

# HOME

a documentary  
about  
four families

by  
Julie Gustafson  
and  
John Reilly

with Nathaniel Merrill

Funded by:

The National Endowment for the Arts  
The New York Council for the Humanities  
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Produced by Global Village

Presented by the Television Laboratory  
of WNET/THIRTEEN

To be aired by

Public Broadcasting Service and WNET/13  
November 4, 1979, at 10:00PM.

Check your local station for an exact listing.

Consultants to the project:

Dr. John Demos  
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Designer: June Manton



JOHN REILLY  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

# GLOBAL VILLAGE

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454 BROOME STREET, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013 · 212 966-7526

## HOME

By Julie Gustafson and John Reilly  
Produced by Global Village

A Ninety-Minute Videotape Documentary Special  
for National Public Television Broadcast

Home by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, humanistically explores home and family through important moments in the lives of four different families: the birth of a child, the death of a parent, a marriage, and growing old. The impetus for the program comes from the producers belief that one of the problems in modern life is that many of the personal moments and functions of the family have been removed from the home and placed in the hands of institutions or been lost altogether. The following descriptions tell something of the families included in the tape and indicates some of the issues raised and conclusions drawn.

Part 1: Birth of a Child. "Yes, what else but home?" \* Among the life processes taken out of the home is birth. Part 1 portrays Irene and Barry, a young Jewish couple from Brooklyn who gave birth to a first child in a hospital setting. In preparing for their second child, they choose an alternate method. They rebel against the lack of intimacy and family feeling in the hospital birth and choose instead to give birth in a small maternity center where Barry could be involved in the natural delivery and where their first child and family friends could come and visit freely.

Part 2: Growing Older/Nursing Home. "It all depends on what you mean by home." The idea of hospital and out of home care for adult, healthy people is a relatively recent one (50 to 70 years). In Part 2 we see 95-year old Lena who has the salty manner and bearing of a great New England lady and who was born and bred in Greenport, Long Island where she lives now in a nursing home. She

\* Each section is introduced by a line, quoted here, from Robert Frost's poem, "The Death of the Hired Man."

is forced by age and her two children's need for independence to make a home of a nursing home. The conflicts Lena and her family feel over this situation are dramatically portrayed.

Part 3: Marriage. "Home is the place where, when you have to go there,/they have to take you in."

With the high rate of divorce and the seeming reluctance to marry (there is less of a certainty in our society that people who are in love will marry), the question of marriage and the meaning of its commitment is a large issue. In Part 3, Dee and Lee, a 30-ish Black couple, are preparing to marry. Dee, the bride, is divorced, having married before at a very early age. She had two children by that marriage and she has raised them alone. Dee and Lee plan a large wedding. In their case, the meaning they find in the commitment of marriage is the establishment of roots, the establishment of a home.

Part 4: Death of a Parent. "I should have called it/ Something you somehow haven't to deserve."

By and large, people who are seriously ill before death are forced into extended hospitalization where the emphasis is on treatment of the disease rather than the emotional concerns of the dying individual. Part 4 is the story of a family who determines they will make their dying mother's sense of well-being more important than personal agendas. Ben, the second child of three in an Irish Catholic family, gives up his job, moves into his mother's apartment, and cares for her during the last few months of her life.

Home is offered to the national public television system through WNET in New York. Funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York Council for the Humanities. Projected broadcast date is early 1979.

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## KAY GARDELLA



**T**HE BEE GEES are warming up for their first television special Thursday, Nov. 15, on NBC (8:30 p.m.), but they're not expecting miracles in the record sales department. In fact Robin Gibb — he's the one with the flaming red hair — says, "TV isn't an important medium. Radio can double sales, but I don't think TV increases sales."

Robin, who has been performing with his brothers Maurice and Barry for 20 years since they started lip-synching records in Manchester, England, is a laid-back type, almost noncommittal. He was with Molly, his attractive wife of 12 years, the other day when he discussed the special which he and his producer-writer Stuart Birnbaum were working on.

According to the Birnbaum, the 90-minute outing will have great scope, covering the entire spectrum of the group's career including recording sessions, their recent 38-city tour, how they live and a generous sampling of their albums. They've sold 50 million, according to Robin, in the past three years and 100 million over a five-year period.

**IF THE RECORD** industry is nosediving it hasn't had any impact on the Bee Gees, says Robin, who attributes the drop to the escalating cost of gasoline. Their recent tour, he said, was the biggest. Some 56,000 packed Dodger Stadium and 46,000 Pontiac Stadium to see them.

Their "Saturday Night Fever" theme music, Robin said, would have come out even if the film had not been made. Robin said they had already written "If I Can't Have You" and "How Deep Is Your Love."

Robin agrees with TV critics that for musical groups

the sound is the biggest problem in television. "It's one of the reasons," he says, "television has never done justice to groups." He's hoping things will be different Nov. 15. He exudes a confidence that could easily be interpreted as indifference.

The group appeared on "Music for UNICEF," a special earlier this year on NBC. Their contribution was "Too Much Heaven." But Nov. 15 is all theirs. Producer is Ken Ehrlich, director Lou Horvitz. Executive producers are Robert Stigwood and David Frost.

