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PREFACE

The following document is an accompaniment to the included thesis film Shelter to Home. The film can be watched at http://youtu.be/IfDMLgiJdZM. Also accompanying the film is the website http://armfilm.wordpress.com.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my Thesis advisor Gordon Murray, along with my oral defense committee, Catherine Wing, David Smeltzer, and Dean Donald Williams. A special thanks to the Anonymous Relief Mission for providing inspiration and to the Vineyard Community for embracing me in their world. I would also like to thank Scott Budzar for being my gateway into the world of ARM and for welcoming me with enthusiasm. I would like to thank all of the organizations mentioned in the film that allowed me access to their facilities and the volunteers who were wiling to sit for interviews, namely Freedom House and Safer Futures. Finally I would like to thank all of the musicians who allowed me to use their music in the film, namely Scott Budzar, Bethesda, Chris Black, Jasmine Tate, and En’ Garde.
CHAPTER I
THE BACKDROP

As a child, I used to crouch in front of the family television late at night. I kept the volume down low so as not to wake my sleeping family. I was mesmerized by the documentaries aired on public television that seemed to only be on in the middle of the night. I was drawn into the worlds of Meg Ryan searching for white elephants, of inner city boys going to school in Africa, of coffee farmers struggling to grow their crops, of t-shirts making their way from US donation boxes to across the globe…. Each night it was a new world and a new fascination. I had found my passion.

As documentaries have gained popularity over time, I have found the power of documentaries to change the viewers’ minds equally intriguing. I think it is remarkable that I can ask almost anyone whether they have seen a good documentary recently, and get a good response about a film that changed how they think and even act. People will stop drinking bottled water after watching the documentary “Tapped.” They will stop eating fish after watching “The Cove.” The influence of this film genre is becoming pervasive in society.

So with this love of documentaries in the back of my mind, I began my journey through college. I spent one year at The Ohio State University studying
architecture and journalism. Then in 2009, I transferred to Kent State University to take advantage of the far superior journalism program there.

I brought with me a unique view on what long-form journalism could be. After all, documentaries lay in the gray realm between news and entertainment. They present facts and tell stories. Additionally, like architecture they create space. Good architecture creates an aura about it. When walking into a courthouse one feels the power of the laws that are upheld in the building. When one enters a church sanctuary there is a feeling of holiness and awe.

Dan Rice once said, “There are three forms of visual art: Painting is art to look at, sculpture is art you can walk around, and architecture is art you can walk through.” Unfortunately, Rice did not live to see the age of film and television. I believe it would be a rightful addition to his quote to say that film is art that draws you into itself. When a viewer is watching a good film there is a suspension of disbelief as they are drawn into the world that the film creates. This aspect applies to documentaries that hold the ability to pull viewers into the lives and worlds of others.

While attending Kent State, I also began attending The Vineyard Community Church in downtown Kent. It was unlike any church I had ever attended. Located in a nondescript brick building, it was tucked neatly around the corner from The Kent Stage on West Main Street. Walking through the front door
there was immediately a welcoming aura about the small church that looked more like coffee shop than the sanctuaries I was used to. The room was filled with a motley assortment of individuals from graduate students, to townies, and homeless individuals. It was like entering one of the worlds from a documentary.

It wasn’t until a year or so of attending The Vineyard that I found out about the Anonymous Relief Mission. The grassroots non-profit sprung out of the church in 2006 and its main goal was to move homeless individuals and families out of homeless shelters and into their new homes. Immediately I knew this group could provide the stories and microcosm for a documentary. The richness of the characters involved and the heart of the group were compelling. Their anonymity was mysterious. I tucked the idea into the back of my head, knowing this would require much more time and effort than the reporting classes that I was taking could afford me.

On Halloween of 2010, while most Kent State students were participating in downtown costumed shenanigans, a group of seven students including myself spent the weekend experiencing poverty first hand in Cleveland, OH. The outing was a university-sponsored Urban Immersion Trip. We spent our time eating at soup kitchens, living in a church, and visiting nonprofit organizations. The homelessness and poverty we saw was shocking, but traveling to Cleveland seemed unnecessary when I knew the problems of poverty and homelessness hit so close to home. This propelled me even more to expose the poverty and
homelessness around Kent. Why was the university taking students on trips to Cleveland to see poverty, when they could drive down the street to Ravenna or even around the corner in Kent where the homeless live in hidden pockets?

On January 1, 2011, The Vineyard closed its doors due to lack of funding. Out of its ashes sprung forth ARM. The old Vineyard building was renamed the ARM House and the non-profit carried on its work.

With all of this- the story of ARM, the reality of poverty in Kent, and my passion for documentaries- floating around in my mind, all I needed was opportunity and a platform. The summer of 2011, before my senior year, I learned of the opportunity to do a Senior Honors Thesis. Seeing this as my last opportunity before graduation, I thus began my actualization of creating a documentary on ARM.
CHAPTER II
THE FILM

_Shelter to Hope_ follows the story of Rob Keffer, a homeless veteran in the quaint college town of Kent, OH, as he moves from a local homeless shelter into his first apartment. Along the way, he is helped by the Anonymous Relief Mission, a grassroots organization that furnishes the apartments of homeless individuals, moving out of shelters. However, the organization is facing problems of its own, resulting in the loss of their primary location, an old church building. The volunteers have as much hope as the individuals they are moving.

