In 2012, when Ryan and Amy Green learned that their baby son Joel’s rare cancer was terminal, they were devastated. Searching for a way to explore his feelings, Ryan, an indie video game developer, found solace in the most appropriate creative outlet he knew: making a video game.

Ryan Green created a video game called “That Dragon, Cancer,” a game that is at once a poetic exploration of a father’s relationship with his son, an interactive painting, and a vivid window into the mind of grieving parents.

Green also recruited his wife and sons into the process of documenting their daily lives for a film, Thank you for Playing, about the video game’s development. In creating the documentary and the game, Ryan had to decide where to draw the line in sharing his family’s experiences of raising a dying child. From having his sons reenact difficult conversations, to recording Joel’s giggle, to painstakingly photographing every detail of the hospital, Ryan’s life became consumed by the complicated process of creating a digital world that mirrors his own, even as he continued to care for his son.

Combining footage from both Ryan’s real and animated worlds, Thank you for Playing examines how we process grief through technology in the twenty-first century, and the implications of documenting profound human experiences in a new artistic medium: the video game.

“That Dragon, Cancer,” the video game, was developed by Ryan and Amy Green and Josh Larson along with five others at their studio, Numinous Games. It was released in January 2016. As the Numinous team describe it: “That Dragon, Cancer” is a video game developer’s love letter to his son; an immersive, narrative video game to inspire love for others; a memorial for hundreds who have fought cancer. It is a poetic and playful interactive retelling of Joel Green’s 4-year fight against cancer, and an autobiographical memoir of how parents Ryan and Amy embrace hope in the face of death.”

Developed by parents of a terminally ill child, “That Dragon, Cancer” facilitates emotional connection and spiritual awakening.
The directors of the “Thank You for Playing” documentary were David Osit and Malika Zouhali-Worrall. In a statement, they noted: “Ryan and Amy’s video game, ‘That Dragon, Cancer’ comes at a time when video games and interactive media are emerging as a wildly innovative art form. And yet simultaneously, society is questioning our dependence on technology more than ever: it seems to be bringing us at once closer together and yet further apart. (As Directors,) we are fascinated by this tension, which is why we set out to make this film.

“From the moment we first heard about “That Dragon, Cancer,” we immediately wanted to know more about why Ryan and Amy had chosen a video game — a medium so often associated with explosions and violence — to convey one of the most emotional and spiritually-challenging experiences a family can go through. Once we saw for ourselves how many people were profoundly moved by the game, and how playing it often facilitated more, rather than less, social interaction, we were hooked and knew we had to keep following this story. The fact that a video game was capable of awakening this sort of empathy to allow players to join Ryan and Amy on their journey astounded us, and we soon realized that Ryan isn’t only a video game developer, he’s also an artist — and programming is his paintbrush.

“Thank You for Playing explores the very personal experiences of a family battling cancer, and the beauty and hope that can be found in the artistic process, while also examining the age-old question of where the boundaries lie in representing difficult emotional experiences in art. Ultimately, we hope [Thank You for Playing] the film will challenge people to reexamine their own assumptions about bereavement, technology, video games, and art.”

The “That Dragon, Cancer” game can be found at thatdragoncancer.com. Thank You for Playing appeared at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2015, and is available for download at http://www.thankyouforplayingfilm.com/watch/.

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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE (continued from page 1)

a previous offer to volunteer, please accept my sincere apologies and contact me again so I can assist you.

Call for Donations, Gifts, and Bequests
SSIT’s 2018 fundraising campaign is focused on securing the level of resources required to scale activities over the coming years. Funds will be invested in further strengthening and expanding volunteer activities. Options to financially support SSIT volunteer activities include:
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