

The Making of “Mr. Wilson’s Kids: From East Cleveland to Beijing”

by

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To the Shaw High School Mighty Cardinal Marching Band:
“There is no need to reach high for the stars.
They are already within you—just reach deep into yourself.”

Pre-Production

The Original Plan with the China Chronicles in Beijing

Tom Jacobs, an independent producer for BZ Media, LLC, of Shaker Heights, Ohio, has always had a strong tie with China. His wife, Vilma Seebring, a professor at Kent State, teaches Chinese culture and together they have a daughter that was adopted from China. It only seemed natural that Jacobs would come up with a plan to create something in Beijing, China, during the 2008 Olympic games. But, the initial plan was quite different from the plan that actually took place.

Originally, the idea was to travel to Beijing during the 2008 Olympic games and shoot stories about the people of China and how the Olympic games were affecting them—rather than focusing on the Olympic games themselves. BZ Media, LLC was working on a program called *The China Chronicles* (www.veoh.com/channels/thechinachronicles), which featured online programming that focused on different places and events in China. The goal of *The China Chronicles* was to help spread interest and bring awareness of the events and culture of China. At this point, we had already produced five segments about different locations in China. The idea of the Olympics taking place in China was a great opportunity for the country and their people, as it opened up more opportunities for jobs and tourism.

Because commercial media outlets would be spending so much time discussing the Olympics, a small production such as *The China Chronicles*, would not stand apart from the competition. Therefore, focusing on the people rather than the games would give the production a niche that others would not cover. Since our time would not be taken up by sports, we would have time to travel and shoot extra raw footage of China and then market it to TV stations of interest. This process could then be overlaid to other events in the country, such as the Shanghai World Expo of 2010.

The China Chronicles was currently working to partner with ChinaOnTV. As an article on PRNewswire explains:

ChinaOnTV is an expanding digital media company that distributes videos, news and information content about China to the Americas, European countries—and now China as well. Its popular Web site, www.chinaontv.com, provides a gateway to China for the English-speaking world (PRNewswire, 2007).

This partnership seemed to parallel what BZ Media, LLC wanted to accomplish, which was to get more Americans interested in the Chinese culture and people.

On September 5, 2007, Jacobs presented *The China Chronicles* to NBBC “one of the industry’s first digital video syndication businesses” (Bergman, 2007). “NBBC was created in 2006 by NBC and its affiliates as a new marketplace to view video content that was in syndication, for a user fee. It was a new way to attempt to monetize video on the Internet” (Oiaga,

2006). If a deal could be worked out, it could then be presented to Jacobs' brother, a marketing executive for Wal-Mart, for advertisement monies. Along with the meeting with NBBC, Jacobs scheduled a meeting with venture capitalist, Yang Cheng. Cheng was interested, but wanted BZ Media, LLC to re-edit pieces of their packages while in China in order to "Americanize" them. Furthermore, Cheng wanted to work a deal with Shanghai Media Group (SMG) for a weekly 30-minute piece produced by BZ Media, LLC, for SMG's English-language channel.

The first two lessons I learned from Jacobs were to "get all approvals in writing" and that "nothing in broadcast is final." These lessons were quickly proven through our connections with NBBC. BZ Media, LLC sent out a press release regarding the verbal approval from Brian Buckwald, the General Manager of NBBC. The project was then dismissed from NBBC due to the press release. Because the approval was only verbal, there was no paper trail to prove the OK; therefore "Get all approvals in writing."

Another lesson learned from Jacobs was "Don't try to get it on the front end, get it on the back end, money-wise." If one contacts a company and asks them for a large sum of money with nothing to show for it, one would more than likely get rejected. However, if one begins by asking for a much smaller amount and then comes back with a product they appreciate, one can then ask for more later.

Because trips back and forth to China are expensive, we wanted to

have more flexible options. Cathleen Chang was a reporter and the host of *The China Chronicles*. Chang, a Chinese-American woman who grew up in Dallas-Fort Worth, now lives in Beijing (Washington, 2007). We thought a good option would be to send Chang a simple camera and shoot weekly video blogs. This would help keep our site current until a full shoot could be scheduled. The blogs could be as simple as taking her viewers to daily activities such as a yoga class or an art festival.

September 2007, Jacobs contacted Nokia to get sponsorship for usage of their videophone for Chang's blog. There was no luck there, but in January 2008, Pure Digital became a sponsor and sent BZ Media, LLC three of their new compact Flip HD video cameras. Two of the Flip cameras were sent to Chang, while the third was kept in Cleveland for testing. During a phone meeting with Chang, Jacobs and myself, we discussed how to use the Flip camera and that she was responsible for three 2-minute blog postings each week in order to keep *The China Chronicles* current. This was a temporary solution until a trip could be scheduled for BZ Media, LLC to return to China to shoot. As part of the sponsorship deal, links were placed on both the Pure Digital and *The China Chronicles* websites to help send traffic back and forth between the sites.

In 2007, BZ Media, LLC was not getting a lot of feedback about the Olympic trip for *The China Chronicles*. Jacobs said that most companies had a hard time looking into the future, and once it got closer, people and

companies would be more responsive. Now that 2008 was approaching, sponsors were calling back asking if the production was still looking to create content at the Olympics.

Jacobs then began researching funding to pay for transportation to China. He asked Continental Airlines for 8-to-12 round-trip tickets to China for use between January and August 2008. As an incentive for the deal, he promoted an exchange that included the production of short informational videos on China that Continental could play on their international flights. According to Jacobs, if all went well, we could then go back to Continental to ask for more tickets, allowing all crew and family members of *The China Chronicles* to go to the Olympics.

Problems Arise

On November 4, 2007, the host of *The China Chronicles*, Cathleen Chang, was offered a job at Press TV, “Iran’s first international news network” (PressTV). Jacobs expressed deep concern over Chang’s choice to take the job. Due to the current political issues that surround Iran and the United States, Jacobs was concerned not only that our project might lose sponsorship, but for the future of Chang’s career. If BZ Media, LLC were to lose Chang, we would have to find another person in China to take her place without meeting them in person. Furthermore, all the videos currently on the young website would have to be redone with said new host

to make the site look consistent. The other option was to keep Cathleen Chang while she worked for PressTV. But due to the United States' current views and trouble with Iran, we would be fighting an uphill battle to get sponsorship with companies such as Continental Airlines. It was decided that it would be too difficult to convince most large corporations to sponsor a production with a host working at an Iranian news network. The only choice was to replace Cathleen Chang.

By using the Internet, we asked that people interested in our new hosting position post videos of themselves on YouTube, reading to the camera. We had many candidates, but not too many that would be comparable to Cathleen Chang. After searching through multiple entries, we ended up deciding on a new host, Frances Chen. She was originally from Chicago, but currently lived in Beijing. She was a former human resources representative for FedEx, and was also a voice actor with a good on-camera presence. Even with all these qualities, we would still only know how good she would be on the first day of the shoot.

