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Integrative Project
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“The M.I.S.S.I.O.N”

For my senior thesis, I will aim to effectively combine my skills, passion and education on documentary photography to highlight and ultimately help improve the lives of the M.I.S.S.I.O.N. (Michigan Itinerant Shelter System-Interdependent Out of Necessity) community through the use of photography, sound and video. I will also aim to educate the general public about this specific homeless community in Ann Arbor with the hopes of raising awareness, breaking stereotypes such as why the homeless are homeless, and merely just showing the humanity of these people. I will do this by showing their story from their perspective with the use of personal narratives within the community.

M.I.S.S.I.O.N. is a non-profit and self-governed organization for the homeless community of Ann Arbor. Their goal is to help support those who are trying to recover from past addictions or mistakes they made that may have lead them to this lifestyle. M.I.S.S.I.O.N. is run by a group of people that provides shelter and basic resources for the homeless and others who want to better their lives. Faith-based organizations donate food or comfort items every week, and M.I.S.S.I.O.N. heavily depends on donations as their main source of funding.

M.I.S.S.I.O.N. mainly grew from Camp Take Notice, which was a group of homeless people that lived in Ann Arbor’s first tent community, which worked in partnership with M.I.S.S.I.O.N. before it was more developed. Camp Take Notice was shut down two years ago for political and legal reasons, along with Camp Misfit and Camp Serenity.

Questions that linger in my mind are questions that I am not sure if I will find direct answers for. My first question I have been trying to answer is what kind of audience should view this documentary? I want to inform two specific audiences: students in the Washtenaw county area whom are unaware of this organization, and people in general, nation wide, who may have a stereotypical view towards homeless people as a whole. Through my film, they will learn about the M.I.S.S.I.O.N. community that might have preconceived judgment of this group of people or might not even know they exist. I want to touch an audience that sees homelessness in a stereotypical way, so to try to break down that wall of misconception with all the stories I will tell through M.I.S.S.I.O.N. leaders and homeless guests.

My second question that I have not found an answer to, is who and where I should send the documentary to after presenting it? Many professors and advisors have told me to create a reel of a collage of clips, somewhat similar to a trailer and send it to whatever jobs I am applying to. I was thinking of sending the full documentary to media outlets since it is supposed to be only 15-20 minutes long but I know that not many people would want to sit down and watch an entire short film. Others have advised me to send them to film festivals, but not specific ones. I know that if I want to make a difference for the homeless community then the film has got to have an influential audience or a news and media outlet to show it that could reach a very big audience. I would also like for this long-term project to help me find a job, and become a part of this informative and artistic feel

My main mediums are photography, film and sound. Through these mediums, I cannot only capture the topic I am focusing on, but I need to express my creativity and passion for documentary work. For half of my Integrative Project, I used my Nikon D7000

with a fixed 35-millimeter lens. This was a limitation because this specific camera lens automatically zooms in and cannot zoom out to get a wider view of a scene. The 35 millimeter lens also strengthened my photographs since it forces me to be close and intimate with the people I was photographing, which shined through in many portraits of guests of the community. My Nikon camera had a video feature, which was perfect for my project considering half of the film is videos so it was very convenient to switch between mediums while I spent time in the community. The camera had a low quality ISO that wasn't the best for shooting in darkly lit situations, so by second semester, I started using a Nikon D60 camera body that creates better quality images all while still having a video feature. I also received a new wide-angle lens that allows me to capture a different perspective of this community; a wider view of the small but crowded rooms during the Sunday meetings that the 35 fixed millimeter lens could not provide. The new lens brought a variety of artistic photographic choices for my photo series within the documentary short film, rather than having to only use one constrained view throughout the entire 6 months.

All of my photographs and film are in color. I tested out some of my photos in black and white after converting them in photo editing software, Lightroom, but after much feedback from peers and professors, that seemed too cliché to do a documentary film about homeless people in black and white. Even though it is nearly impossible to try to do something that has never done before, the most famous series of homeless people are shot in black and white, which automatically sets a negative and somber tone to the content. After more testing and thought, I realized that the color photographs were full of life, energy and showed the humanity that exists in the homeless community.

My video clips are mainly of interviews with guests and leader figures, but also capture moments and discussions within the community. I record all of the sound elements for my documentary with a Zoom Recorder that I always have with me. I record sound whenever I am interviewing and videotaping. To piece everything together into a final product, I use Final Cut Pro that combines my three mediums into one through multiple layers of work.

At the beginning of my Integrative Project course, I was instructed to create a blog to help keep track of my work methods through the course of the year. I use Tumblr to post diary entrees every week after each experience with the community with my top ten pictures from each experience attached. This process helps me keep track of what photographs represented my time there the best.

