One More Hour: The Creation of a Motion Picture

A Creative Project (ID 499)

by

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In writing a paper on my film, I considered several approaches in which I could explain my project and the work that went into it. I wanted to make the paper an interesting extension of the film, while making it an enlightening article for students who have little idea of what is needed to see a film through its initial conception to final completion. I was one of these students when my project began in September of 1985.

Being a telecommunications major, it has been my desire for the past two years to direct and produce a film as my creative project for the Honors College. My reasons were not terribly practical, which made them all the more challenging. I knew absolutely nothing about working with the legitimate film medium. My background at Ball State University had been concentrated in the videotape medium, and I had always felt cheated to some extent because I had never started with the basic film element. During the Autumn quarter of 1985, I began my first step. I enrolled in a basic film production class under Mr. Joseph Pacino who is now my faculty advisor for this project. At the time, I had tentatively decided on making a documentary film, but changed my mind after a few weeks in the class.
Our quarter-long assignment was to create a short film which utilized moving action combined with matched sequences in some form of a story. Much to my surprise, a scenario I had submitted was one which was chosen for production. It was then that I realized that this had the potential to be an interesting and creative film project for my Senior Creative Project.

At this point, I had already gained enough knowledge to realize I could not do the film completely on my own. The classroom was an ideal setting to work in because my entire crew consisted of untrained novices like myself. Therefore, I was open to many creative channels that are often closed when one is too knowledgeable of a subject. There was always an element of surprise throughout the project since neither I nor my crew were ever completely sure of how an idea would turn out. Suddenly, the film production class became more of a necessity to my project than the project was for the class.

Surprisingly, the storyline of my film has changed relatively little from the original treatment. Although the title has undergone a series of changes, *One More Hour* has had a consistent plot. It is a romantic ghost story. The main character, a young man,
is exploring an abandoned house. He finds an antique trunk while searching, and opens it. The trunk contains a number of items including a woman's costume from the turn of the century and an antique velvet photograph album. As the man looks through the album, he finds a portrait of a beautiful Victorian woman dressed in the same clothes he has found in the trunk. Intrigued, he removes the photograph and finds the woman's name, Mary Manning, and the date, November 24, 1884, on the back. As he is looking at the photograph, he thinks he hears his name whispered, but turns to find nothing. He glances back at the portrait and now finds the woman's image has disappeared from the picture. She is now standing near him, dressed as she was in the photograph. Frightened, but drawn by her, the man tries to follow her as she appears and disappears first in the house, then outside. While chasing her, he suddenly finds himself in an ancient cemetery. The woman begs him to follow her, eventually stopping at a particular grave. As he watches, she slowly begins to sink into the grave, pleading him to follow. He runs to the grave, only to find her gone. Confused, he pulls out the photograph he has carried with him and glances at it. Stunned by what he sees, he drops the photograph on the grave. The camera zooms in on it, and we see that the woman's image has reappeared. Now, however, the young man is also with her, dressed
in the same period of clothing.

My advisor was impressed with the film story, but was obviously concerned with the complicated properties and settings the film would need in order for the results to be effective. Needless to say, so was I. In order to make the film work, I knew that each step would need to be carefully orchestrated. The first step was to create an illustrated storyboard, detailing each shot as I saw it in my mind. This in itself was difficult since I had no idea of where we would find the house and cemetery needed for the story. With the storyboard developed, I set out on finding the details. Fate proved to be my guide. In one week, I found the ideal house, secured permission to use it, found a cemetery less than one mile away from the house, and found a photographer who could create the series of photographs needed for the film. However, many hours of preparation were still ahead. I had decided on using black and white 16 millimeter film for the project to give the mood I did not think I could achieve with color film. Unfortunately, such film is practically obsolete. A firm in Chicago did stock such film, but not inexpensively. Each 100 foot roll cost approximately $15.00, and I had estimated a need for at least five rolls for the project. Also, the location for the film, Pendleton, Indiana, was about thirty minutes
the script while on the set. Sometimes certain sequences would not work. Other times, the location lent itself to the film in ways even I could not have foreseen.

