

GLOBAL VILLAGE

Presented by

# The Pursuit of Happiness

## The Pursuit of Happiness

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident... that all men are created equal... endowed by their creator with certain inalienable Rights...”*



### ORDERING INFORMATION

**RENTAL:** \$65 ¾ inch video, \$50 VHS or BETA  
Express mail postage not included.  
Please order in writing 4 weeks in advance, by phone 2 weeks in advance. Include:

- Exact date and alternate of screening
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### RENTALS AND SALES

**GLOBAL VILLAGE**

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**THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS**, a video documentary by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly explores this most elusive of "inalienable" rights in the lives of six Americans. Using the unique, modified cinema verite techniques, for which the makers are well-known, this documentary poses hard, thought provoking questions about the value of human life, the relationships of individuals to society, and the choices involved in changing society.

Set in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the work begins with Molly Rush, mother of six and a committed anti-nuclear activist, and her husband, Bill Rush. Deeply shaken by his wife's acts of civil disobedience, Bill struggles to understand and share in her political passion. It is when Molly receives a stiff jail sentence for an act of "disarmament" at a nuclear weapons plant, that the work unfolds into the lives of the documentary's other characters: the warden, George Petsock whose life has been devoted to abiding by the letter of the law and achieving promotions within the prison system; his wife, Ida May who sets out in middle-age to become a writer; two prison inmates - Walter Henderson a black man who has spent most of his life behind bars - and Ron Grim, a big, sweet-faced man, more recently incarcerated - who pass their days hoping to change the jail's commutation system.

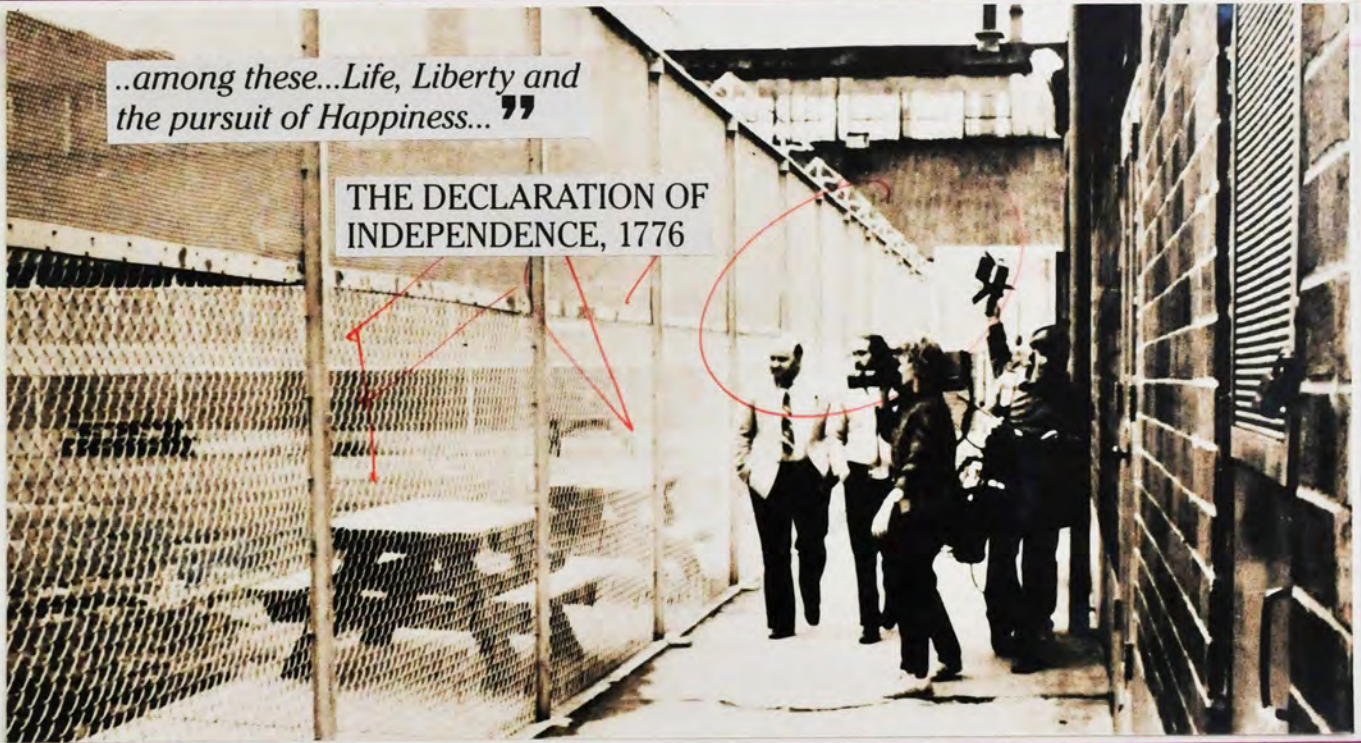
Through its intimate portrayal of the struggle of these six individuals, **THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS** encourages the viewer to explore their own definitions of happiness and personal meaning in modern American life. In court and at home, Molly and Bill Rush discuss the massive build-up of first-strike nuclear weapons, bringing up the question of individual responsibility in the face of such a threat. Probing more deeply, the work also reveals the impact Molly's actions have had on the happiness of the rest of her family. Ida May and George Petsock, in contrast, struggle over the priority and demands of George's work,

personal relationships, and their own version of "the American Dream." Inmates Walter Henderson and Ron Grim apparently have fewer choices, nonetheless they wrestle with questions of personal fulfillment, freedom, and the awesome uncertainty of whether "the pursuit of Happiness" was really meant for everyone.

While prison - both actual and psychological - is a powerful metaphor of the documentary, the work's subtext is the relationship between men and women and the conflicts that arise over differing needs and values. The tape counterpoints the dramatically different relationships between all the couples, including Ron Grim and the woman he marries while in prison. In a striking contrast of feminine identities, Molly will not subordinate what she sees as a life-threatening issue to her family's immediate needs - just as Ida May proudly favors her husband's and children's needs over her own - asking if she is less a person because she waits awhile to fulfill what she wants out of life.

The 58-minute documentary is an ideal tool to initiate discussion about the changing roles of men and women, as well as about the rights and obligations of citizens and the challenges involved in changing society. Women's studies, history and philosophy classes; civic, religious and community organizations; peace and justice groups; legal, corrections, inmate and educational institutions as well as video art and documentary enthusiasts will find **THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS** useful in classrooms, meetings, "teach-ins" and conferences.

**THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS** premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and aired nationally on PBS and the Learning Channel. It won the Gold Plaque Award for Best Video Documentary at the Chicago International Film Festival, top honors at the Atlanta Film and Video Festival, and an honorable mention at the American Film Festival.



*..among these...Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."*

**THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE, 1776**

**"When was the last time a TV program really challenged you, calling into question the very premises of your life?"**

Sandy MacDonald  
NEW AGE JOURNAL

**"THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS is the most complex documentary video narrative to emerge in the eighties...It shares with drama a multi-faceted artistic shape where characters emerge - complete with tragic flaws... a major documentary achievement."**

Deldre Boyle  
VIDEO CLASSICS

**"THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS is heir to the two greatest traditions in television: the live drama and the intimate documentary. The filmmakers have the ability to put viewer at emotional risk almost immediately; then, the more they tell you about**

**these people, the more deeply you care...(it is) a brilliant film."**

Tom Shales  
THE WASHINGTON POST

**"This patriotic season's most extraordinary video documentary..."**

Arthur Unger  
THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

**"Conceived and shot with delicacy...THE PURSUIT OF HAPINESS is interested journalism taken to a fine extreme."**

Adele Freedman  
TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL

Funding for **THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS** was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Rockefeller Foundation. Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, best known for their documentaries **GIVING BIRTH and HOME**, are the directors of Global Village, a non-profit alternate media center in New York City.

# WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL FILM/VIDEO FESTIVAL:



**crossing  
cultural  
boundaries**

Outstanding film/video makers will be present  
to screen and discuss their work from:

**10:00 AM to 10:00 PM  
Wednesday-Thursday, March 25-26, 1987**

**University Center Ballroom**  
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Garden City, L.I., N.Y. 11530

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## Thursday, March 26, 1987

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11:00 am-12:20 pm MIRA NAIR, India and New York

*"So Far From India"* 1983 a beautiful documentary portrait of a family split between two worlds, capturing the complex rhythm of middle-class family life in India and the drama and pain of starting a new life as an immigrant in New York. Translated into 9 languages.

*"India Cabaret"* 1986, a controversial film which captures the lives of strippers and their customers in a Bombay cabaret; shows the larger world of sexual politics that both creates and ostracizes cabaret dancers.

12:30 pm-1:50 pm CHRISTINE CHOY

*"Inside Women Inside"* 1978, award-winning, highly utilized film revealing the personal experiences of women prisoners who, while doing time, deal with family conflicts, illness and pregnancy.

*"Fei Tien: Goddess in Flight"* 1983 (excerpts). In her first dramatic film, Choy looks at the cultural perspectives of two Chinese American women who first meet on a park bench near Chinatown.

*"Permanent Wave"* 1986, a fast-paced drama set in a shopping mall beauty salon which satirizes the familiar sitcom format while allowing a deep look at the issue of sexual violence.

2:00 pm-3:30 pm JULIE GUSTAFSON

*"The Politics of Intimacy"* 1974. Ten women, 15 to 54 years of age discuss their most intimate sexual feelings and behavior; spontaneous dialogue provokes humor, pain, anger and pleasure. Interview with Dr. Mary Jane Sherfey, author *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality*.

*"The Pursuit of Happiness"* 1983. An intimate "video verite" portrayal of the struggle of six individuals, posing hard questions about definitions of happiness and personal meaning in modern American life.

5:00 pm-7:00 pm MIRRA BANK

*"Yudie"* 1974, portrait of NY Jewish immigrant experience through the life of one woman.

*"Enormous Changes at the Last Minute"* 1985, (excerpts) a trilogy about the lives of three single NY women, based on the short stories of Grace Paley with a screenplay by John Sayles.

*"Spirit to Spirit: Nikki Giovanni"* 1986, a recently completed performance film highlighting the literary and political career of the writer/activist often called "the Princess of Black Poetry..."

# Television celebrates the spirit of America

by Arthur Unger

**A**MERICA, the Statue of Liberty, and America's place in the world are an important part of television programming during the next few weeks...

## Statue of Liberty

Independence Day and the Statue of Liberty have become intertwined in the minds of most Americans, and television continues the mixture this year — especially since we are approaching the 100th birthday of the lady of Liberty. Here are some of the special anniversary programs scheduled to begin tomorrow:

• *The Pursuit of Happiness* (PBS, Saturday, June 30, 10-11 p.m.) is this patriotic season's most extraordinary video documentary, an incisive study of six people seeking their inalienable right to happiness. Documentarians Julie Gustafson and John Reilly have interwoven the lives of real people, drawn subtle analogies, and pinpointed inconsistencies and natural growth patterns in America through intimate portraits of some fascinatingly "average" human beings. It is uniquely celebratory television and, if you feel you have to choose only one Fourth-of-July program to watch, there is no question that this is the one you will never forget.



**GLOBE  
VILLA**

Julie Gustafson, Director  
John Reilly, Executive Producer

454 BROOKLINE ST.



FESTIVAL  
OF FESTIVALS  
TORONTO, CANADA



Warden George Petsock in *The Pursuit of Happiness*

## A moving quest for happiness

BY ADELE FREEDMAN

**T**HE PURSUIT of Happiness, a video documentary by Julie Gustafson and John Reiley, questions Americans' constitutional rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness by simply asking a half dozen citizens of Pittsburgh if they think they've achieved them.

This wasn't accomplished by taking a camera to the street. *The Pursuit of Happiness* traces the lives of six people who either in defence or in defiance of the system, impinge on each other in courtrooms, living rooms and the state penitentiary. Part of the Festival of Festivals VIDEO/video series, it will be shown at the Royal Ontario Museum theatre Sunday at 8:30 p.m.

The video was conceived and shot with such delicacy that its meaning sneaks up gradually,

inducing the privileged mental state of discovery rather than the boredom of being told what you already know. Its form is a web, with first one thread, then another, coming into focus, until the whole structure of interconnected discourse intensifies into a kind of social sculpture. Its overwhelming mood is regret — for the past that promised but didn't deliver and the future that might never come to be.

Molly is an anti-nuclear activist on the model of Helen Caldicott who faces a jail sentence for an act of non-violent protest. Her husband, Bill, has given his life to softball; he's trying to cope with his wife's dedication to the cause as best he can. George is the superintendent of the state prison — his fondest hope is buying a motor home; his wife is an articulate victim of delayed gratification. Meanwhile, two men serving life sen-

tences in the pen discuss the ins and outs of commutation, trying to persuade themselves to keep their spirits up. Every so often, their private thoughts and discussions are interrupted by an interviewer who poses the question: do you believe in the pursuit of happiness?