The Switch of Focus to Shaw Band in Beijing

In February 2008, the whole focus of our trip changed. A new opportunity had arisen that could possibly help fund the trip we were originally planning. A marching band from East Cleveland was making headlines.

“During one of the band's performances, agents were scouting for bands to perform in China in a pre-Olympic salute to celebrate the upcoming Olympics. It would be an incredible opportunity, but this East Cleveland school just didn't have the funds” (Riggenbach, 2008).

They were one of only five marching bands in the US asked to perform in the Beijing 2008 Olympic International Music Festival. The trip would take place mid-June 2008. However, the school district was having financial troubles and could not afford the \$220,000 bill to send the 60 members to China; they began reaching out to the community (Mitchell, 2008). While the district continued to struggle, the Shaw High School Marching Band was a bright spot. They had won more than 150 band competitions and had raised \$73,000 themselves, but they needed \$150,000 more by March 18, 2008.

Sometimes, at the beginning of another practice for Shaw High School's marching band, Director Donshon Wilson stands in front of his students and just stares at them. They stand, too, silent and still. Waiting.

Usually, one of them finally will ask, "Why are you staring at us, Mr. Wilson?" They know the answer, but they want to hear it again. "Because you made it," he tells them. "You aren't out there doing drugs. You aren't out there with the gangs. You came here to play music, to be a part of this band."

They stiffen, stand a little straighter. A few smiles escape. As often as not, Wilson adds, "I love you." Then he holds up his baton, his face as stern as ever, and begins to count: one, two, three, four ... That's how Wilson stokes hope in East Cleveland, Ohio. One practice at a time, in one of the poorest cities in America (Schultz, 2008).

Jacobs pitched a documentary to the band director, Donshon Wilson in February 2008, and in March 2008 it was announced.

BZ Media, LLC is pleased to announce that it has been granted exclusive rights to produce, *Mr. Wilson's Kids: From East Cleveland to Beijing*, a documentary on the inspiring story of The Shaw High School Marching Band's upcoming trip to the Beijing 2008 Olympic International Music Festival. We are also delighted that Progressive Insurance, Cleveland State University, Case Western Reserve University, and Kent State University have signed on as financial underwriters for Mr. Wilson's Kids: From East Cleveland to Beijing (PRNewswire, 2007).

The band not only needed the money to make the trip to China, but they also needed basic necessities, such as luggage, clothing to march in and immunizations. Jacobs worked with Wilson to help the band acquire these things. Many companies stepped in to help: Wal-Mart donated luggage, CVS provided toiletry kits and The Children's Hospital of the Cleveland Clinic provided medical check-ups and immunizations for all of the students.

Courtesy of the Office of Government and Community Relations, the Office of Alumni Relations, the School of Dental Medicine and the Department of Athletics, a donation of \$1,000, T-shirts with the university's logo, dental kits consisting of toothbrushes, toothpaste, mouthwash and dental floss, and luggage tags were sent to the band (Cool, 2009).

Once we had exclusive rights to the documentary, we had to find someone who wanted to air it. Jacobs and I have produced other

documentaries about China for PBS in the past, so Jacobs went to WVIZ in Cleveland. They thought it was a great local story and signed on. He also thought that we should apply for a Sundance documentary filmmaking grant in the amount of \$50,000 to \$60,000. A rough cut was required to apply for this grant by August 15, requiring a tight turnaround in post-production. He decided to apply for \$30,000.

The trip would consist of 14 days of traveling. The band was to perform in three different locations including the Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an, the Great Wall of China and the International Music Festival in Beijing. The \$220,000 was only the amount needed for the band to go, so funding for our travel and equipment had to be separate. In order for us to be able to make the journey, Jacobs had to raise funds via underwriters. He approached IMG, Cleveland Clinic, Key Bank, State Farm, Case University, Kent State University, Cleveland State University and many more. By February 18, we had \$15,000 committed with the possibility of \$20,000 by the end of the week. The next day, Case University, The Cleveland Symphony Orchestra and the Cleveland Clinic had signed on to help. In the end, Cleveland Clinic, Progressive Insurance Group, Continental Airlines, Kent State University, Cleveland State University and Case Western Reserve University all signed on to sponsor the documentary.

Jacobs knew the ins and outs of traveling internationally. On the other hand, the band was a large group and decided to work with a travel company to help them organize and prepare. The travel agency, Kingsway, was able to

handle many of our travel arrangements and book our rooms along with the bands', allowing us to stay close to them for filming purposes. The only problem was the company later became confused with our tickets and we didn't receive them or confirmation of our hotel rooms until about two weeks before we were supposed to leave. According to the travel agency, we weren't allowed to be on the buses with the kids, so we had to find our own way around while in China. We would decide to use taxis to travel around in the cities, which would cost about \$350 a day—a cost that would quickly add up.

At the beginning of June, we finally had plane tickets and hotel rooms, but no visas or Hepatitis shots. China is a difficult country to get a visa to and to do it with such a quick turnaround is nearly impossible. Connie Shultz, reporter for The Plain Dealer, began following the Shaw band and was an advocate for its members. She published articles about Shaw in order to help get funding for the band's trip. Luckily, with the help of Schultz's husband, Ohio Senator Sherrod Brown, we received our visas just in time. We weren't able to get our immunizations from Cleveland Clinic, like the band members were, but we did manage to get them on our own dime.

On June 3, 2008, Cleveland Hopkins Airport invited the Shaw band to visit and discover what an airport was like. Because most of the kids had never traveled outside of Cleveland—aside from bus trips for band competitions—most of them have never been to an airport and were worried about what to expect. We went along to shoot the kids' initial reactions of the

airport. The airport staff had all of the kids go through security, wait in a terminal and then gave them a personal tour of a plane inside the Continental Airlines hangar. This visit made the trip start to seem real and you could see the excitement begin to build for the kids.

Gathering TV Stations to Pick Up the Story

Jacobs had offered to send the Fox Network video updates of Shaw's trip in China while we were filming, but they passed, even though the footage was offered for free. In June, once the date of the trip was growing closer, Jacobs approached other media outlets and pitched that we could send them edited video updates for a fee. WOIO Channel 19 (broadcast news, Cleveland, Ohio), The Plain Dealer (newspaper, Cleveland, Ohio) and HD News (cable and satellite news, Greater New York City, New York) all signed on to receive news packages. WOIO and HD News wanted edited pieces to air, while The Plain Dealer wanted segments to add into their web articles to help attract more people to their website. WOIO had been following the Shaw stories for months, so this would complete their coverage. All three groups would get a variety of stories with diverse focuses. Because they are in different markets, they were indifferent to the fact that other companies were also getting footage.

Later in June, Fox aired a story on the Shaw band and wanted video updates as well. Jacobs explained to them that we had already offered the

segments for free and were turned down. WOIO would be receiving the footage instead. Fox was not happy that someone in their station had turned down the footage. On June 6, HD News decided that they also wanted additional beauty footage of China they could use for packages during the Olympic coverage. Also, the radio station WCPN (radio, Cleveland, Ohio) signed on for audio stories during the trip. Jacobs planned to relay these stories himself with phone interviews while in China.

