

FAMILY PORTRAIT

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS**

**GRADUATE PROGRAM IN FILM
YORK UNIVERSITY
TORONTO, ONTARIO**

September 2017

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Abstract

*For perhaps we are like stone; our own history and the history of the world embedded in us,
we hold a sorrow deep within and cannot weep until that history is sung.*

- Susan Griffin, *A Chorus of Stones*

It's a rare experience to have lived formative years on a commune and to be the daughter of its leaders.

In the late 1960s my father and mother were at the centre of a Toronto-based communitarian movement of baby boomers some called *Family*. During an intense period of social and political re-imagining they engaged in a leftist Christian philosophy, being of service to others and sharing resources.

In 1971 the community purchased Midian Farm as a back-to-the-land social experiment, but its utopian vision eventually collapsed. The end of my parents' marriage and the subsequent fall of the farm left a resounding residue, a hangover from hope.

A canvas for seeking, of memory; piercing through time with new energy, FAMILY PORTRAIT is a process-driven personal essay documentary. I stitch together a visually immersive treasure trove of archives and dip between memory and current day reflections to memorialise a shared piece of history.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my parents Diane Marshall and Grainger Cowie for their love and support of me, and for their brave willingness to participate in this project. It has been a profound privilege to explore my roots, with them.

Without the participation of my aunts and uncles and the Midian Farm community this story would not be known. I am deeply grateful for their trust in me, for the use of their archives, and for the opportunity to connect again.

Featured participants: Dick Both; Mary Both; Jim Budd; Peter Corbett; Nancy Budd-Denham, John Denham; Nancy Embury; Richard Hood; Nancy Hood; Nancy Kendel; Judy Kennedy; Michele Lavin; Debbie Mealia; Melanie Morris; Bill Munro; Don Sedgwick; Ruth Walmsley; Ken Whiteley; Don Wilkinson; Rob Williams.

Participants and families who attended the Midian Farm reunion film shoot: Susan Adams; Aaron Both; Jared Both; Julia Budd; Kate Budd; Terry Cowderoy; Rick Deschamps; Katherine Denham; Kaliyana Denham-Rohlicek; Sarah Hale; Isaac Hale; Marian Hann; Jennifer Hood; Stephanie Hood; Ray Kendel; Hersh Kline; Brian Maan; Margaret Maan; Beth Mealia; Mary Mealia; Jane Porter; Doug Porter; Dorianne Sauve; David Walmsley; Caitlin Wilkinson; Kerry Wilkinson; Luke Wilkinson; Skye Wilkinson; Dave Wilkinson.

This project has been an unforgettable journey and I am indebted to the out-of-the-box spirit and culture of the Cinema & Media Arts MFA program at York University. John Greyson, Graduate Program Director, championed my interest to return to school after two decades, and without his advocacy it may never have happened. Praise for Kuowei Lee, Graduate Program Assistant, who works tirelessly and meticulously to keep us all on track. A flower for Philip Hoffman, Supervisor, who opened doors and windows in my practice. A flower for Brenda Longfellow, Reader, who provided feedback and guidance along the way to challenge me to think and write more critically, and she underscored the feminist context of my mother's history. Jennifer Baichwal, master of the long-form essay documentary, helped to initiate my very personal journey with the film. Janine Marchessault, Professor and Trudeau Fellow, encouraged me to *play* with the concept of utopia. Hat tip to my 2015 – 2017 MFA Production cohort, you challenged and inspired me: Meghan Armstrong; Lesley Chan; Alexa Hickox; Nathan Hughes-Berry; Daniel McIntyre; Esery Mondesir; Kazik Radwanski; Lina Roessler; Erica Genereux Smith; Chris Wiseman.

The Midian Farm reunion shoot was a feat and I couldn't have pulled it off without the following talented crew: Nathalie Klinck, John Price, Justin Lovell, Esery Mondesir, Karin Culliton, Peter Sawade, Chris Miller, Mike Filippov, Stacey Koudys, Anna MacLean, Zachary Nigel, and Lorena Elke.

My child-spirit incarnate, Matilda Rae Lachica-Smith, is a colourful bundle of energy. I loved our filming interactions and am grateful for the support of her parents, my friends Joy Lachica & Anne-Marie Smith.

Post-production workflow was immense and I cannot stress enough the value of being organized when working with various codecs, themes, a cast of characters, archival and other materials.

Veteran film Editor Mike Munn helped to expertly piece together the bones of the feature-length rough cut, a documentary currently in the works. This was brick and mortar towards my editing journey with my thesis. Ellen DesRues, Assistant Editor, was the heroic organizer/labeller of archives and interview materials. Carolyn Wong of Scanology scanned 242 images. David Bitton worked as Post Production Supervisor to streamline technical workflow issues, and he set me up in Premiere Pro. I am now obsessed with editing. Ryan Wibowo, Sound Editor and Mixer, is a new talent to look out for, appreciation to long-term post-audio colleague Garrett Kerr for facilitating the connection. Thanks to the technical prowess of colleague Karen Vanderborght who colour graded the film.

It was a pleasure to work with the one and only Ken Whiteley - musician, composer, singer-songwriter, and member of the Midian Farm community. Ken's music adds an irreplaceable layer of memory and authenticity.

Appreciation to my close friends and colleagues who expressed strong interest, enthusiasm and support as I charted new territory.

Gratitude to my partner in life, Lorena Elke, who keeps me grounded, keeps me believing.

This project was made possible through the generous support of:

The Susan Crocker and John Hunkin Award in the Fine Arts,

and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship.

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Chapter One: Evolution of Concept

Haunted Treasures

How often I found where I should be going only by setting out for somewhere else.

- Richard Buckminster "Bucky" Fuller

My process began with the realization that Midian Farm, its cohesiveness from beginning, middle to end, was unknown. This motivated me to draw near to something that was obscured through decades; partially memorialized by a fading hodgepodge of family images. The past lives in the present and early childhood memories would surface in my mind's eye like short movie clips on repeat, locked in a landscape that was a happy swirl and something so terribly empty. I lived at Midian Farm from 1971 to 1974, from the age of two to the age of five.

Midian Farm is a collection of multiple voices, old branches and universal themes, and I set out to unearth an untold Canadian story, one I had always had in my back pocket. During initial research and development I dodged the echo of family trauma only to eventually accept the truth of the film I most needed to make. Cracking open Midian Farm was excavating the story of my mother and father, their marriage and leadership. It required a special kind of grit, as if prying the rusted lock of an ancient chest.

I realized there are two films: an in-depth feature length documentary MIDIAN FARM, focused on the social-political backdrop of the era and Midian's multi-cast community, then and now; and FAMILY PORTRAIT, my Masters' thesis, which would summon a dormant voice to explore transformational ground.

Creative Departure

*To put the world right in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order,
we must first put the family in order; to put the family in order,
we must first cultivate our personal life; we must first set our hearts right.*

- Confucius

My professional body of work has been commissioned by broadcasters and private and public Canadian and international funding agencies. Documentary filmmaking is how I seek to offer new ways of seeing the world and as a working director/producer since the late 1990s I have tackled challenging subjects around the globe, featuring change-makers, posing questions about our shared humanity. From war-affected children, sweatshop labour, HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, the struggle to protect water from privatization, the use of billions of animals within the industrialized world, to the future of meat and climate change, I use the documentary platform to elevate big questions. This is most effectively achieved with my 2013 award-winning feature documentary *The Ghosts In Our Machine*, which is translated in six languages, and distributed on all continents.

With *FAMILY PORTRAIT* I remain engaged in the space of hope; the pulsating life force determined to try, and have created a character study of a utopian experiment, to reflect universal themes about community and family. What freed me to make this film is not approaching it from the context of funding and the film industry. Instead, I engaged in a liberating creative departure not predetermined and formatted, not requiring me to think about an audience or about social change as an outcome. In letting go of these expectations and responsibilities I experienced a renewed communion with filmmaking.

I returned to a Do It Yourself (DIY) approach; shooting, recording sound, and editing myself, which I haven't done since the early 1990s, at Ryerson University in the Media Arts undergraduate program (film, video, photographic arts).

FAMILY PORTRAIT is my first foray into personal filmmaking; deconstructing the convention of the fourth wall that separates me from the viewer. Through a porous thin veil I stitch threads between myself today to the past. I committed myself to finding the film along the way, deciphering and shaping the ecosystem of elements during the editing phases. It was freeing to dwell in liminal space: sometimes knowing, sometimes not knowing, finding my way between the layers of other people's stories and my own.

Ethics

The unconscious wants truth.

It ceases to speak to those who want something else more than truth.

- Adrienne Rich

With human-centred documentaries there is an interpersonal-ethical dimension that underscores the entire process from development through dissemination. This can last years, depending on how long it takes to make a film and release it to the world. The director bears the weight of responsibility; holding captured images, stories and trust bestowed, navigating issues of editorial integrity with material that can be profoundly personal, sometimes off limits, while daring to push to the edge. Sometimes people confide in cathartic ways as they open unexplored territory, but even with consent it doesn't grant carte blanche or moral license. Representation is fraught with ethical complexity.

Can documentary makers of white privilege make films about people of colour without a subconscious unexamined racist bias? This equation is applied across the board to gender, poverty, religion and more, and the discussions are raging throughout the film industry.

The ethical dimension with FAMILY PORTRAIT was about trust. Unscripted documentaries evolve and change, and as I peeled back the layers my motivation for making the film and the focus of the film became more personal than I had anticipated. I am holding a piece of tangled family history and in it the collective and individual stories of dozens of people. I was challenged differently because of my unique and personal access; I inherited the trust of the community, which is an unforgettable gift.

Documentary ethics includes acknowledgment of power. The filmmaker holds privilege, gazing and exploring, subjectively and observationally, through glass and prisms of light, with intimate access. Subjects control things as they choose to participate by varying degrees, steering story and the parameters of access, and inhabiting the filmmaker's sleeping and waking life for stretches of time. As an old friend and mentor Shelley Saywell suggests, it is the director who stays awake at night, tossing and turning through the ocean of production, and then again through the release of the film when it is held under a microscope by the public (Phone conversation, 2013). This is my experience always. In capturing the rise and fall of Midian Farm through audio-recorded conversations, my father is described by the community as an "out-of-the-box teacher", and a "charismatic spiritual leader" (Interview transcripts, 2016).

Many go further to describe his leadership at the farm as authoritarian, “Your dad became the leader; leader would be nice; dictator might be another word.” (Nancy Kendel, former Midian Farm co-owner). “He's a large personality. He was physically strong, he had a big voice, he had the beard, he commanded authority, commanded respect.” (Don Sedgwick, former Midian Farm visitor). “... my recollection is your father was in charge...in terms of leadership I think Grainger was seen as the leader... Diane was much more measured ... and would love the kind of community focus of it.” (Richard Hood, former Midian Farm visitor).

I was confronted with the personal challenge of how to tell the story of the farm, with all of its complexity, and to not shy away from my dad's impact, and to not alienate or hurt anyone.

My mother was excited to engage and was a vital resource when charting the historical timeline and social-political context of the farm community. However, she was clear from the onset that the details behind the collapse of her marriage and her subsequent breakdown were off limits.

I knew I would pass by this terrain sensitively and she graciously understood that it would need to be referenced. Finding a way to express the collapse of my parent's marriage and the dramatic undoing of a community was an epic undertaking. Finding the film language took time.

At each challenging juncture, my thesis supervisor Philip Hoffman wisely reminded me that each step of the way I am making this film for the good, for the collective. I am the medium, it is bigger than me and I don't have or need all of the answers. Empathy for all is more important than the film (Conversation with Phil Hoffman, 2016).

