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Program companion website: <http://www.pbs.org/knocking>

***Independent Lens: KNOCKING***  
**TO HAVE ITS TELEVISION PREMIERE**  
**ON PBS, TUESDAY, MAY 22 AT 10:00 PM (check local listings)**

**Film Explores the Often Misunderstood World of Jehovah's Witnesses**

*"Riveting and illuminating. KNOCKING takes us inside the world of Jehovah's Witnesses in a way that is utterly surprising and moving."* – Anderson Cooper, *CNN*

*"A thoughtful telling of an important, often-overlooked story about essential American issues."*— Jon Meacham, *Newsweek*

(San Francisco, CA) – A fascinating look at an often maligned and misunderstood religion, Joel P. Engardio and Tom Shepard's **KNOCKING** opens the door on Jehovah's Witnesses. Among the film's many surprising revelations is the fact that, while protecting their own rights, Jehovah's Witnesses have won a record number of U.S. Supreme Court cases which have resulted in expanding freedoms for all Americans. In Nazi Germany, they chose the concentration camps over fighting for Hitler. They refuse blood transfusions on religious grounds but support the science of bloodless medicine. And they are moral conservatives who nevertheless stay out of politics and the Culture War. **KNOCKING** will have its television premiere on the Emmy® Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, May 22, 2007 at 10:00 PM (check local listings.)

Jehovah's Witnesses are a Christian group that has ministered door-to-door for 130 years and counts seven million members worldwide. Though often dismissed as an odd or irrelevant sect, **KNOCKING** reveals how one unlikely religion helped to shape history beyond the doorstep. Narrated by journalist Joel P. Engardio—who was raised as Jehovah's Witness, but never joined the religion—**KNOCKING** follows two Jehovah's Witness families who stand officially firm for their often-controversial faith. The film introduces an unlikely Jehovah's Witness: Joseph Kempler, a Polish Jew living in Reno, Nevada. As a teenager 65 years ago, Kempler was a prisoner at six Nazi concentration camps, where he lost his faith and cursed God for allowing the Holocaust.

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In the camps, he met Jehovah's Witnesses who were voluntary prisoners; the Nazis would let them leave as long as they renounced their religion, but they refused. After surviving the Nazi camps, Joseph immigrated to the U.S., where a pair of Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on his door. Always curious about this group, he invited them in. He found a renewed purpose for God in their teachings and eventually converted. Some Jews consider him a traitor; others are moved by his renewal of faith. Joseph still embraces his Jewish heritage, as part of his family remains religiously Jewish while the rest follow the tenets of the Jehovah's Witnesses. As we see in the film, both sides of Joseph's family accompany him to Austria and Poland to visit the concentration camps where Joseph confronts his deeply etched memories of despair and hope, loss and renewal.

We also meet Seth Thomas, a young man who was raised as a Jehovah's Witness in suburban Dallas. A genetic disorder has ravaged his liver and at 23, he requires a transplant to survive. Denied a donated liver, Seth's own father volunteers to be the live donor, giving half his liver to his son. But because of the tenets of their faith, neither will accept a blood transfusion. Surgeons at Baylor Medical Center in Texas refuse to treat him but the University of Southern California Hospital in Los Angeles is willing to try the experimental procedure without a blood supply in reserve. Doctors at USC say this is the future of medical treatment and should be explored and embraced. Some members of the Thomas family are not Jehovah's Witnesses and oppose the religion's stand on blood, agreeing with the doctors who say this procedure is too risky. Informative and always surprising, **KNOCKING** offers a long overdue look at the widespread influence Jehovah's Witnesses have had on the rights and freedoms of all Americans.

The companion website for **KNOCKING** ([www.pbs.org/independentlens/knocking](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/knocking)) features detailed information on the film, including an interview with the filmmakers and links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for views to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film and more.

**KNOCKING** will be the featured May film in ITVS Community Cinema, the monthly screening series featuring upcoming selections from the *Independent Lens* season. Presented in partnership with local public television stations and leading community organizations, ITVS Community Cinema holds preview screenings in select markets across the country making a real contribution on a range of current social issues by connecting communities with organizations, information, and the opportunity to get involved. For more information, visit [www.itvs.org/outreach](http://www.itvs.org/outreach).

