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“Vicariously” - Short Film

Kaylee Karlik
Syracuse University

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“Vicariously” A Short Film.

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Kaylee Karlik
Candidate for B.S. Degree
and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2013

Honors Capstone Project in Creative-Television/Radio/Film

Capstone Project Advisor: Executive Producer-
Professor Tula Goenka

Advisor Title & Name

Capstone Project Reader: Production Supervisor-
Jason Kohlbrenner

Reader Title & Name

Honors Director:

Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date: May 7th, 2013

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ABSTRACT

This film helped me to fulfill something academically, and allowed me to do something challenging and out of my comfort zone. Academically, I wanted to have the effect of a “jointed perception” experience. I wanted to explore the basic idea of what Synesthesia is, or how I interpret it. Synesthesia is a psychological phenomenon that means jointed perception of the senses. So when one takes something in by sight, sound, feel, taste, touch, one actually experiences it in another sense. I thought everyone could relate to this phenomenon in some form, even if not clinically diagnosed. When I learned about it, it fascinated me. I wanted to communicate that when Allie, the main character, hears, she sees; it triggers her memories. Then, since the viewer sees the film, I had hoped it would allow him or her to feel something emotionally. I believe this is a true goal of a film for a filmmaker, to establish this form of “jointed perception.” This film was also challenging and out of my comfort zone because it was personal, and it was told through so much imagery with music.

The story of the short film, *Vicariously*, is heartfelt; it is about the relationship between a single father and his daughter. The basic premise is that the daughter is leaving to start her life, and the father has to let go, and accept he did right by her, raising her, and that she will be successful. It is left ambiguous where she is going exactly, but the viewer knows she is on a journey without him, and has grown up. I left it ambiguous on purpose, as it is not important for the message. In film school, one of the earliest things one learns is how to make the general, specific, and the specific, general, in a way that the theme or message resonates with the audience. The connection with a specific character can show an experience that may be felt by many people throughout life. This story, and its message, is also timely for the audience it is being screened to, and timely in my life. It was cathartic to make, as I graduate and start my next chapter, and have to let go of what is safe and try to strive for my dreams. It also made me reflect on the relationship I have with my own father, and how he has helped shape me into the person I am today.

The story puts this young woman, Allie, leaving on a train. As she travels, she listens to her iPod. The song envelops the scene, no longer making the viewer a passenger with her, but putting the viewer inside her head, as she goes back into memories. These memories are triggered by the words and message of the song.

In order to accomplish my capstone film, I wore many hats. I not only came up with the concept-which evolved-I was the writer, producer, director, and editor. I also did many, other, smaller, on-set jobs. I had a large crew to facilitate on-set production as well. It was about twenty people, including the cast. My capstone would not have been executed without the help of Professor Tula Goenka, who acted as an advisor and executive producer through the TRF 469 Advanced Filmmaking course.

REFLECTIVE ESSAY

My short film, *Vicariously*, and my journey to finishing it, challenged me and stretched my abilities beyond what I thought I could accomplish with this capstone. As a filmmaker, I am never fully satisfied with my work, and quite critical of it, and any faults I see along the way. If decisions were made slightly differently, I question if it would have come out the same, or if it would have made me less critical. I suppose this is the on going question of someone in a creative field. I did last minute touches until the very end, and probably still would if time allowed. It is also the plight of a perfectionist, which I am surely guilty of.

In order to complete *Vicariously*, I had to wear many hats. I not only came up with the concept- which evolved- I was the writer, producer, director, and editor. I also did many, other, smaller, on-set jobs. That included craft services, or getting the food for being on set everyday, and functioning as a casting director and a camera person on one shooting day. I had a large crew to facilitate on-set production, despite taking on all these jobs. It was about twenty people, including the cast, but that had to be managed as well. I also was the producer and co-engineer, (along with alumni, Drew Carlson), for the music used in the film, “Rohs Street Dance”, by singer-songwriter, Jasmijn White. The sound was also co-designed by a fellow classmate and I, for a television-radio-film (TRF) class in Newhouse, TRF 454 Sound for Picture with Professor Doug Quin. My capstone would not have been executed without the help of Professor Tula Goenka, who

acted as an advisor and executive producer through the TRF 469 Advanced Filmmaking course.