Jacobs was working with BET on a bunch of different ideas that included the band. They discussed the documentary and a reality show—“Shaw: Next Generation,” a show about what happens next year to the band—once the Seniors graduate and how Wilson trains the band and keeps it going. They also discussed a theatrical release with the China trip being a small part of it. They wanted to see a 20-minute presentation by July 15, 2008, less than three weeks after we would return from China. In the end, none of it panned out.

Jacobs’ commitment to the news stations would require that I bring more video equipment than we had originally planned. Now, I was not only shooting the documentary, but I had to capture footage and edit it while in China and send the edited packages back to the States nightly. This would require a laptop and a strong Internet connection.

Technical Issues

While Jacobs set up the financial logistics of the trip, I began gathering

the technical aspects. First was to figure out which format of video we would be shooting and in which format PBS wanted to air the final documentary. Then, I had to figure out how to send broadcast-quality footage to the news stations on a bi-nightly basis while in China.

There are three types of video format that will be addressed in this paper. Standard Definition (SD), High Definition (HD) and High Definition Video (HDV). SD is represented in pixels as 720x480 and it typically has an aspect ratio of 4:3. HD has about 5 times the definition as SD at 1920x1080 pixels and an aspect ratio of 16:9 (Wondershare). With five times the amount of pixels, there is also an increase in file size, which would increase the upload time. “HDV is a recording format used to record HD signals. Therefore, HDV is (a subset of) HD. There are two versions of HDV, progressive (1280x720) and interlaced (1440x1080)...Broadcast 1080i is 1920x1080” (VMIVideo, 2003).

The cameras we were shooting with were the Canon XH-A1 and the Canon HV-20. The Canon XH-A1 is a lower-end professional HDV camera that gives manual options such as aperture, focus and frame rate settings. The camera reads colors with a 3-CCD chip device that can interpret Red, Green, and Blue as three separate colors, providing a more realistic and vivid picture over all. The Canon HV-20 is a simple consumer HDV camera. The main difference is the manual settings are very limited and it does not have a 3-CCD chip, therefore the image does not match the quality of the Canon XH-A1.

This was something we discovered in the post-production process.

There were four main reasons for shooting with two different cameras. First, we did not have a large budget to work with so we could only afford one upper-scale camera. Second, I was the principal shooter with Jacobs being the additional shooter. Jacobs is not as technical as I am and shooting is not his strong point, though sometimes it would be necessary for him to shoot. Giving him a small handheld camera would work out easier for him. Furthermore, it was important to have a backup camera, in case something was to happen to the main camera. Finally, the smaller camera was crucial because of our location: China is a country that can be very controlling and particular about media coverage. Jacobs and I both were in the country on visitor visas, rather than media visas. This was essential to be sure we would be granted the same access to all locations as the students. Media visas could be frowned upon in certain locations such as Tiananmen Square. It was much easier to get away with shooting in certain areas if you just looked like a tourist and not a reporter.

WVIZ wanted the documentary to air in Standard Definition. Therefore, our footage would be compatible; more details about this process are in the post-production section of this paper.

After getting the gear together, the next challenge would be to figure out how to get the footage—shot and edited in China—back to the United States in a broadcast-ready format. Shipping overnight packages was not financially

feasible or quick enough. We needed to send the videos digitally. I knew I would need to send these large files via an FTP client, which would directly connect to the recipients' server—"The File Transfer Protocol (FTP) provides a mechanism that allows a client to establish an FTP control connection and transfer a file between two FTP servers" (Allman, 1999)—but the question of Internet quality was a big factor. Not many hotels had access to high-speed Internet. The term "high-speed" Internet is also a very loose term. There are two big factors that determine the speed of Internet; upload and download. Most Internet companies say that they have high-speed Internet because you can download music, video and pictures quickly. I needed to do just the opposite. I needed to quickly upload broadcast quality video: the download speed made no difference to my cause. However, most hotels don't know their upload speed, as it's not a factor that is usually advertised by the Internet providers.

When the initial testing phase started, we had two clients signed on; WOIO and The Plain Dealer. I first started by working with The Plain Dealer to test their server—the location to where I would be digitally sending the news packages from China. Our tests needed to answer two questions: Could it handle the file size of a large video, and if so, how long would it take on my side of the upload? Though the people at The Plain Dealer and WOIO were very nice and tried to be helpful, they were photographers and most were not very tech savvy. Jacobs soon after informed me that we would be working with

a third client, HD News.

I began speaking with Corey Arnold, Studio Operations Manager at HD News, and things started to change quickly. By nature, HD News operated in a different fashion than a regular local news station such as WOIO. HD News was stationed in New York, but had Mini-Bureaus all over the country and beyond. These Mini-Bureaus were single people who would go on a time-sensitive shoot in their current location and would FTP the footage back to the editors in New York, so they could edit the packages and get them to air within the same day. Because of this, Arnold already had systems in place that were successful for them in the past.

HD News was a Mac platform-based operation, giving a new set of issues to attend to. At this point, I was a PC-based editor, using Adobe Premiere Pro (a PC non-linear edit system), sending footage to two PC-based news stations. Final Cut Pro, a Mac platform video editing software, dealt better with the HDV footage that I would be shooting. It would capture it without issues and output an HD video file that I could upload to the FTP. Now we were looking at a new dynamic.

Neither WOIO nor The Plain Dealer cared if the footage I sent back was HD or SD mainly because they were worried the larger files would not go through and wanted to stay safe. But HD News would only use HD footage, so I had to work with them. Arnold was great to work with. He insisted that I bring along a Mac laptop—that they would send me—along with my PC laptop.

Because I was a PC platform-based editor, I was not familiar with the Mac platform and nervous to learn it while being in a different country, with no one to help if something went wrong. Luckily, I would not be alone because all of their laptops were equipped with remote desktop software that would allow Arnold, at any time, to take over the laptop and help fix what would be wrong. My screen would become his screen and he could troubleshoot problems remotely over the Internet.

Because the Mac laptop was HD News equipment, using it to edit for other clients did not feel right, so I thought I would need to bring both laptops. My next worry was carrying two computers on my back along with all of the other camera equipment. Jacobs did not feel comfortable leaving any expensive equipment in the hotel room; therefore, I had to plan on carrying it with me everywhere we went. Arnold went on to say that I could use the Mac for any personal use while I had it, including sending footage for the other news stations. Because the stations are in different states, he felt there was no direct competition. Besides, every station was getting different packages with different focuses.

The next dilemma was getting the new laptop loaded with all of the additional software I would need that HD News didn't have already loaded. More importantly, I only had a few days to get comfortable with a new computer platform and editing software. Finally, I only had those couple of days to retest my new formats with the other news stations.

