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Seat 20D

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Seat 20D

by

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ABSTRACT

When sculptor Suse Lowenstein’s son Alex was murdered in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in an effort to come to terms with her grief, Suse turned to her art. She began to sculpt herself “stripped” naked and in the emotional position she fell upon hearing the news of her son’s death. She found the process brought some solace. Thinking this might help others, Suse posted about her project in the Pan Am Victims’ Family Newsletter inviting others to participate. Seventy-five women responded. Suse sculpted these women posed in the painful moment they fell into when they received the news. It took Suse fifteen years to complete Dark Elegy. She says she prolonged the process because, “It kept me alive.”

Nearly 30 years later, after being rejected by universities, parks and museums, Dark Elegy now resides on the grounds of Suse’s home in Montauk, New York and is open to visitors from ten to noon daily. As the 73 year old Suse grapples with her mortality, she must figure out the fate of this hauntingly beautiful ode to a brutal terrorist attack that altered American history. Suse’s surviving son Lucas will inherit the house and the sculptures, a legacy he is uncomfortable with. Will he take up the mantle and find an appropriate home for them? Suse’s dream is to find a venue that would permanently display Dark Elegy, yet as the sculptures age, this prospect becomes increasingly more difficult. Seat 20D is a poetic exploration of how art cradles a mother's soul and touches all who view it. Every time someone is murdered in an act of terrorism, we all die a little. This film helps us confront our collective grief by witnessing the raw reality of those most intimately affected by it and poses the question: does a monument to private grief have a public place?
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

“Art is a wound turned into light.” (Braque)

On a trip to Montauk a few years ago, I discovered *Dark Elegy*. I could not get this stirring memorial off my mind; how it prompted moments of reflection on my personal sorrow over what transpired and what continues to occur in our world of seemingly weekly mass murders. Having studied abroad in London a couple of years before the tragedy, I came to the realization that thoughts about this specific disaster cross my mind every time I am on a plane. “Aviation security as we know it today did not
exist in 1988” (FBI). Thirty-five Syracuse University students who were returning home from a semester abroad in London lost their lives. While studying in London in 1985 as an Ithaca College student, we often socialized with Syracuse University students and sometimes took classes with them. When the crash occurred, I remember thinking “this could have been me.” So when I happened upon Dark Elegy in Suse’s backyard in Montauk, I felt an immediate connection to the work.

