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### Dziadziu: A Walk with my grandfather

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**DZIADZIU: A WALK WITH MY GRANDFATHER**

**BY**

**PAUL V. CHAPLO**

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM  
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES  
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

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Charles Werberig, Thesis Board Chairperson  
Professor  
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences  
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

Malcolm Spaul, Thesis Board Member  
Associate Professor and Chairman, Film/Video Department  
School of Photographic Arts & Sciences  
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York

Morgan Wesson, Thesis Board Member  
Independent Documentary Filmmaker  
and Film Archivist, George Eastman House/International Museum of Photography  
Rochester, New York

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Paul V. Chaplo  
28 Walcott Street  
New York Mills, New York 13417

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                       |    |
|-----------------------|----|
| BACKGROUND. . . . .   | 1  |
| PREPARATION . . . . . | 3  |
| PRODUCTION . . . . .  | 5  |
| EDITING . . . . .     | 10 |
| INFLUENCES . . . . .  | 16 |
| CONCLUSION. . . . .   | 21 |
| SOURCES. . . . .      | 22 |

### APPENDICES:

- APPENDIX A: THESIS PROPOSAL
- APPENDIX B: TECHNICAL NOTES
- APPENDIX C: EQUIPMENT LIST
- APPENDIX D: COMPUTER-BASED TAPE LOG
- APPENDIX E: TAPE LABEL FROM DATABASE
- APPENDIX F: EDIT DECISION LIST
- APPENDIX G: EXPENSE SPREADSHEET

## VIDEO INDEX

This volume is accompanied by one 3/4" format videocassette containing the complete video **DZIADZIU: A WALK WITH MY GRANDFATHER**. Please view and listen to the video *prior* to reading the report on its making.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I particularly enjoyed the challenges and support of those persons who dialogued with me during the process of creating this thesis, as the oral tradition of education is to me most meaningful. Through discussion, I discovered a personal context and viewpoint which enabled me to face the twenty hours of videotape and distill one hour of essence through editing. My full appreciation of each relationship is only touched upon by this blanket credit.

Individual thanks to several essential elements in the success of this thesis:

The teachers who accepted my request to be on my thesis board, Charles Werberig, Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology, and Malcolm Spaul, Associate Professor at Rochester Institute of Technology. Charles Werberig worked closely with me even through the summer vacation months, viewing rushes and helping me to grow as a videomaker with his observations, questions, and support. Malcolm Spaul provided much of the practical knowledge that has made me competent as a videomaker.

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My soundperson and sole crew member, Sheau Jing Lee who spent weeks recording on-location and days logging cases of videotape. I will always remember Sheau Jing seated beneath the old enamel kitchen table recording sound during the check-writing sequence. I so admire her that we are now married.

Dirk Large helped tremendously with spontaneous lectures, often illustrated on paper napkins, which aided in problem solving. His news of our mutual friends and many stories made me feel connected to something larger.

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To my Grandfather, Mr. John Kielbasa  
who first taught me photography.

*The only person who never makes a mistake  
is the one who doesn't do anything .*

- John Kielbasa



## BACKGROUND

*I wish to return home, once again, to remember the intimacy of my old room, the mystery of the cellar. I wish to hear the voices again, my Grandfather's stories, the call "time to get up." To see my Grandmother paring apples and the warm window light across the snow at night. Let me remember the mystery and joy I felt, a living dream, a reverie.*

To return home is a mixed basket of experiences. There is mystery in being back in a space so significant in a primal way, joy in the rediscovery of once familiar sights and smells, and sorrow in the harshness of the present conditions -- in this case the death of my Grandmother and the aging of my Grandfather.

By returning home, I hoped to learn something, to see something missed before but now perceivable -- perhaps clues to the forces that shaped me. Upon acknowledgement of the physical deterioration of my Grandfather, I felt an urgency to return to what seemed a vanishing world.

Having been raised in an extended family, I felt a bond with my Grandfather (or Dziadziu, in Polish) in whose house I was raised. As a boy, I grew up listening to his stories, often while relaxing in the feather comforter of my Grandparents' bed.

Over the years, I have heard each story repeated many times. But the repeated stories did not bore me, much to the opposite, they seemed to sink deeper within me as a source of assurance and intimate familiarity. The inflection and rhythm of my Grandfather's voice was enjoyable in itself,

and the stories were rich enough to provide an occasional new observation by a youth's growing awareness. During my college years, I became more interested in my family background -- who were my ancestors, where did they come from, what did they do for a living, etc. I was looking for clues to my own predilections.

My Grandfather was the most direct link to the past since he participated in raising me and also knew about the family's history. My hope was to capture fragments of his life in the present, and memories through his storytelling. I decided to take another look at my roots and share some of the stories with others through video.

Storytelling interested me far more than the record keeping of genealogy. The directness, humor, and detail of the past events which the stories kept alive through memory and performance were my primary interest. Set in the literalness of the present day, the stories bridged time and gave past happenings a new vitality. In this way, a sense of drama was created which was juxtaposed against the mundane actions of daily life.

The early videos which my Grandfather and I created were composed of a single shot, usually beginning with an in-camera fade-up from black and ending with a fade to black. This approach was similar to that used by filmmaker Georges Melies in his emphasis of mise en scene.<sup>1</sup>

One of my first attempts, **The Last Hunt**, was accepted into the Ithaca Video Festival and subsequently toured the U.S. as part of SONY/A.F.I.'s **Visions of the U.S.** (1985) touring

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<sup>1</sup> Lecture by Charles Werberig, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, Date unknown.

exhibition. The video consisted of a single hand-held shot of my Grandfather telling a hunting story while coffee water was being prepared. **The Last Hunt** was shown at eight prominent museums from coast to coast including the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the National Museum of American Art in Washington D.C., and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in California. Representatives of the American Film Institute indicated that the video was a favorite on the museum tour and that audiences responded to the tape's "warm personal feel."<sup>2</sup> I took this success as an indication of the interest which my style of personal videomaking held for other people and my enthusiasm grew.

