HYBRID FILMMAKING:
USING DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY AND COMPOSITING ANIMATION
TO CREATE "A STORY FOR STEPHANIE"

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities
Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Joel Brashear
April 2009
Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Arts degree.

Director of Thesis, Robert H. Willenbrink

Master's Committee: Robert H. Willenbrink, Chair

Date: May 29, 2009

Robert E. Frank
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Joel Brashear, M.A.
Morehead State University, 2008

Director of Thesis: Robert A. Willard

Producing the animated children’s short “A Story for
Stephanie” posed several challenges including limited
resources in similar projects, a lack of professional
performers in eastern Kentucky, and a multitude of
technical issues. Techniques and methodologies new to the
filmmaker were implemented to achieve the exact look
desired for the film. Technical expertise and artistic
talent working synergistically to create a positive
experience became a necessity. Also, the ability to
effectively lead small groups became paramount for
completion of the film in a timely manner while still
delivering a great piece of art.

Accepted by:  

Robert Z. Frank, Chair
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HYBRID FILMMAKING:
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There is a certain alchemistic nature to producing film and video; in essence, filmmaking is a magical synergy of art and science that must be in perfect balance to function properly. Filmmaking wizards use their skills and creativity to transport audiences to new and exciting places. Moviegoers have literally seen far away galaxies to the deepest recesses of the human mind. A film featuring brilliant acting and plot cannot be considered well crafted if it is technically wanting. Likewise, a film with state of the art computer generated images cannot be considered successful with no real sense of creativity. It is in the melding of the science and the art where truly great cinema is created.

The budget and scale found in typical Hollywood films allow for amazing technical achievement and in some cases great artistic merit. Major motion pictures, be they block-buster space epics or independent films exploring personal interactions, all share one common
bond: to be successful there must be a synergistic connection between the creative and the technical. Micro-budget films, such as student productions, are generated with minuscule funds when compared to large-scale films. Therefore, greater forethought concerning creative techniques and technologies must be given to produce unique and innovative pieces. With creating an original video production as the main goal of this project, the finished movie became "A Story for Stephanie," (Appendix A) a computer animated short. Producing this product successfully required the development of alternate moviemaking techniques to those found on most small-scale productions. By utilizing alternative production techniques to those found on similar projects, a hybrid filmmaking method dubbed "video storybook" was developed.

This document describes the filmmaking process of unconventional methods of production and editing used to create an animated mixed media video. Each area of the production process, from pre-production (where the initial production is initiated, analyzed and planned) through the production phase (where the performance is captured to film or video) to the postproduction (where
the picture, sound, music, effects and titles are melded and merged into a completed piece) is thoroughly detailed and explained. The document concludes with an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the project producer and the finished product. The analysis indicates the measure of success in melding the aesthetic and technical, thereby determining the synergistic relationship between the art and science of filmmaking. To consider this film successful, the producer will must achieve the following goals.

1. Create an original film that is found to be entertaining to the target audience of children, with hopes of entertaining adults as well.
2. Use various forms of technology in the production process, opting for innovative rather than traditional filmmaking techniques.
3. Achieve a greater understanding of the medium, thereby growing as an artist.

Only if and when these goals are met can this project be considered a success.

The producer faced many obstacles preceding the development of this thesis film. To achieve the goal of
developing a student film, creating a skill set for filmmaking is a personal obsession. Beginning with “Fire Under the Mountain,” (Appendix A) an hour-long documentary recounting a coal mining disaster that took the lives of 38 men in the winter of 1970, the first tools of filmmaking were introduced; essentially becoming on the job training. Shot in the summer of 2002, camera techniques, interviewing skills, non-linear editing and basic composition were all areas of personal growth for the producer, with virtually no involvement from professors or industry professionals. The following year, “Fire Under the Mountain” premiered to over two hundred and fifty eastern Kentuckians including several family members of the men who were killed in the blast.

The success of “Fire Under the Mountain” resulted in a position with WYMT-TV, the only network affiliated station in the region. This job provided a more professional level of video production. Being named Studio Director a mere six months after being hired offered the opportunity to steer both live and pre-produced broadcasts. After a mere three years, station management awarded a promotion to Promotions Manager, a
position which included the responsibilities of writing, producing, shooting, directing and editing on-air spots designed to promote and extend the brand of WYMT-TV. This resulted in what amounted to mini-movies being produced on a weekly, if not daily basis.

A focus of study on the research and criticism of Film and Film Theory continued upon entering graduate school. Whenever possible, projects dealing with film were chosen; some of which featured research papers on horror films for an east Kentucky market or the depiction of violence in horror films in comparison to the violence represented in nightly newscasts. Others included speeches on pop culture icon Superman and even a persuasive film sales presentation. The incorporation of video production into projects also increased the level of film training. For a class on Media Criticism, a collection of four short films that explore the major criticism theories was presented. (Media Criticism, Appendix A) A directed study class provided another opportunity to stretch as a filmmaker, writing a feature length screenplay, “At Summers End,” with the assumption that it would be filmed for a graduate thesis. However,
this proved to be too ambitious and the plans to shoot "At Summers End" as a thesis film were scrapped.