Subjects As Participants

My Mother & Father

There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

- Maya Angelou

The rise of the farm and the end of the farm was central to the arc of my parents' marriage. I knew in my bones that the chaos that befell my family following Midian Farm was a ricochet carrying with it the failed hopes and dreams of marriage and of a brave social experiment with formative friends. Its echo through the years has made it impossible to come together as a family unit and, after more than four decades, the risk of calcification was taking form when I dared crack open the story. My quest to breathe life into the legacy of Midian Farm was fuelled by intense creative curiosity and motivated by a subterranean need to confront the ancient chasm in my family, and to understand my roots. My empathy fused to my mother when I was a child, her breakdown at the farm was traumatic, and we have both lived in Toronto since I was eight years old. My relationship to my father has been incomplete, and I sought to know him better through making the film.

To engage in a process-driven unscripted documentary meant that Grainger and Diane's participation would inform the film. I relaxed into the give and take, back and forth dynamics between us, accepting what would be. My brothers would not participate and I realized this meant leaving some darkness intact. Their absence is part of the story.

Email communication is one way that my parent's and I communicated throughout the project.

The following excerpts from the late fall of 2015 and early winter of 2016 are significant:

Grainger Cowie wrote (Fall 2015)

It's your film so do what you have to do

I'm sure that you realize that you are opening a can of worms that will not invite a positive response from all family members. I guess I'm wondering if you realize that you will need to take responsibility for this.

May the god be with you Liz

Dod

[my dad signs his emails "Dod" as a joke because he says I pronounce "Dad" as "Dod"]

Liz Marshall wrote (Fall 2015)

Cc: Diane; Paul; Mike

... what i can say is that i have always used film as a positive tool. I am seeking cohesion and understanding in attempting to stitch together the stories of the Midian (broken) circle, which I consider my own extended family. it is an incredible piece of our shared history, and yes there is some pain... in speaking with people and writing and planning for this film there has been a lot of joy, and i am learning some difficult things too... my question for each of you is do you trust my approach and instinct that a film on midian can be an important thing to engage in?
- liz

Diane Marshall wrote (Fall 2015)

I am aware of your process as a film-maker, Liz, and how much you try to bring out the positives, and the things to celebrate, in all your work. There is much to celebrate in the period of our family's history at the farm. In my mind and heart, that (and the amazing people we all lived and worked among) is a rich part of our past, and although there was pain and loss, it is also a part of who we have each become in the present. I love you all, and am grateful for the good times Grainger and I have enjoyed together in the past few years.

Grainger Cowie wrote (Fall 2015)

Right on Diane - I also very much enjoy our friendship now

Diane Marshall wrote (Fall 2015)

Thanks, Grainger, I really appreciate your comment, and at this stage of our lives.

Before I started production, my dad and I shared emails about the concept and for a short period he expressed reluctance and even withdrew from participating, feeling uncertain about the direction I was headed, but he always supported my creative and personal need to make the film. Of course it posed a dilemma, how would I tell the story without my dad's participation? I came to accept that his absence, along with my brothers' absence might be part of the film. But as fate would have it, in early 2016 there was an opening that allowed us to move forward.

Grainger Cowie wrote (Winter 2016)

Hi Liz

A few more words on our latest communication - after we last talked and I mentioned that I felt your creative edge ... It's this connection to whatever is leading you and is you in making this film ... I feel we are on the same ground now and feel that I can enter in some way thru your creative abilities

In the name of William Wallace

[Sometimes my dad signs his emails as "William Wallace", one of his Scottish heroes]

During our first shoot in the spring of 2016, I probed my dad about his role and impact at the farm, about how others elevated him, and he explained, “I am not a teacher – I don’t have the language, or the skill. I just believed in people, and helped them to believe in themselves. People’s image of me was that I was a leader, a bit of a dictator, I can see that but it wasn’t something that I saw in myself. I saw myself as being with people and getting things done.” (Interview transcript, Spring 2016).

During the writing of this paper in the summer of 2017, Grainger reflected via email correspondence with me, “I can see how they [the Midian Farm community] might have felt my intensity at the time as a demand for total dedication to the community. Yes, I was hard core at facing the ‘truth’, but I was really quite happy with them just being who they were.” Later, in person during a brief visit when finalizing this paper in September 2017, Grainger reflected, “I never saw the farm as mine. It was Donny’s and it was Jack’s, they were doing the work.”

While making the film, during visits with my parents, I would sometimes shoot more footage, and I shared different phases of my editing process. They were seeing the film unfold, and talking with me about it. My final shoot was with them together in Ontario in the fall of 2016. I asked if they would drive through the neighbourhoods they lived in during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and to the Midian Farm property. They agreed, and I filmed from the backseat as a fly-on-the wall. This footage yields some hilarious almost slapstick humour exchanges between them, and offers a helpful device to enter their formative history, to contrast who they were then and who they are now as individuals in their 70s.

Translating the passage of time through juxtapositions like this offers pause for reflection about life's journey and how it shapes and changes people. Grainger's humour and tendency to joke his way through things provides much needed levity in the film, but I needed more. During the spring of 2017 I continued to prompt deeper questions, using my cell phone to record our conversations, and all of our email correspondence since has been grounded in trust and openness.

Grainger Cowie wrote (Summer 2017)

Wonderful Liz - do your magic - whatever you do is fine with me

Love dod

In the end, in their own ways, my mom and dad offered so much to this project. Their participation, and their trust in me, made the film what it is. The journey was transformative.

Subjects As Participants

Midian Farm Community

To begin, I reached out to a handful of Midian Farm people to help me lay the bones of the farm's historical foundation, and to connect me to others. My mother Diane, her youngest sister my aunt Nancy, and Don Wilkinson, a former co-owner of the farm, were especially resourceful as I initiated the journey of discovery. I was ushered into an old grapevine, reaching through the years, connecting the general whereabouts of each person along with bits of oral history. Like clues to uncover I was part detective compiling an evolving contact list, and ongoing sleuth work led me to dozens of people during the fall of 2015.

One of the many soulful phases of this project was initially connecting one-on-one with each person, mostly by phone, also by email, to talk about my interest in making the film, to seek their participation, and to inquire about archives. They shared memories of me as a child and in speaking with each person, hearing their voice, I felt comforted in an old familiar blanket.

The Midian diaspora crosses Canada from east to west with the majority clustered in Ontario and along the British Columbian coast, in small towns, big cities and majestic rural settings. Some relationships are lifelong marriages with children and grandchildren, sustained friendships, while others lost touch long ago, in the 1970s.

They are the original owners, residents and visitors of Midian Farm. Fourteen are in Ontario, eleven in British Columbia, one in Montreal, one in the North West Territories and one on the East Coast. The Midian Farm community is predominantly Caucasian, from diverse class backgrounds, and they have led lives as artists, therapists, teachers, financial advisors, real estate agents, contractors, builders, and naturalists. Some have travelled the world, one is a multi-award winning roots gospel blues icon (Ken Whiteley), and some remain active in social justice movements. Some still identify as Christian. More than fifty consented to being in the film, twenty-two of which I visited across Ontario and British Columbia to film and interview and gather archives from. The others attended the film's big multi-camera reunion shoot that I conducted at the end of August 2016. My questions were burning as I prepared to capture their stories. Each audio conversation was a descending journey lasting approximately two hours, tapping an ancient well. There was laughter, bubbling non-linear recollection, silence, and for some there were tears. Each found their way to memory, reflection, and perspective.

I also wanted to know whether in today's neoliberal age they dismiss their formative values. Who were they then during an era of utopian aspiration, and who are they today in a world of planetary urgency? While the answers to these questions do not fit the focus of my thesis film, they are factored into the feature length version I am working on.

Ongoing archival discoveries were unearthed over the duration of the project, leading to a robust collection, forming a comprehensive vivid visual tapestry. Unknowingly, this community had collectively documented their historic experiment from multiple vantage points, during each season.

Midian Farm was a pivotal life experience, and for some it was better left in the past.

Two people who had been very central to the farm chose to not participate.

Chapter Two: Underpinnings

Christianity

*Don't suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures -
either God's Law or the Prophet's. I'm not here to demolish but to complete.*

I am going to put it all together, pull it all together in a vast panorama.

*God's Law is more real and lasting than the stars in the sky
and the ground at your feet.*

- Jesus

As an agnostic wary of religion, I initially minimized and overlooked the Christian theme, but after conducting twenty-two audio conversations, amounting to more than sixty hours of transcribed content, it was undeniable that Christianity was the bedrock beneath and between the community. My parent's Christianity rooted more than a decade earlier, and to gain further insight I pieced together the story of their marriage leading up to the formation of the farm.

A fire in the belly is what brought Grainger Cowie and Diane Budd [Budd is my mom's maiden name] together. They met in the early 1960s through Young Life in Vancouver, an Ecumenical Evangelical youth organization founded in 1941 in the United States. As a newly married couple they were like celebrities in Christian circles. From the age of 15 - 17 my mother worked as a fashion model for Eaton's department store, the money she earned paid for her university education, which she started at the age of 16. Grainger was popular at high school and university, was an avid lacrosse player, and while at university he worked as a youth leader at Young Life, where he was considered influential and charismatic.

When they married in June of 1963, Diane was eighteen and Grainger was twenty-four.

They had each experienced a similar conversion into Christianity at Young Life's Malibu summer camp. For Grainger it was the late 1950s, two weeks before he started university, and for Diane, it was the summer of 1960, she was fifteen. In recollecting their experiences Diane remembers that the New Testament felt like "sacred text", "the gospel became good news to me; it leapt out as profoundly significant". Grainger's memory was also about the immediacy of it, "As soon as I got back to Vancouver I met with the leader of Young Life and told him I wanted to become a Christian. He was charismatic and talked about forgiveness and the conversion into God's love. I was blown away learning about love and forgiveness, and that combined with a focus on social change blew my mind." Diane expressed the same essence, "I felt loved...the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King, was happening. Justice for people was the message, and it felt right for me." (Phone interviews, Winter 2017)

In the mid 1960s, my parents backpacked around the world, studying and working through Europe, the Middle East and Asia, developing a worldview grounded in social responsibility. When they returned my father fell into a depression and needed time to assimilate the impact of their travels, he struggled with his faith and newfound awareness of western privilege and chose to live alone in a rooming house for a few months. Grainger was restless and my parents decided to leave Young Life to seek out less conventional streams of community engagement, and they headed east to Ontario. My father studied Theology at Knox College at the University of Toronto and practiced as a student Presbyterian Minister. My mother worked for Children's Aid with Indigenous youth and developmentally challenged children, and she completed her University of British Columbia undergraduate degree by mail correspondence, graduating with Honours in History and Psychology.

By the early 1970s, after living and working in a few locations around Ontario, Grainger had become an influential high school teacher in Toronto, and Diane had given birth to Michael, me, and Paul. During all of this they managed to galvanize a bustling nondenominational Christian fellowship that some referred to as “Family”, comprised of a cross-section of youth grassroots networks in the Toronto area. My father was considered a charismatic spiritual leader and my mother a strong co-organizer with a keen intellect. Members of the community co-purchased Midian Farm in the spring of 1971, as a back-to-the-land experimental hearth. In conversation with my father about the biblical essence he and my mother embraced, he explained, “Our Christianity was not a watered down version, it was not legalistic or linear, but a much broader understanding, and included and emphasized social justice and a mystical interpretation.”

I read the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament because my parents refer to it as a “seminal” and “core” text for them. The Sermon on the Mount, chapters 5-7, is the teachings of Jesus and I read a contemporary version of Diane’s called *The Message*, translated by Eugene Peterson. Its language is unrefined with a simplicity that strips nuance and poetry from the collection of parables.

You’re blessed when you’re at the end of your rope.

With less of you there is more of God and his rule.