## PREPARATION

As I worked more with electronic editing, I saw an opportunity to produce a longer work which would fuse many shots, locations, and stories. I saw my thesis project as the perfect opportunity to successfully complete such a video with my Grandfather (*Dziadziu*) as subject. To gather information for the thesis project, I simply started to spend more time with my Grandfather. I listened to the stories again, took notes when I got ideas, and audiotaped conversations. I asked more questions about family history and was surprised to find such richness. I also borrowed a video camera to record preliminary video footage in a sketch-like manner, and enjoyed seeing the familiarity of my first home appear as a video image during playback in my Rochester apartment. These acts successfully immersed me in the subject and gave me artifacts to bring back to Rochester that served as catalysts for my imagination and interest. I felt that spending time on-location without a camera was valuable in building a stronger rapport with my subject and in stimulating both memories and new ideas.

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Connie Conrow, The American Film Institute, to Adeline K. Chaplo, 3 June 1985, Personal Files of Adeline K. Chaplo, New York Mills, New York.

In video, a fundamental concern is *access*, that is, how will you get your hands on expensive video equipment (see Appendix G: Expense Spreadsheet). As preparation for the eventual reality, I was interested simulating an independent producer's working environment during my thesis work. I minimized my reliance on RIT video facilities and devised a strategy to push myself to make alternative arrangements for equipment access which had a two-pronged approach -- purchase and barter.

I chose to purchase *production* equipment for two reasons: first, I wanted to be able to spend extensive time on location even through the summer months when access is difficult at RIT; and secondly, I planned to use the equipment commercially. Both reasons turned out to be realistic.

I chose to barter for access to *editing* equipment for two reasons: first, I wanted to avoid the debt associated with the financing of such hardware (approximately \$17,000); and secondly, editing was widely available in Rochester at a number of commercial facilities and the Institute. I found that access to editing was more readily available than long-term access to production equipment.

Once I had the video shot, I would definitely be able to find a means to edit the program. Therefore, I placed the priority on acquisition of production equipment. Univisions Video Systems, a local supplier, matched the lowest bid I received for the video camera package and microphone from a New York City supplier.

I presented myself as a startup company which would provide future business, but currently needed a price-break. The effort was successful. The earlier purchase of a VCR (JVC CR-4900U also from Univisions) was a lesson, as I failed to prepare adequately and paid excessively. This time I had more information and succeeded in negotiating to my advantage.

The choice of the 3/4" video format was based on several factors: cost, image quality, and availability. The cost was moderate, image quality was superior to the standard VHS format available at the time, and the fact that 3/4" was the most common acquisition format for T.V. news and corporate video was the most important factor. Editing facilities for 3/4" were common -- a real benefit which made our tape readily compatible with equipment owned by others.

Regarding equipment options, my advice to others interested in producing this type of project is :

1. Purchase production equipment, find editing at school or in post houses.
2. Use a camcorder for simplicity and mobility.
3. Consider a compact, editable format such as Hi-8 (hi-band 8 mm.).
4. Use a separate hand-held microphone so you can mic a subject, even when you pan the camera away to another subject.

## PRODUCTION

I began production alone but soon discovered that I needed help in sound recording and VCR operation -- there were just too many tasks for one person to handle effectively. My friend Sheau Jing Lee volunteered to help. Since Sheau Jing was a business major, I improvised a crash course on sound for video.

Also, we practiced with the production equipment in my Rivernoll apartment to develop a way of working together. Although Sheau Jing lacked a technical background in film/video, she possessed other qualities that I deemed greater: she was committed and she cared about the subject.

When choosing crew, the following may be helpful:

1. Consider compatibility, as you will be spending much time together.
2. Find someone responsive to the subject, rather than just a technical wizard.
3. Provide a shooting schedule and timeline so that the prospective crew can understand the substantial time commitment involved.
4. Practice working together with the actual equipment you will be using before going on-location.

As a team, we spent a great deal of time on location. Much of it was waiting, with the camera on preheat to save battery power. We were like firemen waiting for a call, unable to predict exactly when it might come, always needing to be alert. When the opportunity arrived to shoot, we were ready, and moved quickly. In addition, I felt that the waiting helped us in another way -- we became part of the environment during the wait. We were no longer an intrusion.

At the beginning, we shot a great deal of footage each day on-location. It was a time of learning and adjustment. Part of the learning was growing accustomed to the relationship between the electronic viewfinder image in black & white, and the tape playback in color. I was particularly concerned with developing an eye for exposure, as underexposed video appears lifeless and overexposed video "blooms" when it washes out. Also, overexposed video above 100 IRE's can cause a buzz on the audio track when RF modulated.<sup>3</sup> I soon acquired a feel for exposure which provided a richness that I enjoyed. Also, in the beginning of the shoot, I had little preconception of what the tape would be like when completed. Later, anything might fit in the context of the edit. There were possibilities in even mundane acts such as the making of morning tea or the taking of pills.

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<sup>3</sup> Lecture by Malcolm Spaul, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, Date unknown.

During production, I viewed rushes both on-location and in my apartment back in Rochester. The continual feedback from this regimen of viewing enabled me to make adjustments in my camerawork, and allowed the production team to work out problems which occurred -- particularly in the early stages of working together.

Most of the problems concerned communications during shooting -- how to indicate intentions; how to move together; how to signal approaching tape end, dying battery charge, wind noise, etc. During production, these communications with the soundperson are of great practical importance.

Sheau Jing and I alternated with the responsibility of carrying the VCR. At first, I preferred to have her carry it, believing that I was more effective in my camera work without the extra burden. But, as we became familiar with typical audio level settings and shooting situations, I began to carry the VCR, and we became more mobile as a team. I liked being able to move the bulk of equipment all at once and having Sheau Jing concentrate on her microphone work.