I was interested in learning more about Suse, the victims and all the women in the garden (see fig. 2). I Googled Pan Am Flight 103 and found endless accounts of documentaries and news clips that covered the politics surrounding the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, but there was very little that focused on the stories of those left behind. “People make documentaries to seize and preserve something they cherish before it vanishes” (Rabiger 9). The sculpture garden Dark Elegy as well as Suse’s journey creating it, and her present relationship to it call for this form of cinematic exploration and preservation.
I reached out to Suse to see if she would consider allowing us to film. It was not an easy pitch. Suse was worn down by the press over the years and wary of more questions and cameras. She’s had a hard time placing *Dark Elegy* publicly and she informed me that her husband Peter was battling terminal heart failure. It was not the best time to approach her, yet she was curious about the project I proposed to her. I sent Suse a link to my film *Mr. Chibbs* (see fig.3) that I recently directed and produced.
The film premiered at DOC NYC in 2016 and was acquired theatrically by Abramorama. I wanted Suse to get a feel for my style as a director and how I work with documentary subjects. We discussed my vision for the film which would be the opposite of a news piece, more poetic and invested in the emotion and depth that her work *Dark Elegy* evoked. My goal was to produce a film that would elicit a similar experience to what one felt when visiting Suse’s sculpture garden.
German artist Kathe Kollwitz whose work inspired Suse says, “I thoroughly agree, that there must be understanding between the artist and the people. In the best ages of art that has always been the case” (Kollwitz 68) (see fig.4). I spoke to Suse about my connection to *Dark Elegy* and about my time in London a couple of years before Alex was there. As a mother, I felt intuitively connected to Suse, her art and her loss. Every time this type of tragedy happens, I mourn with and for the mothers. How do they stay alive? It is, of course, a mother’s worst nightmare to experience what Suse went through. Yet, in losing her child, Suse birthed *Dark Elegy*. We communicated often and eventually I earned Suse’s trust. She invited me to begin filming in May 2017.
The artistic objective of the documentary *Seat 20D* explores, advances and aligns with Suse’s intention for her sculpture garden. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines the word “elegy” as “refers to a song or poem lamenting one who is dead.” Suse’s elegy gives us a sliver of hope within the chaos and calamity of senseless loss of life. “The process of making art opens the door to spending time, a lifetime if need be, remembering the lost and attending to grief” (Long). If Suse could survive this horrific tragedy that killed her beloved Alexi, then we all must. Yet Suse has not forgiven nor does she want to forget. This is validated by the seventy-five sculptures of ladies in mourning in her backyard. Every day Suse wakes to this unconventional memorial. Is it too much? Maybe this feeds into her need to find a home for them somewhere outside her own garden. As Suse tends to the statues one witnesses how much these women are a part of her. Does she truly want to let them go or does she subconsciously want them to remain? Visitors to the garden say this type of memorial is needed to relive the emotions with the victims, so that they can come to terms with it and never forget. They want to study these figures and contemplate their anguished faces. They appreciate the solitude and privacy of the garden to ruminate and process. They say they don’t notice the nudity. It is the transparency of these women. The way their bodies dropped into the tragedy. Suse says, the only reason she was able to engage the women’s trust and create this memorial was because, “I was one of them.” And about the nudity she says, “I needed to portray these women at the moment they learned the news, when they were stripped bare of everything and then I applied gauze over their bodies as a bandage to hold them together.”
There have been many news reports, films and books that have surfaced from the debris of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, and while this tragedy was the catalyst for *Dark Elegy* the sculpture garden, the film focuses on Suse and her journey to, through and beyond *Dark Elegy*. As we watch Suse process her relationship to her creation, she sheds light on how we mourn personally and as a society. How terrorism, now embedded in our collective psyche, affects us on a deeper level than we might suspect. *Dark Elegy* the sculpture garden gives the viewer the space to address and meet these emotions head on. In the film, by exploring the many layers of Suse’s story we open the gate of the garden to a larger audience, enabling them to better process their feelings towards grief.
The film becomes the museum, and then, possibly, it will promote the case for the sculpture garden finding a permanent home.

Fig. 6: Tori Cedar visits *Dark Elegy*, Jill Campbell 2018

By tracking the history of Suse’s journey with *Dark Elegy* and the people most intimately connected to it, we take a deep dive into the lives of those touched by it including Aphrodite Tsaris (mother of Alexia), Eileen Monetti, mother of Rick (Alex’s London roommate,) Tori Cedar (Alex’s Remembrance Scholar), Megan Phan (Rick’s Remembrance Scholar) and Lucas Lowenstein (Suse’s son and Alex’s younger brother). We explore how this tragedy affects each character and connect it back to Suse’s momentous memorial. Each character lends a different perspective on grief. Suse felt her
“whole insides were sucked out” when she heard the news, eventually leaning on her art to get her through. Aphrodite felt like her uterus was contracting and she was “experiencing birthing pains,” yet she finds ways to combat her grief through laughter: “Watch funny movies. Laurel and Hardy were great.” Kollwitz had similar thoughts, “for joy is really equivalent to strength” (Kollwitz 87). We visit Syracuse University where Alex was a student and where 34 other students who were travelling home from a semester abroad in London perished aboard Pan Am Flight 103. This is where we meet Tori Cedar, Alex’s Remembrance Scholar and learn of Syracuse University’s Remembrance Scholar program. Scholarships are awarded to 35 students in their senior year, who spend the year dedicated to activities that honor the 35 victims who perished. The scholars’ motto is, “Look Back, Act Forward,” and the scholarship’s objective is to “to educate the campus community about terrorism by relating Syracuse University’s experience of Pan Am Flight 103 to more current events.” (University Archives). These scholars and their devotion to the memory of the person they are chosen to honor, give us hope in this generation’s ability to manage the crazy world they are inheriting. They are passionate and level headed. We join Alex’s scholar Tori and Rick Monetti’s scholar Megan at the Syracuse University Remembrance Archives. Megan shares her own relationship with grief. Her mom lost a child before Megan was born. Megan says “the grief was always there.” These archives contain hundreds of archival boxes devoted to the victims. Each box contains many artifacts from the victims and their life. They include schoolwork, journal writings, poetry, art, photos, and items retrieved directly from the crash site, as well as items donated by the victim’s friends and families. These objects serve as an intimate reminder of who that person was. They also serve as physical
and spiritual connectors to their memory. Suse has kept Alex’s red jacket found in the debris of the crash. She now wears it when she welds. Tori examines Alex’s orange camera in the archives. She wonders: “What was the last picture he took?” Megan reads Rick’s *Philosophy of Life*: “Do all you can while you can. Life is a one-time deal.” Suse asked the women who posed to provide an item of personal connection to their lost loved one. Women provided poems, cassette tapes, and even comical items such as fake green flies. Each was left inside the finished sculpture furthering the bond that the women had with Suse’s work (see fig. 9).