You’re blessed when you feel you’ve lost what is most dear to you.

Only then can you be embraced by the One most dear to you.

You’re blessed when you’re content with just who you are—no more, no less.

That’s the moment you find yourselves proud owners of everything that can’t be bought.

- Jesus, from Matthew, The Beatitudes | 5:3-5 *The Message*

“The first part of chapter 5 is called the beatitudes – the blessings by Jesus. The poetic language works for me - Jesus uses images throughout the entire discourse with his disciples, teaching moral principals through parables: not to retaliate; to love your enemies, and don’t store up treasures on earth. It’s about the essence of giving. It’s about forgiveness and love, the merciful and the peacemakers.” – Diane (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

“From Matthew, the Sermon on the Mount is everything; it is the Gospel, about forgiveness; if you can’t forgive you are nowhere. The other core text is the Crucifixion, the journey to absolute emptiness, the denial of God and then being at one with God.” – Grainger (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

The Midian community read the gospels and the story of Jesus and held weekly discussions. Diane remembers that, “The real meaning of church is what we had at the farm - a community of believers. We didn’t believe in the bible in a doctrinal way. Jesus’ teachings gave us the energy or spirit of doing what we were doing.” Omar Walmsley, a friend and schoolteacher colleague and mentor of my dad’s lived beside Midian Farm and later became a co-owner (he passed away in the 2000s). As someone older and kindred, Grainger listened to Omar’s insights and sometimes still quotes things Omar said to him in the Midian years, “I remember Omar said: everybody has heroes, everybody has symbols but they know their symbols...the thing about you is you think you're Che Guevara. You think you're Jesus. You think that you have to do the same as those guys – you become one with them.” (Interview transcript, Spring 2016). According to Grainger, “Embodiment of the biblical teachings” was key to how he interpreted the bible. It was not a “script”. (Conversation, September 2017).

As expressed in their quotes above, my parent's attempted to live out their interpretation of the teachings of Jesus at the farm. They had stopped attending a church regularly, and the community was a fellowship, like a church.

Living their values meant sharing resources, trying to support and love each other, helping those in need especially the troubled and drug-affected youth who came to the farm and worked the land. In speaking with former owners and visitors, by most accounts Grainger was considered the "leader"; he had either been their school teacher or community organizer in the city, and his knowledge of the scriptures (having practiced as a student minister) gave him the credentials of authority, and he was the oldest, most members were in their late teens. However, from what I gathered, he wasn't considered a *guru* in the stereotypical sense, as seen in some communal structures of the day, most famously The Farm in Tennessee led by Stephen Gaskin. The leadership structure at Midian Farm didn't preclude people from having other mentors and influences, and as part of my research into the Christian theme I stumbled upon the Berrigan Brothers - their books could be found in the farmhouse library. Daniel and Philip Berrigan were priests at the heart of the American Catholic peace movement and they became public figures in 1968 after setting fire to draft files in Maryland, USA. There is a large corpus of writing between, by and about them. As American Catholic priests they resisted nuclear weapons, the Vietnam War, and spent time in prison, and their writings and frontline activism influenced a few of the members of Midian Farm. My uncle Jim (my mother's youngest sibling) and his wife, my aunt Debbie, married at Midian Farm, and Michele Lavin (Michele married co-owner Don Wilkinson at the farm) studied with and hung out with the Berrigan Brothers in 1973.

When Grainger and Diane's marriage dramatically ended in 1974, their spiritual lives went in different directions. I dug deeper to understand more about how their foundations grew and changed, and interviewed them separately by phone during the winter of 2017.

As a burgeoning feminist in the late 1970s, Diane was ready to resign from the church because, "although women had been ordained in 1976, the roles of women in the church were subordinate to men", but her decision changed after she expressed her position to the head of the Anglican Church in Canada, Archbishop Ted Scott. (Phone interview, Winter 2017). He went on to create a national task force focussed on the full participation of women in the church and Diane agreed to be part of it. It was called The Participation Taskforce. According to Diane, "I became active and focussed on bringing inclusive language to prayers and hymns. We did a cross-country survey about the roles of women in their parishes and those who did the work of fundraising and organizing, 60% were women, but women made up only 20% of the decision makers. We now have women Bishops." (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

By the late 1970s Grainger wanted nothing to do with organized Christianity, "I was fed up with the hypocrisy. I became interested in the mystical side of things and got into primal scream therapy and then studied Tarot. I went to psychotherapy and got into bodywork and a primal scream experience was like baptism - it was like going down under the water in death and coming back into full life... I read Helen Luke's work and *Old Age: Journey Into Simplicity* is all about giving up everything... Transformation is only possible when we go into the abyss and fear. You have to lose everything to find anything." (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

... for Odysseus, the oar he carried must have grown a heavier burden, as the realization grew in his thought that the moment when he could be relieved of its weight would also be the moment of the final letting go of that which had held him the meaning of his life. The horizon for such travellers shrinks and shrinks until they are stripped of all but the present moment

- Helen Luke - *Old Age: Journey into Simplicity* – pg.9, *The Odyssey*

In piecing this all together, I see that Diane has grown over her lifetime within the context of her early conversion experience, focused on social justice, “My form of Christianity has been inspired by a commitment to social justice rooted in my faith in Jesus; the teachings of non-violence and the message of love and care for all persons, the creation/environment.” In her work over the last forty years as a therapist she has been committed to “the integration of personal and relationship healing with social justice and societal healing.” My mom has (and still does at the age of 73) worked with homeless youth, women, men and families, and with refugees and persons with disabilities. For twenty years she belonged to a former inner-city church in Toronto that had a large food bank.

After my dad left the church, his experimental spirit flickered onward. I knew he left all forms of sanctioned institution to explore mysticism, but it was through this project that I learned he didn’t stop believing in Jesus, “Whether I call myself a Christian or not depends on who I am talking to. Am I follower of Jesus? I am not sure how to answer that. I never had a Guru... In Shamanism, they find you an image or an animal totem, and my shaman came out of the trance and said that mine is Jesus.”

Grainger and Diane have lived very different lives since they were married, but a shared insatiable love of adventure and for other cultures, sparked in 1964 – 1965 during their world travels, is something they each continue to foster. Over the decades my dad has worked as an agriculturalist and a contractor and has lived abroad for months at a time in Australia, France, Scotland and Spain. He lives simply with a small ecological footprint, and endurance cycling trips with friends, usually 30 kilometres and sometimes up to 700 kilometres, remains central to his active lifestyle at the age of 78.

My mom has travelled for work and pleasure over the decades to different parts of Asia and the Middle East, including representing the Anglican Church of Canada as part of inter-faith delegations, and in recent years she has enjoyed long walking tours with close friends in different parts of Europe.

History, Culture, Timeline of Midian Farm: 1971 – 1977

Midian Farm was one of many utopian dreams of the 1970s, inspired on a foundation of hope, formed during a historic period of social flux. Its rise and fall was influenced at the intersection of social revolution. Based on my research about the era, there was an intense convergence of social movements, from civil rights, the second wave of feminism, radical theology, the anti Vietnam War peace movement, gay liberation, youth counter-culture, environmentalism, ethical vegetarianism, to an urban back-to-the-land ethos, and more. The spirit of the day was busting out of convention, redefining identity and culture through experimentation and utopian aspiration.

“The original idea for Midian came while Diane and I travelled the world. I thought of getting a place to bring different peoples together to share the world - - our minds were blown by our travels and we wanted others to see beyond the smaller perspective. Also I loved farms and wanted to grow stuff, and provide a support place and a teaching place.”

- Grainger (Email correspondence, Summer 2015).

“Our community read books like Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice*, discussed abortion, the Vietnam War, the developing world, and liberation theology movements. I started reading the early writers of the second wave of feminism.” - Diane (Email correspondence, Summer 2015).

In the spring of 1971, Grainger and Diane Cowie along with eight of their friends from the city purchased a large parcel of farmland northeast of Toronto in Beaverton, Ontario. (*Appendix A*) Sprawling outward along the Trent Canal the property yielded more than 85-acres of arable land, a densely thicketed forest of cedar, beech, oak, sugar maple and hemlock, and a century old farmhouse and barn. They named it Midian Farm. I was two, my brother Paul was a new baby and my brother Michael was four.

Core members of the community were part of the grassroots network my dad and mom started in Toronto; a culmination of several community offshoots including Young Life - the Evangelical Christian organization my parents had departed from in the late 1960s - and Doorway, a drop-in centre for struggling youth, and a Monday evening bible study at our home on Northey Drive in Don Mills. *Family* was an alternative to a church and Grainger was the resident theologian, and Diane a supportive listener to numerous young participants seeking comfort and direction.

To begin, the farm would be a two-year experiment (*Appendix B*) after which its core owners and members would review their shared philosophy. The vision included an outward-bound program for troubled and drug-affected youth, a therapeutic educational environment, a retreat centre, large self-sustaining gardens, feed crops and animal agriculture.

The community engaged in a leftist grassroots Christian practice, being of service to others and sharing resources as a form of resistance to capitalist individualism. They believed a radical change of lifestyle was the solution to society's increasing problems.

After the community purchased Midian Farm in the summer of 1971, a group of twenty-one embarked on an experimental road trip facilitated by my father. The trip tested the group's interpersonal potential, to experience the world outside of their comfort zone. They set out for a month in an old school bus driven by Grainger, from Ontario down through the United States to the West Coast to Mexico, and back. They slept in farmers' fields, ate simply, kept a group journal and listened to Cat Stevens' *Tea For the Tillerman* on repeat. Diane, my brothers and I stayed in Winnipeg at my grandparents place, and the bus picked us up on its way back to Midian Farm in Ontario.

Midian took root in the fall of 1971. My aunt Nancy and uncle John were married under the property's magnanimous maple tree. There was a large celebratory barn dance with live music and feasting, and their wedding unofficially opened the farm to the public, growing a spirit of love. The community held weekly meetings to plan and report on work projects, discuss their philosophy, and often there was an agenda. (*Appendix C*)

There was daily song and prayer during the main meal at mid-day, a feast of fresh bread and foods prepared and shared among owners and visitors around the large hemlock kitchen table made by my uncle John. Upwards of fifty people would come and go in the summer, the fields were scattered with tepees and tents. The farm was seen as a welcoming haven for young people questioning society's values and institutions, and for those who wanted to get clean from the Yorkville hippie drug scene in Toronto. Midian Farm was different from the popularized intentional communities of the day. In the United States for example, Stephen Gaskin's The Farm was considered the epicentre of hippie counterculture, with hundreds of fulltime members from San Francisco building their own society, where marijuana was considered sacred, meals were strictly vegan, artificial birth control was prohibited and some practiced group marriage (marriage between more than two people.) Whereas at Midian Farm, most still worked or lived part-time in Toronto, it was a place to get off of drugs, not to take them, and marriages were between two people, "Midian was providing us with an alternative to being on the streets, in parks, in malls, or downtown in Yorkville where much of the activity involved heavy drugs, sex, heavy music. We were all acting like hippies to one extent or another (including the more socially responsible stuff, such as radical student newspapers, protests and music festivals)." – Rob Williams, former visitor (Email correspondence, Summer 2015).

Major projects included the fixing of old structures and the building of two geodesic dome dwellings inspired by futurist and inventor Buckminster Fuller. Ongoing seasonal work kept people busy year-round, with manual tilling of the soil and the planting and harvesting of food without the use of pesticides. (*Appendix D*).