In conjunction with prior academic study performed by the producer, a short horror film appeared to be the logical next step, as previous success had been found in that area of filmmaking. The producer created a short film entitled "Goodnight, Sweetie" (Appendix A) about an elderly man who kept the decapitated head of his former lover stuffed on his bedroom wall. A concept was developed or using "Goodnight, Sweetie" by incorporating the piece into a mini-anthology film in the style of "Tales from the Darkside: The Movie" (Harrison, 1990) and "The Twilight Zone: The Movie." (Dante, Landis, Miller & Spielberg, 1983) This mini-anthology resulting from this project would be a film approximately thirty minutes in length. It would feature three short horror films linked together with a wraparound story. Unfortunately, the scope of this project was estimated to be too expensive and expansive to be produced successfully.

Following this setback, the possibility of creating several filmed monologues as opposed to a multi-actor production was examined. One such piece, "Z-Day,"
Films (2004) describes the filmmaking process from idea conceptualization through the festival circuit and distribution. Anatomy of Film, (Dick, 2005) and Film Theory (Stam, 2000) are texts used in several film schools that expound the film medium. The history of the medium and the theoretical principals are explored in great detail. For modern filmmaking, specifically digital production, The Filmmakers Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide for the Digital Age (Ascher & Prince, 1999) not only explore the technical aspects of both filmmaking and video production, but also the post production for both disciples as well. Sheridan’s Digital Short Films (2004) follows a similar path, but focuses solely on the production of digital shorts. Here, more credence is given to the artistic aspects of video production, offering insight into generating story ideas and developing methodologies for converting these thoughts into actual films.

What a Producer Does (Houghton, 1991) presents an explanation of producing films as a profession, recounting the responsibilities and benefits of the position, giving insight into visualizing every step in
completing the film before the script is written. Similar instruction for directing was found in Katz’s *Film Directing Shot by Shot*. (1991) Here, practical advice for working with actors is merged with technical instruction for movement both within the frame and from the camera. For storyboarding, *Setting Up Your Shots* (Vineyard, 2000) offers insight on many different camera angles and methods of capturing images. The process of compositing shots in editing was also simplified through the use of this book.

*Stage Makeup Step-by-Step* (Swinfield, 1994) instructs makeup applications from basic corrective procedures through advanced liquid latex appliances. More advanced makeup techniques, such as lesions, limb removal and assorted viscera are covered in Vinther’s *Special Effects Makeup*. (2002) The techniques found in this book were regarded during the early, horror film stages of this project.

The practical tips and tricks found in Kenworthy’s *Digital Video Production Cookbook* (2006) offer real world expertise on issues found during the course of gorilla-style filmmaking. For actors, *Acting for the Camera*
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(Barr, 1997) gives an excellent explanation of the subtleties of performing for the lens as opposed to acting on the stage. Techniques in this text, such as body positioning, or physicalization, offer incredible insight for an inexperienced cast. Lighting for Digital Video & Television (Jackman, 2002) offers specific lighting setups ideal for small chromakey shoots.

A method of digital art similar to the one used in this project can be found in Photoshop for Right-Brainers. (Ward, 2006) While the effect used in this film was achieved with a non-related method, the one featured here offers similar results.

Several films were also studied as part of this process. These included historically significant animation feature films, such as "The Secret of NIMH," (Blooth, 1982) "Toy Story," (Lassiter, 1995) "The Nightmare Before Christmas" (Selick, 1993) and "The Lion King." (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) These examples show what can be achieved with animation techniques. "In NIMH," Blooth incorporated groundbreaking technologies, for the time, to create a universe new to the silver screen. "Toy Story," the first fully rendered 3-D animation film,
offers insight into the implementation of new media and technology into children's cinema. "Nightmare," however, uses stop motion animation, a technique used primarily for special effects and not for the entire production. Here, stop motion is used exclusively, making "A Nightmare Before Christmas" the first film to be generated entirely from stop motion animation. Disney's "The Lion King" was influential to this production due to the film's ability to invoke a sense of wonderment in viewers. Artistically, the Adult Swim Cartoon Tom Goes to the Mayor. (Heidecker & Wareheim, 2004) served as the basis of the look of the piece. While there technique features characters depicted only in blue and white, this production took their work one step further, adding a full color pallet to the art.

Training software for special effects editing techniques were also examined. (Holmes, 2006 a & b) Here, graphic artists disclose methods of using three-dimensional software in a standard compositing program.

Methods and Materials

To complete "A Story for Stephanie," many computer programs and technical equipment were used. The following
is a listing of all materials used throughout the course of creating the film from the preproduction stage through initial public screening.

Software

12 inch Design: Royalty free graphics library used for pre-built animations found in the SPACEMAN sequence.

Adobe After Effects: Motion graphics and visual effects generator. Used during the compositing process to animate characters, alter visual perspective and move other objects within frame.

Adobe Photoshop: Photography retouching software. Used to alter digital images into a faux color pencil drawing.

Final Cut Pro: a non-linear editing program, used to cut audio tracks and complete final composition of film.

Live Type: text animation software used for animated objects.

Soundtrack Pro: a music-generating program used for all sound effects.