In all cases, the answers are so moving that it's wise to see the documentary with handkerchief in hand. One reason for the rise of video as an alternate form of broadcasting is the possibilities portable equipment offers both for intimate communication with subjects and for personal statement. *The Pursuit of Happiness* shows small people grappling with big questions while at the same time revealing the personalities and sympathies of the people who made the tape. *The Pursuit of Happiness* is interested journalism taken to a fine extreme.

## GLOBAL VILLAGE

Julie Gustafson, Director  
John Reilly, Executive Director

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

# VIDEO ART

Deirdre Boyle

## Whatever Happened to Guerrilla TV?

Ask a kid today about "radical software" and you get the reply, "Is that a spreadsheet for your PC?" Computer technology fascinates the public the way video technology once did, in the days when important technological advances included the time-base corrector and the color portapak. At that time, *Radical Software* was the journal of a video underground dedicated to making media by and for the people. Since then, somehow, the legacy of alternative television

Deirdre Boyle is a teacher and writer. Her video courses are offered in New York at the New School for Social Research and Fordham University College at Lincoln Center. Currently she is working on a book, *Subject to Change: Guerrilla Television Revisited*, with help from the New York State Council on the Arts and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Another book, *Video Classics: A Guide to Video Art and Documentary Tapes*, will be published by Oryx Press next year.

has virtually disappeared, absorbed by the popular television medium it once sought to change.

Guerrilla television was part of a larger alternative media movement which swept across the country during the sixties, affecting radio, newspapers and magazines, as well as the fine and performing arts. Its advocates were molded by the insights of Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Norbert Wiener and Teilhard de Chardin. They were influenced by the style of new journalists like Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson and by the content of the agonizing issues of the day, which included the Vietnam War, the women's movement and racial equality. Video freaks picked up their portapaks and went out to the barricades to tell it like it was—not from the lofty viewpoint of broadcast TV cameras, but from within the crowd, subjective and involved.

These video pioneers would never have existed if it weren't for the mid-sixties introduction of Sony's ½-inch, helical-scan portapak. For baby boomers who grew up on TV, access to the tools to create your own was heady stuff. In home video's formative years, everyone with a portapak was a video artist and everything was fit for taping. In short order, two camps emerged: the video "artists," whose ranks included many recognized artists from other disciplines, and whose outlet was largely the festival/gallery/museum circuit; and the video "guerrillas," who were more concerned with issues than with art per se, and whose outlets were anything from playback in the portapak viewfinder, to cable TV, to, eventually, public and network television.

The term "guerrilla television" comes from the 1971 book of the same title by Michael Shamberg and Raindance. This manifesto outlined what was philosophically wrong with corporate American television, and what alternative information systems could be developed now that portable video and cable TV were available to the public. Shamberg, a former *Time* correspondent and co-publisher of *Radical Software*, had found video a more potent medium than print. With a bunch of video friends, he formed TVTV (aka Top Value Television) to cover the 1972 presidential conventions. Their made-for-cable documentary of the Republican Convention, *Four More Years*, established guerrilla television's reputation for intimate, iconoclastic video journalism, beating the networks at their own game.

At first guerrilla TV was a grass-roots or cable phenomenon, concerned with documenting and narrowcasting ideas and information to a target audience. But once the possibility of reaching a mass audience opened up—with the advent of the time-base corrector in 1973, which made it possible to broadcast small-format independent video—the very nature of guerrilla television changed. No longer out to create an alternative to television, guerrilla TV could compete on the same airwaves for viewers and sponsors.

As video technology quickly advanced, video freaks found they needed more expensive production and postproduction equipment if their tapes were to be broadcastable. While some continued to make television in their own way (pioneering what has since become the world of low-power television and the terrain of public-access cable), many others yearned to see their work broadcast.

Somehow, without anyone's noticing it, the rough-edged vitality of guerrilla video's early days was shed for a slicker TV look. The "voice of God" narrator, which had been anathema to TVTV and other video pioneers, was heard again.

Gone were the innovations—the graphics, the hip style and subjects, and the scrutiny of power centers and the media. Gone was the intimate approach of the amiable cameraperson/interviewer, popularized by Skip Blumberg, which became a hallmark of alternative video's style. Increasingly, video documentaries began looking more and more like "television" documentaries, with conventional stand-up reporters and a slide-lecture approach that skimmed over issues and took no stand.

Many of guerrilla TV's innovations appear in today's network programming, in trivialized form. Broadcast TV has since transformed the sincere documentary about ordinary people into "mock-u-entertainments" like *Real People* and *That's Incredible*. The video-vérité style of the award-winning *The Police Tapes* was the template for *Hill Street Blues*. In the sixties, video theorist Paul Ryan proclaimed, "VT [videotape] is not TV," but today it appears that VT is TV.

The decline of guerrilla television is due to many factors, not the least of which is diminished funding, as well as changes in public television programming patterns. But it also has to do with the personal choices of many video pioneers who decided to move with the times, out of the not-for-profit world of alternative media and into something that would allow them to buy a house and raise a family. For some it meant

opening up their own corporate video firms, for others it meant working for change from within television, and for a few, like Michael (*The Big Chill*) Shamberg, it meant using their proven skills to get to the top. The departure of talented iconoclasts from alternative video production has left a chasm of creativity and

talent in what was once the brash and exciting world of guerrilla TV. Few newcomers have appeared to take up the charge.

However, lest the picture appear too grim, be aware that many pioneers are still tilling the alternative video fields. Although many of the earlier groups, with colorful names like the VideoFreex, People's Video Theater, Ap 1 Video and the Underground Vegetables, have disappeared, some individuals persist: Skip Blumberg, DeeDee Halleck, Jon Alpert, Keiko Tsuno, Jim Mulligan, Skip Sweeney, Joanne Kelly, Louis Alvarez, Andy Kolker, Stevenson Palfi, Wendy Appel and Fred Simon are a few of those still committed to defying the odds and making guerrilla television in the eighties.

Global Village's Julie Gustafson recently produced an extraordinary documentary of structural and emotional complexity, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. It probes the existence of a matrix of people linked together by a prison, both actual and metaphoric. It suggests that mental restraints can be as stifling as iron bars, and it poses hard, thoughtful questions about the value of life, glimpsed through the humor and pathos of some marvelous characters. In this piece, Gustafson, who has been working in video since the early seventies, demonstrates a new maturity as an independent producer. *The Pursuit of Happiness* also demonstrates the new maturity of the video documentary. Gustafson is working on a fictional film script now; perhaps she, too, is being forced to abandon alternative uses of the medium and the genre due to dwindling support and flagging interest in provocative nonfiction subjects.