ARTISTIC JOURNEY, INSPIRATIONS, AND CHOICES

My capstone idea has evolved substantially since its inception in the fall of my junior year here at Syracuse University. The goal was always to produce a short film, no longer than fifteen minutes, which somehow encapsulated my time and experience here at college, and could be used professionally in my reel to help me obtain future jobs. I chose to make this final, senior thesis film as a TRF student, as other film schools, specifically USC and UCLA, provide funds and require students to produce a thesis film to graduate. It will provide me a more level playing field, when competing with these fellow graduates. Also, I sincerely wanted to produce something for me that was personal, academic, challenging, and a bit out of my comfort zone. I believe my piece accomplished all these set goals.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

In the fall of my junior year, I proposed a project much different than the film that can be viewed now. I originally proposed an animation-live action mixed, fifteen-minute, short film. It did not have a script then, or any sort of concrete story. I just knew that I wanted to mix these elements. My original capstone advisor, Professor Larry Elin, has a specialty in animation, and had

taught me on the 3D animation program, Cinema 4D, at the end of my sophomore year. I wanted to utilize this new skill that I had found I enjoyed, and also learn animation in Adobe After Effects to do the film. The learning of this program would have benefited me greatly upon looking for jobs after graduation.

I also wanted my project to reflect the psychological phenomenon of Synesthesia. This condition means to have “jointed perception” of the senses. So when one takes something in by sight, sound, feel, taste, touch, one can actually experience it in another sense. When I learned about it freshman year, it fascinated me. I thought everyone could relate to this phenomenon in some form, even if not clinically diagnosed. I believe this is a true goal of a film for a filmmaker, to establish this form of “jointed perception.” A filmmaker wants the viewer to see his or her work, and in turn, have that sight give the viewer emotion, and make the viewer feel as if he or she is there in the scene through the his or her other senses, even though, except for sound, film cannot actually stimulate the other senses literally. However, seeing can trigger memories and emotions that do. So I wanted to incorporate it into the story of my film somehow.

Initially, I undertook Synesthesia as being the main message I wanted to communicate and educate on, while also expanding my own knowledge on the topic. The concept would have been Disney’s *Fantasia*-esque in a short film. I wanted to focus on music especially, and how that triggered seeing something else, instead of just hearing music for what it is. Professor Elin and I brainstormed, and thought up going from one person listening to music in real life, and then showing the inner-workings of his or her brain “on music” through

animation. When the music was played, and a note or word was specifically heard, a part of the brain would light up. First associated with color, and then by actual music notes, and then the vision would transform into an actual scene, most likely a memory. This transition into memory was also interesting to me to see if I could execute it visually. I had read that memories or visions in someone's head actually appear more like caricatures, and not as vivid as one thinks, if one focuses. I remembered it from some film theory and psychology book excerpt I had read in class sophomore year. However, that does not mean that they always appear this way in someone's head. I wanted to play with the idea that the music makes the memory clearer and brings it into focus. The animation would get fuller until it became live action again. I still like a lot of this idea, but animation and learning it is extremely time consuming. I realized this was a large undertaking, and a bit overwhelming.

The music I originally chose was from John Mayer. John Mayer has clinically diagnosed Synesthesia. When he writes, he sees colors. These colors correlate to music, so he hears colors. If the colors look good together, he knows it will be a good melody. I chose, "Stop this Train." The lyrics of this song also started to shape my initial story and script.

Professor Elin, along with advice from Karen Hall at Honors, helped guide me to important people and resources to consult to get started on my capstone film. Professor Elin gave me a few books to read about music and the brain. He also wanted me to talk to Barre O'Neil about her art experiment. She had been experimenting with putting her paintings to music in her exhibits. She wanted

people to be able to experience them through more than one sense. This obviously went along with my theme of jointed perception. He also advised me to talk to Jennifer Billson, a Ph.D. student, doing her dissertation on how music triggers memory recall. Finally, he told me to visit Douglas Quin, a fellow TRF professor who focuses on sound and music in media. Karen Hall, upon hearing my project, thought if I were to do it more documentary and story oriented, that I should watch a film called, "Down the Rabbit Hole." This film incorporated this style, also told about a psychological phenomenon, and had a story line demonstrating it with special animated visuals. I ended up speaking with all the people Professor Elin recommended, and researched a bit into the books and film suggested. However, all this started to feel too scientific, and not as inspiring for the creative goal and film I truly wanted for myself. This started my crisis about whether I really wanted to finish my honors capstone or not.

