

PRESS KIT

THE NATIONAL FILM BOARD OF CANADA
presents

PINK RIBBONS, INC.

Directed by
Léa Pool

Produced by
Ravida Din

Written by
Patricia Kearns & Nancy Guerin
and Léa Pool

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PINK RIBBONS, INC.
Production Information

“We used to march in the streets; now we run for a cure.”
 Barbara Ehrenreich, author of “Welcome to Cancerland”

Breast cancer has become the poster child of corporate cause-related marketing campaigns. Countless women and men walk, bike, climb and shop for the cure. Each year, millions of dollars are raised in the name of breast cancer, but where does this money go and what does it actually achieve? *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* is a feature documentary that shows how the devastating reality of breast cancer, which marketing experts have labeled a “dream cause,” becomes obfuscated by a shiny, pink story of success.

Directed by acclaimed filmmaker Léa Pool, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* is produced and executive produced by Ravida Din for the National Film Board of Canada.

A PINK MYTH?

A Pink Myth—emblemized by the ubiquitous pink ribbons of cause-related marketing and philanthropy—permeates our culture, assuring us that: *We are engaged in a highly-successful battle against breast cancer; We are very close to finding a cure.*

But these messages belie the grim reality and facts of breast cancer, with which no company would want to be associated. Women in the US have a 1 in 8 chance of developing breast cancer. Mortality rates have not significantly changed in 60 years. Women diagnosed with breast cancer today face the same treatment options they did 40 years ago when the “War Against Cancer” was declared: surgery, radiation and chemotherapy—an approach Dr. Susan Love refers to as “slash, burn and poison.”

Women are the most influential market group, buying 80 per cent of consumer products and making most major household purchasing decisions. As they walk, shop, run, jump and race for the cure, corporations continue to boost their bottom line. Yet the money raised through all these efforts is unevenly allocated—treatment and cure are favoured over primary prevention, to the virtual exclusion of the latter.

Who really benefits from the Pink Ribbon campaigns—the cause or the company? And what if the very products that promise to find a cure are actually contributing to the problem?

LONG SYNOPSIS

“We used to march in the streets: now you’re supposed to run for a cure, or walk for a cure, or jump for a cure, or whatever it is . . . the effect of the whole pink ribbon culture was to drain and deflect the kind of militancy we had as women who were appalled to have a disease that is epidemic and yet that we don’t even know the cause of.” – Barbara Ehrenreich

When writer and social critic Barbara Ehrenreich was diagnosed with breast cancer, she became fascinated by “the breast cancer culture” and wanted to understand the phenomenon of pink ribbons.

Each year, 59,000 women in North America die from breast cancer. And each year, hundreds of thousands of women and men participate in corporate-sponsored fundraising events and campaigns that, while raising millions of dollars towards the cause, also market the brands that promote these events. In fact, breast cancer has become the poster child of “cause-marketing” which, as marketing guru Carol Cone explains, can do what “no promotion or no advertising can ever afford to create.”

Pink Ribbons, Inc., a feature documentary directed by Léa Pool and produced and executive produced by Ravida Din, looks at how the breast cancer movement has moved from activism to consumerism and challenges viewers to rethink their assumptions about the meaning of breast cancer in our society. Featuring in-depth interviews with an array of experts, authors, activists and medical professionals, ***Pink Ribbons, Inc.*** also includes the participation of the leading players in breast cancer fundraising and marketing.

The film visits the largest breast cancer fundraising and awareness events, including the Revlon Run/Walk for Women in New York, the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in Washington, D.C., the two-day Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in San Francisco and the Pharmaprix Weekend to End Women’s Cancers in Montreal. But as celebrations of “survivors,” is there room at these events for the women who are dying from the disease? “We’re living. We’re human beings. We’re not just a little pink ribbon,” says Maricela Ochoa, one of the members of The IV League, a group of women living with metastatic breast cancer. The voices of these women are in sharp contrast to those of the women participating in the pink ribbon events, where the atmosphere is often celebratory and festive.

