

SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF THE MYSTERIOUS SIDE OF MYSELF

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This film is an autobiographical documentary which tells the story of the process of documenting the filmmaker's trip to his land of heritage. As his plans for his journey and film begin to go awry, he begins to question the entire process of trying to connect with nation and place.

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PROSPECTUS

This section was written in June 2008, before the production phase of *Sights and Sounds*. This is the original proposal that was submitted to the thesis committee and was approved. In order to present the process of making this documentary, I have left the proposal as it was presented.

Introduction

I am a British born documentary filmmaker from the United States. In the summer of 2008 my father and I will travel to Belarus to discover our Polish roots. *Sights and Sounds* chronicles this journey. It is a personal essay documentary, in the self-reflexive mode, about personal identification within the larger communities of family and nation. The documentary will be filmed in several locations but will center a region in Belarus known in Poland as the Kresy.

The word *kresy* has several translations including borderlands, but in Poland the term is synonymous with a small strip of eastern Poland, Western Belarus and Ukraine, and South Western Lithuania. This region of Europe stands on the cultural divide between Eastern and Western Europe. This is a place where Slavic brethren have met and divided themselves on the basis of language and religion. In the last century, it has seen the brunt of two world wars, revolutions, national expansion, conquering, liberation, and increased ethnic tension. It is within this ethnoscape that this story begins.

The film starts as I have arrived in London, this city of my birth, to visit with my *babcia* (Polish for grandmother). The city in which she lives is a drastic change from the small Polish village of Stolowicze where she was born. Her home is very well kept and is adorned with remembrances of her family and homeland. During the day I capture images of my *babcia* as she does her daily chores, watches a variety of British and

Polish television shows, and cooks. She openly talks about politics, the local news, the foreign neighbors who don't care for their homes. She is pleased to see me, her eldest grandchild. As I sit down that evening for dinner, which consists of a very large shepherd's pie, we talk about life and my family. She is happy to see the latest photos of her great grandchildren. As time passes she gets upset as I do not finish all of the food that she has prepared for me, enough to feed at least two others. We move to the sitting area of the house. She offers me vodka with apple juice and we sit and talk about the past. She reluctantly begins to tell me about her early memories of growing up in the small peaceful village of Stolowicze.

She struggles to tell me about her childhood. She can barely remember her school and friends. She tells me how she and her sisters played and danced in the fields. No matter what she recalls, these innocent memories are over shadowed by the horrors she experienced during the Second World War. Her last memory of her hometown Stolowicze was the night that she and her family were forced from their home by Soviet soldiers and deported. She says it was a cold night, and she was so very frightened. She doesn't want to talk about it anymore. It is getting late and she wants to go to bed and say her prayers.

The night that she and her family were deported changed her life, and is vital to my existence. If she was not deported she probably would have never left Stolowicze. The family spent years in exile, moving from labor camps to refugee camps from Siberia to the Middle East, to Africa and finally to Great Britain. When she arrived in England, my *babcia* met another displaced Pole, married him and had two children, one of which was my father, Zbigniew Dojs. He was raised in a community of exiles. He grew up

speaking Polish. He was surrounded by Polish culture at home and at the homes of extended family and friends. Growing up in the Polish community in London was not easy for my father. Not only did his name have no English translation, it was nearly impossible to pronounce for most of his fellow classmates. He did his best to adapt to fit into the country of his birth. He began calling himself Richard, an English translation of his middle name. Though he tried his best to fit in, my father never really abandoned his Polish culture, he just integrated it with the English.

He arrives in London on Sunday, and we start on our journey back to Stolowicze very early the next day. We are the first in our family to return to the village since the night the family was deported. *Babcia* constantly reminds me that things have changed, the people are not the same. She tells me that it is a waste of money and that we should just stay in London with her. She is obviously uncomfortable about her son and grandson going to Belarus and warns us to look after ourselves and belongings on the trip. As we are getting into our taxi, my *babcia* rattles something off in Polish to my father. He responds. I don't understand exactly what is being said, but I can tell that he is telling her not to worry. The door closes and we head towards Heathrow Airport to catch our flight to Warsaw.

My father is excited about his first trip to Poland, though he tries to hide it under the guise of using the trip for genealogical purposes. As he has grown older he has taken up the hobby of tracing the family history. He is looking forward to looking in the church records in Stolowicze, roaming through the cemetery looking for surnames that look familiar. I am excited as well, but nervous. I have never been to a country where I do not know the language. Will this prevent me from connecting to Poland and my

Polish roots? What about when we head towards Belarus and the region of the Kresy. As my father and I begin to cross from Western to Eastern Europe I try to understand my identity within the communities. What will we find there? How will the entire experience affect my father and myself? Will I connect to my Polish roots, or feel like an outsider in the country of my heritage?

Style and Approach

Sights and Sounds is an attempt to understand elements of my own identity by traveling to the country of my heritage and making this film. The end product will be an autobiographical film in a self-reflexive style. The film will take on the appearance of a road trip film, as a majority of the film will focus on the journey and experiences of my father and I in Poland and Belarus. The shooting style will be a mixture of cinema verite and planned and structured shots. Since I will be shooting the high-definition video, those that I interact with will appear to interact directly with the camera. Characters within the film will interact with the camera throughout the film. Elements of Ross McElwee film style will be noticeable, not only his interaction with others and his use of the camera as an extension of himself, but also his use of reflexive narration.¹ McElwee's smart and humorist writing is one of the major characteristics of his films and I want to include these elements in my film. I plan to use personal voice over narration in my film. This voice over will take the form of both video diary and scripted thoughts composed during and after production. To help generate provocative ideas for this voice over, I will be journaling before, during, and after the production.

The dynamics between the characters is crucial to any film wanting to hold the

¹ Cuevas, Efen, and Alberto N. Garcia, eds. *Landscapes of the Self: The Cinema of Ross McElwee*. Madrid: Ediciones Internacionales Universitarias, 2007.

attention of its audience. Without this element, a road trip film might as well be a tourism video. The major interaction on the road will be between my father and myself. My father has a very unique sense of humor, tends to be blunt at times, and has a difficult time speaking introspectively. There will be moments of tension, humor, and surprising moments of self revelation while my father and I travel. It will not be as extreme as the dynamics of the relationship between Alan Berliner and his father, as seen in his documentary *Nobody's Business* (1996). Throughout the interview process, Berliner's father constantly refuses to "play nice" with the filmmaker who is trying to understand his often distant father.

Similar to this dynamic will be my interaction between my *babcia* and myself. The film will start as I visit her, asking her about her memories of her homeland, but I will also be flashing back to these moments while my father and I will be traveling. These will be used in several ways, including: to serve as background, to connect thoughts between other characters, and to reveal differences in experiences and time.

To help give historical and geographical context to the story I will be incorporating archival footage in the film. This will include newsreel footage and some home footage. I have obtained newsreel footage of Polish refugees arriving in Iran after being released from their captivity in the Soviet Union. This is the first visual record of those who were deported by the Soviets during the Second World War. I also have collected a large number of reels of family footage. Several members of my family, mainly my father and my grandfather, shot hours worth of 8mm home films from the 1970s through to the early 1980s. These images not only display my family, but capture important family celebrations including *Vigila*, which is the Polish Christmas Eve celebration. I would like

to include some of these images to show my family background and my limited experience of Poland.

Intended Audience

The target audience of this film is western audiences, primarily male, between the ages of 26 to 43, and of multiple ethnic heritage. The major audience for *Sights and Sounds* are located within English speaking countries, primarily in cosmopolitan centers where there is a historic presence of European immigrant populations, such as but not limited to New York, Chicago, Toronto, and London.

Audiences of Polish heritage will take special notice of *Sights and Sounds* because the film is primarily set in Poland and traditional Polish territory. With an estimated 15-20 million people around the world claiming Polish heritage, the Polish migration, often called the Polish diaspora, is one of the largest in the United States and the world. There is also a renewed interest in the history of the deportations of Polish citizens from eastern Poland during the Second World War. This documentary will provide a unique view of that event from a generational survivor.

Finally, *Sights and Sounds* is designed for audiences with interest in traveling, Eastern European culture and history, and their own familial roots. Genealogy is one of the most popular hobbies in the United States, and many families have has at least one historian who keeps track of their family chronicles. *Sights and Sounds* will also have an immediate audience within the Polish-American and Polish-British communities. Many within these communities have desires to travel back to their fatherland and make the same discoveries that my father and I did. This documentary will provide a gateway for many who cannot travel to return.

PREPRODUCTION RESEARCH

Subject Matter Research

Since I was a child I have always wanted to go to Poland. When my parents gave me a Polish first name to go with the last, they forever tied me to the nation of Poland. I was given a name from a foreign nation that I had only known through maps and picture books. Growing up I only met one other person who had the same name so the name "Marek" simply came to represent me. My name became a very personal identifier and it was always associated with the nation of Poland.

For the last 30 years of my life I have lived in the United States. I was raised in an English home that had a hint of Polish tradition, and that was only on Christmas Eve. My mother, who was born and raised in a traditional English family, learned how to cook the Polish foods that my father ate when he grew up in London. Like so many others of his generation, my father was born into a family of displaced Polish citizens after the Second World War. *Babcia* was ten when she last saw her homeland and nearly 70 years later she still has not returned. She still lives in England. I wanted to collect images of her village and homeland to show her. In some way I hoped that she could find some peace with the pain she experienced during the war.

People, Location Research

Because this film focused on the journey my father and I undertook, we are obviously the main characters. Additional characters are developed as we encounter them on our journey. The major locations that are featured appear in the film are London, Warsaw, and Stolowicze, a small village in Belarus. The London shoot was focused on my *babcia*. All the footage is captured in her house in the northern part of

the city. The only view of London that we see is a shot of the neighborhood where my *babcia* lives. From there, my father and I travelled 900 miles east to Warsaw, the capital of Poland. This journey was a symbolic act of connecting with our “fatherland” so classical images from the Old Town of the city and the banks of the Wisła are seen. Then we travel another 200 miles east to Stolowicze. The village is located about 5 miles north of Baranowicze, the nearest industrial center and 75 miles southwest of the capital, Minsk. From interviews with my *babcia*, her two sisters Veronica and Cesia, and other former residents of the village, I had established a rough idea where my family lived before the Second World War. Before our journey, my father made an effort to contact distant relatives in Baranowicze. We received a response from a distant relative inviting us to contact them when we arrived in Belarus. At the time we had no idea who these people were or how they were related to us. These family members become an important part of the film as it develops.