MID-PROJECT CRISIS AND REDISCOVERY

I became a bit disillusioned with doing my capstone, as I wasn't as inspired, and was more overwhelmed the summer and beginning of my fall semester, senior year. However, I was able to get over this hump, with the help of Karen Hall's advising, and the realization that I wanted to come out of undergraduate film school with a final film. I decided to enroll myself in Professor Tula Goenka's Advanced Filmmaking course (TRF 469) for the spring of my senior year, something the capstone guidebook advises creative project, filmmakers to do in order to complete the capstone. This class would also add the

structure, schedule, and feedback I desperately needed. It became my focus and disciplined me. It also changed my advising. I enrolled in Douglas Quin's Sound for Picture course (TRF 454) as well, where I could complete the sound for my film, with a partner, for my final in his class, guaranteeing that I focused on perfecting the outcome of the film's score.

During my Honors update and in-class pitching, I came up with a story I connected with personally, and that made me get even a little bit choked up. It was based upon the premise of a journey, where one chapter is ending and another one is opening, and this involving letting go and moving on. It was a message that was timely to me and I wanted to communicate it. I also wanted to make sure some of my original proposal ideals remained. I took the basic idea of Synesthesia I knew about, the creative advice of Barre and Jenn, the brain on music idea- that it could trigger memory, and how transition into memory might be communicated visually. The project, then, became guided by Professor Goenka and Professor Quin. Jason Kohlbrenner, my boss at the Newhouse Edit Suites, became my Production Supervisor and reader as well at this point. The animation idea was left behind, although my Title Designer, among many other things, Susy Benaim, created an animated tile sequence off the basics of my idea, which is used in the film now. (Through watching her create it, I actually did learn a little bit of After Effects, which was part of my original goal.)

My first script focused on memory triggered by other senses as well as hearing the music (i.e. the character was presented with coffee and the smell took her back to a memory of her grandparents.) It went to many different aspects of

life, and general memories people have of growing up, before they must accept that they have to carry out the next part of the journey. The weaving and binding thread was the main character was riding on a train while drifting through her memories. These memories involved a whole host of characters. I decided on John Mayer's "Stop This Train," as the main score of this film, as it stuck with using his music for the random fact that he has Synesthesia, and that the song was very rhythmic, like a train on the tracks, and really illustrated the sentiment I wanted the story to tell about growing up and moving on.

This original script, and even its subsequent drafts, proved to be too scattered on paper with too many characters, once it was presented to the filmmaking class. It was confusing message-wise, without a focus, and things could not be seen visually as well as they were written. It was harsh to hear at first, since I was attached at the time, but I really see those points now, and the focus my script took from there really helps to connect the audience to the story and the actual emotion now in the final product.

I went through revisions, even writing two other scripts that were more in my comfort zone- entertainment for entertainment and escape, not necessarily to bring some bigger emotion or message, or be cathartic for me. Eventually, because of some other class feedback and meetings, I focused my original script on the memories between the main character and her father, as she goes off to her next part in life, and new destination. This focus came mainly through the dropping of the use of John Mayer's "Stop This Train," due to future copyright issues if I ever wanted to show this film outside of school. I instead chose, "Rohs

Street Dance,” by Jasmijn White, a song I produced and co-engineered in the spring of my sophomore year, a song I was really proud of. This changed the focus of the concept to a father-daughter relationship. The words are powerful and beautiful, describing a strong and genuine relationship as a father watches his daughter grow up. Therefore, it complimented the visual story well, but would not be literally shown word for word. In a way, this film would function as an extended music video, although that was not my full intention. However, music would play a leading role in the film, so it was important that it would be incorporated in such a strong way, as it is a passion of mine. I intend for any film I produce to have a strong connection to the music and sound that accompanies it. (Music industry was also my minor here at Syracuse University and I wanted to make sure that aspect made it to my capstone.)

The new script was approved, and put into production. I am by no means a scriptwriter, and I think it shows. I think the story could have been better developed and executed. Considering the accomplishment, I know I am being critical of myself, but I know what I am good at in my field. I am much better working in production, managing, and post production, than any other aspects.