Final Draft: Script writing software used to generate teleplay.

Garage Band: Music generating software used for three note sequence found in library sequence.
iDVD: DVD authoring program. Used to create DVD menus and generate finished discs.

Image Capture: Apple software used to import still images from the camera to the hard drive of the computer.

Snap! 10,000 Photos: Royalty free image collection used for background generation.

Hardware

Canon Rebel XTI: Digital camera used to capture images of all visual performances.

Canon XL2: Digital camcorder used to record audio tracks of actors.

Kasear Chroma-Key Fabric: Large green fabric used to key performers. 9’x 12’.

Kasear Support System: Photographers backdrop stand used to hang chroma-key fabric behind performers. 9’x 12’.

Lowell 4-Point Light Kit: Digital Video lighting kit used during the photo shoots.

Power Mac G5: Apple computer used for all editing.
During the preproduction phase of "A Story for Stephanie," several steps were needed to prepare before capturing the performances onto some form of media. Using Final Draft to format the script for "A Story for Stephanie" required three weeks to compose and refine. (Appendix B) After the script was written, storyboards, or thumbnail images for each shot used in the film, were created. (Appendix C) These images served as templates for future shots and gave others a guide for how the director visualized the text. The meticulous process of storyboarding resulted in a crucial document that was referred to during the photography sessions.

It was during this time that the final concept of the film began to formalize. No professional actors were readily available, so non-professionals were utilized. Traditional filmmaking relies heavily on the talent of actors in front of the lens; using untrained performers would ultimately result in an unsuccessful film. To rectify this issue, traditional filmmaking would not be the primary form of production and instead an amalgamated cartoon-like film was created. This meant visual cast members would not record dialogue while performing.
Instead, trained professionals would be brought in at a later time to record sound. Since "A Story for Stephanie" was a children's film, the decision was made to create a visual style similar to those found in picture books.

The filmmaker gained several advantages over traditional filmmaking by using this process, which came to be known as "Video Storybook." The actors' performances did not hinge on their vocal talent, only on their ability to follow instruction from the director. Also, the visual style was very unique and offered a new and innovative form of filmmaking to those working on the production.

Once the script was written and the conceptualization finalized, actors were chosen to portray the characters. Costumes were procured for them to wear, adding another layer of depth to the film. Once all actors were fitted with costumes, makeup tests were needed for the GNOME. Latex appliances were used on the actor's nose and chin, elongating both. Various shades of green, black and gray makeup were used to add a troll-like appearance to the actor. This, in conjunction with a medieval costume, resulted in a strong, inhuman
appearance. (Appendix D, Figure 1) The actor was then photographed in full costume so that final look could be judged before moving on to the next phase.

Production on a film such as this required the use of a digital camera and some form of backdrop featuring a key color. For this project the XTI, the support stand and the green fabric were used. A tripod may be used if desired, but not required. The lighting kit was also not essential, but improved the finished piece. After the equipment was in place, the actors were positioned between the camera and the key wall. Ideally, the subjects stood eight feet from the wall behind the actor and eight feet from the camera. The camera was optimally sixteen feet from the wall. This distance gave ample room to avoid light spillage on the actor and excess shadows on the background. Unfortunately, this distance was not possible for most shots due to limited space.

Two days were required to capture all still images needed for the film. Day one was spent working with the child actors. Over two hundred and fifty pictures were taken of the actors during the two and a half hour session. Knowing that dialogue would be recorded later,
this time was spent focusing on positioning the actors into the various poses and facial expressions needed for the film. Hannah, the actor portraying STEPHANIE, followed direction well and maintained focus while under the hot lights. Colin, the super hero BROTHER, excelled at performing with his mask and cape. FAIRY GOD SIS Emma was also fantastic as the world’s youngest fairy godmother. At only three years of age, she was the youngest member of the cast.

Day two was spent with the adult actors. Digital photographs of the six characters were taken over the course of five hours. As in session one, no audio was recorded, allowing for total focus on visual performances. Chris Combs, who portrayed both the COWBOY and the SPACEMAN, needed a few small accents to his costume. A fake mustache gave the COWBOY a rugged look that really fit the character. (Appendix D, Figure 2) The SPACEMAN needed an otherworldly appearance, which was achieved by adding red and blue makeup around his eyes and to the sides of his face. (Appendix D, Figure 3) After compiling a total of over six hundred and fifty pictures, all that remained was to record audio.
The vocal tracks were recorded two weeks later due to conflicting schedules. Two professional actors from the Lexington area were kind enough to lend their voices to the film. James Hamblin had the thankless job of reading the NARRATOR role, while Adam Luckey provided the voices of all other male characters. Traveling to Adam's home in Lexington for the recording, a Cannon XL2 digital camcorder along with two stick microphones on stands and cables were the only hardware needed. This one-hour session consisted of four complete readings of the script and a few extra takes on lines that did not meet the director's needs. While not part of the visual cast, the two audio performers make a cameo in the final film as the BARDS, (Appendix D, Figure 4) who briefly fly across screen in the final shot. The skill of these trained actors elevated the script in unimagined ways. These brilliant artists delivered textured performances that raised an admittedly simple script to something truly special. The production was fortunate to have procured their services.