![Fig. 7: Tori Cedar and Meghan Phan at Pan Am Flight 103 Lockerbie Disaster Archives, Jill Campbell 2018.](image)

We attend Syracuse University’s annual Remembrance Memorial Week, where we meet the 35 scholars, families of the victims and film memorial week activities, such
as the talent show, which is dedicated to the victims. We witness the rose laying ceremony and convocation. We learn about the victims through this immense archive, which allows us to get to know them on a personal level. We watch as the inspiring scholars reflect on the contents of the archives and learn how it affects them and helps to keep the student’s memory alive for all. The scholars admit they become deeply attached to the student they represent. Tori reveals a tattoo that she had inscribed on her wrist in Alex’s honor, Seat 20D. This was the seat Alex was sitting in when the plane blew apart. We film as Tori visits Dark Elegy for the first time and meets Suse, uniting the generations in hope and love. Ultimately the film conquers evil through the kindness of the human spirit, solace of art and the power of hope. In each location that we filmed, we discovered different iterations of art cradling grief. At Syracuse University the students sing and write poetry in the victims’ memories; a cellist volunteers to play a commemorative 9/11 concert on September 11th inside the Dark Elegy sculpture garden; and Lucas plays his dad’s favorite song on guitar. Music becomes indigenous to the film, and as people perform, we incorporate it into the fabric of the narrative.

After exploring the back story of the project, we meet Suse in present time. Suse’s husband Peter is sick with a terminal heart ailment, which is forcing Suse to come to terms with her own mortality. Suse becomes increasingly anxious about the fate of the sculpture garden. She says she has given up searching for its permanent home because: “How much rejection can an artist take?” She has lost hope that the sculptures will find a suitable home. After searching for eight years and being rejected everywhere she inquired, including the National Mall in Washington DC, the town of Montauk (where she lives) and Syracuse University (where 35 of the victims were students), the garden
now resides temporarily on the grounds of Suse’s Montauk home. “It is true my sculptural work is rejected by the public. Why? It is not at all popular” (Kollwitz 68). There have been many reasons why the garden gets rejected including its size and the nudity. Suse was particularly offended by the reaction of the Regional Director of the National Parks Service, John G. Parsons, to her proposal to donate the sculpture to the mall. He denied her request “because some of the poses of the various figures create an opportunity for irreverent behavior by visitors” (Banville). The issue of finding them a suitable permanent home is palpable, and it is what drives the narrative. Suse must figure out the fate of this haunting memorial to a terrorist attack that altered American history. Many more such attacks have occurred since and many more survivors could seek solace from viewing this work. Suse’s husband Peter unfortunately passes away right after we film him viewing the cello concert for 9/11 in the sculpture garden. Suse remains strong, determined yet sad. Suse’s surviving son Lucas will inherit the house and the sculptures, a legacy he considers a burden and an honor. Will he take up the mantle and find an appropriate home for them? Lucas, who 30 years later is still vulnerable and raw from his brother’s death, is dedicated to helping his mother find a home for the sculpture garden, yet he is nervous about the plight of his mother’s work landing in his hands. He mentions that his parents placed “too many demands” on the institutions that they wanted to donate to, requiring them to “permanently display” the work. Lucas feels that this is part of the reason they were rejected. Even Suse admits: “It’s expensive to care for them.” Lucas hopes he can help Suse find Dark Elegy a permanent home while Suse is still alive.