Using our arrangement, Sheau Jing carried the mic in one hand and a coil of mic cable in her other which could be paid-out when I moved away quickly. This worked most effectively. Most of the concerns regarding our working together were answered best by time and experience. Over the weeks of working together, an intuitive way of working developed that was superior to our conscious "job description" approach. We filled in for each other as needed.

During production, Charles Werberig and I met to view rushes and talk about possibilities. As the dialogue with Charles grew, I started to make decisions that gave the video direction. As a result of these decisions, I began to visualize an edit plan and sense the need for particular footage. Thus, the dialogue affected the shooting which was still in progress. For example, I saw the need to

incorporate environmental shots into the video and to do it in an organic way. So, I started to look for subtle ways to accomplish this goal. Also, I stopped using a tripod and opted to hand-hold the camera all the time.

I preferred the mobility, especially the ability to make small changes in position, experienced while hand-holding the camera. I also felt that the differing characteristics of tripod shots and hand-held shots contrasted too greatly and would adversely affect the overall texture of the video if intercut in editing.

**Paul Chaplo:** I like hand-held because I'm so much more mobile -- I find a tripod frustrating . . . I find that it ties me down.

**Charles Werberig:** . . . There is a quality of movement of the [hand-held] camera that is consistent with the character of your Grandfather. . .

. . . this is something that I'm quibbling about just to make a point -- that is, what it is that disturbs me about the camera being on tripod -- it's too static, and conveyed an entirely different feeling about my relationship with your Grandfather.<sup>4</sup>

I consider hand-held camerawork as an opportunity for expression. The movements are marks which affect the way in which the viewer experiences the subject. The handheld camera offers the possibility to be spontaneous and gestural. On a tripod, the marks take on a mechanical quality. I prefer the gesture and human presence possible in hand-held camerawork.

The production period was the most concentrated period of shooting in my career and was fruitful in several ways. The most beneficial was a sharpening of my hand-held camera skills, which soon took on a satisfying sureness. It seemed that I was in the right place at the right time, and getting it all on tape.

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<sup>4</sup> Conversation with Charles Werberig, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, Date unknown.



Getting my "chops" for camerawork was only one aspect of shooting that I enjoyed. Another was the process of getting attuned to the subject and environment so that upcoming action of interest could be anticipated. I am excited when I can anticipate action and immediately start to shoot. Signs of upcoming action such as a ringing doorbell, a holiday, or simply knowledge of the subject's daily rhythms can provide cues to roll tape.

Once action is taking place, I decide instinctively where to position myself, preferably to close to the action -- even in the midst of it. I am willing to talk from behind the viewfinder, and even leave the camera completely behind, if the situation warrants, to become a participant.

I worked in a blend of both documentary and dramatic traditions, feeling free to step from behind the viewfinder to influence environment and action. I discovered through experiment, however, that I was most happy with a minimum of interference in the scene.

Action which I staged completely usually struck me as too unnatural (perhaps due to the use of untrained talent and incongruity with the otherwise "documentary" nature of the videos). On the other hand, when I acted as catalyst for action such as prompting with a question to obtain a response on a certain subject within the location I deemed suitable, I was most pleased. An effective example is my prompting Dziadziu to speak about his wife's death while he was writing a check for her doctor bills. I felt that I had maintained an integrity found in the subject.

As I spent more time at Dziadziu's home and continued my dialogue with Charles Werberig, I became increasingly aware of my family's socioeconomic background as Polish-American mill workers. In the videotape rushes, I heard the stories of strikes, working conditions, and child labor. Yet, I wanted to produce a "personal" video about my Grandfather rather than an "informational" video about an example of an old Polish-American mill worker. I'm sure that the

video functions on several levels and may be of interest as a document of local history, but my priority was on personal viewpoint. Keeping with this approach, I decided to keep the emphasis on my Grandfather while keeping outside references to a minimum. If background information were to be included, it would have to emerge from the subject in his environment.

We were videotaping on-location practically every weekend, usually leaving Rochester late Friday afternoon and returning late Sunday night. We lived with Dziadziu during this time, sharing meals and celebrations such as birthdays. On several occasions we stayed for about a week.

## EDITING

We had shot about 20 hours of field tape when I began to search for a means to bring it all together. My objective was to find an organic way to do this, one that emerged from the personal approach I was using. That is, I wanted to discover a structure that was natural, even present (or hidden) in the footage, rather than resort to voice-over or excessive manipulation through editing. And yet, I did not want a purely chronological assembly of shots.

As a starting point, I decided to log the camera originals. To facilitate the logging process, I created a computer-based "log sheet" using the Macintosh Plus computer and Helix database software. The database I designed was based on a conventional log sheet form widely used in the film and video industry. The purpose was to streamline and standardize the logging process to save time and ensure legibility, knowing well that we would be logging tens of hours of videotape.

The completed database and system folder was stored on 3.5" 800K double-sided, double-density diskettes for portability. Each disk had room for logging approximately ten 20 minute videotapes. Thus the tapes could be logged shot by shot on-location or at my apartment and the logs saved on disk. After logging, each disk was copied to a second disk as a back-up in case the original were ever damaged. The log sheets (actually, database records) were then printed using an Imagewriter dot-matrix printer. <sup>5</sup>

The database application, which I named **TAPE LOG** had several features including automatic shot duration calculation based on shot begin and end times; automatic shot numbering; and a lookup function that created a complementary adhesive label. The label bore the tape number, location, and description to place on the videotape for easy identification. <sup>6</sup>

In this way, the twenty hours of videotape we produced was well organized by the time we moved into the editing stage. **TAPE LOG** saved us a great deal of time in the editing process by allowing quick access to shot descriptions and rapid I.D. of videocassettes. I often made additional handwritten notes on the log sheets as the editing process progressed, usually indicating edit "in" and "out" points for shots destined to be included on the edit master.