At first glance it looked like pretty stiff medicine the Federal Communications Commission's panel on children's television doled out to the industry Tuesday — a demand for five hours a week of educational programs for preschoolers and half that for school age children.

From early in the morning until prime time hours we're inundated with serials and game shows. So it's not too much to ask of a network to put one hour a day on something for the small fry. Had they been wise enough to lock into "Sesame Street," which public broadcasting airs, they might not have found themselves in this predicament. Why not do some "Sesame Street" reruns early in the morning?

FCC Chairman Charles Ferris noted that television is dealing with its third generation of preschool children. The situation has been studied to death. It's time to act.

If you're home Sunday, and looking for a program that cuts right to the marrow, we recommend Channel 13's "Home" at 10 p.m. This remarkable hour, produced by Global Village in association with the Television Laboratory, will move you to tears of joy and sorrow.

You will see a baby born at home. You'll visit with Lena Gardiner, a vital 94-year-old widow adjusting to life in a nursing home. You'll see a second-time-round couple insisting on an elaborate wedding as a symbol of their commitment. And the most heartbreaking segment of all shows a son taking care of his mother who is wasting away with cancer.

Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, two independent producers, are to be congratulated. Their hour is award material.

# DAILY @ NEWS

New York, Friday, November 2, 1979

# Susan Slobojan



## A 2½-year project — worth every minute

By SUSAN SLOBOJAN  
News Staff Writer

"Home" is the sort of program you'll never see on a television network. Too much of a downer. Not fast-enough paced. Wouldn't pull a high enough rating.

It is also the sort of program that makes you rejoice in the existence of public television. The sort that makes you glad that out there somewhere, there still are people who will sink three years of their lives and a lot of their own money in a private, intimately personal artistic vision.

"Home" is easily the best documentary I have seen on television this year. Created, produced and in part

### The TV column

financed by independent filmmakers John Reilly and Julie Gustafson, it airs tonight at 10 on Channel 56.

It is about the changes 20th-century life has wrought in the American family structure. Specifically, it deals with how the focus has shifted, for many momentous occasions and events, from the home to that of various institutions.

NOT SO LONG ago, we had our babies and tended our elderly at

home. Now we have our babies in hospitals and send our ailing loved ones there to die. We put our elderly in nursing homes, hopefully to live. "Home" is about four families who are searching for a different route.

In four individual portraits, we witness momentous occasions in their lives. We watch a widow growing old in a nursing home; a couple having their second baby at a center staffed with midwife-nurses; another couple marrying in the traditional manner; and a son who tends his terminally-ill mother himself, rather than allow her to die in a hospital.

Some of the segments are uplifting; others are heart-rending. All are successful, mostly because of the producers' minimalist approach. Reilly and Gustafson have the perfect touch for this material: They never preach, and they ask no leading questions. Mostly they remain off-camera, allowing the story to tell itself.

In "Growing Old," 94-year-old Lena Gardiner sums up her nursing home experience concisely and immediately. "It's awful when you grow old," she begins flatly. Why? "You can't do what you like when you have something happen to you."



Lena Gardiner, 94, with 'Home' producer Julie Gustafson and her baby, from the program's 'Growing Old' segment.

Continued on Page 88

# Worth every minute

Continued from Page 68

LENA LIVES IN what looks like a wonderful place. They have monthly birthday parties in her nursing home; good, hot meals three times a day; a beauty parlor staffed with kindly, considerate people. Her son, who lives nearby, visits once a week; her daughter, who lives out of town, visits when she can.

Yet all it takes is one communal meal, at a cheery table set with charming appointments, to see what's wrong. Lena lives in unnatural isolation. The only people she sees are as old as she is; when her son and daughter visit, the place somehow makes them treat her like a child. It's all very nice, we quickly see, but it isn't home.

Home is where George Donnelly decides his cancer-stricken mother, Elizabeth, deserves to die. In the program's final segment, "Death of a Parent," Elizabeth asks her children not to send her away for the two to six months she has left. They agree, and George moves into her apartment. "She has never turned her back on anybody in her life," he reasons simply.

We watch as George feeds his mother, changes her, wakes up in the middle of the night with her and sees to it that her family and friends are at her bedside when she dies. "She knew we were there, because she cried," he says when it's over. "I wiped tears from her eyes. It's all worth it — just for that one-tenth of a second."

"HOME" HAS ALREADY received

major awards at Atlanta and Texas film festivals. In addition, it is one of few American documentaries to be selected for screening at the International Television Screening Conference in Milan.

But the prizes don't tell half the story. "Home" was more than 2½ years in the making. That time, and the producers' obvious loving care, make it an exotic and vanishing breed in American television. Watch now, for extinction may come sooner than you think.



Newlyweds Delores Seay and Lee Marshall are featured in the well-done documentary 'Home.'

THE DETROIT NEWS  
DETROIT, MICHIGAN

November 6, 1979

Continued

THE TUBE TONIGHT

# No Place Like 'Home'

Once in a great while, a television program comes along that bolts down all the escape hatches and requires its audience to think—perhaps even to reexamine a few long-standing values and traditions.

"Home," a poignant, forthright, occasionally gut-wrenching 90-minute video documentary (airing tonight at 11 on KCET) is one such experience.