Winter production included the tapping of maple syrup from the sugar bush in the woodlot at the back of the land, and the autumn season included harvesting large crops of potatoes, squash, tomatoes and an abundance of other vegetables and herbs, also canning and pickling. They reared and cared for a flock of sheep, chickens and roosters, pigs and cows, for food. Some animals were sold to market, others were slaughtered on the property, and there were at least two members who practiced ethical vegetarianism. The core owners had two horse companions, Bill was the resident workhorse who assisted with the tilling of the land and pulled sleds to the back woodlot for firewood and other supplies. During winter months the farm's full-time expert organic farmers, married couple Dick and Mary Both, pumped heat from their woodstove under the ground into a winterized small geodesic dome greenhouse, this innovation allowed them to enjoy root and leafy vegetables during the harsh Ontario winter season.

I remember farm life as colourful and adventurous. I loved all of the animals - the chickens, cows, horses, dogs and cats, and I named them all after Peter Corbett, a resident of the farm who I adored. I ran around exploring the property with my brothers, following grownups as they worked. I remember music, sitting on the lap of co-owner and musician Ken Whiteley as he led song and played *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*. I remember the large round kitchen table, the smell of turnips, and watching my brother eat his toast with jam upside down. I remember holding hands with a large family of people around the table singing *Johnny Appleseed* before we ate. These scenes are like bursts of film in my minds' eye. Farm life was chaotic, probably confusing and disorientating for small kids, but it felt happy.

My aunt Nancy was a fixture, she helped raise my brothers and me, “I believed that being in community was like being in an extended family. We even called our gatherings "Family Meetings". Yes, I was committed! I put my body, heart and soul into the work of building an intentional community. Also, I loved ANIMALS and GARDENING and HARD WORK! Oh, the Promise!” - Nancy Budd-Denham, former co-owner (Email correspondence, Summer 2015)

Inevitably, however, tension set in. Financial resources were scarce and winter months were challenging with fewer people living full-time on the land tending to the animals, water, firewood, shovelling snow, and maintaining food and sustenance.

Human dynamics collided as the more outspoken would drown out the quieter ones, and by most accounts Grainger's leadership style became authoritarian. By some accounts, full dedication was demanded to accomplish the vision, which meant personal sacrifice - not having commitments beyond the greater good of the community.

By the spring of 1973 my family lived full-time in the farmhouse while the community built two geodesic domes, one of which my family would live in. The giant dome at Expo '67 in Montreal, conceived by Buckminster Fuller, was a spectacle of the day and still stands as the Montreal Biosphere of Environmental History. Diane and Grainger witnessed the dome at Expo '67 and it was an influence, and Dick and Mary Both had already built a small geodesic dome prototype as their greenhouse, but no one quite remembers whose idea it was to build two large hemispherical dome dwellings. Nonetheless, with all of its innovative complexity and trial and error, the community committed themselves to the endeavour.

To dig and lay the foundation, build and assemble two round structures was a monumental project that required money, resources, teamwork, patience and hard labour. Simultaneously, my father started Erin Lane alternative high school in downtown Toronto (*Appendix E*), which was, in part, inspired by Summerhill School in Suffolk, England – an experimental learning centre formed in 1921. Grainger and Diane had taken a course at the University of Toronto in 1971 about alternative concepts of education and read a book called *Summerhill*, which gave substance to the idea of forming an urban alternative high school connected to the farm. Grainger was the principal of Erin Lane and a teacher. He lived communally in the city during the workweek and came up to the farm on the weekends.

By the summer of 1973, my parents' marriage was deteriorating. Some people left the farm in disillusionment including my aunt Nancy and uncle John who had been central to the community and to our family. My aunt Debbie, uncle Jim, and Michele Lavin (each central to the community) went on an excursion during the summer of strife to further explore links between their desire to radically participate in society and their Christian faith, "During the summer of 1973, Jim, Michele and I read *No Bars to Manhood* by Daniel Berrigan – we then found out that he was to teach two courses at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg and we decided to venture there to be part of it. The courses were 'Prison Literature' – everyone from St. Paul, to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jacques Ellul, Malcolm X, and more. We were immersed in civil disobedience and challenged to think about following our conscience, even if it meant breaking the law. We had the privilege of studying with Daniel Berrigan and through him we met his brother Phil and ended up living at Jonah House in the United States to work fulltime to help end the Vietnam War.

My biggest lesson was that I saw in Dan and Phil a model of healthy empowering leadership (this wasn't the case at Midian Farm), and I busted any fear I had of authority. A truly transformative time.” - Debbie Mealia, former co-owner (Email correspondence, Summer 2017).

Back at the farm, during hardship in the fall of 1973, a freakish hailstorm of epic dimension emerged from blue skies and wiped out the entire harvest in under one hour. Fruits of hard labour were destroyed. Hail was the size of golf balls; denting vehicles, breaking windows, puncturing through canvas tents. A lightning-bolt split the farm's central majestic maple tree in half and damaged the barn. Shockingly, neighbouring properties were unscathed. This catastrophic event heightened pressures and emotional fractures already being experienced. But the community persevered. The small dome was framed, wired, plumbed, insulated, painted and finished as a cozy abode, with leaky window joints, in time for winter, and my family settled in time for a Christmas holiday open house party. The second larger dome, meant as an educational retreat arm of the farm, was incomplete, due to lack of money and resources.

By the winter of 1974 Diane's burnout reached a peak level, which led to a physical and emotional breakdown, and she was hospitalized for several weeks in Toronto. When my mother returned to the farm she decided to leave in the spring, temporarily, with my brothers and me. I remember this time as very empty and I developed anxiety about my mother's health and wellbeing. We took the train out west to British Columbia to build a new chapter, and didn't return to the farm.

The collapse of my parents' marriage resulted in dramatic endings and new beginnings for the Midian Farm community. Some stayed, new people came, my dad remained involved but mostly focused on Erin Lane School. The Midian community tried to make things work by envisioning a commercial scale of farming to generate sustainable income, but after an electrical fire in 1977 the farmhouse was gutted, "After the farmhouse burned down, due to an electrical issue, we had some demolition parties, where we all came for some days and helped take the house down, "A very sad time for all of us. Midian Farm came to an end in 1977." - Don Wilkinson, former co-owner (Email correspondence, Summer 2015)

Although the house was rebuilt, they sold the property shortly after and shares were divvied up in 1977. (*Appendix F*)

Feminism

By the early 1970s a forceful critique of patriarchy percolated Western culture. In many of my interviews with the Midian Farm community, early feminism was referenced as something in the zeitgeist; women were gravitating to it, also critiquing it, men were trying to find their place, while others outright rejected it.

In the context of farm life, an egalitarian model was alive in the kitchen and out in the fields, "Women didn't just cook, and we all took turns doing the dishes... most of us grew up in households where the boys did the garbage and the girls did pretty much everything else."

(Michele Lavin, former co-owner) “I cooked supper every night, that was one of my tasks ... I got into canning, I actually started making pies.”(Ken Whiteley, former resident) “I think I dug most of the septic field for the dome by hand out in the field because we couldn't afford to get a backhoe.” (Nancy Kendel, former co-owner) “Nobody felt constrained by gender roles. Gender roles were all over the place, cooking had to be done, mopping up stalls had to be done ... there was no job description.” (Richard Hood, former visitor). (Interview transcripts, Spring – Summer 2016).

For as long as I can remember my mother has been a strong advocate of women's liberation and I consider her to be one of the pioneers of early feminism. Reading her Ms. Magazine's formed part of my early education. In the 1960s my mom was shaping a perspective on women's issues and she read *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. Diane had been rejected from medical school in the early 1960s, as an Honours student, because during the interview, when asked, she expressed a desire to have children.

During my mom's world travels with my dad through the Middle East and Asia she witnessed women's lives, “how they tended to the sick and the elderly but were largely hidden from public life.” (Interview transcript, Summer 2016) During their travels in Europe Diane worked in the women's pavilion at Bloemendaal, a psychiatric hospital in the Netherlands where several of the long-term female patients were rape victims [sex slaves] of Nazi Germany. But it was two seminal books *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Female Eunuch* that influenced her theoretical understanding of feminism. In my examination of the social-political underpinnings, I felt it important to inquire about the impact of *The Female Eunuch* on my mother's consciousness;

she read it in 1971, the year Midian Farm was purchased. In form and in content Germaine Greer's book was considered a revolutionary text, challenging the status quo and tackling the subject of women's sexuality:

Hopefully, this book is subversive. Hopefully, it will draw fire from all the articulate sections of the community. The conventional moralist will find much that is reprehensible in the denial of the Holy Family, in the denigration of sacred motherhood, and the inference that women are not by nature monogamous.

Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* – pg 11- 22, 1970, Paladin

In November 1971, just before her 27th birthday, Diane was in the hospital healing from a herniated disc. She had been putting storm windows in at Midian Farm and felt the pop in her neck. She was hospitalized for ten days and then needed to lie flat on her back and wear a neck brace for two weeks when she returned home. My younger brother was ten months old, I was two and a half, and my older brother was four, "I had to hide *The Female Eunuch* under the bed sheets at the hospital because the doctors and nurses were appalled by the book cover image [a naked woman's torso]. I had a sense that something was revolutionary...

I continued reading it when I got home but I hid the book under the bed so that Grainger wouldn't see it." Diane didn't feel she had peers to relate to about the views that were forming, "I didn't know any Christian women who combined marriage, children and a career." At Midian Farm she was the oldest woman (in her late 20s) and the only mother, the only woman with a university degree, and she was determined to forge a career as a Counselling Psychologist,

“I made myself available to talk with all of the young people in our community, to listen to them, and I see that as the beginning of my work as a therapist.” (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

Although at the time Grainger was seen as the farm’s leader, in retrospect a few of the Midian Farm people I interviewed commented that in the context of today Diane would also be referred to as a leader. “I was asserting my full participation at the farm and never played the role of being submissive in my marriage.” (Phone interview with Diane, Winter 2017).

I asked my mom during my phone interview with her whether she referred to herself as a “feminist” at the farm, and she said, “No! Because the word had a bad connotation in the circles we were in: feminists were destroying the family, were anti-children, were bra burning women who didn’t respect social institutions, who didn’t respect religious institutions, or the family... I went about it in my own way, pointing out that women in the bible were fully recognized by Jesus.” In 1975, International Women’s Year (declared by the United Nations), my mom was a single mother, and she decided to claim the term ‘feminist’ for herself, “It became liberating for me but I was lambasted for it.” (Phone interview, Winter 2017)

Chapter Three: Methodology

Influences & Approach

When I first started writing songs and being very explicit, it was hard, but one of the main things people respond to in my writing is that 'just say it' attitude of my songs. There really is nothing personal or private; it's all universal, if you can just find the courage to be open about your life.

- Ani DiFranco

In the 1990s I was passionately inspired to make a film about American folk icon Ani DiFranco. Her autobiographical lyrics and vulnerability, fierce brand of feminism, sexuality, and *fuck you* to the corporate system introduced me to the feminist slogan of the 1960s and 70s: *the personal is political*. I was fresh out of film school when Ani commissioned me to document her life on the road during her 1995 tour in Ontario and New York, during the rise of her indie success and influence. With behind-the-scenes access I directed a multimedia archival road-movie-collage shot on super 8mm and 16mm film, hi-8 video, Polaroid and 35mm photographs, and with digital audio recordings. I co-shot the material with my Ryerson film school compatriot, the amazing cinematographer Chris Romeike. Chris and I intuitively ignored any convention of a fourth wall and included the filmmaking team and process as part of our documentation. There are shots of us, the cameras, me talking and connecting with Ani, laced through the footage. The result is a 40+-hour multimedia archive that I intend to shape into a film one day. I imagine an experimental diary film – recounting and celebrating an era, an icon, and unpacking my first independent film project, inspired by a self-actualized young political artist. We were both twenty-four. This diary approach to filmmaking was my instinct back in the 1990s.