Funding

I was given an incredible opportunity to fund this film by the Southwest Alternative Media Project’s 2008 Emerging Film Fellowship Program. The \$5,000 fellowship provided me the initial funds to travel to the United Kingdom, Poland, and Belarus. Without this grant I would not have been able to make this film. A requirement of the fellowship program was to produce a short, no more than ten minutes, film that focused on the theme of migration. The final piece, *Return to Stolowicze*, is a poetic view of the history of my Grandmother’s village in Belarus and my own feelings of connectivity to the place.

My receipt of the 2008 Pulaski Scholarship for Advanced Graduate Studies from

the American Council for Polish Culture was the second major provider of the funding for this film. The second \$5,000 influx provided further preparation by arranging Belarus Productions to assist me in my work while in Belarus. My contact from Belarus Productions was invaluable to me during my shoot in Belarus.

Funds that were not used for travel arrangements or production services were rolled together to purchase camera equipment.

Secured Funding

- Southwest Alternative Media Project (SWAMP) Emerging Filmmaker Fellowship Program - promotes the creation and appreciation of film, video, and new media as art forms of a multicultural community. This program provides funds for worthy projects, and, most importantly, provide mentorship and peer forums in which emerging artists can strengthen their artistic skills and knowledge while fine-tuning their work. The grant was in the amount of \$5,000.
- Pulaski Scholarship for Advanced Graduate Studies - Initially endowed by the Conrad R. Walas family, it is administered solely by the American Council for Polish Culture. Applicant must be a citizen of the United States of America of Polish ancestry and be a classified graduate student enrolled at an accredited university in the United States. The scholarship was in the amount of \$5,000.
- Staples Graduate Scholarship - Graduate scholarship awarded to a student within the Radio, Television, and Film Department of the University of North Texas. The scholarship was in the amount of \$1,000.

Traveling to Poland and Belarus provided two very different experiences. When arriving in Warsaw my father and I had absolutely no problems. To enter Poland's

neighbour, Belarus, there were a number of hurdles that need to be jumped. The fate of the documentary hung on whether or not my father's and my visa applications would be approved. Thankfully we had no major problems.

Distribution Possibilities

The festival strategy for *Sights and Sounds* involves targeting festivals located in areas with a high Polish-American community in the Midwest and East Coast. There will also be an international festival push including festivals in major cities in Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. After the Second World War Polish refugees were scattered throughout the world, mainly within the former British Commonwealth. Several federations have been established in countries where Poles currently reside, whose goal is to maintain Polish culture and language to new generations. I plan to approach the Centre for Polish Arts and Culture (POSK) in London as a possible venue to screen *Sights and Sound* because my father is representative of the British Polish population. The Association of Polish Culture in America, who have provided a large portion of funds for this project, have already expressed interest in screening this film at their gatherings through the United States.

There are also several possibilities for broadcast, mainly on PBS outlets within the Midwest and East Coast of the United States. Additional potential screening opportunities include the PBS series', *P.O.V.*, *Wide Angle* and *Independent Lens*. There are several outlets in the United Kingdom for broadcast. The BBC are constantly interested in documentaries to fill programming slots on their four major networks.

Goals of the Production

When I began planning this documentary, I simply wanted to mix the genres of

the historical documentary with the personal essay. I have had a fascination with history since I was child, especially the history that my family was connected to. The major event that changed the course of my family's life and eventually lead to my own existence was the Second World War. This conflict is at the heart of this documentary. I wanted to examine how the events of the war intersect with the personal experience and how that experience is transferred generationally.

I have also been intrigued with the idea of nationalism. Having been born a British citizen (or as some might say "subject"), given a Polish name, and eventually naturalized as an American citizen, I wondered how connected I am to all these nations, especially my Polish nationalism. Being British and American made sense to me, but being Polish has been so much more mysterious than the others. I thought that by traveling to Poland I would be able to understand my connection to Poland.

Feasibility

I shot this documentary in Belarus, Poland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The trip was funded by the Southwest Alternative Media Project's 2008 Emerging Film Fellowship Program. The shoot took place over a two and a half week period from the July 7-23, 2008. I spent one week in London shooting and collecting additional materials to further prepare for my trip to Poland and Belarus. Lodging was provided by my *babcia*. The following week was spent traveling and shooting in both Poland, in the capital Warsaw, and Belarus, in the village of Stolowicze and the surrounding region. Traveling to Belarus proved to be a challenge.

Westerners traveling through or into Belarus are required to have an approved visa. For my father and I this process demanded that we complete an application and

send it with a fee to the Belarusian Embassy in Washington, DC. Political issues were also of concern. When pre-production began on this film and funding was in place, the United States demanded that Belarus close its embassy and consulate in the United States. The U.S. government also threatened to close its own embassy in the Belarusian capital in Minsk.² Though Belarus gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, since President Alexander Lukashenko took power in 1994, the government has taken on the look of a dictatorship, so much so that Belarus is often considered the “Last Dictatorship in Europe.”³ For a brief period in June there was a serious possibility that our visa applications would be refused due to these political tensions. Luckily our visas came back approved for travel within the country for five days.

Before making any travel arrangements to Belarus, I made contact with a company in Minsk whose focus is to assist journalists and filmmakers from the United States and the United Kingdom. Ilya from Belarus Productions gave me plenty of advice and direction in planning my travel. For instance, there are also very complicated rules for foreign journalists who work within the borders of Belarus. One of these rules state that any footage shot in Belarus must be presented to government officials to be inspected one week before leaving the country. Though this is considered a rule, Ilya informed me that it was rarely enforced. He advised me not to inform the authorities about my intent film a documentary. If this was noted on my visa application the possibility of rejection increased; if the visa was accepted, there could be problems

² http://www.nydailynews.com/news/us_world/2008/05/01/2008-05-01_us_orders_belarus_embassy_closed_.html

³ <http://www.cato.org/events/04252006.html>

with border guards who could see an opportunity to “pad their pockets” when entering the country.

The language barrier proved to be a challenge throughout the trip. I do not speak Polish, but since I grew up listening to my father speak it do understand particular words and phrases. While in Poland my father served as translator, but when entering Belarus my father’s Polish was not useful. Though the region in which we were staying was traditionally Polish, due to deportations and population displacements programs implemented by the Soviet Union, the dominant language of the area is Belarusian and Russian. I have limited knowledge of the Russian language so I contacted a company in Minsk to provide a production assistant who could speak English. The production assistant met us at the train station in Baranowicze on the morning we arrived and stayed with us through the entire trip. I was very surprised that my limited knowledge of Russian and Polish allowed me to understand more than I expected when in Belarus. While listening to people speaking I would hear Polish words I knew mixed with Russian words that I was familiar with.

My father had the address of a very distant relative who lived in Baranowicze. Before our trip my father made contact and arranged to meet while in Belarus. This contact proved to be a major source of the material for this documentary. During the production I played the roles of director, director of photography and editor. My father and production assistant helped with sound recording at several locations.

I interviewed my mother, father, brother, and sister as part of the research for my film. The interviews were shot in the United States at my parent’s house in Missouri City, Texas. None of this footage appears within the documentary itself but helped me

understand the concept of identification within community from outside my own perspective.

RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

I must admit that the pre-production phase for the film was rushed and I was not as prepared for the shoot as I had hoped. Perhaps the most challenging element of pre-production was preparing for two separate documentaries that would be utilizing the same footage. One of these films would focus on the journey of my father and I as we travelled to the village of Stolowicze. The second film was going to be a historical film about the deportations that occurred in eastern borderlands of Poland during the Second World War. Part of this would rely heavily on an interview with my *babcia*. During pre-production she began to show signs of resistance to an interview, but I hoped to persuade her while in London. I had conducted audio interviews with her in the past, but she showed much more signs of discomfort when I mentioned the camera. She was constantly telling me that talking about that time of her life was difficult, but she was also extremely uncomfortable about my father and I traveling to Belarus. She was mainly concerned about our safety traveling to the place where the terrible memories from the war begin. Maybe she thought that if she did not sit for an interview then we would not go. The danger of losing this interview threatened the foundation of this film. This caused some significant panic and doubt in my ability to complete either documentary.

It was very difficult for me working with two films. Throughout the process I kept a film journal to help express and record my thoughts. These journals are invaluable tools for me as they allow me to constantly review and reconceptualize my work. On the very first page of the journal I wrote this reminder:

When things get confusing or you are lost *READ THE FOLLOWING*:

Remember:

You are making 2 films.

1. A short 10 minute one for SWAMP
2. My thesis

This doesn't mean that the short will be sloppy or structured poorly.

Both are vitally important.

Both have a unique story to tell.

Both films will require large amounts of work, blood, sweat, and tears.

What are the 2 stories that I will be telling in these films?

How will I tell these stories?

What are the visuals I will see?

Whose are the voices I will hear?

Who are the characters I will love?

Who is going to watch this film?

Why will they? What will they get out of it?

I was unsure how to approach these films stylistically. My documentaries tend to have a poetic flow to them, so I wanted that to continue in both films. I also knew that both films needed to be very different. The ten minute film could not be a shortened version of the thesis. I have a hard time working like this, so I needed each film to have a specific goal. The problem I had was determining what exactly were those goals.

The 10 minute film was going to contain the history about what happened to my family during the opening months of the war. The facts would not be presented in a traditional historic sense but in a personal way. My *babcia's* would tell specific stories about her childhood before and after the war. I would then provide visuals of the locations that my *babcia* was speaking about, while making my own comments on what that location meant to me.

The thesis film was going to focus more around being a product of a multinational family and how I identify with my Polish heritage. By traveling to Poland and then on to Belarus I was going understand my Polish heritage more. My *babcia's* story was going to be important in the second film because I needed to explain my multinationalism.

THE INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRODUCTION

Theories and Rationales for Use

Written in a single sentence, this film is about a British born documentary filmmaker raised in the United States who travels to Belarus with his father to connect with his Polish roots. There are several points made that can be examined from a theoretical aspect. 1) The film is a self-reflexive documentary; 2) it is autobiographical; 3) there is a father/son dynamic; and 4) the filmmaker tries to identify himself within particular communities.

Documentary Style

The very first films that were produced with the invention of the motion picture technology were documentary films. The Lumière brothers were famous for presenting moments within real life, workers leaving a factory, a wall being demolished, or a scene from a busy street. Their films, “were not an illusion, or a performance, but a grey, flickering mirror of a past reality. The cinema, unlike any previous art form, was able to represent the spontaneous - the very essence of life itself.”⁴ The documentary form has obviously evolved from the early days when audiences were only exposed to simple, yet powerful images of reality. Bill Nichols has broken the documentary into six separate categories he calls poetic, expository, observational, interactive, reflexive, and performative modes, suggesting a chronology of linear development. Documentary films often do not fit directly into these modes, but they do allow the documentary to be given some type of framework.