Samantha King, the author of *Pink Ribbons, Inc. – Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*, notes that many women feel alienated by this approach because “in order to be a survivor, you must maintain this optimistic outlook and participate in what I call the tyranny of cheerfulness.”

With its attendant drugs, chemotherapy, radiation treatments and mammographies, breast cancer is a multi-billion dollar industry in North America. But what happens when a company engages in “pink-washing”—raising money for breast cancer while manufacturing products that are linked to causing the disease?

Pink Ribbons, Inc. suggests viewers consider heeding some simple words of advice from the organization Breast Cancer Action: “*Think before you pink.*”

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Breast cancer has become the poster child of cause-related marketing campaigns. Countless people walk, run and shop for the cure. Each year, millions of dollars are raised in the name of breast cancer, but where does this money go and what does it actually achieve?

Directed by Léa Pool and produced by Ravida Din, ***Pink Ribbons, Inc.*** is a feature documentary from the National Film Board of Canada that shows how the devastating reality of breast cancer, which marketing experts have labeled a “dream cause,” has become obfuscated by a shiny, pink story of success.

ONE-LINE SYNOPSIS

Pink Ribbons, Inc. is a feature documentary that shows how the devastating reality of breast cancer, which marketing experts have labeled a “dream cause,” has become obfuscated by a shiny, pink story of success.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Internationally acclaimed and award-winning filmmaker Léa Pool brings her unique, signature style to ***Pink Ribbons, Inc.***, a feature documentary that looks at the politics of breast cancer philanthropy. As high-profile “pink” marketing campaigns raise millions of dollars in the name of breast cancer, the focus is not on prevention but on “the cure,” and the breast cancer movement has changed from activism to consumerism.

While Ravida Din and Nancy Guerin (Associate Producer, Writer, Researcher) had discussed cancer issues as possible documentary subjects years earlier, it wasn’t until Din’s sister suggested she read Barbara Ehrenreich’s feminist critique “Welcome to Cancerland” that Din had what she calls her “a-ha moment.” Din began thinking about the political ramifications of perspectives on cancer and, specifically, breast cancer in our society. Soon after, she came across a review of Samantha King’s *Pink Ribbons, Inc. – Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy* and, after reading the book, realized it could provide the framework for a film.

Din was especially fascinated by King’s analysis of the history of corporate philanthropy. “It reinforced the importance of looking at an issue like breast cancer,” says Din, “which has become something that you talk about only in a particular context—you’ve always got to be optimistic and upbeat and hopeful, you certainly can’t talk about how horrible and painful the

disease is. Here were women writing from another experience that we don't see in popular media."

Din contacted Samantha King to explore the possibility of using *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* as the framework for a documentary, and the National Film Board subsequently optioned the book.

LÉA POOL DIRECTS

A high-profile project, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* required a visionary filmmaker at the helm, and NFB executive producer Ravida Din had her sights set on Léa Pool, a director known for her slate of award-winning features. "I knew Léa's strength would be to bring a cinematic approach and make what might have been a talking-head-kind of film accessible to a large audience: it had to be both emotional and intellectual. Léa was going to be able to find that, not only in terms of a cinematic language, but also in terms of heart."

The producer and director met to discuss the project and, after reading Ehrenreich's article and King's book, Pool became very interested. She says, "At first, I didn't really know what pink ribbons signified besides raising money and awareness. But after reading the material, I saw there was a profoundly political aspect to something as simple as a pink ribbon that had a lot to say about our society, our value system and health."

When Pool joined the project in October 2009, a wealth of resources had already been compiled by Guerin and writer Patricia Kearns, who had been researching the film for 18 months. Pool took the material in hand, did eight months of additional research (with Guerin) and wrote the shooting script before filming began in May 2010.