In this film, not only do pieces of furniture get refurbished and homeless individuals get a new lease on life, but the volunteers experience life-changing transformations of a much deeper level. _Shelter to Hope_ has a compelling exposition that states the poverty level of Portage County, where the film is set. It appeals to the emotion of the audience as Rob recounts how he came to be homeless after a series of unfortunate events. The film goes on to introduce ARM and reaches an unexpected climax when financial difficulties result in the organization closing the doors of its downtown facility. As volunteers share their experiences of working with ARM, Rob is moved into his new apartment. The film
resolves with Rob at a fresh start and the intrepid volunteers vowing to continue
their work, building or no building.

*Shelter to Hope* tells more than just a story of transitioning from shelter to
home, but a tale of the restoration of hope in ARM’s clients and volunteers.
SUMMER – SEPTEMBER 2011

Preproduction for the film began in the summer of 2011. This stage included research of poverty and homelessness in the Kent area. It also included information gathering and story planning. Over the summer, I compiled a list of necessary interviews and video shots. I created a schedule for interviews and filming. A great deal of this time was also spent familiarizing myself with the editing software and the video equipment that was to use in post-production. In addition, over the summer I began the storyboarding and scriptwriting of the film. I also began to develop the web platform for the film to be uploaded on: www.armfilm.wordpress.com. I met with Scott Budzar in September to discuss the documentary and to compile ideas and sources that he thought might serve useful.

OCTOBER 2011

Production of the film began in October. Throughout this stage I set up interviews, filmed them, and sorted footage into manageable folders on an
external hard drive. In October, I gathered stock footage of Kent and filmed a
grocery drop off with Scott and several ARM volunteers. I also drove to
Columbus, OH to interview Bill Faith, the Executive Director of the Coalition on
Homelessness and Housing In Ohio. He was to serve as the expert in the film, to
provide an outsider’s knowledgeable view and to expand the reach of the film
beyond the city of Kent and into every small town of Ohio. I also toured the
Freedom House and met Rob Keffer for an initial interview. I filmed a fundraiser
for ARM at the Folk Fest that did not make it into the film, along with an interview
with the owner of a local Christian bookstore.

NOVEMBER 2011

November was a month of non-stop filming. During this time I set up and
filmed interviews with Denise Gump, ARM advocate; Josh Muller, ARM volunteer;
Jessie Sloan, ARM volunteer; Ryan Everett, Program Coordinator of The
Freedom House; Jillian Alexander of Safer Futures; and Scott Budzar, cofounder
of ARM. Each interview came with its own unique difficulties, which will be
discussed later. In addition, I unsuccessfully attempted to film the grocery
handouts at the ARM House several times in November. In this time, the news
broke that the ARM House would be closing due to lack of funds, providing a
unique twist in the plot of the film. I filmed the Pay the Rent Concert and the move out from the ARM House.

DECEMBER 2011

With the end of the semester, filming slowed down in December. I filmed Rob’s move and the move of one other veteran and headed into post-production.

JANUARY – MARCH 2012

Post-production included a full month of sorting and reviewing over 100 GB of over 300 video clips. After reviewing and grading the quality of the clips, I began a long process of re-watching interviews to pull out quotes that would be used in the film. With all of the quotes decided upon, I organized the film based on the need for a compelling beginning, an unexpected middle, and a satisfying ending. I sought to have a distinct exposition rising action, climax, and falling action in the film. I used Adobe Premiere Pro CS5.5 and the rest of the Adobe production suite to edit the film and to correct any audio problems. After completing the film, I reviewed it several times, insuring the audio levels were appropriate, the video quality was maintained, and the plot flowed well. I then uploaded the film to the web platform for viewing.
CHAPTER IV
THE DIFFICULTIES

I found it is infinitely easier to watch and critique a documentary than to actually create one. Throughout every step of the process I encountered difficulties. These in turn formed the film and built my character as a filmmaker. Some of the largest struggles are mentioned below.

ACCESS

While I had access to Scott because of our friendship through The Vineyard, his busy life with a big family and several jobs made access to him and any ARM moves very sporadic and difficult. I found others were willing to sit for interviews but typically only after talking with Scott about it. Ideally, I would have followed several moves into new homes and would have done follow up interviews with these individuals, but this could not be actualized due to lack of access.
ACTION FOOTAGE

Due to lack of access, I found myself also lacking action footage for the film. I had a plethora of interviews and good quotes, but nothing to overlay on the interviews to keep the attention of the viewer and to help the plot flow. Towards the end of production this became increasingly frustrating as I moved to Columbus, OH for the Post-Production stage of filmmaking.