Suse’s raw honesty provides guidance to others experiencing this kind of loss as well as to society as a whole. Seat 20D is a deep dive into grief, how one survives it and
how we can help others who have experienced or will experience this type of pain. This project has been painstakingly difficult to film, edit and live. As a filmmaker, I’ve shed tears through the interviews and the edit. I have devoted much attention to my relationship with the subjects who are still grieving, tired and a bit weary of being on camera talking about the death of their most precious loved one. Every time we experience this type of senseless murder, we all die a little. The sculptures of *Dark Elegy* allow us to stare, grieve, openly comprehend and mourn with the victims while simultaneously allowing us our own space to contemplate and personally reflect.

**RESEARCH ANALYSIS**

There are thousands of news items dating back from 1988 that cover all aspects of the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie Scotland. I read articles in the New York Times, The New Yorker, The Observer and other publications dating from 1988 to the present. I was interested in articles that reported the crash, investigated the crash, examined the history of the United States’ relations with Libya, reviewed the fight of the victims’ families for justice, and the effect of the crash on Syracuse University and its students. I researched writings on *Dark Elegy*, such as *Terrorism Not Coming to National Mall (Yet)* (Washington City Paper). My goal was to familiarize myself with the tragedy as much as possible, before I met Suse in person, so that when I interviewed her and the other parents, I would be prepared and compassionate to their experience and their fight for their children. I reviewed government documents relating to the crash such as publications put out by the FBI: *The Bombing of Flight 103* (FBI).
Next I explored the archives at Syracuse University. After the bombing, Syracuse University Libraries Special Collections Center, Pan Am Flight 103, Lockerbie Air Disaster Archives was created and dedicated to the victims of the attack (see fig. 8 & 9). “The goal of the archives is to bring together in one place materials regarding the disaster” (University Archives).

These archives contain material on the students who perished, the crash and the trial of the accused. Families are invited to donate their child’s belongings, schoolwork, writings; anything they choose. Alex Lowenstein’s many boxes contain items that were on him during the crash like his camera and clothes, plus schoolwork and diaries. These

Fig. 8: Scottish Police Report for Alexander Lowenstein, 1988, Syracuse University, Pan Am Flight 103 Lockerbie Disaster Archives.
archives were an invaluable resource as well as material found on the Archives’ website, where I was able to download documents (see fig. 9), photos and writings of Alex Lowenstein, Rick Monetti and Alexia Tsairis.

Fig. 9: Rick’s Philosophy of Life, Rick Monetti, Syracuse University, Pan Am Flight 103 Lockerbie Disaster Archives, 1988

I watched many newscasts found online. *A Look Back at the Lockerbie Plane Bombing* (CNN) was particularly helpful in terms of sourcing archival footage that focused on the families and politics in the United States. *Surviving Lockerbie* (BBC Manchester) went into detail about the Lockerbie citizens who were impacted by the crash and helped wash the victim’s belongings after the crash. *Inside Story - Who Was Really behind the Lockerbie Bombing* (Al Jazeera English) provided insight into the process of convicting and later releasing Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, the Libyan intelligence officer who was responsible for planting the bomb.
Having started my career in the theater, my objective when filming is to capture moments of authenticity whether we are reliving the past or moving forward in time. Similar to great performances of actors on stage, the goal is to find the sweet spot, which is only obtainable through intense research and rehearsal, where the actors are so prepared they are able to drop all pretense of the production and are able to exist in the moment. “Documentaries, like the feature films they resemble are authored constructs” (Rabinger 69). In documentary we are observing reality, but we are also simultaneously constructing it. Only when the subjects truly forget about the camera because they are so immersed in the experience they are living or sharing, is one able to capture the authenticity and drama of real life that can compare to the best theatre. I watched many biographical documentaries and analyzed their structure. My goal with Seat 20D was to keep the action in the present tense, always forward moving even when revisiting the past. All archival material used is there to enable the forward action of the narrative while simultaneously educating the audience on historical facts. I searched for specific documentaries to view whose structure might inform the film’s narrative and found 32 Pills: My Sister’s Suicide (Litoff), La Jetée (Marker), and Model (Weisman) helpful in their treatment of grief, mass murder and observational footage filmed in the 1980s. The documentary Since (Furey) featured the Lowensteins and Tsairis but focused on the political side of their stories. Suse and Aphrodite mentioned that they appeared in this film, and I watched this early on to make sure we were not covering the same material. Where Since is a well-documented account of the politics both before and after the bombing of the plane, Seat 20D focuses on the human angle: Suse, her journey with her sculptures, the Remembrance Scholars, and the women who modeled for Suse. It
concentrates on what happens after the tragedy when the media leaves and individuals are left to somehow move on with their lives.