In its four vignettes—touching on the individual milestones of birth, aging, marriage and death—"Home" makes a persuasive case that Americans have put too much stock in the sanctity of institutions—that we have, over the years, surrendered too much control of our own destinies.

"Home" advocates alternatives: A young couple make the decision to have their second baby in an out-of-hospital maternity center, assisted by a midwife and surrounded by family; a 95-year-old widow stoically lives out her years in a nursing home, only occasionally letting down her guard to reveal the hurt and humiliation.

A divorcee with two young children decides on a traditional church ceremony for her second marriage, a formal bonding of her commitment; and a 34-year-old man moves in with his mother, who is terminally ill with cancer, to care for her during the last few weeks of her life.

The segments on aging and death are blunt and unadorned. There is little playing to the camera. This is real life going on here—as it is with the other two vignettes, although they are decidedly more upbeat.

The common thread that links all four is the somewhat ironic reaffirmation of another institution—one that has tottered on shaky ground of late—and that is the institution of the family as a single, supportive, self-contained entity. "Home" makes a strong case for its continued reinforcement.

—JAMES BROWN

LOS ANGELES TIMES  
Los Angeles, California  
November 6, 1979

Not for media librarians only . . .

## The "Best" of the Best: Award-winning Films and Videotapes of 1981

### Lifestyles

Every new decade brings with it changes in attitudes about what may best be summarized as "lifestyles." Some dramatic shifts are evident today in our views about the family as its members redefine their roles, relationships, and responsibilities to each other, and the family unit struggles to redefine its authority and responsibility vis-à-vis social institutions. *Home, a four-part videotape by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly*, explores how four families approach some important moments in their lives. The tape opens brightly with the birth of a baby, not in the sterile atmosphere of a hospital but in a home-like clinic staffed by midwives. In contrast to this happy scene, we next encounter a bitter elderly woman ensconced in a nursing home by a family with "no room" for her. The third family is a newly merged one, formed by the marriage of two divorced blacks. The last family awaits death as a young son cares for his dying mother at home. Although the tape is flawed by occasionally banal camera work and tedious real-time editing, the four vignettes effectively argue the case for maintaining traditional family responsibilities and values rather than surrendering them to monolithic, impersonal institutions.

Another side of this argument is seen in Ira Wohl's *Best Boy*, the academy-award winning documentary about Wohl's retarded cousin. Philly is 52 years old and dependent on his elderly parents when Ira intervenes and encourages his cousin to move beyond his sheltered home environment to attend school, summer camp, and finally settle in a supervised community residence for retarded adults. Here we're shown an institution providing Philly with the independence and self-sufficiency he lacks at home, but not without our questioning at what expense to the feelings of Philly's widowed mother. Like *Home*, *Best Boy* is sure to get discussions going.

How to live well on less than \$2000 a year was the subject of 20-year-old Dolly Freed's book, *Possum Living*, and Dolly is the subject of Nancy Schreiber's film *Possum Living*. Dolly is an outspoken, ingenious, confident, and decidedly unconventional young woman. Though we see her supervising

meals, shopping for and storing provisions, gardening, and combing thrift shops in quest of her "no frills" way-of-life, it is the complex characters and relationships of the Freed family that command Schreiber's and our attention. When her parents divorced, Dolly decided to stay with her father. Out of work because of layoffs in the aerospace industry and unwilling to accept government assistance, Frank Freed decided to try living off the land. Dolly quit high school and joined her dad in improvising their living. Schreiber admits the implicit rivalry between Dolly and her mom without comment, including a dinner visit where her mother boasts, "You'll never be the cook your mother is." Glimpses of Dolly with her boyfriend appear, too, without comment, contributing further to the tantalizing puzzle of Dolly's personality. She is shown off at her best when promoting her book on "The Merv Griffin Show." The juxtaposition of Hollywood glamour and superficiality in the person of the smooth talk show host with Dolly's plain-spoken, forthright views on simplicity and economic self-reliance is both funny and richly illustrative of the wide margins defining life in America today.

Three young women who are very different from Dolly Freed are the focus of *Teenage Girls: Three Stories*, cinema verité portraits of girls living in one of New York's inner city neighborhoods. The bleakest life belongs to 14-year-old Paulette. Least articulate of the trio, Paulette's defeat and sullen withdrawal from her mother's sharp tongue signifies a deep discontent with her life. She comes from a poor, black, single-parent home: her mother had her first child when she was Paulette's age. Paulette at 15, and three more children in almost as many years. Paulette yearns to escape her mother's angry outbursts, but knows that marriage—the only "out" she can envision—would only lead her to a life like her mother's, perpetuating her unhappiness.

Sharon is an attractive, bright 17-year-old whose mother is dying of can-

cer. She coldly avoids her mother's gaze and touch and is cruel in her retorts. In one uncomfortable exchange between them, Sharon caustically complains about her mother's bad breath, refusing to acknowledge the truth: "I'm rotting," her mother blurts out, adding that it's the cancer, and not bad breath, that smells. Sharon's uncaring attitude scarcely conceals the fright and confusion of emotions stirred by her mother's "desertion" of her. Her answer is to leave first, not for a teen marriage, but to study in Israel.