Sights and Sounds combines several of Nichols’ categories mainly observational,

⁴ MacDonald, Kevin, and Mark Cousins, eds. *Imagining Reality*. London: Faber and Faber, 2005. (4)

reflexive, and poetic modes. I decided to shoot *Sights and Sounds* using more of an observational style. This would allow for the capture of the most authentic reaction to the events that my father and I were experiencing. There are some shortfalls to this style. For instance, it is very difficult to have a camera running 24 hours a day capturing absolutely everything that is happening. I had to make directorial decisions regarding when to film, and what to film, so a few key moments were not captured because they occurred when the camera was not recording. When this happens it simply makes the editing process more challenging.

Observational footage is scattered throughout *Sights and Sounds*. Within the opening scene in Durniwicze, Belarus, the narration directly speaks of the task of observational filmmaking. “As a documentary filmmaker, I am often put into situations where I don’t know what will happen. I just have to watch and listen.”⁵ The theme of “watching and listening” and the struggle to do both in a balanced way continues through the film and eventually leads to an acknowledgment of my own failure to listen carefully.

The observational style developed in the United States, Canada, and France in the 1960s when handheld camera and portable audio recording devices were developed. Instead of following the examples set by Drew Associates and Frederick Wiseman who captured their subjects by simply being a “fly on the wall,” I decided to follow the early example set by Unit B of the National Film Board of Canada and the work of Ross McElwee. They utilized an observational approach that contained reflexive element to them. In *Lonely Boy* (1962) directed by Roman Kroitor and Wolf Koenig, the

⁵ *Sights and Sounds* (2009)

interaction between the camera crew and those being observed is clearly seen. For example, when singer Paul Anka exchanges an uncomfortable kiss with the owner of the Copacabana, a voice comes from behind the camera that asks them to do it again. Suddenly, the two laugh and kiss again, asking “Was that better?” when they finish. The entire scene is included in the final film. For a film to be reflexive it must refer to the producer of the film, the process by which that film is made, and the final product itself.

Jay Ruby states a reflexive film must

be sufficiently self-aware to know what aspects of self are necessary to reveal so that an audience is able to understand both the process employed and the resultant product and to know that the revelation itself is purposive, intentional, and not merely narcissistic or accidentally revealing.⁶

Reflexive films that begin to incorporate the not only the process of making the film, but also reveal the “author’s thoughts, perceptions, and self-examination” become self-reflexive. These films are often seen as a form of self-administered therapy and normally have an autobiographical element to them.

Poetic elements appear throughout the film within composed shots and pacing. This mode of documentary is the most natural way of filmmaking for me. *Return to Stowicze*, which is the short film that I produced to meet the requirements of the SWAMP grant, is a very poetic documentary. Perhaps the most identifiable feature of documentaries that fall into the poetic mode is the emphasis of finely composed visuals and a lack of a strict linear or logical sequencing. Often poetic films move away from showing an objective view point of a particular situation in order to focus on the inner truth underneath what we are seeing. For example, in Humphrey Jennings’s classic film

⁶ Rosenthal, Alan, and John Corner, eds. *New Challenges for Documentary*. New York: Manchester UP, 2005. (35)

Listen to Britain (1942), the director presents the British people as strong and unshaken by war by showing images of people living their lives as normal as they can while under the constant threat of German air raids. References to the war appear through the film in simple ways: people walking the streets with helmets hanging off their shoulders, paintings missing from their frames in an art gallery, and a train of Canadian soldiers passing. Another example of a poetic documentary is Joris Ivens' *Regen* (Rain) (1929). The short 12 minute film is a collection of finely composed shots that show a simple rainstorm in Amsterdam. Perhaps the most important poetic sequence in *Sights and Sounds* is the scene when I am standing on the land that my family once owned. The shots of the field and flowers are deliberately composed and stand out from the more observational footage that leads up to this moment.

The Autobiographical Documentary and Self Reflexivity

Though autobiographical writing has existed for centuries, it wasn't until the late 1960s and 1970s that it became a pervasive within the Western film world. The social movements of the time that were "committed to promoting personal issues of sexuality, gender, 'race' and ethnicity have, by popularly expressing and thereby foregrounding these issues, contributed to the expression of self and identity in autobiographical forms of filmmaking."⁷ Filmmakers use the autobiographical documentary form to explore deeper elements of identity in many different ways. Some will point the camera on members of their family while others will turn the camera on themselves.

Film theorist Paul Arthur states that the modern strain of self therapeutic, autobiographical documentaries thrive in an environment "which agonizing first-person

⁷ Beattie, Keith. *Documentary Screens: Non-Fiction Film and Television*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004. 105.

revelations are valorized as hip, normative entertainment.” This is clearly seen on the Internet, where

young bloggers, who grew up watching home videos of themselves and whose attitudes towards nonstop exhibitionism are honed by sites like Myspace and Facebook, the airing of embarrassing or otherwise self-implicating incidents functions as a kind of virtual-reality talking cure, in which online respondents function as supportive auditors.⁸

In my own film, *Frogs and Snails* (2008), I focus on my journey to manhood and my struggle to identify as a “man” instead of simply a boy. In *Sights and Sounds* I examine my fascination with my national heritage, history, and my own name.

There is a long tradition for these so-called “self-therapy” documentaries. Film theorist Jean Epstein, who thought that the camera had the power to reveal hidden truths, wrote that the projected image:

Twenty times larger than life, drenched in light... stripped like a patient by a psychiatrist, presented naked and afraid, the human being is cut short in all his lies by the camera lens that hears his confession, intimate, ashamed, and possibly true.⁹

Epstein continued in his writing asking, “Will psychotherapy or forensic process some day make use of this film confession in which the subject sees himself become the object seen?”¹⁰ This thought was applied mostly to fiction films until the first of the autobiographical documentaries began to be seen first in avant garde nonfiction films in the late 1950s. These avant garde filmmakers began making films that provided an alternative to the dominate Hollywood mode. The films were shot with a small crew, often by the filmmaker themselves, and focused on, “noncommercial autobiographical

⁸ Arthur, Paul. "The Moving Pictue Cure: Self-Therapy Documentaries." *Psychoanalytical Review* 94 (2007). 871

⁹ Arthur 873

¹⁰ Arthur 871

themes, specifically the everyday events and domestic scenes of the filmmakers' lives."¹¹ Some of these films include Stan Brakhage's personal portraits such as *Window Water Baby Moving* (1959), *Films by Stan Brakhage: An Avant-Garde Home Movie* (1961), *Dog Star Man* (1961-64), and *Sincerity* (1973). Jonas Mekas, the Lithuanian filmmaker exiled in the United States, produced films that often included voice over narration that commented on his struggles. Many of his films focus on the experience of exile and the Lithuanian community in America such as *Walden (Diaries, Notes, and Sketches)* (1969), *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1971-72), and *Lost, Lost, Lost* (1975).

When portable image and sound recording devices were introduced to filmmakers in the American documentary tradition, the autobiographical documentaries produced used a different approach than those used by avant-garde filmmakers. The new autobiographical documentary could examine the world in an

expressive, analytical, or meditative way, but, unlike the avant-garde, sound and image were consistently recognizable and not abstract. The autobiographical documentary was fundamentally different from the autobiographical avant-garde at the formal level. Cinematic aesthetics were put in service more to explore the social world and less to overhaul the tradition of representational art.¹²

Filmmaker Ross McElwee, who studied under Richard Leacock, one of the great filmmakers from the early days of cinema verite, adapted a unique autobiographical form that combined traditional verite techniques with a very personal shooting and writing style. McElwee enters into his own films from behind the camera. People address McElwee directly, often looking straight into the lens of his camera. It is the

¹¹ Lane, Jim. *The Autobiographical Documentary in America*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin P, 2002. 11-12

¹² Lane 14

inclusion of McElwee's narration and on screen confessions that makes his work self-reflexive. In his film *Sherman's March* (1986) he utilizes the power of the camera as he meets women while following the trail of General Sherman's march through the South. In one scene at the opening of the film, McElwee's sister comments how the camera gives him an instant rapport with people. Later on when being introduced to a potential girlfriend by his friend Charleen, she tells him to put the camera down. McElwee tells her that, "Certain people come close to revealing more about themselves when they have a camera in front of the than when they don't."¹³ In the case of *Sherman's March* McElwee's camera and narration reveals more about the filmmaker than anyone else.

When shooting *Sights and Sounds* I kept McElwee's style in mind. The film is a process of understanding cultural roots and how history has affected my family. So throughout the film the process is constantly being revealed, both within the visual image and accompanying audio but also within the narration. People interact directly with the camera and react to its presence. My own voice is heard from behind the camera several times as I try to communicate with those around me. There are also several moments where I appear within the film with and without the camera. These moments are used to reveal more about my own character within the film.

Father / Son Dynamics

The third theoretical aspect of this film involves the father/son dynamic that will unfold as the filmmaker travels with his father to the land of their common heritage. It is not uncommon for sons to look to their fathers as a source of their own masculine identity. In my own film *Frogs and Snails* (2008), I examine the multiple influences on

¹³ Cuevas, Efren, and Alberto N. Garcia 90.

my understanding of masculinity and fatherhood, my own father being the most powerful. The interaction between my father and I, especially when I turn my camera on him, reveals intimate elements of the father/son relationship. Using documentary to examine family relationships is not new. In his film *Nobody's Business* (1996), Alan Berliner turns the camera on himself while making a documentary about his father. During the process Berliner begins to understand that it is through the interaction between him and his father where the body of the film lies. Ross McElwee relationship with his father is often examined within the filmmaker's work. Tension exists between them non-verbally on camera, but also through their dialogue. For example, in his film *Sherman's March* the following exchange clearly presents this tension:

Father: What did you do all day?

Ross: I filmed.

Father: I know, but what?

Ross: I filmed Dede washing her dog. I filmed Steve going to a music company where he used to work.

Father: Now, how is that going to be useful?

Ross: In this film?