Guerrilla television is, by nature, too controversial for today's funders and programmers, who promote instead the flowering of new narratives and of video art—marvelous genres in themselves but only part of the video spectrum. How can guerrilla television be kept alive? One way is to shed light on its dimming past. Another is to seek out work being made today that poses new ways of creating and viewing video.

The goal should not be to recreate the past—no one really wants to see handheld, black-and-white, out-of-focus imagery shot on primitive equipment, as was the norm in guerrilla video's frenzied heyday. The goal instead is to recapture the creativity and exploration that were characteristic of video's formative years. Perhaps the need to communicate will prevail. Independents with consumer Beta and VHS cameras and recording decks are documenting the struggles in Central America. Somewhere amid the home video production boom, a new generation of video guerrillas may yet be in training.



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**LOST IN THE TRANSLATION** (1984, 10 minutes). By Tony Labat.

Sound. Color. Rental \$50 (¾"), \$40 (VHS). Sale \$300 (¾"), \$275 (VHS).

In *Lost in the Translation* Tony Labat continues to explore contemporary story-telling conventions. Adapting the fast-editing style of broadcast television, he interweaves a series of fragmentary vignettes, featuring an elderly woman and a carnival man who divulge their secrets, as well as a group in the woods, an artist's model, and two young boys. The situations bear a resemblance to "human interest" stories found in the news media.

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**PIANO PLAYERS RARELY EVER PLAY TOGETHER** (1982; long version 76 minutes, short version 60 minutes). Written, produced, directed, and edited by Stevenson J. Palfi in cooperation with Mississippi Educational Television.

Color. Sound. Rental (76 min.) \$150 (¾"), apply - VHS. Sale (76 min.) \$725 (¾"), apply - VHS.

Rental (60 min.) \$125 (¾"), apply - VHS. Sale (60 min.) \$600 (¾"), apply - VHS.

*Piano Players Rarely Ever Play Together* documents an attempt to bring together three generations of jazz pianists—Isidore "Tuts" Washington, Henry "Professor Longhair" Byrd, and Allen Toussaint—on one stage, in one club, on one night. Although the concert at Tipitana (named for Professor Longhair's song) never happened—Professor Longhair died two days before the performance—*Piano Players* succeeds in exploring the musical and personal relationship among these men. As the camera follows them through the sometimes frustrating and often humorous process of rehearsing an old boogie-woogie composition, each musician tells his own story. *Piano Players* ends with a rare look at a very personal and sacred tradition, a New Orleans wake.

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**THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS** (1984, 60 minutes). By Julie Gustafson with John Reilly.

Color. Sound. Rental \$90 (¾"), \$75 (VHS). Sale \$350 (¾"), \$300 (VHS).

In *The Pursuit of Happiness* Julie Gustafson and John Reilly question the "inalienable right" mentioned in the Declaration of Independence to pursue happiness. Shot with hand-held cameras, the documentary focuses on Molly Rush of the Plowshares 8. A member of this group of Catholic activists, she was sentenced to two to five years in prison for smashing the nose cone of a nuclear weapon. Interwoven are interviews with Molly Rush's husband, Bill, and with the warden and two inmates of the prison where she was held. Each

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## VIDEO SUPPLEMENT

### 1985

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responds to the question of how one can live according to one's own values and, at the same time, pursue the American Dream.

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**THE REFLECTING POOL** (Collected work, 1977-80, 62 minutes). By Bill Viola.  
Color. Sound. Rental \$100 (3/4"), \$80 (VHS). Sale \$500 (3/4"), \$400 (VHS).

This is a collection of five independent works that together describe the stages of personal journey, utilizing images of transition—for example day to night, motion to stillness. Each work explores specific video techniques and technologies, in combination with the spatial potentials of stereo sound. In *Reflecting Pool* (1977-79) movement and change in an otherwise still scene are limited to the reflections and ripples on the surface of a pond in the woods. *Moonblood* (1977-79) is a set of images relating to a personal concept of a woman; *Silent Life* (1979) presents a series of portraits of newborn babies, from five minutes to one day old. In *Ancient of Days* (1979-81), diverse rhythms of natural and subjective time are interwoven into a complex whole using the mathematical notation of SMPTE time code editing. Finally, in *Vegetable Memory* (1978-80), a repeating cycle of images recorded at the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo becomes continually extended in time.

Also in the video collection is Viola's *Chott el-Djerid*.

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**DER RIESE** (1983, 82 minutes). By Michael Klier.  
Black and white. Sound. Rental \$100 (3/4" & VHS). Sale \$400 (3/4" & VHS).

*Der Riese (The Giant)* is an ominous work recorded from surveillance cameras permanently installed in different urban locations such as an airport runway, a shopping mall, and an outdoor cafe. From their omniscient vantage situations, the fixed black-and-white cameras mechanically pan the mundane situations. Klier heightens the suspense of watching and waiting for the unusual occurrence with a soundtrack that includes Mahler and Wagner.

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**SOME CALL IT BAD LUCK** (1982, 47 minutes). By Lisa Steele. Cast: Karl Beveridge, Ian Gzinck, Gerald Hannon, Donna Reuss, Lisa Steele, and Pat Wilson. Camera: Clive Robertson and Norman Cohn.  
Color. Sound. Rental \$75 (3/4"), \$65 (VHS). Sale \$300 (3/4"), \$275 (VHS).

In *Some Call it Bad Luck* Lisa Steele portrays a single parent, an American immigrant to Canada who is down on her luck. She is questioned by the police as a witness to a crime and as a result is accused of

manslaughter. Although at first she is certain of her innocence, the relentless bullying by the interrogating officers gradually breaks down her ability to differentiate between truth and fabricated reality. Steele, who has given this work the look and grittiness of a documentary, emigrated from the United States to Canada in 1968.

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**TAPES** (1979, 16 minutes). By Pier Marton.  
**UNITY THROUGH STRENGTH** (1981-82, 7 minutes). By Pier Marton.  
Color. Sound. Each title is in its own cassette. The rental and sale is the same for each title. Rental \$50 (3/4"), \$45 (VHS). Sale \$200 (3/4"), \$175 (VHS).