The last teenager is Susie, an exuberant 15-year-old with less apparent conflicts in her life than her predecessors. It is not her mother but her older sister Rosa's husband who is the source of tension here. Rosa married while in high school and now lives at home with her baby and out-of-work macho husband. Like Paulette, Susie knows at close hand the consequences of early marriage and is determined to live her life first and wait for the "right man" to come along. These three portraits are more like rough sketches with unfinished, open-ended conclusions, intended by the producers to stimulate discussion. There is plenty of material here to spark serious thought.

Searching for a means of self-expression, a way of forming ties with the past and the future, women have often found the answer in quilting. *Quilts in Women's Lives* looks at the folk art and how it functions for several different women today. For Grace Earl, "It's like love," and for Nora L. Condors, "It's just like praying." Radha Donnell found herself suddenly being taken seriously by all the people in her life as she discovered her own voice in quilting. Whether displaying the exquisite quilts made by their grandmothers or their own beautiful handwork made for grandnieces, women demonstrate not only the extraordinary diversity of quilts but a variety of meanings—from artistic expression to spiritual journey—whom quilting provides.



# The Miami Herald

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## PBS Special Hits Home

By **STEVEN REDDICLIFFE**  
Herald Television Writer

"Home," the superb documentary airing tonight at 8 on WPBT (Ch. 2), is about love for life, in sickness and in health, till death do us part.

In four segments — "A Birth," "Growing Old," "Marriage" and "Death of a Parent" — "Home" reports on "the meaning of home and family in an age in which nursing homes and hospitals have taken over territory formerly occupied by mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, neighbors and friends.

A production of the Television Laboratory, the ambitious program out of WNET, New York's public station, "Home" was taped by John Reilly and Julie Gustafson in a simple, eloquent video verite style.

"HOME" IS witness to a birth at a New York childbearing center

("The sweet sounds," says the proud father on hearing his baby's cries), captures the sadness and joy at a home for the elderly, goes to a giddy wedding and records the actions of a family caring for a terminally ill relative.

There is love in all of these portraits, and, very often, a contagious enthusiasm for life. "That's the foot that used to kick me," says a delighted mother as she wiggles her baby's toes. A woman about to be married says of her husband-to-be, "He's the first male person I've met in years that I can say I really need."

Lena, the woman at the nursing home, is not at all pleased to be there, but her daughter's visit appears to be a happy occasion.

George, who takes care of his dying mother at her home, says the idea of nursing homes offended him, and that perhaps his presence would be the "spark" that keeps her going.

AT ONE POINT, a woman says, "I have more trust in my family than in institutions," but that doesn't seem to be the sole message of this production.

In one touching scene after another, "Home" says that home is where the heart is.

Citing low ratings, WPLG (Ch. 10) has canceled "The \$20,000 Pyramid" and replaced it with "Play the Percentages," which debuts today at noon. Geoff Edwards is host. . . Today also marks the debut of a new set for Ch. 10's news shows. Color it earth-tone tan and brown. . .

To celebrate its 25th year on the air, WPEC (Ch. 12), the ABC affiliate in West Palm Beach, is featuring a wonderful grab bag of vintage TV programs this week. Airing at 9 a.m., 5:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m., the shows include "The Millionaire," "You Are There," "San Francisco Beat," "The Twilight Zone," "December Bride" and "Our Miss Brooks." Because television so often denies its past (perhaps an acknowledgement that programming really was better then), this series is especially welcome.



# Video Pioneers

## HOME: Four Portraits by Global Village

By Ron Sutton

*HOME* is a quartet of four video portraits on birth, aging, marriage, and death, by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly of Global Village. Each of the vignettes stands alone, yet each is linked to the other by the central theme.

For it is a home-like, natural atmosphere that Barry and Irene seek for the birth of their second child. The expectant mother says quite candidly to the video camera, "I have more trust in myself and family than institutions." That comment sounds a

quiet but recurring theme that reverberates throughout all four of the portraits. There is some off-hand criticism of the institutional birth of the first child but the emphasis is positive, focused on the caring and knowing involvement of the whole family in the birth.

It is in a maternity center that this NY couple will have their birthing experience. They are shown participating in all phases of the process from prenatal examinations to bundling their new child



home twelve hours after she emerges into the world ... a world peopled by mid-wife, assistant, father and the strained, tired but joyous mother. It's quite an experience for the viewer to share and illustrates one of the precious values of small format video. This format can go into situations like this and leave them relatively intact. We're there but we haven't taken over. There is no sense of "let's pretend we're not here." Questions are asked, and acknowledged by the video makers. People are obviously aware of the camera's presence at times. But the presence is gentle and unobtrusive as it mediates the experience for us. Seeing bear-like Barry cradle his newly born daughter just moments after her birth, watching the older sister match her hand to the newborn baby's hand, and hearing Irene's exclamation "Oh, I'm not pregnant anymore!!" are their own reward.

The theme of the larger family is introduced as both sets of grandparents are drawn together the day after the birth to see the baby at the couple's home. In this scene we find there is not universal approval for the new approach to birth. One also senses in these scenes at home that some problems may emerge with the first child in relation to the very special quality of the second child's birth. But the fade out shot of Barry, Irene and the new born babe totally absorbed in one another on the wide double bed offers a beautiful closing for the first movement of this video quartet.