Once I received the Mac, I was excited. It was very small and light, much easier to carry in comparison to the large PC laptop I had originally planned on taking. I loaded the software quickly and began testing with the other news stations. Then, another problem arose.

WOIO and The Plain Dealer could not open the video files I was sending. Because I had changed platforms, I changed file types. I went from sending them a PC-formatted QuickTime (QT) file to a Mac-formatted QT file. Because QT is by nature a Mac format, the PC version could be opened on both a Mac and PC, but not the other way around. The only way to export the edited HDV footage from Final Cut to an HD file was in a native Mac format QT file. At this point is when The Plain Dealer and WOIO decided they only wanted SD files, which were not a problem to export from Final Cut.

I tested Kent State's Internet upload speed as my sample, using *www.speedtest.net*. I thought this would be closer to a hotel's Internet speed, versus checking at home. The upload speed was about 2 Mb/second. The average video I would be sending back was 300Mb, therefore taking roughly 150 seconds—about 2.5 minutes—to send. This would still be a faster connection than any hotel, so 2.5 minutes would be my best-case scenario.

In 1997 the Chinese government passed a law that allowed them to regulate the Internet. They have blocked social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook and even well established news sites, such as BBC China. They are very protective with regard to the spread of any information

that puts China in a negative light. Surrounding the Olympics, there were talks of opening up more Internet sources than they normally would, so journalists could gain access to everything they needed.

As part of China's plan to hold a "high-tech Olympics," broadband wireless Internet services will be widely available, according to a handbook issued at the same news conference, to ensure "convenience for journalists (and) promptness of news" (Reuters, 2008).

In August, all access still was not available. Many sites were still being blocked.

Chief of the International Olympic Committee, Mr. Rogge at a news conference (says) "We are not running the Internet in China. The Chinese authorities are running the Internet." Following a meeting with IOC officials on Thursday, China restored access to several Web sites that it had previously blocked (Fowler, 2008).

While performing the FTP tests, I would send Chen links that I would need access to in order to send all of the videos to the news organizations here in the US. She had approved that they were all available, but that was not necessarily a guarantee they would stay that way. Since Jacobs and I would be staying in hotels and not at Chen's house, research needed to be done in order to determine if the hotel's Internet would be satisfactory.

Initially, Kingsway, the travel agency, was handling all reservations, including ours. Due to the amount of students Kingsway was working with, they seemed to let our reservations slip through the cracks, so Jacobs

began picking up their slack. Also, we didn't always need to stay in the same hotel as the band. Two key factors were involved with choosing our hotels. One, we needed to be close to the Shaw band and two, we needed high-speed Internet with a higher upload speed. Jacobs found some business-style hotels that were American chains, such as the Marriott, with Internet service. Jacobs gave me the numbers of the hotels so I could call and ask my technical questions. It turns out, after several phone calls, that no one knew their upload speeds or how to figure them out. It was hard enough to talk to the people in the first place due to their lack of English and my lack of a Chinese, but then to ask such technical questions was not going well. We were dealing with the luck of the draw.

Production

In Cleveland

Production began in Cleveland, Ohio. The band was in high demand and had practices and performance several times a week. I needed to begin working with the band before traveling with them. Jacobs had many interactions with the kids up to this point, but I have not even met them. I began going to their performances so I could view the band. Then I began going to their practices, introducing the camera. We needed to get them used to the camera so it would not be distracting while they performed. Next, I went and began filming their performances. Not only was this to get them used to the camera, but I would also need lots of B-roll--additional footage used for coverage—for the beginning of the documentary. We began shooting with the kids in February, four months before traveling to China together.

As June drew closer, Jacobs tapes some pre-trip interviews. Shaw High school is dominantly African-American. Jacobs is part African-American and part Indian, whereas I am Caucasian. Jacobs wanted to ask the kids questions about their childhood and their families that would be personal. He said my presence might have caused them to give different answers, so he wanted to do it alone. He had also spent more time with

the kids, so they would be more likely to open up to him, instead of me.

In China: Issues and Experiences

For this section of the paper, I wrote a blog while in China that I will refer to. It was written and posted online for friends and family to keep up with my experience. They were able to comment about each entry and I thought it was nice to have that interaction. I left the blog how it was written and posted. My writing style shows my emotion of that time along with my fatigue, which I feel were important components of the experience. Therefore, I left the writings in their initial format, beginning with a date-stamp and location.

When the time came to head to China, I drove to Jacobs' home, where all of the equipment was stored. Not only were there cameras to worry about, but also power. We had packed extra batteries and supplied ourselves with multiple power converters and power strips; all of which I packed thoroughly and tried to take a nap around 9:00 PM. Once I awoke, I would be awake nearly three days in a row factoring in the times we were traveling and the time zone changes. We flew out of Cleveland, Ohio to Newark, New Jersey. From Newark we flew to Xi'an, China. We were to stay in Xi'an for three days before our final destination, Beijing, China. Our new reporter, Frances Chen would be along with us in Beijing, but we needed a translator in Xi'an. Because of Jacobs' wife's connections, we

were able to use one of her PhD students to translate for us in Xi'an.

June 20, 2008 - Newark Airport - 11:12

It was great hearing all the kids' excitement when we got on the plane. They all clapped and cheered when the plane lifted off the ground and then again when it landed. Everyone seemed to enjoy it, especially when we broke through the clouds!

The trip began with sightseeing. We visited the Terracotta Warriors, City Wall and Wild Goose Pagoda. The Terracotta Warriors were originally commissioned by the first emperor of China, Qin Shi Huangdi and were re-discovered by farmers while digging wells for water in 1974 (Horin, 2007).

Inside the tomb stand over 7,000 terracotta soldiers and horses lined up in rows to protect the emperor's tomb for all eternity. Though never fully completed to Qin Shi Huangdi's specifications, the Terracotta Army still took a monumental 36 years to build. Originally painted in bright colors, the army has faded to a gray-brown hue due to the natural oxidation process. Most remarkable upon close inspection of the army, however, are the individual expressions and unique features that each warrior has been given. (Austin, 2007).

Our next stop was Xi'an's City Wall, the most complete wall remaining intact in China.

City Wall of Xi'an is an extension of the old Tang Dynasty structure, as a result the wall-building campaign ordered by Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor of Ming Dynasty (from 1370 A.D.- 1375 A.D). After the enlargement, the city wall stands 12 meters, 12-14 meters across the top, 15-18 meters thick at bottom and 13.7 kilometres in length with deep moats surrounding it (Heritage Key).

While at Xi'an's City wall, the kids were free to roam and ride bikes along the long perimeter. We went to capture footage of the kids enjoying

their first exposure to Chinese culture. Though the performances were the main focus of the documentary, their trip in general was important to our project.

Still in Xi'an, the band's first performance took place at the Wild Goose Pagoda, which...

...is located inside the city's DaCi'en Temple. The pagoda was built during the Tang Dynasty to house Buddhist sutras and figurines that were brought from India via the Silk Road (Heritage Key).

