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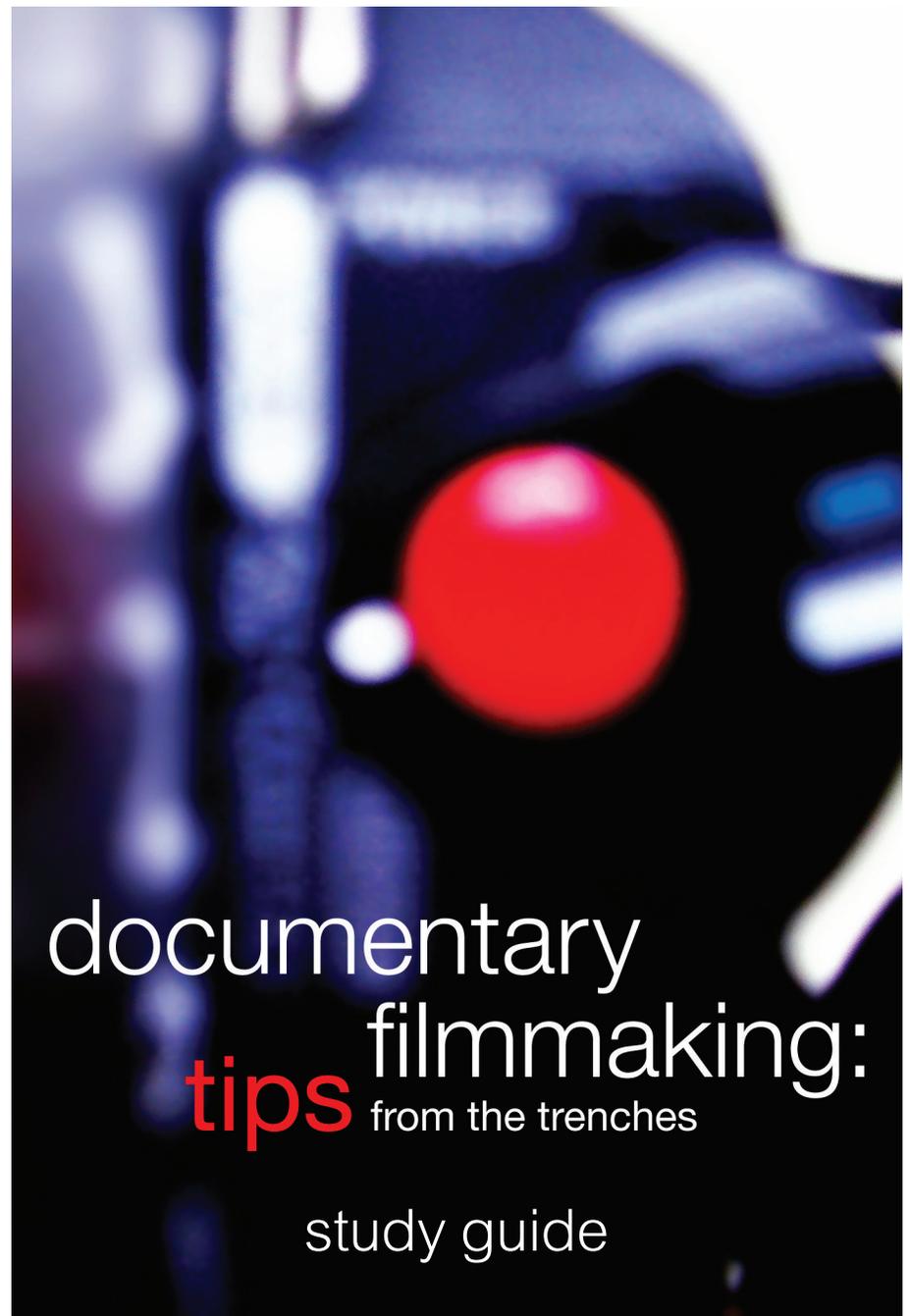
Program for Documentary Production
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS



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documentary
tips filmmaking:
from the trenches

study guide

F2663DVD

Contents

Introduction to Documentary Film

What is Documentary? (2:37)

Why Documentary Matters (4:55)

Why they make films (3:45)

A Student of Film (2:37)

Story

Finding Good Stories (4:18)

Finding Good People (2:14)

Story into film (3:25)

First Person Perspective (3:12)

Shooting & Editing

Sound & Picture (8:32)

Editing (5:18)

Screening your rough cut (1:08)

Legal Issues

Releases & Clearances (3:28)

Fair Use (1:52)

Music (2:38)

Ethics

General Ethics (4:21)

Specific Ethics (7:30)

Financial & Distribution

Getting Your Film Made (7:30)

Getting Your Film Out There (4:06)

Documentary Filmmaking:

Tips from the Trenches

Every year I attend the Full Frame documentary film festival in Durham, North Carolina, bringing a group of students from Elon University. Without fail, we return from the Festival energized by the films and inspired by the expert advice from filmmakers. So I started thinking about ways to recreate that energy in the classroom, eventually arriving at the concept for this DVD.

