KNIGHT BEFORE DAWN

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To my parents, who always supported me (and paid for my education).
I can write better than anybody who can write faster, and I can write faster than anybody who can write better.

—A. J. Liebling (1904-1963)
ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT

Knight Before Dawn
by
Jeffrey Dylan Zimmerman
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Knight Before Dawn presents an alternate view of the glamorous life of a professional skateboarder. The nineties were a great time of expansion for the skateboard industry. Companies grew, athletes became better paid, and everybody prospered. But of course with such a dangerous career, issues are bound to arise. In the midst of his booming career, Chad shattered his fibula in 10 places.

As prosperous as the industry was, it was also unforgiving. Chad’s career was over, and his fans realized this. Chad had lived the dream, and returned to reality. We will explore what it takes to make a comeback in this industry and get the fans back supporting you, as well as what professional athletes do when their careers are over.

The film is a 90-minute feature documentary and incorporates various aspects of both expository and observational documentary modes. It serves as a character profile of Chad, but also tells a larger story of the industry as a whole. A Blu-Ray of the film is available for viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

When asked what they want to be when they grow up, many children will respond that they aspire to be professional athletes. Being rich while doing something you love seemingly has no downside. But many do not realize the harsh economic realities of being a professional skateboarder. It is nothing like being a professional football, basketball, or baseball player, etc., which traditionally offers a realistic shot at financial success and stability.

The skateboard industry is a niche market that is seemingly booming in many aspects. But the median of the athletes are not paid nearly what one might imagine. Many professionals struggle to pay their bills; few live their lives at the levels that professionals in other industries achieve. Some professional skateboarders will even work side jobs to supplement their careers, while also selling off skate-products they received for free to pay their rent, instead of using them as their sponsors intended.

Odds are against you if you aspire to be a professional skateboarder: there are approximately 18 million skateboarders in the world, but only a few hundred that are considered “professionals” from a financial standpoint. And if you do reach the pinnacle, if you don’t land a shoe or video game deal you won’t be able to live solely off skateboarding.

Additionally, on a personal note, Chad was the first serious skateboarder that took me under his wing. He let me film him, and gave me the contacts to sell the footage to his sponsors. From there I got a lot of other work with other people, and have gotten to where I am at within skateboarding today. I owe a lot of my success to him. I hope to repay the favor with a solid documentary he can be proud of. This relationship can definitely put a strain on the film itself. I wanted to make my film, but I also wanted to appease him. I needed to find a balance so that my film would not suffer.
STATEMENT OF THE SUB PROBLEMS

For those who do make it, the career of a professional skateboarder is volatile. As a professional athlete health care companies charge premium rates to keep you covered. Many choose to test their luck without it, as was the case with my subject Chad Knight.

Life after skateboarding is a privilege, not a given. Skaters that don’t save and plan for the future find themselves broke, looking for another way to pay their bills. Often in a worse position than their adoring fans, who have traditional steady jobs and planned ahead for their futures.

Some of the bigger corporations (Nike, Gatorade, Monster, etc.) have taken an interest in skateboarding, and have the resources to pay their athletes what they are worth. But many skaters see this as “selling out” and would rather risk their futures over infuriating their fans. With so many different money making possibilities, but such an adverse mentality towards growth into other industries, skateboarders are limiting their financial possibilities in the hopes of preserving their images, which begs the question: what is more important, fame or fortune?

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal was to create an entertaining film that inspires people as well as enlightens them about the dangers of being an athlete, especially one without health insurance. The story, of one man overcoming adversity, is inspiring. Many skateboarders have their 15 minutes of fame, and inevitably end their careers broke and looking for another line of work. Some stand out and lengthen their 15 minutes while capitalizing financially as well.

