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Splice Magazine is a publication of The Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative, a non-profit artist-run centre that supports, encourages, and assists independent filmmaking in Saskatchewan.

The Filmpool Cooperative is committed to developing an awareness and appreciation of independent film that reflects the individual and collective cultural expression of Saskatchewan people.

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The opinion expressed in Splice are not necessarily those of the Filmpool, its Board of Directors, the Editor, or anybody other than the authors.



## A Message from the Filmpool Executive Director



It gives me great pleasure to present this special edition of Splice Magazine - commemorating the Filmpool's 35<sup>th</sup> year of supporting independent filmmaking throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Recently, I had the opportunity to talk to one of the Filmpool's first members, Brock Stevens. It was wonderful to hear him talk about those early years (Filmpool's first location was actually on Scarth Street!) and the reason why all six founding members - after working together on the feature film *Who Has Seen the Wind* - joined to form the co-op. They wanted to make films. They wanted to share their expertise and pool their resources (equipment received from a Canada Council grant) to make projects that would have been near impossible otherwise.

Although technologies have changed, the essence of the Filmpool has remained the same for 35 years - to support, promote and contextualize film and filmmaking as an art form within society. The Filmpool believes this is important, and Splice Magazine has been an instrumental voice for sustaining the spirit of independent filmmaking.

Special thanks must go out to Kelly-Anne and Jessica Riess for their endless efforts in supporting the Filmpool, and with the publication of this exclusive issue of Splice Magazine.

Gord Pepper, Executive Director

## A Message from the Splice Editor



Looking through past issues of Splice, I was impressed with how the independent film industry has grown over the last 35 years. It has been remarkable to read how the Filmpool launched so many people's prosperous and interesting careers.

Former member Stephen Surjik said the Filmpool lent him the equipment he needed to begin learning the film medium before going on to find success in Hollywood. Members Brian Stockton and Gerald Saul made the first feature film in the province, *Wheat Soup*, which likely inspired others to follow in their footsteps.

Many others used the Filmpool as a place to earn experience to launch their own film and television businesses, Ian Toews (291 Film Company) and Robin Schlaht (Zima Junction Productions). The majority have given back to the film community by serving on boards, teaching workshops and classes.

The Filmpool over the last 35 years has proved to be fertile, growing and nurturing much of Saskatchewan's film talent. Most successful filmmakers from Saskatchewan have had connections to the Filmpool at some time or another.

Having served on the Filmpool board for the last four years, I have witnessed the current staff's tireless generosity in assisting with individual projects and community initiatives. They truly are all remarkable individuals.

*Here's to another 35 years of producing filmmakers and film enthusiasts.*

Kelly-Anne Riess, Splice Editor





# SASKATCHEWAN FILMPOOL COOPERATIVE



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# OUR CHANGING LANDSCAPE

By Lowell Dean

*It has never been a more interesting time to work in film. And by interesting, I mean unpredictable, confusing, maddening and rewarding.*



Shooting film on Doomed. Doomed photos by Aaron Feser.

This business and art form is a relatively young one (It's barely 100-years-old – compare that to the likes of painting and singing and sculpture). It's also an industry heavily tied to technology, which is changing at a rapid pace. The world of the filmmaker is evolving quickly, both in terms of how things are made and how our products are consumed. This is especially true here on the prairies.

In terms of technology, there have been many changes to the medium of film in the last few years. In fact, even calling it the “film industry” seems odd since most productions – both independent and mainstream – are now shot on video. The evolution is staggering, even from a decade ago when I took Film & Video Production at the University of Regina. Back then, we used to hand in our final projects on the glorious format known as VHS... Perhaps you've heard of it?

The move to video created a big advantage for independent filmmakers, and industry standard cameras, such as the RED Epic, have never been more accessible than they are today. University students or people with a few thousand dollars set aside can now make films with a quality that rivals Hollywood blockbusters – minus the superstars and visual effects, of course.

Though the technology is good, things are currently very uncertain for Saskatchewan filmmakers, due to the well-publicized end to our provincial tax credit. As I write this I am - for the first time in my career - seriously considering a move from my home province. Unfortunately, I am not alone. Many of the people who make their daily living working in film are either moving to other provinces or considering a change in careers.





A medley of 3 pictures; George Hupka shooting Super 16mm film, Alden Adair (as zombie) shooting Canon XL2 and Adrian Dean shooting on the RED One Camera.

It seems our current government no longer embraces the industry, as they have drastically altered the tax credit program in a way industry insiders call unsustainable. While the misinformed may consider filmmaking a hobby industry, it is a business first and foremost, full of skilled workers in a variety of trades. In my opinion, each of these craftspeople are renewable resources that are as valuable (if not more) than the oil and potash that line Saskatchewan's pockets. The fallout from this decision is still an unknown. While there may still be films shot in the province without a viable tax credit, it is wildly improbable that our province will be competitive on a global scale. Smaller independent films may rise from the ashes, but these will probably serve as the exception, not the rule. On the bright side, it is starting to matter less and less where you are from when you make your projects.

Screening a film used to be restricted to theatres and other venues with a large screen and adequate seating capacity. Now, screens are everywhere – there are several in each home (televisions, computers, iPads) and even in our pockets (smart phones).



Crew on set of short zombie film *Doomed*. Film was shot on super 16 mm. Photos by Aaron Feser.



If you would have told me years ago, as I struggled to burn my first DVD, that I could simply beam a short film into the Internet and anyone in the world could watch it where they sat, I would've called you a visionary lunatic. But here we are, less than a decade later. These technological leaps and bounds are even giving way to new genres, such as the web series – a multi-part video series almost like a mini TV series for your small screens (and attention spans).

Our industry is changing so rapidly, and it is easy to take it for granted. Regardless of technology, filmmaking will always be a difficult task – if you want to do it right. There may be a million videos readily accessible on YouTube of cats and hilarious

groin injuries, but to do something with good acting, solid production values and most importantly a good story, will always be a challenge. Challenges are a good thing, and it is exciting to know that the technology is there for people wanting to make a short film, a web series, or a feature film.

It is also quite exciting to know that once that film is done, you can share it with the whole world with the push of a button. I guess the only down side for a prairie filmmaker is that those of us who are left are currently living in a province that doesn't grasp the value of this industry. The tools are there; the audience is there – and being competitive has never been easier.



The (much smaller) video crew shooting a scene.

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# FOR THE ASPIRING DOCUMENTARIAN

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By Steve Suderman



A scene from *To Make a Farm*.

I've often come across the almost implicit assumption that true artists don't really need to be paid for their work, as if they live on passion alone. Artists are supposed to be artists, come hell or high water—in fact, especially come hell or high water. It's a notion that's somehow offensive and romantic at the same time. And it's one that you might start to mull over as an independent filmmaker in that doubt-filled and often cash-poor period 'between' films. Am I still a filmmaker when I spend months on nothing more than paperwork? Am I being weak or just realistic when "being a filmmaker" becomes a decision made daily, or maybe weekly? The whole thing starts to feel a bit abstract and unsustainable.