In both tapes the artist presents himself in a series of performances that explore aspects of the self and at the same time expand the creative potentialities of video. An intensity of feeling is achieved through a variety of devices, including fragmenting and repeating dialogue, creating simultaneous views of the artists within the frame, and the use of abstractions and image break-up.

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**VOYAGE OF DREAMS** (1983, 30 minutes). Produced and directed by Collis Davis and Raymond Cajuste.  
Color. Sound. Rental \$75 (3/4"), \$65 (VHS). Sale \$450 (3/4"), \$400 (VHS).

*Voyage of Dreams* documents the efforts of the Haitian boat people to escape from the political and economic strife of their homeland and build a new life in America, where they face incarceration and deportation. Narrated by Ossie Davis and Raymond Cajuste, this video documentary features exclusive footage from Haiti and interviews with those who survived the perilous journey across the ocean, recreated by the Haitian artist Nemo through the use of computer graphics.

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**YOUR MONEY OR YOUR LIFE** (1982, 45 minutes). By Laura Kipnis. The mugger is played by Ernest Parry.  
Color. Sound. Rental \$50 (3/4"), no VHS. Sale \$250 (3/4"), no VHS.

The videomaker takes a satirical approach to produce a statement on poverty, racism, and injustice. The principal character, a cynical, unemployed young man, describes how he took up mugging people to make a living. Shot on location in the streets of a deteriorating inner city, the tape draws its strength from the skillful blending of narrative and documentary techniques.

# The New York Times

Television TUESDAY, JULY 10, 1984

## TV Review

### 'Pursuit of Happiness'

By JOHN CORRY

**T**HE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS" is an ambitious attempt to show how six people exercise one of the "unalienable rights" mentioned in the Declaration of Independence. The six — a Roman Catholic peace activist and her husband, the warden of a prison and his wife, and two prison inmates — pursue, or at least try to pursue, happiness. The cinéma vérité documentary will be seen on Channel 13 at 11 o'clock tonight.

In fact, the documentary is more interesting in what it attempts to do rather than what it does. Whatever we consider the purpose of cinéma vérité — presumably to capture, amplify or interpret life — it is still a technique. Occasionally some of the people in "The Pursuit of Happiness" — the wife of the prison warden, in particular — seem to be reacting to the camera, but for the most part the able film makers, Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, are faithful to the technique.

Thus, we have some affecting and even poignant moments: the husband of the peace activist says he's got a lot of "catching up" to do in his marriage; a prisoner says he'd like to live just one year like an ordinary person. Cinéma, or video, vérité is at its best in sequences like that.

On the other hand, moments, or sequences, no matter how interesting, do not necessarily add up to a coherent whole. The people we see talk about their lives, but without purpose. Meanwhile, "The Pursuit of Happiness" tries to superimpose meaning by saying that it is exploring the lives of its subjects in the context of the thinking expressed in the Declaration of Independence. It is a provocative idea, but it doesn't work.

One reason it doesn't work is that the documentary, even if inadvertently, misrepresents the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration says that the "pursuit" of happiness, not its achievement, is our unalienable right. Thomas Jefferson did not promise us a rose garden, only the freedom to plant it.

The documentary, however, suggests otherwise. The predominant mood of the people in "The Pursuit of



Molly Rush, a peace activist, in the documentary "The Pursuit of Happiness," at 11 on Channel 13.

Happiness" is resignation or regret. The implication is that somehow the Declaration has let us down.

At the same time, the happiest person we see is the Catholic peace activist. There is a paradox here. We are reminded that the Declaration also says that when government tramples on our rights it is "the right of the people to alter or abolish" the government. The documentary would have us believe that the peace activist has sacrificed her happiness and the happiness of her family by pursuing this right.

However, when the peace activist says, "I choose to say my life means something," or "I can only be responsible for my own vision," she is rather cheerful in her commitment. In fact, she is exercising the right to pursue happiness in her own way. Although the documentary seems to believe otherwise, she is fulfilling Jefferson's vision.

"The Pursuit of Happiness" wants to make a political statement in all this, but it does not. At best, it seems to be giving us only another worn message about the collapse of the American dream. The film makers bring high skills to making the documentary but not to giving it meaning.

## GLOBAL VILLAGE

Julie Gustafson, Director  
John Reilly, Executive Director

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

by Deirdre Boyle

# Men and Women on Tape

## The Revolution Continues



POSSIBLY IN MICHIGAN

**W**hat does a loving relationship demand of a man and a woman in today's world? In the aftermath of the sexual and social revolutions of the Sixties, we are faced with complex issues involving new definitions of masculinity, femininity, and gender roles, as well as some age-old issues about loyalty and duty to one's self, one's family, and the larger human family. A number of video artists and documentarists have been examining such questions, each in his or her own distinct fashion; and their explorations afford some rich, provocative insights.

ALGEBRA AND OTHER MENSTRUAL CONFUSIONS is Connie Coleman's witty, autobiographical meditation on male-female aptitudes for mathematics, among other things. The tape opens with stylized feet dancing to a lively beat, a carefree image of adolescence. Suddenly, a male, voice-of-God narrator starts reciting mathematical problems: "Two ships are out to sea. If one is travelling at. . ." Surreal images—vividly colorized and computer-processed—of cars, ladders, earth-moving equipment, and swimmers illustrate these problems in a manner that subtly becomes an increasingly ironic statement of male sexuality. Juxtaposed with these fantastical images and relentless puzzles, Coleman—in a wispy voice—recalls her memories of high school: wearing circle pins and mohair sweaters, stuffing paper in her bra, and being caught smoking in the ladies' room. Her sing-song voice accompanies a computer-generated notebook with pencilled diagrams, mathematical equations, and snapshots of Coleman and her friends at the beach, prom, and school. Coleman parallels adolescent female absorption with one's self and one's relationships with the male obsession with exerting control over the external world, exemplified in the very problems submitted for mathematical solution. There is marvelous irony in how Coleman brilliantly undermines these images of feminine incapacity for mathematical, abstract thought and lack of

interest in the "real" world with her own impressive mastery of the computer and grasp of the complex factors in sexual stereotyping.