Throughout my life I have written my dreams, kept a journal of thoughts, notes and sketches, preserved handwritten letter correspondence, captured 35mm photographic images, shot videos and films of family and friends, and of environments across the globe, and I keep the raw footage from each film I make. This amounts to a vast analog and digital collection preserved in trunks, drawers, frames, and on hard drives. Exploring my family history in film form was instinctive for me, and while FAMILY PORTRAIT is my first formal attempt at personal essay, diary filmmaking, my voice was dormant not nascent.

The feature length essay documentary is what I have been experimenting with through my industry-funded work since 2008. Exploring global issues, following protagonists, making “the ‘invisible’ world of thoughts and ideas visible on the screen...” (*The Film Essay*, Hans Richter, 1940 paper). This nonfiction cinema practice continues to call me, with all of its heavy lifting, and I will continue along my newly forged path, creating personal, nonlinear essay films, to shape materials from my life, including the Ani DiFranco archive. As part of this ongoing discovery I will learn more about the Film Diary tradition. For example, the extensive filmography of American experimental filmmaker Su Friedrich, whose feminist body of work is known and celebrated for blending the personal with the political, and the catalogue of American pioneer Jonas Mekas, which extends from the 1960s. In *Walden: Diaries Notes and Sketches* (1969) and *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty* (2000) Mekas constructs personal archives of family and friends, uses outtakes from unfinished projects, and inserts himself in his works. His following quote sums up an approach that I find explosive in its freedom, and relates to my experience in making FAMILY PORTRAIT:

*I'm working in a form of cinema that can be described, and has been described,
as a diaristic form of cinema. In other words, with material from my own life.*

I walk through life with my camera, and occasionally I film.

I never think about scripts, never think about films, making films.

- Jonas Mekas on Filmmaking, interview with Tish Wrigley, AnOther, 2012

References while making FAMILY PORTRAIT were films that navigate multiple characters, time and memory, and that are self- reflexive about family. Philip Hoffman's *Process Cinema* methodology was an enduring influence, introducing new energy and subjectivity to my practice. In Phil's course an "improvisational and interactive ... fluid integration of writing, shooting and editing, not necessarily in that order" (course syllabus) is how I shaped exercises around themes of Midian Farm, experimenting and sketching out elements. For example, using the black and white portrait of my family taken in 1971 and making it dynamic through close-ups of details within the image, I tapped the core essence of my film, which is my relationship to the story through my parents, and I explored the cinematic power of silence and black. In watching Phil's epic films *All Fall Down* (2009); *What These Ashes Wanted* (2001); *Passing Through/Torn Formations* (1988), I am immersed in liminal spaces through a seeking camera and fluid layers, and *In What These Ashes Wanted*, the musicality of multiple voices was a reference for me in building the collective voice of Midian Farm - like a chorus of voices the Midian community is one voice; expressing a shared vision. Sarah Polley's *Stories We Tell* (2012) is a masterful Canadian personal feature documentary. She investigates family history, revealing the subjective nature of memory and truth, and convincingly mixes real archives with super 8mm re-enactments.

Polley's film was a reference for me as I created re-enactments with a child non-actor (a friend's child) who embodies my child-spirit from the Midian days. I filmed her running and playing at Phil Hoffman's farm, interacting with farm animals, and I also filmed her at the former Midian Farm property. Having seen *Stories We Tell* a few times, studying its complex structural treatment, I reached out to veteran picture editor Mike Munn in 2015 to discuss the feature length version of the Midian Farm film I was conceiving. I was fortunate to work with Mike during the fall of 2016, after I had completed production, to assemble the narrative arc of the rise and fall of Midian Farm, for the feature length documentary called MIDIAN FARM. I ported discoveries over to my thesis film; as a springboard to go further, to experiment with form, to utilize elements from sketches and exercises at York, and to further excavate the personal dimensions of the story.

I have a passion for observational documentary cinema, and have experimented with Cinema Vérité and Direct Cinema forms over the years, sometimes breaking the fourth wall by interacting with subjects and constructing stylized setups, but have mostly maintained a fourth wall to not draw attention to me the maker, to instead immerse fully in the subject's point of view. The Canadian 1969 Direct Cinema documentary classic *A Married Couple* by Allan King intimately transports the viewer into the messiness of marriage, no holds barred (he coined the term "actuality drama"), and I have watched it a few times observing the masterful handheld camerawork. *Killer of Sheep*, the 1978 American drama by Charles Burnett (likened to Italian Neorealism), is another film I have admired for its observational naturalistic beauty and immersion.

French film critic and theorist André Bazin said that Neorealism portrays “truth, naturalness, authenticity, and is a cinema of duration” (Bondanella, Peter. page 3-4) In comparing Neorealism (fiction) with Direct Cinema (non-fiction), both share the aesthetic and illusion that subject and audience do not notice the presence of the camera.

Yet, the legacy of late French filmmaker Jean Rouch, the pioneer of Cinema Verite, is described “...by exploring the relationship between observer and observed, often giving as much importance to the presence of the former as to that of the latter, has become central to anthropology and to documentary film.” - Senses of Cinema, Matt Losada, 2010, Issue 57.

In shooting FAMILY PORTRAIT, I filmed within a naturalistic paradigm that I apply to most of my work: simple technical set-ups, steady observational handheld camerawork, and situational daylight to capture details, moments, and honest interactions. My lens finds my parents in their homes, films the details of their environments, observes them driving together around old Toronto area haunts, and walking on the former Midian Farm property. I filmed Grainger and Diane and the Midian Farm participants looking through their archives. The multi-camera shoot of the Midian Farm reunion applies the same observational technique. Everyone ignored any illusion of a fourth wall, calling me by name, looking into the lens, engaging in spontaneous interaction: I am behind the lens as the daughter, niece, grown child of the community, and an experienced filmmaker they trust. In this sense, FAMILY PORTRAIT reflects both a Direct Cinema and Cinema Vérité approach to and with subjects/participants.

My Presence

I am the entry-point, and with privileged proximity I inhabit the present and the past, interacting with a cast of characters, inviting a participatory experience. I knew the personal core would be challenging but that is an understatement - it was terrifying at times. I tossed and turned, uncertain about my voice-over narration. The film needed me at times, to explain my motivation, to add context, and to reveal deeper parts of myself, without being obvious and without navel-gazing.

In the end, I arrived at a voice-over that is very minimal (I explain my process in more detail in the “*Conclusion: Challenges*” section of this paper). Separate from my narration, I inserted my presence around the edges of the film. My voice is present in the one-on-one audio conversations with the participants but mostly through interactions with my parents. I occasionally prompt questions, or respond, I reframe and focus my handheld camera. I am reflected in the glass frame of my mother’s art in her apartment, and I interact from behind the camera with my dad who jokingly challenges the inequity he feels in certain moments (I am hidden, he is exposed). I see these moments between us as content, reflecting our negotiation of trust. Through impressionistic super 8mm and hand-processed 16mm film, I am also a child poetically engaged with memory, the land, and the animals. I use this film thread sparingly, as a motif to suggest innocence, and also healing.

Elements

Just give me a home, in a great circle dome

Where stresses and strains are at ease.

- Buckminster Fuller

The Midian Farm story offers an inherent dramatic narrative arc, and so does the story of my parents. Unscripted, process-driven filmmaking was identifying an ecosystem of pieces and moving parts and exploring film language - sound and visual form. This was done through extensive research and writing, gathering of archives, various shoots, and an editing process that spanned a year with built-in breaks along the way to gain perspective.

The following is a descriptive list of the audio-visual elements in the film, and I provide some technical notes such as format of materials and workflow.

Archives

It was new and exciting terrain making a documentary with strong historical material. To effectively navigate between worlds - the past and the present – meant relying on non-sync visual archives to bring Midian Farm to life. I gathered a treasure trove including colour Kodachrome slides, colour and black and white 35mm photographs, twelve minutes of silent colour super 8mm film (each second is a drop of gold as the only existing film footage I could locate), the original hand-written agreement between the ten co-owners, real estate papers from the sale of the property in 1977, wedding invitations, typed and handwritten minutes from communal meetings, and more. There were many surprises along the way – new angles of the fields, dome, barns, the farmhouse interior, and images of all the people.

A tray of slides emerged from an old storage box at my mom's place of my parent's trip around the world. Grainger had taken the images and I discovered his amazing instinct for photography. Everyone I connected with had something precious and different in their possession, amounting to a robust collection of three boxes. More than 242 still images were professionally scanned and labelled according to who loaned them to the project, what the theme of the image is (for example, "kitchen table"), and who is featured. The edit of the archives mostly respects the integrity of full compositions, sometimes slowly panning or zooming in, and I also edited layered dynamic sequences consisting of different opacities of photos and film footage, to express immersive impressionistic memories.

Audio Conversations

The camera would distance me from them, creating a layer between us, and so I engaged in a total of twenty-two audio-recorded conversations with my parents and the Midian Farm community. As a one-person crew I needed to be fully available, less as a filmmaker and more as a participant in the story. I used a simple battery operated Zoom Portable Digital Recorder, one mic for me and one mic for them. I sat in many quiet living rooms across Ontario and British Columbia using the same six questions with each person as a guidepost. I encouraged diversions and stream of consciousness, and most recorded conversations lasted roughly two hours. I had it all transcribed and the volume of pages amount to two thick binders of content. A momentous task was for each audio file to be organized thematically according to what was discussed (for example, "purchase of property", "geodesic dome", "Grainger and Diane"), and I worked with a very skilled assistant editor, Ellen DesRues, who organized the audio in preparation for the editing phase, identifying dozens of shared themes.

During the edit I aimed to conceptually capture one communitarian voice and experimented in my final course at York University, creating a short film called “*the Chorus*”. I applied this concept to my thesis film, to elevate the collective hopes and bubbling optimism of the community. Voices are sometimes slightly overlapped like a call and response, building on what the last person offered, to create a sense of immediacy about farm life. There is clarity and singularity of voice when each person speaks but FAMILY PORTRAIT is about the group experience, and their individual names are not on-screen during the film, but each person is prominently credited at the end of the film. For the feature-length documentary, the identities of individuals and their stories will be part of the film.

Family Portrait

I begin the film with close up frames, exploring a single black and white portrait of my family taken in 1971, the year Midian Farm was purchased. I return to the same image near the end of the film, exploring new details like a puzzle before revealing the full composition. As I explain earlier in this paper in the *Methodology: Influences* section, I first experimented with this iconic photograph in Phil Hoffman’s Process Cinema course - it is there I discovered the power of working very minimally with a single photographic image to convey so much narrative content. The photo is dynamic, containing memories of togetherness, on the cusp of our final chapter as a family. Later in the film it is revealed that we have not come together again as a family unit since 1974, the year my mother left Midian with my brothers and me. I use this image in the film as an entry-point to my father’s voice, my filmmaker voice, and my exchange with my dad, and I use it again to enter my mother’s personal recollection about the context of the photo.

I use silence and black, leading up to and following the photo, creating immersive interior space that no image or sound can fill. This family portrait is a symbol representing the heart of the film for me, hence the title of the film. The notion of “family” invites reflection, and the Midian Farm community was and still is, like an extended family. In the credit block I dedicate the film “to my big family”.

Film re-enactments

In the *Methodology: Influences* section of this paper I reference the colour and black and white 16mm and Super 8mm film footage that I shot of a child non-actor (a friends’ child) running and playing in fields and interacting with animals. She wears vintage overalls I found in a second-hand clothing store, and her general look and athletic physical nature mirrors me as a playful happy tomboy child in the early 1970s. This footage is like slivers of memory, poetic not literal, and it augments my relationship to the story. I also shot details of the land, an old barn interior and exterior, breezy tall grasses, pigs burrowing in the mud and a large Clydesdale resembling Bill, Midian Farm’s work horse. The 16mm film footage was shot at Phil Hoffman’s *Film Farm* as part of our Process Cinema course where I also hand-processed the black and white film footage, exploring organic textures of scratches and grit. I shot the Super 8mm footage on the Midian Farm property of the horizon, of flowers and grasses, and of the child running around with her dog.