I spoke with Professor Anne Smith at Ramapo College. Professor Smith teaches a course on grief and in the past has devoted a class to Suse’s *Dark Elegy* sculpture. We were set to interview Professor Smith and film her class, but after the tragedy in Parkland, Florida, Professor Smith switched her syllabus and devoted her class to the topic of school shootings. Through several conversations during which I took detailed notes, Professor Smith provided psychological insight into Suse and her need to create after her loss. “Suse is helping us all grieve by opening the window into one of the most intimate moments one can experience in life: news of the death of a very close loved one. A son, daughter, sister, husband or wife. Just like in the news clip of the mother falling to the floor in pain and grief at JFK. We watch, even though we feel we should not. It’s like we are peering at someone naked through a window.” *Option B*, a website which helps people “build resistance and find meaning in the face of adversity” was another helpful resource. The website was started by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg after the sudden death of her husband. The “Grief and Loss” panel invites people in mourning to share their bereavement stories in hopes that it promotes the healing process.

I watched many documentaries on art and artists and found Art 21’s series of films on artists informative. In the documentary *Kentridge: Anything is Possible* (Art 21) the filmmakers used a structure that I was interested in. They delved into Kentridge’s history while attaching the forward momentum and narrative to an upcoming show that Kentridge was preparing for. This enabled the viewer to learn about the artist through present tense action, peeking into his past utilizing archival only when the story required
it. These were similar to the challenges I encountered while documenting Suse’s story. How does one bring thirty years of history into the present creating a compelling forward moving story? By attaching their film to the structure of Kentridge’s impending show, the filmmakers found a built in narrative. With Seat 20D, I chose to attach the narrative to Suse’s journey in the search for a permanent home for Dark Elegy. “A good documentary is a drama drawn from lived reality, with all its moral and social implications made visible by the enhancement of astute storytelling” (Rabinger 69). Michael Rabiger’s Directing the Documentary and Sheila Curran Bernard’s Documentary Storytelling were extremely helpful as resources for documentary production and structure. I would often refer back to them for insight at various stages of the process.

THESIS PRODUCTION PROCESS

Biographical documentaries are difficult because while we are retelling the past we need to find ways to activate them into the present. By utilizing an observational technique we can do this by witnessing the forward life of the subjects while they look back at their lives. In Suse’s case it enables us to inform the audience on ways to grieve, while simultaneously investigating the creative process and its ability to fill a void when one is in mourning. “Art opposes silence. Art refuses to forget the lost ones. Art recognizes the grief of survivors, holds it, expresses it” (Long).

In an effort to achieve authenticity, I film in as observational a manner as possible, even during sit down interviews. The camera is rolling all the time, so we get the subject moving into their seat and doing whatever they need to do. We also wait before we shut the camera off at the end of an interview. We are careful to have the camera rolling as much as possible and from the moment we arrive at a location. This
means we set up everything before loading it into the car, so that when we arrive, we are ready to jump out and film. This is because many times we are greeted by the subject or some sort of activity that is important to film and in the past, if I am not ready to roll, I have missed great material. So, as soon as we get to a location, after greeting the subject we ask them if we can put the wireless lavalier on usually as we are rolling. My aim is to also make sure we have a wide shot, medium shot, over the shoulder shot and close up when we do interviews and shoot vérité sequences as well as lots of cut away material. The challenge when shooting observational footage is that you are capturing life as it happens, so as a director I must decide whether to keep following or ask the subject to stop a moment while we film coverage or get my shots. Sometimes when you do this you lose the momentum, so it is a balancing act when deciding the best shot and when to get it. Once we shoot the main action, the plan is to get additional footage of the setting and multiple angles of the scene, but the challenge is, that you are following the subject onto the next action. On larger productions when working with a Production Assistant or Associate Producer, you can ask them to remind you to get all the coverage you need, but when you are a small crew, as we were for this film comprising of usually myself and the camera person, it is always a challenge. The benefit of a small crew is that it allows for a certain amount of intimacy, which is lost with a bigger crew. We shot this with a Canon c100 with a Ninja Flame monitor, and recorded to the Canon and the Ninja. We used the Canon XA10 on some shoots as a second camera for additional shots, cut-away material, coverage and audio. We used two Sony wireless lavalier sets, a shotgun mic on the camera and at times a boom. We also used the zoom in some locations. Most of the time
the cinematographer shot, but there were times that I filmed as well. We shared audio responsibility and on several shoots had an audio person.