The following day, we left Xi'an for Beijing, China, where we would spend the remaining two weeks. Jacobs had purchased two hotel rooms for us. I set up all of my gear and began uploading the first segment via FTP. Though I had full access to all of the websites I needed to use, the upload speed was not going to allow files to be transferred.

June 24, 2008 - Beijing - 08:17

We get to the hotel and I attempted to submit a piece to Channel 19 and it took 8 HOURS!!! to FTP the video. Our connection here is HIGH SPEED at 22/kbs! (for my geeky friends, you will appreciate that) the rest of you, it should have only taken an hour, not 8. So I edited The Plain Dealer piece and then we ventured out for dinner while everything was uploading.

The files did not transfer, so we needed a new plan. Chen was with us quite often and she lived in Beijing. She suggested we try the Internet connection at her home.

June 24, 2008 - Fran's House, Beijing - 22:39

Reporting tonight from the comforts of home! Well, not my home, but Fran's. The Internet connection at the hotel sucked, so I had to try a different alternative.

For the remainder of the trip, I stayed with Fran. Even though the hotel rooms were paid for, it gave me free Internet that was much faster than the expensive hotel Internet. The hotel Internet was being shared with all of the guests, causing the upload and download speeds to drop exponentially. Even though her Internet was steadier and faster, all of my issues did not dissolve. Another alternative to putting the files up on a FTP site was to use an email client that could zip larger files, put them up on a server, and send the recipient a link, where they could download the larger file. An example of this would be *www.YouSendIt.com*. The time difference, 13 hours, made it difficult to work and troubleshoot with people at the news stations back in the US.

June 25, 2008 - Fran's House, Beijing - 00:07

So, I've been having lots of fun internet issues....files mysteriously disappearing off the server.....2 different people asking for two different formats of video from another station....FTPs not working at all....blah. Word of advice. If you every need to send large files internationally, use YouSendIt....then you are safe...you have notification email stating the time and date to the sent file to back up your story...BLAH. So, work wise, WOIO has a couple of pieces that I'm waiting to hear the air dates for. Same with The Plain Dealer, except theirs will be online. If you see any photos in The Plain Dealer, save them for me! HD News, based out of New York, is airing a couple of pieces as well. So, I worked on that last night until I fell asleep on the couch. I love how no one will talk to me until their lunch time....by then it's 1 am for me and I have to be up at 6 or 7am.....News stations are very thoughtful....BLAH ANYWAYS...work is done today.

Besides Internet issues, I had a couple of run-ins with security and

police about filming in certain areas. Because of Chen's help, in almost each scenario everything worked out.

June 21, 2008 - Terracotta Warriors Museum - 23:10

Though I was filming the whole time, the museum was very beautiful. I got yelled at in Chinese for videotaping. I called Fran and she said I needed to get a permit. So we ignored him and video taped out of his guard area.

It turns out that the security was only responsible for a very small section of the museum, and even though the guard could still see me, as long as I stood out of his perimeter, he would not say anything about filming. So I continued to move around a lot.

June 24, 2008 - Tiananmen Square - 00:13

...We packed up the camera and headed to Tiananmen Square. We got there and there were police EVERYWHERE. They went through our things before they even let us in. They took one look at my video camera and said no. They started asking Fran many questions in Chinese and she pretended to not understand them, so the guard got frustrated and just let us in.

Tiananmen square was at one time the center of the city. Students were holding a peaceful demonstration against the Chinese government to bring in democracy, however, the government didn't like the number of people joining the demonstration, so they called in the military. Tanks came down one of the main entrances and the military used "severe" force to break up the demo. Some students were killed in during the "force." So there you go, if you didn't know what it represented. Now, it's a huge open area that people used to fly many kites in. Now, kites are banned.

The whole time we were there, I had the police/military following me around waiting to pounce. We left about 9 minutes later with the kids; so needless to say, shooting today was kind of a bust.

If you are not interested in the historic aspect of Tiananmen Square,

there is not a lot to do or see. The kids were all very hot and bored so they were all sitting around each other in the square, completely harmless from their point of view. Next thing we knew—while I was filming the kids—police started swarming from all directions and the Chinese tour guides hurried to the kids to have them stand up quickly. The kids did not understand what was going on, but one must think about it from the Chinese police point of view. A group of African-American students—who the Chinese don't usually see a lot of—all sitting together in the middle of Tiananmen Square. It could look like the beginnings of a protest, like the one in 1989.

In China: Cultural Experiences

The entire experience of being in China was amazing to me, however I have been fortunate to be able to travel to other places, such as Europe and South America, so the culture was interesting but not as shocking as it was to the students. Most of the kids have not had the opportunity to travel much farther than one or two states away, so to see the differences between Ohio and China was incredible. Surprisingly, the food was one of the biggest factors for the kids. The band was introduced to some Chinese cuisine before we left Cleveland, but it's very different when you are immersed in it. What's worse is that because we were a group of 60 people, the touring company only booked meals at buffet-style restaurants. I think it's comparable to have someone come to the US and only take them to eat at *Old Country Buffet*.

June 20, 2008 - Sheraton Hotel - 00:00

So we had a buffet for dinner, which was pretty westernized. I had some tofu soup and mainly rice. All the kids ate French-fries...LOL.

June 21, 2008 - Xi'an - 09:00

So, breakfast was interesting: your choice of Danishes, sushi or cold cuts. Lots of rolls for CourTney! I'm all about sushi but not at 6am.

June 21, 2008 - Xi'an - 15:34

Lunch today was interesting. Notice that everything is interesting. I've decided that my opinion was a little jaded last night due to the lack of sleep and pure exhaustion. Anyways, lunch. These women were walking around the restaurant pushing carts of beverages. There were also jugs of wine...containing...snakes and bats...in the wine. Two of the parents took a swig. Gross. They said it was great and wanted to buy a whole bottle. The wine was about 30 Proof.

Food in a foreign country is always an experience. But the fact that I was a lone Caucasian woman carrying camera gear and traveling with a full band of African American students made mixing into the Chinese culture much more difficult. One thing for sure, we did not blend in very well. This had both positive and negative effects on the students.

June 21, 2008 - Terracotta Warriors - 23:10

A lot of the Chinese men kept asking the girls with us to take pictures with them. LOL Jacobs was saying they never see African Americans, so it's something different. At last, I'm not the one standing out...really...kinda.

June 23, 2008 - Wild Goose Pagoda - 00:20

So yesterday....

We met up with the kids at the Pagoda. It's a really cool place. In the evening they have a huge fountain show...The type that plays to music and kids can run through. It's about 5 HUGE fountains in a row. Before the fountain show, The Shaw band played a warm up performance. They gathered such a huge crowd. It's interesting to see the Chinese faces. They stand so stone faced and barely clap, so you can't tell if they are enjoying it, but when the students were leaving, they followed and we

had to keep telling them to stand back (so they wouldn't get hit by flying flags or drums (watch their performance, and you'll understand)) Then, they kept grabbing students to hop into pictures with them. They loved them.