Another goal was to make a modern style documentary about an extreme sports athlete. It is hard to get the younger generations to watch documentaries, but if done properly I think this film will attract a diverse audience. Ideally my film will appeal to today’s youth, who have short attention spans, as well as yesterday’s youth, who grew up in the same era as Chad and would remember him or at least relate to the time period.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Definitions are separated into project topic terms and film terms.
Project Topic Terms

- **Bearings**: Metal gadgets inside wheels that consist of 6-8 rotating balls that keep the wheels moving smoothly.
- **Fakie/Nollie**: Doing a trick off the nose of the board, both switch and regular.
- **Fibula**: Leg bone located on the lateral side of the tibia.
- **Fisheye**: Lens that refracts light to create a 180 degree view, used in skateboarding to make jumps look bigger than they actually are.
- **Frontside/Backside**: A trick that is performed on one side of the body, either the way you are facing, or behind you.
- **Goofy**: Riding with your right foot forward.
- **Grind**: The act in which your trucks scrape across various materials.
- **Grip Tape**: Sandpaper type material that allows for a frictional pull from the shoes to the skateboard.
- **Hardware**: Various screws and bolts that hold the skateboard together.
- **Mongo**: Pushing with your front (wrong) foot.
- **Ollie**: Process of jumping off the tail of the board while creating friction forward on the grip tape in order to propel the board into the air.
- **Regular**: Riding with your left foot forward.
- **Street**: Style of skating done, generally illegally, in the streets on objects not made for skating: stairs, rails, benches, curbs, etc. This is looked down upon by society but is more respected within the skateboard community.
- **Switch**: Riding backwards. Many tricks are much more difficult when done switch; it is very common.
- **Trucks**: Metal hangars that hold the wheels on to the board and aid in turning, etc.
- **Vert**: Style of skating done in a controlled atmosphere, usually on a large wooden ramp where the skater goes back and forth. This is a more universally respected form of skating, i.e., Tony Hawk.

Film Terms

- **Cinéma Vérité**: Style of documentary filmmaking, combining naturalistic techniques, staged set-ups, and the use of the camera to provoke subjects.
- **Direct Cinema**: Characterized initially by filmmakers’ desire to directly capture reality and represent it truthfully, and to question the relationship of reality with cinema.
• **Expository Mode:** Emphasizes verbal commentary and an argumentative logic; use of narration. This is the mode that most people identify with documentary in general.

• **NTSC:** National Television System Committee. American standard for television broadcasts, in practice since 1941.

• **Observational Mode:** A documentary that tends to simply observe, allowing viewers to reach whatever conclusions they may deduce.

• **Participatory Mode:** Encounters between the subject and the filmmaker are recorded. Filmmaker actively engages with the situation, asking questions of subject, and sharing experiences.

• **Performative Mode:** Acknowledges the emotional and subjective aspects of documentary, and presents ideas as part of a context, having different meanings for different people, often autobiographical in nature.

• **RED:** Broadcast quality camera capable of shooting high definition video, suitable for movie theaters/other forms of distribution.

• **Reflexive Mode:** Demonstrates consciousness of the process of reading documentary, acknowledging the presence of the viewer and modality judgments they arrive at.

**DELIMITATIONS**

Chad’s story is one of persevering through adversity, although there is more to it than that. In this piece, Chad touches on the subject of health care, and how important it is in today’s society. While there is so much that can be said on that topic, it was not a direction I wished to take my film. Chad’s story has a lot going on, and to convolute it with sub-stories of why our society should be different would detract from the overall quality. A film of that nature would require many more subjects to prove that it isn’t an isolated incident.

In the realm of professional skateboarding, there are implied issues of race, ethnicity, class, and economic standings. Chad briefly mentions the issues he had to deal with growing up in Ohio, being the poor, scrawny white kid skateboarding in a school full of jocks. However, he does not go beyond that, as it seems to deter from the narrative storyline of Chad’s life, especially his professional career.

In addition, throughout the film we discuss Chad’s substance abuse issues along with his excessive partying (at one time). This is an important topic to help build his character, but we do not (heavily) discuss the societal repercussions of encouraging professional athletes to
party, in a sense, to maintain their image in the skateboard industry. I allowed no more than a minute for this.