This was a very challenging documentary in terms of the subject matter. How does one discuss the murder of one’s child with their mother? Although it has been thirty years, it was apparent how raw and on the surface the wounds still were in Suse, Aphrodite and Eileen Monetti. Suse was under further stress because her husband was so ill. She wanted to share her story, but she understandably was not in the best place to collaborate on a documentary, which in a way, allowed us to film her vulnerability. With all the subjects, my goal was to slowly get to know them by continually explaining the process of what we were doing, and why it was important: why we needed to film particular scenes, etc. I explained what context the footage would have in the film. I also shared intimate moments from my own life with Suse and the others. I did the same with Kenny Anderson while filming Mr. Chibbs. If I am asking people to open up and share their lives with me, I think it is only fair that I share my life, who I am, with them. I look for common ground to relate. I am the mother of a son similar in age to Alex when he passed. The subjects should know and trust me as much as I know and trust them. Suse and I share the same sensibility regarding authenticity and if I veered towards the inauthentic or tried to do anything that resembled a setup, she would rein me in saying she “wasn’t into it.” I considered this a true collaboration between us.

While following Kenny Anderson in Mr. Chibbs, I learned that at times, you just need to get out of the way and let the action unfold. Sometimes it is even better if I am nowhere in sight and a trusted cameraperson is filming. This is when the subject can really forget the camera is there. As a director, standing next to the cameraperson as they
film is a constant reminder to the subject of your presence. I’ve found if I walk away for a bit as the camera rolls, I often am pleasantly surprised by how the characters open up. If I am behind the camera filming, the same happens. The process of standing next to the cameraperson and staring as life unfolds in front of you, often unnerves the subject. If the subjects forget we are there, it helps to create a film filled with moments of truth that can be active, telling and compelling to the viewer.

Filming the sculptures was also a challenge. The first time we filmed it was a sunny day and the sculptures were not yet refinished. It was difficult to move within the garden with the film equipment. Each time we returned, our filming of the sculptures in the garden improved. Suse allowed us full access to her property and the garden, so we went often and got better along the way. The most productive shoot of the “ladies” occurred on a day when Suse was not there. It enabled us to take our time and shoot as much as possible. It also rained intermittently which allowed for stunning light on the sculptures and property (see fig.11).

I started logging the footage as we were filming and then in December of 2018, I began to watch all the footage and created detailed logs in Google Docs. This consisted of creating a document utilizing time code and clip numbers where I would transcribe important moments from interviews and scenes. I used markers within Adobe Premiere to log and note footage. I also use colored labels in Premiere and code the footage by theme. Once everything is logged and viewed, I begin to work on a detailed outline of the plot utilizing classic structure. At this point I constantly consult my screenwriting and documentary books such as *Save the Cat* (Snyder), *Directing the Documentary* (Rabiger) and *Documentary Storytelling* (Curran Bernard,) as I like to constantly review important
structure points such as the inciting incident, climax and the third act crisis. I start
thinking of the story the moment I decide to film and I never stop. The story is on my
mind and guides all the interviews and shoots. I make sure that all my collaborators are
on board with my vision and I am open to their ideas and collaboration. I always edit the
first draft chronologically to see how much of the story we have. Once we have the
chronology, then I am free to play with time, if the film merits it, utilizing key moments
from the over 200 hours shot to tell a 58-minute story. “Documentary is not reality but a
construct. You cannot show events themselves, only a construct of selected shots”
(Rabiger 69). After I have a written out the outline, I use paper note cards to select the
scenes that will build the plot. I experiment with the cards and structure and once I feel
like the story is comprehensive, I start the assembly of the film in Premiere. I am strict
about sticking to the structure I have written trusting that I have spent a lot of time to
work out and connect plot points; knowing that I can change material that does not work
in later drafts. Once I have the assembly I review and share that with trusted
collaborators. From those notes we move material and build our rough cut. I can’t get a
feel for how material works together until I am in the edit. After three or four rough cuts,
and many screenings and notes from collaborators and advisors, we are ready to edit the
fine cut.