During the course of production, Pool attended, and filmed at, some of the biggest breast cancer fundraising events in North America: the Revlon Run/Walk for Women in New York, the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure in Washington, DC, the two-day Avon Walk for Breast Cancer in San Francisco, and the Pharmaprix Weekend to End Women's Cancers. The production team also traveled to Ottawa for the lighting of the Parliament Buildings; Windsor, for interviews with people at the Ford Motor Company and the plastic focus group; Austin, Texas, to meet with the women of the IV League group; Los Angeles, to interview Dr. Susan Love and Judy Brady; and West Palm Beach, Florida, where Nancy Brinker was interviewed in her home.

Pool then spent seven months in the editing room. "We worked to keep what was essential in the interviews and assemble them in a logical manner. It was very important to me that the film stay on a personal and emotional level. That is why the subjects look directly into the camera, why the interviews run without beauty shots or b-roll, and why there is no narration."

WALKING, RUNNING AND JUMPING FOR “THE CURE”

Pool and Din attended a number of fundraising events across North America. How the women at these events were to be portrayed was the subject of many discussions before filming began. “One of the biggest challenges, and what frightened me the most in making this film, was that I really wanted to be respectful,” says Pool. “I wanted to make sure we showed the difference between the participants, and their courage, and will, to do something positive, and the businesses that use these events to promote their products to make money.”

“What was really important was to show that, at heart, each woman sincerely wanted to do something,” says Pool. “They want to feel like they can have some power over their own lives and the lives of those close to them and we didn’t want to attack that. I was more interested in being critical of those who profit from breast cancer.” Pool says that she found the women involved in the events to be formidable and was moved “to see the power of all these women, 40,000-strong, in Washington.”

While in New York, shooting at the Revlon Walk, Pool says, “One of the things that struck me was that I didn’t once see the word ‘cancer.’ They don’t even want to show that it’s cancer—it’s all erased so that everything is set up to give a feeling of hope. It’s a false image.”

THE ANGEL OF DEATH: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

“You’re the angel of death, you know, you’re the elephant in the room. And they’re learning to live, and you’re learning to die.” – Jeanne Collins, IV League

Pool felt it was important to show women who were living with the reality of breast cancer. The film frequently cuts from scenes of boisterous, costumed young participants at an event, screaming into the camera, to women in the IV League group talking about dying. “I always wanted to keep this image,” says Pool, “because there’s an enormous contrast between the kind of power and invincibility women feel when they are walking together in these events, as opposed to the IV League women. They don’t give a positive message to the disease. They live alone with the fact that they are dying.”

Throughout the film’s development, there were numerous discussions about finding the right balance between an approach that would engage audiences emotionally and an essay-like format that could incorporate the views of various experts. One of Pool’s early ideas was to follow a group of women going through treatment to show the brutal reality of the disease. Even as this possibility was being explored, Barbara Ehrenreich suggested contacting Sandy Kugelman, a woman in the IV League group in Austin, Texas. “These women had a very critical approach but, at the same time, there was a lot of humour, a lot of heart,” says Pool. “They were dealing with this disease at its most terrible stage.”

When she arrived in Austin to interview the group, Pool was pleased to discover a rapport had been established between the women and Nancy Guerin, who had had many phone conversations with them beforehand. “There was already a very positive chemistry and I saw that, if I let them speak, I would probably have very moving testimonials. It was totally the opposite of what we did with the other, more structured interviews. Instead, I threw out topics and left the group in silence until they wanted to speak. We weren’t afraid to wait until something came and I think that was the right approach because these women ultimately shared very emotional and personal stories with us. It was amazing.”