The final step of the production consisted of capturing sound with the lead actress. Six-year old
Hannah had limited experience working with a script. The recording process became much smoother when Hannah was given line readings, a process where the actor is fed the line just as the director wants it to be said. Hannah worked well with the instructions and the session concluded after only an hour.

Postproduction was the last phase of filmmaking, where the visual and auditory elements captured in production were edited together into a cohesive film. All digital elements of the film were transferred into an Apple G5 computer. The audio recordings, which also included video shot of the performances, were captured onto the computer using Final Cut Pro, a non-linear editing program designed for use on Apple computers. Still images were transferred from the camera via Image Capture, Apple’s standard program for such a process.

With all data stored, the images were digitally altered using Adobe Photoshop to match the “Video Storybook” style. To achieve this effect, the following process was performed on every still image of the actors used in the film. First, the “Background Eraser” tool was used, removing as much of the green key as possible.
Setting the tool's strength to 90 often resulted in the best results, but there was some variance from picture to picture. Next, the layer was duplicated twice, resulting in three layers of the same image stacked upon each other. The effect "Photocopy" was applied to layer one, making sure that black was selected as the foreground color and white as the back. This resulted in a black and white image that resembled a pencil drawing. The settings for the "Photocopy" layer varied from character to character, but all used a detail level between four and twelve and a darkness level ranging fifteen to thirty five. Layer 2 features a change in the blending mode setting. The blending mode changed the properties of individual layers regarding how they interact with the layers found below them. By changing the blending mode from "Normal" to "Color", a black and white image now looked stenciled in colored pencil. Finally, layer three's blending mode was altered from "Normal" to "Overlay," giving the image even more color and enhancing the colored pencil look. This process was used on every still image found in "A Story for Stephanie."
Completing the three-layer process on all frames would have been an arduous and time-consuming process without the use of Photoshop's "Automate" function. Using the "Batch" tool in Adobe's Photoshop, many of the steps detailed above were automatically processed by the program with no human involvement. Each image still needed to be tightened and cleaned, however.

"Automate" requires the user to record the steps that need to be performed on all images into what Adobe refers to as "Actions." These actions can then be applied to entire folders of pictures and saved in a separate location for ease of use later. However, most, if not all of the pictures resulting from the automated process had to be corrected manually in some way, with incorrect keying being the most common of these errors. Nonetheless, countless hours of monotonous work were avoided by implementing this automation.

The next postproduction step in making "A Story for Stephanie" involved editing the audio tracks of the actors into the actual film narrative. To accomplish this process, Apple's NLE, or non-linear editor, Final Cut was utilized. This program, like most NLE programs, allowed
the editor to cut, trim, position and rearrange audio and video tracks across a timeline. Each take was reviewed and monitored for quality and clarity. The best takes of each line from the performances were culled out from the rest of the data. Next, a rough cutting between the Lexington Session and the Hannah footage was constructed by placing the individual cuts in order in accordance with the script. Next, video from each shot was removed, leaving only the audio tracks.

After all characters were digitally altered to match the storybook theme and the audio track was compiled, compositing the final animated sequences began. Photoshop's sister program, After Effects, was used to compile the film into segmented scenes. This program allowed for the complex sequences to be composed from several individual elements. Every frame of "A Story for Stephanie" was compiled in After Effects.

The animation process involved building environments for the characters to inhabit before they were incorporated into the frame. Every sequence began with a stark white background so that each cut would resemble a page from a storybook. For example, grass-like brushes
were used in Photoshop to create the cornfield in the COWBOY sequence. Two cornstalk images were created and dissolving between them resulted in the illusion of cornstalks swaying in the breeze. The elements found in the castle scene with the GNOME were taken from stock photography. The castle door and turrets were processed in the same manner as the character images and then blurred slightly, creating a separation of foreground and background. The lunar ground seen with the SPACEMAN was actually composed with photos of caves, de-saturated and distorted to emulate the moon.

As soon as the environments were created, the process of animating the characters began. "Key Frames" were set at the point of origin where the object or character needed to be at the start of the sequence. Another Key Frame was set for each object correlating to where it would end. When rendered, After Effects animated every frame between the key frames. This resulted in a smooth, continuous shot for each render. Many sequences in "A Story for Stephanie" used 3D-style animation, altering not only the position on both the X and Y-axis, but the Z-axis as well. This allowed for freedom to
digitally manipulate how the viewer sees the composition in three-dimensional space, even within the flat space of a viewing screen. In Figure 5, STEPHANIE stands in the foreground while her family stands behind her. (Appendix D) Key fame changes on the z-plane created movement within the frame, mimicking a tracking shot where the "camera" is on a dolly moving away from the home. While all shots in "A Story for Stephanie" do not use 3-D positioning, every sequence used key frames to alter X and Y movement, along with transparency and scale. Special effects and animations were used to add the level of fantasy needed in "A Story for Stephanie." After Effects was able to accommodate some of these needs. Specifically, using the "Cylinder" effect enabled the creation of the tornado used by the COWBOY. (Figure 6, Appendix D) Also in the Spaceman sequence, After Effects was used to easily create the star field seen in the background on two separate shots. (Figure 7, Appendix D) Other graphics, such as the magic ball and the explosion used in the introduction of Stephanie's MOTHER came from a separate program called Live Type. This program's primary use is the animation of text to be used in video
production. It does, however, feature pre-built graphic elements that worked well in this film. Live Type was also used to create the text background for STEPHANIE seen just before she leaves on her quest. There is an "Easter Egg" hidden in this shot of STEPHANIE standing with words animating on frame behind her. If one looks closely, the producer's name appears just over her right shoulder. (Figure 8, Appendix D)