It's hard to find examples in English Canada of filmmakers pursuing projects that they're passionate about while making a living at the same time. In fact, I recently met Marshall Curry, American director of two Oscar-nominated documentaries, in the midst of the rush and hubbub around his latest film, *If A Tree Falls* (2011). In a rather candid conversation, he offered that filmmaking is about art and passion, but probably not career. You do it as long as you can, and if that turns out to be a lifetime, you've been blessed. Of course, I'm paraphrasing, and perhaps it was a moment of doubt for him. But coming from a man who has had the type of success that most of us strive for, his words landed with some weight.

Werner Herzog often suggests that filmmaking is about working hard and learning a craft, which is an idea that appeals to me because hard work is something I can do. And it means that I can take an incremental approach to developing my skills. The 'artist' is a finished package, whereas the athlete





Leslie from the film *To Make a Farm*.

(to borrow one of Herzog's analogies) is always in training. That's why I get excited about the idea of making another film: because I love the work of it, and I can strive to make it a better film. I can draw on what I've learned, and continue to develop my toolbox. And of course, filmmakers should talk about and share their toolboxes with others. (How sexy is that?) Financial doubts aside (they're not going away any time soon), perhaps being an artist or filmmaker remains a bit of an abstraction because there are too few of us around, or we're too isolated. So in the spirit of practicality and conversation, below are a few thoughts about documentary filmmaking that will hopefully be useful to aspiring documentarians.

### START WITH WHO YOU ARE:

At the risk of giving cliché advice about knowing yourself (which I don't actually think is possible), I would just say that there is value in pursuing a film that makes you feel uncomfortable enough to cry, but that is familiar enough that you don't get too lost. In other words, take some risk and make it personal.

### LEARN FROM OTHERS:

This can happen by working with other filmmakers. But it can also include dissecting

the films you love. Load them into your NLE and pull them apart. Watch shots with cold detachment, time them out, examine camera movements, imagine yourself on location, re-order shots, listen to only the audio, etc. Then do it all again, but this time with the love and empathy of a filmmaker who has invested years of their life in the subjects on screen. Are you at risk of just copying someone else? Not if you start with who you are.

### DOCUMENT YOUR JOURNEY:

I always keep a notebook with me to jot down my thoughts, feelings, questions, frustrations as I'm researching, shooting, and cutting. These scribbles generally fall under two categories. The first is related to filmmaking itself. Simple but painfully learned lessons, like ALWAYS arrive on location early, ALWAYS have more batteries and blank media than you can ever imagine needing, NEVER push an interview beyond its natural life.

The second category relates to the film itself: what I'm learning about the participants, ideas that will need to be clear in the final cut, things that surprise me. Basically, an outline of how my own understanding has grown and evolved. I actually find this part very difficult because I love learning and can get lost in it. But when it comes to editing and giving your documentary shape, you have to be able to go back and take your audience on a journey, perhaps similar to the one you've just been on. After months or years of research and production, you've gotten used to the language, the ideas, the process. You take things for granted. Looking back at your early notes will help you start at the beginning. Your editor can also help with this.

### KNOW YOUR MOTIVES:

We all want to make good films. And in documentary, what is good for your film is not always good for your participants. More often than not, drama comes from conflict. So as your film is getting better, your participants' lives might be getting worse. Unless you're



making purely reportorial or informational documentaries, it's impossible to avoid this ethical conundrum. But when your participant turns to you and asks you why you want to keep filming, you may not want to answer that their misfortune is your good luck.

To be honest, I find good answers hard to come by. I guess what I strive for is a humane answer. For me that usually comes back to a social imperative, or at least an honesty imperative. In other words, 'I know this is painful, but it's important in exposing the truth of your story.' or 'This is important because without it your point of view will not be represented.' The reality is that these responses have two targets: one is my own conscience (am I here to do more than just exploit?) and the other target is the motives of my participant (if they have agreed to be filmed, they probably want to tell their story). It's also useful to warn your subjects from the beginning that you will need to film even when times are tough. This is part of keeping communication as open and honest as is realistic. And yes, there will mostly likely be times when you feel the most humane thing to do is turn off the camera.

Ultimately there will be a film—an object you have brought into the world—and your participants will not like every part of it. It's something you'll have to learn to deal with as a documentary filmmaker. But I like the advice of Steve James, who has made several challenging documentaries, including *Hoop Dreams* (1994), *Stevie* (2002) and *The Interrupters* (2011). He generally sits down and shows his subjects the film just before it's locked. If your subjects are going to take issue with it, you should probably be confident enough in your work to go through the uncomfortable process of either defending the choices you've made, or honestly considering some changes. This doesn't mean you're giving up final cut. It means you're respecting the fact that you're creating a public representation of their private lives. James actually argues that

his films sometimes get better as a result of this process. He brings a camera along and has on occasion shot new interview footage that ends up in the film. So far I've only tried this with one film, but it was a rewarding experience.

#### TRY TO BREAK YOUR FILM:

Don't be afraid to try radical changes, even late in the editing process. Duplicate your sequence so you're not afraid of losing what you have, and then rip it apart. Cut the shots you think you can't live without. Cut or change the music. Cut all establishing shots, or all close-ups, etc. Put the end at the beginning. Add shots you've thrown out. Hack at it until it no longer holds together. This is part of learning the story and your material. Now that you've worked so long on getting it to work, push past the fear of breaking it.



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## DO TEST SCREENINGS:

Test screenings are difficult. No way around it. Your audience is watching with a critical eye, and hopefully they feel like they can be honest with you. But that means that you are also being more critical, and hopefully honest with yourself. You'll get feedback that hurts, and you'll get some that doesn't do you any good. There will be distractions and aberrant readings you can't help. But there are a couple very helpful things that can emerge. You might get several (or many) people saying the same thing, which probably indicates a problem area. You will also (if you're honest with yourself) get confirmation on something that you already suspected wasn't working, but didn't want to admit. I think it's normal to want something to work that really isn't. Wanting it badly enough won't change how it plays with an audience. If the cutting doesn't become very painful, you're probably not getting to the heart. Almost certainly, you'll look back a year later and see something you should have dropped, or cut differently. But more

work now will reduce those regrets.

One of the most interesting things I have discovered with test screenings is that while a specific scene or shot might be identified by the audience as a problem, the actual location of the offence is often elsewhere (though usually nearby). Even though films are linear, our experience and recollection of them is more fluid. So it can be fun trying to figure out what is actually tripping the audience.

## DON'T WAIT FOR PERMISSION:

If you're just starting out, don't just write proposals and wait for a granting agency to say yes. Sometimes this works, but more likely, you'll need to get out there and prove you can do it. There are a lot of films that can be made for very little money these days, so take advantage of it. Most first documentaries have very humble beginnings.



Steve Suderman in the edit suite with Jackie Dzuba.