The second portrait presents a more somber picture concerning *HOME*, or in this case, the lack of one for the main protagonist, Lena. She is a woman of 95 years who lives in a New England nursing home. Some attention is paid to her son and daughter and their involvement or rather lack of it in her life, but the piece doesn't carp or preach — just lays out the facts and feelings. Given the present drift of our culture — especially the "I must live my own life" credo of the seventies — one simply must prepare to live out one's own last days in such surroundings. That is deftly brought to bear in the portrait, understated, but there nonetheless. For if we can't or won't have our mothers and fathers live with us, it appears unreasonable to expect our children to turn 180 degrees and take us into their homes in twenty years... a harsh projection quietly unveiled.

This episode is nicely paced. We meet and know Lena and she comes across as a likeable person — someone we would enjoy knowing and visiting with as a friend. But the loneliness and feeling of abandonment are there, caught by wisps of conversation such as "I cried a lot when I first came here but then got used to it." You learn this early in the piece, then later experience Lena as such a strong person in her own right that to remember that she cried when coming to the home is quite a jolt. This type of subtle but firm resonance seems a hallmark of Gustafson Reilly's work — a hallmark that I like and respect.

There is no sardonic put down of either her son or daughter. They're shown quite candidly as troubled by their mother's situation. They want to help but can't see their way clear to take Lena to their respective homes. So she, strong, sturdy lady that she is, must survive in this "home."

And this home, never prodded or poked as in some video investigations, is shown as trying to deal with its "family." A mix-up with a patient regarding what she can and cannot eat shows the way in which personal needs are "handled" in institutions. She is told she can have only one potato because she is diabetic. That is upsetting to the elderly guest — not the loss of the second potato, but the wrong label, "diabetic." Even though a breezy and easy supervisor corrects the mistake when challenged — the guest and viewer are left with an uneasy feeling that such mix-ups could be fatal if medication were involved. Indeed it is a "home" with limitations. Lena looks so strong as she blows out not the proper one but two candles on her 95th birthday cake — so strong and sturdy but still without a real home.

The third portrait is one involving a marriage that establishes a home. We first see the couple as they pick up their marriage license and follow them until they stroll into the soft night darkness after their wedding reception. It is Delores' second marriage, Lee's first. They are older and her two boys, about 9 and 11, are involved. The vignette brings out all the right nuances — the couple's love for one another, Lee's respectful but nurturing relationship with her children, De-



lores' warm and caring feelings toward her parents, even the cool and funning attitude of Lee's bachelor friends on the eve of the wedding.

The wedding is in a Church and in color with lights (cables were clearly visible in one shot). The service itself felt authentic but staged. It seemed abbreviated, "done for the camera," and contained no prayers or singing. It didn't work for me quite as nicely as two other moments in this segment. One of these occurs when the two boys walk in on a marriage ceremony being played out on a TV soap opera. The camera catches them as they act out the ceremony themselves, the older one remarkably accurate as he recites the ritual. The part concerning "If any man knows any reason these two should not be joined . . ." has special poignance for stepchildren and is picked up and given that special resonance when it occurs again later in the actual service.

The other powerful video image for me is of Lee and Delores dancing at the wedding reception. It is lovely, soft, black and white imagery and the hushed voice of Lee can be heard saying, "... but this is paradise." Only the stroll of the wedding party into the soft night's darkness exceeds the tender beauty of that shot in the tape.

All that happens here is the basis for a "home" — not one without stress and problems — finances, fidelity, Lee's relationship to the boys, the parents, etc. — but a home for living, warm, feeling human people.

And watching the effect of warmth and life slipping away from a home is the theme of the last tape segment. It took guts to end with this episode. True, death is last for us all, but no one enjoys facing that, especially on TV. Actually, the focus of the last piece is not really on the mother who is dying—it can't be really for she is in agony, comatose, and terminally ill with ravaging cancer. Instead, it centers on a young man, George, who takes the brunt of responsibility in caring for his mother as she dies in her own home over a two to three month period. The other children and the woman's sisters help, but George is the central figure.

The fine moments in this segment alternate between watching respectfully and at a tasteful distance as George cares for his mother's every biological and emotional need — and having George talk to us about why he is doing what he is doing.

"She never turned her back on anyone. We couldn't let her death occur in an institution."

He feels he is her last strand of hope. As long as he hangs in and admittedly pretends she may

improve, he feels she continues to fight for life. He does not talk to her realistically of death, but he is there facing the disease and death in all its ugliness with her. None of that ugliness is shown to us graphically but it is felt nonetheless and quite powerfully communicated in what is edited in and out.

George phones the family as the sensed moment of her death approaches and a freeze frame with title tells us she did indeed die later that night. That's as close as we get and as close as I wanted to be to actually watching a person die.

Intercut with the funeral and burial are further interviews with George. He describes the end for us, how all was the way it should be. "Her heart just stopped; suddenly there was no pulse." He tells how she cried and knew all the children were there with her before she died.

