Educational Film Festival. PBS national broadcast on POV series, 1993.

REBUILDING THE TEMPLE: CAMBODIANS IN AMERICA, released 1991. A one-hour film that looks at the influence of Khmer-Buddhist culture on the Cambodians' adjustment to life in this country. Sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities and a consortium of state humanities councils. Gold Apple, National Educational Film Festival, Chicago International Film Festival. CINE Golden Eagle, Asian-American Film Festival. PBS national broadcast, 1993. The Discovery Channel, 1995.

SENTIMENTAL WOMEN NEED NOT APPLY: A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN NURSE, released 1988. Awards from National Educational Film Festival, American Film Festival, Women in the Director's Chair Festival, Sigma Theta Tau and winner of a CINE Golden Eagle. PBS national broadcast, November, 1990. 58 minutes.

THE ADIRONDACKS: THE LIVES AND TIMES OF AN AMERICAN WILDERNESS, released 1987. Traces major themes in the history of the largest wilderness area in the eastern United States. Blue Ribbon - American Film Festival, CINE Golden Eagle, Silver Apple - National Educational Film Festival. The Discovery Channel, 1989. 28 minutes.

NIAGARA FALLS: THE CHANGING NATURE OF A NEW WORLD SYMBOL, released 1985. Explores the historical and cultural significance of a national symbol. Blue Ribbon - American Film Festival, as well as awards from San Francisco Film Festival, CINE, and Birmingham International Film Festival. PBS broadcast, 1985, National Geographic Explorer Series, The Discovery Channel. 28 minutes.

THE GARDEN OF EDEN: THE CASE FOR NATURAL DIVERSITY, released 1983. Explores the importance of preservation of natural habitats to the planet's economic and ecological health. Academy Award Nominee, CINE Golden Eagle, Blue Ribbon - American Film Festival, First Place - American Outdoor Writers Association, San Francisco International Film Festival and others. PBS Broadcast, 1985. National Geographic Explorer. 28 minutes.

THE OLD QUABBIN VALLEY, released 1981. A film about water resource conflicts and the loss of community. Blue Ribbon - American Film Festival. Awards from New England Film Festival, National Audubon International Film Festival and others. PBS national broadcast, 1983. 28 minutes.

RADIANCE: AMERICAN ART AT THE SPRINGFIELD MUSEUMS, a one-half hour film about the American Art collection at the George Walter Vincent Smith and Museum of Fine Arts in Springfield, Massachusetts. Released in 1999.

IMAGINING ROBERT: MY BROTHER MADNESS AND SURVIVAL, a one-hour film about madness and medicine. Robert Neugeboren, age 58, has been on locked units of psychiatric hospitals for the past 38 years. Jay, his older brother and a well-known writer, has been struggling to care for him. Funded by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, the Rosalynn Carter Fellowships for Mental Health Journalism and the Carter Center, the Animating Democracy Initiative of Americans for the Arts funded by the Ford Foundation. Award from the Council on Foundations; Honorable Mention, 34th Annual Media Awards Competition from the National Council on Family Relations. Released in 2002.

THE HARRIMAN ALASKA EXPEDITION RETRACED, a two-hour film about two expeditions: Edward Harriman's famous 1899 survey of the Alaskan coast, and a 1999-2001 centennial recreation of the voyage. A co-production with the Clark Science Center, Smith College and Tom Litwin. Anchorage Film Festival, Environmental Film Festival (DC).