Father: In any film?¹⁴

The father / son dynamic appears throughout *Sights and Sounds* in indirect ways. My father is very similar to my grandmother as they do not enjoy being on camera. My father will tolerate it because he wants to help me in my work. Before traveling to Belarus I met with my father on several occasions letting him know what I was going to need him to do. I clearly explained that I wanted to film him as we explored his mother's village in Belarus. I also explained that I would need him to sit and talk with me a few times during our journey. He agreed, but during the filming, he did his best to avoid being on camera. There are several moments where he looks directly into the lens to

¹⁴ *Sherman's March* (1986)

communicate with me non-verbally. Sometimes it is to make sure I understand what people are saying. Other times, he is tense and uncomfortable by the camera's presence or annoyed at how long the filmmaking process is taking.

Another example of father / son dynamics within documentary occurs within Niklas Vollmer's *Reading the Water* (2007). In the film the filmmaker and father have two very different goals, as presented in the opening shot of the father. The filmmaker's camera is focused squarely on his father, while his father is looking at distant wildlife through his binoculars. When the father asks the filmmaker if he caught a shot of a particular eagle, the filmmaker is caught looking at his father. The tension that exists between the two goals, the father's to show elements of ecosystems, and the filmmaker, to examine his father and his upbringing, rise as the two figures try to influence the filmmaker's son.

Identification within Community

The fourth theoretical aspect of this film involves identification within different communities. The goal of the autobiographical documentary is normally to understand the self and/or the community the filmmaker is within. "Self" can easily be understood as our own person, while personal identity is how we see ourselves within the context of large communities. For example, someone might identify themselves as a son, brother, cousin, and father within the context of a family. That same person might be identified as a construction worker, church member, and friend within the context of a neighborhood. As the size of community expands, the way the individual identifies themselves within it also grows.

People group themselves within large communities based on similarities and

differences. The language they speak, the traditions that they hold, the culture they are raised in. When someone from Mexico meets someone from Columbia they discover that they speak the same language, live relatively close, and have similar customs, but it is the differences that divide one into the category of “Mexican” and the other into the category of “Colombian.” These larger cultural groupings can be interpreted as national identities. “These differences are the product of centuries. They will not soon disappear. They are far more fundamental than differences among political ideologies and political regimes.”¹⁵

A unique element to *Sights and Sounds* is that it take place within a region of Eastern Europe that is commonly considered the dividing line between the East and West. This boundary is based on religious differences, between Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. The dividing line runs through the modern nation of Belarus, separating the more Catholic western Belarus from Orthodox eastern Belarus. Anne Applebaum describes this region in her book *Between East and West: Across the Borderlands of Europe*:

It could be said that there were, until recently, no nations in the borderlands - or at least no nation-states in the sense that we know them now...In the eighteenth century, if a borderland peasant were asked about their nationality, he would probably have replied “Catholic” or “Orthodox” or perhaps simply used the Polish word *tutejszy* - it means “one of the people from here.”¹⁶

For Poland, the *kresy*, the Polish word for “borderlands,” was used to describe this region. Polish historians mark the year 1385 as the beginning of Polish influence on the Kresy, but this did not mean a complete Polonization of these lands. Ethnic

¹⁵ Huntington, Samuel P. "The Class of Civilizations?" *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*. New York: Foreign Affairs, 1996. 4.

¹⁶ Applebaum, Anne. *Between East and West Across the Borderlands of Europe*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1994. xi.

communities formed within villages, often centered around one of three religions: Catholic, Orthodox, and Jewish.

It wasn't until the end of the Second World War that the multiethnic and multi-religious elements disappeared within the Kresy. Between 1939 and 1945 the war passed through this region three times, each time affecting the different cultural groups. When the Soviet army controlled these lands between 1939 and 1941, a series of mass deportations removed nearly 2 million Polish citizens to Siberian labour camps. When the Nazis entered, they began the mass deportation and murder of the large Jewish population. Finally when the Soviets re-claimed these lands at the end of the war, the remaining Polish population were deported and resettled in Western Poland. The damage that this mass migration and ethnic cleansing caused can easily be noted by looking at the ethnic diversity of Poland before and after the war. The 1921 census of Poland stated that 69%¹⁷ of the people in Poland declared themselves as Polish. The 2002 census of Poland revealed that number as 96%.¹⁸

Sights and Sounds follows the descendants of Poles who were deported by the Soviet army and displaced at the war's conclusion. These Polish citizens joined larger Polish communities throughout the world, especially the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia, and Argentina. The United Kingdom was a popular choice for Polish refugees because the British Army was instrumental in providing support to the displaced peoples. They established communities and churches where they continued to live and share their Polish identities.

¹⁷ Romer, Eugene. "The Population of Poland According to the Census of 1921." *Geographical Review* 13 (1923): 398-412. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/208278>. JSTOR. 7 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.jstor.org/>>.

¹⁸ http://www.stat.gov.pl/gus/45_4520_PLK_HTML.htm

While migration is nothing new, the combination with mass media allows people of a particular culture to remain in contact with their native culture. In his book Modernity at Large, anthropologist and globalization scholar Arjun Appadurai focuses on the effects of media and migration on the work of imagination, or the dreams and fancied possibilities of cultural groups. He states,

More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the wellspring of the increased rates of migration at every level of social, national, and global life. Others are dragged into new settings...

Those who wish to move, those who have moved, those who wish to return, and those who choose to stay rarely formulate their plans outside the sphere of radio and television, cassettes and videos, newsprint and telephone. For migrants, both the politics of adaptation to new environments and the stimulus to more or return are deeply affected by a mass-mediated imaginary that frequently transcends national space.¹⁹

For example, Turkish migrants in Germany can communicate with their native Turkey not only through open road ways but through the internet, telephone, satellite television, newspapers, and other printed material. The connectivity to their native culture impedes the assimilation process because they never truly integrate with their new homeland, but their native culture is being communicated through the filter of media. Though it is not as dramatic in my own case, being raised in an English home I experienced similar experience. American and British culture are very closely related, so integration should not be a challenge. What has made it challenging though is having a Polish name that constantly connects me to a third foreign nation.

Individual / Community Representation Within *Sights and Sounds*

The major characters within *Sights and Sound* are representative of several

¹⁹ Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2005. (6)

larger communities. My *babcia*, Irena and her cousin Elzbieta are the two eldest, and foundational characters. One was taken from these lands, one remained. Elzbieta grew up in the Soviet Union, but within a Polish family that elected to stay in the East. Her national identity did not shift, it simply remained Polish as she understood it. My *babcia* spent her childhood in labour camps and Polish refugee camps before she settled in the United Kingdom. Her understanding of her Polish identity had more of a unifying effect. For those in labour camps, the idea of Poland began to represent freedom. In the refugee camps, being Polish gave these displaced people an identity with a stable nation. After settling in the United Kingdom, my *babcia*'s understanding of what it meant to be Polish continued to develop within the Polish community in London. It is important to note that the development of the Polish identity within the United Kingdom at the turn of the war was not effected by what was actually happening in the nation of Poland. The national identities of those who remained in their native land developed under totally different influences.

My father represents the first generation of the exiled Poles in the United Kingdom. He is a full blooded Pole whose parents were refugees from Poland. His mother, Irena Harasimowicz was from a small village in eastern Poland called Stoliczka, while his father, Adam Dojs, was from Poznan, a large city in western Poland. When he was born my father was given the name Zbigniew Ryszard Dojs. While my father was very young, his parents divorced and he ended up living with his mother and her family. His first language was Polish and he did not learn English until he went to boarding school. While he was growing up he was constantly having to moving back and forth between the English and Polish cultures. He changed his name

to Richard, which is the English translation of his middle name, so that he could fit in with those around him, but did not reject his Polish identity fully because he was constantly surrounded by it at home and with other friends. He frequently would attend Polish youth gatherings around the city. It was while he was at one of these dances that he met my mother, who was invited to attend by a Polish friend from college.

My mother, Theresa Elliott, was born into a British family in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. People from this region have a very distinct accent and are known throughout the country as Geordies. The only other nationality and culture that had any other impact on my mother was the Irish. Her maternal grandfather was an Irish immigrant to the Northeast. She lived in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne for 16 years until she and her parents moved to the South so she could attend college. She met my father and a few years later were married.

My parents relationship resemble so many others in England at this time. The children of the Polish refugees were intermingling with the new culture they were living in, but because of the strength of the large Polish community within London, they never fully lost their Polish identity. When I was born my parents decided to give me a Polish name, Marek. I interviewed my mother in December of 2008 for my film. During the interview she explained that she was the one that pushed for the name Marek because she really liked it. She told her parents that they could call me Mark because many English speakers had difficulty pronouncing the name correctly. My mother also wanted me to be exposed to my mixed national background. My parents planned to send me to a Polish school in London so I could experience the best of my English and Polish heritage. These plans changed when I was three years old as my parents and I

immigrated to the United States. We lived in Cincinnati, Ohio for several years before the company my father worked for relocated to Houston, Texas. Immigrating to the United States removed all influence of Polish culture on my daily life. I now lived between two cultures, a British family life and American social life. The one thing that prevented me from fully identifying with one or the other was my Polish name.

Review of Additional Text Reviewed for Research

Documentary Films

Several documentaries served as stylistic examples for *Sights and Sounds*. The most influential would be the films of Ross McElwee including: *Backyard* (1984), *Sherman's March* (1986), *Time Indefinite* (1993) and *Bright Leaves* (2003). I have already written extensively about how these films served as stylistic examples.

Not many documentaries have been produced concerning the events surrounding the deportation and exile of the Poles from the Kresy. The most recent film, *A Forgotten Odyssey* (2001), presents the history of the events and provides first hand accounts of the deportation and exile.

Literature

There is a growing collection of personal accounts and history written concerning the deportation of Polish citizens from the Kresy. The following is a collection and brief explanation of the sources that I have utilized in my own research.

Adamczyk, Wesley. *When God Looked the Other Way: An Odyssey of War, Exile, and Redemption*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004

A recently published autobiography of a survivor of the deportations. Adamczyk was a small boy when he and his family were deported. There is emphasis on Katyn in many places in the book as his father was murdered there. The latter half of the book concerns his thoughts as he travels to the Katyn Forest memorial.

The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents. London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1965.

The official document produced by the Polish Government in Exile concerning the facts of the Katyn Forest Massacre. This event occurred in the context of the deportations.

Czapski, Joseph. *The Inhuman Land*. Trans. by Gerald Hopkins. London: Chatto & Windus, 1951.

One of the best known works and well written works concerning the plight of the Polish citizens in Russia after being granted amnesty to their evacuation to Iran. Joseph Czapski was one of General Anders' trusted assistants and entrusted him with many responsibilities that dealt directly with the evacuating Poles.

Dangerfield, Elma. *Beyond the Urals*. London: British League for European Freedom, 1946.