Later George says it was important to be with his mother. He felt his father slipped through his fingers without having the sense that he had a son, an ongoing male heir to carry his line forward. George admits he tried to stay close to his mother partly to relieve his guilt pangs at not being there when his father died. The shots at graveside are not overdone and they could have been. Finally, as expected, there is the final one of George, standing to the side by himself. For me, the powerful moments came before these ending shots. They are in the resonance again of hearing the 20 odd year old youth, wearing the inscribed tee-shirt with "Jabberwock—The Ultimate Trip," rap about himself and then watching him change his mother's bedding after a massive hemorrhage. In that juxtaposition and resonance we can see true adulthood emerge.

And that's the power of the entire tape for me. Not the content, though it is well-chosen. Not the style, though most shots are nicely done and a few are stunning in their portraiture. Not in jarring investigative reporting that results in smug conclusions, though some social comment is there. For me, it is the resonance—the catching of life almost unaware so it can live again in our perception of the particular moment: Irene saying, "I'm not pregnant anymore," Lena's crying and then adjusting, Delores' boys enacting the wedding ceremony and George coming into a mature adulthood many of us still grope for in relation to death in our family. This is the power of *Home* for me and indeed the very power of video portraiture itself.

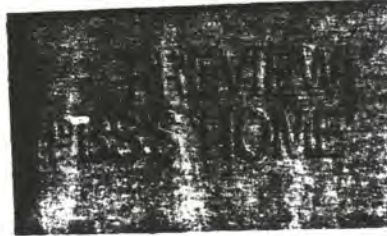
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# GLOBAL VILLAGE

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## VIDEO DOCUMENTARY: "Home" in the Global Village

Scheduled for broadcast over the Public Broadcasting Service network on Sunday, November 4 at 10pm, "Home," a collaborative effort of independent producers Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, is a 90-minute video documentary revealing significant experiences in the lives of four families—the birth of a child, growing old, a marriage, and the death of a parent. How each family member acts and reacts through these crucial moments, rejecting or accepting family and societal mores, is the theme of this four-segment, real-life drama. With one exception, the principals in

Victor Ancona Covers video art for this magazine.

each family have freely chosen the methods for dealing with their respective situation.

Herewith are capsulated facts and several comments covering each segment minus the impact of the actions and reactions, thoughts, feelings, conversations and natural sounds that stunningly penetrate the tv tube directly toward the viewer's emotions:

### I — Birth of a Baby

Displeased with the experience of having their first-born in a hospital, Irene and Barry Berner decide to have their second child in an out-of-hospital childbearing center where nurse mid-wives attend, no drugs are used, and a home-like atmosphere prevails.

# Videoography

# Videography

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The sequence covers the Berners at home, on their way for a checkup, in the birthing room, and explicit scenes of the natural childbirth. Two hours later, the infant's sister arrives for a visit, completing the family unit.

Twelve hours after the birth, the Berners leave for home, first stopping at Barry's parents home to show off the baby. Later scenes depict the grandparents' visit and subsequent discussions between the generations, with Barry commenting: "We weren't psychologically prepared when Naomi (their first child) was born. My first month was spent practically avoiding her. Since then, I've read many books and learned that physical contact and interaction from birth is really important—for me and the baby." With the Berners being so au courant, I wondered why the infant was being bottle-fed. The final scene suggests that Barry ought to continue to read, this time concentrating on the subject of sibling rivalry!

## II — Growing Old

Lena Gardiner, a handsome, strong-willed 94-year-old widow who had broken her hip seven years ago, is forced by her two children's need for independence to adjust to life in a nursing home. This segment vividly

portrays Lena's routinized life among her peers, commenting philosophically, "you've got to take the bitter with the sweet."

Mrs. Gardiner's son, Frederick, lives nearby and visits her weekly, while her daughter, living in Florida, visits her as much as she is able to during the summer. The interaction between mother and children during their visits superbly delineates the indifference, guilt, and rationalizations in their lives. The lack of communication, despite the chit-chat, is acutely felt.

The daughter, Jane, would rather not think about growing older, but when she does, her thoughts are unrealistic and fanciful. Occasionally worried about her being childless, she says: "What guarantee do you have that children will look out after you? They might be too busy looking out for themselves." The older person stereotype seems magnified in a nursing home where personal caring is obviously missing and strangers gather to live out their lives with emotions at bay.

## III — A Marriage

Although more people today are living together without marrying Dolores Seay and Lee Marshall, a black couple, plan an elaborate church

wedding and reception as a symbol of their commitment to each other. Dolores, 30, was previously married at age 18, then divorced. She has two children from her first marriage. Lee, also 30, has never been married.

From the time they get their marriage license to the end of the wedding reception, the camera captures the values, warmth, and maturity of the couple as they deal with their supportive families and friends. As Lee puts it, "he is making roots." As the tender segment ends, Lee says: "this is beautiful," while Dolores adds: "I'm so happy too." We're carried away by their strength and commitment to each other and the future.

## IV — Death of a Parent

Elizabeth Donnelley, a 65-year old widow, returned from the hospital where she had been declared terminally ill with cancer with two to six months to live. Her son, George, 34, moved into her apartment to care for her aided by his sisters, relatives, and visiting professionals.