With the tapes logged, I entered the editing process by saturating myself with the raw footage, viewed over and over again. Soon, I began to have favorites and others that seemed essentials. The favorites generally had the most animation in Dziadziu's performance and subject matter that I personally valued; the essentials usually displayed important aspects of Dziadziu's life experience that I wanted the audience to be aware of, based solely on my own sense of fairness.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix D for an example of TAPE LOG output hard copy.

<sup>6</sup> See Appendix E for an example of TAPE LOG videotape label.

I showed unedited field tapes to Charles Werberig, and we talked about our responses. The conversations which I most valued were audiotaped, word-processed and included in my journal. Charles' questions and comments helped me in shaping the statement I was creating and in developing an editing strategy.

Here are excerpts edited from our talks:

**Charles Werberig:** What are you going to do... like when he's in front of the mill and he talks about when he worked there when he was younger and he also describes what goes on in a mill ... what's the character of your tape going to be -- are you going to show shots of the interior of the mill, old photographs; or is this going to be primarily your Grandfather talking to you, to the camera, to the audience?

**Paul Chaplo:** I would prefer not to go back to old photographs. I think that I want to keep it personal and not so much of an information tape about the history of the mills in Upstate New York. See...I want to keep it about him. It would interest me to show more of the area ...just the way it looks now.

**Charles:** ... I'll tell you the reason for the quandary: is that your Grandfather is very interesting subject... and it might be, you know, destructive to cut away -- it would make it too commercial, too traditional, too conventional -- but maybe once or twice [cut-away] because what he's talking about is so very interesting that you simply can't be, you can't remain abstract ... you see, you can't just stay away from what it is he's talking about... you might want or have to [cut away], but only occasionally as I say only twice at the most. I really don't know -- it's one of those situations, as I prefaced this conversation, where it would have to be tried.

**Paul:** I don't like interviews -- but he is an old man, and alot of what he's about is remembering and telling stories -- see?.

**Charles:** Yes, that's why I think your tape does transcend being just an interview -- because he is telling stories -- he's not responding to you, even though you provoke him by asking questions. I don't perceive it that way -- I don't perceive it as an interview, I perceive it as a man recollecting and in a sense almost speaking to himself. Which is why I think there is that alternative in the way in which you edit this -- is that you may not have to make any external references, just stay with him ... except occasionally, just drift off over the railing. Because I don't get the feeling of it being an interview. And I wonder, and now I'm just talking, not imposing anything on you -- just suggesting -- what I would do ... because of this quality I just described, because your Grandfather is such a strong personality -- maybe you should structure your tape initially just that way and ... look at it. And then see whether maybe you should drift away occasionally.

*Paul:* ... I want to find out if it can hold its own -- just based on that [strength of Dziadziu's personality.] We've identified a quality and some thing that contrasts with it and could be a problem, so that's important.

*Charles:* Yes, it disrupts the character and texture of the rest of your tape.

*Paul:* It's important to me that you have the experience of it [the tape] as storytelling ... and when you spoke about the check writing -- I like that, too. That adds some other quality -- some activity of his. It's a good example of the type of activity I want to include. See, I include those types of details -- you know, what he's going through now.

*Charles:* Yes, that's also an instance, in a much more subtle way than I had initially proposed in which you are doing the same thing -- in that the check writing overlaps with the storytelling character of the film by relating that practical activity with what he's talking about -- about doctors. So instead of cutting away to a shot of the doctor, it's inherent in what he's doing. So, you're doing that without going to the mill in the background. This is an extreme subtlety. Again, I'm not talking about the way to go about doing it.

*Paul:* It's like a passageway ...

*Charles:* It works its way in as a part of the normal activity. He's bitching about doctors and bills and so forth -- here he's writing a check at the same time and then you come in for a very tight close-up of that activity. And at the same time, the use of the magnifying glass in writing the check is sort of self-explanatory -- older people have problems with eyesight -- but then later on that is elaborated on and you see how... you're told how deficient his eyesight really is, and that this is not just a normal activity of old age to your Grandfather -- he really has a serious condition and that adds another dimension to the literalness of the statement -- it expands it, just as the check writing does. But the mill becomes too literal -- the mill in the background.

*Paul:* That's the extreme...

*Charles:* Yes, it's like CBS.<sup>7</sup>

When the time came to edit, I chose to barter with one of my commercial clients for access. I exchanged video services in return for editing time. **DZIADZIU, A WALK WITH MY GRANDFATHER** was edited on a cuts-only, 3/4" format system which was composed of the following: Sony VO-5800, VO-5850, and RM-440. Titles were generated on a Mindset II character generator using Video Titler software.

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<sup>7</sup> From conversations with Charles Werberig, Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York, Dates unknown.

I began to edit sequences which appealed to me such as the Halloween sequence, the check writing sequence, the rose garden (not included in the final edit), the church story, and so forth. Although the segments were strong, my overall impression was one of fragments without a common thread to unify the edit.

About that time, Sheau Jing and I went back to New York Mills. That's when we taped the walk to the post office. It is a simple sequence of Dziadziu walking to the post-office, mailing a letter and returning. But it is one of those sequences that arrive only after months of waiting and shooting that seems to tie everything together. In this case, I found my solution to the problem of finding an organic structure for the edit.

During the walk, so many of the things that my Grandfather talked about in his stories could be seen in their present condition. In this way, I found the references needed to show what he was talking about -- in a manner that was simple and direct.

In looking back, even when we had it, I didn't recognize it. I wracked my brains with ideas to bring the tape unity. I considered narration, sections with titles to stand more individually, and even taking my chances on a patchwork assembly of stories with cutaways. After exhausting the possibilities, I took another look at the walk to the post-office and realized its value. That's when the rough edit was made, and it was two hours in length.