They met up with the second band (one of the five bands that were invited to play in the International Festival of Music) for a "battle." Shaw started and played a song and then the other band would play. Shaw's music is so different and exciting, while the other band was overshadowed...good, but boring.

So, just to give you a visual. Shaw is all African-American and the other band was all Caucasian. Total opposites. During the other band, Fran and I were running around asking people what they thought of the band. They kept asking if Shaw was from Africa. Fran said, "no the States" and the Chinese kept saying, "no, the USA is all whites." Because why? the TV show, Friends. lol! Many were also asking if it's whites against blacks. Obviously not the case. So, Shaw brought their game. The other band just gave up and walked away in the middle of their performance! So, Shaw played "It hurts to say goodbye," as they left the area. They played a couple more and then marched away.

They kicked ass.

I asked the kids after the show how they felt. It was fantastic, they said they felt amazing, like celebrities. There was a group of girls trying to push through to get to the drum line and almost got knocked out by a flag girl. lol, it was great.

Not all of the experiences were positive and uplifting. The saddest part is the one negative experience was from a man that was from the United States. It was an ignorant encounter made by the man who was judging the students, based on where they were from.

June 26, 2008 - Temple of Heaven, Beijing - 23:37

Today was a very upsetting day for me. We were all at the Temple of Heaven. A sanctuary. A calming place. I was shooting the kids, when this guy came up to me and asked what I was doing. I said shooting a documentary of Shaw Marching Band, they're from Cleveland, Ohio. He said "Yeah...I know who they are. Are you shooting it for yourself or for something." I say "for PBS." and he said "why?" so I explained how

amazing it is for these kids to get to go to China and talking about how great they are. Then he said "Well, they aren't acting like they ever left East Cleveland..." and walked away. The way I'm saying it may not be representing the true maliciousness he came at me with. I then turn around and one of the girls is standing right behind me and she looks so upset.

First off let me say, THEY DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. They are way better behaved than any of the other schools I've seen and these students are crazy respectful, So I tried to tell her to ignore him and that he was an ignorant asshole....(I couldn't contain the swearing because I was truly upset.) She got up and went to some of the adults to tell them about him, and they happened to be standing right next to the guy. I was about to cry because he had no reason to make such a comment. So ignoring my own advice, I marched over to him, on the other side of the temple. The two male adults were standing there. I tapped the guy on the shoulder and said "that was completely uncalled for, to say such things, especially in front of a student." and he said he didn't say anything wrong, only the truth and I got outraged. I told him it was uncalled for and rude and we exchanged some more words. I then left leaving him with the FACT that he was a horrible person and I hope he had a nice day.

It's so sad that an adult can act in such a horrible way, especially to a child. I know these guys are almost grown ups, but high school kids are very impressionable and something like that could really hurt them. They may be tough on the outside but they are still fragile on the inside. Just think if someone of a different race called you worthless...I mean...oh...it makes me so sad. And what's funny is he kept saying how he was just trying to gain Chinese culture....in a tourist spot? I mean, he seemed like the type that traveled a lot and seemed so superior to the rest of the world....in his stupid Beijing t-shirt and his rude demeanor....

Jacobs and I decided that he could have been a parent who was jealous from another band who is here. You see, Shaw is truly more impressive than the others here and the others are kind of getting lost in the background. I feel bad for the other kids in the other bands, but he's an ADULT. WITH GRAY HAIR and CHILDREN!!

Even though I was not the one the man was referring to, I found myself to be very protective of the students. This moment stuck with me.

I knew what to expect when I signed on to the project. I knew that we did not have a single location we could keep all of the gear and that I would need to carry it with me, but I didn't realize how difficult it could be to carry the gear while following a fast-paced marching band and furthermore, while doing activities such as scaling the Great Wall.

June 25, 2008 - Great Wall of China - 00:07

Alright, so how about that Great Wall of China! I'm telling you, as we were driving there, I really didn't have many thoughts about it because I've seen the video footage and I know the stats, but as soon as I saw it, I was speechless! I was in a trance and I finally felt like I was really in China for the first time this trip. The tour guide had us go up the harder part of the wall, so less people would be there. HOLY HELL.....that wall is SO STEEP...there is no picture or video out there that can really show how steep it is....seriously...you all need to see it sometime in your life while you still have the lung capacity to walk up it. Words truly can not describe it. And not only was it so steep, you had to hold onto a railing or you would fall backwards, I was carrying an 8 pound camera, monopod and mics!! Everyone I passed was like, wow, and I thought my *purse* was too heavy....I was breathing pretty hard to say the least!

So, they performed today with two other bands at the base of the great wall. They, of course, did fantastic. In fact, they were asked to go last....Hmm...I wonder why. I know, so they didn't over-shadow the other two boring marching bands! You really need to see them if you haven't yet, I love watching them.

The band performed a total of three different locations. The final performance in Beijing was the International Music Festival. It was based in an amusement park. The five bands marched and performed and then all ended in a grandstand location. Each band performed in the grandstands alone and then did one final performance together.

June 28, 2008 - Fran's House - 22:59

Today was the final performance. The PERFORMANCE OF A LIFETIME, as Fran and I called it every time we mentioned it. The kids played at Happy Valley, an amusement park where all the young Chinese wore T-shirts with English writing. I like reading their shirts, just like they probably like reading American's "Chinese" tattoos. One girl at the great wall had a T-shirt on that said....wait for it....."Love Hoes" HAHA...it was great. Another lady, much older, was wearing a "Barbie" T-shirt. I love it.

So the band was fantastic, they've worked so hard and they did it. Kingsway, the Co. that set up the tour, put Shaw last again, because they steal the show. The Chinese were clapping very loudly, which is like a standing ovation in the States!

"The Chinese cheer and clap silently like limp fish" (they barely clap and/or move when they cheer.) As said by another Chinese man standing near me.

As I discovered, even though the Chinese are not a very outspoken society—like many people in the United States—I could tell that the band was intriguing, fascinating and very different from what most of these people had seen before. After speaking to them, I knew the members of the band knew it as well.

We made our way back home where the band had to prepare for the following week of band camp. The kids were greeted in the Cleveland Airport by press, family and friends. We decided to use these visuals of everyone coming home at the end of their journey as the end of our documentary.

Post-Production

Starting the Edit Process

After returning home, work was not yet finished. We had to fulfill a very tight deadline. WVIZ decided that they wanted the documentary to air before the Olympics, giving me roughly one month to produce a final product. The documentary was not the only thing on my plate. I was also working full-time, attending classes and completely jet-lagged from not sleeping or eating properly for two weeks. A month was a very tight deadline indeed.