We stand vigil with George as he ministers to his mother, days and nights, until the very end. "How could I have put her in a home," says George, "She has never turned her back on anybody in her life and it would have



Naomi Berner visits her mother and meets her new sister two hours after birth in the "Birth of a Baby" segment of "Home."

been difficult to do this to her." Here, the camera work is superb—delicate, intimate, discreet, and leisurely. The slow pacing allows for aural silences and visual voids that produce dramatic counterpoints to the all-encompassing subject.

John Reilly and Julie Gustafson began production on this, their second major work, in August 1977 and completed the project in January of this year. Since then, "Home" has been garnering recognition at festivals here and abroad. Even before its first telecast, it received awards at the 1979 Atlanta Independent Video & Film Festival, and the Texas Film Festival. It is one of the few American documentaries to have been selected for screening at the International Television Screening Conference (INPUT) in Milan. "Home" will also be shown in a special category of the Prix Italia, the oldest and most prestigious international competition for radio and television in Europe.

After seeing "Home" at a semi-pub-

lic screening at which the makers and one of their consulting scholars, Dr. John Demos, led a discussion with the audience, I interviewed John Reilly and Julie Gustafson in their SoHo establishment.

"You might say that the genesis of "Home" is related to our previous effort, *Giving Birth*, when Dr. John Franklin said that it was important to treat birth in a special way," said Julie. "Dr. Franklin said that the most important moments in life are the birth of a child, your own marriage, the death of a parent, and facing one's own death." "That got us to thinking—to explore the role of the family versus the encroachment of institutions in these important moments," added John. Julie and John do not deal in the abstract. Their concern is the push-pull of society and how it affects the individual.

While we tend to blame institutions for most of our ills, it is we who turn over certain roles to them. We pay them to relieve us of painful or difficult tasks. Perhaps our affluence has unknowingly corrupted us, stripped us of our humanity, our caring for one another.

"Home" cost approximately \$85,000 to produce—funded by grants from The National Endowment for the Arts, The

New York Council for the Humanities, and The New York State Council on the Arts. Consulting scholars for the work were John Demos, Ph.D., Brandeis University historian known for his studies on the American family; Robert J. Lifton, Ph.D., Yale University psychohistorian; Dr. Marshall H. Klaus, Head of Pediatrics, Rainbow Babies and Childrens Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio; and Toni Morrison, author of *Song of Solomon*.

"If we effectively portrayed significant slices of life, it is largely due to the scholars we chose who flooded us with ideas, suggestions, research material, comments and reactions. We were given new insights to think about, and were encouraged by the fluid and productive relationships developed by and with our consultants," John and Julie said in unison. To succeed, this kind of unscripted, in-depth look into the lives of people requires solid preparation. A haphazard approach could be disastrous to both maker and subject.

Julie Gustafson claims that the tapes she and John Reilly make are usually a collaboration between the people they choose and themselves. "In several instances the subjects we've portrayed later became our friends. There is always an element of involu-

ment of taking risks when making this kind of work," said John. "You never know how it is going to come out. You don't control the situation. You have to constantly be on the look-out for change, remaining resilient and overcoming each crisis as it occurs." Paraphrasing Ed Murrow, John added: "You can't go back to the neighborhood you failed."

The willing participation of the subjects and the creative abilities of the makers here combine to produce a powerful and insightful documentary. What on the surface appears to be casual, everyday human conduct proves to be surprising self-revelations on the part of the subjects. One would think that the camera would be both an intrusion and a reason for the subjects to "ham it up." In fact, the camera's constant long-term presence permits people to relax and therefore reveal themselves.

Julie has a great love for the details of life and she has trained her eye to capture moments of reality that mirror her excitement. "I believe in the importance of the individual. We are saying that there are alternative ways of living. By taking a risk, you might get more out of life than you anticipated."

As cameraperson as well as editor for all four segments of "Home," Julie delivers a smoothness and flow to the work despite the change in subject matter, mood, or environment. Her direct approach to the material is counter-balanced by her sensitivity toward her subjects. This allows for the seemingly simple unravelling, or baring, of life in front of her camera's eye. We are the benefactors. In less capable hands, viewers might feel like intruders or video voyeurs.

John Reilly takes a relatively objective viewpoint to the work. As executive producer he stands at a distance as the work progresses from stage to stage. Julie, on the other hand, enjoys "mucking around with tape and details." Their collaboration, satisfying to both, results in a comprehensive, unified work of considerable power.

"I can become too attached to subjects that may prove detrimental or irrelevant to the work," said Julie. "This is where John's perspective comes into play."

The most difficult technical problem the producers had was setting up optimum lighting conditions in people's homes without having subjects trip over wires and stands or having the mobile camera pick up lighting equipment instead of people as subjects.

Julie and her crew solved the problem by using clip-ons with photo-flood bulbs and placing photo-floods in existing home lamps and lighting fixtures. "While we used an enormous number of bulbs by keeping them lit continuously, we helped to establish a 'normal' lighting milieu instead of turning on distracting lights every time we began to tape a scene," said Julie.

Lighting conditions necessitated taping a number of scenes in black and white but this viewer found the change from color to black and white and back again, both smooth and imperceptible. On the technical side, Julie insisted on singing the praises of Nathaniel Merrill who handled the sound, saying "he was an integral part of the production."