Another source of pre-built animations was the digital library from 12 Inch Design. This royalty free digital graphics package included several elements found in the final film. These included the spaceship, the various planets in the Kalgon shot, (Figure 8, Appendix D) and the spinning Earth used in the opening. Each of these external elements was animated within the frame and digitally altered to match the desired look using After Effects.

When all video sequences were composited and rendered from After Effects, they were imported to Final Cut, matching them to the audio tracks. This was a relatively simple process, being that special care was taken to match the on screen motion created in After
Effects to the audio tracks in Final Cut. Sound effects were then incorporated into the mix, adding another layer of depth to the audio track. These audio effects were collected from the music-generation program Soundtrack Pro. All sound not generated by the actors or the music track came directly from Soundtrack Pro.

With the rough cut finished, the film could now be scored. Marcus Hudson, a gifted musician who had previously worked with the production team, volunteered to compose original music for the film. He delivered a data disc with seven tracks for use in the film: a main theme, in lengths of both thirty and sixty seconds, a guitar riff for the COWBOY, a collection of space sounds and tribal beats for the SPACEMAN, a melodic theme for the GNOME, a xylophone sequence for use with DAD, and a melancholy version of the main theme. These tracks were mixed into the rough cut, elevating it from a collection of vignettes into a cohesive, flowing film. The music dictated the tone of the scenes and effectively heightened the dramatic tension. This was an improvement over the first cut.
The final edit of "A Story for Stephanie" was completed on October 24, 2008. This version of the film was exported from Final Cut as a QuickTime file and then imported into iDVD, Apple's DVD authoring software. In iDVD, the "Anime Pop" preset was used for the opening menu. Stills from the film were added to the menu to create a customized effect. A second menu, listed under "Extra Stuff," was created using the "Sliding Panes" preset. Here, all films created by the producer in conjunction with this project were included. Finally, a master disc was burned, concluding work on "A Story for Stephanie."

Presentation of Project

The thesis project that eventually resulted in "A Story for Stephanie" was a long and arduous production process, lasting over sixteen months from start to finish. After all the time and effort that went into producing this film, those involved were excited about sharing their talent with the public. Before any public screenings were planned, however, the producer conducted small screenings for friends and family to gather feedback prior to a screening for a wider audience.
"Flawless" and "amazing" were some of the comments received after the showing. When the film ended, the children in attendance immediately asked to watch again. More interesting comments came from educators in attendance. A grade school principal, along with a former school librarian, mentioned that it would be ideal to show in classrooms for the purpose of encouraging students to read, write, and take advantage of the library. The positive reactions received during these small screenings confirmed that it was time to show Stephanie to a wider audience.

Several factors were taken into consideration for the initial public screening. In the summer of 2003, "Fire Under the Mountain" premiered to a crowd of over two hundred. At just under an hour in runtime, it was believed that the piece warranted a viewing in this traditional manner. With Stephanie, however, a different approach was taken. At 7 minutes, the film is too short to warrant a large-scale screening. This, along with Stephanie being produced for children, led the producer to premiere the film at a children's Halloween festival held at Hyden Citizen's Bank. This allowed for many more
children the opportunity to see the film as they entered the bank's candy giveaway. Also, while there was no cost to either the production or the bank, but both would benefit. The bank had new visitors looking to see the film while the film received many more viewers than would have come to a simple screening.

The film played for audiences every twenty minutes over the course of the three-hour festival. During the night, over eight hundred costumed kiddies, along with their adult supervision, passed through the Halloween exhibition. While some candy-crazed children simply wanted to fill their bags and leave, those that stayed seemed to enjoy the film. Some parents even called back their children in order to see the film.

In regards to public feedback, special attention was paid to what specific scenes of the film drew the attention of the audience. More often than not, young boys would stop for the sequences with the COWBOY and SPACEMAN, while girls seemed to remain during the opening and closing segments. The appearance of the GNOME may have frightened the audience, resulting in little connection between them and the character. (Figure 10,
Appendix D) The employees working the event, who had to endure over twelve viewings over the course of the evening, offered great praise for the film. Several viewers also inquired about purchasing a copy of the film to share with others.

Discussion of Results

In the terms set forth by the producer at the beginning of this process, "A Story for Stephanie" should be considered a successful project. The need to create an original film was achieved with the completion of the final edit. As for entertaining the target audience, all feedback received in both public and private screenings has been positive. The use of various forms of technology, such as videography, still photography, musical composition, acting and others achieved the second goal. The producer has achieved goal three as well, learning many new techniques during the course of the project, as well as expounding his personal boundaries as an artist.