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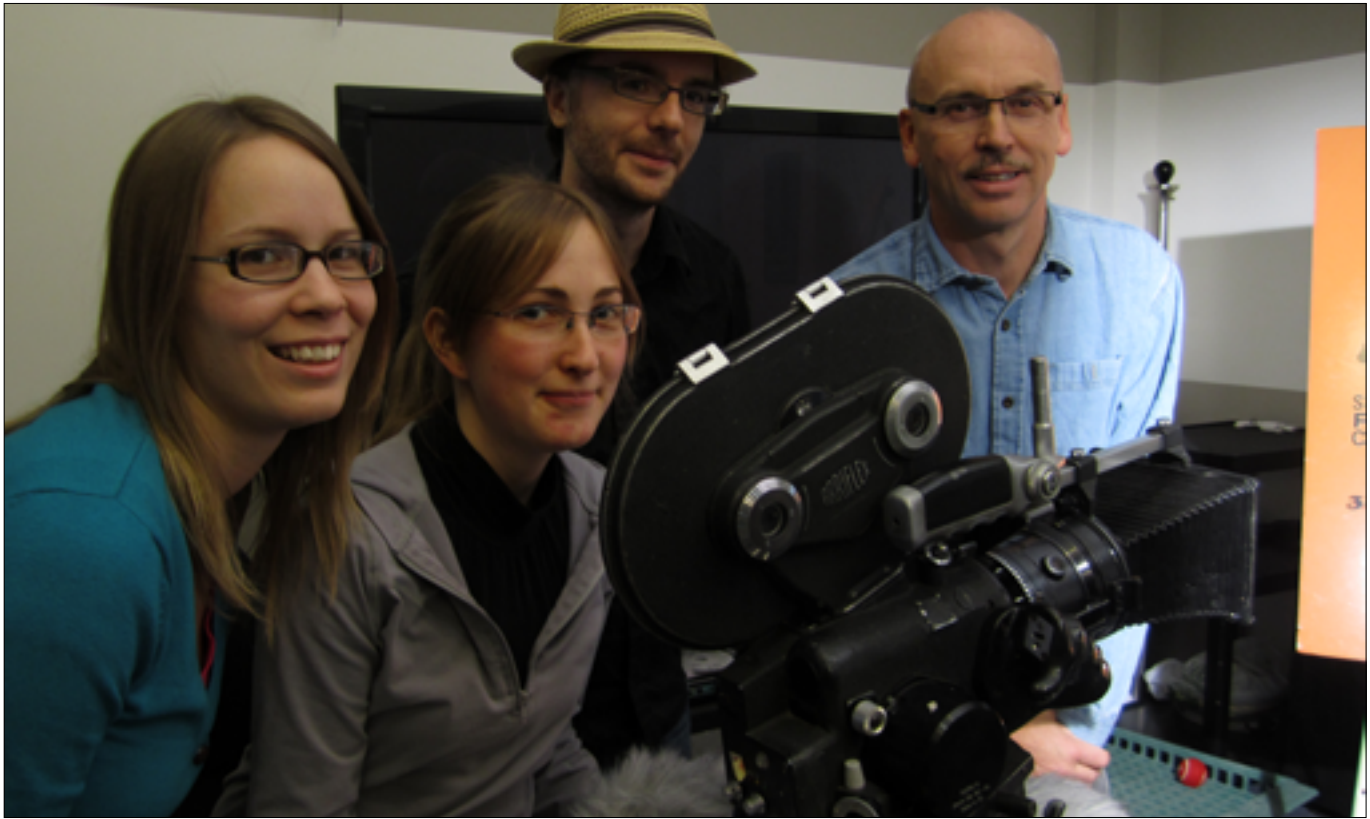
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# Leading the Last Show in Town

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By Daniel Redenbach

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2012 staff of The Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative Noelle Duddridge, Kristine Dowler, Berny Hi, Gord Pepper.

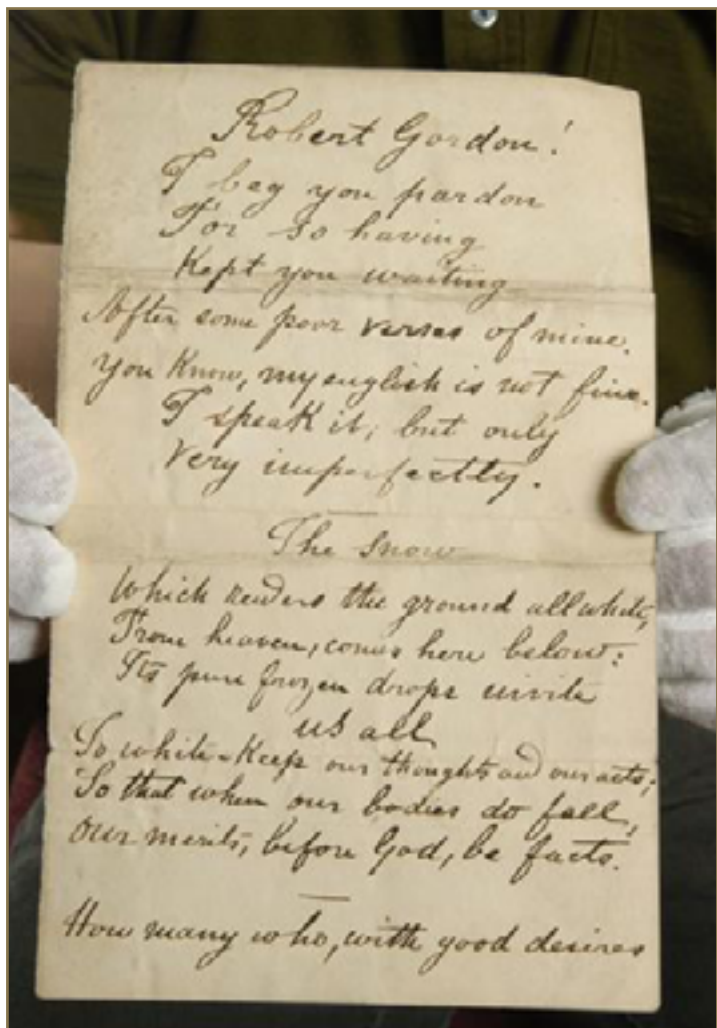
Gordon Pepper was the first face of the Regina filmmaking community I was introduced to. He was lecturing to a full auditorium of Film 100 students at the University of Regina, impassioned over Eisenstein and Hitchcock. Gord's unabashed willingness to guide anyone and everyone gave this then-unknown path ahead a friendly guide. "Support is the key, even if it's just encouragement," Gord told me over a coffee many years later. This attitude and empathy made his move to the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative a natural one.

