

No paper Christmas cards this year, due to an insanely busy end to an extraordinarily busy year.

I started the year by teaching a workshop in Oaxaca for two weeks that was magical. I've been teaching workshops for over a decade and they are always excellent, but this one was truly special, partly because of the challenges presented to filmmakers working in a foreign culture and language and the satisfactions in overcoming them, partly because of the marvelous mix of people and partly because of the wonder of Oaxaca itself. Best of all, I'm set to do another at the end of February, in just a few weeks.

My biggest job of the year, and the one that aged me more than any ever, was a film for the United Nations Development Programme and the Asian Development Bank, a long-term client. It was a month's shoot, very ambitious, traversing the five Central Asian Republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and was eye-opening for me, my first visit to former soviet republics. The film was designed to promote cooperation between the countries, which have had a rough go of it since independence. The whole trip was like an archeological dig for me, trying to unearth the Soviet Union that loomed over my Cold War childhood. It was an amazing trip, and the post-production nearly killed me, the final script that was accepted by UNDP and ADB was the 20<sup>th</sup> and I delivered two versions, an English one, narrated by Leonard Nimoy, and a Russian one, translated and narrated by a student of mine, a Russian vascular surgeon who now lives in New York. You can read an account of the shoot (and also of the time I spent teaching Tibetan monks Final Cut Pro in India on my way home) at this link:

<http://www.studiodaily.com/studiomonthly/tools/casestudies/5449.html>

You can watch the UNDP film (Caravan of Dreams) and the film I made with the monks (Khalong, which played in the Dallas Video Festival) at my site, <http://billmegalos.com>.

The UNDP edit took the whole summer, I think I might have seen Elena, who was home from college, maybe twenty hours all summer. I did manage to see my parents for a weekend in upstate New York when I went to the UN to show a roughcut for approval.

At the end of September, I had the great fortune of going to the Ukraine and making a film with Paul Mazursky. Though he's made

17 features, at 75 he can't get arrested in Hollywood, so he decided to make a documentary about the Hasidic Jews who descend on Uman, a village where Rabbi Nachmann, one of the guiding lights of the Hasidic movement, was buried nearly two hundred years ago. Coming from all over the world to celebrate the new year, Rosh Hashanah, this year the crowd numbered 20,000 (all male, the majority from Israel.) Think Sundance Festival for Hasidim. It was a marvelous time being with Paul, I don't think I've ever laughed so much, he's the greatest story-teller and I still haven't processed the trip.

On the way home from the Ukraine, I'd been scheduled to teach a workshop in Crete, which in the end was cancelled, but I still managed to spend a week in Greece, and though I'd gotten sick in Uman (where we were sleeping seven to a room) it was still great to be there.

I spent my birthday and the two weeks following it in Uganda, teaching a workshop on working with NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations) and guess what? It was wonderful. Though I've seen tremendous poverty all over Asia, this was my first trip to sub-Saharan Africa and the second I landed I realized I was personally carrying a lot of baggage, a lot of ideas about Africa being a "basket-case" as so many public figures have written it off. I loved the friendliness of the Ugandans and was especially taken with their understanding of the problems they were facing and their steadfast commitment to making a better life. Across the board and across the nation, there is a profound belief in education and the crucial need to rescue children orphaned by war and HIV/AIDS and to get them into school, no matter the sacrifice. That moved me enormously and it was a pleasure and honor to be able to contribute our small part to creating a more hopeful future. What made this workshop special for me was being able to see the class fan out into Uganda, each student finding a story and working hand in hand with an NGO, figuring out what sort of electronic media the NGO needed, coming up with a plan and finishing the film in the two weeks we were there. Though much of my own work has been with NGOs over the past five years, it was great to be able to pass on things I've learned and to see them put into action.

But wait, there's more. If that weren't enough for any year, 2005 ended on an even higher note. Masako Sakata, a student who has taken several workshops with me, is a Japanese woman in her 50s.

She was married to an American photographer, Greg Davis, for 30 years. Greg had been a GI in Viet Nam and distinctly remembered being sprayed by Agent Orange when he was there. After he died in 2003 of liver cancer likely caused by the Agent Orange, Masako, who had never worked in film before, decided to make a film honoring him and examining the effects of the defoliant in Viet Nam, where the dioxin has never left the soil. She made two trips to Viet Nam to shoot and has made a very moving and important film, which was accepted to the Biarritz Film Festival based on her roughcut. I managed to squeeze in an eight day trip to Japan so that we could online it, color-correcting and mixing the film after re-recording Masako's voiceover and writing music. Masako, Tadashi Namba (a Japanese composer now living a mile from me in LA) and I spent an amazing week snowbound in her 150 year-old farmhouse 100 miles north of Tokyo.

We had two meters of snow and worked around the clock, Masako and I on the film, and Tadashi on the music. We didn't have time to spot the music cues, Tadashi just started playing and recording on a piano, an ocarina that had belonged to Greg and a borrowed nylon-stringed guitar. When it came time to put it all together on the final night, the results were overwhelming. Every piece fit perfectly, swelling where it had to, fading out at the perfect time. It was beyond eerie. I've never been on a project where the creative process took over quite this way, where we were so in the zone. I'm very proud of the film and look forward to seeing how it will fare in the big world. I also can't wait to work again that way, totally trusting that all will work out.

I arrived in Los Angeles from Japan the morning of the 21<sup>st</sup> of December and flew out that evening to Costa Rica with my family, hoping to get to know them again.

I look forward to the new year with great hope, despite the cruel mistakes and egos of our leaders. Wherever I have been in the past year, there has been positive growth, whether in my family (Elena continues to prosper in college, Tana in high school, Judie at work) in my work, in my work with the homeless, or with the band I play in.

So I wish you a great year, one of unprecedented creativity, satisfaction and love. xoxoxoxo