

Student films thesis on assassination

By NANCY LUSE
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Chip Selby was just a toddler when President John F. Kennedy was shot, but once he was old enough to study this part of history he was totally captivated.

Enough so that the 26-year-old University of Maryland film major made the assassination the subject of his master's thesis, producing a 55-minute film that recently was bought by a national cable company. Additionally, it was judged a winner in a film and video contest sponsored by the Council on International Non-Theatrical Events.

Through all the work that went into his project — the days strung together without sleep, the countless interviews — the conclusion that kept returning to Mr. Selby, and is reflected in his film, is that "I don't think we'll ever know the true story of how it happened or who did it.

"It's like working on a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle," where pieces are missing or are tossed in from another puzzle.

"There's not enough to get the

complete picture, but the one picture we do get is that the crime

As it happened

Exactly 25 years later to the minute, the A&E Cable Network (Frederick Cablevision Channel 32) will retelecast NBC's coverage of the assassination in a six-hour special, "JFK Assassination: As It Happened." At 1:56 p.m., Tuesday, Nov. 22, A&E will interrupt its regular programming at the same moment the NBC newsroom broke into its schedule 25 years ago.

The six-hour special includes reports from then-NBC correspondents Chet Huntley, David Brinkley, Robert MacNeil, Frank McGee and Edwin Newman, and comments from former President Dwight Eisenhower, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and many other world leaders.

The special will be repeated on Saturday, Nov. 26, beginning at 10:56 p.m. EST.

didn't happen the way the Warren Commission said it did," Mr. Selby said.

The creator of "Reasonable Doubt: The Single Bullet Theory and the Assassination of John F. Kennedy," said that "there were two conspiracies involved — one to kill the president and the other was what happened afterwards with the FBI and the secret service. They had noble intentions, I don't think it was deliberate. It was done to try and soothe the country, make everything OK... the government said let's protect the people, they don't really want to know."

Mr. Selby, often using hand gestures to emphasize what he was saying, said FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover was "obsessive" about sticking to the story that Lee Harvey Oswald "did it and did it alone."

Mr. Selby viewed a number of other assassination documentaries such as one contending it was the work of the Mafia, but was left unsatisfied, in part because of their

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Student films master's thesis on assassination of Kennedy

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sensational nature. He also devoured books on the subject, including those by Harold Weisberg.

"I began to realize he was the premier expert," Mr. Selby said of the Frederick author.

"He gave me some of his contacts" and others were located by Mr. Selby's search through documents for names, and later perusal of telephone books.

Interviews with six people are included in the Selby documentary, although he filmed a total of 10 people and talked to at least 100.

Some of his leads failed to pan out such as an attempt to interview the two FBI agents who were present for the autopsy on the president. "Neither would talk to me about it." He also had similar disappointment with the doctor who headed the autopsy team.

In the more than three years it took Mr. Selby to produce his film, he said he only once seriously considered giving up the project.

"I went to Pittsburgh to interview a forensic pathologist. It was the first interview I had conducted. The first time I had used a video camera. He was great," Mr. Selby said of the way the interview went.

Unfortunately, when he got the tape back, he discovered all sorts of technical problems. "It was awful." The interview had to be filmed again, but the pathologist "was pretty good about it."

During his work, he was nearly

broke. He had loans for graduate school, loans for living expenses and at one point was so wrapped up in the project that he quit his job. He remembered the meals of microwave popcorn.

His girlfriend, Sandy Svobada, and her family floated him a loan. She laughed. "We're not going to let him go," she said of the debt.

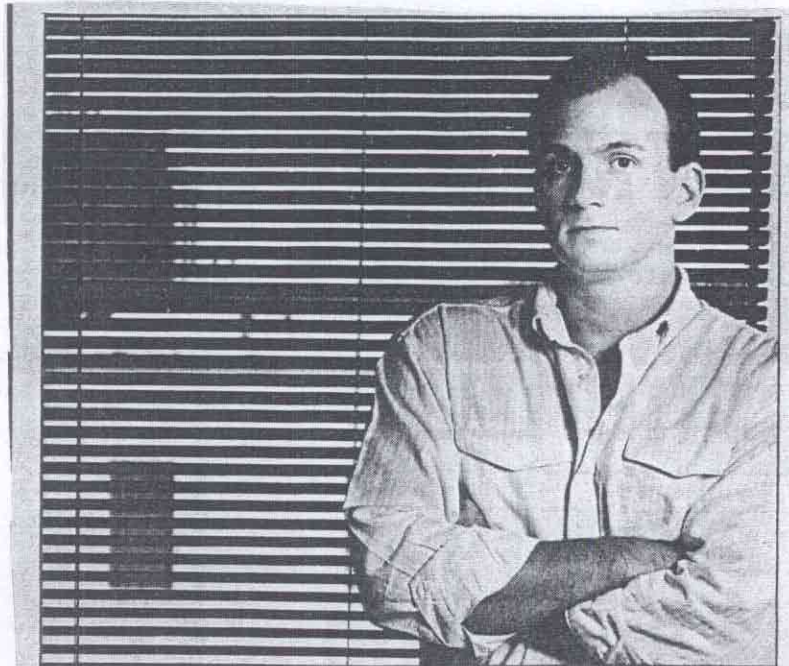
Originally, the film was to have cost \$7,000 but to sell it commercially, he had to pay for clips used from other films.

"You pay and pay through the nose," Mr. Selby said. The average cost of using previously filmed footage was \$30 per second. The total expense for the approximately hour-long documentary was \$19,000, but the narrator, Channel 9 newsmen Mike Buchanan, did the work without charge.

In addition to the cash outlay, there was the time. In the three months he spent editing film, he was in a lab from 9 o'clock at night until 5 a.m., the odd hours necessary to avoid conflicting with scheduled classes.

"Reasonable Doubt" was finished in time for the 25th anniversary of the JFK slaying and this past weekend was aired by the Arts and Entertainment Network, joining a line-up of other television specials for the anniversary.

By this time, he admitted being a bit weary of the subject but, "I'll watch it all because I'm interested in it. . . I'll always be interested in it."



Staff photo by Kelly Hahn

A documentary about the John F. Kennedy assassination was produced by University of Maryland graduate student Chip Selby.