The story focuses on the daughter, Allie. She is going to live her dreams out and start a new independent chapter. Meanwhile her father is proud, even though he has had to let her go and grow up. Allie has ended up doing what her father used to do and wants to continue as a profession, but he had to give up due to life getting in the way. Because they are close, and have a strong father-daughter relationship, he tries to be a really involved parent, and also, because

they share the same interest about music and audio recording. He lives vicariously through her, as she accomplishes her set out goals, that he shares. As the story moves through her interest in the recording studio when she was young and watching her father, to her actually recording independently, the audience can see that she is taking on the same dreams and aspirations. The daughter now has taken on the work of the father. These ideas are all told through Allie and her memory, as she takes her train ride onto her next destination.

PRODUCTION AND PROCESSES

As we went into production, a lot of things had to be coordinated pre-production-wise to get ready to work on set. A budget had to be set and created. Craft services had to be set up and taken care of. A crew to film had to be assembled, and locations and actors found, with permissions taken care of. Equipment had to be booked ahead of time and transportation figured out. My fellow classmate who had helped with the animation credits, Susy Benaim, came on as my Director of Photography, and helped artistically, before and on set, to make all the choices about the shots, which I then approved. Another classmate, Mary Castellanos, came on as a cameraperson, as well as my roommate, Meghan Caporali. My sound class had provided me with a partner to get production sound and editing done, Wandeyu Estada-Goeman. I then asked my friends, Brendan Hogan and Eric Stanistreet, to become the grip, electric and gaffer crew as they also work in communications at Onondaga Community College and the TRF graduate program here at Newhouse, respectively. Another thesis classmate, and

fellow honors student, Hannah Louys, became my first assistant director.

Broadcast student, Luisa Ardila, took on the role of make up and wardrobe. I also had Shelly Wang and Bing Xu, classmates from previous film courses, come on as production assistants. Production went smoothly, over three days, March 23rd and 24th, and April 6th. It was a challenge to direct for only my second time, and manage crew and actors. (Overall, it went well, as everyone followed their roles, and was a good experience for those involved.)

The permissions for the Regional Transportation Center, or train station, took the longest and most work to obtain, as well as finding and doing my best to stick to Amtrak's filming policy. I filmed on the train by following their non-commercial video rules, and contacted Centro's media relations department to talk to the head, Steve Koegel, whose permission was given to film in the train station, as long as the crew was not intrusive.

As far as getting actors and casting, I knew extras could be found in our crew, and the young parts of Allie could be played by my red-headed, younger siblings. I casted Jenna Genkos, an extended family member, who is also a red head, to play the lead role of Allie. The part of the father proved to be a bit of an obstacle, with every potential actor's schedule being jam-packed, but Cody Duger, a family friend, pulled through at the last minute. I think they both did a fairly good job, considering their lack of experience and the time crunch.

EDITING AND SOUND DESIGN FOR STORYTELLING

When I started editing my short film, I knew I was on the home stretch. I logged all the footage in, and picked the clips I knew would work, and moved onto an assembly cut. During that time, I also had to plan for sound design, especially because my other class and partner's final grade depended on it. Wandeyu, my sound design partner, and I went back to the train station to record some ambience, sound effects, and room tone in order to bring the scenes all together. We also worked strenuously during the editing process, bringing in the music, pulling it under when there was dialogue, and getting it to fit in just the right place with each subsequent cut and change. We worked hard to design a soundscape that had depth with our added effects and original production sound. We were able to gain feedback through not only my production class with Professor Goenka, but also through Professor Quin and his class, and IA, Brett Barry. This really helped in the development of the final product. The hardest obstacle in sound design was using it facilitate the transition into memory. In order to bring the viewer into Allie's head, she is seen putting her headphones on, and the music is heard as if the viewer is a passenger next to her. The music then fades into the full sound of the song as Allie drifts into her memory. At this time the sound of the train also fades down, but as each memory surges in, the train also surges up a few second in the score. This helps the viewer feel as if he or she in Allie's head as she drifts in and out. The rest of the score, before and after the memory montage, does not have music or incidentals. I did this to accentuate the

musical focus of the song. The busyness of the train station and rhythm of the train, with the ambience and sound effects, also proved to have much depth alone as a soundscape for the other scenes. The idea of having the train sound surge up to prelude each memory came from something I remembered happening to me when I was little. Every time before a nightmare began, I recall that it would be precluded by a train sound. I utilized this artifact of my past to help transition in Allie's memories, and I think it really worked as part of the device.