One of the first publications concerning the deportations of the Poles in Siberia. It was designed to draw attention to the plight of the Poles.

Dark Side of the Moon. London: Faber and Faber, 1946

The most well known primary source detailing the deportations to the evacuations to Persia. Combines personal narratives with Governmental records. Preface written by T.S. Elliot.

Davies, Norman. *God's Playground: A History of Poland*. 2 vol. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

A general history of Poland focusing specifically on 1795 to modern Poland. This is to be used as a general reference. Written by one of most well known scholars of Polish History

Dojs, Marek. *Harasimowicz: A Comparative Study of the Child's Experience of Deportation and Exile*. University of St. Thomas, History Department, 1998

This is my undergraduate thesis. I intended to give historical credibility to the oral history of the deportation and exile of his family to Siberia. This was achieved by comparing oral history interviews with documents, general histories, and personal narratives relating to the deportations and exile.

Gross, Jan Tomasz. *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Jan Tomasz Gross is one of the top scholars in the field regarding the history of Soviet oppression in Poland during the Second World War. This book focuses on

the Russification of the eastern borderlands of Poland. There is considerable emphasis on the methods the NKVD used in the deportations.

Gross, Jan Tomasz, and Irena Grudzinska-Gross. *War Through Children's Eyes: The Soviet Occupation of Poland and the Deportations 1939-1941*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981.

An extremely valuable primary source for this film. Jan Tomasz and Irena Gross examine personal testimonies written by Polish children in Persia. Narratives were chosen from a vast range of backgrounds and translated into English.

Herling, Gustaw. *A World Apart*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986.

Having been captured when he joined an underground Polish Army, Herling was sent to a Soviet Gulag. His eloquently written autobiography describes his time in captivity, the people he was imprisoned with, how he survived, and eventually his release.

Malcher, G.C. *Blank Pages: Soviet Genocide Against the Polish People*. Surrey: Pyrford Press, 1993.

This book was written to reveal the extent of Soviet genocide in Poland, including the deportation of nearly 2 million citizens from the eastern borderlands of Poland. Another focus is to expose the number of "blank pages" in the history of Soviet relations to communist Poland.

Piotrowski, Tadeusz. *The Polish Deportees of World Wars II*. London: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2004.

Another collection of personal narratives of those who survived the deportation and exile into the Soviet Union. There are a number of narratives written in African refugee camps which have not been published in English before.

Stalin and the Poles: An Indictment of the Soviet Leaders. London: Hollis & Carter, 1949.

An early attempt to accuse the leaders of the Soviet Union for crimes against Poland.

Sword, Keith. *Deportation and Exile: Poles in the Soviet Union, 1939-48*. London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1994.

Written by a scholar of modern Polish history. Keith Sword has written a number of books concerning the relations between the Polish nation and the Soviet Union. This book, though covering the entire event, focuses mainly on the amnesty and evacuation of the Poles from Siberia.

Other (Websites, List-serves, Interviews, Etc.)

One of the greatest tools for researchers of the history of the deportation of the Polish citizens from the eastern borderlands is the Kresy-Siberia Yahoo! group²⁰ and Website²¹. The membership of this list-serve contains survivors, historians, descendants, and others who are interested in learning more about the history and the Kresy. The Website is dedicated to preserving the memory of those who were victims of the Soviet aggression in the Kresy. Members can upload their own photos and historical documents to the site so others interested in the subject matter might have access to the information.

²⁰ <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Kresy-Siberia/>

²¹ <http://www.kresy-siberia.org/>

PRODUCTION

Overview

Production of *Sights and Sounds* took place over two and a half weeks in July of 2008. Making travel arrangements, working the pre-production on two films, and preparing to defend my thesis proposal made the time between notification of my reception of the Southwest Alternative Media Project (SWAMP) Fellowship and my flight to London pass by very quickly. The summer was the best time of the year to shoot this film. Not only did it provide a good amount of time for me to take leave of my family in Texas, but it is also considered the best time of year in Poland and Belarus. The days are long and the temperature is very mild.

Schedule

European production occurred in two phases. Phase 1 occurred in July 2008, and Phase 2 occurred at the end of January 2009. Production took place in England, Poland, and Belarus. Additional production continued throughout the fall, mainly filing interviews with my family in the United States.

Phase 1 began in London on July 9 and ended on July 13th. The schedule was not extremely busy and focused around my *babcia's* house. I wanted to get her acquainted with the camera so I could do a sit down interview with her at the end of the week. Unfortunately my *babcia* became increasingly uncomfortable around the camera as I was shooting and refused to do an interview. On July 12 I did persuade her to sit down and allow me to do an audio interview with her. My father arrived in London on July 13 and we departed to Warsaw the following day. Upon arrival I immediately began filming as we explored Warsaw. We spent a total of one day in the city before we

departed to Belarus via train. We arrived in Belarus on the morning of July 16. Due to the scheduling by my production assistant, I planned to scout the village of Stolowicze on the first day and shoot in the village July 17-19 but allowing myself to be open to the events that would unfold during our journey. Phase 1 ended on July 22 in London as I filmed a meeting with my father, his mother and her sisters where he revealed what we discovered in Stolowicze. I originally intended to use this footage in *Sights and Sounds* but as the story advanced in postproduction the footage appeared out of place and confusing.

Phase 2 included all footage shot in the United States. This footage included two interviews with my father discussing our trip, footage of my wife and mother talking about Polish recipes and my wife cooking a Polish dish for our family. This took place during the Thanksgiving holiday, November 26-30, 2008, and during the Christmas holidays, December 21, 2008 to January 2, 2009. This production also covered three family celebrations, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the wedding of my sister. It was difficult to determine whether or not this footage would make it into my film. My modus operandi requires me to talk to others to assist in my own personal understanding, so capturing these interviews on video allowed me to review what was said and analyze it deeper. I did attempt to cut the interview with my father into the film, but the footage of the interview and the observational footage never seemed to look right together. My final decision to leave the interview out was an attempt to stay true to the footage of the original event.

Crew

Marek Ryszard Dojs, Producer, Director, Cinematographer, Editor, Writer

After graduating from the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas with a joint Bachelor of Arts degree in Communications and History (1998) I was accepted to the Institute for Historical Documentary Filmmaking at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. At the Institute I worked with a group of student filmmakers on a short film entitled *The Road Out of Peekskill* which focused the events surrounding the most violent anti-communist riots in American history. I worked as a researcher and eventually became the lead editor for the project. From 2000 to 2006 I worked as the Coordinator of Youth Ministry at St. Theresa Catholic Church in Sugar Land, Texas. Understanding the power of media, I utilized my skills in visual story telling within the ministry as often as possible. I continued working free lance as a cinematographer and editor. I was accepted to the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) program at the University of North Texas in 2006 where I began to focus my work back to documentary film. My short film Bath Time (2007) was screened at the 2008 University Film and Video Association Conference and won Student Visionary Award at the New Liberty Film Festival.

Equipment

Even though I had access to equipment within the Department of Radio, Television, and Film, I only utilized university audio equipment. My desire to film this documentary in high definition led me to using my own camera, a Sony HVR-Z7U HDV recorder, which I purchased shortly before my trip to Europe. Audio was captured using two wireless microphones: a shotgun and lavalier microphone. I also relied heavily on the on-board camera microphone to capture audio. No additional lighting was used during any of the shoots in Europe. It was almost impossible to determine lighting

needs before the trip to Belarus since the journey and discovery of traces of our family's existence in Stolowicze was part of the planned shooting. Additional lights were used for two interviews that I conducted with my father after the trip. These lights were provided by the RTVF department.

All footage was captured in solid-state format, utilizing the external memory recording unit of the Sony HVR-Z7U. I utilized four 32 gigabyte compact flash card, each able to capture 148 minutes of HDV 1080i footage. I made the choice to capture my footage in 24p mainly to capture the "filmic" images which would suit the old world style of the village of Stolowicze.

This was my first experience working with an HD workflow. There were several challenges that were presented to me especially when shooting overseas. I shot with 4 32gb compact flash cards. Each with the capacity of 144 minutes of high quality 1080i HDV footage. I also had the option of shooting on MiniDV tape simultaneously. I shot on both only in Belarus because I was concerned about the security of my footage when leaving the country. There is a loosely enforced law that requires all foreign journalists to submit all footage captured in Belarus one week before leaving the country so it can be reviewed. This posed a problem for me because I was only in the country for a few days and refused to leave the country without my footage. By shooting on both tape and compact flash I had the ability to "surrender my footage" if I was required to when leaving the country.

Each evening when the shooting was complete I began the transferring process. The footage from the compact flash cards were duplicated and moved over to my 1tb external hard drive. The only computer that I had available at that time was an older

model and was only equipped with a USB 1 plug. So the process of moving several gigabyte of footage took several hours each evening. When the transfer was completed the hard drive would be stored in a secure location in the hotel room and not used until the next evening.

Budget

I have included a full budget for *Sights and Sounds* in Appendix A. My decision to shoot this documentary in HDV™ high definition video added additional budgetary lines including the need to purchase a new camera, compact flash cards to record to, a compact flash card reader, and a 1 terabyte hard drive for storage for all the footage captured in the field. The advantage of spending this money initially is that I will not need to purchase a new camera in the future or media.

Shooting a film abroad can be a very expensive venture, especially if you are not familiar with the language of the country you are shooting in. The most expensive item in my budget for *Sights and Sounds* was my production assistant in Belarus which equaled: \$3,000. The services provided by Belarus Productions not only included production assistance but also provided me with 24 hour a day assistance within Belarus. There was also some pre-production scouting of the areas that we were traveling through before we arrived in the country.

POSTPRODUCTION

Schedule

Scheduling the postproduction was broken into two phases, each producing a unique film. Under the terms of the SWAMP Emerging Film Maker Fellowship, I was required to produce a 10 minute film by October 10. The following is the postproduction schedule for *Return to Stolowicze*:

Aug. 4-8	Review and Logging of footage
Aug. 29	String Out
Sept. 18	Rough Cut
Sept. 25	Fine Cut
Oct. 6	Review of Fine Cut
Oct. 10	Deadline to send Final Cut to SWAMP

Postproduction schedule for *Sights and Sounds* began in mid December to allow enough time in between the two films. After editing *Return to Stolowicze* I came to understand that *Sights and Sounds* could not take the same poetic form. The two films needed to be drastically different and one of the major ways to allow this was the passage of time. The following is the postproduction schedule for *Sights and Sounds*:

Dec. 1-5	Review and Logging of additional footage
Dec. 19	String Out
Feb. 5	Rough Cut #1 No Narration
Feb. 9-11	Write and Record Narration
Feb. 13	Rough Cut #1 With Narration
Feb. 20	Rough Cut #2 With Revised Narration

Feb. 26	Screening of Rough Cut #2
Mar. 13	Fine Cut
Mar. 16-20	Audio Mix-down and Color Correction
Mar. 24	Final Cut

Equipment

This film was edited using my own editing equipment. The entire work was edited on a Macintosh with Final Cut Pro™. Working with HDV™ high definition video requires a very large amount of drive space. One 1 terabyte external hard drive was used as a work drive while the original media was backed up on two separate hard drives. Graphics, photo manipulation, and text were generated using Motion. Audio editing occurred using the audio editing tools in Final Cut Pro and Soundtrack Pro.

RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF FILM DURING POSTPRODUCTION

The focus of *Sights and Sounds* shifted a number of times during postproduction. Perhaps the most difficult thing was to think about editing two separate films with the same material. When I completed the edit for *Return to Stolowicze*, I screened it as often as I could to find out what else audience members were interested in. Most spoke about wanting to get to know the people that I met in Belarus and my experience in this country that most people have never heard of. After taking a month break from editing, I took feedback that I received and went back to the footage in November.

The footage shot in Warsaw was not used in the first film, so I began editing these images and determining how I would incorporate it into my film. Two general themes began to rise out of that material. First, I have always been interested in how historic events have been connected to me, specifically events during the Second World War. Since my childhood I have known there were several moments during the war that one of my grandparents could have died. These events have always fascinated me and have given me hope for my own life. My logic has been: if my grandparents survived in order for me to be here, then I must have some importance. So in many ways these events are defining moments in my life even though they occurred before I or my parents were born. This theme was in the forefront of my mind during the production phase of this documentary,

The second major theme that began to arrive was my relationship with my family. My relationship with my father became a major theme in the Warsaw footage, particularly in the dining scene. I simply recorded the moment for my own remembrances and I did not think that it was going to be in my documentary. At this

time of the production I was still focused on the history, so I did not spend much time focusing on the interaction between my father and I. This moment in Warsaw became a center piece in the Warsaw section and began to raise the issue of how I interact with my own family. As I continued editing future sequences I noticed I interacted with others while having the camera in my hands. I used the camera as a way to connect with those I was filming, but the camera ended up acting as a barrier.

The title of a film is normally the first thing that I solidify when working on a film. A title gives me an anchor when I inevitably begin to veer off course. The original title that I developed was *Return to Stolowicze*. As previously mentioned, this was the title of the short ten minute version that I finished in October. The long piece became about something more. The title of the film was constantly in flux and was not finalized until mid April. The final title *Sights and Sounds of the Mysterious Side of Myself* was inspired by a line of narration that I had written very early on: "I wanted to come here to find some physical connection with this nation and culture that is intimately connected to me, but is so mysterious as well."²² Through journaling and writing narration I determined that my film was more about an attempt to understand myself by traveling to the land of my heritage. What I ultimately connect with is a part of my family that we had no idea existed. The title of the film might appear somewhat self centered, but in my opinion our identities are influenced by the communities that we are connected to, and the family represents the most influential community. When journaling about what I was expecting in Belarus I wrote this,

So what was I expecting to find in Poland and then Belarus? I wanted to learn more about the foreign side of my identity. Being English is easy. I can easily

²² *Sights and Sounds* (2009)

enter back into the culture and blend in. Being Polish is mysterious. So much more foreign. If my nationality and ethnicity has an influence on my identity, then I understand the English side, but the Polish side has yet to be understood. When we went to Poland I was wondering if I feel a connection with the country. The strange thing was that I didn't feel too much of a connection to Warsaw.

Not feeling a strong connection in Warsaw was troubling at first, but it was when I was with my family in Belarus I felt more Polish. The film is about my family, but my focus is understanding how my family has made me into the person that I am today.

Perhaps the biggest struggle that I had in postproduction was writing narration. From the very beginning of the preproduction of *Sights and Sounds* I knew that I was going to use narration. I delve deeper into this in the following section.

JOURNALING AND NARRATION WRITING

One of the greatest tools that I use as a documentary filmmaker, besides the camera and edit station, is my journal. I tend to have an analytical approach to topics. My undergraduate liberal arts education at the University of St. Thomas showed me that there are many different ways to examine the same topic. Journaling helps me organize and process these thoughts. I can get my thoughts out of my head and look at them on paper, in a new way. During the months that I am actively working on a documentary I make it a habit to carry and write in a specific film journal. This is especially true when that film is autobiographical and self reflexive. Since the film is about some element of me, it is very difficult to separate myself or stop thinking about the film. The process of journaling gives me the opportunity to process a significant amount of personal thought and information when working on a particular documentary.

Journaling for films is not a novel approach. It was an important process for the filmmaker Ross McElwee. In his description on how he came to decide a career in documentary film instead of a career in writing, McElwee said,

I wasn't sure why I continued to write in my journal, since I no longer wanted to be a novelist, but I had become somewhat compulsive about it. A journal seemed, in some obscure way, to provide me with perspective on my life and some murky validation of the events that comprised it. But what I really wanted to do was make films. I decided that perhaps the best approach might be to try to make a documentary. In college, I'd been interested in non-fiction writing. I'd been editor of a political magazine. My journals were "non-fiction," albeit of a very personal sort. I'd taken a photography course at the Rhode Island School of Design my senior year in college. Perhaps documentaries would provide a way for me to meld all these interests. I began researching graduate programs in filmmaking.²³

When starting an autobiographical piece I beginning journaling about the most

²³ Cuevas, Efren, and Alberto N. Garcia (242)

basic element of the most basic theme of the film. I then begin to journal of the next element, examining how each is dependent upon the other. For *Sights and Sounds* I have journal entries entitled: What makes me part of a community?; My Name, My Story; Family; Passing on Culture; and so many more. These journal entries serve as the basic foundation for much of the written narration. I have included an appendix with excerpts of my film journal.

Many documentary filmmakers shun the use of narration. They claim that they want to visuals and the people that appear in the film to tell the story. My opinion is that narration is a tool that needs to be in the toolbox of every documentary filmmaker and it should be used when necessary. I made the decision very early on during the production of *Sights and Sounds* to have a more personal tone to the voice over narration. The personal tone gives the narration in a friendlier and less didactic presentation. I went through at least fifteen versions of my written narration. I biggest struggle was to not give more information, especially concerning the historical events surrounding the deportation of my *babcia* and her family. I eventually decided to focus on my own thoughts and experiences while traveling through Poland and Belarus.

EVALUATION OF COMPLETED WORK

Preproduction

The evolution of this documentary from preproduction to final cut is surprising. I began this process making a very different film. I normally do a much better job in the preproduction phase but I think many of the problems that I experiences stemmed from the fact that I was shooting two films, my thesis and a one as a requirement for one of my grants. When I received the funding I quickly entered in to the preproduction process because I had approximately two months to make all my arrangements. Along with the multitude things that I needed to do to prepare of the trip, I had to form a committee and prepare my prospectus to officially begin this thesis film.

The purchase of my equipment also caused several problems. I ordered my Sony HVR-Z7U and other equipment from an online seller. When receiving my order I was missing a large amount of materials that the company refused to send to me even though I had paid for them. This lead to several weeks of phone calls and letter which eventually lead to me registering an official complaint to my credit card company. I eventually was charged for only the items that I received, but this entire process was time consuming and added additional stress to the preproduction phase.

Production

The amount of time I spent preparing the travel arrangements paid off during the production phase. My father and I were able to move from location to location with little to no problems at all. Our visas to enter Belarus were secured several weeks before we boarded the train to enter the country. Contacting a production company in Belarus was also one of the best things that I could have done in preproduction. My production

assistant not only served as a translator, but he also helped arrange our hotel rooms, provided transportation, and scouted locations before we arrived. He had worked with plenty of foreign journalists and filmmakers so he knew where I could get particular shots that I needed.

Perhaps where my preproduction failed was in London. I had spent so much time preparing for my shoot in Belarus and dealing with the multitude of issues that surfaced between May and July, that I did not spend enough time preparing my *babcia*. She knew that I wanted to come and talk with her, but I don't think she understood what that meant. When I began talking about an on camera interview, she began to dislike to idea of the entire thing. She told me that she didn't like to think about what happened, but as we spoke further I discovered it that she was concerned about how she would appear and sound on camera. She did help set up a meeting with a family friend who had also been deported from Stolowicze but had returned a few times. We met with this family friend and he gave me advice and points of interest in the village. After this meeting my *babcia* refused an on camera interview. About two days before leaving London to head to Poland and Belarus, she agreed to talk with me and to have her voice recorded. This interview became an important element for the short film, *Return to Stolowicze*, but did not appear in *Sights and Sounds*.

The production that took place in America more of a result of looking at my footage and comparing it to my original prospectus. I noticed that several issues that I wanted to focus on such as transnationalism within my own family experience were not as strong as I had thought in my original footage. While conducting these interviews with my parents and siblings I began to delve deeper into my own understanding of how

nationalism has formed my own identity. This was one of the themes of my original prospectus, but I began to think about it in a much more personal way. It was during these interviews that the focus of my film began to shift more towards what I had actually captured in Europe.

Overall I would say that production was very productive. This was my first time working with an HD workflow and I had very little problems with it. After shooting in solid state format I do not expect to go back to miniDV.

Postproduction

The postproduction phase of this film has taken me longer than any other film. I began organizing my footage in August 2008 and began editing in September. *Return to Stalowicze* was completed by the second week of October. I screened and received some wonderful feedback at a large screening in Mexico City at the end of the month. Much of the feedback focused on a desire to meet the people that I met while in Belarus. I took this feedback and journalled about the longer film during November and half of December.

The postproduction for *Sights and Sounds* began in January 2009. I quickly created a string out and early rough cut. The major sequences were set by mid February, but the exact structure was not complete until the beginning of April. The most challenging aspect of postproduction was writing narration. The difficulty in writing came through my struggle with what exactly *Sights and Sounds* was about.

The distribution possibilities of *Sights and Sounds* still remain the same as I stated earlier in this work. Several organizations have already expressed interest in the film, including the American Council for Polish Culture. I will be immediately submitting

Sights and Sounds to several film festivals including the NextFrame, Full Frame, and Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival. The film is scheduled to be screened at the 2009 UFVA Conference in New Orleans. The film will be submitted to be screened on the program *The Territory*, an independent film program broadcast on KUHT Houston PBS. Other PBS stations that I will be approaching will be WYIN Chicago and Wisconsin Public Television both of which serve populations with high Polish influence. I will also submit the film to KERA Dallas / Fort Worth PBS since there is interest in broadcasting the work of local filmmakers.