Several factors must be taken into consideration when confirming the success of "A Story for Stephanie." The amount of planning and the process of storyboarding,
while demanding at the time, eventually paid huge dividends during production and editing. Surprisingly, the quality of animation achieved with no traditional drawings or computer modeling being used is impressive. The animation is simple compared to other computer-generated films, but it thematically matches the tone of the piece well. The methods used in “A Story for Stephanie” worked well in achieving the initial goal of producing a video representation of a children’s storybook. Using Photoshop to create the color pencil effects was a huge boon to the piece and in conjunction with After Effects; a special piece of art was created. It is this aesthetic that draws younger viewers to the film. This, along with the dramatic content, results in an entertaining film.

This is not to say that the production was perfect. Scheduling and time management became huge issues in finishing the piece. Even with local talent and readily available equipment, the process took much longer to complete that originally anticipated. Also, the development of the color pencil technique used in Photoshop was lengthy and laborious. It is in these
difficulties, that the second goal was met, however. Utilizing alternative filmmaking techniques, such as still photographs in place of moving video and the color pencil method are not typically found on a film set.

While the equipment chosen for this project was done so based on availability and familiarity rather than perfectly fitting into the method, all hardware and software worked perfectly in finishing the piece. The Canon cameras, both still and video, met every need required of them. And, perhaps most importantly, new techniques and features of all software were learned over the production process. During the editing of Stephanie, a new method for video storybook filmmaking was discovered that allows full video to be processed as the still photographs in the film. Video is shot in front of a chroma wall, just as the still were in the previous method. Next, a still image of each frame is exported as a separate file, resulting in thirty separate pictures for each second of video. Using the Automate feature in Photoshop as previously described, all frames are processed in the color pencil method. After Effects is then used to import all still images as an image.
sequence, which reconstructs the images into a video file. This new video now has full motion along with the color pencil look. Also, the background will be empty, allowing for anything to be composited behind the video file. This discovery was both exciting and disheartening in that developing this method will help any filmmaker use this technique more effectively. “A Story for Stephanie,” however, was too far into the editing process when this discovery was made to benefit from the technique. Nonetheless, the finished piece derived from this production is a successful artist piece of mixed media that accomplished all goals the producer had for the film. These new techniques and growth fulfill the third and final goal set forth by the producer.

However, there are some aspects of the finished film that do not meet all standards of the filmmaker artistic standard. In particular, the voice acting for the GNOME character, while brilliant, does not match the physical appearance of the character on screen. Altering the GNOME’s appearance so that he was smaller on the frame was attempted, but the proportions of the actor forced the scale to remain as it was shot. If time and budget
restraints were less stringent, a new actor could portray the GNOME with a smaller stature. Another solution to this problem would be to record another audio track of the GNOME'S section of the script. Better direction to the actor would rectify this problem and another session would relieve this issue. Additionally, the second shot of the film, where the camera zooms and tilts between the houses into a sign is off a bit. (Figure 11, Appendix D) The physics of the shot were difficult to manage, with houses moving awkwardly in relation to the road and the sign. This was a quick shot and not distracting; yet upon multiple viewings, was an issue with the producer.

Conclusion

It could never be claimed that "A Story for Stephanie" is a perfect film, but few films are. After examining this process as both an artist and a technician, utilizing both creativity and scientific knowledge, it became clear that I achieved my goals set out at the start of this process. Melding and merging still photographs that were digitally altered with music and dialogue, I produced an actual film. I created an
original piece of art and was successful in sharing that art with an audience.

The synergy between art and science needed to produce a successful production could not be more evident than in this film. Untrained amateurs could not achieve the technical proficiency found in this film. The artistic sides of the piece: the actual creativity of generating the script, capturing the performances, even applying the makeup, are all areas that need artistic sensibilities to be performed in a proper manner. However, it is in the coming together of these two vastly different worlds that the magic of making movies really shines. Without one, the other cannot function. "A Story for Stephanie" epitomizes this belief, and stands out as an example of what can be accomplished with multimedia productions.

Producing "A Story for Stephanie" was truly a labor of love. This piece was by far the most difficult ever undertaken by the producer, but also one of the most rewarding. Much was learned during the course of this film, both in front of and behind the camera, at the
computer writing the screenplay, as well as editing and mixing the final cut.

These characters have existed in one form of another for over sixteen months, eliciting both love and hatred from the producer. STEPHANIE and her friends have been companion and albatross, friend and foil. And yet, now that they aren't around the office quite as much as before, I feel like I have lost an old friend. This was a rich and rewarding experience and one that no one who worked on this film will soon forget.
References


Georgetown College “Maskrafters”
http://www.georgetowncollege.edu/departments/tpa/productions/index.htm
(Retrieved June 22, 2008)


Appendix A: DVD Contents

1. “A Story for Stephanie”
2. “Goodnight Sweetie”
3. “Z-Day”
4. “Fire Under the Mountain”
5. “Media Criticism”
Appendix B: Script

TITLE SCREEN

"Tales From Mythsville: "A Story for Stephanie" by Joel B.

Slow dissolve to fly-by of a small town. Strange buildings are interspersed with normal houses

NARRATOR
There is a land where imagination is a way of life. There is a nation made from a notion. There is a place where stories are born.

