
Brazilian Grandma in US Lets Her Videocam Tell Immigrant Family's Saga

Contributed by Newsroom
Thursday, 21 May 2009

Grandma Has a Video Camera is a one-hour documentary about the use of home video by a family of Brazilian immigrants, chronicling their lives in the United States for over 20 years. The work helps to answer questions like: "Who are the many immigrants of today? What are they seeking when building their new lives? How do they see the new land and its people and where do they go to understand both? Do they belong here or there? And who needs to make that decision?"

From enchantment to disillusionment, from idealization to conformity, first-hand images and voices in the documentary depict how recently arriving immigrants see their new world, and struggle to settle down in their adopted homeland.

The United States has been described as a "melting pot," a land where immigrants from diverse lands blend into something we call Americans. But this is changing. Immigrants today tend to hold on to their past and their original homelands, they resist assimilation in order to live a life that offers the best of both worlds.

Children are encouraged to become Americans, but they are also taught to remain faithful to their roots.

Modern technology, from jet aircraft and the telephone to the Internet and cable television, has helped to shorten the distance between one's country of origin and the new land. And for grandma Elda, the video camera does that job just as well.

For her, videotape is a substitute for family albums, TV entertainment, and writing letters to those back home. She has kept family ties strong by sending videotapes to those still in Brazil.

Grandma Has a Video Camera explores the parallel stories of the family's immigration, and how the video camera registers their lives. These video diaries examine issues of identity, social dynamics within immigrant families and their community, the conditions of transnationality and the conflicts of loyalty to a single country.

The Lalau-Cypriano family represents the different generations and different faces of immigration: those who never learn English, living solely within their immigrant community, as well as those who try to assimilate into their new culture.

Some are born on American soil and struggle to fit their parents' culture into the society in which they live. They live here with one foot in each country, or move back and forth as they can't commit to one home. Some have dual citizenship. Others have lived here for 25 years and still hold a green card.

A first trip to see snow, a tour to a supersized supermarket, or a video letter showing the latest motorcycle offers an intimate portrayal of the uncensored, the honest, and the amazed. What has emerged from several years of videotaping is an incredible portrait of people overcoming barriers - their desires, their loneliness, and their fears - to make a dream come true.

Premiered at the Latin Beat Film Festival at Lincoln Center in New York, and first broadcasted at KQED in northern California, *Grandma has a Video Camera* is now being aired at PBS Stations throughout California.

Grandma Has a Video Camera was directed by Tânia Cypriano. Brazilian filmmaker Cypriano has been working between the United States and her native Brazil for over 15 years.

Her films and videos have won international awards including Best Documentary at the Joseph Papp's Festival Latino in New York, the Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Art Institute International Film Festival, Festival do Cinema de Gramado in Brazil and Fespaco in Burkina Faso.

They have also been shown around the world in places such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Jerusalem Film Festival, the Amsterdam Documentary Film Festival, Rock in Rio and the Berlin International Film Festival.

Her television credits include working on documentaries for PBS, the History Channel, NHK in Japan, GNT in Brazil and Channel 4 in England.

Tânia Cypriano has also been a grant recipient of the New York State Council on the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Soros Documentary Fund, The Ford Foundation in Brazil, the Jerome Foundation, Experimental Television, and the National Latino Communication Center.

Recently she worked as Line Producer on *Lady by the Sea*, a one-hour documentary about the Statue of Liberty, written and directed by Martin Scorsese and Kent Jones. She also worked on the production for *Premiere Brazil!* at MoMA, an early showcase of contemporary Brazilian cinema curated by Ilda Santiago and Jytte Jensen.

Filmmaker' Statement

In 1986 my youngest aunt Marina got pregnant. As a single mother she asked my grandmother Elda to come from Brazil to live with her and help her raise her child. So, Grandma packed up her life at the age of 70 and moved to California.

As Marina had a full time job and was out most days, she bought Grandma a video camera to videotape her daughter growing up. Through the years, Grandma's camera videotaped her granddaughter, her daughter, their evolving life in this new country, and the family around her.

For Grandma, videotape became a substitute for family albums, TV entertainment, and writing letters to those back home. She kept family ties strong by sending videotapes to those still in Brazil.

I became curious about Grandma's videos after noticing how much her camera was present in my family's daily lives. Every time I visited relatives in California, I would notice Grandma with her video camera. I asked her if I could see her videotapes and in the months that followed, as I watched them, I learned that they spoke from within, of a side of modern immigration never portrayed.

The story of the many immigrants, whose families are broken apart and become divided about living here or there. Those who move back and forth, always longing for the missing country, while struggling to find their final home.

We live in a video age where many people tape their lives, possibly trying to find some understanding of themselves and often not succeeding.

What is so compelling about my grandmother's videos is the unselfconscious way in which people reveal themselves. Through a constant subjective camera, the viewer is invited into the minds of immigrants and what they think of the places and the situations in which they live.

For broadcasts of Grandma has a Video Camera visit: <http://www.klcs.org/0309/tvschedule.htm>

To order a copy of Grandma Has a Video Camera write to:

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