

# In Person

## KAREN O'DONNELL

by Kenneth E. Seaton

### Leading By Example

*She is a woman of many hats: writer, storyteller, producer, director, teacher and certainly last but not least a mother. Toronto-based Karen O'Donnell has been described as a passionate, knowledgeable and a driven person whose emotionally charged documentaries never fail to inspire and move viewers.*

**K**aren has a degree in Fine Arts from York University in Toronto and has consulted for the Ontario Media Development Corporation. She was on the Board of Directors for Women in Film and Television and the Documentary Organization of Toronto. To add further oomph to her bio she has adjudicated for the Gemini awards, The New York Film Festival, and the International Emmys.

In the fall of 2012 her short film *No Place Like Home* was selected to be one of the Ontario filmmaker's contributions to the International *Why Poverty* project. "Oh very, very well!" Karen responded when asked how it was received. "It was another film that was very near and dear to my heart, I wanted to be able to do a full-length version of that topic and I accepted with great pride the invitation to do a five minute piece on the topic." She's very proud of the fact that the film is still being shown by a non-profit agency to help explain a little bit about what they do.

O'Donnell has also written, directed and produced a series of short documentaries including; *If I Were An Artist*, *The Don Lisk Story* – about an amazing self-taught egg shell sculptor – and *Working Without A Net*, – introducing several entrepreneurial filmmakers as they launched their own production companies.

Her ADHD-related documentaries include *My Different Life*, *Odd Kid Out* – her son Kail and others are showcased in this film about what life is like for adults with ADHD – and *A Mind Like Mine*. All these films should be

included in everyone's must-see list.

It was during the process of filming *A Mind Like Mine* that she first discovered that she herself had ADHD. She asked her doctor if he knew a mature, late-diagnosed ADHD woman who might be interested in being in her film and he turned to her and said, "I really hope that you're going to take this the right way, but why isn't it you?" Once she realized that he wasn't joking, she decided that she'd "Better start looking into it." It totally changed the trajectory of the film.

"Once you realise that you have it and once you realise that it's not all that bad, there are actual positives that go along with it. You have to be able to build your own self-esteem," she once stated following a screening of *A Mind Like Mine*.

"A lot of what I believe in regarding finding your way with ADD is that you really have to be aware of what your strengths are, what you're good at and what you are passionate about. I'm very fortunate that I have directed myself into a field that fits all of those things. I can be pulled in many many different directions at the same time and they are very high priority and things have to get done; deadlines have to be met. Somehow I just keep going and it helps that I'm a workaholic"

In partnership with Centennial College's Centre of Entrepreneurship, she created and teaches the only Canadian business training program for aspiring independent television producers. Her Independent Television Producers' Program runs for nine weeks and has been successfully



operating for 15 years. It focuses on the business of being an independent producer and covers such topics as financing projects, budgeting, proposal writing and pitching.

She brings expert advisors to work with the students and for Karen it has proven to be a wonderful and rewarding experience. They have had "many, many, many successes" and if it weren't for privacy issues regarding naming names she would do some name dropping. "But let's just say that you would recognize some of those people and their projects for sure in the Canadian domain".

She has produced several educational videos including *The Real Deal: An Insider's Guide to Purchasing a Used Vehicle*; *The Self Employment Process*—currently being used by the federal government as a training video – and the hour-long *Entrepreneurial Success Stories*, detailing the road to success for four new business owners and was shown on Rogers Cable.

She is currently developing a television series entitled *Line of Fire*, about firefighters and their world.

Karen is also the founder of the production company called Wordshop Productions Inc. and its mission statement reads, "By igniting the flames of thought, and illuminating the recesses of reflection, Wordshop Productions plants the seeds of inspiration, through empowering programming, daring the soul to dream."

The statement couldn't be more reflective of the woman herself.