There is so much to discuss within Chad’s life, that it would be detrimental to the project to stretch it in so many different directions. Topics such as health care, race, and substance abuse are very important, but will have to be saved for another film.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF PROJECT**

I hope that my film will leave its viewers with a resounding feeling of encouragement for how Chad turned his life around. Uplifting films, when done properly, are an effective form of entertainment that can help to inspire the viewers about their own lives. The film is a cautionary tale about risks and rewards available to the younger generations who pursue skateboarding as a professional career.

Films like *Dogtown and the Z-Boys* were effective in enlightening the general public about the history of skateboard culture. My film focuses more on an individual than a group, but hopefully opens many people’s eyes to the hardships that some professional athletes experience in niche industries (mainly extreme sports industries: skateboarding, BMX, motocross, surfing, etc).

Ideally my film will be seen as an entertaining look at a growing industry that will also send a message that many can relate to, or at least comprehend. I am not trying to solve the world’s problems, but rather share one’s incredible story.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE, FILMS, AND GENRES

LITERATURE ON PROJECT TOPIC

Knight Before Dawn required research on various aspects of skateboarding, as well as society’s views on it and counter-cultures as a whole. David Browne’s Amped provides a comprehensive overview of the history, business, and culture of skateboarding as well as many other action-sports. Additionally, Tony Hawk and Sean Mortimer’s Hawk: Occupation, Skateboarder gives us a firsthand experience of an athlete’s experiences in the industry. Both novels tell a similar story in which major corporations try to manipulate their way into a niche industry.

Over time skateboarding has become more and more commercialized. “‘You just have to build it [the marketing campaign] from the grass roots,’ Carter said. ‘You have to demonstrate support for the sports. It’s more of a cultural phenomenon than traditional sports has to deal with’” (Browne 174). For the most part, skateboarders have no interest in major corporations getting involved in their sport, so the companies must sweeten the pot somehow, contributing something towards the sport as a show of good faith, to show they are interested in more than just themselves, which of course is not true. “Mountain Dew is a huge brand, but we don’t want people to believe it’s so big because it wouldn’t be very cool anymore. So we try to do stuff where we act like a small brand all the time, try to take more risks and do things differently and be a bit more edgy” (184). The idea that large brands have no place in extreme sports is definitely a prevalent feeling in the industry. But brands like Mountain Dew (owned by the larger Pepsi Corporation), Monster Energy (owned by the Hansen’s Corporation), etc., portray themselves as these smaller “core” brands that have athletes’ best interests at heart.
Pretty soon more and more companies found themselves jumping on the bandwagon. It was commonplace for mainstream brands to dabble into the foreign world of extreme sports. “With the combined successes of Gillette and Activision, corporate America entered the arena with a fanfare it had never demonstrated before. It became impossible to glance through the business pages of trade magazines and not see an announcement for another major company buying into the action-sports culture” (Browne 190). Coke’s new product, Surge, had taken aim at the action sports industry and Mountain Dew decided to compete. “To ward off competition from Coke’s similarly marketed new soda, Surge, Pepsi hired Bill Carter’s Fuse firm to help sharpen its approach and ingratiate itself further with the action-sports crowd. Carter suggested sponsoring events and contests, and soon enough the Dew logo could be seen at Vans Triple Crown and X Games competitions” (184). At this time the Triple Crown and X Games were seen as grassroots events for skaters, by the skaters. In order to follow that image, Mountain Dew devised a new plan.

. . . the company hired young, affable, T-shirted “samplers” to work the crowds and pass out free soda . . . . Pepsi had learned that the most effective way for an institution to secure credibility with its targeted audience was not to act like an institution. X Games attendees were not supposed to know that Dew was a part of Pepsi, which also owned Frito Lay, Tropicana, and Quaker Oats [etc]. (Browne 184)

As under the radar as they tried to be, their intentions were still known by major players in the industry. Professional skateboarder Tony Hawk recalled from a Dew commercial spot: “They were like: ‘We’re not Pepsi—we’re just a small division of Pepsi’” (Browne 184).

Tony Hawk announced his decision for retirement in 2003. He was slated to compete at one last contest, held by MTV.