The solution to my quandary was to punctuate the walk with stories. The stories expanded on the locations visited during the walk, and the walk provided literal references for the stories in a manner that fit my approach. During the process of refining the edit, we arrived at a one-hour version of the video. The reduction in running time was achieved by removing stories which did not work in the context of the walk sequence, and by trimming those that remained to keep

momentum in the finished tape. My decision to keep my Grandfather as the center of interest played a role in determining length. Anything over an hour became tedious to watch.

By that time, I experienced a burn-out from watching the footage. Seeing my aged Grandfather's image over & over during the editing simply overwhelmed me, and I set the tape aside and began to work as a producer for Bausch & Lomb on a freelance basis.

When I viewed the tape about a year and a half later, things had changed. My Grandfather's physical condition had worsened and his image on video, recorded when he was more mobile, took on the quality of a fond memory. Secondly, I had a fresh impression of what I had done, and found the rough edit (one-hour version) quite a rich viewing experience. I had a clear idea of what was needed to complete the tape. For example, I felt that the walking sequences were too long and boring -- seemingly leftovers from the process of originally editing the separate sequences. The final cut (44 minutes) was more austere and I felt that all extraneous footage was successfully removed, resulting in an final tape that contained only the necessary.

The decision to make a personal video is visually manifested in the edited tape. The devices used in "informational " programming are intentionally avoided: cutaways and voice-over are utilized as little as possible; file footage, "mood" music (other than that present in the ambient sound), and on-camera interviews with outside "experts" are avoided. I made these decisions to place the emphasis provided by camerawork and editing on one subject -- Dziadziu.

In editing, I did include footage that helped to provide some background information to help the viewer, by answering questions such as "Why does Dziadziu have trouble walking?" or "How does he make a living?" But such shots were second in priority to those of the stories and the present day occurrences. I included these 'informational' shots only where I felt that they worked

on other levels. A good example is the story of the "payloader accident."

I found the time away from the rough cut version of the video was of great value. It enabled me to clear my head of all the rushes I viewed and memorized. I was able to get a fresh impression of what I had done.

## INFLUENCES

The earliest films which I have viewed are the Lumiere films such as **Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory** (1895), **Arrival of Conventioneers** (1895), and **Coronation of Nicholas II** (1896) which record found subjects on-location using available light. Louis Lumiere and his international network of camera people took advantage of a portable film camera to explore uncontrolled subject matter. The early Lumiere films manifest the documentarists' impulse to take the camera to the action. This contrasts with Edison's strategy to bring the subject to his bulky camera which was permanently housed in the Black Maria studio. As a videomaker, I find that I am drawn to location work much more strongly than studio work. In this way, I share Lumiere's desire to record the subject in its environment.

Dziga Vertov's film **Man with a Movie Camera**, which I viewed first at Syracuse University, excited me as evidence of the inventiveness possible with the moving image. The vitality of the film and the feeling of exploration with a mobile camera and creative editing was a strong motivating force at an early point in my interest in film and video. As a theorist, Vertov anticipated direct cinema concerns and called for a cinema independent of literature, drama, and music; and an organic approach which acknowledged the complex interrelationships and interdependency between



shooting and editing.<sup>8</sup>

I have often thought of Robert Flaherty -- particularly, his way of working. During the filming of **Nanook**, Flaherty lived with the Eskimo family which he filmed, and went so far as to process film in an on-location lab, and even edit in the environment of his subject. Flaherty's need to see rushes and work with footage in editing while in the process of shooting is one which I share. In this way, the shooting and the editing begin to work together coherently, and the results of experiments may be assessed and either incorporated or discarded in the next day of shooting and editing. As a result, my shooting ratio was 26:1 for **Dziadziu**. Flaherty's was 25:1 for **Nanook**.

Also, Flaherty's strongest work was based on subjects which were most familiar to him. **Nanook** drew upon his experiences from boyhood traveling with his father in Northern Canada (his father was a mining prospector).<sup>9</sup> This previous knowledge of a subject which was gained before he brought his camera to film **Nanook**, clearly served him well in subsequent filming. **Nanook** exhibits an empathy with the subject which no "run and gun" news team can achieve, if only because their schedule does not allow it. Taking the time to know a subject's complexity is an important aspect of my working method. I like to spend time visiting without a camera.

I claim the pragmatic innovation which typifies the American filmmaker as my heritage. Robert Flaherty's innovative camerawork and unconventional editing in **Nanook**, parallels my need to keep things interesting by trying new things in each production, even at the risk of questionable results. Thus, I continually experiment during shooting and even practice camera moves in my apartment. This process is intuitive and exciting.

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), pp. 5-9.

<sup>9</sup> Erik Barnouw, Documentary, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), pg. 33.

In contemporary usage, I consider the term *documentary* to describe a *style* which is utilized by film and video makers. The style includes characteristics of films shot in uncontrolled environments such as the use of hand-held camera, long takes, use of available lighting, use of wide-angle/close-range cinematography, and unpredictable plot. The style may be utilized in both fiction and non-fiction film -- for example, **Wargame** (Peter Watkins, 1960) and **No Lies** (Mitchell Block, 1973) are fiction films which use the documentary style. Well researched and planned by Peter Watkins, **Wargame** uses the feeling of actuality in the documentary style to show the effects of a nuclear attack on Great Britain.