### Music Video, Mayhem & Marriage

Violence and sexuality are twin themes in Cecelia Condit's thinking-woman's music video. Set against the surreal backdrop of suburban shopping malls and tree-lined, middle-class neighborhoods, POSSIBLY IN MICHIGAN is a New Wave retelling of several old-world fairy tales. Composer Karen Skladany's lyrics narrate the tale; her lilting music box airs alternate with a driving tom-tom beat, suggesting a radical dialogue between masculine and feminine. Appropriately, Condit's characters are archetypal. She condenses Prince Charming, the Frog Prince, and the Wolf into one anthropomorphic prince. Her protagonist, Sharon, is a dazed innocent whose trancelike behavior evokes Sleeping Beauty—until she wakes up. She is accompanied by Janice, a female version of the hero's loyal friend rather than a passive confidante. This new wrinkle in heroic conventions is the first in a series of unexpected twists.

Skladany opens by singing, "I bite at the hand that feeds me," suggesting some connection between voracious appetites—for food and sex—and the dependence of women on men. Men feed women only to devour them is a thesis illustrated by courtly men wearing pig heads. When Prince Charming tells Sharon, "I will eat you or cut off your arms or legs" and throws her down on the bed, she replies wistfully, "Love shouldn't cost an arm or a leg." Janice finally comes to her aid with a macabre solution. In this modern-day fairy tale, it is Red Riding Hood who devours the Wolf, neatly disposing of his bones in a black plastic trash bag, later devoured by a garbage truck.

Condit is inspired by bizarre and disturbing real-life experiences, which she cleverly manipulates to create a metaphor for a darker, cannibalistic side of male-female relationships. Her style draws upon the traditions of surreal art, such as the films of Jean Cocteau, as well as today's popular culture, from shopping malls to MTV. Along with Skladany, she reinvents soap opera as feminist opera, subverting the soaps' message of feminine submission to male power by substituting an absurdist alternative. Playing off melodrama, horror story conventions, and fairy tales, Condit presents a new view of the war between the sexes.

In *MEN AND WOMEN: AFTER THE REVOLUTION*, Fred Simon interviews a fascinating cross section of 12 men and women of different ages, races, classes, and geographic locations to find out what they think about love, sex, and fidelity, among other topics. Married, single, and divorced, these articulate, thoughtful people speak candidly, revealing pain, humor, and—sometimes—hope. "Who the hell found their prince on the first try? I found my prince—but he's still a frog," slyly grins one woman.

Simon employs his own distinct style, which he pioneered in his award-winning portrait of *FRANK, A VIETNAM VETERAN*. Shooting in minimal, pristine black and white, Simon focuses on each speaker in close-up, establishing an immediate rapport and much greater intimacy than conventional "talking heads" ever achieve. Thematically cross-cutting between speakers, Simon allows us to discover gradually what each person really thinks about love and male-female relationships—despite what he or she may have said. These revelations are full of delightful surprises.

Last but not least, Julie Gustafson's complex documentary narrative, *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS*, parallels the lives of

## Videography

*ALGEBRA AND OTHER MENSTRUAL CONFUSIONS* 8 min. color video 1984. Directors: Connie Coleman & Alan Powell. Dist: Coleman & Powell, 834 Corinthian Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19130.

*MEN AND WOMEN: AFTER THE REVOLUTION* 60 min. b&w video 1984. Director: Fred Simon. Dist: Fred Simon, 42 Myrtle Street, Norfolk, MA 02056.

*POSSIBLY IN MICHIGAN* 12 min. color video 1983. Director: Cecelia Condit. Dist: Electronic Arts Intermix, 10 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10003.

*THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS* 60 min. color video 1983. Directors: Julie Gustafson & John Reilly. Dist: Global Village, 454 Broome Street, New York, NY 10012.

seven people who share two common links: prison and marriage. The prison is both an actual and a metaphoric one, one that locks them into mental restraints as chafing as iron chains. By examining what "the pursuit of happiness" means to each, Gustafson poses hard, thoughtful questions about the value of human life and the challenges of married life.

Featured are the Petsocks, Ida May and George, a marvelous couple whose resemblance to Edith and Archie Bunker is funny but misleading, since they are far more complex and appealing than the Bunkers. Ida May left her roots behind in order to follow George to his current job as superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Prison. She longs for a future that her overly cautious husband fears to count on.

At the prison, we meet two lifers. Ron, a Vietnam veteran implicated in an armed robbery, hesitantly conducts a romance by mail, afraid to hope he will have any future with his would-be bride outside prison. Walter, a worldly black inmate, is the only unmarried person in the tape: For him, happiness inside or outside the prison walls is about the same. Briefly interned in the prison is Molly Rush, a Catholic peace activist whose anti-nuclear protest with the Ploughshares 8 jeopardizes not only her own future but that of her family and, especially, her marriage to Bill. But the way she looks at it, she and all humanity may have no future unless people stand up against the threat of nuclear holocaust. Bill, confused and agonized by his wife's flinty zeal, worries more about the survival of his marriage than that of the human race, but tries valiantly to understand and support Molly. All the players in this moving human drama are driven by their visions of a meaningful life, one that involves not only their own happiness but that of others.

Gustafson sensitively observes each couple, capturing amazing revelations of character in natural dialogue that often surpasses the best writing of talented dramatists. In a passage that rivals Beckett, Ida May and George discuss their retirement and the pros and cons of "planning for" versus "counting on" the future. Since these are not fictional characters, their reality gives heightened power to the human hopes, fears, and compromises they face. Like Connie Coleman, Gustafson collaborated with her husband on this tape. *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS* is a far-seeing work about love, conflict, and growing through change—an appropriate subject for any husband-and-wife team to tackle. **SL**

## WHAT'S A NICE GIRL DOING IN A DECADE LIKE THE 80s?

### RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

In dramatic interchanges, four adolescent women share viewpoints about jobs, sexuality and roles. The Women's Theatre Project created this piece with playwright Margot Kriel under the auspices of Dayton's.

A videotape of "Red Light/Green Light" will be available for rental or sale by January or February, 1986, in ¾" ½" Beta, or ½" VHS formats. Rental: \$75. Sale: \$175.

**YES,** I would like to receive mailings about this and other videotape programs.

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**ucvideo**

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Minneapolis, MN. 55414, (612)376-3333.

*Deirdre Boyle is the author of Video Classics: A Guide to Video Art and Documentary Tapes (Oryx Press, 1985) and a member of the media studies faculties at The New School for Social Research and Fordham University, College at Lincoln Center Campus. "Video Playback," which she began in the Fall of 1978, concludes with this column.*

## The Pursuit of Happiness

by Julie Gustafson and John Reilly

1983. 60 min. color.

Distributor: Global Village. Format: 3/4".

