

For Immediate Release

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**INDEPENDENT LENS: “GUNS & MOTHERS,”
Thom Powers’ Insightful Documentary About Two Mothers on
Opposite Sides of the Gun Control Issue**

GUNS & MOTHERS *Airs Nationally on Independent Lens on May 13
at 10PM on PBS*

“Unfortunately, the tragedies that do happen in schools, especially in suburban schools, are like a wake-up call. Who would think that a child could be murdered in school? It does not matter where you live, and it’s not just an urban problem, it’s a problem in this country. It can happen to anybody...no child is really safe.”

— Frances Davis, founder of Mothers of All Children

“When a woman can carry a handgun for self-defense, a woman has equality. And if the so-called feminist movement is about equality, then I guess I would be a feminist.”

— Maria Heil, National Press Spokesperson for the Second Amendment Sisters

(San Francisco, CA)—Thom Powers’ documentary **GUNS & MOTHERS**, an incisive exploration into the women’s movements on both sides of the emotionally charged gun control debate, will air nationally on the PBS series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday, May 13, 2003 at 10PM, two days after Mother’s Day (check local listings).

The Million Moms and the Second Amendment Sisters are diametrically opposed on gun control, but they agree on one point: mothers will and should have a voice in determining

gun control policy in America. **GUNS & MOTHERS** explores the grassroots of both movements by focusing on two different women, living in two different Americas.

Frances Davis lives in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Having lost all three of her sons to gun violence, she advocates for stronger gun control and supports the Million Moms. She and the Million Moms see stronger gun control laws as a way to prevent the alarmingly high number of deaths of young people from gun violence in America; an estimate of 12 deaths per day. (This statistic was current as of 2000 but has recently been revised to 10 per day.)

Maria Heil lives in rural Pennsylvania. Convinced that a gun is a woman's best tool for self-defense, she's become active with the Second Amendment Sisters. These women view guns as a woman's most effective way to protect themselves and their families, and they quote statistics about lives saved by the use of guns.

The film follows their parallel crusades over the course of a year, starting on Mother's Day 2000 when the two movements were born with the Million Mom March on Washington and the Second Amendment Sisters' smaller counter-rally that same day. Fueled by the national shock and outrage over the shootings at Columbine High School, the Million Moms were committed to using the wholesome image of mom and apple pie to get Congress to hear their concerns. With inside access to both sides, Powers shows how both the Million Moms and the NRA recruited women; how tempers flared around the gun issue; how Presidential candidates handled the debate; and how the movements looked a year later. Throughout the narrative, two keen observers of gun politics, author Robert Spitzer and *New York Times* journalist Fox Butterfield, shed light on the dialogue. As Butterfield says, "People in America have two entirely different experiences with guns. As long as there's such a huge chasm between the two sides, it's very hard to get them agree on any new proposals. There appears to be no middle ground."

As the Million Moms and Second Amendment Sisters plan their next rallies around Mother's Day in election year 2004, **GUNS & MOTHERS** will help viewers better understand both sides of this most explosive issue, an issue on which almost every American has a deeply passionate opinion. Whatever you think about guns, this documentary will hopefully challenge your assumptions, deepen your understanding and foster continued debate.

For more information, go to www.pbs.org/independentlens/gunsandmothers

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About the Participants

FRANCES DAVIS, 53, was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. All three of her sons—Raleak, 20; Andrew, 22; Frankie, 18—were shot to death between 1987 and 1993 on the same block in the neighborhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant. In 1996, her two nephews—Dwayne Boone, 21, and Glennis Saunders, 15—were also shot and killed in the same housing project. Davis became active in several gun control organizations including New Yorkers Against Gun Violence and the Million Moms Brooklyn chapter. She started her own support group, Mothers Of All Children. In 2001, she received an *Essence* Award for her work. A former hospital worker, Davis now devotes herself full time to activism.

MARIA HEIL, 42, lives in New Freedom, Pennsylvania with her husband and four children. She joined the Second Amendment Sisters during its formative months leading up to its first rally in Washington, DC on Mother's Day 2000, organized as a counter demonstration to the Million Mom March. With no previous experience in activism or public speaking, Heil became known as the SAS's official spokesperson. Today the organization has chapters in 30 states. Heil is now helping to plan SAS's next rally in Washington on the Saturday before Mother's Day, 2004.

FOX BUTTERFIELD has written extensively on gun issues for the *New York Times*.

ROBERT J. SPITZER is the author of *The Politics of Gun Control* and *The Right to Bear Arms: Rights and Liberties Under the Law*. He is professor of political science at the State University of New York, College at Cortland.

Credits

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Director	Thom Powers
Producers	Thom Powers Meema Spadola John Walter
Executive Producers	Fred Green Patty Payne Green
Editor	John Walter
Composer	Rick Baitz
Writers	Thom Powers, John Walter
Narrator	Tracy Thorne

About the Filmmaker

Thom Powers is a director, writer and co-owner of Sugar Pictures in New York City. His work has appeared on HBO, Cinemax, PBS and the Sundance Channel. He previously directed *Private Dicks: Men Exposed* (HBO) and produced *Breasts* (Cinemax), both made in collaboration with Meema Spadola. Powers attended high school in Detroit, Michigan, where escalating homicide rates initiated his interest in gun issues. One of his former classmates John Walter is the editor of GUNS & MOTHERS. He now lives in Queens with his wife Leela Jacinto, an international news reporter at ABCNews.com. He is currently writing a book about the past 40 years of documentaries in America called *Stranger Than Fiction* for Faber & Faber.

A Statement from Thom Powers

In the spring of 2000, I became interested in the growing movement to frame gun control as a women's issue. After decades of watching the NRA dominate its opposition, I wondered if the Million Moms could put up a credible challenge. That question was the seed of this documentary.

After talking to dozens of mothers who had lost children to gun violence, I chose to focus on Frances Davis for two reasons. One is that Frances was not a newcomer to gun control. She had been speaking out on the issue several years before the Million Mom March. Secondly, the gun control movement of 2000 was driven largely in reaction to school shootings at Columbine and elsewhere. It was easy to forget that America's biggest killing zones are still inner city neighborhoods. Following Frances's story brought that back into focus.

I quickly realized my documentary would be incomplete without examining the grassroots movement on the pro-gun side. Although the Second Amendment Sisters rally on Mother's Day 2000 was much smaller than the Million Moms, I recognized that it was

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a powerful minority. When I attended the NRA convention a week later, I was struck by how much effort was being made to recruit women. I decided to follow Maria Heil because of her strong commitment to the cause.

The documentary concludes a year after Mother's Day 2000, when the political tide had shifted considerably. Now, as we anticipate the 2004 Presidential election, I think it's important to revisit what happened in 2000. Both the Million Moms and Second Amendment Sisters are planning new Washington rallies for Mother's Day weekend next year. Will the country pay as much attention? Will anything change?

Gun violence statistics are hotly contested by both sides of this issue. For further information on guns and the movements chronicled in the film, please check out:

<http://www.millionmommarch.com>
<http://www.2asisters.org>
<http://www.childrensdefense.org>
<http://www.nra.org>

About *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Angela Bassett, the anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of dramas united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. *Independent Lens* is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS.

About ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow

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