A COMPELLING NEW DOCUMENTARY ABOUT A MEXICO CITY HOSPITAL WHERE YOUNG LIVES ARE TRANSFORMED

From the producer of Two Spirits comes a fascinating look at one of the world’s most remarkable hospitals, the disfigured young patients to whom it offers new lives, and the team of surgeons, physicians, and medical professionals who are convinced that it’s the best place in the world to practice their unique, life-transforming craft.

Beautiful Faces is a film that’s at once moving and inspiring, informative and challenging, a story that’s told with narrative power and visual eloquence.

Beautiful Faces is a film that will open your eyes and tear at your heart. You’ll come away convinced that healthcare can be affordable, humane, and excellent, and that every one of us deserves a face with which we can bravely meet the world.

ONE OF THE WORLD’S BEST HOSPITALS—IN A VERY UNLIKELY SETTING

The Hospital General Gea González, located in Mexico City’s frenetic Tlalpan district, is surrounded by a high metal-barred fence, its entrances guarded by policemen carrying automatic weapons. On any day, literally thousands of impoverished Mexicans wait patiently for services, often for many hours, yet early every Tuesday morning, the hospital’s plastic and reconstructive surgery unit becomes what Dr. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, its eighty-six year old founder, calls “the most exciting clinic in the world, the only place I want to be”—a place where young patients like Gabriela Morales come from throughout the country to be evaluated by a team comprised of the finest craniofacial surgeons in the world.
Gabriela, now sixteen, has come to Mexico City for surgery with the aid of the World Craniofacial Foundation. She grew up in a shantytown in Tijuana, where her life has been terribly compromised by a congenital malformation of her face that’s led many to turn away from her, cruelly taunt her, even presume that she is possessed by evil spirits. She has abnormally wide-set eyes and a dramatically malformed nose—which was made even more unsightly by a well-meaning but untrained physician soon after she was born. Yet the shy girl with big dreams still has hope that one day she can fulfill them.

One of the most highly skilled surgeons in the world, Dr. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, is legendary throughout Mexico and much of the world, and is the founder of the reconstructive plastic-surgery unit at Hospital Gea González. His remarkable skills, profound compassion for young people with disfiguring diseases, and singular spirit continue to inspire protégés and patients alike. In his ninth decade, he nonetheless arrives at the hospital every morning at seven a.m. wearing a custom-tailored white coat, and throughout the day his boundless energy infects everyone with whom he comes into contact.

Dr. Ortiz Monasterio is proud that surgical centers like the one he founded demonstrate that even the very poor can receive excellent medical care at costs that don’t bankrupt health-care systems—and that Gabriela and everyone like her can be offered the basic human right of a normal face.

In Beautiful Faces, audiences are inspired in equal measure by patients like Gabriela and caregivers like Dr. Ortiz Monasterio. The film documents the extraordinary community they and many others create on the fourth floor of a hospital that, at first glance, is ordinary in every way. Yet this place, patients and medical professionals enthusiastically agree, is very special indeed.
THE HUMAN RIGHT TO A NORMAL FACE

Consider what life entails for children like Gabriela before they are treated; imagine the constant rejection, soul-killing ridicule, and the virtual impossibility of succeeding in school, making friends, or one day falling in love. For many centuries, people with facial deformities were locked away, and oftentimes, infants with terrible deformities were simply not allowed to live. All too often today, people with shocking facial abnormalities still are shunned, hidden, shamed, and tormented.

Forty years ago, medicine offered little hope to patients with severe deformities of the skull, jaw, and face. But what once was impossible is now a practical reality because of the advancements of modern medical technology and the extraordinarily well-honed skills of a host of professionals like those at Hospital Gea González.

When people can see, hear, speak, and chew normally, and when they’re not forced to hide their faces from the world, their spirits can soar. Our faces are us in a very fundamental way. Four of our five senses are located in our faces and heads; it’s with them that we encounter and decipher the world around us. And just as importantly, with our faces we give those with whom we interact a vital glimpse of who we truly are. Our faces communicate—far more accurately and eloquently than does speaking, in many ways—what our minds believe and our hearts hold true. Imagine expressing love, for example, without a face behind which you are comfortable. Imagine the despair of never receiving it.