To discriminate between the controlled type of documentary filmmaking, and the uncontrolled variety which I consider as my roots, I prefer to use the term *direct cinema* for the latter. Direct cinema is the act of filming real people in real situations. In direct cinema, the filmmaker is an observer attempting not to alter the situations he witnesses, recognizing shooting and editing as part of a continuous process, rather than independent functions. This approach "is an attempt to strip away the accumulated conventions of traditional cinema in the hope of discovering a reality that eludes other forms of filmmaking and reporting."<sup>10</sup>

The direct cinema filmmakers have been the greatest influences on my work. The patriarchs of direct cinema: Richard Leacock, David and Albert Maysles, Donn Pennebaker, Wolf Koenig and Ralph Kroiter, and to a lesser extent, Frederick Wiseman have all provided significant viewing experiences. Their films have impressed me with views of the world which were complex and often unresolved. After years of watching prime time television and Hollywood feature films, the directness of the direct cinema films was enjoyable. In the direct cinema films, I found a presentation more open to interpretation, a confrontation with the unexpected which more closely resembled my life experience than the neat plots and the statements of other genre.

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Mamber, Cinema Verite in America, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), pg. 2.

In **Dziadziu: A Portrait of My Grandfather**, I depart from the practices of direct cinema in several ways. First, I participate in action as Grandson and cameraman, and even step from behind the viewfinder to enter the scene. Direct cinema asks that the maker remain an objective observer. Also, I have a greater interest in the ability of the media to extract, interpret, and express rather than attempting to provide an unbiased record of events. I ask questions to elicit responses, and respond personally on-camera but prefer not to conduct structured interviews. Examples of a similar presence of the film/video maker may be found in the work of Jean Rouch and Jon Alpert.

Jon Alpert is one of the videomakers whose work I admire. His work is politically oriented yet exhibits a personal approach which is appealing. I remember seeing a special segment during the national news in which he revisited Vietnam and investigated an orphanage full of Amer-Asian kids fathered by American servicemen. I believe this was a Special Segment report containing an excerpt from **Vietnam: Picking Up the Pieces** which Alpert produced in 1977 combined with new material. One element which I liked was his spontaneous verbal responses which appeared on the soundtrack and were recorded at the time of the videotaping.

Independent videomakers such as Jon Alpert produced videos used by political groups as catalysts for change. Others produced personal videos in a diary-like style. I started my involvement with video in the personal genre, focusing on my family and videotaping events which were personal, yet interesting to audiences outside my family. **Passage** (1982) was one of my early efforts in this vein which depicted of the interaction of my brother and Grandfather following the shooting of a deer and its subsequent butchering on the kitchen table.

I do agree with cinema verite's tenet to present events in their complexity without providing simplistic conclusions. Also, I prefer to avoid voice-over or narration explaining the events for the audience, allowing the audience to reach their own conclusions or remain baffled. I respect direct

cinema's departure from the writing tradition of journalism. The representatives of journalism's tradition tend to present themselves as being successful in reducing complex events and issues to brief statements muttered by a commentator with a trained voice. The journalistic approach to film and video uses words as the basis for structuring the visuals. I prefer to work more visually, and as a result, scenes in my work usually run longer (as they do in direct cinema) than their journalistic counterparts.

My interest in film and video history has been driven by the desire to understand the unique properties which these media possess, and to examine how the maker uses these elements to extract, interpret, and express both subject and self. I am aware of the shaping of a statement through the medium. Although the work I create is shot in an uncontrolled environment, I do make adjustments during shooting I consider to be decisions based on my knowledge of the medium.

The complexity of film and video media and the temptation to catalog facts on the development and use of the technology has often led to an undue emphasis on the machinery of film and video, rather than an exploration of the expressive options which a practitioner faces in making a statement. Another pitfall is that continual claims are made about the understanding of film and video by those whose criteria come from the areas of literature, painting, and still photography. Unfortunately, the modalities of these mediums do not necessarily transpose well to the visual/aural moving image.

In the course of my education, the film and video makers and their work mentioned above have influenced my approach to the moving image. Each offered a chance to compare and contrast my own style with theirs in a critical manner, and to learn something new that I could incorporate or avoid in my own work.

I believe that video has its own unique properties, apart from its ability to function in a film-like manner. Perhaps the live telecast and the satellite teleconference best utilize the potential of video to the fullest degree and indicate a distinct quality which is unlike any other medium. I believe that video's nature is one which emphasizes a feeling of immediacy, of the event happening now, as its distinguishing characteristic.

## CONCLUSION

There was a peculiar timeliness in the completion of **DZIADZIU: A WALK WITH MY GRANDFATHER**. Just after I completed the final cut, he had a leg infection and was admitted to the hospital. When he returned, he needed the support of a walker to move about his house, and discontinued his walks to the post-office. Upon writing these final thesis words, I realized that I had fulfilled a mission that I had set out on several years ago, spurred by a Bill Parker workshop -- to return to subject matter that I valued.

And so I feel that this thesis project was much more than a 'partial requirement' for my MFA -- it was a return to work of personal importance, and a time to complete a project which takes its place beside the old hand-colored portrait of my Grandfather as one of my favorites.

For the future MFA student hoping to find a sense of renewed value in their work, I strongly recommend a return to subject matter that matters.

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**Appendix A: Thesis Proposal**

Dziadziu: A Portrait of My Grandfather

(working title)

by

Paul V. Chaplo

Thesis Proposal

Master of Fine Arts Degree

School of Photographic Arts and Sciences

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, New York 14623

November, 1985

Thesis Board Members

Charles Werberig, Chairman *Chas.*  
Professor  
Film/Video Department  
Rochester Institute of Technology

Malcolm Spaul *M.S.*  
Chairman  
Film/Video Department  
Rochester Institute of Technology

Morgan Wesson  
Filmmaker/Film Archivist  
George Eastman House/  
International Museum of Photography  
Rochester, New York

Approved by Graduate Committee:

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Chairman

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Date



## Purpose:

To use the moving image (picture and sound) to create a portrait of my Grandfather.