"If you've ever had, you know, a real job... it's kind of a drag," he confessed. Born and raised in Saskatoon, chumming around with the likes of hometown hero and *Sons of Anarchy* star

Kim Coates, the world of film was a likely fit for Gord. He's held the position of Executive Director at the Filmpool for almost four years now, but it's not his first time at a coop. Gord was Coordinator of Production at the Calgary Society of Independent Filmmakers, active during its peak period in the 1980s and 1990s. It wasn't until Regina's own Brian Stockton delivered a package of Filmpool projects to the Calgary office that Gord felt the need to come back home—"I remember watching these films and thinking... this is the kind of work we should be doing here." Unpretentious and esoteric, the work coming from the Saskatchewan coop was undeniably exclusive to its province.



2012 staff of The Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative Noelle Duddridge, Kristine Dowler, Berny Hi, Gord Pepper.



Poem written by Riel to his jailer Robert Gordon days before his execution. U of S Archives.

These qualities are on full display in Gord's 2006 documentary *Light Unleashed: The Photography of Thelma Pepper*, a lyrical look at his mother's successful career as a photographer. "In Saskatchewan, we don't realize how isolated we are. This isn't good or bad—it's a fact." He told me that one of the common themes of Saskatchewan independent filmmaking is that truth and transcendence are not found in the province's urban centres, but in the nature surrounding them. The documentary's black and white photography emulates that of its subjects, both soft and stark. Disembodied voices tell Thelma's story against images of pioneering women standing weathered amidst a harrowing prairie landscape. He also published a companion piece to the documentary called *Human Touch: Portraits of Strength, Courage & Dignity*, which was shortlisted for a Saskatchewan Book Award.

*To Robert Gordon*, Gord's similarly poetic documentary, created for Saskatchewan Archives Week in 2008, reads and contextualizes Louis Riel's final written letter and poem. Despite the short film's heavy subject matter, it remains decidedly apolitical by recounting the events without sentiment or glamour. Like the controversial Canadian historical figure's title poem, the film doesn't take one side or the other, instead calling integrity to arms, to inspire virtue in its viewers. "There's a hesitancy to politicize, to make a statement," Gord added to his list of thematic Saskatchewan filmmaking tropes, "But this will change."

Surely it will, given the recent end of the Film Employment Tax Credit and forecasted thinning of the province's filmmaking community. "We have to keep going . . ." Gord proclaimed, "Keep doing workshops, keep meeting people, keep being creative." There may come a day when the Filmpool is the last show in town.



Not that this would by any means be a detriment, as Gord guided the Filmpool through one of its' most exciting years of programming. This past year has seen "Shoot Your Short Film" with Lowell Dean, "How To Get A Great Score" with Jason Cullimore, the ambitious artist-in-residence project "This Big World" with Christine Ells, and many more. "No one will ever say 'you can't do that here'—We're here to support independent, visionary filmmaking," Gord states of the Filmpool's mandate.

This school of thinking trickles down too. Filmpool staff members are encouraged to keep their own creative sparks alive through doing their own work. "This is a want-to-do kind of job, we are both the employer and the employee." Besides the task of keeping the Filmpool train running smoothly along the tracks, Gord has a long-gestating project in development exploring the digital revolution. The Marshall McLuhan-inspired project explores the retribalisation of society into global villages, housed in the digital realm.

The primary piece of advice Gord gave to me in first year film school is the same he shares with new members or passerby's of the Filmpool, "Get your work seen." A diverse economy, highlighting culture and community is imperative to the continuation of Saskatchewan independent filmmaking.

"Indigenous filmmaking serves the community, both locally and globally. You see your culture represented. It's all seen in hindsight—you really are a more interesting person than you thought you were."



Website: [misponfestival.com](http://misponfestival.com)  
Follow us on Twitter: @misponfilmfest

We are excited to announce that the fourth mispon festival in 2012 will be Messengers from Mother Earth: New Beginnings taking place in December! We will open December 1 with workshops, screenings and other activities that will run throughout the month and close by celebrating the Solstice on December 21. Keep checking our website for updates and more information on our guests and activities.



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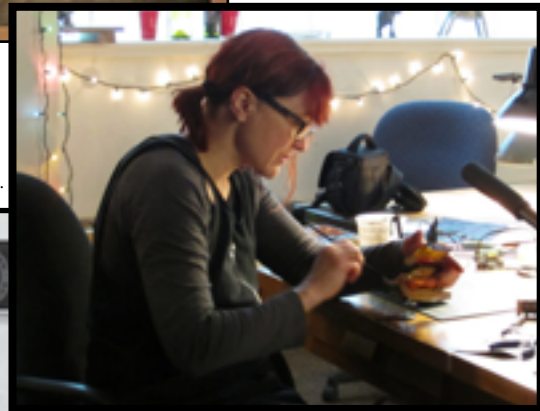
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2. Tarrah from the film *To Make a Farm* (Suderman)
3. Brian Stockton on the set of *Wheat Soup* (1987)
4. Scenes from a *Secret World* (Amalie Atkins, 2009)
5. Scene from *Wheat Soup* (Saul + Stockton, 1987)
6. Members celebrate the Filmpool's 35th Anniversary
7. Richard Kerr's *Last Days of Contrition* (1988)
8. *Henry*, Rah Rah music video (Lowell Dean)
9. Filming of *Wheat Soup* (1987)
10. Berny Hi creating a tiny puppet for *This Big World* (2012)
11. Steven Surjik's *Razor in the Wind* (1983)
12. Birthday cake served at the Filmpool's 35th Anniversary
13. Chrystene Ells creates in the Underground Puppet Works (2012)
14. Filmpool location on Broad Street.
15. The Filmpool begins.

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# Yorkton life: Web Series Finds Success on YouTube

By Tricia Martin

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*2012 may be known to many as the year the Saskatchewan Film Tax Credit was eliminated. The vibrant film industry here was under attack and the cuts made us all wonder if the local industry here would truly fade to black entirely.*



[www.gunderson.tv](http://www.gunderson.tv)

In June, I sat down with a beacon of light on a potentially dim horizon—charming and talented Daniel Redenbach, a local filmmaker, to talk about his style of filmmaking, his latest creative project Gunderson and the future of industry and indie filmmaking in Saskatchewan.

When I sat down with Daniel what I wanted to know first was how the tax credit cuts would impact him and his film career in Saskatchewan.

“I remember reading a press release from the government back in January or February. The press release stated there were no new productions slated for 2012-2013 season. I had a project slated for development,” said Daniel. “I was working on a big project currently with Crime Stories- that has a big budget and 90 per cent of that money didn’t come from Saskatchewan. It came from US or overseas sales. At the same time, I am working on two projects and had turned down a project in Saskatoon, so it’s like, what are you guys talking about, that there are no productions happening here?” And that was just what Daniel himself was working on and knew about.

My conversation with Daniel was just beginning and already I was beginning to see the difference between spin and the reality of what the tax credit kerfuffle was all about.

One of the sentiments I had personally heard about the tax credit was whether or not it supported truly Saskatchewan stories or films. The idea being that just because films were shot here did not really mean they were “Saskatchewan films.”





Designed and animated by Adrian Dean.

Is it only the writer's or director's story, or is it indeed what we all know filmmaking to be: a collaborative process?