As far as editing went for a picture lock, a lot of tough choices were made that added to my film's evolution. After the assembly cut, I had to decide which scenes were not needed, and trim and tighten to smooth the film out. I took out a scene where Allie tries to reassure herself that she is ready to move, in the train station bathroom. It was not adding anything to the story, so it had to be cut, and this helped get the film down to a better length. Besides a lot of additional trimming, I almost cut the playground memory, however it was moved into the memories montage to add an extra layer. As Allie drifts into the playground memory and then into the next memory, her father is also seen in the work cubicle memory, frustrated and wishing to be somewhere else. He then shares in this same memory drift, wishing to be doing the work he used to, and wishing for when his daughter was small and playing on the playground. A couple of dissolves as transitions also facilitated these memory switches, and helped set the device that takes the viewer into Allie's memories.

We shot a lot of coverage when we were in production. I had a lot to choose from in editing. I also had to decide when each card -a connecting thread

and motif-was to be shown, and make sure it stayed long enough on screen to be read. The ending was difficult, as there is a scene that was cut that shows where Allie was going. I thought it was more symbolic and better stated the message if we didn't see it, and she faded into white as she got off the train. However, the sound of the train is still going, symbolizing her on-going journey, even though the train has physically stopped. I wanted the last shot of the father to be his reading and understanding of the card, as a proud smile comes across his face.

There were also other, subtle visual effects added to help further the story and its message. For example, the color saturation changes when Allie drifts into her memory. It starts more washed out and then becomes more vivid as the memories become more recent and closest to the current time. All these decisions, smoothing to make the footage look better, several cuts to get everything that was needed and not more, mise-en-scene indicators that gave clues to the story in the production, and technicalities led to the finalized film the viewer can see today at a running time of about eight minutes.

WHAT THIS WORK MEANS TO ME & FURTHER INSPIRATION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This film and its events are personal to me, because of the relationship I have with my father. Some things the film is based off of are very autobiographical. The card given to Allie is actually one given to me when I was about thirteen, and freaked out about math homework I didn't understand, and my

Dad was there for me. The card and its message have stayed with me ever since, and remind me to never give up.

My Dad wanted to be a recording engineer as well, and ended up having to leave that behind for our family. He went to a communications university, got his degree, and I can remember, since my father had me young, getting inspired seeing him edit and produce music while he was at college. Even though he doesn't get to do much of this anymore, as he works a different job -although still in communications- I know he misses it. As I grew up, I discovered I, too, wanted to go to a communications school. He has continued to live his dreams of making it big through me. He gives me the strength to continue to reach my goals, and not make same mistakes he did. This film is a testament to that.

If I could change one thing about the film's message, and when I send my Dad that actual card Allie's father receives in the end, I will add that it is never too late to try and follow your dreams again. This film is that card, symbolically, to my father. My Dad and I have always bonded over music, so that helped play the theme in this, and went along with the song. The act of recording and bonding over music is "the dance" as it correlates to the song used. As long as they have this bond, " life is okay."

I also am dealing with the timeliness of this all as my Dad, as well, as the rest of my family has to let go as I follow my dreams, hopefully also in a film or music related field. My film is timely for me, and my fellow graduating peers. I do feel emotional as I watch it. It's been an emotional journey to make it and work through its message for my life. I too will have to leave my family to start

my next chapter, and that is very sad as well as exciting. It is the message of growing up and letting go I wanted to explore and work through.

Although *Vicariously* is not perfect by any means, it did fulfill a lot of my objectives. If I could go back, I would try to make the production values higher, by having a bigger hand in how shots were filmed, and not just directing actors on set. I also would like it to feel less cheesy and more mature, but perhaps that is just me being too close to it, as I have gotten good and desired reactions out of viewers who see it for the first time. I would try to make the writing and acting stronger as well, but as this goes, as my second attempt at directing and my first attempt at something with such a large message and that is sentimental, and not just escapist entertainment, I think I can be very proud of myself.

I got so much out of this whole journey and process. I was made to be the writer, and confirmed that this is not a career path I want to take in film as a screenwriter, but I also learned that I love and am good at production on set throughout the work on this film this semester. For so long post-production and music management have been my only focus at school, and I am glad I am leaving with the ability and confidence of being professional on set as well. This would also not be possible without production professor and specialist Neal Coffey, who has taught me so much throughout my Syracuse academic career in TRF. Besides my short film production this semester, I also was Director of Photography for fellow Advance Filmmaking classmate, Mary Castellanos. I have to say her footage looks very nice. I also worked on another honors capstone for a friend, Matt Mussacchio. I wrote, directed, and edited a music video for his artist,

Kara Della Valle, in order to help in her promotion. The video has reached a large amount of views in a short period of time on Youtube. All these experiences have opened me up to different jobs possible in my career field.