Being together on the Midian land added an additional layer of immersion while shooting, but all of film footage that I shot and edited transports me to Midian Farm, blending with the archival materials.

Geodesic Dome

The Geodesic Dome, popularized by the late visionary architect Buckminster Fuller, is a forward-thinking icon, containing the spirit of invention and an eco-conscious humanitarian vision for the planet. I knew early on in my filmmaking process that Midian's dome would be a magical device for the film, symbolizing hope, failure, and time. During my research phase I scouted the former Midian property in Beaverton, Ontario to take photos and obtain permission to film on the land. I secured official access and discovered that the dome still stands, unoccupied, ravaged by animals and nature; falling apart at the seams, yet still a perfect sphere with the same kitchen and bathroom fixtures. In sorting through the photographic archives I discovered a series of colour slides of the dome being built, documented beautifully by Midian's neighbour, friend and mentor Omar Walmsley. *FAMILY PORTRAIT* charts the making of the dome through chronological photographs during the final act, characterized by hardship. 4k locked-off cinematic video footage composed on an Epic Red camera, lingers on details of the dome interior and exterior today, as a meditation on memory and the passage of time, and as a framing device to begin and end the story.

Kitchen Table

When Don Wilkinson, a former owner of the farm, told me that he had kept the original pieces of the farm's hemlock kitchen table in his garage, I was inspired to film it being put back together. I made a short 08:00 minute film around this idea for a course led by acclaimed Canadian filmmaker Jennifer Baichwal.

In the winter of 2016 I invited a few of the former Midian Farm owners in Ontario to come together, to share a potluck meal around the kitchen table. Ken Whiteley offered to host the event in his Toronto back yard recording studio, and I directed the scene as a two-camera observational shoot, to capture what would unfold. The sense of immediacy was palpable; the kitchen table transported us all. From 1971 – 1977 it was the centrepiece of the farmhouse kitchen, up to twenty-two could squeeze around it for daily meals, discussions, music and prayer. In FAMILY PORTRAIT I use brief revealing moments from my short film *“Kitchen Table”* during an immersive archival sequence about the gardens, the harvest and the table. The past and present are interchangeable. The present day footage foreshadows difficult times as one of the participants, Dick Both, sheds tears, and this triggers a shift in the film’s tone. The making of *“Kitchen Table”* marked the beginning of production and Jennifer was a helpful sounding board as I wrestled with how to integrate, or not, my voice in the piece. In the end it did not need my voice, it speaks for itself, but it was clear that my voiceover would be my greatest challenge with FAMILY PORTRAIT. Jennifer validated my instinct to keep it sparse. In her 1999 documentary *“The Holier it Gets”* she and her siblings bury their father's ashes in the Ganges River, and Jennifer shared with me some of her own similar challenges in writing and recording something so personal. It was clear that for such a deeply personal family film I needed to include a voice-over - it is motivated, adds depth and context to the film. I speak about this in the *“Challenges”* section of this thesis paper.

Reunion

The biggest undertaking was orchestrating the reunion, on the same parcel of 85-acres of fields and woods. I started the planning a year in advance, to take place August 29th 2016, after I had conducted the one-on-one shoots across Ontario and British Columbia.

I captured the event with a talented crew using High Definition video cameras with sound recordists, and a small production crew to manage catering and details. This freed me to be present on the actual day, as the director, and also as a participant and member of Midian Farm. Cameras were strategically placed for the arrivals, to observe the flow of people at different locations, as they set foot again on the land and greeted each other. My main points of direction for the cinematography were for cameras to be handheld when filming people, calm and astutely observational, holding on people's faces and interactions, not hurried, intuitively tuned in to the emotional weight of the event for people, and for locked-off landscape compositions of the property. With so much going on it was important to be an intuitive witness and to not attempt to control things too much – but I also needed the group to stick together, even it meant forking off into two to three smaller groups, and I needed to shape the day around our shooting needs with the available light. We had no electricity and once the sun went down it was pitch dark. Upwards of fifty people attended the reunion from across Canada, including kids and grandkids, with the understanding that by attending the reunion they were part of the film, and release forms were signed. The event was advertised as 'rain or shine', and luckily weather was on our side, with blue skies and golden end of summer light. My aunts and uncles Nancy and John and Jim and Deb, and a few of my cousins attended, including Katherine (John and Nancy's eldest who lived at the farm as a baby). Diane attended, Grainger couldn't make it, and neither could my brothers.

People congregated on the same sprawling lawn that weddings once took place, beside the property's new farmhouse (which has the same stone foundation), and they looked out over the land in front of a wild overgrown area of weeds, flowers and grasses, where the barn once stood. I have a total of sixteen hours of Direct Cinema documentary footage, following small groups at a time through the old geodesic dome nestled in a small wooded area (the trees were planted by the Midian community), and walking the land to re-experience the fields, woods and the canal. During magic hour, back on the lawn, we enjoyed a catered feast and potluck (where they once shared meals and had weddings). The day ended around a bonfire with song led by Ken Whiteley, and people took turns speaking from the heart. My uncle John surprised my aunt Nancy with a new wedding ring to commemorate their forty-fifth wedding anniversary (in 1971 they were married at Midian Farm), and Diane spoke bravely about reconciliation, which in part ends the film. The final shot of the day (and the final shot of the film before credits) was a drone from above the bonfire slowly lifting to its apex in the indigo sky; the little circle warmly lit below is encased by a vast and changed landscape.

Foundational Images

The following eight image selections are iconic symbols in the film, representing themes, relationships, conceptual ideas, and the passage of time. Some are recurring, some juxtapose the present tense with the past. Each is a portal to significant aspects of the film's narrative.

Image #1: Black and White Family Portrait

Credit: Patrick Scott

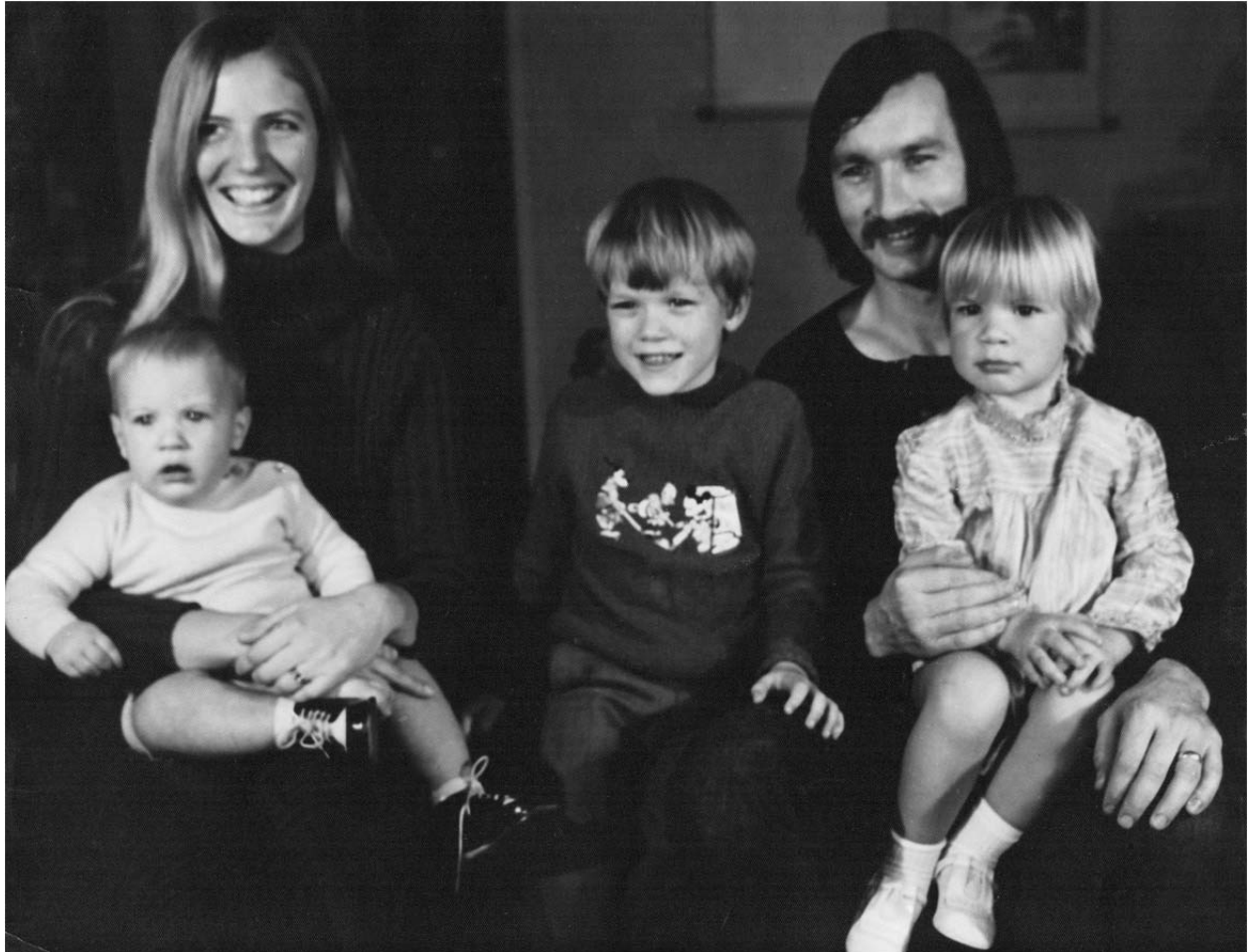


Image #2: Geodesic Dome: then

Credit: Omar Walmsley



Image #3: Geodesic Dome: now

Credit: Justin Lovell



Image #4: Gardens

Credit: Omar Walmsley



Image #5: Kitchen Table: then

Credit: Midian Farm Community Archives



Image #6: Kitchen Table: now

Credit: Liz Marshall



Image #7: Film Re-enactments with child

Credit: Liz Marshall



Image #8: Film Re-enactments with child

Credit: Liz Marshall



Chapter Four: Conclusion

Challenges: Filmmaker as Subject/Participant

Each film is a new world. Challenges are many but ultimately they are rewards as I expand my vocabulary. Each film is a journey but transformation doesn't come without a gruelling obstacle or two.

In the *Ethics* section of this paper I reference the challenge I was confronted with in needing to not shy away from the dramatic narrative arc of the story. The details of the collapse of Grainger and Diane's marriage and my mother's subsequent breakdown is something I would never expose in a film, but both are referenced as they dovetail with the hardship at the farm. So the challenge lay in how to express this overall tragedy. It's easy to get swept into the gaze of filmmaker, but a lot was at stake personally: I am caught in the story, but as a filmmaker and as an adult who is removed by time from the immediacy of this history, I am also critically removed, which allows for necessary reprieve, to meditate on bigger connections. The failure of Midian Farm is timeless and universal. This is the emotional and philosophical tone I aim for. Writing and recording my personal voice-over narration was the most arduous hair-pulling and tedious undertaking. I experimented over months, recording and rerecording many tracks. My takeaway was to be very minimal in my voiceover narration, to not risk stepping on the film. The film speaks for itself either directly through someone's content, or in a nuanced way through image and sound. I prefer some open-endedness, to invite the audience to find themselves in the story. Mostly, what I felt is that I cannot probe for truth and vulnerability in others without also doing the same, offering more of myself.