Looking back on this entire process I am pleased to be finally finished with it. This film has been a challenge to me because most of my autobiographical films are aimed at discovering or working through some personal issue. At the end of *Sights and Sounds* I am obviously frustrated that I feel like I haven't learned anything except family relationships that help form who we are also are so much more complex than they appear.

APPENDIX A
BUDGET ITEMIZATION

BUDGET ITEMIZATION FOR SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

Production					
Production Unit	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Producer (Marek Dojs)	\$2,000.00	1	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
DP/Sound- Pack.w/Producer					
Production Unit Total			\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$0.00
Belarus Productions					
Belarus Productions	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Location Scouting/Advice	\$350.00	5	\$1,750.00	\$0.00	\$1,500.00
Translation Service	\$250.00	5	\$1,250.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
Belarus Productions Total			\$3,000.00	\$0.00	\$2,500.00
Production Totals			\$5,000.00	\$2,000.00	\$2,500.00
Equipment Expenses					
Camera	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Sony HVR-Z7U / Batteries	\$3,499.00	1	\$3,499.00	\$0.00	\$3,499.00
Camera Total			\$3,499.00	\$0.00	\$3,499.00
Stock	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Sony miniDV DVM63HD	\$8.99	4	\$35.96	\$0.00	\$0.00
Transcend 32GB CF Cards	\$150.00	8	\$1,200.00	\$0.00	\$500.00
Stock Total			\$1,235.96	\$0.00	\$500.00
Audio Equipment	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Wireless Microphones	\$500.00	2	\$1,000.00	\$1,000.00	\$0.00
XLR Cables	\$20.00	4	\$80.00	\$80.00	\$0.00
Audio Equipment Total			\$1,080.00	\$1,080.00	\$0.00
Equipment Expenses Total			\$5,814.96	\$1,080.00	\$3,999.00
Travel Expenses					
Airfare	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Houston to London 7/12-23	\$1,167.00	1	\$1,167.00	\$0.00	\$1,167.00
Dallas to London 7/7-23	\$1,438.55	1	\$1,438.55	\$0.00	\$1,438.55
London to Warsaw 7/14-21	\$288.00	2	\$576.00	\$0.00	\$576.00
Airfare Total			\$3,181.55	\$0.00	\$3,181.55
Hotel	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Baranovichi, Belarus	\$36.00	5	\$180.00	\$0.00	\$110.00
Hotel / Travel agency Fees	\$18.00	1	\$18.00	\$0.00	\$18.00
Hotel Total			\$198.00	\$0.00	\$128.00
Rail Travel	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
London Travel Card	\$10.00	1	\$10.00	\$0.00	\$10.00
Warsaw to Baranovichi	\$60.00	2	\$120.00	\$0.00	\$120.00
Baranovichi to Warsaw	\$60.00	2	\$120.00	\$0.00	\$120.00
Rail Travel Total			\$250.00	\$0.00	\$250.00
Travel Expenses Total			\$3,629.55	\$0.00	\$3,559.55

Postproduction Expenses					
Editorial	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Editor / Final Cut System	\$2,500.00	1	\$2,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Editorial Total			\$2,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Hardware	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
1 TB External Hard Drive	\$250.00	4	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Hardware Total			\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Music	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Music Composition	\$1,000.00	1	\$1,000.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Music Rights	\$500.00	1	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Music Total			\$1,500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Stock Footage	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Buyout Footage	\$484.00	1	\$484.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Audio Equipment Total			\$484.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Post Production Total			\$5,484.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Distribution Expenses					
Distribution	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
DVD Stock (DVD+Blu-ray)	\$500.00	1	\$500.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
DVD Duplication	\$2.29	200	\$458.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
DVD Cases and Covers	\$5.50	200	\$1,100.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Festival Entries	\$750.00	1	\$750.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Distribution Total			\$2,808.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Advertising	Rate	Amt.	Total	In-Kind	Funded
Posters	\$200.00	1	\$200.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Postcards		2000	\$165.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Advertising Total			\$365.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Distribution Total			\$3,173.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Grand Totals					
			Total	In-Kind	Funded
Requested Funds	\$9,962.96		\$23,101.51	\$3,080.00	\$10,058.55

APPENDIX B
JOURNAL EXCERPTS

The following pages are excerpts from my film journal. They have been transcribed and slightly edited for clarity. They were written between June 2008 to March 2009. See JOURNALING AND NARRATION WRITING for more information concerning my journaling process.

What makes me part of a community? (Written in June)

My very existence makes me part of a community. I was born into a physical and emotional community, my family. Biology is part of it. Two must unite, male and female, in order to allow a biological family to form. But there is more to it than that. When a child is born its very existence depends upon the communion created between mother and child. The mother feeds and warms, nurtures and cares for the child. That is biological community. What about the father? Biologically he is not required after fertilisation, but on a very animalistic level, the man might stick around to protect his offspring from others. I think this is a very simple example of social community. The father cares for the mother and child. He protects them. This is the formation of the basic family, the original idea of what family is.

The family is the foundational element of much large communities such as tribes, neighbourhoods, towns, villages, cities, nations, etc. Theoretically all of us are part of a global human family. We are all connected some how. We might be different in the way we speak, or the way we look, or even the way we dress and the foods we eat, but we are family.

Individuals identify themselves within the context of community. Be it brother, sister, father, or mother. We are unique but connected. Multiply this across the globe and you will have billions of unique individuals living within the context of communities. These communities influence thought, religious and political beliefs, economic and so

much more. Languages are developed in order for the communities to communicate. Similar foods are eaten. Similar styles of clothing. “You have your mother’s eyes.” “You have the look of your grandfather.” Genetically, we carry traces of our community with us where ever we go. And we bring these traces of community into any new relationship we make...

My Name = My Story (Written in June)

For as long as I can remember there has been a particular ritual that I go through when I meet people for the first time. When I introduce myself this is what usually happens:

“Hi my name is Marek.”

“Wow. That’s a really unique name. What nationality is it?”

“Polish.”

“So, you’re from Poland?”

“No. I’m from England, but I have lived in the States for most of my life.”

“So what’s up with the Polish name?”

For my entire life I have been connected to Poland as a homeland, but I have been so disconnected from it. If I were to describe my own nationality I would say that I am a Brit who immigrated to the United States when I was young, whose father is a child of Polish refugees to England. My Polish background is more in the foreground because of my name.

I had an opportunity to change my name to a more anglicised version: “Mark,” but I have never liked that name. Maybe because if I accepted “Mark” as my name, then I was in some way denying a part of myself... Would life be easier if my name was

“Mark”? Am I afraid that I would simply blend into the sea of nameless faces, not making my “mark” in the world?...

In some strange way my name is what has prevented me from fully identifying myself as an American. Everyone I meet causes me to face the reality that I am from somewhere else. Of course that country that my name associates me with is the one homeland that I have the smallest amount of exposure to. I always thought that Poland held something special for me. Will this land reveal something intimate about who I am? I always thought so...

Family (Written in July - After Trip)

Of course the community that has had the biggest impact on my identity is my own family. This was the main reason for my trip to Poland and Belarus in the summer of 2008. If my *babcia* was not from Stolowicze there would be no reason to go. My father's sister, Barbara, told me that she has no urge to go to Stolowicze. So what else was I seeking? And what was my father looking for?

I think that I am fascinated by the event of the deportation. If this event did not happen, my grandmother would have never met my grandfather. And my father would not have been born. This event is crucial to my existence, but it was such a terrible thing. I have pride in the fact that my family survived. I am interested though in the place of Stolowicze. This place is the origin of my Polish heritage, but this place is no longer in Poland...

Going to Belarus this summer was an attempt to find something out about myself. For my father it was a search for family. Growing up without a father, my father appears to be possessed with the search with family, as if he is looking for that missing

piece. It is different for me. I'm not searching for my family...

I have also had a desire to understand where I have come from. That is the root of my love of history. Everyone has a role in someone else's life. Every event effects the lives of those who experience them and the lives of those that come afterwards. And we are intimately connected to these events. Sometimes our very existence relies on these events...

So what was I expecting to find in Poland and then Belarus? I wanted to learn more about the foreign side of my identity. Being English is easy. I can easily enter back into the culture and blend in. Being Polish is mysterious. So much more foreign. If my nationality and ethnicity has an influence on my identity, then I understand the English side, but the Polish side has yet to be understood. When we went to Poland I was wondering if I feel a connection with the country. The strange thing was that I didn't feel too much of a connection to Warsaw.

The Connection (Written between December and January)

One of my desires on the trip was to have some physical connection to the past. I wanted to see that my family had some impact in the region. I wasn't expecting to actually find their home, or so we thought.

When we were drove down the street to our next location a flurry of discussion began as we passed by an old run down house. I was not sure what was happening at all. Ilya tried to explain, but was continually trying to keep up with the discussion. "This was their house" is all he could get out. I was confused. *Babcia's* childhood home had been destroyed. It was not located in the village proper, but rather on the land we just saw. Elzbieta even pointed out where she thought it once was located. Now this was

their house? I was confused.

We walked through the tall grass outside the house. I couldn't see exactly where I was standing and I ended up getting bit by ants. The house had fallen into disrepair and in need of repair. The majority of the windows were covered with plastic rather than filled with panes of glass. I began filming the house, but still confused. My father then cleared up some of the confusion. "This was *babcia* and *djacek's* house from the *osada*. It was moved from there to here." Ilya agreed. "Elzbieta said this was once a beautiful house." Suddenly the ugliness of the house was lifted. This home was built by my great-Grandfather. The pieces were placed together by his very hands. This was the home that my Grandmother and her sisters were born in. This was their childhood home. They walked through these very doors. The family lived within these four walls. And it was here, that on the morning of February 10, 1940 that Soviet soldiers came and deported my *babcia* and her family. That was the moment that began a massive exodus out of Poland, through the Soviet Union, to the Middle East, Africa, and finally England.

Ilya turned to me and said that he could get me inside the house if I wanted to. I was concerned about it. The house was run down, but it looked like there might be someone living there. The front door was padlocked, but the back door was closed with only a heavy latch. So I ventured inside. I actually broke into a house in a small village in Belarus to film inside. I didn't go in far, just two rooms immediately accessible to me. The place was a mess. There were empty vodka bottles strategically placed in one corner. Dirty clothing lay around. I remember filming the wallpaper. It looked ancient. It had peeled off the wall and was patchy. There was more empty wall than wall paper.

