



Making the Documentary

An Interview between Gregory Fish and Sid McGregor

Greg: I want to welcome my good friend Sid McGregor to the “toolkit” this month. Sid, we’ve had similar interests since way back in high school. We had a great time playing music together through the years. Now on top of that we’re both into video. I’m kind of self-taught, learning by experience/trial and error. You have had formal training. How has the education process been?

Sid: First of all, let it be said that I’m not 100% convinced you have to go to school to be successful or good at the art of film making. I was however fortunate enough to go through a program at Missouri State University called Electronic Arts (EA) that forces you to be involved if you want to succeed. It’s labeled an ‘inter-disciplinary’ program that lets you decide what you’re going to do. The theory behind this is revolutionary in the field of education because most educational institutions give you your big projects and tell you what to do, but in EA you get to decide. It’s risky and not without fail, but it provides you with the opportunity to instill passion like no other educational process I’ve ever been involved with.

As far as the actual work that is done in class, it’s a bit different. The only way to learn film is to do it. And usually without fail, the first few attempts are more than embarrassing. The other side to learning film is to watch it and study it. We would watch, in class mind you, different clips from 100’s of movies and analyze the day-lights out of them. You learn that way. There are so many things that can only be taught by watching and listening to Hitchcock, Spielberg, Coppola, Shyamalan, Reiner, Howard, Burton, Scott, etc.

The real fun though in the educational process is when you put a crew together in your last year of school and together you make a great project. On set is where all the classroom learning comes into play and where everything needs to be right... especially as students who have no budget. There is something magical about having an experienced crew that has worked together through some really bad productions to finally click and get it right. Honestly, it’s addicting!

If I could sum up the educational process in one phrase or one idea it would be this one: collaborative organization. If you think you can do it all on your own, think again. If you are not organized or don’t have people to keep you organized (called producers) you will fail. This is a challenge for me because I am not as skilled at it, but I am learning its importance and adapting myself to be more organized. The producer(s) is/are the savior of a project. As part of the organization process for a film there are so many things that must be taken care of before day one of filming and they cannot all be done by one person. For example: storyboards, crew, actors, set design, script, location scouting, permission to film at locations, props, food for crew and actors, extras, electricity, sound elements and so on. If you’re going to do

it right, you can't plan far enough ahead.

There are two main general ideas that I've learned that will help any production no matter the size or the type. One is to be professional. No matter the size of the production, the amount of people involved, keep it as professional as possible and the results will be positive and obvious. The second thing I learned early on in my educational process, when I was able to speak to Les Garland, the founder of MTV and VH1. I told him the scope of my senior project, and he said this, "Put your money on the screen." I have yet to hear more practical advice for a production.

Greg: We're all about the medium of video being used to portray an important message. You've got a burden on your heart, especially for the poor or the "least of these". How have you used video to get this message out?

Sid: I took a group of people to Kenya and filmed a documentary on micro-financing called "One + One: A Human Network." My passion has always been for the poorest of the poor in this world.

Through trips to Jamaica and Mexico during my teen and early college years, I became aware of poverty and how that affects those living amongst it and what human rights really means and how those rights are violated where poverty is found.

Being raised in a mid-western Christian conservative family in the same town as one of the prominent non-denominational Christian colleges in the nation, I attended. My years there were full of bliss and misery. Needless to say, I discovered that my passion and my talents were

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not best suited for a ministry based job. So, I headed to a State university.

During those same years, I was also exposed to a lot of ministry-based media. And to say that I was embarrassed by what I saw is an understatement. Every major Christian media production that had been done up to that point fell very short of the production quality that it needed to succeed and be deemed as watchable. I knew that the production quality could be done better. And, Mel Gibson proved it. Since that time, I have seen a

major shift in the quality of 'Christian' based media and I am glad that it has improved greatly since that time.

So to sum up the back-story, I decided that doing media with a purpose was a necessity AND possible. Furthermore, to do that and do it right, studying that art was the next step for me. So, given the somewhat 'free-spirited' nature of my degree program I said to myself, "Why wait?"

I was able to unite a crew of 7 people to join me in a life changing trip to Kenya, Africa to make a documentary about the inner workings of micro-financing in the slums of Nairobi. We joined up with an organization from Denver, Colorado called The 10/10 Project. We also worked with the co-founder of KIVA.org and with Prince Cezda Dlamini, the grandson of Nelson Mandela. It is the first documentary produced by the school and since its completion in May has been shown to 1,000's of people and is being entered into film festivals all over the globe.

To those of you saying to yourselves, "Oh no, not another film about Africa," I agree with you. In keeping with my disillusionment of Christian media, I am even more so disgusted at the exploitive nature of Christian media as it relates to the poor. Because of that, we purposefully set out to let the Africans tell their story and not us. And furthermore, to make an honest and deliberate attempt that any monetary benefit that is obtained goes directly to the Kenyans involved in the film. And, in my mind, and in the mind of the main Kenyan gentleman in my film, who has seen it since its completion... we succeeded.

Greg: You did indeed succeed. I thought it was wonderful and have already been moved to action. What equipment did you use to film and edit this documentary?

Sid: We used a Canon XH-A1 as our main camera in Kenya. We used a Panasonic HVX for most of our state-side filming. The reason in doing this was because the school, no matter how much they backed us and trusted us, wouldn't let us take their Panasonic cameras to Kenya. So, one of our crew members bought the Canon and solved that issue for us. Thank you, Brian.

We didn't take lights so all of our lighting in Kenya was natural. We brought a pop screen to reflect light

where we needed it. This was most useful when filming into the tin houses and mud huts with no windows, and also to brighten up the faces of those we were interviewing.

For audio, we went straight into the camera. When traveling around the slums of Nairobi, you don't want to have a lot of equipment with you. One reason being, you already stand out enough; no need to push the limits. Two, transportation is a major issue in any third world culture and you will most likely be carrying your gear on your person anywhere you go. Besides, portable audio devices are bulky and expensive.

The main microphone that we used in Kenya was Sennheiser M66. Again the school wouldn't let us take their microphones, so Good News Productions International lent us their audio gear from their office in Nairobi, Kenya.

For editing we used AVID Media Composer 2.5 and Pro Tools HD 7. However, for budget reasons, I would recommend Nuendo over Pro Tools.

Greg: How has the response been in those that have seen the documentary? And how is it being distributed?

Sid: The response has been great and I've been invited to show it on the local PBS channel and it's also being shown and used by The 10/10 Project to generate awareness and hopefully monetary gain that will directly impact the people in the film.

In May, when I finished the film in accordance with my degree requirements, I knew it wasn't complete. I have since added all the major changes that I knew needed to be done and I feel it is complete. I am now preparing to launch a major campaign to get 100,000 people to see the film within the next 12 months.

Links here:

<http://www.oneplusonefilm.com>

<http://www.the1010project.org>

<http://www.Kiva.org>

<http://www.cedzadlamini.com>

<http://www.dustyfeetonline.com>