



MINDING THE GAP

Bing Liu

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SYNOPSIS

First-time filmmaker Bing Liu's documentary *Minding the Gap* is a coming-of-age saga of three skateboarding friends in their Rust Belt hometown hit hard by decades of recession. In his quest to understand why he and his friends all ran away from home when they were younger, Bing follows 23-year-old Zack as he becomes a father and 17-year-old Keire as he gets his first job. As the film unfolds, Bing is thrust into the middle of Zack's tumultuous relationship with his girlfriend and Keire's inner struggles with racial identity and his deceased father. While navigating a complex relationship between his camera and his friends, Bing explores the gap between fathers and sons,

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Minding the Gap started as a skate video and snowballed into a film that, every time I showed my friends a new rough cut, increasingly ended in them wanting to talk about their childhoods.

I was 8 years old when my single mother took a job in Rockford, Illinois, a crumbling factory city two hours west of Chicago. She remarried and had a child with a physically and mentally abusive man, remaining with him for 17 years. Because of his explosive, often unpredictable violence, I perceived the world as lacking causality: you could do the right thing or the wrong thing, but either way things might not go well for you. After I started skateboarding at age 13, I slowly discovered, after many bruises, broken bones and hard-earned tricks, that I'd regained a sense of control over my pain. Most importantly, I found myself in a group of outcasts much happier in the streets than at home. We spent countless hours together, making our own version of family.

Heading into my 20's, I was stricken by loss. I wanted to know why, after I'd permanently escaped my home to move to Chicago, so many of my peers were falling prey to drug addictions, jail sentences, or worse. I was still filming skate videos for fun—driving solo around the country and couch-surfing with other skateboarding friends I'd met throughout the years. Eventually I began interviewing skateboarders: "What does skateboarding feel like?", "Who do you love more, your mom or your dad?", "Who taught you the feeling of hate?". These conversations often turned into unexpected therapy sessions, intimate spaces for catharsis and realizations.

I discovered a pattern of absent, distant, and abusive father-figures—something that affected mental health, relationships, and parenting styles. A little over a year into the project, I returned to Rockford, where I sat a charming, goofy 16-year-old named Keire down in his mom's attic to ask him about his father. He'd never talked about their relationship before and was fidgeting with the sleeves of his sweater. When he told me about his abusive father, I felt my chest tighten with anxiety. "Did you cry?" I asked. "Wouldn't you?" he shot back. "I did cry," I said. We sat in silence, neither of us daring to attempt a joke.

For the next four years, I returned to Rockford to continue following Keire as well as the ad-hoc leader of the Rockford skateboarding community, a charismatic 23-year-old named Zack, who was about to become a father himself. After partnering up with Kartemquin Films, I now wanted to explore the connected themes of skateboarding and violence in the home through a character-driven approach. I took on a more cinema verite style, drawing inspiration from the films that resonated with me in my adolescence: Gummo, Waking Life, Kids, Slacker—stories that captivated me with their representations of growing up in a chaotic, uncertain world that I could relate to and also find hope through.

As I began assembling rough cuts and holding feedback screenings, people were surprised at how close I was to the subjects and themes of the film. With their encouragement, I began participating in the film more, a la Sherman's March, casting the cameraperson as a character. But then everything changed when (spoiler alert) the mother of Zack's child told me Zack had been battering her. The heart of the film, which had been exploring how skateboarders deal with masculinity and child abuse, suddenly became much more milky with immediate and personal ramifications; I was forced to become an active participant in the story, eventually interviewing my estranged mother and half-brother about my stepfather and re-visiting old footage to find a way to tell my own story.

In the course of editing the film, I realized that Zack, Keire and I were all harboring toxic experiences buried under the weight of years of societal and personal repression, and we all chose our own ways of dealing with that pressure. The film has given me a sense of clarity about myself and how, while there's no one-size-fits-all solution, some ways of coping aren't sustainable.

What's clear from doing this project is that violence and its sprawling web of effects are perpetuated in large part because these issues remain behind closed doors, both literally and figuratively. My hope is that the characters who open doors in Minding the Gap will inspire young people struggling with something similar—that they will survive their situation, live to tell their story, and create a life of causality for themselves.

– Bing Liu

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Bing Liu **Director, Producer**

Bing Liu moved from China to Alabama to California to Rockford, Illinois with his mother all before he was 8 years old. He honed his cinematography and editing skills making DIY skateboarding films as a teenager. When he was 19 he moved to Chicago and began freelancing as a grip while attaining his B.A. in literature from the University of Illinois at Chicago, where he graduated Magna Cum Laude. At age 23 he joined the International Cinematographers Guild, working in the camera department on fiction films and episodic television series. In 2014 he began collaborating with Kartemquin Films on his first feature, *Minding the Gap*, a co-production of POV and ITVS. Bing is also a Story Director and DP for the upcoming Steve James mini-series, *America to Me*. Bing is a 2017 Film Independent Fellow and Garrett Scott Development Grant recipient.

Diane Quon **Producer**

Diane Quon lived in Los Angeles for over 17 years before moving back to her hometown of Chicago. While in LA, Diane worked at NBC and at Paramount Pictures where she was last the Vice President of Marketing. Diane is producing multiple documentaries with Kartemquin Films (*Hoop Dreams*, *Life Itself*) including *Minding the Gap* directed by Bing Liu; *Left-Handed Pianist* along with Chicago Tribune arts critic Howard Reich, and co-directed by Leslie Simmer and Kartemquin founder Gordon Quinn; and *The Dilemma of Desire* with Peabody Award-winning director Maria Finitzo. Diane is a 2017 Film Independent Fellow and is currently developing a fiction film based on a New York Times best-selling book.