## Background:

My earlier video work such as The Last Hunt (1982) touched upon the subject of my Grandfather or "Dziadziu", in Polish. These early pieces were short - six minutes or less, and shot/edited in a direct, sketch-like manner. The choice of my Grandfather as subject was primarily based on personal value as it is for Dziadziu - now with an urgency exaggerated by his age of eighty-five years. Dziadziu will be a statement on my experience of his life and our relationship.

## Procedure:

Pre-production will include interviewing my Grandfather and others who remember him, and scouting locations which may be used during production. Also, I will consult my own memory for significant events, places, etc. that may be included in the project. Ideas stemming from this research will be recorded as notes, storyboards, or video-sketches.

Production will involve videotaping, audiotaping, and perhaps, filming an enormous amount of "field" footage. This material will then be viewed, logged, and edited during the post-production process.

At present, I am seriously considering the presentation of the work in an installation environment. The decision will be finalized as the project progresses toward post-production...

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## APPENDIX B: TECHNICAL NOTES

As objects, pieces of video equipment do not appeal to me. Unlike a film camera, a video camera does not offer me familiar character or any assuring smells -- even after years of use. I think of video equipment best as transparent -- a means to an end. I do, however, value familiarity with the controls on my camera on a functional level. I am able to make adjustments by feel, without removing my eye from the viewfinder. Being able to white balance, increase or decrease gain, and adjust iris *while tape is rolling* are useful skills. Such craft is demanded by shooting in uncontrolled environments, and is rewarding in terms of a sense of mastery as a camera person.

I find that image quality degrades above + 9 dB gain when using the Sony M3A camera. Also, auto-iris is unbearable, so I disconnect the one on my camera. I like wide angle settings on my 12X zoom lens (i.e. 9 mm) and opted for a lens without a built in 2X extender. A fixed focal length, wide angle lens is a viable option for future MFA students looking for a lens for close-range documentary videomaking.

I enjoyed video's ability to provide immediate results. We often rewound tape in the field and viewed shots immediately after shooting. The JVC CR-4900U recorder which we used had "video confidence heads" which allowed *real time* (actually, imperceptibly delayed) monitoring of the recorded video through the viewfinder (or composite video output #1 for external monitor). "Video confidence heads" (or simply "VC heads" ) are a source of assurance when involved in fast-paced recording simply to make sure that you are actually recording video. Also, VC heads are great for trouble shooting. For example, excessive dropout in one batch of tape (SONY) was observed immediately through VC playback and we were able to change to another carton of stock. This saved considerable distress which would have been experienced if we depended on conventional playback at a later time.

## APPENDIX C: EQUIPMENT LIST

### Production

Camera: SONY M3A (3 MF Saticon tube color camera)  
Lens: Fujinon J15 X 9.5 (12X Zoom Lens f/1.8, 9 108mm)  
Recorder: JVC CR-4900U (3/4" portable VCR)  
Videotape: SONY KCS-20BRK, SCOTCH MBR-20S (3/4" format)  
Headphones: Audio Technica ATH-M7 PRO (closed-back design)

### Editing

Play Deck: SONY VO-5800 (3/4" VCR)  
Record Deck: SONY VO-5850 (3/4" VCR)  
Controller: SONY RM-440 (microprocessor controlled, single-event)  
Character Generator: Mindset II with Video Titler software  
Audio Mixer: SHURE FP-42 (stereo)  
Videotape: SONY KCA-60BRK, SCOTCH MBR-60 (3/4" format)

### Choice of Microphone Cable

Mic cables seem unimportant until you come home with a day of rushes that have noise on the soundtrack resulting from physical contact and manipulation of the mic cable. *Microphonics* --- resulting in what is commonly known as "cable handling noise" is a significant problem which must be addressed since cables will be handled all the time during a production like this thesis project. To minimize the effects of microphonics, choose a cable which is designed for applications in which handling will be frequent. I like Canare cable available through Brighton Lights & Applied Audio and other audio suppliers.

DZ REFUGIANS  
START 15:20

|                |                |          |   |  |
|----------------|----------------|----------|---|--|
| 13.0           | 14 18 --       | 15 41    | cont. CU Dz, signals to stop, moves away from cam. walks to dining rm. door to check & returns. MCU Dz move to CU     | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 1 23   | Dz:Such a drag for the co. That's all for now. Just a min. (took a peep). 1925 joined Indep. Citizen's club-political | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   | club. Get candidates,maybe can get gd  |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A | 15:43   |  |
| STOP ROUGH CUT |                |          |   |  |
| 14.0           | 16 41 --       | 17 24    | cont. CU Dz, 16:28 Dz has to sit down, cam on floor,sits on chair ,moves w/paul to bed.                               | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 0 43   | Dz:Herbet Heart running for office,Mayor.Came for assist. Give them something if win. I gotta to sit down Paul.       | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   | P:Want to lie down?Cath yr breath Dz.  |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A |   |  |
| 15.0           | 17 24 --       | 18 24    | cont. cam on floor, wine bottle,dresser and cane hanging from linen closet door knob.                                 | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 1 0    | Dz:They got me Paul. P:It's ok,just relax. Comfortable? Dz:Ya. (Breathes hard).P:How are you doing now. Dz:Better     | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   |  |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A |   |  |
| 16.0           | 18 24 --       | 19 29    | cont.Dz lying on bed. CU feet, pan to CU face with hands raised above head.   | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 1 5    | P:Does that happens often? Dz:No, first time today. P:What is it? Dz:Flutter of the heart.Goes 160/min. I can hear it | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   | even if I don't hold pulse. (Big yawn) |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A |   |  |
| 17.0           | 19 29 --       | 20 46    | cont. Dz on bed. 20:24 move in to closer shot, Dz raises arm for Paul to check pulse.                                 | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 1 17   | P:How are doing now? Dz:Same, don't feel so hot but still pounding. (deep breath)Just taking deep breath & keep it.   | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   | Back to normal.P:Gd,you had me         |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A |   |  |
| 18.0           | 20 46 --       | 21 3     | cont. CU Dz moving tongue.  | Yes                                    |
| INT            | Bedroom        | 0 0 17   | (silence)   | Yes                                    |
| Tape 28        | 12Oct86        | Dziadziu | Excellent. Great light.   |  |
| Paul V. Chaplo | Sheau Jing Lee | 4900 M3A |   |  |