After the first series of sequences were shot, the film was sent to Indianapolis for developing. The results were then viewed, registered, and logged for their intended uses. From there, I noted which takes would need to be refilmed, and the entire process started over. By mid-November, all but the very end of the film was shot. Unfortunately, nature could not wait for me to finish these essential shots. Snow began to fall, and completion was delayed until spring. My winter quarter was spent editing the developed film, learning the art of creating continuous action between shots, and attempting to create the mood I wanted with the material I had.

When spring finally arrived, I was faced with several complications. Since the film production class had ended in December, most of my crew had dispersed and were involved in other projects. I was now not only directing and producing, but also shooting and editing on my own. The art of shooting sequences that would blend with the previous footage took on a new dimension
also, since spring had brought with it such obstacles as trees with leaves and a slightly different placement of daylight. Shots had to be replaced and revised constantly in order to overcome these changes.

By the end of May, six hundred feet of film had been shot...and the on-location production work was completed. My goals were to edit in the new footage, review the entire film, cut out the excessive material, and permanently splice the finished product. While sounding basically simple, the process became not only tedious, but mentally-taxing as well. In the videotape medium, one can easily edit and re-edit a shot until he is satisfied with it. With film, one must be careful not to cut a shot too much, or the footage will be ruined. With the realization that I could not afford the luxury of reshooting any part of the film, I became a very cautious editor.

The entire project was set aside for most of the month of June as I began a ten-week internship at a television station in Fort Wayne. Concerned with finishing the film in time for graduation, I inquired at the station if there was film editing equipment available for me to use. Surprised that such a young person had a desire to work with film (an obsolete medium in television), several veteran editors
supplied me with the needed equipment, and the film was completed by the end of July. The work seemed to be over. I sat back to watch the film and, unfortunately, found the story to be somewhat empty. I did not know what was wrong. I had tried to create the illusion of a three-dimensional world. I attempted to translate the theme of the film graphically. I worked at going beyond the general plot to give the film an emotional, psychological tone like my advisor had suggested. The film felt hollow.

I decided that, like its ancestors of the silent film genre, the film needed music to set the mood, to turn it from a technical production which was too aware of itself to a story with emotion. Thus, a new dilemma was born. To lay a soundtrack meant the entire film would have to be copied onto a new, continuous length of 16mm film, then striped for sound. The process could easily cost another one hundred dollars and could take months to complete since I was not trained to lay film soundtrack. I then decided upon a more feasible alternative. By transferring the entire film to videotape, I could apply my knowledge of that medium while enhancing the film at the same time, and at a fraction of the cost. After choosing this possibility, I proceeded to develop the soundtrack. Two motion picture soundtracks
adapted easily to my project. At the same time I was developing the audio track, I also decided to limit all other audio to that of the ghost's voice. I had considered using a variety of sound effects to compliment the film, but decided to keep the track simple and true to the film's style. At this time, titles and a credit roll were also added. Ironically, the entire process of transferring the film and dubbing the soundtrack took only twelve hours, which shows the dramatic impact that videotape has made on the broadcast market and the film industry.

The film, as it now stands, was completed by the first of August and represents some interesting statistics. The entire film runs eight minutes and five seconds and has cost about $195.00 to produce. Six hundred feet of film were used for shooting the production. About three hundred feet were used in the final product. The entire story consists of sixty-two separate shots sequenced together, and took approximately 170 hours to shoot, edit, and complete. The entire film was dubbed onto broadcast quality 1/2 inch videotape and was copied onto standard 1/2 inch VHS tape after the audio was synchronized with the film.
In reviewing the many aspects of this creative project, I am basically pleased with the results. Knowing the film as intimately as I do, I can see many things I would like to rework and redefine. But, as a complete novice to film, I have gained a wealth of knowledge that could never have been learned from a single quarter of film production. By working in the film medium, I have been able to hone my ability to mentally plan productions ahead of the actual program, and to think in terms of the final results. This has helped me to eliminate many problems before they could manifest. By working with film, I have learned the true value of the element, the importance of videotape, and I have enhanced my performance in both. I have also learned the values of resourcefulness, flexibility, and economy in production. I have found great satisfaction in developing and completing One More Hour and hope that it is found to be an effort worthy of acceptance by the Honors College as my Senior Creative Project.

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submitted for approval
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