*Seat 20 D’s* structure worked best by following the chronology of events. My goal
was to bring Alex alive by utilizing archival footage as well as having Suse and others
describe him. I also wanted to bring the viewer back to the 1980s and give them a feel for
the culture and politics of the time, yet I did not want to go into too much depth regarding
the political, or it would have veered me away from the through line of the film, which is
Suse’s journey with *Dark Elegy*. It was important that the audience got a sense of who Alex was and the anguish Suse experienced when he died, so that they could fully understand how this served as the catalyst for the creation of *Dark Elegy*.

After giving a concise overview of the history, I delved into Suse, her relationship to her art and how she discovered it as a tool to get her through and “not drink myself to death.” This was similar to what Kollwitz did with her piece *Mother with her Dead Son* which she created after her son died as a soldier in Germany in World War One. “Peter was killed on 22 October 1914 just months into the conflict, a loss which Kollwitz admitted she never recovered from” (Freeland). We then moved on to the conflict Suse had with getting the sculptures placed and counter that by showing visitors to *Dark Elegy* who are visibly moved. We visit Syracuse University where the scholars and their devotion to the lost students present hope in future generations. Each scene in the film interconnects and advances the plot, adding nuanced layers that touch on the themes of the film.
AUDIENCE AND EXHIBITION

Once we finish the festival version, including clearances and final finishing, we aim to premiere the film in the New York tri-state area, at the Hamptons Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival or the Montclair Film Festival. We will focus on screening in locations where people are directly affected by mass murder both domestic and international. We feel that people in mourning over the violent death of a loved one can find comfort from Seat 20D. We will devise a festival application document aiming to submit to larger more competitive festivals first. We want to have a long educational run of the film. We want to screen at museums and universities, especially Syracuse University and other schools nationwide.
In terms of outreach and audience engagement, we plan to contact terrorist/murder victim support groups and gun control groups. We will partner with these organizations to provide the film as a tool for their own advocacy work. The story of Suse and the other mothers who appear in this film will hopefully comfort and help anyone dealing with the death of a loved one via a brutal murder. Unfortunately this type of mass murder does not seem to be going away, but hopefully seeing how these women came to terms with this awful reality will bring a bit of comfort to others. For this reason we feel this film will have a healthy grassroots and community screening run around the country and in Europe, particularly the United Kingdom where so many remember this tragedy.

After we finish intensive educational and institutional screenings, we will make the film available on Amazon and other streaming services. We will explore whether we will self-distribute or partner with a sales agent.
Once the film is locked, I plan to consult with attorney Peter Jaszi regarding the archival material used in the film. I have worked with Peter on five previous films and have learned that by consulting with him as early as possible on what archival and music is fair use, I can save time and money. We will fair use whatever archival footage we can, and contact the owners of copyrighted material for permission to use it in the film. We will contact the musicians we are using as temp music for the score right now to see if they would consider creating a score for the film. We received performance releases from all the subjects we interviewed. We hung and documented “Filming in Progress” releases when we filmed performances. We are working with Kelly Rodoski to receive specific
releases from the scholars we filmed at the talent show, but the rest of the participants are amply covered by the “Filming in Progress” signs. We received press credentials and permission from Syracuse University to film. We received permission from Suse to film on her property. We received on camera releases from the visitors to Dark Elegy that appear in the film.

My goal is to ensure the widest distribution for this film so it can reach as many of the audiences for which it is intended. And my highest hope is that the film can serve as an artistic extension of Suse’s work and life, and as an additional memorial of her son and his fellow travelers’ untimely end.
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