Part of my Integrative Project course is based on research. Most was done at the beginning of the course when I wasn't sure what I was doing. One of my four most relevant sources that helped me kick-start my vision was Tom Gralish's "How They Survive" series for the Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine in 1985. I met Mr. Gralish, a Pulitzer Prize photographer while I was interning at the Philadelphia Inquirer this past summer of 2014. I saw his series and he told me about his experience. It was truly moving and empowering. Gralish would spend time with the people he photographed and heard their stories instead of just photographing them and moving on to the next "subject". Learning about this series of work really opened my eyes to Philadelphia's homeless community and the homeless community in general that I turned a blind eye to previous to seeing "How They Survive." It motivated me to find a topic that I could be as passionate about. Little did I know I would find that my senior project would also focus on a homeless community but in Ann Arbor.

My second source was “*Take Notice: A Camp for the Homeless*” that was created in 2012 by former CNN correspondent, Anthony Collings. After I had already decided on my topic for my senior thesis, M.I.S.S.I.O.N. Leaders had informed me about a documentary that had been published two years ago on their tent community at the time, Camp Take Notice. At first, it was extremely disheartening to me that someone already covered this topic and this community, however when I watched the documentary multiple times, I realized some key differences in how Anthony covered Camp Take Notice and how I want to tell their story and M.I.S.S.I.O.N.’s. Collings uses music throughout his short film, which is quite distracting at times. I have always thought of music as a way to make an audience feel a certain emotion towards the scene and I wanted the music of my documentary to simply be the voices within this community. Collings also didn’t show photographs in his film, only video clips, another key difference. Lastly, Collings narrated the entire film himself, while his point of view was interesting, it made me recognize that I wanted the people within the M.I.S.S.I.O.N. community to tell their stories instead of myself.

The film, *Shenandoah* by David Turnley was created in 2012 and was my third source of research and inspiration. I had previously seen it twice in both of my classes with David and both times were so stimulating as I watched and quickly became emotionally invested in his film. Each video clip was as if I was looking at a photograph even though he didn’t incorporate photographs until the credits. His film contained amazing lighting, great use of composition, and measureless intimacy with the people he was documenting. My goal after watching his film was that my documentary would also cause an audience to feel something during and after the film. He also opened the film with a visual of the town Shenandoah. It was a beautiful, scenic shot of the town that ironically experienced so much

drama and pain. I understood that that was how I wanted to open my film, with shots of Ann Arbors most visually beautiful and recognizable features, such as the Diag, Cube, and Big House, to contrast with the homeless community and show the audience that Ann Arbor has more to it.

“War Photographer– Film about photographer, James Nachtwey” by Christian Frei is my fourth and final most substantial piece of research that guided me to the results of my documentary film. I also watched this film in David Turnley’s class this past semester and it intrigued me. After watching this film about James Nachtwey, I comprehended the process of combining the three mediums and how it would only be fully successful if there was a balance between the three and one not outshining the other. I had tested this combination in David’s class when he assigned us to create a short documentary film of 10 minutes. I chose to document a once homeless couple now recovering from a life of hitchhiking, drugs and alcohol while the girlfriend, Claire, is 19 with a newborn. I followed the couple around for nearly two months while Claire was pregnant after meeting them through M.I.S.S.I.O.N. My final project in David’s class was a success and gave me the confidence to be able to do even better on my documentary on M.I.S.S.I.O.N.

I want to emphasize that in order for me to consider this integrated project a success, I would like to see some forward progress and make a difference in not only how M.I.S.S.I.O.N. is viewed by others but also reach an audience that can contribute financially to this organization. I understand that the issue of homelessness is global but there are small changes that can be made in this particular community that can make life easier and more comfortable for some of its residents. I would like for a major news organization to see this and find it worthy of showing on the air. I would also like the Ann Arbor

community to become more involved after either viewing my 9 photographs while listening to voices of the community in the Slusser gallery, by watching the trailer of “The M.I.S.S.I.O.N.” at the Michigan Theater, or by seeing the full feature short film at the Michigan Union. In the eight months of following this community and getting to know so many of the individuals of the community as well as the M.I.S.S.I.O.N. organization, I would like to be able to report some positive changes, or any changes of any sort from when I started to the end of the project including political and emotional aspects. Finally, I want to offer the viewing public, a simple means of either contributing financially to M.I.S.S.I.O.N., an address to write to local or national politicians, or a way to help by volunteering their services. I understand that change is not always immediate. That includes change in the community and change in how people view the community, both are equally important and necessary. A year ago the homeless community was not on my radar. I want to do for others that are perhaps as ignorant or apathetic to this problem as I was a year ago, what Tom Gralish’s documentary did for me; raise awareness and make a difference.

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