Zoom into Mythsville city sign.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
There is a place called Mythsville. Everyone that lives in Mythsville is from one story or another. Everyone, that is, except Stephanie.

Whip pan to STEPHANIE'S house. STEPHANIE stands in the foreground with her family in the distance. She is dressed in bland cloths and looks disconnected.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
All the people that Stephanie knows already have stories of their own. Her father is a famous detective

"The Case of the Missing Chips" in text comes on screen.
DAD, dressed in a suit, Sherlock Holmes hat. With a spyglass, he examines a set of footprints that lead to STEPHANIE holding her fathers chips. She Shrugs and smiles

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Stephanie's MOTHER is a well know
witch with amazing powers!

Haunted house graphic behind MOTHER. SHE waves her wand and a slice of pizza appears in her other hand. She takes a big bite and smiles.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Stephanie's brother Clark is a Super hero sidekick.

CLARK, dressed in a cape and tights, shoots laser beams out of his eyes and flies off screen.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Even Stephanie's baby sister has a story. She's the worlds youngest fairy god mother.

EMMA dressed as a fairy princess waves her star topped wand and proclaims "Bibitty Bobity BOO!" Cut back to STEPHANIE, looking sad.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
But none of these stories were for Stephanie.

STEPHANIE
I've got to find a story of my own. But I don't know where to start!

DAD sits beside STEPHANIE and puts his arm around her.

DAD
Why don't you go to the library? That's where all the stories are kept. Maybe one will find you there.

Cut to STEPHANIE walking down road with her house and family in the background.

NARRATOR
And so Stephanie set out to find a
story all her own. She hadn't gone half a mile when...

A LASER BEAM blasts across STEPHANIE'S face. Cut to SPACEMAN, wearing silver cloths and holding a laser pistol

    SPACEMAN
    You won't get away this time Kalgon! I'm going to take you away to the prison plant Detention 12!

    SPACEMAN stops next to STEPHANIE and looks around.

    STEPHANIE
    Sir, who are you talking to?

    SPACEMAN
    Not now, little girl. I'm on the hunt for the evil Kalgon!

    STEPHANIE
    But I don't see anyone?

    SPACEMAN
    You wouldn't! He's only visible with these special sunglasses...

    SPACEMAN reaches to his face and realizes he has forgot his glasses.

    SPACEMAN (CONT'D)
    Not again! Being a science fiction hero is SO HARD!

    SPACEMAN touches his chest and beams off screen.

    STEPHANIE
    Well, I don't think I want to be in a Sci-fi story now.

    STEPHANIE again begins her trek to the library.

    NARRATOR
So again, Stephanie sets out to find her place in Mythsville and a story to call her own.

Something catches STEPHANIE's attention to her right. She stops to take a look.

COWBOY (O.S.)
EXCUSE ME! Little girl, can you help me.

STEPHANIE sees a cowgirl tangled in her own lasso.

COWBOY (CONT'D)
Hi there. Do you think you can help me? I seem to have roped myself here.

STEPHANIE
What happened?

STEPHANIE begins untangling COWGIRL

COWBOY
Well, I was rustling some steer when a tornadee got stuck in my lasso and 'fore ya know it...I'd roped myself. What are you doin' out these parts?

STEPHANIE
I'm looking my own story.

COWBOY
Well, you could be in westerns like me. Sleep under the stars, ride horses and such.

STEPHANIE
That sounds like a lot of fun, but I don't think it's MY story

COWGIRL and STEPHANIE shake hands and STEPH walking again.
NARRATOR
So the Cowgirl thanked Stephanie and sent her on her way. She could see the library in the distance when something... or someone bumped into her.

STEPHANIE and GNOME bump into each other. They both rub their heads in pain

 GNOME
Sorry there, young miss. Didn't see you there. You wouldn't happen to have a ring for me?

 STEPHANIE
Ring?

 GNOME
Or was it a sword?

 STEPHANIE
Sword?

 GNOME
Magic Scroll?

 STEPHANIE
I'm sorry, I don't have any of those. I'm just going to the library.

 GNOME
For a book of spells no doubt.

 STEPHANIE
No, I'm just looking for a story of my own.

 GNOME
Would you care to join my quest to
find the mythical shield of Steve? It is said to grant you the power of...something

STEPHANIE
Thank you, but I don't think that's the story for me.

GNOME
Suit yourself. But you're going to kick yourself when I find the sandals of Sammy.

The GNOME exists as STEPHANIE continues to the library.

NARRATOR
After a day of walking and talking and thinking and searching, Stephanie finally arrived at the library. However!?!?

Cut to close-up of Library doors. "CLOSED FOR RENOVATION: See you this Fall!"

STEPHANIE
CLOSED!!! It can't be closed.

STEPHANIE sits on the ground and begins to sob.

NARRATOR
Stephanie was lower than low. Sadder than sad and sure that she would never find a story of her own.

STEPHANIE
OH, I'll never find my story now!

AUTHOR walks to the library door, sees STEPHANIE and approaches her.

ARTHOR
Hey. You lost little girl?
STEPHANIE
No, well, not really. I just want to find a story of my own.