Once we got back to the United States, I began to capture all of the footage into my computer. Once the interviews were captured, I sent the footage to Jacobs so he could begin writing the script. After watching the interviews, he decided to take what he called a “field of dreams” approach to the documentary—not to be confused with the popular 1989 film starring Kevin Costner—writing a positive, uplifting story that followed the entire band on a remarkable dream trip to China. He decided he did not want to focus on the individual stories of the students, but instead focus on the band director and the band as a single entity. Therefore, all of the “hard hitting” questions were left out. They were still important during the shooting process, because it got the kids more in touch with Jacobs while he was interviewing them.

“One of the advantages of video is that you avoid the hassle of post-production syncing [of audio and video], as you are automatically in sync, but logging and identification is still very important for every cassette and every new scene” (Rosenthal, 2007, p. 200). Because of the preparation and the shooting logs I made everyday during each shoot, I was easily able to find the footage that we had. The logs were also helpful for Jacobs to know what we had visuals of while he was writing the script. It was also helpful when capturing all of the footage; by using the logs, I could accurately describe what was being captured. This helps one stay organized while capturing 20 to 30 hours of footage. It also helps to keep your edit organized while looking for specific shots when putting the story edit together.

Once I had finished organizing the footage, a script was given to me. I made a scratch track—a rough audio recording to use only until the final audio track is received— of the narrations to use until our narrator got back from China. The narrator, Mary Major-Jack, was traveling through China as well, because of Olympic-related events. While in China, she and her husband shot stand-ups—a person speaking in front of something—of all of the narrations in different locations including the Great Wall and the Terracotta Warriors. Once we got the footage back from Major-Jack, we decided her stand-ups caused separation in the documentary and she felt like an outsider, as opposed to a true narrator and part of the story. She re-recorded her narration as a simple

audio track once back in the States.

With my scratch track in place I began to assemble the story. The script had a substantial amount of story about the band before we started shooting the documentary. This was an important aspect to the approach Jacobs wanted to bring to the story, because it described the huge change the band went through once Wilson became the director.

The main issue with talking about the band in previous years was the lack of archival footage. We were able to secure some VHS tapes of previous years of the band practicing and marching in a parade. It was helpful to have the old footage, but the new footage was HDV and this old footage was SD. Because SD footage, on screen, is physically a much smaller format than HDV, the footage was not compatible when cutting it together. In order to make the SD footage fit in an HDV frame, I would have to enlarge the SD footage about 5 times larger than it was, making it blurry. I decided to leave the SD footage in its original size and place it on a color matte background, to keep the old images intact.

Even though Jacobs and I disagreed on the direction of the documentary, I was given full creative control of the opening sequence and some of the music. The opening sequence of a documentary is important because it sets the tone of the story your viewers are about to partake of. Staying with the “field of dreams” approach that Jacobs had created, I wanted to showcase the talent of the band, along with the hopefulness the trip could

bring. This trip had the opportunity of opening the students' eyes by showing them there is more to the world than just East Cleveland.

When choosing music for the documentary, I wanted to include the band and local artists as much as possible. Alex Thomas, owner and engineer of Nexus Sound Studio in Warren, Ohio, wrote a piece of music for the band to play for the opening of the documentary. We traveled to the school together and he recorded a small group of students performing the piece in the library of the school while I filmed students playing and dancing as they do in their performances in front of a green screen. I then used the green screen footage to create animations of the students dancing and timed it with Thomas' song to create an animated open for the documentary.

With any documentary, there is never a single cut that one person approves before it airs. The documentary went under several revisions with Jacobs and I both deciding on the final cut to export for WVIZ.

WZIV wanted the documentary to air in Standard Definition. Even though this was disappointing to give a SD final product because we had taken the time and energy to shoot in HDV, it had the possibility to be financially beneficial, as we would not have to use DVCAM tape, which is required to print HDV footage. DVCAM tape stock ranges around \$20 for 90 minutes (Tape Stock Online) verses a common SD-DVD that costs about \$0.30 (Super Media Store). However, WVIZ would not accept DVDs, only DigiBeta or Beta SP tape stock. We had to get the DVD transferred to Beta SP, bringing the price back

up to DVCAM cost. When making copies for family, friends and some media outlets, the SD-DVD was still much more cost effective than making a Blu-Ray disc or HD-DVD.

We learned that the segments we sent back to Ohio to air while we were in China were considered successful. The Plain Dealer had received 5,700 hits on their website directly related to Shaw and WOIO received 9,000 hits. For local media, that seemed pretty successful.

On August 11, 2008, the documentary was completed for the deadline that WVIZ had requested. However, after they received the documentary, they decided to push the airdate to September 7th 2008—after the Olympics were over. We were disappointed because it would have been a good opener to the Olympics rather than an after-thought. Also it made many of my sleepless nights trying to rush for the original deadline in vain. Another famous quote I've heard from many production people: "Hurry up and wait."

The Private Screening

A private screening was scheduled mainly to give the students a recollection of their trip along with their family and friends. The anticipation for this day had been growing. It was very nerve-racking and exciting. I was about to show this amazing group of kids what the whole Cleveland area would soon see: the story of their trip and why it was so remarkable. Would they be offended, happy, or would they just be excited to have their 15 minutes of

fame?

I think for most of them, the thought that they were just in China did not really hit them until seeing this footage while gathered in a hall at Case Western Reserve University. WOIO, along with others, were there to grab the reactions of the kids and a sneak peak of the documentary. Jacobs had already released the documentary to the news with a written agreement that they were only allowed to air 2-to-5 minutes on air. He said it would be better to give a taste to help spread the word instead of trying to keep it a secret.

Just as we were about to play the documentary, we discovered technical issues with the university's projection system's computer. We were worried it would not play and the students and news stations would be disappointed. Luckily, we had another laptop in the car and saved the night. The documentary brought smiles, laughs, sighs and a standing ovation at the end. I felt so proud that I was one to help in telling the Shaw band's story in a way that they could make this audience smile.

That's a Wrap

Things I Would Change or Do Differently

There are many stories that already exist that could have focused on the depressing nature of the city of East Cleveland or its poverty issues. Jacobs felt that a good, uplifting narrative would be more appropriate for a story about the Shaw band. The band is a bright spot in the community that is helping to keep many high school students out of trouble. The band director, Mr. Wilson, makes all the kids try out for positions and requires that all members of the band hold a “B” or higher grade in all subjects. The band is something in this high school that many students want to be a part of. Wilson treats the students with respect therefore they treat him with respect. I even heard some students call him their father. While in China, we were around many groups of high school-aged kids and there is no doubt that this group of kids were the most well-behaved and respectful group.

There are parts of the story and script that I would have changed. I was not happy with some of the generic phrases such as “performance of a lifetime.” I felt that it took away from the emotions and attitudes of the kids and instead bracketed them together making the moment overly majestic. I

would have liked to build up to their performance like we did in the documentary, but then backed up their experience with some post-interviews to make the entire ending of the documentary more grounded and real. It would have been nice to find out from the kids themselves what affected them the most and what they brought back with them regarding the people or culture. This would have allowed the ending to feel more emotional and could have given the viewer more of a connection with the kids, rather than saying the performance itself was the only magical moment. An important feeling that Scott Billups mentions in his book, *Digital Moviemaking*:

Audiences go to the movies to experience situations and sensations that will generate strong emotional reactions and insights. The structure the characters, and the conflict of the script must engage the audience and give them a revealing insight into the human spirit (Billups, 2000, p. 119).