THE VOICES OF *PINK RIBBONS, INC.*

The film features interviews with an array of activists, writers and physicians, many of them feminist, as well as with the major players of the breast cancer fundraising and cause-marketing cultures. Interview subjects include Dr. Susan Love, advocate of preventative research and author of *Dr. Susan Love’s Breast Book*; Dr. Olufunmilayo Olopade, a leader in clinical cancer genetics who heads a research program at the University of Chicago Medical Center; Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *New York Times* bestseller *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* and the recent *Bright-sided: How Positive Thinking Is Undermining America*; activist Barbara Brenner, former Executive Director of Breast Cancer Action; Samantha King, author of *Pink Ribbons, Inc. – Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*; Ellen Leopold, whose two books, *A Darker Ribbon: Breast Cancer, Women and Their Doctors in the Twentieth Century* and *Under the Radar: Cancer and the Cold War*, were crucial to the film’s research; Nancy Brinker, founder and CEO of Susan G. Komen for the Cure, which has raised over a billion dollars; Dr. Marc Hurlbert, Executive Director of the Avon Foundation Breast Cancer Crusade; Evelyn Lauder of Estée Lauder, the first cosmetic company to use the pink ribbon as a symbol for breast cancer awareness; Kim McInerney, the marketing manager at Ford Motor Company who oversees Ford’s Warriors in Pink campaign; and marketing guru Carol Cone, whose signature cause programs have raised more than \$500 million for various social causes.

“When you think about the voices in the film,” says Din, “these are really interesting women with distinguished careers. It was important to me that these women be on the screen in a high-profile documentary—it’s about making sure that our stories and our lives are reflected. There are many important stories to be told by women and we want to make sure that these are the women who are telling this story.”

While Barbara Ehrenreich’s article “Welcome to Cancerland” was the all-important spark that set the *Pink Inc.* film wheels in motion, the writer’s participation in the production was not a *fait accompli*. Din says, “Because it started with her, I thought it would be critical to have her in the film. While it was never important or a prerequisite for the interview subjects to have been through treatment for breast cancer, when you can speak from that lived experience you obviously bring another dimension to the issue and to your work.” But when Din contacted Ehrenreich, the writer basically said “no thanks.” Din says, “She was deferring to

the women who are on the ground doing the work of activism.” Ehrenreich suggested speaking with Barbara Brenner of Breast Cancer Action, who ended up being one of the key voices in the film. But Din persisted and called one more time, and Ehrenreich finally agreed. “Which was great,” Din says, “because she sets a tone for the film and it starts with her.”

Din discusses some of the main players in what she calls the breast cancer culture. “I’m loath to call it a movement, even though they refer to themselves as a movement. I don’t think it is. It’s a business, and an industry—there are many corporations involved.”

While there are four major breast cancer fundraising organizations in North America, Susan G. Komen for the Cure is the largest in financial terms, having raised over a billion dollars. It was clear to the production team that, if they were going to look at the major players in the industry, Nancy Brinker of Komen was going to be key. The team was also interested in speaking with Evelyn Lauder and someone from Avon. “We wanted to get their perspectives on why they were involved in cause-marketing and especially breast cancer,” says Din.

Pool notes that because more and more documentaries are denouncing or attacking corporations, there was some initial concern about the likelihood of getting interviews with the more controversial subjects. “We knew we had to be careful because if we didn’t have these people, we wouldn’t have a film. We couldn’t make the film with just activists, so it was important to get the participation of people that are important in the Pink movement.” This was a major factor in her decision to direct the film without the use of narration. “I didn’t want my point of view to pull the direction of the film. Of course, it does, because I edited it, but I wanted everyone to be able to say what they had to say.”

OTHER ISSUES

Even after four years of research and development, and a year of interviews and filming, Din says she remains surprised that there are still so many unanswered questions. “I thought it would have been much easier, from all the research we did, to get clearer answers around why there’s been so little progress when so much money has been invested for such a long time. I was always waiting for something that would be revealed where I would go ‘ah, it all makes sense, that’s why they’re doing this.’ Why would there not be something absolutely profoundly life-changing for women? We looked for that and it never emerged. It’s such a complicated issue and disease and the way they’ve set up to do research will take years and years and years. I was surprised that I never saw something that made me think a really positive outcome is happening because of all the work. More and more questions emerged as we did the research.”