ARTHUR
A story of your own?

STEPHANIE
One that is for me. One that fits me!

ARTHUR
I see. Well, my name is Arthur and I write stories. Why don't you tell me about yourself and I'll see if I can help you.

NARRATOR
Stephanie began to tell the man about her day and the people she met and the library. Everything. She didn't leave a single bit out. As she spoke, Arthur began taking notes and drawing pictures. When she had finished, Author patted her head and smiled.

ARTHUR
Stephanie, don't you see. You don't need to find your story because you're already in it. What do you think today has been. This is your story Stephanie.

STEPHANIE looks puzzled, so AUTHOR stands and walks to the library. He puts his notes into a slot and out pops a book. He looks at the cover and hands it to STEPHANIE

STEPHANIE
What's this?

ARTHUR
This...is “A Story for Stephanie.”

STEPHANIE looks down at her book and smiles the largest smile any child has ever smiled.

STEPHANIE
This...it's my story. A story for me? About me?

ARTHUR
Why don't you read it and find out for yourself.

ARTHUR rubs her hair and exits. STEPANINE sits to read her book.

NARRATOR
From front to back, cover to cover, Stephanie sat and red her book.
And when she reached the last page, she started again.
She had found her story and All was right in Mythsville. For now at least...

Dissolve to a college shot of all the character's we've seen with "The End"

GNOME
A-HA! The great and powerful spork of Greg! At last!!!
Appendix C: Story Boards

Storyboard for Stories for Stephanie, page 1

1. Wire set for show
   Action scene w/keen
   Civic Space: Kearns

2. Look East on Town
   Scen.

3. For Stephanie
   Come in full gear
   Clothing art

4. Case of
   The M's
   Chips

5. Test apathy on
   Catholic voting
   St. Peter's

6. Mrs. Heel class
   I follow the footballs
   Female in Tier

7. And can Bob Stephanie
   has fallen his chest

8. Go'man stay and
   Smoke a Sharry

9. Mark stands in front
   of a haunted castle
   She looks her God...

10. And cleans alone
    i mix of pizza...

11. Clock stalks in a
    Super user

12. Clock shows 12:30
    as a sign of 1450 p.m.
    Clock falls

13. From here, it is a path
    that goes into the land
    of a buffalo gate...

14. And you some
Storyboard for Sticks for Stephanie, page 2

1. Cut to Stephanie looking sad. She clayshakes her clay away.
2. Mean girl looks at her, makes snarky comment.
3. Old lady walks by. Stephanie looks at her, smiles.
4. Stephanie Deposits her clay.
5. She walks off, looking sad.
6. She walks past a flower, smiles.
7. She walks past a flower, smiles.
8. She looks sad, looks at her flower, doesn't.
9. She walks past a flower, smiles.
10. She walks past a flower, smiles.
Storyboard for Stories For Stephanie, page 3

1. Initially, Stephanie is portrayed as a boy looking for help.

2. She finds a council of old men.

3. The council offers help.

4. Stephanie's mother is depicted as a woman giving her daughter advice.

5. Stephanie's father is shown as a man encouraging her.

6. They all work together.

7. Stephanie wakes up and is surprised.

8. She realizes she was left in a梦.

9. The council members fill her room with their treasures.

10. The story concludes with a message of gratitude.

11. The final scene shows Stephanie saying goodnight to her parents.

12. A final note of encouragement is written at the bottom.
Storyboard for Stories for Stephanie, page 4

1. Magic scalliwags fight in town. Then they buds into plains.

2. Step (shakes his head).


5. Step.

6. shirt of stephen fell down.

7. Glasses in front of stephen.

8. Step.


10. Step.

11. Step.

12. Step.

13. Step.


15. Step.

Storyboard for Stories for Stephanie, page 5

1. M.S. shot. Arthur looks at Stephanie. He laughs a bit
2. Close-up on Arthur, smiling
3. CU on Arthur, crying
4. (Alternate between these 3 x 2s)
5. 2-shot: Arthur talks to Stephanie. He looks worried
6. Stephen, close-up
7. CU on Arthur. He continues talking
8. 2-shot: Arthur talks to Stephanie
9. CU on Arthur
10. Close-up on Arthur
11. CU on Stephanie
12. Close-up on screen
14. CU on Stephanie
15. CU on Arthur
16. Special effects

Caption: "At the top of the stairs to the library"
Storyboard for Story for Stephanie, page 6

1. A. The last of Stephanie
2. Close-up of Stephanie
3. He is also in Stephanie
4. Scanning out...

5. THE END
6. CREDITS
7. Credits
8. Ground联 on face...
Appendix D
Figures

Figure 1: GNOME Makeup

Figure 2: Cowboy Mustache
Figure 3: SPACEMAN Makeup

Figure 4: The BARDS
Figure 5: 3-D movement in a 2-D world

Figure 6: Cylendar in After Effects used to create Tornado. Note the flying Cow.
Figure 7: Star Field Effect

Figure 8: Example of Live Type effects. Can you find the Easter Egg?
Figure 9: 12 inch Design graphics used for planet animations.

Figure 10: Gnome Scene
Figure 8: Street Sequence