### **Issues Explored in KNOCKING**

**Civil Liberties**—Jehovah's Witnesses have gone before the U.S. Supreme Court 62 times, more than any other single group. Their 50 wins set Constitutional precedents in nearly every area of the Bill of Rights. During World War II, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Jehovah's Witnesses in several landmark cases that helped pave the way for the modern civil rights movement. Their most recent victory at the high court in 2002 was considered an important protection to free speech after the events of 9/11. Although Jehovah's Witnesses are moral conservatives who do not agree with every group their legal victories have helped along the way, they are fundamentalists who refuse to fight in the Culture War. Jehovah's Witnesses share their beliefs at the door, but keep them separate from government and politics.

**The Holocaust**—In 1933, when Hitler first came to power, Jehovah’s Witnesses attempted to distance themselves politically from Jews. But when Nazi anti-Semitism took a brutal turn, the Witnesses spoke out. For their noncompliance to the Nazi State, German Jehovah’s Witnesses were arrested, their books burned and printing presses destroyed. They were among the first put in the concentration camps and were forced to wear a purple triangle on their uniforms. But Jehovah’s Witnesses as a group were the only prisoners given a choice—as Germans who could have belonged to Hitler’s so-called “master race,” Jehovah’s Witnesses were always free to leave the camps as long as they renounced their religion and pledged allegiance to Hitler. Few accepted the offer. Witness inmates smuggled information out of the camps, and by the mid-1930s the group used its international network of members to publicly report Hitler’s abuses.

**Medicine**—Jehovah’s Witnesses do not accept blood transfusions based on an interpretation of the Bible that blood is sacred. In life-threatening situations, doctors traditionally gave Witness patients a stark choice: blood or death, which often created an adversarial relationship. Many physicians have forced blood upon Witnesses with court-ordered transfusions. This raised the question of how much sovereignty a patient has over his or her body. After viruses like HIV began threatening the blood supply, doctors began exploring the possibility of bloodless surgery. Jehovah’s Witnesses became eager guinea pigs willing to test new medical advancements that could treat them without blood. Now bloodless surgery is commonly available to patients, regardless of religion, at more than 100 medical centers in the United States. However, there are still experimental treatments such as the organ transplant are available while and ethical issues continue to divide the medical community

## **About The FILMMAKERS**

### **Joel P. Engardio (Producer/Director)**

Joel P. Engardio was the recipient of the 2000 National Press Foundation award for science writing. In 2003, the Society of Professional Journalists named Engardio best opinion writer in Northern California. He was a finalist for the University of Missouri’s 1999 national lifestyle writing awards in multicultural journalism. Engardio has written for the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *San Francisco Weekly*, *Newsweek*, *Boston Globe*, *Christian Science Monitor* and *P.O.V.* magazine. In television, Engardio worked as an associate producer for ABC News at the news-magazine *20/20* and the network’s documentary unit, *Turning Point*. Engardio also consults as a media and communications strategist for the American Civil Liberties Union. He graduated from Michigan State University where he majored in journalism and history. Engardio was raised as a Jehovah’s Witness in Saginaw, Michigan but never joined the religion. His mother is the only Jehovah’s Witness in his mostly Catholic family. Engardio lives in San Francisco.

### **Tom Shepard (Producer/Director)**

Tom Shepard produced and directed **SCOUT’S HONOR**, an ITVS-funded documentary that won the Audience Award for Best Documentary and Freedom of Expression Award at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival, as well as several other awards including Grand Prize at the 2001 USA Film Festival. **SCOUT’S HONOR** was broadcast nationally on the PBS series *P.O.V.* Previously, Shepard worked as an editor at National Public Radio for Linda Wertheimer and *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*. At NPR, he co-produced *Listening to America*, an audio documentary on the history of public radio in America, based on Linda Wertheimer’s book by the same name. Shepard graduated from Stanford University where he majored in biology and film. He is currently directing a new film about child geniuses and science education.

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### **About *Independent Lens***

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10:00 PM on PBS. Hosted this season by Terrence Howard, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films 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 engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at **www.pbs.org/independentlens**. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

### **About ITVS**

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy® Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10:00 PM 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 Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting **www.itvs.org**. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

### **About PBS**

PBS is a media enterprise that serves 354 public noncommercial television stations and reaches almost 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is a leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers and offers a broad array of other educational services. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (**www.pbskids.org**), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at **www.pbs.org**, one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet.

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