"Even if we are not always implicitly telling Saskatchewan stories, within the industry sector, people that come through here are experiencing life here," said Daniel. "The best example of this is Julia Ormond, who has been here twice to shoot films and is also on the current season of *Mad Men*. They mentioned Regina on *Mad Men*. Julia spent a significant amount of time here. How do you think they knew about Regina?"

The impact of the film industry is felt here by all who work within it, but we also have significant impact on those people who come here to work in our province. They become ambassadors of Saskatchewan out there in the rest of the world.

There is no shame in learning from others in a globalized world. Daniel further explains the significance of the feature film industry to himself as a filmmaker: "If there are no experts and veterans here to foster an independent community, how does the independent community foster itself? Of course, we have the Filmpool and the university, but I think the gap between that and a 30 million dollar feature film is still a big gap and a sizeable

difference."

The film industry is not an isolated, elite industry separate from our economy or our people. People who work on big budget film productions that come to Saskatchewan are benefiting directly as a result of those productions that happen here. Daniel agrees: "There are a lot of independent filmmakers like Lowell Dean, myself, Rob Hillstead, most of us make our living by working on the big shows.

We learn and get trained . . . I mean I get to be an A.D. seeing all sides of every film production. Had I not had five years of experience working as an assistant director there is no way I would have been able to make *Gunderson*. "*Gunderson* originally sprung from the creative loins of Tyson Off.

A few years ago, Tyson created a web series called *Welcome to Yorkton* and it was very popular there. Tyson had created something that people really liked. Even the mayor of Yorkton made a cameo and caused a bit of a stir in the local media.

By playing more fowl versions of himself, the raunchy and funny Tyson also was making a commentary on life and real issues that people talked about in Yorkton.



KunderKong [www.gunderson.tv](http://www.gunderson.tv).

Daniel joined Tyson as more than just a friendly advisor and they tried to get Gunderson on SCN.

When SCN took a turn for the worse, they didn't let that defeat them. They gravitated towards doing a web series and haven't looked back since.

Tyson and Daniel pursued Arts Board funding, got Filmpool equipment deferrals, applied to the tax credit, and to do that, got an Executive Producer from Yorkton to sign on, who fronted them money for the tax credit.

Gunderson was moving on to a bigger stage and broader audience.

Daniel and Tyson made it happen by being very resourceful, partnering with local businesses and various stores to promote local business as well as local music artists that have music featured on Gunderson.

Gunderson features some of Saskatchewan's best punk and rock bands including Volcanoless in



[www.gunderson.tv](http://www.gunderson.tv).





[www.gunderson.tv](http://www.gunderson.tv).

Canada, Kleins96, The Rabid Whole and Molten Lava. Saskatoon band Shooting Guns, featured on several episodes of Gunderson, has enjoyed some acclaim after being one of the bands nominated for the Polaris Prize long list.

Cross promotion is a beautiful thing. Daniel learned all he had to do was ask and bands one after the other came on board to make up the soundtrack for Gunderson. Daniel received great support from local musicians and at the same time solidifying Gunderson's rock and roll lifestyle.

"Gunderson is very collaborative. We had some scripts and worded dialogue, to say what is on the page, but that was a rarity." editing suite far away from here. VISO Comedy Channel, a new premium channel on YouTube just picked up Gunderson for a distribution deal. Even with the success of Gunderson, times are still bitter sweet. While Daniel and Tyson will develop another season of Gunderson, trying to still shoot in Yorkton, they will do it through correspondence as Daniel tells me, he will most likely not be living in Saskatchewan by the

end of the year. "It's an explicitly a Saskatchewan story." And now it will be told partially from an The hope remains that people here can still live and produce film and television in Saskatchewan. I suppose only time will tell if the tax credit cuts will have a lasting impact on local film and television production. In the mean-time don't be a stranger to the well of Saskatchewan made content that is online, there is a tonne of it out there. The good news is the internet will always be there as a way to connect to your audience no matter how far away from them you are.

Gunderson can be found on YouTube and on [www.Gunderson.tv](http://www.Gunderson.tv)

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# Through the Years: Voices From the Past

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Jean Oser standing outside the old FilmPool premises on Rae Street.

"I think that the FilmPool is a tremendous place because Saskatchewan is very remote and for someone who is compelled to make a film, it's so great that such a place exists that allows people to go out and make their own films. It's so much more important than film schools or granting organizations because really, you don't need anything to make a film except equipment and the actors and the scripts. The FilmPool is a great thing and I'll support it forever."

*-Stephen Surjik, 2002*

"I've been a member of the Saskatchewan FilmPool since 1984. When I joined I was a student. If I have any voice at all anymore, it must be the voice of the old guard. I am an echo from the past. New members have new ideas and I don't expect them to listen to me any more than I listened to those who came before me. The film co-op is an asylum where inmates regularly exchange keys."

*-Gerald Saul. 1997*

"Films rarely turn out the way the filmmaker expects them to . . . Once again I am facing the dilemma of what to shoot, what to include and how to contact all these passing feelings, half formed notions."

*-Mark Wihak, 1993*

"I had a lot of friends in the film industry and that made me realize, hey, wait a minute, there's an opportunity."

*-Stephen Hall, 1997*

"I suggest that what lie at the heart of the Saskatchewan FilmPool is not just the films or the filmmakers, but rather the ability to foster an environment of open, uninhibited creative energy."

*-Gordon Pepper, 2002*

"I have found the work of the Saskatchewan FilmPool Cooperative is well-represented nationally and internationally."

*-Jason Britski, 1999*

"What could be accomplished if all filmmakers could remain in the province to build upon their success? How could they foster future filmmakers and the talent that continues to reside in Saskatchewan?"

*-Alex Rogalski, 2009*

"The most difficult thing as a filmmaker is to sit in an audience and watch your own stuff . . . Criticism in any form is always the most difficult to take as an artist, but it is something we all must endure."

*-Dianne Ouellette, 1999*



“If there was a mean demographic for a Regina filmmaker during the 1980s, arguably the stats would be late or post-boomer, white, male and with a middleclass upbringing in the suburbs (or the Regina equivalents (thereof)). These products of the 1960s and 70s breeding likely understood they were not brought up in the centre of the known universe, but felt secure in a world the co-inhabited with the Dominion grocery stores, the Roughriders and the Sunset Amusement Park.”

-Brett Bell, 1996

“During the production of Solitude we actually considered posting a banner in the production office saying ‘With a budget this low, who’s going to care if we screw up?’ The intent was to encourage each and every person on the production to feel free to experiment, to throw caution to the wind. We had no funding agency or broadcaster looking over our shoulders to monitor their investments, so we had only ourselves and our audiences to answer to. Viewed in this light, a small budget, despite its hardships and restrictions, is actually very liberating.”