Pool was distressed to discover what she calls “the cynicism of certain companies—those that make both medicine and carcinogens. That, for me, is the epitome of cynicism: that you profit from something that makes people sick, and then you profit from treating the disease.” She was also surprised by what she learned about the marketing campaigns. “I didn’t realize that

women were taken advantage of to that extent. Sometimes, I'd ask myself if we were making things look worse than they are, because it is after all a film and we have to show what we're talking about, but I would always answer, no, this is really what it's like. It's just that we don't really want to believe that this is how it is—you don't think it's this evil."

"THINK BEFORE YOU PINK"

Director Léa Pool hopes that *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* will encourage people to question their actions. "To use their power as women to mobilize and unite, but use it with more reflection and activism. To be more critical and more politically conscious about our actions and to stop thinking that by buying pink toilet paper we're doing what needs to be done."

"*Pink Ribbons, Inc.* asks important questions," says Ravida Din. "When I think of the importance of documentary film and, specifically, why this is an NFB film, I think about opportunities for dialogue, reflection and, more importantly, tools for social change and social action. If we continue to attach what we think is a movement for change to fundraising, which implies there are corporations involved, I'm not sure we'll actually see a transformation around health. This film is about trying to find real change in women's experience around breast cancer and asking whether this is the right way to get there.

"The film calls for accountability," Din says. "It's an important through-line. It gives us a glimpse of how we have moved from political activism to being really good consumers."

Pool adds that, as the filmmaker, she is not suggesting throwing the baby out with the bathwater. "I don't want to say that we absolutely shouldn't be raising money. We are just saying what I think Breast Cancer Action says very well: 'Think before you pink.' That is to say, let's think a little more about the actions we are taking and how we can be more effective if we act with a political conscience."

ABOUT THE CREATIVE TEAM

FILMMAKER BIO

Léa Pool (Director, Writer) is an acclaimed filmmaker whose work has been honoured by an array of international awards. Originally from Switzerland, Pool emigrated to Quebec in 1975, where her career began soon after.

In 1978, she co-directed and edited the short documentary *Laurent Lamerre, portier*, and the following year she wrote, produced, directed and filmed the award-winning short *Strass Café*. Pool went on to direct a series on cultural minorities for Radio-Québec, as well as *Eva en transit*, a program on the French singer, Éva, before turning her hand to features.

Pool made an astonishing feature debut in 1984 with *La Femme de l'hôtel* (*A Woman in Transit*), which won several international awards and a Best Actress Genie for Louise Marleau in the title role. In 1986, *Anne Trister*, which Pool wrote and directed, was selected for Official Competition at the Berlin International Film Festival, and the film also took home the highest awards from other major festivals. *À corps perdu* (*Straight for the Heart*) was presented in Official Competition at the Venice, Montreal World and Chicago International Film Festivals and was honoured with top prizes at Namur and Halifax. *La Demoiselle sauvage* (*The Savage Woman*) won the Best Canadian Film and Best Artistic Contribution (Photography) awards when it was screened in competition at the Montreal World Film Festival in 1991.

The following year, Pool wrote and directed *Rispondez-moi*, one of the shorts in the *Montréal vu par...* ensemble. Pool's fifth feature, *Mouvements du désir* (*Desire in Motion*), was presented at the Sundance Festival in 1994 and nominated for eight Genie Awards, including Achievement in Direction and Original Screenplay. In 1999, Pool's *Emporte-moi* (*Set Me Free*) was awarded the Special Prize of the Ecumenical Jury at the Berlin International Film Festival. Her most recent features include *Lost and Delirious*, starring Piper Perabo, Jessica Paré and Mischa Barton; *The Blue Butterfly*, starring William Hurt and Pascale Bussières; *Maman est chez le coiffeur* (*Mommy Is at the Hairdresser's*); and *La Dernière fugue* (*The Last Escape*).