MEDICAL CARE THAT’S AFFORDABLE, HUMANE—AND OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY

Today, paying for state-of-the-art surgeries and courses of treatment is often an enormous challenge. In the United States, the highest quality medical care is denied the children who need it most because insurance companies and Medicaid will not pay for the multidisciplinary teams required to achieve optimal outcomes. Many of the best young surgeons abandon their early interest in reconstructive plastic surgery when it becomes clear that their reimbursements will represent only a fraction of their true costs. But in countries like Mexico—where public health-care systems are in place and costs are roughly one-sixth of those in the United States, the quality of care is
often on par with the best patient care in the world. Yet regardless of the setting or the system, the great challenge remains the same: striving to make a difference with one patient—and one precious life—at a time.

**FASCINATING PEOPLE IN A TIGHTLY KNIT COMMUNITY**

As *Beautiful Faces* opens, it’s early morning, the huge city awakens, and we watch both patients and staff arrive, discovering as well that the hospital is “home” to a number of patients who live there throughout weeks, months, and even years of surgical treatment.

It’s a place, too, from which many young residents seldom depart, catching only odd hours of sleep in a single room stuffed with bunk-beds, laptops, and half-empty soda cans. As Dr. Ortiz Monasterio explains to them when their residencies begin, “Next Monday morning you will arrive at seven a.m., and you will not leave until Tuesday morning—three years from now.”

**As Beautiful Faces unfolds, audiences get to know the remarkable people who form a unique kind of community.** We meet, for example, Magdalena Ayala, a twenty-two-year old Guatemalan woman whose husband, in a fit of rage, horrifically sliced off her nose, lips, and chin with a machete. Magdalena seems vacant, empty, far-removed from the world, perhaps the only response possible when your face is taken from you. For a long time to come, she will re-experience terrible violence every day of her life simply by looking in the mirror. The sole light in Magdalena’s life is that, with the help of the Guatemalan government, she has come to a place where her face—and her soul—can slowly be returned to her.
There are the anguished young parents who despair that their children will ever have good lives, the hospital staff who once were craniofacial patients themselves, and who are proof that at Hospital Gea González both faces and lives are successfully renewed. Audiences meet surgical residents from across Mexico and much of the world who can imagine no other place they would rather train; the orthodontics staff who use acupuncture and a variety of alternative modalities to serve their patients; the young women who help patients and their families endure hours-long waits by teaching hygiene, nutrition, and child-care with the simple aid of old-fashioned blackboards. And we meet two more remarkable physicians.

Internationally renowned plastic-surgeon Kenneth Salyer, a forty-year colleague and friend of Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, led a career in the United States that paralleled his fellow surgeon’s in Mexico. He has been the subject of a cover story in Parade, and a 2002 front-page article in the New York Times when he led a team of more than fifty in the successful separation of Egyptian twins who were conjoined at the skull. The two men and three other surgeons in other countries literally created the art and science of contemporary craniofacial surgery, and late in their careers they are actively involved in the development of stunning new advances—the successful regeneration of facial structures and full-face transplantations.

The founder and president of the World Craniofacial Foundation, Dr. Salyer passionately supports centers around the world like the one at Hospital Gea González, and he spends as much time as he can in Mexico City, where, like his dear friend, there really is no place he would rather be. “This center is extraordinary evidence,” Dr. Salyer says, “of the
kind of medicine that can be practiced anywhere in the world—with adequate public funding, local administration that is very patient-focused, and an unwavering commitment to excellence.”

Dr. Fernando Molina Montalva is chief of surgery in the reconstructive plastic-surgery unit at Hospital Gea González and a professor in the post-graduate division of the medical school at the Universidad Autónoma de México. A superb surgeon who pioneered distraction osteogenesis, a procedure that stimulates new growth of bone in jaws and skulls, Dr. Molina has assumed Dr. Ortiz Monasterio’s founding role as leader of a surgical and medical team of unparalleled international quality in a challenging third-world setting.

Beautiful Faces has extensive experience telling stories about complex, sometimes visually challenging issues. They bring humane perspectives to the people they encounter and the stories they tell. The visual feast that is Mexican culture, the capital city that is always alive, the constant hum of activity at Hospital Gea González—in its clinics, wards, operating suites, labs, classrooms, cafeterias, waiting rooms and hallways—is filmed aesthetically rather than reportorially, and Beautiful Faces is a beautiful film to watch.

All the medical professionals at Hospital Gea González speak English, and the film will require only limited subtitling. It will be shot in high-definition video in 16:9 aspect ratio and Dolby 5-1 sound and will be cut to an 86-minute runtime.