I feel that this documentary was missing that “insight into the human spirit.”

Beyond the script, there were some technical changes I would have made. Jacobs’ main goals were visual, never aural. Therefore, it would have been nice to work with an audio person, someone with experience, especially since the documentary was about music. I feel that good audio can make or break a piece, regardless of the content but especially when the story is about music. Secondly, the documentary was shot on two different types of

cameras, as discussed in the technical section. When putting the footage together in the edit, there were big discrepancies in the look of the footage. The Canon HV20 colors didn't match up with the Canon XH-A1 when cut side-by-side. Overall technically, if it were possible, it would have been nice to have a second camera person and or audio person and a second matching camera, budget permitting.

The final documentary's duration was one hour. WVIZ, the Cleveland PBS station airing the documentary, was the one who requested an hour-long piece. I discussed with Jacobs about the content being better suited for a 30-minute piece, but in the end it was his decision to give PBS the longer format. Because the documentary was stretched to one hour, it severely limited my editing choices. There was really only enough good footage for a 30-minute documentary. Because of the time stretch, the documentary contains many long cuts and simple transitions. There simply wasn't enough material on tape to do more than that.

Once the due date had passed and the local station had aired it, I had planned on doing a re-cut of the documentary to thirty minutes, but my home—where the documentary was edited—had been vandalized and the edit and footage was lost, leaving only the final DVD. This resulted in other problems because PBS wanted to re-air the documentary nationally, but they had requested a few changes that couldn't be made from a DVD.

Even though Jacobs had good reasons for shooting the pre-trip

interviews with the kids without me being present, I would have liked to work out something different. He said that my presence might have caused the students to answer some personal questions about their background in a different manner. Even though their answers may have been better by having Jacobs interview by himself, I was not happy with the look of the footage. All of the interviews were under-lit, framed poorly and some had audio issues. If I could do it all again, I would go to the location, set up the frame and lighting of the shot and then leave the room while he conducted the interviews. I would have even liked to help organize some of the questions prior to the interviews.

Taking into consideration the fact that it was edited in a matter of weeks and that I have had two more years of professional experience under my belt since then, this is what I would have done differently if possible. It was interesting watching the documentary again for this project after stepping away for about two years. When you work on anything that's a creative process, it's very hard to ever call something finalized or complete.

Future On-Camera Possibilities for Shaw

My last project with Shaw was a 2-minute package I edited to play on the scoreboard at a Cleveland Indians baseball game. The video introduced the band as they marched onto the field to perform. They were, as always, fantastic to watch. I enjoyed working with the kids and director Wilson and I

am glad I had one last chance to work with them after airing the documentary.

As mentioned earlier, Jacobs had also pitched the possibility of a reality show for BET about the next Shaw band. The next round of high school band competitions were starting in a few short months and a large percentage of the band had graduated.

According to Jacobs, “The first step in getting a show picked up by a network is to plug into the right person; the person who feels your project can become something.” On July 21, 2008, Jacobs told BET they could see the finished documentary on August 11. The network still seemed interested, but it turned out that they were planning on a full 90-min “*Hoop Dreams*”-style, against-all-odds feature film instead of a reality show. Once August came, BET was in the middle of a large convention and our project got pushed to the back burner until the flame went out. Nothing worked out with the network, so Jacobs then wanted to take the documentary to ITVS.

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) brings independently produced, high-quality public broadcast and new media programs to local, national and international audiences. The independent producers who create ITVS programs take creative risks, tackle complex issues and express points of view seldom explored in the mass media. ITVS programs enrich the cultural landscape with the voices and visions of underrepresented communities, and reflect the interests and concerns of a diverse society (Independent Television Service).

He had hoped to gather \$20,000 from our underwriters and then ask ITVS for \$50,000, gaining a total of \$70,000. He again went to Case Western

University, Kent State University, Cleveland State University and Progressive, but with no luck.

Jacobs talked about trying to bring the documentary to air nationally on PBS, but we needed to partner with a PBS station in order to take the documentary national. It could be done without the partnership, but that would have required Jacobs to push the documentary to roughly all 300 separate PBS stations, versus PBS pushing the documentary for us. Jacobs next tried TV One.

TV One is a new cable/satellite television network, programming primarily to African American adults. TV One offers a broad range of lifestyle and entertainment-oriented programming that respects their values and reflects their intellectual and cultural diversity. TV One's goal is to be distributed on the most widely available cable and satellite service level in markets where African Americans represent a significant segment of the population (TV One).

TV One only returned with “We’ll think about it.” Because the documentary was to be entered into Sundance, the research for taking the documentary national was put on hold. In order to be accepted into Sundance, the documentary could not air nationally.

Though Shaw’s adventure to China had come to an end and they no longer appeared in the nightly news, there were still many talks about the future including discussions about the band traveling to South Africa to perform in a large art festival that benefits underprivileged children in 2009. In the end, Mr. Wilson decided he wanted the band to focus on other

endeavors instead. I think the most interesting result of their China experience is that these trips and offers are now hopefully the standards for what they can envision for the future. The trip to China is now a memory and not just a dream. The future is filled with possibilities.

No one has accepted the stories since PBS and the application to Sundance did not pan out as hoped. Footage about the band's story was sent to Ellen, Oprah and others to help try to gather funding. These requests have gone unanswered, but the funding for the China trip came in quickly—within a month—so anything is feasible.

Closing Thoughts

Though I do not think I will become a documentary filmmaker, I learned a great deal by taking on this project. It takes a lot of work to not only get people on board with your project, but even more to hold and keep their attention. You must learn to work with others, be able to express your opinion on the project, but also work with others' visions. Jacobs and I did not agree on every aspect of the final product, but we did listen to each other and work with each other's suggestions.

Even though time has passed since the trip to China in 2008, and technology has changed even since then, the same guidelines and questions I asked myself while going through the process still apply. There are currently more ways to send video via the Internet, along with advancements in

compression rates and video formats.

Currently, I work as an editor for NBCUniversal. When we submit shows to our distributor, they are not submitted on tape but in a digital format via the Internet. Technology changes quickly and while it's good to keep up with the changes, it's more important to have basic troubleshooting skills. Because of the way I handled the video submission from China to HD News in New York, they also offered me a job once the documentary was completed.

The creative process is very non-linear. Ideas come in plenty, but in this line of work, you must be ready to mold, flex and change directions at the drop of a hat. You must be ready to work in undesirable situations while still completing the project and meeting its deadlines. I can truly say that with this trip to China and my experiences since, I have learned a great deal about how to successfully accomplish these tasks and am ready for the next challenge.

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