-Robin Schlaht, 2001

“There was a serious debate about the inclusion of digital video into the Filmpool. This debate was a difficult consideration for the members of the Filmpool. Should we, as an organization, continue with trends in the industry? Or should we remain true to our roots and support the medium we started with? Both are difficult questions with no easy resolution, yet it was a decision that the membership had to make.”

-Felipe Diaz. 2005

“Regina is a hotbed of documentary work, both among Filmpool members and in the wider filmmaking community.”

-Ken Wilson, 2002



“Every film that I make, or want to make derives from a documentary impulse. Its ideas, subject and content originate in real life: my travels, experiences, feelings, beliefs and politics.”

-Ian Toews, 2002

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# The Long and the Tall of It:

It's about time... and about space; The Preston Kanak "Three-minute shorts" video project

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By Gerald Saul



Flooding makes filming difficult for Sorensen and Kanak.

There is an enigmatic aspect to Preston Kanak. His videos uploaded to Vimeo over the past two years number over four hundred, each of them a shining example of technique. While many of them are demonstrations of equipment, basically mini-industrials, they all uphold a level of high craft that borders on obsessive. Kanak's desire to keep learning, to find a way to make things work, and to take risks has served him well. His employment has allowed him constant access to good hardware and has had him traveling frequently around Canada and the USA testing and demonstrating cranes, dollies, and other camera equipment. In 2010, he dedicated himself to the creation of a video every day. In 2011, he slowed himself down to a mere three per week (but increasing the care behind each) and he continues creating and posting videos on the web, driven to discover meaning of and through his craft. As his videos drew the attention of dancers, poets, performance artists, and other filmmakers, Kanak has discovered kinship with like-minded individuals who will stop at nothing to practice their art. This dedication in others has further inspired Kanak in his pursuit to create, both alone and alongside these new collaborators.

Kanak's collection of video work leads me to ask a number of questions. Why create so many videos over such a short period of time? Why commit to such a level of painstaking craftsmanship to each video? And most importantly, at the root of it all, what is he saying? To begin to appreciate Kanak's more or less twenty hours worth of videos and to assist me in answering these quandaries, I would like to discuss the work in terms of three complimentary, recurring characteristics of movement in the videos; individual, external, and universal.



Movement of the individual, as can be seen in dozens of Kanak's videos, is depicted through the literal movement of the camera. This movement, often realized with the use of motion control cranes and dollies, is more graceful than any unaided human hand or eye could produce. With machine-like precision, the camera eases forward and backward, rises and drops, or slides sidelong from one carefully chosen composition into another. Such regular use of this aesthetic suggests that Kanak identifies with the camera; not just the lens's viewpoint but the entire apparatus. That Kanak's world view is thusly tied begins to illuminate the overall thematic meaning of his collected world.

The external subject matter of Kanak's videos is often sites of urban or natural activity; of people or water. Only in some recent collaborations is this subject even aware of the camera's presence. Rather than direct this subject, Kanak 'redirects' it through manipulation of time, most notably using time lapse cinematography. Unlike the camera

apparatus, the objects flowing in time lie outside of Kanak's controllable sphere. They can be altered by never tamed.

In such videos as *A Week in Montana, Spring*, and *Cloud Formations 2* Kanak's camera and subject unify as he turns his sights to the sky. Time laps allows us to perceive the movement of clouds and even stars, essentially of the movement of the planet itself. Our earthly rotation is entirely beyond control and is only observable through cinematic manipulation. The universality of this action-less motion instill in us a conflicting sense of wonder and bewilderment, a detached belonging.

Kanak is constantly moving but the lack of classical 'action' reminds us that we can, should, and must move but at the same time, there is nowhere to go. The camera creeps forward, shark-like and inhuman, discovering new visions through its relentless control. The subjects move chaotically but, whether it is water or people, the flow begins



Intercepting a tornado.



In the Gallatin Valley, Montana.

to seem like a pattern; they become less frightening through the cinematic manipulation of them. The sky also reveals its patterns, but we are less comforted by the realization of how small we really are.

Kanak's approach to creative video is pragmatic; he suggests constant hard work if progress is desired, a goal he demands of himself. Like the well-calculated progress of his cameras through space and time, Kanak's aesthetic prowess crawls relentlessly onward, testing new tools and new limits with each short work. Even in the wake of cuts to the local film industry, he remained optimistic, believing that Saskatchewan people's do-it-yourself initiative will prevail for those committed to telling their stories. In time, I expect Kanak's work to become increasingly profound and, I hope eventually, to transcend the mere beauty and wonder of a changing world to become images that change the world itself.



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# Catching Up with Ron Jacobs

By Mazin Saffou

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Former Filmpool Production Manager

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“It was like somebody’s basement with a bunch of film gear”, laughs Ron Jacobs, an alumnus of the University of Regina’s film program and former production manager of the Saskatchewan Filmpool as he reminisces about the Filmpool’s early years. “It was an old house in Cathedral area and the equipment room was in the basement . . . It was like the Sixties. It was the alternative film scene,” he jokes, reflecting on the humble beginnings of the Filmpool at a time when the film industry in Saskatchewan, commercial, alternative, or otherwise was still trying to find its legs. Over the years, Ron has watched the industry grow and evolve from those humble days to what it is now, noting the early 1990s as a major transition. “One of the first film’s I worked on was *The Great Electrical Revolution* (Dir. Larry Bauman, 1990) and that was a big training program that got a lot of people here into the industry and thinking about bigger things,” he said.

Ron became involved in film after a year of studying computer science, citing an interview with Polish filmmaker Simon Turnowsky as a turning point, claiming that the director talked him into it, a decision that allowed Ron to indulge his fertile imagination. “There’s no growing up,” he proclaims. Ron remembers the excitement of the early days when modest grants would increase, which allowed new equipment and different projects than before, a thrilling time to be the equipment coordinator—the custodian of the new toys coming into the Filmpool, and cooperation was key.

“You relied a lot on each other to do your film . . . you wouldn’t have a whole lot of money so that was a big reason for the Filmpool being there because they could be the focal point”. One memorable project in particular for Ron was working as the cinematographer on Mark Wihak’s *Ballad of Don*



Ron Jacobs, 2012.



Ron Jacobs at the Saskatchewan Filmpool.



Scene from *Wheat Soup* (1987)

Quinn (1992), a short film about an aging punk rocker who wants to get the band back together and having it and his relationship all fall apart. “It’s one of those failed attempts at rejuvenation,” he says.

Another memorable project for Ron is Brian Stockton’s and Gerald Saul’s *Wheat Soup* (1987), Regina’s first locally produced feature-length film, a strange odyssey through a post-apocalyptic Saskatchewan prairie landscape where wheat has become a peculiar form of currency.

For Ron, the particular character of a Saskatchewan film is more difficult to trace than one may think. There are the usual tropes that one expects, like agoraphobia (as in Saul’s *Agoraphobia* in which a shut-in finally finds it within himself to step outside only to have a safe land on him), vast horizons and open skies, the dirt road with a car whizzing by on the highway, the atmosphere of contemplative isolation. And yet Ron emphasizes the realist style of shooting as perhaps the most quintessential element of Saskatchewan film.