INTERWOVEN NARRATIVES THAT ARC FROM DESPAIR TO RENEWAL

Beautiful Faces interweaves the stories of patients and their families who come to Hospital Gea González seeking the kind of physical transformations that will renew their
own and their loved ones’ lives with the personal stories of the enormously talented medical professionals whose work is both their passion and their gift to humankind.

Less a chronology of given days or weeks, or a before-and-after look at the results of repeated surgeries, the film’s focal subject is the remarkable community of caregivers and care-receivers who come together on the hospital’s fascinating fourth floor, and who profoundly influence each other’s lives. From Dr. Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, the beloved patriarch of the place whose demands for excellence from his subordinates remain exacting, to Jorge Peña, a twenty-year old staff photographer and victim of Crouzon’s syndrome, whose own face and skull were successfully restored when he was twelve, and who’s likely to work at the hospital for decades to come himself, Beautiful Faces is a mosaic of stories—the richly visual tales of people who meet in a singular place and who collectively understand that in valuing individual lives and striving to make them better, we value all of humanity.

The film ultimately demonstrates that on many levels, the distinction between patients and caregivers is only an illusory one, and that—much more than cutting, sawing, and sewing—the essential task of the hospital is the freeing of the human spirit. It is work that allows doctors and patients alike to look comfortably in the mirror and understand that they are
vitaly important members of the human family.

A FILM WITH AN INTERNATIONAL MARKET

*Beautiful Faces*’ producers will seek a North American premiere at either the Sundance Film Festival in the U.S. or the Toronto Film Festival in Canada, a Mexican premiere at the Guadalajara International Film Festival or the Morelia International Film Festival, as well as the Amsterdam International Documentary Film Festival in The Netherlands. Theatrical screenings will be scheduled in major U.S. cities and the film will be actively marketed to broadcasters in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand.

The film will also be marketed at MIPCOM in Cannes to broadcasters in non-English-speaking countries around the world. Its subject matter is universal, as is its broad reflection of hopes and aspirations, challenges and achievements that reach the hearts of people everywhere.

If producing partnerships are secured in the near term, the film will be completed and ready for its premiere in early or mid-2012.

CREATED BY A SEASONED TEAM OF FILMMAKERS

**Russell Martin** is producing and directing *Beautiful Faces* in collaboration with a team of highly talented co-producers, filmmakers, and advisors. In 2009, he wrote and produced the *Monette-Horwitz award*–winning film *Two Spirits*, which will be broadcast during the 2011 “Independent Lens” season on PBS. His bestselling books, including *Beethoven’s Hair, Picasso’s War,* and *Out of Silence*, have been translated into two-dozen languages. The *international television documentary, Beethoven’s Hair,* based on his book and directed by *Larry Weinstein,* is the recipient of three *Gemini* awards and the *Festival Director’s Prize* at the *International Television Film Festival.* When Colorado College, his alma mater, awarded
him an honorary doctorate, the citation read, in part, “Mr. Martin offers to general audiences precise and accurate . . . studies of extraordinarily complex issues. He does more: he sees beyond what is already known; he moves beyond synthesis to new insights. His work is disciplined, analytical, and creative. It is also profoundly humane.”

Beautiful Faces’ production team includes:

Vasco Nunes, whose cinematography in films such as We Live In Public, Blood For Water, and Anvil: The Story of Anvil, has become part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, earned two Grand Jury Prizes at the Sundance Film Festival, a Peabody Award, an IDFA Special Jury Prize, and selections at major film festivals, including Cannes, Sundance, Tribeca, SXSW, Locarno, Vancouver, Seattle, Melbourne, Pusan, Karlovy Vary, and London. A native of Portugal, Vasco has worked extensively in Mexico City and maintains many contacts there in the Mexican film industry.

Editor Darrin Navarro edited Bug for famed director William Friedkin. The film received the FIPRESCI Prize at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. He produced and edited the documentary film The Painter’s Voice, also directed by William Friedkin, as well as the feature films Grace, Momma’s Man, an official selection at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival; Hate Crime, an official selection at the 2005 Palm Springs International Film Festival, and numerous other shorts, documentaries, and features.

Supervising sound editor and sound designer Ron Eng’s credits include Coraline, Lakeview Terrace, Darfur Now, Bug, Vanilla Sky, Mulholland Drive, Independence Day, and Return to Neverland, among many other films.

David J. Reyes, who composed original music for Two Spirits, is a Chicano music historian and archivist, classical music composer, and classical and contemporary musician.

Beautiful Faces will break your heart and let your spirit soar; you’ll believe in the promise of medicine once more, and you’ll never take your face for granted again.