CONCLUSION

Of course, there is even greater detail about all these processes if I were to get into the step by step, day by day, nitty gritty, however, this is not necessary for understanding this project and that it fulfilled its objectives. A lot of what I have been learning my whole college career went into this. I think this is something a capstone should strive to have, something reflective about time spent by the student at Syracuse University. Every choice I made had a reason. I think in the finalized film, the viewer can see that a strong, genuine, father-daughter relationship was captured and conveyed. This was made clear to me during my capstone presentation. I could no longer be objective anymore in the final stages of the editing process to know if it was really going to have my intended effect, and through a new audience's eyes, I saw that I had accomplished this goal. It still kept this little seed of Synesthesia I had started with as well. The story moved music into memories, and those memories hopefully evoked emotion. This still plays into the "jointed perception" of senses idea I was going for. The hearing of the music signaled the sight of the memories in her head. They were correlated, and these sights triggered emotion. Again, I believe this is a true goal of a film for a filmmaker, to establish this form of "jointed perception." This, in turn, proves everyone can tap into this psychological phenomenon in some way for his

or her senses- even though it's not in clear-cut diagnosable cases. It is how media and its mediums are interpreted. Through my exploration of this, it proved this idea to me. It is especially important for my medium to communicate in this way, and to utilize this in my future career endeavors, whether it is in music or film. Even though not all original aspects of my proposal survived, I believe, ultimately, that is what a capstone should do. It should be able to evolve as you evolve with it, and reflect your journey to its completion.

CREDITS

Cast

Allie.....Jenna Genkos
 Allie's Father.....Cody Duger
 Youngest Allie.....Abigail Karlik
 Younger Allie.....Tatum Karlik
 Allie's Boyfriend.....Eric Stanistreet
 Engineer Partner.....Timothy Karlik
 Train Extras.....Bing Xu
Shelly Wang
Brendan Hogan

Crew

A film directed, written, and produced by
 Kaylee Karlik

Director of Photography/ Cinematography
 Susana Benaim

Production Designer
 Susana Benaim

Editor
 Kaylee Karlik

Assistant Editor/Colorist
 Susana Benaim

Associate Producer
 Susana Benaim

Executive Producer
 Tula Goenka
 S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University
 Renee Crown Honors

Hair, Makeup, Costume Design
 Luisa Ardila
 Tatum Karlik

“Rohs Street Dance”

Performed and Written by Jasmijn White

Produced and Engineered by Andrew Carlson and Kaylee Karlik

Sound Design, Mixing, and Editing

Wandeyu Estrada-Goeman

Kaylee Karlik

Casting Director

Kaylee Karlik

First Assistant Director/Script Supervisor/Unit Production Manager

Hannah Louys

Second Assistant Director

Shelly Wang

Key Grip

Eric Stanistreet

Gaffer/Electric

Brendan Hogan

Production Sound

Wandeyu Estrada-Goeman

Brendan Hogan

Camera A

Mary Castellanos

Eric Stanistreet

Kaylee Karlik

Camera B

Meghan Caporali

Susana Benaim

Post Production Supervisor

Jason Kohlbrenner

Craft Services

Kaylee Karlik

Timothy Karlik

Catering By

Wegmans

Marks Pizzeria

Title Designer
Susana Benaim

Production Assistant
Bing Xu

Special Thanks
Tula Goenka
Douglas Quin
Brett Barry
Jason Kohlbrenner
Larry Elin
Steve Koegel for Centro and Regional Transportation Center Services
Karen Hall
Gerard McTigue
Eric Holzwarth
Neal Coffey
Michael Schoonmaker

Filmed on Sony FS100 and Sony NX70, Lit with Arri Lowell Lights, Case Lights
Recorded at Newhouse Edit Suites and Sound Studio 3

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Newhouse Television/Radio/Film 469/454

Appendix Note

All artifacts from the filming of *Vicariously* can be found in the physical production book, or in the logged footage upon request.