I filmed it because I remember the walls from my bedroom as a child. I remember the walls of my *babcia*'s house. Perhaps she would remember this. The fact that the wall paper would need to have been over 65 years old did not bother me. It was possible.

Our Belarusian cousins insisted on walking with us through Stolowicze. I'm not sure if they felt obligated to keep us company, or if they genuinely wanted to show us around their mother's village. They obviously didn't understand that the filmmaking process takes time. I felt constantly rushed to finish my shooting...

It looked as if someone hadn't been there for months, but there was just enough evidence of life that I feared there might be someone inside, fearful of those who were now walking around the back rooms. This was probably the reason that we left when we did. I grabbed a few shots and we continued down the road towards the church. This was the place I really wanted to go before we discovered the house. The church of the Sacred Heart was one of the distinguishing buildings in Stolowicze. It was in so many photos that I had seen of the village. It was probably damaged during the war, but I hoped that much of it was still intact. *Babcia* remembered going to the church. She remembered it was a red bricked building, but she could remember nothing of the inside.

I hoped to capture an image that would stir her memory. The inside was pristinely white, almost as if it had recently been painted. There was an older altar off to the side. Perhaps this was the altar from when my *babcia* and her family had come to church. Above the altar was a painting of Jesus. It was nothing fantastic. Not a work of art. Something interesting about it was that the artist had placed Jesus in a field that resembled the land around the village. Jesus was walking up a road that looked like the

dirt road I was on outside the village that wandered through the land my family once owned.

I had been isolating myself in my filming. My father and the others were getting bored and waited around for me to finish. There were discussions going on the entire time. Some old man who had let us into the church was dominating the discussion, and Elzbieta was filling in any breathing space with more of the discussion... I blocked it out and continued my search for a glimpse of my grandmothers childhood...

We headed back Baranowicze, to Elzbeta's house, where food was being prepared for us. There was plenty of discussion about what we were planning to do next and our plans for the next day. While my father and Elzbieta spoke, her son, Czeslaw, spoke, loudly, on the phone to his son also named Czeslaw, but to help with the confusion that comes with father and son sharing names, he was known as Slava. He was planning to come in from Minsk the next day and offered to take us to local tourism sites. I was not too keen on doing typical tourist things. I was in Belarus to make a documentary and I was only here for a few days. I was focused on the immediate area, and the history here. Zaosie was mentioned. This small village was only a few miles away from Stolowicze and was the historic birth place of Adam Mickewicz. Mickewicz mythicised this portion of Poland in his poetry and I wanted to go there. There was also an opportunity to go to Nowogrodek and Lake Switez, two more locations known for their history, association with Mickewicz, and were in the region.

Then a bomb shell was dropped. Elzbieta began explaining something to my father. He paid close attention, responding when necessary. He then turned to me and said that Elzbeta had made a mistake. The old house we had visited that day in

Stolowicze was not the family's house. The house was moved from its original location to another location but was burned down a few months later. She apologised and appeared embarrassed. I tried my best to hide my disappointment, but the news severely knocked my thoughts and feelings off balance. I had established a connection with this place that I thought was my family's home. I was invested an emotional attachment to that place, so much so that everything we pasted it during our time in Belarus I just had to stare at it. A connection had been made and it did not matter that the house was simply a run down shack. That house and the experience and connection that formed will always exist...

I had not expected to find any of the family homes. I'm not sure what I was expecting to find. For me it was the fact that I was going to stand in those places, in that village. It was another opportunity for me to connect, not only to history, but to my own personal story. I hoped to find the land where the family lived, but wasn't planning on it. I wanted to walk the same streets as my *babcia*. I wanted to connect with the Poland that my *babcia* knew. Or at least catch a glimpse of it. The strange thing about my trip was that it was while I was in Belarus that I began to feel connected to my Polish roots. After learning about the house, I now question if that feeling is simply something that I fabricated in my mind. Is there really a connection, or do I want it so badly that I think that one was formed?

Was a connection made in Belarus? I would have to say yes, but not what I was expecting. I have a Belarusian family. They run parallel lives to my family. They welcomed us and treat us so well. I might have wanted the connection to occur in Stolowicze, but it was solidified around the table, with food and drink. It was also

strengthen on the trip the next day. They wanted to take us to Mir castle. Coming from England I have seen my fair share of castles, so I wasn't exactly thrilled about going, but the family offered and it was impolite to refuse such a gracious offer.

Belarusian Roots? (Written between January and February)

We met up with the family and started towards Mir. This was the time I felt like a tourist, which was not part of my plan. I hate being a tourist. I'd rather stumble upon things and experience things as pure as possible. The day was all right, and I filmed everything thing to be nice. I honestly did not think that I would be using much of what I shot. I felt that the day was going to be a waste and that the next day, my final day in Belarus, would be even more rushed. I felt that I was losing control of my film.

Something strange happening on that day. I began to connect with the family even more. Besides my father, only Czeslaw's son, Slava, spoke English. He was my generation, and was just a few years younger than myself. Without Ilya there translating for me, I started to isolate myself, but Slava spent his time talking with me. Probably because we were the close in age, but he also had an interest in photography. We talked about Belarus, his nation... I began to see a wider beauty in the country. Rolling hills and plains, with forests scattered through the region. I really began to fall in love with this countryside. That evening the family sat around the table and shared a meal. It wasn't the first meal we had shared, but this felt more like a family. We spoke about family and about future trips. There were plans being made about our last day. We then took family pictures since this was the last day we would all be together.

Then a group of us headed north to Lake Switez. This was a resort area, but it had been made famous by a poem by Adam Mickewicz. This place was beautiful and I

loved it. I became engrossed in filming the lake. Off to the side my father and Ilya were talking about travelling through America. I couldn't believe that they were talking about Florida and the Texas coast here, in this beautiful place. It wasn't until I returned that I read Adam Mickewicz's poetry. It really is nice, but I hear it is nicer in Polish. He is considered a master of the use of the Polish language. I read about the pixies who Mickewicz imagined who lived around Lake Switez. They would lure unsuspecting men by their beautiful voices. Perhaps I was drawn in by the same power that motivated Mickewicz to imagine pixies...

Poland vs. Belarus (Written between February and March)

It is strange that I felt more connected to my Polish roots while being in Belarus than in Poland, in Warsaw even. My father loved being in Poland. It was an opportunity for him to be immersed in the culture he was brought up in. He was raised as a Pole in exile. I liked Warsaw, but I felt no connection to the place, or at least not a deep one. My family had nothing to do with Warsaw. My father's father came from the west, Poznan and his mother from Stolowicze in the east. I did not know my grandfather when I was forming my national identity. When I was connecting myself to the large communities. *Babcia* was my direct connection to Poland. She was the present one. She personified Poland for me. The Poland she knew is the Poland of my heritage. This is probably the reason that I felt more connected to Poland in Belarus.

The reconstructed nature of Warsaw gave it a feeling of being fake. This city was absolutely destroyed during the war, and all the restoration that was done still did not completely capture an original feeling. The monuments to the war seemed like the only authentic thing in the entire city. These monuments represented what happened to the

city. The one monument that really connected to me was the Monument to Those Fallen and Murdered in the East. This was a relatively new monument, mainly because building it was a way to place blame on the atrocities in the east firmly on the shoulders of the Soviet Union. The fall of Poland's menacing neighbour allowed Poland to begin telling the story of what happened to nearly two million Polish citizens from the Kresy.

I spent close to three hours on two separate days filming the monument. There are no names, just regions and cities, which are written on railway ties. The train wagon was filled with crosses and other representations of tombs made in haste. Many of the crosses were lying on the floor, others were leaning over. These represented the tombs in the deeps snows of Siberia. When these snows melted, the crosses would fall over, and often the bodies of the dead were exposed. There was nothing human about the wagon except one thing, a multitude of hands and fingers. Obviously representing the multitudes that were taken to Siberia in cattle cars. When these trains passed through villages and towns there were no immediate signs of the human contents if the train unless people came close to the trains to hear the voices and see the hands and fingers jutting out of every crack desperately seeking help. The final railway tie had a Polish phrase inscribed on it, that read, when translated "This is their Grave" There is no monument to those who died in Siberia by Soviet Aggression. This was the monument to their lives, but more so their unjust deaths and sufferings for those who survived. This monument was dedicated to my *babcia* and her family who lived, but also to her grandmother who died that first winter in Siberia and was buried in the frozen ground. I could have stayed at this monument all day, but my Dad was obviously getting bored.

He reacted differently to what I expected. We were going to his mother's

homeland... I thought it would mean something more. When I asked him about it, his answers were strange to me. "What did you feel being in the village of your mother's birth?" and he would answer, "She only lived there until she was ten. She doesn't even remember the place."

"Do you feel a connection to this place?"

"It was a nice place to go on holiday." That is what he thought of the trip... partially. He knew I was there filming, but he denies having any other motive for going than visiting. I personally think his desire to work on the family tree was a motivating factor... As he has grown older he has become more interested in working on our family tree. He brought his computer with the information on it. While at Elzbieta's house he was showing people the tree and it was obvious enjoyed it. But when I asked him about the family in Belarus and if he felt that they were family his answer was perplexing again. "You can't deny the connection, but I don't feel like they are family." He went on to say that since they were nice and hospitable we should reciprocate if any of them ever came to the States. Of course we would. That is what family does, right?" Perhaps the word family means something different between my father and I...

When we left we headed towards a village that my great-grandfather was supposedly from. The name was different today, but everyone called it "Durniwicze"... Elzunia directed us to one particular house where an old couple lived with their mother... A discussion ensued which I do not understand, but I figured it was about trying to get information about the Harasimowicz family that lived in the village. She could not remember, after we were asking her to recall memories from the 1920s... It was then that I realised something. These people represented my family if they would have never

been deported. They would claim Polish nationality, but would be speaking the vernacular: Belarusian. The language was a mixture of Polish and Russian, with a few unique qualities. As I filmed these faces I began to wonder what their lives could possibly be like...

Our train was to come in the evening, so Elzbieta wanted to feed us one last time... I noticed the large apple tree in the back garden. There were apples in bloom. There were also apples that had fallen on the ground... The trunk of the tree was beautiful. It began to represent a very narrow minded view of family. Many think family is one thing, and this is the way it should be. Often I think that there are members of my own family, mainly older members, who view family very myopically. I started to film branches and from there the multitude. I spent a good hour filming that tree... and a good amount of time filming the trunk. I wanted to get the shot.

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