Joshua Altman **Editor**

With over a decade as an award-winning filmmaker, Joshua Altman has premiered documentaries at almost every prestigious film festival. Four of the films he edited premiered at Sundance: *We Live in Public* took home the Grand Jury Prize at Sundance in 2009, *The Tillman Story* was on the 2011 Oscar shortlist for the Best Documentary award, and *Bones Brigade: An Autobiography* went on to become the #1 documentary on iTunes upon its release. His work writing and editing *Code Black* earned that film the Best Documentary award at the LA Film Festival and was later adapted into a CBS series which is now in its third season. His most recent editing endeavor is *The Final Year*, an HBO documentary following Obama's foreign policy team during their final year.

Nathan Halpern **Composer**

Nathan Halpern is a Brooklyn-based composer, recently named one of Indiewire's 'Composers to Watch.' The 2017 Oscar Shortlist for Best Documentary included two films he scored: *Hooligan Sparrow* and *The Witness*. His score for *Rich Hill*, winner of the Sundance Film Festival Grand Jury Prize for Best Documentary, was praised as "one of the best non-fiction scores we've heard in years" (Indiewire). In 2015 he re-teamed with *Rich Hill* co-director Andrew Droz Palermo for the supernatural thriller *One and Two* (IFC Films), which *Variety* called "hauntingly scored." The 2017 Sundance Film Festival featured two films scored by Halpern: *Rancher*, *Farmer*, *Fisherman* and *The Workers Cup*, of which *Variety* wrote "prolific composer Nathan Halpern's evocative score is another big plus."

Steve James
Executive Producer

Steve James' affiliation with Kartemquin began in 1987 with the start of production of *Hoop Dreams*, for which he served as director, producer, and co-editor. Its many honors include the Audience Award at the Sundance Film Festival, The Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award, Chicago Film Critics Award – Best Picture, Los Angeles Film Critics Association – Best Documentary and an Academy Award Nomination. One of the most acclaimed documentary makers of his generation, Steve has won several Emmy, DGA, PGA, IDA, Independent Spirit, and Cinema Eye Honors awards throughout his career, with noted works being *Stevie*, *The New Americans*, *The War Tapes*, *At the Death House Door*, *No Crossover: The Trial of Allen Iverson*, *The Interrupters*, *Life Itself*, and most recently, *Abacus: Small Enough to Jail*. His mini-series, *America to Me* will premiere at the 2018 Sundance Film Festival.

Gordon Quinn
Executive Producer

Gordon Quinn is the Artistic Director and co-founder of Kartemquin Films, where over the past 50 years he has helped hundreds of documentary filmmakers advance their projects forward and been a leading champion of the rights of all documentary filmmakers. He is the 2015 recipient of the International Documentary Association Career Achievement Award and was a key leader in creating the Documentary Filmmakers Statement of Best Practices in Fair Use. His

credits as director and producer include films as diverse and essential as *Inquiring Nuns* (1966), *Golub* (1988), and *A Good Man* (2011), and as executive producer include Academy-Award nominated *Hoop Dreams* (1994), and the Emmy Award-winning *The Interrupters* (2011), *The Trials of Muhammad Ali* (2013), *The Homestretch* (2014), and *Life Itself* (2014), and the acclaimed limited series *The New Americans* (2003) and *Hard Earned* (2015).

Betsy Steinberg
Executive Producer

Betsy Steinberg joined Kartemquin in December 2015 and oversees its daily operations and development, as well as serves as Executive Producer on Kartemquin projects. Prior to Kartemquin she spent eight years as Managing Director of the Illinois Film Office where she spearheaded Illinois' transformation into a world class film destination. She was instrumental in the passage of the Illinois film tax credit and implemented an overall business development strategy resulting in over \$1 billion in direct economic impact.

Kartemquin Films

Kartemquin Films is a collaborative center for documentary media makers who seek to foster a more engaged and empowered society. In 2016, Kartemquin celebrated 50 years of sparking democracy through documentary. The organization has won every major critical and journalistic prize, including multiple Emmy, Peabody, duPont-Columbia and Robert F. Kennedy journalism awards, Independent Spirit, IDA, PGA and DGA awards, and an Oscar nomination. Kartemquin is recognized as a leading advocate for independent public media, and for its filmmaker development programs that help further grow the field, such as KTQ Labs, *Diverse Voices in Docs*, and the acclaimed KTQ Internship. Kartemquin is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization based in Chicago. www.kartemquin.com

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Dogwoof is a London-based documentary specialist integrating production, world sales and UK theatrical distribution. The company is regarded as the foremost documentary specialist brand in the world and is a stamp of the highest quality content.

Dogwoof is a London-based, documentary-centric film company integrating production, world sales and UK distribution. The company is regarded as one of the foremost global documentary brands and prides itself on delivering content of the highest possible quality. Founded in 2004, Dogwoof has so far released 18 Oscar®-nominated documentaries, with three wins and an additional two BAFTA winners. Dogwoof recently launched its first film production investment fund, focusing on feature docs, docu-series, and remake rights, gearing up the company towards vertical integration.

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