By the time I arrived in Vegas, MTV was hyping up my situation. I asked them to tone it down, but they didn’t do too much about it. Again, the problem with dealing with nonendemic companies is that you and they don’t share the same goals. MTV wanted to produce a program that would get high ratings; I wanted to end my competitive career without a parade on TV. (Hawk and Mortimer 244-45)

The bottom line is that these major corporations’ main priority is making money, not the interests of the individual.

Fuse Marketing, headed by Bill Carter, is a unique marketing company that saw a new growing market that needed direction. They give major corporations direction in the confusing new world of extreme sports, while mapping out their futures and trying to keep
them from looking like conglomerates. Right Guard decided to tackle the market, introducing a new deodorant: “Right Guard Xtreme Sport.” Fuse Marketing hated the word extreme, or any variation of it in his marketing campaigns, knowing that it isolated their corporation as “uncool.” But the product was already past development, in production, and was not going to be changed. “Carter decided to stay quiet. He didn’t want to lose a huge client, and he figured that teaching behemoth corporations how to penetrate this large but elusive market was what he had set out to accomplish when he started Fuse in 1995 after working for two previous sports and entertainment marketing firms” (Browne 188). These well established companies know the ins and outs of marketing, but what they don’t know is how to appeal to rebellious youth. That is where Fuse excels.

. . . what the manufacturer wanted from Carter was advice on buying credibility. Months before the product arrived in stores, banners announcing Right Guard Xtreme Sport began popping up at events like the U.S. Open of Snowboarding and the Vans Triple Crown series of bike, snow, and skate competitions. The marketing equivalent of a preemptive strike, the message was simple: You haven’t heard of this product, and you may be suspicious of the name, but Right Guard believes in these sports and wants to help ensure that events such as these take place. (Browne 188)

I myself was personally at the Vans Triple Crown in Oceanside and remember seeing the Right Guard banners all over the place. I went home with a goodie bag full of deodorants, T-shirts, etc. I can’t say that the marketing worked, as I never bought their product, but it definitely did help get the name recognized.

As these companies jumped into extreme sports, the athletes began to reap the benefits.

The skaters, snowboarders, BMXers, in-liners, and motocrossers could only watch, alternately stunned and caustic, as the influx of outsiders with large wallets approached them. They saw the money thrown in their direction jump, like big air, from an average of $20,000 for an annual deal in the pre-Gillette days to as much as $100,000 (and occasionally more) after. All they had to do was slap company logos and stickers onto their gear, appear in ads, and make nice. (Browne 191)

There was various support and opposition to different levels of involvement from these companies, but they couldn’t be ignored. These were life-changing endorsement deals. “By the end of 1998, I [Tony Hawk] was getting some weird offers for endorsement deals. The money was ridiculous compared to what I was used to. Some of the offers themselves were
just plain ridiculous, regardless of the monetary potential. It became overwhelming” (Hawk and Mortimer 225). Tony eventually got an agent for himself to help weed through all the offers. “I was scared of being misunderstood and treated like a football player, or ice skater, or any other type of mainstream athlete. It was unheard of for a skateboarder to have an agent for anything besides television commercials. But I also realized I was heading into uncharted territory with all the mainstream interest, so I decided to test the waters” (225). Tony ended up signing with the William Morris Agency. They worked out lots of endorsements for him, and got him far more money than he could have on his own.

Skaters as a whole had many preconceived notions about corporations getting involved in their niche sport. “Along with the new paychecks, though, came conflicting emotions the athletes had never experienced before. They knew all too well the history of corporate infiltration into their world” (Browne 191). Over the years various major corporations tried to tap into the market of skateboarding, and were shunned. But this time around they were trying to disguise what they actually were.

They [athletes] want the money and the notoriety but want their underground secret culture and don’t want to let anyone into it, . . . even when they signed on a dotted line, they worried about how they would come off; if an ad in which they were featured was cheesy or too slick and didn’t mesh with their image, irreparable damage could result. (Browne 192)

Although the companies were succeeding in marketing the industry, they could never fully understand the culture.

These newfound sponsors had no idea how to treat an extreme/alternative sports athlete.

