

Report on completing 'Death and Taxes' by Steev Hise

Current Status and Recent History:

'Death and Taxes', a documentary about war tax resistance, was initially funded with grants and donations gathered by NWTRCC between December 2007 and July 2008. The project is directed by myself, Steev Hise of Pan Left Productions in Tucson, Arizona, with advisory supervision from the rest of the NWTRCC video committee. Production began in January 2008 and concluded in May. Post-production began in June. Post-production met with many problems and fell far behind schedule – without going into too much detail, I will summarize the cause of the delay thusly: the task of organizing all the pre-existing and new footage and creating a coherent film with a compelling narrative proved to be a much more difficult task than was previously predicted. A lack of clear communication about the nature of the film, despite my best efforts, also contributed to many hours of labor misspent. As the editing continued to consume more and more time, the budgeted funds for post-production ran out, at the end of November 2008. After two more months of working voluntarily, I completed a rough edit of the film in mid-January 2009, which was presented to the video committee and a handful of others for comment. In mid-February collection of feedback was completed and a conference call with the committee occurred. In light of all feedback and discussion, I have arrived at the following assessment, plan, and alternate plans for completing the project.

Assessment & Plan

The original budget for the project included 20 days of editing. In reality, the total time spent so far has been more like 80. The extra time has been spent voluntarily by myself, but it must be understood that I make a living as a filmmaker. I have no other source of income than film/video projects such as this one. In order to put in the extra time this project has needed, I have disrupted the schedules of other projects and even passed up other, paying projects. Because of my current financial situation, in March of 2009 I concluded that I cannot complete this project without further compensation.

My estimate, given the experience so far working on the project, is that I can complete a final edit in another 30 days of post-production. Because I am also engaged in other work at this time, this 30 days would happen over a period of 2 actual months. In addition, it has become evident to me that the film would really benefit from some original soundtrack music and I would like to be able to commission a composer for this purpose.

Budget for completion

editing:	30 days @ \$100/day	\$3000
original music:		\$300
10% contingency:		\$330
total:		\$3630

(Note that the day rate listed for editing is, as a courtesy, 1/3 the rate listed in the original Pan Left budget.)

In the last two weeks I've started a fundraising campaign in order to raise these funds independently. So far I have raised \$400. I have plans to hold a fundraising houseparty here in Tucson this month. I hope to have raised at least half the amount needed at that time and then resume work and continue raising the rest if necessary while work continues. Again, these efforts are independent of NWTRCC and the remaining funds due to Pan Left upon completion, although assistance from anyone in raising these new funds would be helpful.

Some Details for the Final Edit

This is a description of my general plan for changes to make to the existing rough cut and arriving at the final edit of the film:

1. The rough cut is 82 minutes long. Target length of final film: 45-60 minutes
2. Redo the introduction to make it faster, snappier, more attention-grabbing. Add a montage of inspirational/motivational introductory interview clips at the end of the introduction.
3. In general, re-record all narration in a more upbeat, excited style.
4. Move Julia sequence to first after introduction.
5. Cut Susan and San Francisco workshop sequences way down and add lots of explanatory onscreen titles and motion graphics to underscore points.
6. Tighten all sequences, stressing motivational and inspirational content over factual and procedural details.
7. The film is a “quest” or “journey” film – so in keeping with the concept set up during the introduction, include more personal reflection, with final conclusion by narrator at end (“what did I learn?” kind of thing).

Alternatives/Additional

I want to stress that this project has been a collaborative effort; Many grantors and donors have contributed the initial funding, many members of the video committee besides myself have put in many hours in offering feedback, and assisting in organization and execution of production (in the Bay Area and the East Coast), and of course the efforts of the film's “stars,” Shanti and Rico, should not be forgotten. However, as has been mentioned multiple times during discussions of the video committee, a film cannot be made by committee, and in the end it is up to the vision of the director.

Nevertheless, from the moment I ever thought about making a documentary about WTR (which was, by the way, sometime around April 2003) my aim has always been to make something that will have the maximum usefulness to the group of people who have been putting their lives and energy into the war tax resistance movement for many many years. Thus, the future of this in-progress film is not up to me alone. Here, in my view, are some possible alternative or additional plans that I want to put forth:

1. NWTRCC and any other interested parties could make a concerted effort to assist me in raising the aforementioned finishing funds.
2. Someone else could finish the film. This could be a volunteer, or someone who raises their own funding or is funded by additional NWTRCC efforts. I would cooperate to the best of my ability with transferring all materials to this other filmmaker. Since the captured digital footage for the project totals about 150 Gigabytes of disk space, I would need a hard drive of at least that size shipped to me, or funds to purchase one. I could then copy everything to it, and ship it along with all other material (raw footage tapes, logs, notes, etc) to wherever it needs to go. I've been working on the project with Final Cut Studio 2, so for maximum compatibility with my files, whoever took over would need to be using that, or of course they could start from scratch with the raw footage. I also would want my credit in the final product to reflect that it would no longer be “my” film, in other words, I would not be listed as director and editor but as something else.

I had thought I'd have a few more ideas for other ways to proceed, but I guess I don't, at least any that I want to seriously think about. However, I'm certainly open to other ideas and discussion.