In 1990, Léa Pool shot her first feature documentary, *Hotel Chronicles*, which won the Gold Medal at the Chicago International Film Festival. Other documentaries include two episodes of the bilingual television series, *Women: A True Story*, based on scenarios by Rina Fraticelli and Léa Pool and hosted by Susan Sarandon, and *Mile End*, for the CBC series *Hidden Lives*. In 1998, the documentary *Gabrielle Roy* won the 1998 Rockie Award in the Best History and Biography category at the Banff Television Festival and a Géméaux Award for Best Documentary Film.

In 1994, Léa Pool was distinguished with the title "Chevalier" by the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, and the Blois Festival in France presented a retrospective of her films. In 2006, she was honoured with three lifetime achievement awards: the Prix Reconnaissance from the Université du Québec à Montréal, the Prix Femmes de mérite from the Women's Y Foundation, and the Prix Albert-Tessier, the Quebec Government's top honour, in recognition of her exceptional talent and contribution to Quebecois cinema.

PRODUCER BIO

The uncompromising commitment of **Ravida Din** (Producer, Executive Producer) to social justice and feminism is integral to her work and a strong guiding principle in her efforts to produce social documentary films that offer insightful, engaging analyses.

In her position as Executive Producer of the NFB's Quebec and Atlantic Production Centres, her mandate is to envision and manage a varied program of theatrical and television documentaries, community-based media, interactive digital projects and alternative drama. Her

recent credits include *The Socalled Movie*, directed by **Garry Beitel**, which was selected to screen at Hot Docs and IDFA in 2010; **Pablo Alvarez-Mesa's** *Jelena's Song*, winner of the Pierre and Yolande Perrault Award at Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois 2011; and *Family Motel*, directed by **Helene Klodawsky**, an award-winner at the 2008 Rendez-vous du cinéma québécois.

Din is currently producing the documentaries *Payback: Debt and the Shadow Side of Wealth*, based on the book by **Margaret Atwood** and directed by **Jennifer Baichwal**, and *The Feminist Project*, an exhilarating chronicle of the Canadian women's movement, directed by **Karen Cho**.

NANCY GUERIN (Researcher, Writer, Associate Producer) is a writer, producer, researcher and journalist who has worked on many documentary productions.

In addition to *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, with which she has been involved since 2006, Guerin also line produced *Partly Private*, a feature documentary about male circumcision that won the Best New York Documentary award at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2009.

Guerin has been involved with several children's television series, researching *In Real Life*, the Gemini-nominated *Mystery Hunters* and *Active-toi*. She also worked as an archival researcher for *La Quête* and the light-hearted feature documentary *Short & Male*, which examines the obstacles facing short-statured men.

Nancy Guerin was born in New York and studied Communications and Journalism at SUNY Albany, earning a master's degree. She went on to work as a reporter and news editor at *Metroland Newsweekly* in Albany, where she won several awards. She also taught journalism as an adjunct professor at SUNY before relocating to Montreal in 2003.

PATRICIA KEARNS (Writer, Researcher) is an independent filmmaker living in Montreal who brings a strong sense of community and a wide range of interests to her work.

Through her company Pack Productions, she has produced and directed such acclaimed experimental documentaries as *If the Family Fits*, a thoughtful deconstruction of the family-values agenda; and *Choir Girls*, a celebratory portrait of a women's choir. *XS STRESS: Teens Take Control*, a youth primer on how to survive adolescence, is the second documentary she has written and directed for the National Film Board, following *Democracy à la Maude*, a profile of Canadian social activist Maude Barlow.

Kearns is a founding member of Montreal's image + nation Film Festival and Studio XX, a centre committed to enhancing women's participation in new media technologies. For the National Film Board, she was interim project leader and producer of the CitizenShift website, which is dedicated to media and social change.