"We had 210 cassettes or 70 hours of tape to edit and re-edit, and re-edit. Our fourth rough-cut was over four hours long," recalled Julie. "Finally we cut it to the desired 90 minutes comprising the four segments." While each episode stands on its own, the direct juxtaposition of the four life dramas is important, adding power to the work as a whole. In the last segment, George Donnelley, the young man who cared for his dying mother at home, dramatically articulated the theme of the work when he said: "You go through periods in your life when you don't have time to think of anybody else."

While local air rights were sold to New York's WNET/13 through the creative encouragement and administrative ability of David Loxton, executive producer of "Home" for the Television Laboratory or WNET, the makers opted to offer the work gratis to the Public Broadcasting Service network. "it was not in our best interest to go through protracted negotiations," said John Reilly. "We have to get on with our next work and the work beyond that. We did not want to tie up the work for another 10 or 12 weeks. What's more, public television stations can't get together to decide whether or not to air controversial or experimental material. Non-fiction television is not paid for by any money from the system. It's not coming from CPB or PBS, or WNET, for that matter. The Ford Foundation and NEA are both outside the system."

Reilly plans to meet the deficit for "Home" in two ways. First, through one-time release sales to European systems, (the production has been sold to Belgian National Television where it will be shown subtitled in French) and to sell/distribute the work either as a videotape or as a 16mm film

transfer. The traditional markets for this kind of work—organizations, schools, churches, museums, libraries, hospitals—are already equipped with 16mm projectors, even though video-cassette players are gaining in popularity. Through special mailing lists and advertisements in selected publications, John Reilly claims to have sold "hundreds of copies of Giving Birth." They plan to do the same with "Home." Plans are afoot to also enter into negotiations, on a nonexclusive basis, with other distributors of tapes and films.

Speaking as executive director of Global Village, the New York-based non-profit video production group and media center, Reilly emphasized that organizations like this ought to learn about and be involved in the distribution as well as in the production of videotapes. "Individual videographers can't make it alone, not in the real world," he said. He is mindful of the key role NEA plays in helping to identify and fund media centers.

"Home is where the heart is" are the words inscribed on a cross-stitched sampler my daughter made when she was seven years old. "Home," the 90-minute documentary to be seen over the PBS network, is also where the heart is. Its humanity will touch you.

Videography



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## TV Previews

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By Tom Shales

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# Hitting 'Home'

"Home" comes to us with a heavy hat the gray fedora of grave significance. But the 90-minute video verite special, at 10:30 tonight on Channel 26, frequently and movingly surmounts a pretentious format and, appropriately, hits us where we live.

The videotape, more a vital document than dull documentary, was made by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly for Channel 13's industrious TV Lab and records four pivotal experiences in the lives of Americans in the shifting '70s. It begins with a birth and ends with a death; "Growing Old" and "A Marriage" are sandwiched in between.

The idea was to invade the privacy of selected people at delicate, crucial moments, in the hope that the subjects were representative both of common human experience and of contemporary changes in home and family. Overlong printed prologues strive too hard to establish the illustrative credentials of one and all.

It is in the specifics rather than the generalities that the program exhibits exemplary insight, candor and sensitivity. Some observers have called the last sequence—a death watch for a terminally ill cancer victim—the most affecting, but in fact the second section, "Growing Old," is likely to elicit the strongest and most painful responses.

It was shot at a nursing home where a 94-year-old widow named Lena waits out hours and days. In recalling the happiness of her 60-year marriage, she casually provides the recipe for peaceful coexistence. "I gave up my dancing, because he didn't dance well," she says of her husband, and in her house, "We were both the boss."

There is no room for her in the home of her offspring, so she is remanded to the kindness of strangers, to the patronizing voices and pats-on-the-shoulder of those hired to feign concern. The sequence ends with the old people using frail breaths to blow out candles on a communal birthday cake. Then they sing "There Are Smiles."

"Hearts will never be practical," to quote the Wizard of Oz, "until they can be made unbreakable."

In the opening sequence, we see in extreme and stunning detail the arrival of a baby by natural childbirth. The mother is not only awake but wearing her glasses, the father chants "push, push," and the baby is greeted with cries of "Oh, my goodness" from mom and "A baby! a baby!" from dad.

"A Marriage," part three, shows a young couple going hesitantly through the formal rigors of official union.

The two young sons of the bride, who was married once before, act out the ceremony in a small room after watching it on closed circuit TV.

Gustafson and Reilly do not flinch at harrowing or pathetic occurrences, but they show discretion and keen judgment that remove the stigma of voyeurism, particularly in the very difficult "Death of a Parent" segment. There is no obsession with the details of suffering but rather an examination of how the woman's family and friends cope with the inevitability of her death.

"Home" walks a precarious line between clinical indifference and gross sentimentality, almost never tipping too far to either side. It has immediacy and impact possible with no other medium but television, and an inquisitive compassion that turns cold video images warm and real.

Channel 26 should have shown "Home" at its scheduled PBS time, last Sunday night, but the station was busy with an antiquated and trifling British mystery rerun.