Discovery: The Personal is Creative, is Transformational

The film is a gift for your parents, the community, but mostly for yourself, as a way to move on from the powerful grip of what seemed a fixed history.. (not anymore...you sprung the moth free from the sedimentary shale and the threat of fossilization).

– Philip Hoffman (Email correspondence, Summer 2017)

In making FAMILY PORTRAIT I fostered a deeper trust with my instinct, and I whet an appetite for personal essay filmmaking. It has been a cathartic filmmaking practice, spanning an unforgettable two and half years within the context of my Masters in Cinema Production at York University.

I needed to open Midian Farm to understand it and put it to rest. It inspired reconnection among the Midian community, and a renewed and reconfigured relationship to my family history.

Making the film with the participation of my parents offered me the privilege of seeing Grainger and Diane more deeply as fellow humans in their final chapter of life.

When I started the journey I went through a temporary phase of foreboding; fearing what I would find, but darkness transformed into soulful excavation, and joy.

Contribution

Until now, the Midian Farm experiment has been unknown. In foraging and examining, shaping and living this film, I am happy to say it is now on public record, in the vault of Canadian ethnographic history.

FAMILY PORTRAIT is first and foremost a contribution to my family history, dedicated to my parents, aunts and uncles, and to the Midian Farm community (*Appendix E*).

This documentary is part of the film catalogue at York University, to be shared and critiqued by students, peers, colleagues and mentors. It is also for those who see themselves reflected in the film's multi-cast: the baby boomer generation - they are at a nostalgic juncture of life and some still engage or are interested in counterculture. My fellow generation x'rs will find common ground with my journey to question my parent's generation, and to seek reconciliation within the context of a broken family story. Today's younger generation of millennials are engaged in alternatives and could learn something from the social experiment of Midian Farm. The film will interest those who identify with a spiritual or Christian socially engaged path and perspective.

FAMILY PORTRAIT is a piece of Canadian history, capturing the idealism and social flux of an era, and drawing universal parallels: everyone has a family, many are broken, and everyone, no matter how small or large has a dream.

We stumble we fall, and we can celebrate the enduring spirit of intention.

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(Note: all email and telephone sources, as referenced as endnotes in the text, are in author's private collection)

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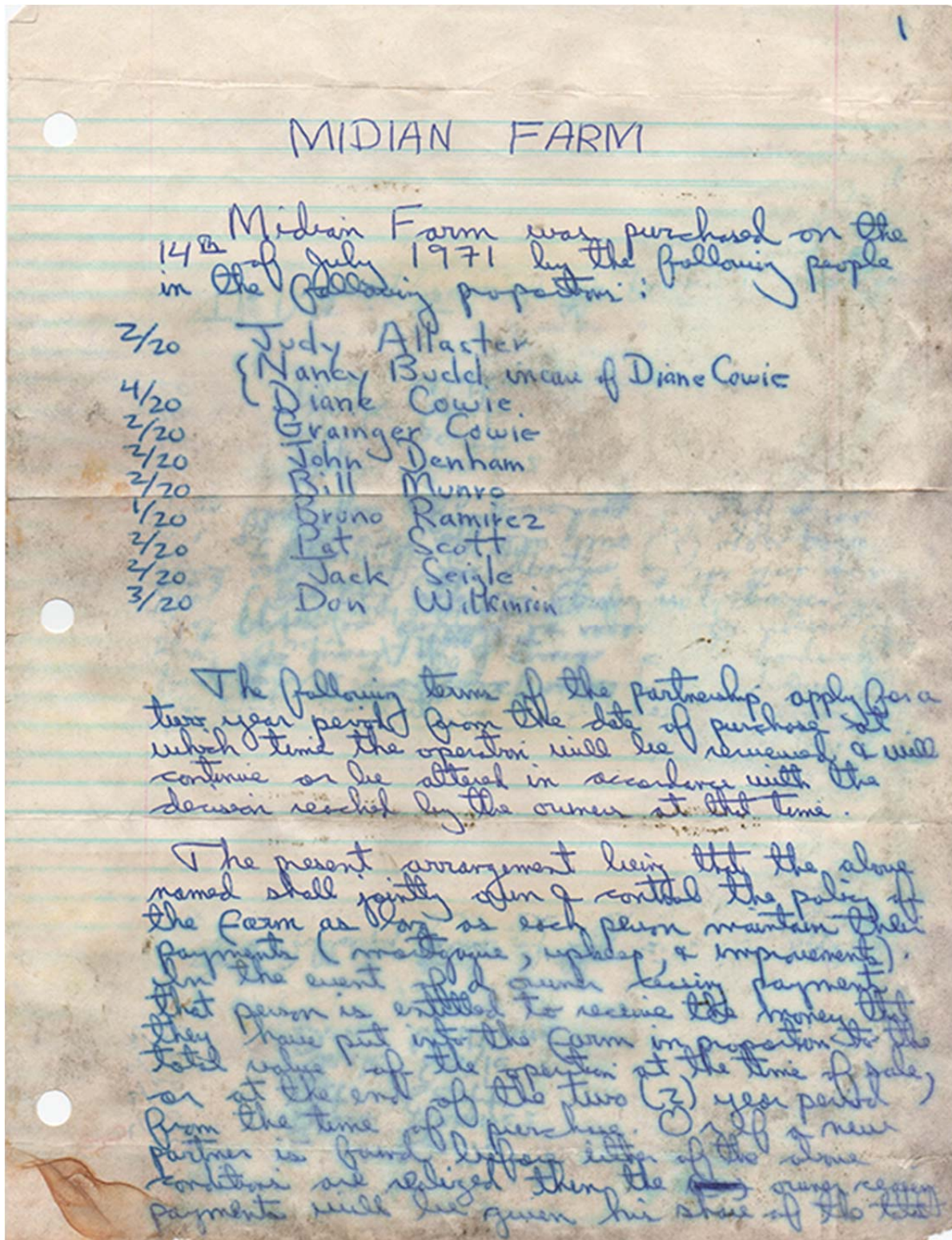
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Appendices

Appendix A: Purchase of Midian Farm



Appendix B: Vision

Midian: philosophical overview based on the past 8 months together.

Midian has served this year both as a meeting place and an in-between place for those of us living there. In seeking to first establish a home together, we discovered our diversity of reasons for being at the farm--for some primarily a year of studying and reflection, for others a desire to be slowed down away from the clutch of the city and attached to the physical surroundings, for others a time of waiting to do new things, for still others a time to establish a home and more solid roots with people.

The one factor common to us all was the "in-betweenness" of our stay at Midian. This is not to say we will all leave at the end of the year--this probably will not happen. But during this year we have recognized the real need for continuity of persons to create and maintain the farm as a home and a place for people, as well as to establish a firm agricultural and co-operative economic base that might act as a safeguard in these times of economic instability. The two cannot be separate, and it would seem necessary that a core group of persons be committed to developing these two aspects of Midian simultaneously, in order that it might function more fully for persons outside the living environment of the farm.

This state of "in-betweenness" has allowed for co-operative learning in many new areas:

i) time--because of the questions of correlation of tasks over the year, the farm has been able to develop a "rhythmic" time of life.

ii) space--because of the need for a place to live and work, the farm has been able to develop a "rhythmic" space of life.

iii) structure of common work,

separate tasks--we have attempted to structure and interrelate these at our Monday morning organizational meetings in a way that best facilitates the accomplishment of corporate farm tasks; this common scheduling has allowed for greater freedom of individual movement and a more natural working together.

iv) common worship, sabbath--Sundays are for us a time to be alone, together and at rest; worship times in the evening have for some been important times of coming before God together for singing, reading Scripture and prayer; some communion services have been very special; this area continues to grow every week as each of us recognize more deeply our centre in Christ.

v) bible study--along with our worship we have begun short daily times to study together the gospel of Mark which is serving as new eyes through which to perceive our daily lives; much deeper content and study is still lacking and many of us have looked elsewhere for that necessary content.

vi) economics, money pool--because of limited funds we have begun to develop a "co-operative money pool" to assist individuals monthly who are in need and to set aside money for persons coming to the farm over the summer unable to pay for food; this still needs a lot of thought and discussion together as we seem to have many varying attitudes towards money.

Appendix C: Agenda

March 25/73

Fellow Farm Owners,

Our two years are up and the big decision making weekend is upon us. We have a lot to discuss and work through, so I've tried to put together a summary of the past two years and an outline of what appear to be the basic questions that have to be dealt with. We should all have a pretty clear idea of where we personally stand and so should do some very concentrated thinking and feeling about what has happened ~~xx~~ and what we want to have happen. I hope the following can provide the stimulus for this procedure and help to give some direction to the week-end. To further clarify our own thinking can each person please WRITE OUT his or hers response to the following questions, plus any further questions or unclear areas that you feel we have to deal with. Early Friday night we can finalize our procedure so we should be prepared then with questions to be discussed. A final plea - PLEASE GET LOTS OF SLEEP - we've got to be well rested or else, we won't get another run at this you know!

Owners

Outline for Farm ~~xxxx~~ Weekend

- original concept - a 2yr. experiment
- a place to provide the opportunity for different interests to express themselves
 - outward bound
 - arts & craft shop
 - animals
 - conference centre
 - therapeutic or educational environment.
- a place of retreat

Does your understanding of our definition differ or have anything to add?

How do you personally assess the farms progress over the last two years? (in light of your own experience and expectations)

- history - animals - moderate success all round
 - needs to be better organized with additional facilities (water, grain storage,...)

gardens - good for summer use

- ill managed

dorm - good for summer use

- needs more space and more facilities

never

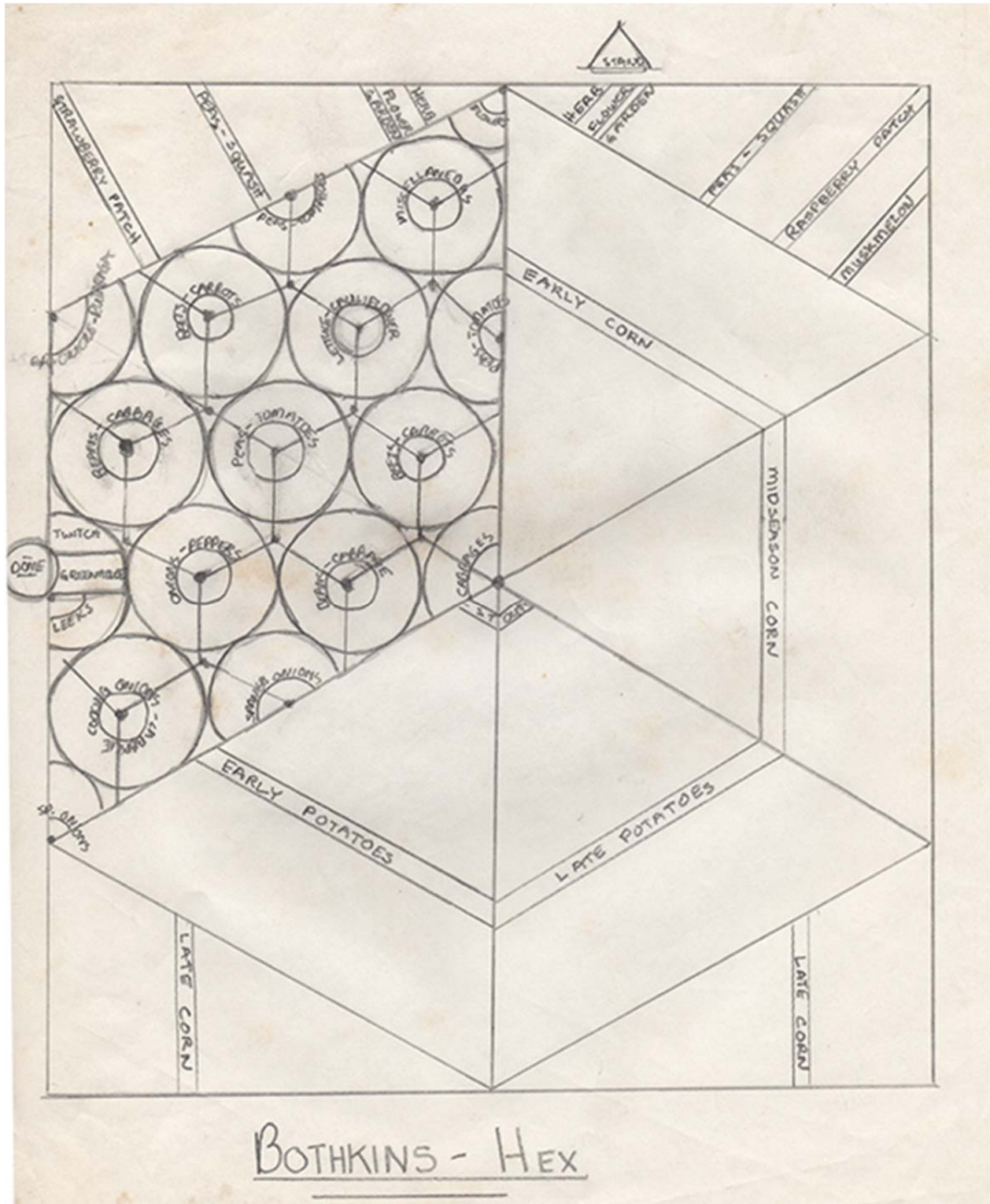
art room - room built but ~~xxxx~~ set up for use