This DVD is a chance to hear from emerging and seasoned filmmakers as they discuss technical, legal, ethical and business issues of documentary film. It was created to be watched in brief topical sections, although it can also be watched straight through. We've organized the subjects as they might be encountered in creating a film, from finding good stories to getting your film out there. This booklet also contains short discussion questions to be used in class or by aspiring filmmakers to think more about the ideas and insights offered by our interviewees.

I thank the many filmmakers who agreed to be interviewed for this project. I thank them not only for the invaluable insights on this DVD but, more importantly, for their greatest contribution to those wishing to learn—their films, which stand as timeless examples of the power of documentary film.

~Brooke Barnett, 2008

STUDY GUIDE

Here are a few things to consider about each of the sections, for use in classes or among filmmaking groups.

Introduction to Documentary Film

- a. Define documentary. Offer suggestions of films that fit into this genre.
- b. Come up with films that are socially significant (documentary or fiction films). Discuss what makes them important films.
- c. Explore your own motivation for making films.
- d. Watch a film that you've seen before and liked and deconstruct it. Think about why certain scenes work. What determines the length? What keeps the viewer asking what happens next and/or saying I did not know that?
- e. How is the documentary connected to journalism? In what ways are these fields different and the same?

Story

- a. Break apart the story elements in a documentary, a fiction film, a newspaper article, a news story and a short story. Talk about story element such as exposition, rising action, climax and falling action. Think about these elements for your own projects.
- b. Come up with a plan of action for finding good stories. Read through every section of a newspaper and come up with a good story idea for a film. Justify why this would make a good film and why people would want to see it. Identify a potential story arc and compelling characters in the idea.
- c. Think about the BBC rule of educate and entertain. Apply this to a film you've seen, fiction or non-fiction.

Shooting & Editing

- a. Think about how the filmmakers talk about how they try to make sense of the chaos when they first arrive at a scene and start shooting. Talk about your plans for making sense of the chaos in your own shooting.
- b. Discuss the use of a tripod and whether this is a stylistic choice or a matter of professionalism as Cynthia Wade suggests.
- c. Think about the old editing adage of "kill your babies" and why this might be necessary. Offer examples from your own work.

Legal and Ethical Issues

- a. Discuss music option for your film in light of the fact that musical scoring is never an acceptable fair use claim. What other options do you have? Discuss Needle Drop, original music, canned music, clearing someone's else's music, etc.
- b. Go through the steps to obtain the rights to a song, keeping in mind the rights of the song writer and also the rights to the performance of the song.
- c. Explore places to find public domain images, music and films.
- d. Look at one of the following films *Outfoxed*, *My Date With Drew* or *This Film Has Not Yet Been Rated* and talk about the legal and ethical issues in the film.
- e. Check out the Center for Social Media site at American University for a wealth of resources on fair use:
http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/fair_use/

Specific Ethical Issues

- a. In the film *Startup.com*, two best friends are profiled. At the end of the film, one friend fires the other. If you were working on this film and had become friends with each of the founders, how would you handle this development?
- b. Rex Miller focused on an teenager who is dealing with typical misbehavior issues. As the sole person shooting during these events, does he turn the camera off when the subject behaves badly or does he shoot and then decide what to include later, when editing? Does he intervene and help the teen to get out of the difficult situation?
- c. When Molly Bingham and Steve Connors were shooting the film *Meeting Resistance*, they did a series of interviews with one man who said great things. Then he starting asking them for money. They turned down the request and then decided that the man's information could not be used in the film because they were unsure of his motivations. What would you do and why?

Distribution and Finance

- a. Discuss how money dictates film choices. How much are you going to consider audience and funding when you decide what films to do? Will you choose a topic and look for money or find people wanting to put money toward certain films and offer to make those films? Or some other alternative?
- b. What are your plans for getting your film seen? Discuss the pros and cons of film festivals, broadcast, internet, home DVD sale and whatever else came to light since we made this DVD.

