

Film centers on struggle for athletic equality

By Gretchen Flemming
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Mary Mazzio just couldn't shake the story.

An Olympic rower in the 1992 Barcelona Games, Mazzio had grown up with every opportunity afforded female athletes of her generation. But while working out years later with Chris Ernst, who had been a rower at Yale in the 1970s, Mazzio discovered a true pioneer.

After Ernst spoke about the hardships she had to overcome to compete in athletics, Mazzio took action.

"I was an Olympic athlete, a rower, and I had never even heard of her story before she told it to me," Mazzio said. "It was an important story that was in danger of being lost."

So Mazzio, a lawyer who was taking filmmaking classes at Boston University at the time, began the process that led to the 40-minute feature, "A Hero for Daisy."

The film will be shown in Grand Rapids on Monday at three locations. Mazzio will travel from

'A Hero for Daisy' to be shown here Monday



Mary Mazzio

her home in Boston to accompany the showings at Grand Valley State University (9 a.m.), Calvin College (4 p.m.) and at Studio 28 Theaters (7 p.m.).

The two student events are free and open to the public, while the Studio 28 showing costs \$3 for students and \$5 for adults. Tickets are available at the door or by calling 742-2389.

The film tells the story of Ernst, a two-time Olympic world champion in lightweight double sculls, who first made waves in 1976 by leading her Yale women's crew team in a Title IX protest centered around their lack of locker room facilities.

"They were booed at, hissed at, leered at and made fun of," said Mazzio. Title IX, which prohibits

sex discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal funds, had been enacted in 1972, but few were paying attention.

So the Yale crew team decided to take matters into their own hands. In front of a reporter from the New York Times, the women stripped, exposing the phrase Title IX written in blue marker across their backs. The story was carried by major news outlets the next day, then the phones at Yale began ringing off the hook.

"It was such a great act of courage and rebellion," Mazzio said. "It woke up so many people."

Mazzio had conceived of the idea in 1996 and produced a two-minute short for a filmmaking class she was taking. But while on an extended maternity leave, she wrote the feature script and had it produced by Arnold Communications, which produces television commercials, most notably for McDonald's.

"It started out as a personal, private process," Mazzio said, "then my husband said to me,

'you've got to tell this story.'"

The film is named for Mazzio's 3-year-old daughter, Daisy. The movie debuted last year and has been shown on ESPN Classic. Mazzio has taken the film to a number of schools along the East Coast.

The film includes interviews with Yale graduate Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., former Yale athletic director and football coach Carm Cozza, and Dave Vogel of the U.S. Rowing Association and Yale's head rowing coach.

Mazzio calls the documentary-style film a cross between "Ken Burns and MTV." She said it took a while to convince Ernst to do the movie, but she had little trouble convincing people at Yale to speak about the subject because she didn't take a confrontational approach.

The result was a film that is receiving rave reviews.

"It's an inspirational film," said Mary McLoughlin, a member of the steering committee that helped bring Mazzio and the film to Grand Rapids. "It shows what people can do if they want to change things."