EQUIPMENT & RESOURCES

Making a low-budget film is one thing. Making a no-budget film is something else entirely. For the film, I used my own camera, microphones, and editing software on my computer. To say the least, none of these would be considered high caliber equipment. This often made for a struggle in capturing quality audio, correcting said audio, and even rendering video over extended periods of time. In fact because the only computer I had to edit on was my own, it took over eleven hours to render the entire film for export. The documentary industry is not one that is well funded. Most documentarians that I have come in contact with are, like myself, working other jobs to support their passion. I believe with better equipment, I could have created a film with higher quality video and audio.
PRECEDENT & RESEARCH

There is only one other video project that has been done for a thesis and it was a fictional short film. With no precedent, it was a bit difficult to determine the amount of work necessary or appropriate for my thesis. In the end I sided with the idea of the more the merrier. Because of the form of my thesis, not much research was necessary besides touching on statistics of poverty and appropriate audio levels. Though this is the nature of the project, I found it a bit disconcerting that I could not list off tens of books that I referenced for the film. Most of my research came from myself being the experiment as an independent filmmaker.

SENSITIVITY OF TOPIC

Finding homeless individuals willing to talk about their state proved very difficult, in fact Rob was one of only two homeless individuals I was able to interview. Especially sensitive and nearly impossible to navigate around was the topic of the women of Safer Futures. Because these women were coming out of abuse situations, it was not possible to interview them or film where they were moved. This left a large gap in the final film.
STAMINA

After three months of Preproduction, three months of Production, and three months of Postproduction, keeping motivated to finish the film was one of the hardest and most constant problems of the process. Looking to the end goal of experience and knowing that it would provide good practice for the future was what kept me going.

TIME

Time never seems to be on one’s side, especially when it comes to squeezing filmmaking into nine month’s time. I would have liked to follow ARM for at least a year to get a more rounded view of the non-profit and to follow more moves. Having a short amount of time limited what I could accomplish in filming and editing.
CHAPTER V
THE REWARDS

I found that the rewards of my thesis work are not quantitative, but rather internally qualitative. I have come away from this project with experience and fieldwork. I have seen what it takes to make a documentary and have gained an increased passion for filmmaking. I do not think that the final product I made is anything award winning, but it is a step in the right direction. Ira Glass spoke this about creative work: “For the first couple years that you are making stuff, it isn’t so good. Okay? It’s not that great. It is trying to be good; it has ambition to be good; but it is not quite that good. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, your taste is still killer; and your taste is good enough that you can tell that what you’re making is kind of a disappointment to you.” This is where I am left, my taste and insight for what qualifies a good documentary is there, but my films don’t meet my taste quality. Glass’ remedy for this gap between what I hope to be producing and what I actually am producing is to continue to work and to build up a large volume of work. In the end, my thesis does not have a sellable product, or break through in research, or theory data, but it has brought me one step closer to the filmmaker I hope to be.
CHAPTER VI
SELF REFLECTION

At the end of March 2012, I drove up to Cleveland to see a documentary by my favorite directors that was being screened at the Cleveland International Film Festival. After the film was over a panel was held to discuss the film. Various Clevelanders sat on the panel along with one of the assistant producers of the film. It was so easy for me to sit in the audience and critique the film, to pick out aspects I enjoyed, and others I thought needed to be changed. In fact, as a hobby I keep a documentary review blog. After working on Shelter to Hope, I found it is not so easy to be sitting on the panel rather than in the audience.

My professor and thesis advisor Gordon Murray told me something while I was in the production stage of the film that has stuck with me. He said, “There is a fine line between them and us,” meaning that there is not so much different between my favorite producers and myself as a student of documentaries. He is quite right. With a bit of tweaking, I may be able to get Shelter to Hope aired on the local PBS station.

Going into producing a documentary, one is left up to luck as the story cannot be predetermined; what happens will happen. I had to hope I was there at the right time to get the right footage. If I were to review my final documentary on
my review blog, I would probably give it 2.5 stars out of five. It is not the best film I have seen. There are some technical issues that detract from the film and it drags without any action footage. The best fix for this would be shortening it to cut out some of the slack.

The plotline of the film is also a bit sketchy. Though in editing I tried several different routes. I never realized how difficult editing a documentary would be. It is a bit like putting a puzzle together without a picture to reference. I attempted several ways of putting the pieces together. At first I tried going by the emotions I wanted the audience to feel of intrigue and sympathy to motivation and surprise to satisfaction and empowerment. This was a bit confusing so I attempted to edit by a color scheme of blue to gold to yellow. This was a bit abstract so I tried a religious approach from faith to hope to love. Still this was too far reaching so eventually I wrote out the footage and interviews I had on index cards and arranged them in a way I thought would flow well while still providing a basic rising and falling action.

Needless to say, I don’t think the work I produced is Sundance worthy. But it is 9 months of my life that I believe were well spent. With each difficulty, the line between “them” and me became thinner. The hope that I found in witnessing the restoration of the volunteers of ARM translated over to myself. Through the process my hope of stepping over that line has become stronger. I found that I actually can produce a documentary. It is not that far-fetched of an idea. So my
work might be novice but that’s only right now. I am proud of it and ready to produce more and better films. Wait a few years and then we will see…
REFERENCES