“I think you can really see it in independent film . . . back when I was at the Filmpool, it was something shot outdoors to a large degree, and on location. Not on a set per se, it’s been shot at somebody’s house or on the street or where it’s happening.” Ron’s experience at the Filmpool opened the doors for him to work on commercial projects as well, in particular

the nature documentary series *Time and Place* with renowned nature documentary filmmaker Bob Long. For Ron these projects while initially not offering the personal touch of an independent film still required an astounding amount of devotion and perseverance. “Sometimes nature documentaries take more passion and dedication than something else because you could spend a lot of time sitting out in the middle of the bush waiting for an animal to do something that you could do with a trained animal in 10 minutes,” he jokes. During this time, Ron traveled all over the country with Long, shooting specific natural events, the most memorable for Ron being a venture to a little hamlet on the west coast of Victoria Island called Holman (traditionally known as Ulukhaktok) in the Inuvik region of the

Northwest Territories. Taking up shelter in this tiny Inuit village, Ron and crew were fortunate to be in Ulukhaktok during the summer solstice, a beautiful time of year where daylight persists almost all throughout the day. “Around that time it’s hard when the sun doesn’t go down because your body, without the darkness, it doesn’t want to stop. It doesn’t know when to slow down.” Ron was fortunate to witness the Eider Festival here where the Eider ducks native to the region migrate back home to their nesting grounds. He remembers the scene vividly, flocks of ducks gathering while the village inhabitants sled out onto the ice that is just starting to break up to witness the ducks’ return.

The villagers spend several days hunting the ducks and then celebrate with a lively festival. Ron recalls one day in particular, during his time in Ulukhaktok, where the fortunate experience of being in this secluded part of the world left a profound impression on him. “At one point it was a bit foggy, misty, and then it was snowing a bit . . . It had a sort of magical quality, a snowy Christmas day on June 21, and you’re standing up on the ice in the middle of the Arctic Circle with these people who live there all year and it’s just . . . it makes you realize not necessarily how good you have it, but how much you don’t know about so much of our country definitely and the world”.



Ron's experiences in Holman with Bob Long, working on *Time and Place*, would not have occurred if he didn't attain the skills and experience provided by the Filmpool.

For Ron, the Filmpool is particularly important for people in the province to get the resources and the skills they need to get a start in filmmaking, a chance to meet like-minded artists and others who will provide encouragement, assistance and support. Facing the possibility of a fading film industry in Saskatchewan following Brad Wall's controversial recent tax credit cut earlier in March, Ron is deeply concerned about this loss and the possibility of a crumbling film infrastructure in Saskatchewan.

But Ron knows that even in the most bleak of circumstances that things can change as he remembers working in the days when he and the other passionate local filmmakers of the 1980s set the way working out of a basement in that old house in Cathedral Village.

"When I was going to Film school the industry wasn't really happening yet...so I've seen it go full circle." While Ron is optimistic that this surge of creativity can happen again, he doesn't think that it will happen for a while, that if the industry wanes in the next couple of years, that it will take some time to rebuild the infrastructure and to entice filmmakers to stay in Saskatchewan as well as to entice government support, in which case the Filmpool will be more important than ever as a focal point for aspiring filmmakers and artists in visual media. "They really are the most important infrastructure to have...I mean if that's not here it's just that much harder and more expensive to do stuff here."

Ron has seen hard times come to the Filmpool before as he reflects upon the mid-nineties when it appeared as though the Filmpool was about to lose all of its funding and was going to be dissolved entirely following severe financial mismanagement at the Filmpool's upper levels. Ron credits the Board of Directors' discretion at the time in not shutting down shop completely but instead guiding



Ron Jacobs at the Saskatchewan Filmpool..

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Ron with former University of Regina film professor Richard Kerr.



Ron Jacobs at the Saskatchewan Filmpool.

the Filmpool through the process, a step-by-step investigation to find out what happened, and that those responsible for the mismanagement of funds were removed from any connection to the Filmpool.

Ron remembers this as a trying time as the Filmpool had to work very hard to hold on to its relationship

with funders which involved major restructuring in its organization. For him this crisis marks a turning point in the maturity of the Filmpool to where it is now.

While Ron is concerned about the potential decline of "It changed things; it made the Filmpool stronger in terms of its organization and its ability to handle difficult times. I think that's how serious that situation was, for [the Filmpool] to come out of it so strong, even stronger than before with relationships with funders and things like that . . . We don't talk about it much but I think it's important that people know it happened."

If the film industry in Saskatchewan following the tax cut he is still excited in the creative potential of independent film here. Currently there is the explosion of digital media that in the face of a significant tax credit cut allows for cheaper and easier exhibition and numerous exciting possibilities in post-production. In tandem with these changes is a passionate, media-savvy generation of filmmakers coming out of the University of Regina's film program. "It's like people are probably getting more education, not necessarily formal, but a lot of the people coming into the Filmpool are graduates of the U of R so they have a good basis for learning and working in the industry and their art form."

These days Ron Jacobs works for the local office of William F. Whites, a film rental company for commercial film while he continues his support and assistance for independent filmmakers. For Ron, the most rewarding aspect of working in film is the communal aspect, in helping others make their projects happen, citing smaller projects as the most fulfilling experiences. "I mean those ones can be more inspiring because I've sort of been there, done it all and I know exactly what they're going through and the fact that anything I can do for them is really a major help. That's my passion for film is being there to see that something valuable gets done. And if someone really has the passion to see it through then it's probably worth doing."



# Simply Stated Advocacy Matters

Jessica Riess

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**S**imply stated, the arts in all its disciplines are important. They strengthen social bonds and communities, they allow both groups and individuals a means to express themselves and they establish a sense of identity within a community that can be expressed at home and abroad:

*“Our culture, in all its diverse forms, is an important asset for maintaining our high quality of life, sustaining economic growth and building pride in our communities.”*

Dustin Duncan

Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport, 2010

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With this said, advocacy of the arts is also important. It can help elected representatives, institutions, service groups, community leaders and fellow citizens understand the impact of the arts and cultural sector and show how increased arts engagement and activities benefit their communities:

“[It] is time that all of us who care about the arts – both within and outside the arts community – join together and take action... [It] is not enough to preach to the converted. It is not enough to talk about this at arts conferences. The only way we will succeed in obtaining sustained investment in the arts – from all levels of government and the private sector- is by bringing the evidence and the arguments directly before the people who hold the purse-strings.”

John Hobday  
Director, Canada Council for the Arts, 2004  
Chalmers Conference

Nationally, cuts have been widespread. In the last Federal budget cuts were made to the National Film Board (6.68 million); the Canadian Broadcasting

Corporation (115 million); the Library and Archives Canada (9.6 million); Telefilm (10.6 million); and let's not forget – the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA), Canada's oldest and largest advocacy organization, who recently was forced to shut its doors after 67 years.