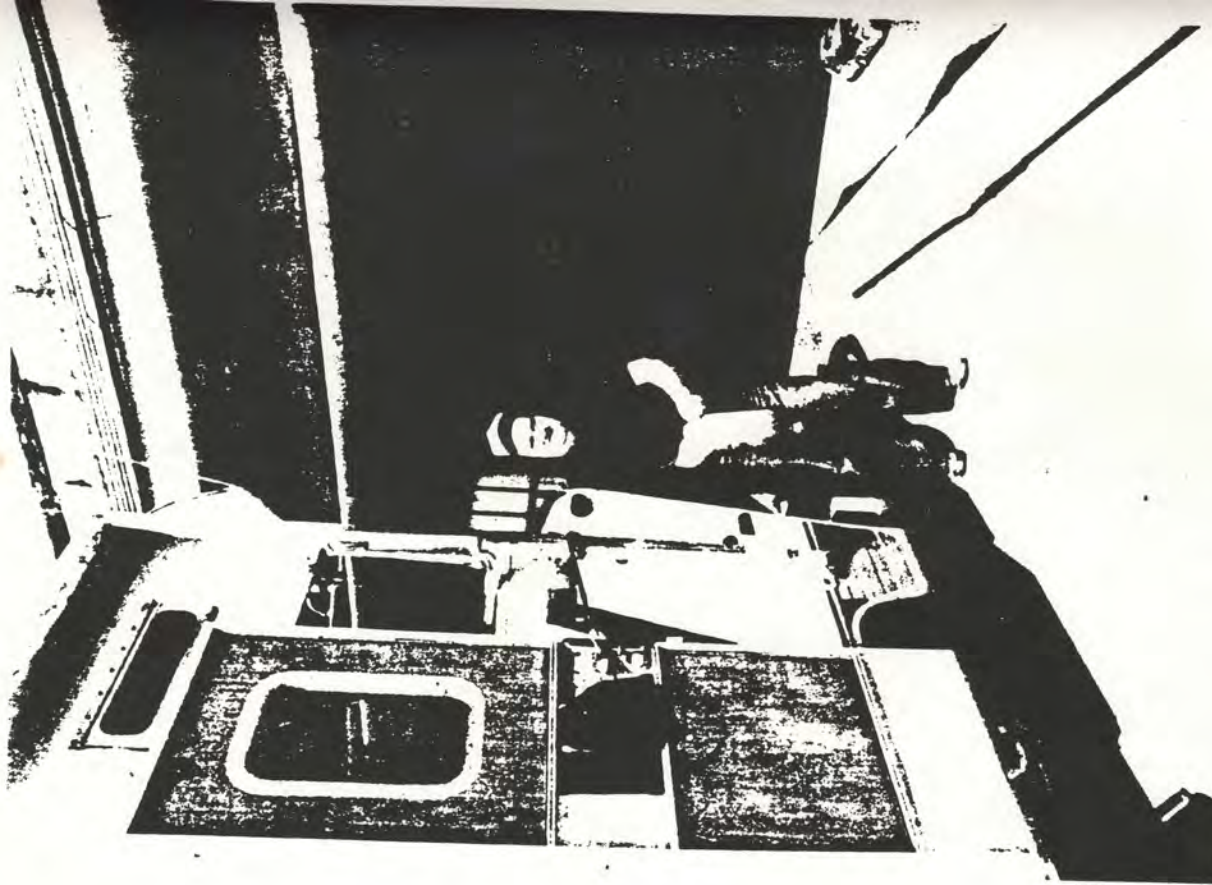
**Credits:** *Producers/Directors* Julie Gustafson and John Reilly *2d Camera* Hart Perry *Sound* Martin Lucas *Additional Sound* Victor Sanchez, Nicole Fauteux. Opening clip of Molly Rush from Emile D'Antonio's *In the King of Prussia*. *Montage Design* Nathaniel Merril.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS is the most complex documentary video narrative to emerge in the Eighties. Julie Gustafson parallels the lives of seven individuals who share a common link: prison. It's not just an actual prison but a metaphorical one, one that locks them into mental restraints as chafing as iron chains. By examining what "the pursuit of happiness" means to each person, Gustafson poses hard, thought-provoking questions about the value of human life. Featured here are Ida May and George Petsock, a marvelous couple whose resemblance to Edith and Archie Bunker is funny but misleading, because they are far more complex and human than that comedy series duo. George is the superintendent of the Pennsylvania State Prison; Ida May has followed him to his current job, leaving her roots behind. She longs for a future that her husband George, ever cautious, fears to count on.

At the prison, we meet two lifers: Ron, a Vietnam vet implicated in an armed robbery, hesitantly conducts a romance by mail, afraid to hope he will have any future with his would-be bride outside prison. Walter, a worldly black inmate, knows that for him happiness inside or outside those walls is about the same. Briefly interned in the prison is Molly Rush, a Catholic peace activist whose antinuclear protest with the Ploughshares 8 jeopardized not only her own future but that of her family, especially her husband, Bill. But the way she looks at it, she and all humanity may have no future unless people stand up against the threat of nuclear holocaust. Bill, confused and agonized by his wife's flinty zeal, worries more about the survival of

From **VIDEO CLASSICS** by Deidre Boyle, Oryx Press, 1986.

his marriage than that of the human race, while trying valiantly to understand and support Molly. All the players in this moving human drama are driven by their visions of a meaningful life, one that involves not only their own happiness but that of others.



Gustafson sensitively observes each couple, capturing amazing revelations of character in natural dialogue that surpasses the best writing of talented dramatists. In a passage that rivals Beckett, Ida May and George discuss their retirement and the pros and cons of "planning for" versus "counting on" the future. But since these are not abstract, fictional characters, their unique reality gives added power to the human hopes and fears they face. While editing the tape, Gustafson and her coproducer-husband, John Reilly, thought of the tape as a novel, recognizing literary precedents in constructing their documentary narrative. This is by no means docu-drama, because its reality is unrehearsed and immediate, but it shares with drama a multifaceted artistic shape where characters emerge—complete with tragic flaws—to engage in a story larger than any of them grasp. The tape is a major documentary and artistic achievement, the culmination of Gustafson's documentary career.

Gustafson's tapes have always emerged from personal concerns. Her first work, *The Politics of Intimacy*, was an outspoken discussion of sexuality by women of various ages and backgrounds, including her mother and sister; a later tape, *GIVING BIRTH: FOUR PORTRAITS*, outlined options for childbirth after her own frustrating experience during the birth of her son. *THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS* is fundamentally about relationships and growing through change, an appropriate topic for a husband-and-wife team to tackle.