CAPSTONE SUMMARY

My capstone idea has evolved substantially since its inception in the fall of my junior year here at Syracuse University. The goal was always to produce a short film, no longer than fifteen minutes, which somehow encapsulated my time and experience here at college, and could be used professionally in my reel to help me obtain future jobs. I chose to make this final, senior thesis film as a television-radio-film (TRF) student, as other film schools, specifically USC and UCLA, provide funds and require students to produce a thesis film to graduate. It will provide me a more level playing field, when competing with these fellow graduates. Also, I sincerely wanted to produce something for me that was personal, academic, challenging, and a bit out of my comfort zone. I believe my piece accomplished all these set goals.

In order to accomplish my capstone film, I wore many hats. I not only came up with the concept-which evolved-I was the writer, producer, director, and editor. I also did many, other, smaller, on-set jobs. I had a large crew to facilitate on-set production as well. It was about twenty people, including the cast. My capstone would not have been executed without the help of Professor Tula Goenka, who acted as an advisor and executive producer through the TRF 469 Advanced Filmmaking course.

The story of the short film, *Vicariously*, is heartfelt; it is about the relationship between a single father and his daughter. The basic premise is that the daughter is leaving to start her life, and the father has to let go, and accept he did right by her, raising her, and that she will be successful. It is left ambiguous where

she is going exactly, but the viewer knows she is on a journey without him, and has grown up. I left it ambiguous on purpose, as it is not important for the message. In film school, one of the earliest things one learns is how to make the general, specific, and the specific, general, in a way that the theme or message resonates with the audience. The connection with a specific character can show an experience that may be felt by many people throughout life. This story, and its message, is also timely for the audience it is being screened to, and timely in my life. It was cathartic to make, as I graduate and start my next chapter, and have to let go of what is safe and try to strive for my dreams. It also made me reflect on the relationship I have with my own father, and how he has helped shape me into the person I am today.

The story puts this young woman, Allie, leaving on a train. As she travels, she listens to her iPod. The song envelops the scene, no longer making the viewer a passenger with her, but putting the viewer inside her head, as she goes back into memories. These memories are triggered by the words and message of the song.

The song used in the film is called “Rohs Street Dance,” by singer-songwriter, and Syracuse university alumni, Jasmijn White. It is about a father-daughter relationship, and its words are powerful and beautiful. It describes a strong and genuine relationship, as the father watches his daughter grow up. I engineered the production of this song my sophomore year, when Jasmijn was still a student here. It compliments the visual story well, but it is not literally shown word for word in the film. This film functions as an extended music video, although that was not my intention. However, music does play a leading role in

the film, so it was important it was incorporated in such a strong way, as music is a passion of mine. I intend for any film I produce to have a strong connection to the music and sound that accompanies it. Music industry was also my minor here at Syracuse University and I wanted to utilize that in my capstone.

The song takes her to memories of her father working in the recording studio when she is a young girl. This is where her interest in what her dad used to do as a profession starts, as she scoots in to watch. She drifts in and out on the train ride, into the memories of her and her father, up through what has led her to this train journey. The memories are displayed chronologically. She is then seen playing on the playground with her father there to catch her on the slide. This memory melds into her doing her math homework, older now, but still not close to her current age- shown in change of actresses- at the kitchen table. In this memory-scene, her father comes in to check on her. He is carrying some boxes, suggesting a move. He asks whether her homework is going easier, and she replies yes, and thank you. She then points to a card her father gave her, saying it really helped. This is something he gave her to make her feel better after she freaked out about math homework. This card motif is carried throughout the film, as this same card is opened on the train in the daughter's current time. She has kept it all this time. It reminds her of her dad, and also symbolizes an important message he gave her to succeed.

The memory again changes. This time her father is working. His desk is decorated with pictures of Allie growing up, even one of him riding on an amusement park train with her. Amongst his office supplies sits a stack of CDs

and his iPhone with ear buds plugged in, but pushed off to the side. In front of her father is a computer logged into a systems network. He is frustrated and wishing to be somewhere else. He focuses in on one of her pictures and thinks of the recording studio mixing board, a job he still wishes he did. He also shares in Allie's memory of the playground. The memory then goes back to young Allie doing her math homework, and opening up the card seen earlier that her dad gave her. The card's words are finally able to be seen. They read, "If a shoulder will help, I've got two. If an ear will help, I've got two. If a hug will help, I've got a million." However, the part that is easily read and is the focus, is the handwritten words from her father. "Don't ever stop trying,--That's the only time we fail. Love you, Daddy." Although left a bit ambiguous, but can be seen by the mise en scene clues, or the subtle ways something happens in the scene between props, set dressing, and dialogue clues, the father has had to give up his dreams of working as a recording engineer because of life hardships and in order to raise her.