They don’t get it. Still, after all the years skaters spent trying to explain what we do and why we do it to nonskaters, it all fell on deaf ears. They treated me as though I were a football or basketball player when I said I’d stop competing; they made it mean I wouldn’t skate anymore . . . . No matter how big skating gets, no matter how many people around the world get it zapped into their living rooms or see it in movies, they won’t understand skating until they go and do it. (Hawk and Mortimer 245)

A frustrated Tony Hawk recalls of how the corporations never fully understood skateboarding and the community that they were supporting, while trying to capitalize. In some ways that is bad but in others good; the companies supplied the money while the skaters supplied the insight.
There was no way to have the best of both worlds, the athletes had to make a choice. Many allegiances were drawn, and skaters split off in two different directions. Some sold out their careers, and made a lot of money, losing their credibility in the industry. Others stuck to core skate brands, their names untarnished, but their wallets significantly smaller. One interesting exception to note is professional skateboarder Chris Cole. He was anti-corporate sponsors until recently, when he had a kid. He publicly announced that he would be signing a million dollar endorsement deal with Monster Energy Drinks, owned by the larger Hansen’s Beverage Company. He was straightforward with his fans and said he was doing it to ensure his and his family’s financial stability for long after he is done skateboarding. For the most part, his honesty was respected and he is one of the few skaters with a major endorsement deal still equally respected by all.

**Literature on Project Style**

The style of *Knight Before Dawn* shall be similar to many lower-budget documentaries being produced as of late. With the advent of DSLR cameras, and various other technological advances, a clean, professional look can be achieved with a much smaller budget for equipment as well as crew.

Skateboarding is a very niche type of film-making. Wide-angle lenses and fisheyes are used frequently to accentuate the action as well as the terrain being manipulated.

Set your camera quite close to the actor, but with a short lens. This accentuates the sense of movement, but exaggerates the background space around your actor. You should keep the camera the same distance from the actor during the shot so the audience feels a strong affinity to her [or his] movement. (Kenworthy 20) Extreme sports are one of the few genres that utilize these lenses, and the look can be achieved on nearly any budget.

Documentary films can be extremely complex. The line between the modes: Observational, Expository, Poetic, Reflexive and Performative is often blurred. “Documentary is not a reproduction of reality, it is a representation of the world we already occupy” (Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 13). A documentary is not meant to just show what is happening, but to do so in a controlled, representative manner. Otherwise we could just present security camera footage and call it a documentary.
Many documentaries employ the use of reenactments to convey the story that is being told. “Reenactments need not be highly realistic recreations, as they usually are in fiction films. Some documentaries recreate past events in clearly stylized ways” (Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 13). The ability to recreate Chad’s incident in a less than realistic manner, with some coloring effects to separate it as a clear reenactment, gave me a lot of freedom in which to tell his story. Chad can be describing his ordeal, while the viewers see much of what he is saying unfold before their eyes. Granted, the reenactments do not encompass everything, but serve their purpose to bring the viewers in and get them more invested in his story.

Documentaries are quite a different animal than fiction films, but by no means are easier to produce. “Documentary films, in fact, often display a wider array of shots and scenes than fiction films, an array yoked together less by a narrative organized around a central character than by a rhetoric organized around a controlling perspective” (Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 23). The plethora of predetermined shots, and the relaxation of having a script locked down, etc., give a filmmaker some comfort when producing narrative films; this is not the case for documentaries. Sure, plenty of preproduction can be done, but inevitably, even with the most interesting of topics, the director of photography must come up with some artistic, beautiful shots to entertain the eyes as one gets deeper into a storyline. “One common but misleading way of defining documentary from the point of view of the filmmaker is in terms of control: documentary film-makers exercise less control over their subject than their fictional counterparts do” (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 13). “Narrative as a mechanism for storytelling seems quite different from documentary as a mechanism for addressing nonimaginary, real-life issues” (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 6). To complicate things even more, the subject of a documentary can be very unpredictable. Chad could tell a very different version of the story than what I expected him to. But he didn’t, and I was able to produce my film as planned. But any good documentary filmmaker knows that you must be prepared for anything, and have a contingency plan for the inevitable issues that will arise.

