
West Coast filmmaker Sandy Wilson offers us all the reflection of our young years in *Growing Up At Paradise*. Jerry McNabb meet with her at Pumps, an art co-op in Vancouver.

by Jerry McNabb

paradise regained



Growing Up At Paradise is the ultimate home movie. Sandy Wilson used her father's home movies, footage he had been shooting since 1948, and edited them down to a tight 20 minutes. **Paradise** is the family's Paradise Ranch, located in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. All the shots that everyone remembers from their own home movies are there – opening Christmas presents, going to the parade, a costume party, and teenage dances. As Kirk Tougas of the Pacific Cinematheque said, Sandy's home movies are really everyone's home movies.

Cinema Canada: When did you decide to make **Growing Up At Paradise**?

Sandy Wilson: I started thinking about it while looking at some footage of when I was a baby with Mom and Dad in the orchard. I was thinking how magic that was, that I could look back and see things the way they were when I was a baby.

Cinema Canada: When did you start on it?

Sandy Wilson: It was always in the back of my mind to make some kind of film, if just for myself. But I guess I actually began working on it in the Summer of 1973. When I was employed by the Provincial (B.C. Educational Media Centre, I thought I could do it as a film that would fit into the grade seven social studies program. But it was a difficult film. Nothing came easy.

Because I don't have a lot of money, and I was working on the film with a Canada Council grant, I would have to leave it for months at a time while I tried to earn a living.

I've always thought the best films were those that told me the most about the person who made the film...

(laughs)... at the same time, I wouldn't mind making a little money.

How do you achieve the balance?

I don't know, really. If you work just to please other people, there are so many people to please. Having worked at the Film Board, and working for other people, I learned that you either please yourself, or simply work for somebody else. That's why I was happy to be making this film on a Canada Council grant, so I wouldn't have to answer to anybody else.

But that's the gamble you take. This film is a good length for classroom use. I've made it as tight and as well technically as I can. I tried to keep certain people in mind who might use the film, such as teachers. But, still, I know it's hard to make money from films in Canada. Sometimes I think maybe I should try my luck in Los Angeles, but I don't know if I would ever do that.

What were your feelings while you were working on it – on something so very close to you?

Oh, I loved it. I had a happy time growing up and going back to that footage was magic. I remember most of it, and even when I dream, most of the background is Paradise Ranch. But some of it hurts to watch, especially the part when I was a teenager. I was such an awful teenager.

What was your family's reaction?

My brother Matthew said if I could get away with this one, he was going to start making movies.

My father questioned some of the shots I chose and said he would have used different shots. But he said I have a good way of putting things together.

Jerry McNabb, one of the founders of the Toronto Filmmakers' Coop, is presently with the Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre.

There are a number of people, family and friends, whose judgement I value, and I hope to God they like it. So I did little things during the editing. The part where my brother Guy is climbing in the mountains, I put the sound of a meadowlark over that because I know he really likes meadowlarks.

Can you explain the technical process you went through to get a workprint and so on?

My father shot all the original in 16mm, starting back in 1948. I took the original to the labs here in Vancouver and made a color print for my father and a black and white workprint for editing. Later, I asked my father to shoot some modern-day footage to work into the film.

So the original is the actual A & B roll?

Yes. But when I took the A & B rolls to the lab, they decided they could not take the risk to print the film because the original had shrunk over the years. They suggested I take it to Arnold Sheimer at the Film Board in Montreal. He knows a lot about plastics and celluloids and does research into printing. He was a fantastic person to work with. He looked at the film and measured it to get an average of how much the film had shrunk. Then he put it into a secret bath overnight that de-shrunk the film. He calls it redimentionalized – He doesn't like me to call it de-shrunk.

Most of the narration and comments were done before I had any idea of how I was going to put the film together. I just went up to Paradise Ranch one weekend with a Nagra.

Little kids seem to especially enjoy the film. Did you expect that reaction from children?

That is a totally unexpected and delightful surprise. The first time I realized children were enjoying the film was during the final editing. A little girl, about three or four, was watching the workprint with her mother on the Steenbeck, with the small image and lousy sound. I expected to have to entertain this little girl while her mother watched the film. But she was mesmerized. She was giggling and laughing. And when I showed it at the Pacific Cinematheque, a couple of seven-year-olds howled with laughter throughout. I don't know how much they are understanding, but they enjoy the film.

Is there going to be a sequel?

Oh, there's some beautiful footage left, and I would love to do a sequel. But I think my father is inspired to pick it up, and that would be more appropriate. □

Filmography

Sandy's 10-minute black and white 16mm film **Garbage** was chosen to be aired on CBC's "Take 30" program in 1969. She edited **Penticton Profile**, an SFU Film Workshop project funded by the National Film Board. In 1971 **The Bridal Shower**, a 23-minute drama was paid for by a grant from the Canadian Film Development Corporation. After working for the NFB in Montreal in 1972, she directed **He's Not the Walking Kind**, a 1/2 hour documentary. She directed and edited several films, including **Raising the Gilhast Pole** while working for the Provincial Educational Media Centre in B.C. In 1974, she directed another film for the NFB, **Pen Hi Grad**, which was shown on CBC's *Pacificanada* series. Most recently, she has completed **Growing Up at Paradise**.