As it drifts back into the train scene, Allie is seen holding the card again, and closing it up, deep in thought. As the song continues, she then reflects on hard times she has dealt with, with her father. She thinks of a fight they had at home, where she wants to go out, but can't because her father was working late and cannot take her. He also is critical of her outfit, not letting go of the fact that she is growing up into a young woman. She slams the door. Her father is obviously flustered, as he is just trying to do his best. She then thinks back on when her first boyfriend breaks up with her, and her father was there for her. He picks her up, turns up the radio, and understands. He pulls over when she won't stop crying,

and hugs her. Allie then drifts back into the current train journey, visibly upset. She and her father have been through a lot, and he has always been there for her. Now she is on her own.

Her next memory is her realization of independence, and one where her father is dealing with letting her go do her own thing. She is working in a different recording studio on her own. Her father calls her and is asking her about her process, but she tries to get him to stop questioning her and let her go. This scene also symbolizes that she has taken on what her dad used to do, and still wishes he did. He is living vicariously through her. This is where the title stems from. His dreams have now become hers, and she is accomplishing them. He wants to still be apart of it, and obviously will be apart of her life, but still has to let go.

Her final memory she drifts into, with the help of the song, is the most recent. It is her final goodbye to her father before she boards the train. It is heartwarming and heartbreaking as he has to watch her go and be on her own, and he is left alone. Allie's music then becomes that of her headphones again, and the viewer is no longer in her head with this mechanism. When her father gets back to his car, however, Allie has left him a card. It is similar to his in style, and reads, "You never gave up on me, and WE made it, Dad. Love, your little girl." This card is meant to tell her father that he never stopped trying, and raised her into the woman she is to day. He can be proud of this, and that she is following their dreams because of him. Therefore, in a way, he has reached his dream. Allie is then seen getting off the train as it fades into white, and it is left unknown where

she is going. Only the sound of the train is heard, symbolizing the continuing journey, even though she has reached her destination. She is on to her next chapter.

This film and its events are personal to me, because of the relationship I have with my father. Some things the film is based off of are very autobiographical. The card given to Allie is actually one given to me when I was about thirteen, and freaked out about math homework I didn't understand, and my Dad was there for me. The card and its message have stayed with me ever since, and remind me to never give up. My Dad wanted to be a recording engineer as well, and ended up having to leave that behind for our family. If I could change one thing about the film's message, and when I send my Dad that actual card, I will add that it is never too late to try and follow your dreams again. This film is that card symbolically to my Dad as well. My Dad and I have always bonded over music, so that helped play the theme in this, and went along with the song. I also am dealing with the timeliness of this all, as my Dad, as well, as the rest of my family, has to let go as I follow my dreams, hopefully also in a film or music related field.

This film helped me to fulfill something academically, and allowed me to do something challenging and out of my comfort zone. Academically, I wanted to have the effect of a "jointed perception" experience. I wanted to explore the basic idea of what Synesthesia is, or how I interpret it. Synesthesia is a psychological phenomenon that means jointed perception of the senses. So when one takes something in by sight, sound, feel, taste, touch, one actually experiences it in

another sense. I thought everyone could relate to this phenomenon in some form, even if not clinically diagnosed. When I learned about it, it fascinated me. I wanted to communicate that when Allie, the main character, hears, she sees; it triggers her memories. Then, since the viewer sees the film, I had hoped it would allow him or her to feel something emotionally. I believe this is a true goal of a film for a filmmaker, to establish this form of “jointed perception.”

This film was also challenging because it was personal, and it was told through so much imagery with music. It was an “art house” like short film, and not just entertainment for entertainment’s sake, or just some cool story. I usually tend towards those types of films. This was different for me. Perhaps that is why I am very critical of it.

Overall, the film accomplished all of my set out goals. Also, it got me really involved and confident in my on set production skills and talents when it comes to making a film. I was also able to incorporate little details into every scene of the film that helped to facilitate the message of the story even more, details not even mentioned here in summary, but done throughout the whole process. For me, my senior honors capstone has come a long way.