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Interview Project: Part 1

Background Research

1. The Interviewee:

I chose to contact a man named Carl Gundestrup. He was referred to me by a mutual friend at my church who knows that I am studying film production. He suggested that I contact Carl because he has many years of experience working in film production in Utah doing lighting and electrical work. I contacted him by phone because my friend only had his phone number and not an email address. I will interview him at his home because that was his request and it will be easier for him.

2. Career Research:

I'm focusing on learning more about film production, specifically the experience and education needed to become a Director of Photography. Back in 1998-2001 I attended college but didn't have a clear idea of what I wanted to major in. I took a lot of general education classes, none of them really got me very passionate and excited except for my Introduction to Film class. I was in the process of applying to that major when I got married. I decided to quit school and find a full time job so my wife and I could start and support a family.

After years of working my way up the customer service chain at UPS I found myself with nowhere else to progress to, and really unhappy with my work. As a family, we decided it was time for me to go back to school and film production became my focus. It is still the one thing that I get excited talking about, and I wake up looking forward to what the work will be that day when I'm filming something.

I've gained some knowledge about the role of the Director of Photography from my film production classes here at SLCC and from my instructors. I've had conversations with one of my teachers, Mark Davis, who worked in the camera department in Hollywood for 20 years. I've also consulted a book, "What I really want to do on set in Hollywood." It's written by cameraman Brian Dzyak and he gives an explanation of each crew position, what their duties are, what their average work day is like, how they get hired, how they move up to other positions, and how much they get paid.

Directors of Photography and independent workers. They will usually be a member of a guild and will also have agents who can help them find and secure work. They are primarily hired through word of mouth or by being asked to work again with people they've worked with before successfully. Usually the decision to hire you comes down to the producer and the director. Starting Directors of Photography can be as low as \$100-200 a day working 12 hour days, six days a week. A small budget feature with union involvement can earn you between \$3,000-\$7,000 a week. Famous Directors of Photography can basically negotiate their own salaries, and can be as high as \$25,000 a week.

Interview Plan

1. Opening:

Hi, Mr. Gundestrup! Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I never knew that someone who worked in the movie business lived so close to me.

As I mentioned on the phone the other day, the reason I called is so that I can interview you on your career in the lighting department for film. It's an assignment for my communication class, but also an area of personal interest to me. I'm studying film production and hoping to obtain work in the film business after school, and really want to get someone else's opinion and advice. I'll be asking questions about how you got started in this business, your schedule, continuing education, and impact on your family life.

I'll be writing a few notes to jog my memory later, but please feel free to keep talking. I don't want it to distract or interrupt you. The interview should last between 15-30 minutes. Are you ready?

2. Body:

Topic 1: Getting Started in the Film Business

First, I'd like to find out how you got started in the film business.

1. What made you decide to choose this as a career, and specifically to specialize in lighting? (Primary, Open)

Has your work experience been more as a Gaffer/Electrical, or as a Grip? (Secondary, Closed)

2. How did you get started as a (Gaffer, or Grip?) (Primary, Open)

Would you start the same way if you could do it over again? (Secondary, Closed)

What would you do differently? (Secondary, Open)

3. I've been told that having a college degree is not a requirement to find work in film. That it is more about working hard, making personal contacts, and marketing yourself. How do you feel about obtaining a college degree? (Primary, Open)

Did you obtain a college degree? (Secondary, Closed)

4. Have you had to purchase your own equipment to do your job as a Gaffer/Grip? (Primary, Closed)

What have you had to buy? (Secondary, Closed)

How much has it cost you to purchase it over the years? (Secondary, Closed)

5. What types of knowledge and skills would I need to gain before I could work as a Gaffer/Grip? (Primary, Open)

How did you obtain these skills? (Secondary, Open)

Topic 2: Your Typical Work Day

Now that I know a little more about how you got started, I'd like to discuss what your typical work day is like.

1. What can you tell me about a typical day of work as a Gaffer/Grip? (Primary, Open)

What tasks do you enjoy the most? (Secondary, Open)

What tasks do you enjoy the least? (Secondary, Open)

2. What is your work typical work schedule like? (Primary, Open)

Have you ever found conflicts with your work schedule and your personal life? (Secondary, Closed)

How have you typically handled these types of conflicts? (Secondary, Open)

3. I'm interested in how this career might interact with my family life. When I spoke with you on the phone, you mentioned that you were married and had children. If you were scheduled to work and had a family emergency, like an illness, would you be able to not go to work that day, and still expect your job to be held for you? (Primary, Closed)

Are there anything significant events in your families lives that you've chosen to miss because of feeling like you needed to work? (Secondary, Closed)

How does that make you feel? (Secondary, Open)

Topic 3: The Future, Trends in the Film Business

Now that I know a little bit more about the work itself, I'd like to discuss any future trends in the film business that you feel are important.

1. What trends do you see impacting film workers in the next 5 years? (Primary, Open)

What can current and future workers do to adapt to these changes? (Secondary, Open)

2. Do you see a big impact as the industry moves away from film to HD Video? (Primary, Closed)

How would a switch from film to video impact the work duties, knowledge, and skills of a Gaffer/Grip? (Secondary, Open)

Topic 4: Clearinghouse Questions

1. Are there subjects we haven't discussed that you think I need to be aware of? (Primary, Open)

2. Can you think of anyone else I could interview to get more information about becoming a Director of Photography? (Primary, Closed)

3. Closing:

Well, that's all the questions that I have right now. Thanks so much for setting aside some time to speak with me. You've been a great help, and I've learned a lot. You've helped me to see the pros and cons of making this a career choice, and you've also helped me to complete my Communication assignment. In order for me to get credit for the assignment I need to have you fill out an evaluation form. If you could be completely honest in your evaluation, whether good or bad, I would appreciate it. Your comments won't affect my grade, but I can't receive credit for completing the assignment until my professor receives it. I have a preaddressed and stamped envelope for you, if you wouldn't mind completing this and mailing it within the next 2-3 days. If you could attach a business card if you have one, that would be great.

Again, thank you so much for your time and it's been a pleasure to meet you.