FILMMAKER BIOS

Richard Berge is a documentary filmmaker whose credits include *The Rape of Europa* (2006), *Yesterday's Tomorrows* (2000), *Sing Faster: The Stagehands' Ring Cycle* (1999), *In Search Of Law And Order* (1998). He was production coordinator for Cadillac Desert (1997), the landmark documentary series produced for PBS by Jon Else about history of the quest and struggle for water in the American West.

Molly Bingham has worked as a photojournalist in Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gaza Strip, Iran, Iraq and as Official Photographer to the Office of the Vice President of the United States. Bingham was detained for eight days by the Iraqi government security services and held in Abu Ghraib prison with four other westerners during the war, and released to Jordan in early April 2003. Bingham teamed up with Steve Connors in August of 2003 and made her first documentary film, *Meeting Resistance*, about the Iraqi resistance movement.

Steven Bognar is an award-winning independent filmmaker of documentaries and dramatic films. *Personal Belongings* (1996), the story of his father's Hungarian roots, was named one of the year's top ten films by the Columbus Dispatch. His most recent film with partner Julia Reichart, *A Lion in the House*, tells the story of five cancer-stricken children and their families as they contend with the disease and medical treatment over the course of several years. The film debuted at the Sundance Film Festival and aired on PBS.

Steve Connors began taking photographs while serving as a British soldier in Northern Ireland in the early 1980s and has since documented significant political issue in former Czechoslovakia, Sri Lanka, the former Yugoslavia, Russia and Afghanistan working for Time, Newsweek, The New York Times in the United States; The Guardian, The Observer and The Telegraph in London and Der Spiegel, Stern and Paris Match in Europe. Connors teamed up with Molly Bingham in August of 2003 and made his first documentary film, *Meeting Resistance*, about the Iraqi resistance movement.

Duncan Copp is a freelance producer/director based in the UK who has worked on several award-winning science series including Earth Story, Universe 2001 and *Magnetic Flip* and *Global Dimming*, both of which have won prestigious WildScreen awards and *In the Shadow of the Moon*, which received its world premiere at the Sundance Festival in January 2007 and won the Audience Award.

Marshall Curry was the director, producer, director of photography, and editor of the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Street Fight*. In 2005 Marshall was selected by Filmmaker Magazine as one of "25 New Faces of Independent Film," and he was awarded the International Documentary Association (IDA) Jacqueline Donnet Filmmaker Award.

Mary M. Dalton is Associate Professor of Communication at Wake Forest University, and her documentaries have been screened at various festivals, museums, and galleries. Her recent film, *Martha in Lattimore*, was an official selection of the 2006 SILVERDOCS/AFI Discovery Channel Documentary Festival. Dalton is also a media critic and regular contributor to the National Public Radio affiliate WFDD-FM in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Peter De Kock has worked as a Director of Photography on numerous documentaries, features, commercials and video clips. In addition to his work as cinematographer, De Kock directed music videos and commercials. *The Hands of Che Guevara* is his first feature length documentary.

Nick Doob has been director, cinematographer and editor on numerous award-winning films, including four nominated for Oscars, and the Oscar-winning *From Mao to Mozart*. He has received seven grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and is a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures. He directed *Down from the Mountain* with DA Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus and *Elaine Stritch at Liberty*, which won an Emmy. In 2000 he won an Emmy as a producer on *American High*, the acclaimed verité TV series. For HBO, he co-directed *A Boy's Life* with Rory Kennedy. Doob has shot a number of Pennebaker-Hegedus films, including *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* (1973), *The War Room* (1993), *Moon Over Broadway* (1997), *Only the Strong Survive* (2002), and co-directed with Chris Hegedus *Al Franken: God Spoke*.

David Emanuele is an editor at NBC Universal News, including the programs *Dateline* and *The Today Show*. He previously worked on such films as *Three Sister's Searching for a Cure*, *Deadline*, and *Gay Sex in the 70's*. He edited *Meeting Resistance* (2007).