conference room - not built

retreat - better this year but organization and atmosphere still lacking

outward bound - not tried yet

Appendix D: Gardens



Appendix E: Erin Lane School

erin lane school

P.O. BOX 337, TORONTO M5S 2S8, ONTARIO, CANADA

March 20, 1975

PRINCIPAL'S REPORT FOR UNIVERSITY ADMISSION:

STUDENT: Herch Kline


Herch has attended Erin Lane School for the past two years. He has gone through a time of great personal struggle and growth while at Erin Lane and in this process has found an area of study he wishes to pursue at the university level.

In the seminar I offered at the school I have seen substantial changes in this boy in the academic realm. Other teachers have stated that it is their belief that he is quite ready for university work.

The staff at the school have been quite demanding of Herch and have been personally rewarded by his performance this year.

In the event that I sound hesitant in speaking of this boy regarding academics it is only because of the great distance he has travelled academically in two short years. In the other areas of his life he is most pleasant and able to enter into the non-academic side of life.

If you desire further information I would be most ready to respond.

Yours sincerely,

Grainger Cowie
PRINCIPAL
ERIN LANE SCHOOL

Appendix F: Sale of Midian Farm

Re: Cowie et al sale to Whiteley, Trustee
Township of Brock - Part Lot 7,
10th Concession

The execution of a deed to the referenced property, wherein it is to be conveyed to Kenneth D. Whiteley, Trustee, has now been completed and prior to asking the beneficial purchasers to bring in their money to us and our completing the registration of the deed, we wish to have your signed confirmation as to the correct distribution of the proceeds of the sale.

To this end, we enclose a copy of a statement of adjustments, effective November 1st, 1975, when the people who are, in fact, going to become the beneficial owners of the property started making all mortgage payments and real property taxes, etc. and took over the total expenses of the operation.

According to the agreement of purchase and sale, the balance due on closing in the amount of \$48,400.00, less legal fees, is to be distributed in the amounts set out therein amongst all of the vendors. Accordingly, all the vendors will receive their distributive share of the proceeds as set out in the following list:

Judy Allaster	\$4,000.00
Diane Cowie	5,700.00
Grainger Cowie	7,000.00
John Denham	3,500.00
Nancy Denham	3,500.00
Jim Budd	850.00
Debbie Budd (Mealia)	850.00
Bill Munro	2,500.00
Melanie Munro	2,500.00

- 2 -

Jack Seigel	\$4,000.00
Nancy Seigel	4,000.00
Don Wilkinson	2,250.00
Michele Wilkinson	2,250.00
Omar Walmsley	5,500.00

\$48,400.00

Appendix G: Response to Film

Note: The following collection of excerpts is from a group email exchange addressed to Liz Marshall, and between featured Midian Farm participants in September 2017.

...I think you did an amazing, heart-felt and artist portrait of your family story. I hope the healing continues for everyone involved. The reunion and your whole process challenged me to re-visit this formative time in my life, and I am so appreciative. We were young and hopeful –and Midian was a crucible. The reunion reconnected and re-energized me, and I see the time we spent together and the years we’ve spent apart in a new and better way. Thank-you for that! Love you all!

(Nancy Kendal, former co-owner)

I was very moved by your documentary. It reminded me that forgiveness may be the greatest personal quest for all of us. I believe that any state of grace we may find in this life frequently comes through art. And, as the writers I’ve worked with throughout my life often tell me, art does not come easily. Today we are having a “large day” in Nova Scotia. That’s the local term for a cloudless sky, which makes all the colours of the natural world come fully alive. I’ll be picking some fruit from the greenhouse I built out of salvaged materials. (Jim Budd would have done such a better job.)...Later, I’ll ponder how our little village can save the precious community school. Your beautiful film reminds me once again of our collective roots.

(Don Sedgwick, former resident)

Dear Liz, Thank you so much for creating and sharing this - you have captured the bitter-sweetness of the Midian Farm experience, and have allowed all of us who shared in this chapter to re-visit it for ourselves. ... Many of the pictures I had never seen, and some brought back such poignant memories...By the end of the film I was missing my dad...[Omar]... I am very much looking forward to the feature length version of the Midian Farm story when it is ready to be shared!

(Ruth Walmsley, former resident and neighbour)

Midian farm for me was more visceral than intellectual. I wasn't a visionary and I didn't read a lot. What I did know was the uniqueness of what we had there. The joy of group work and the bonding that came with it was profound for me. Working in the barn putting animals down for the evening, swimming in the canal, building the domes. These and more affected me a lot. Seeing your video made me realize there was a price to pay, and your family bore a heavy load. It meant a lot to see footage of Diane and Grainger with their kids. Grainger and me both came from blue collar families, so there was some common ground we shared. Maybe I understood him a little more.

(Don Wilkinson, former co-owner)

Liz et Midian al: Like many of you I have watched Liz's Family Portrait and felt deep emotions... Family Portrait reflects a piece of each of our journeys, not just Liz's, Diane's, Grainger's, Paul's and Michael's... I sensed much pain and loss, not just the pain of a biological breakup but of the community - the 'family...I think Diane's comments about reconciliation should call each of us into a state of grateful grace that Liz has put so much on the line and ensure our connectedness as a family provides all the support she needs to complete this much undertaking is has gifted us with. Thanks Liz.

(Patrick Scott, former co-owner)

... Although the tangible intentional community of Midian disintegrated, people's lives were permanently altered, and their paths changed for the better... We have your Mom and Dad and other members of the community to thank for that...Thanks for bringing us all back together, if only briefly, and including us in this very personal journey.

(Melanie Morris, former co-owner)

Greetings Liz and everyone, I still feel a real connection with everyone and perhaps connection could be a defining element of what a community is. We no longer experience the "intentional" part and yet I find that connection a blessing....I just want to say though that to everyone who felt hurt and most especially to you and your brothers who were not there from choice, I want to send healing thoughts and prayers. I feel honoured to be part of your "big family" and as I expressed earlier feel honoured for the connections to everyone who has been a part of this "intentional community. Love to all.

(Ken Whiteley, former resident)

I realize after watching, what a fringe player I was during the time we had Midian but also watched through tears as I heard your heart ache and feel joy ... I see the same emotions in your Dad, Mom, and many of the rest of us as we looked to find ourselves... your Dad in the Farm years was a strong leader but, as with all of us, not without weaknesses. It took courage on your part and his to be a part of this film... You have re-awakened many lovely memories of the Midian time and I will be forever grateful to you for finding me two years ago. Love and best wishes," our Elizabeth,"

(Judy Allaster, former co-owner)

...a tapestry woven with people, shadows in our past; of truths, half remembered, half invented; truths massaged to tell the story we need to tell; ...of families, small and large, struggling to be families; to hang together; to drift apart; ...of persons, old and young, trying to grow ethically into themselves and their community...in all of this, to live in love and significance...to matter!

(Richard Hood, former visitor)

... I found it riveting. The black-screen pauses were at first disconcerting, then I took them as an invitation to breathe... I'm mostly struck by the vulnerability shown by you, your Dad [Grainger] (especially going to get in the truck, and on the beach, on Denman) your Mom (what courage!) in her apartment, talking about her research, rummaging around in the wooden chest, talking about her body (and implicitly her heart) struggles back in the day, and even your brothers (by the comment about their support of your creative process, but declining to directly participate).

(Hersh Kline, former visitor)

...As I watched, I noticed a certain sadness came over me. I think that might be how I was feeling for you, your family, and the greater community as presented here. It wasn't all sadness however. I found great joy, a real education, and sense of contributing when I was at the farm. Perhaps because I was pretty much an outsider, only dropping in when I could, and never experiencing being an owner. I never took up residence there, as you did...

(Rob Williams, former visitor)

Hi Liz and all friends from Midian Farm: Congratulations on a wonderful, very intimate view of a time in our lives that for most I expect has deeply shaped us...I felt quite sad at times wondering about how hard it was for us to support and care for each other more back in the 70's, when that was what we all believed in so much. Yet, as many have said, Liz, I also felt hopeful as the stories and feelings are brought to the forefront again and we can all think about each other from the places we are now.

(Nancy Hood, former visitor)

Nicely done...beautiful imagery. A timely story from every perspective. Thank you for doing this...an artistic history for all of us who participated and were touched somehow for a lifetime. You have a beautiful family--- the small one and the big one. One of the things about community big or small is that it is fluid. Like life, it isn't anything but constant change. What a pleasure for me to see the striking contrast between your mom and your dad in who they are now and their choice of lifestyles. They are both brilliant on screen and off. I love you Liz. - Peter Corbett (the human) Not the cow. Not the doll

(Peter Corbett, former resident)

I echo everyone else's comments- it was both heart breaking and heart warming.

I believe you did justice to our experience. I admire your hours of hard work, travel and patience.

Love love love you.

(Aunt Debbie Mealia, former co-owner)

Reading all the comments here, I am as usual for me, teary with a full heart! The film is a glimpse into the views of some and a journey for you, Liz, which I cherish being a witness to! The countless hours of work listening, filming, compiling, arranging, editing... I hope this has given to you a sense of clarity about your beginnings and the profound impact being a part of our 'experiment', our 'effort', our 'dream', our 'endeavor' had in your formation. That photo of you and your family on Northy Drive captured your eyes intensely watching Patrick behind his camera and reveal an inquisitive, searching soul which is so you even today! That picture and the memory I have of you following John around the farm asking over and over, "Hun doin' John? Hun doing John?" defined you then and who you are today...questing the world with curiosity, seeing and filming the realities before you. Thanks for taking our stories and creating this gift!

(Aunt Nancy Budd-Denham, former co-owner)

Thank you, for all you have expressed. I too feel a deep connection to everyone in my heart and I always will. Indeed you have been a rich blessing in my life, past, present, and moving forward into this stage of life when I am thinking of retiring and moving west to the Sunshine Coast in the next couple of years.

With appreciation and love.

(Diane Marshall, former co-owner)

Thoughts about the film: I just saw it and above all else I am so fixated on the brilliance of Liz's creation. I find myself immersed in it. All begins and ends in beauty.

(Grainger Cowie, former co-owner)