Provincially, artists have suffered a huge blow with the closure of SCN in 2010 and the more recent elimination of the Film Employment Tax Credit. The result of which has led to a great exodus of filmmakers, actors, and other artists from the province and just as many leaving the arts all together. As Robert Enright, cultural journalist and art critic, spoke to at the 2012 Arts Congress, “what happens over the next decade will be critical in determining the kind of culture we'll have in the future.”

This is not the first time the arts and culture sectors have faced serious funding crises, nor will it be the last.

In 1982, facing a severe funding crisis, an ad-hoc committee of thirteen arts organizations, known as the 1984 Committee, collaborated to secure a cultural policy and stable funding for arts organizations from the provincial government.

In 1984, the Committee was renamed the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance (SAA) and has expanded its mandate to embrace all parts of the arts community encompassed within SaskCulture and the Saskatchewan Arts Board. The reach of the SAA, through its membership, extends to individuals

and arts organizations located in all parts of the province, including urban, rural and northern areas, enabling the SAA to be representative of artists and arts organizations throughout Saskatchewan.

As a collective voice for the arts within the province, the SAA has concluded that to advocate more effectively the provincial “arts ecology” must be understood and articulated with hard numbers. The term “arts ecology”, over the last ten years, has become a common way to refer to the infrastructure of the arts and culture community, its local support system and the surrounding environment in which it all functions.

“Advocacy is speaking up, drawing a community’s attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution. Advocacy is working with other people and organizations to make a difference.”

CEDPA: Cairo, Beijing and Beyond: A Handbook on Advocacy for Women Leaders

After thirty years of advocating for the arts, the Saskatchewan Arts Alliance believes that understanding this provincial arts ecology is an important way to advance the arts in Saskatchewan. To do this, the organization has enlisted the help of a multi-disciplinary university-based and community-based team that includes partner organizations. As part of the Arts Ecology Research Project, the SAA is compiling a list of adult artists (18 years and over) that reside in Saskatchewan. The registry will be kept confidential, for SAA arts research purposes only. Those who self-declare as artists are asked to take part in the registry. Artist participation is critical. Simply stated, advocacy matters and by signing in to the Artist Registry artists will strengthen SAA advocacy initiatives.

To sign in to the registry, please visit [www.artsalliance.sk.ca](http://www.artsalliance.sk.ca).



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# Ecology, Community & Wisdom: What We Can Do

Nora G. Gardner B.A., B.Ed., M.Ed.

*Born: Regina, SK. Currently working at the University of Regina as a sessional lecturer with International students in the ESL Program. Nora Gardner is continuing her studies with an M.A. in sociology researching activism in the community in general and ecological citizenship and sustainable consumption in particular.*

That's the title of my latest video and this is the story of creating and premiering a pro-environmental documentary in Saskatchewan. The process of making such a work in this province weaved together the politics of independent low-budget video-making and activist concerns in reaction to what can at best be described as environmentally-destructive policies and practices under the present provincial and federal governments.

While I have plenty of theoretical knowledge handed down to me from film historian and Oscar-award winning director/editor Jean Oser (1908-2002) and some of his predecessors here in Saskatchewan as well as some latent practical experience gained from the video workshops with Sara Diamond and Paper Tiger TV that I organized in the 1980s, the experience over the past five years can only best be described as experimental in nature – which is not necessarily a bad way to go.

The project, that became known as Ecology, Community & Wisdom, was first begun after my

(then) nine-year old daughter, Andrea, and I heard Dr. Helen Caldicott speak for the second time at the University of Regina in March of 2007. At the end of her talk, Dr. Caldicott invited my daughter up on the stage with her to help “spread the word”. Also that evening, I spoke with a friend in the audience who informed me about a network of people based in Regina, who were connected provincially and interested in environmental protection and the ecology movement. The next day, my daughter who had taken Dr. Caldicott's request to heart informed her classmates and teachers about the talk on uranium nuclear energy production and

waste management. The idea for this project and the completion of a video was germinated then. mining in Saskatchewan and the harm caused by

I began taping from the viewpoint of my two daughters on Earth Day, April 22, 2007, at a celebration hosted by the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. Later, with the assistance of the Saskatchewan Filmpool Cooperative and Ian K. Rogers, I was able to conduct interviews with Malin Hansen and Denise MacDonald of Regina Eco-Living and a university professor, Patricia Miller-Schroeder, who encouraged feminist productions on environmental issues. For the most part, the treatment of this video project was from an eco-feminist and arts-activist perspective for educational purposes.

Throughout 2008 and 2009, I was able to compile a working copy that I worked on intermittently with the help of Shawn Bauche and Myek O'Shea.



Jim Harding speaks at the committee for future generations rally at Legislative blg in Regina - 2011



Ema and Andrea Gardner - Summer 2011

Unfortunately, the project sat dormant for another few years until it was resurrected through equipment deferrals and funding received from the Saskatchewan Filmpool and the National Film Board of Canada in 2011. This funding enabled me to complete some necessary updates including interviewing two representatives, Sue Deranger and Terri Sleeva, from a newly-formed group known as the Mother Earth Justice Advocates (MEJA), taping the Committee for Future Generations Walk in Regina, and hiring Angela Edmunds to bring my project to the fine-cut stage.

I must also thank Brett Bell and Berny Hi who gave their assistance in the eleventh hour before and since *Ecology, Community & Wisdom* premiered at the SEN Regina Environmental Film Festival on Earth Day, April 22, 2012 at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum.

To be sure, it was a meaningful day as any premiere is for an artist. However, to be able to premiere the video on the anniversary of its inception, Earth Day, was all the more meaningful to me as an environmental activist. I want to thank Rick Morrell and the Regina Environmental Film Festival Committee for

helping me to make the moment possible as well as Jim Elliott who sent out my press release to the media. Even before the festival began that morning, I was interviewed by Global News to get my response to the Suzuki Foundation's report that named Alberta and Saskatchewan as the worst environmental offenders in Canada. I had to say that I wasn't surprised by the statement made by the Suzuki Foundation given that the Saskatchewan Party government has eliminated both the Climate Change Secretariat and Office of Energy Conservation, made substantial cuts to renewable energy programs, has no plan to end over-reliance on coal-fired power plants and remains committed to maximizing oil sands exploitation. My mom saw the interview on the news at 6 p.m. that day. Now, could the day have been any more complete? I can't see how – it was perfect! Like the saying goes: "it takes a village to raise a child." And, well, it also takes a community to make and premiere an independent low-budget video – a piece of cake when you have the best. And so concludes the writing of one eco-feminist, arts-activist, experimental-documentarian and citizen.

Nora Gardner's recent videography:  
*abstract dharma*, 2007, experimental, 1 min.  
*Meditations*, 2007, experimental-documentary. 12 mins.  
*Breath/Snake Path - Dance & Rhythm*, 2008, experimental, 3 mins.  
*Ecology, Community & Wisdom*, 2012, documentary, 15 mins, 30 secs.





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