Brett Ingram's short documentaries and animated films have won thirty awards collectively, screening at more than 150 festivals and cinema venues internationally. Ingram's first documentary feature, *Monster Road*, won sixteen awards (including "Best Documentary" at the 2004 Slamdance Film Festival) and screened at more than eighty festivals and cinema venues internationally before premiering on Sundance Channel in 2005. In 2007, he was awarded a Fellowship in Filmmaking from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He teaches filmmaking in the Department of Broadcasting and Cinema at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Sean Fine and Andrea Nix Fine have been producing, directing and shooting documentaries for a decade. Academy Award-nominees, they have worked in over thirty countries, from dangerous war zones to the Arctic Circle, to bring unknown human stories to the screen. Sean Fine received an Emmy Award for his acclaimed documentary, *The Pigeon Murders*. Fine has directed and shot some of National Geographic's most provocative documentary series: *World Diaries*, *Taboo*, and *Lockdown*. Fine has also produced, shot and directed stories for ABC News Nightline and The Discovery Channel. Andrea Nix Fine has produced, directed and written films for National Geographic on the world's most remote cultures and scientific explorations, from Inuit hunting rituals in Greenland to Nile croc research in the swamps of Botswana. She was a key producer on *Songs From the Source*, a documentary celebrating the musical roots of Peter Gabriel's Real World record label. The Fines premiered their most recent documentary feature *War/Dance* at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, and won the Best Documentary Director award.

Christie George is the Sales and Broadcast Manager for Women Making Movies. Christie curated and released *The Girls Project*, WMM's series celebrating girls' lives around the world, is now responsible for the organization's sales and marketing efforts for the theatrical, broadcast and ancillary markets. She has represented WMM at festivals worldwide and has served on juries for the Media that Matters Film Festival, the Denver International Film Festival and the IACC Film.

Sturla Gunnarsson is one of Canada's most prolific filmmakers. He has directed feature films, television dramas and documentaries all over the world, which have won a multitude of awards including Emmy, Genie and Gemini Awards, the Prix Italia, the Prix Villes de Cannes and an Oscar nomination. Feature films include the comedy, *Rare Birds*, starring William Hurt, Andy Jones and Molly Parker and the Bombay epic, *Such A Long Journey*. Gunnarsson's documentaries include the cinema verite classic *Final Offer* and the post-apartheid love story *Gerrie & Louise*.

Jon Gustafsson was born and raised in Iceland. He studied filmmaking in Manchester, England, and directing and acting at the California Institute of the Arts. He has directed feature length films, documentaries, music videos, short films and theatre shows in Iceland and Canada. His latest film is the feature length documentary *Wrath of Gods*. Some of his other projects include *Kanadiana* (feature) and *The Importance Of Being Icelandic* (documentary for CBC Newsworld), several stage shows, music videos and television commercials.

Linda Hattendorf has been working in the New York documentary community for more than a decade. She edited the award-winning documentary *7th Street*, directed by Josh Pais; Julia Pimsleur's *Brother Born Again*; Christina Lundberg's *On the Road Home: A Spiritual Journey Guided by Remarkable Women*, Nancy

Recant's *Jin Shin Jyutsu*, and Danny Schechter's *In Debt We Trust*. She was Associate Editor on Frontline's *The Choice '96*, and on Barbara Kopple's *Bearing Witness*; Contributing Editor on POV's *American Aloha: Hula Beyond Hawaii*; a cameraperson on William Greaves' *Symbiopsychotaxiplasm Take 2 1/2*, and a researcher on the Ken Burns series *The West*.

Chris Hegedus was awarded the 2002 Directors Guild of America Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Documentaries and the International Documentary Association Award for Distinguished Feature Film for *Startup.com* (produced by DA Pennebaker and co-directed with Jehane Noujaim). Hegedus and DA Pennebaker have partnered on a host of acclaimed films, including 1998's *Moon Over Broadway* and 1994's *The War Room*, which received an Academy Award nomination for Best Documentary and won the National Board of Review's D.W. Griffith Award. Most recently Hegedus and co-director Nick Doob released theatrically *Al Franken: God Spoke*, about the transformation of political satirist Al Franken.

Cynthia Hill grew up in Pink Hill, a small town in Eastern North Carolina where many of her family members, friends, and neighbors farmed tobacco. Hill moved to New York City in the mid 90's and began her production career working on health education media. For four years she worked as an editor and producer at a post-production facility whose clients included MTV, PBS, Lifetime, Nickelodeon, and many others. Hill moved back to North Carolina and now works on her own films. Her work has broadcast nationally on PBS and includes *February One*, *Tobacco Money Feeds My Family* and *The Guestworker*.

Daniel Karslake's first documentary film is *For the Bible Tells Me So*. Prior to this film, Karslake was an award-winning producer for the highly acclaimed newsmagazine *In the Life*, which garnered him an Emmy nomination. Mr. Karslake is also founding partner of The Atticus Group, Inc., a New York-based production company dedicated to reinventing traditional art forms and promoting discussion across a wide range of contemporary issues.