# the village VOICE

## 'Pursuit of Happiness'

*The Pursuit of Happiness*, which PBS is airing without much fanfare on Tuesday, July 10, is a rarity among documentaries: it doesn't resolve any of the feelings it gives rise to, and doesn't pretend to try. The filmmakers, Julie Gustafson and John Reilly, apparently began with the idea of a movie about some prisoners at Western State Penitentiary, in Pittsburgh; in the course of preparing it, they drifted into other areas, and were smart enough to follow the drift. What they came out with isn't a movie about a prison, but a set of elliptical, memorable words and images about being lonely, feeling wishful, and the ties that both bind and distance. The prison's still a presence, the link between the diverse stories involved, but what's unsettling is that you don't even realize it until the movie's nearly over. Only two of the people featured in the film are convicts, and it's no longer suggested that their incarceration is the main reason for being interested in them; the others include a housewife turned antinuke militant (Molly Rush, who also showed up in Emile de Antonio's movie about the Ploughshares 8, *In the King of Prussia*) and her husband Bill—who's concerned, sympathetic, and yet ultimately baffled by how his marriage has turned out. There's also a doughty, rather likable older fellow, whom we see talking about his dream of owning a mobile home, and listening to his wife play "The Way We Were" on the living-room piano—it's a shock when the camera moves to the prison, and we see him in his official guise as its superintendent.

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VOICE JULY 10, 1984

The film effectively suggests, without being tendentious, that all these people are somehow living out different aspects of the same human condition. The photography and editing are unusually sensitive to the ways that people talk, and how they change in different settings and in different roles. The truisms of popular songs turn out to be their audiences' autobiographies: "I always had problems with that idea of the *pursuit* of happiness," says Molly Rush, "because, well, I always thought that happiness ought to, you know, come to you by *surprise*."

We see connections emerging, patterns that repeat from one life to the next—how, for instance, all the men find an official identity to supplement their private one, as if that's almost a basic necessity, with even the convict Ron Grimm recreating the outside world's societal niche in the presidency of the prison's Lifers' Association. Or else, in the recurring, extended dialogue sequences between each married couple, how perpetual misunderstanding can become so familiar as to make for a kind of harmony. *The Pursuit of Happiness* doesn't preach, and it doesn't dramatize: it looks for the touchstones in people's everyday lives, and comes away without a message or a lesson, but only a small fugue of individual truths.

## GLOBAL VILLAGE

Julie Gustafson, Director  
John Reilly, Executive Director

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



# Power and Pathos in 'Pursuit of Happiness'

By Tom Shales

Video vérité essays like "The Pursuit of Happiness," at 8 tonight on Channel 32, are heir to the two greatest traditions in television: the live drama and the intimate documentary. This is the best kind of TV because it isn't ersatz anything else; it's art and journalism meeting in a way they could only meet on TV.

"Happiness," an astute and inspired choice for Independence Day programming, extracts moments from the lives of six people in variously imperiled straits as they try to shape the directions of their lives. The film, by the gifted team of John Reilly and Julie Gustafson, is compelling in a cumulative way. The filmmakers have the ability to put a viewer at emotional risk almost immediately; then, the more they tell you about these people, the more you want to know, and the more deeply you care.

A common denominator in all the stories is jail. One pivotal figure is the supervisor of Pittsburgh State Prison, George Petsock, whom we encounter in home life with his wife Ida May, and whose path crosses those of other principal figures. Among them are Ron Grimm, given a life sentence five years earlier for taking part in an armed robbery in which a man was murdered (Grimm did not have or fire the gun); and Molly Rush, one of the "Plowshares Eight," a group of antinuclear Catholic activists with a penchant, perhaps even a passion, for getting arrested.

The other characters are Molly's husband and another prison inmate. The introduction of the nuclear protest theme threatens to tilt the film into too political an orbit. Words from the Declaration of Independence about the right of a people to overthrow a government that wrongs them are inserted just before shots of a protest demonstration on the front steps of Rockwell International. The filmmakers seem to be trying to make one feel guilty for not having taken part in any antinuclear activities.

Additionally, I felt the filmmakers wanted us to care more about Molly Rush and her cause than about the Petsocks and their dreams of retirement in a mobile home. To the contrary, Rush comes off as intelligent but terribly pious, and all too well equipped with sensitivity clichés of the '80s ("I just think it's important to respect people's choices," she meaninglessly tells her husband). But the heroine of the film, to stretch a term, is clearly Ida May Petsock, whom we see early playing and singing "The Way We Were" at the living room piano and later referring to it in the kitchen as "that stupid song."

The Petsocks let the filmmakers poke their camera into terribly personal crevices of their lives. Gradually we see Ida May as a woman in the process of having her consciousness raised, but good. Her talks with her husband, who treats her with a kind of suffering tolerance, are touching. When, midway through the film or so, we learn that she has undertaken something of a writing career, one that deals largely with self-help homilies apparently, it's the most gratifying kind of revelation.

She has found a new person inside her after all these years, she says. "It's the me that should have been all along." Perhaps it has to do with the personalizing nature of television, but the odyssey of Ida May comes to seem every bit as urgent as Molly Rush's favorite subject, the possible destruction of the lovely little planet we have here.

Ron Grimm, the lifer, has a heartrending story to tell, and it is meted out in small installments. He was a Vietnam veteran, we learn, who says he knew he should have prevented the use of the gun in the robbery, but didn't. On the practical side, he and a girlfriend plot a strategy during visiting hours for commutation of his sentence. In a more visionary mood, Grimm dreams of having "one good year" free from strife, of owning "my own home," and mourns that he never had "a mother that cared for and loved me."

For the Petsocks, a burning question at the end of the day is whether or not to go to "The Mall." For a bearded prison inmate, life can be summarized in five words: "I don't want to die." For Rush, there is always one more demonstration, and on the way to it she does become eloquent when trying to convince her husband of the importance of her fight. Her dead mother still lives in her memory, she tells him, "but if everybody goes, there is no memory . . . there's nothing left behind."

PBS fed this brilliant film to stations for use last Saturday in a poor time slot. Channel 32 wisely changed that to tonight. But Channel 26, the sleepytime station, will delay the program until July 10 (at 11 p.m. yet), when its Independence Day peg will be lost. WETA through the years has consistently shown the most arrogant contempt for the innovative work of independent filmmakers; the station management seems annoyed that such programs exist at all. At Channel 26, they think public television is the Boston Pops.

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