## Appendix E: Tape Label from Database

|  |        |                |          |
|--|--------|----------------|----------|
| Dziedziu   | TAPE # | 2B             | 10/12/86 |
| Paul V. Chaplo   |        | Paul V. Chaplo |          |
| (315) 736-4781   |        | M3A            | 4900     |
| 20 secs before start. CU Dz in doorway facing bedroom.   |        |                |          |
| Dz: Build church-Stanislaus St. Convert horse barn   |        |                |          |
| Story of church (Dz as altar boy, story of coin taken from boy's mouth) and blacklisting/eviction of Dz's family, Union helped, Priest against strike. |        |                |          |

Appendix F: Edit Decision List (excerpt)

✓ 11. 20:19 21:11 39 TAPÉ #2  
Street sign tilt/pan to Dz approaching  
Match position of lower mill shot-near center screen. Start w/ Dz  
approaching corner, reveal pipes in background, pan right. A+V

✓ 12. 00:10 00:35 40 TAPÉ #6  
Dz moving away toward church.  
Start just before pine tree, church is revealed w/ pan right; Murphy  
moves to hydrant, cut. A+V

✓ 13. 1:30 \_\_\_\_ 40 Dz wants to talk near church. A+V  
Walk near car just before Dz calls out, move in; pan to belfry,  
back to Dz "...I'm the one who was in it [article]" cut.

*CUT EARLIER  
BEFORE STORM IS OVER. OR USE  
SUB-MATTER*

✓ 14. 00:43 \_\_\_\_ 34 TAPÉ #7  
Pumpkin being lit by Dz. A+V  
Pumpkin, quick pan up to Dz & back; lights candle; cover on;  
pats pumpkin "... now behave yourself."

✓ 15. 12:51 22:26 30 TAPÉ #8  
Trick or treaters and Walcott church ghost A+V  
Dz turns around in hallway, starts story; interruption by kids; finish story.

✓ 16. 1:30 2:26 40 TAPÉ #6  
Tilt down from Walcott belfry A+V  
Back to Dz walking toward P.O.; Dz crosses in front of telephone pole, cut.

✓ 17. 2:28 3:10 40 Dz walks toward cam, pulls out letter A+V  
Listen for cadence of steps.

✓ 18. 3:36 \_\_\_\_ 40 Mails letter A+V  
Opens P.O. box, puts letter in mouth, drops into box, puts on glove, turns to face  
cam, cut.

✓ 19. 4:15 \_\_\_\_ 40 Walks past NY Mills P.O. sign. A+V  
Dz enters shadow, car swooshes by, cut.

*TO END OF SHOT*

✓ 20. 4:41 5:14 40 Pan w/ Dz to reveal mill A+V

✓ 21. 5:24 ±7:00 40 Dz walks, stops to tell of Bab working in mill. A+V  
"... and she worked here for years after that." Cut.

22 ✓ 22. 6:13 6:56 5 TAPÉ #9  
Dz jokes about 6 cents - for pencil A+V  
*pan down to chair, cut*

22 ✓ 23. 6:56 7:33 5 Hands, magnifier writing A+V  
*TO HERE*

✓ 24. 10:50 16:05 5 Telling about Babciu's illness & death A+V  
"... even undertaker will die," cut.

## Appendix G - Expenses

| <u>DESCRIPTION</u>                     | <u>MODEL</u> | <u>QUAN.</u> | <u>COST</u>                      | <u>TOTAL</u>    |
|--|--------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b><u>ASSETS:</u></b>                  |              |              |                                  |                 |
| SONY VIDEO CAMERA                      | M3A          | 1            | 6,711.00                         | \$6,711.00      |
| JVC 3/4" PORTABLE VCR                  | CR-4900U     | 1            | 3,810.00                         | \$3,810.00      |
| PORTA-BRACE CASE FOR VCR               | C-4700       | 1            | 124.00                           | \$124.00        |
| LINHOF TRIPOD W/ WOOD LEGS             | -            | 1            | 0.00                             | \$0.00 (BARTER) |
| BOGEN FLUID HEAD                       | 3066         | 1            | 252.52                           | \$252.52        |
| SENNHEISER MICROPHONE                  | M3A/M80      | 1            | 331.00                           | \$331.00        |
| AUDIO TECHNICA HEADPHONES              | ATH-M7PRO    | 1            | 84.53                            | \$84.53         |
| SENNHEISER WINDSCREEN                  | MZW-426      | 1            | 359.87                           | \$359.87        |
| <br><b><u>DISPOSABLE SUPPLIES:</u></b> |              |              |                                  |                 |
| SONY VIDEOTAPE: CAM ORIG.              | KCS-20BR     | 40           | 13.50                            | \$540.00        |
| SONY VIDEOTAPE: CAM ORIG.              | KCS-20K      | 20           | 11.75                            | \$235.00        |
| VIDEOTAPE: EDIT MASTERS                | MBR-60       | 3            | 13.99                            | \$41.97         |
| WHIRLWIND MIC CABLES                   | MK4          | 2            | 12.60                            | \$25.20         |
| GEL CEL BATTERY                        | 12V          | 1            | 39.00                            | \$39.00         |
| <br><b><u>RENTALS:</u></b>             |              |              |                                  |                 |
| 3/4" ELECTRONIC EDITING                | CUTS-ONLY    |              |                                  | \$0.00 (BARTER) |
|  |              |              | <b><u>TOTAL:</u> \$12,554.09</b> |                 |