John Knapich has been a film editor, writer, and director for twenty years. He has edited documentaries for NFL Films, Lifetime and Fox Television (where he won an Emmy for daytime children's programming) and has edited featurette film trailers at Miramax Films.

Jason Kohn is a first-time director from New York. At twenty-three he left Errol Morris's office to make the feature documentary *Manda Bala*. In the course of producing this film he received the Sundance Documentary Fund grant and a Mortimer-Hayes Fellowship.

Ross McElwee started producing and directing documentaries in 1976. His body of work includes five feature-length documentaries as well as several shorter films, most of them shot in his homeland of the South. His work has played nationally in arthouse theaters and has been broadcast on Cinemax and PBS. McElwee is a visiting filmmaker at Harvard University and has been awarded fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Rex Miller has been a documentary and editorial photographer for the past 18 years. He has made two feature documentary films, *I'm Walkin': A Journey Through Parchman* and *SOMAY KU: A Uganda Tennis Story*.

Paola Mendoza is a director, producer and actor. Most recently she co-helmed the award-winning documentary *Autumn's Eyes. Still Standing*, a documentary about her grandmother's quest to rebuild her life after Hurricane Katrina, premiered at Full Frame. Most recently she produced *Without the King*, winner of the Special Grand Jury Prize at HotDocs. As an actor, she starred in and co-created the Sundance 2007 Grand Jury Prize winning film *Padre Nuestro*.

Taylor Neary began her career as an actor in theater, film and television. Originally from New York City, she moved to Los Angeles to attend USC's film school, graduating with a BA in cinema/television production. After film school Taylor focused almost exclusively on writing independent, feature-length screenplays including *Elixir*, *Minors* and *Sex*. Taylor has also written and directed several short films including *Jenny's Secret* and *Aaron*. *Liquid Vinyl* is her first feature film.

DA Pennebaker is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of cinema verite filmmaking. D A Pennebaker made his filmmaking debut with the 1953 short *Daybreak Express*. In 1959, Pennebaker joined Drew Associates, a group of filmmakers dedicated to furthering the use of film in journalism. Together, they produced such landmark films as *Primary*, *Crisis*, and *Jane*. In the 60s, Pennebaker's portrait of Bob Dylan, *Don't Look Back*, and *Monterey Pop*, starring Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix, were two of the earliest films featuring real-life drama to have a successful theatrical distribution. In 1977, the filmmaker met and began collaborating with his partner Chris Hegedus and they have produced numerous films together, earning a number of Primetime Emmy awards, the D.W. Griffith Award for Best Documentary of the Year and an Academy Award nomination.

Julia Reichert has been an independent filmmaker since 1970. With her partner, James Klein, she made many innovative films, including *Growing Up Female*, the first documentary about women from a feminist perspective; *Union Maids*, one of the first oral history films; *Methadone: An American Way of Dealing*, which challenged government policies on heroin addiction; and *Seeing Red*, a documentary film about American communists which earned them their second Academy Award nomination. She is a founder of New Days Films, a cooperative of filmmakers who do their own distribution. She co-produced the acclaimed documentary *Personal Belongings*, directed by Steven Bognar, and the feature film *The Dream Catcher*, directed by Ed Radtke. She and Bognar also made the film *A Lion in the House*, which debuted at the Sundance Film Festival and aired on PBS.

Michael Skolnik has directed a number of documentary films including *Without the King*, a film about the last ruling monarch in Africa, King Mswati III of Swaziland; *Lockdown USA*, which follows Russell Simmons and his quest to end New York State's Rockefeller Drug Laws; *Hooked: The Legend of Demetrius "Hook" Mitchell*, a film about one of the greatest playground basketball legends to ever play the game; and *La Esquina Caliente*, a documentary about the baseball games between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cuban National Team.

Cynthia Wade is a NYC-based documentary filmmaker. In 2008, she won an Academy Award for her film *Freeheld*, which also won a Special Jury Prize at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. Wade directed and shot the award-winning HBO documentary *Shelter Dogs*, which was broadcast in seven countries, as well as the 1999 Cinemax Reel Life documentary *Grist For The Mill*. Wade was co-producer/principal cinematographer for the 1998 PBS documentary *Taken In: The Lives of America's Foster Children*, which was awarded a Columbia-DuPont Award for Excellence in Journalism.

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