Although I had to decide whether to shoot the film on a DSLR or a RED, I was confident that a clean, professional look could be achieved. In Kenworthy’s book, *Master Shots*, he breaks down various techniques the low-budget filmmaker can use to create high-budget scenes.
The examples shown are generally from feature films with big budgets and all the crew and equipment you can imagine. And yet every single shot in this book can be achieved on the cheap, with a handheld camera . . . . Never move the camera for the sake of it, but never sit it on a tripod because you’re too lazy to think of something more interesting. (Kenworthy viii)

Regardless of what camera I ended up with, the quality of the film would be very similar. The creativity and execution of my shots were much more important than the equipment.

When you direct a film, you have a lot on your mind. The hours are long, sleep is short and the pressure is high. And yet, in the midst of the circus, you are required to be as creative as you have ever been . . . . To people who’ve never worked in film, it seems implausible that we can spend 12 hours getting two minutes of useable footage. For those who work in the industry, it seems like a miracle if we get that much. (Kenworthy viii)

Producing a documentary without proper preparation creates plenty of unnecessary additional work. As much preparation as I could manage to complete was crucial to the success of my film.

I anticipated that my film would employ many of the qualities of a Cinéma vérité film. “In pure Cinéma vérité films, the style seeks to become ‘transparent’ in the same mode as the classical Hollywood style—capturing people in action, and letting the viewer come to conclusions about them unaided by any implicit or explicit commentary” (Nichols, “The Voice of Documentary” 260). I wanted to document Chad in his day-to-day life, interacting with colleagues (at his new job), with fellow skaters, and even with his son.

I would suggest that at times people can behave more naturally while being filmed than in the presence of an ordinary observer. A man with a camera has an obvious job to do, which is to film. His subjects understand this and leave him to it. He remains occupied, half-hidden behind his machine, satisfied to be left alone. As an unencumbered visitor, he would have to be entertained, whether as a guest or as a friend. In this, I think, lies both the strength and the weakness of the observational method. (Macdougall 278)

Although we needed some crew available for Chad’s interviews, I wanted to keep it to an intimate setting, where Chad could feel comfortable to share whatever feelings he’d like to.

The benefit of filming with a DSLR over the RED, especially in fly-on-the-wall scenarios, is that the camera will be less obviously present. “In his attempt to make us into witnesses, the observational filmmaker often thinks in terms of the image on screen rather than his presence in the setting where events are occurring” (Macdougall 280) “The qualities of each mode . . . provide a rich toolbox of resources from which to fashion distinctive new documentaries”
My film was not a pure observational documentary by any means, as there was music, interviews, scene arrangement, etc., but it used some of the characteristics effectively. “There is, indeed, a distinctive bond between a photographic image and that of which it is a record. Something of reality itself seems to pass through the lens and remain embedded in the photographic emulsion” (Nichols, Representing Reality 5). A camera cannot pick up what is really happening, but instead picks up what it sees, based on how we position it. What we choose to include, or not include, affects the reality that the viewer experiences.

Every documentary has its own voice, spoken through both sound and images. This voice “speaks through its composition of shots, its editing together of images, and its use of music, among other things” (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary 67). Just as a person utilizes all tools at their disposal to convey their message, a documentary does the same. “Just like the orator or a public speaker who uses his entire body to give voice to a particular perspective, documentaries speak with all the means at their disposal” (67). A documentary is just a different form of medium to convey a message, or represent a facet of reality; where all is, debatably, fair.

Documentaries have no rules. It is an art form, and although many try to define it with preconceived notions of what is considered the norm, none can truly constrain art. “Documentary as a concept or practice occupies no fixed territory. It mobilizes no finite inventory of techniques, addresses no set numbers of issues, and adopts no completely known taxonomy of forms, styles, or modes” (Nichols, Representing Reality 12). In my film I hoped to mix traditional styles of observational cinema with more effective methods such as interviews, possible reenactments, possible voice over/narration, etc.

When producing a documentary I needed to be aware of those who have come before me, and the impact that my film would have on future documentaries. A good documentary is one that “moves forward in relation to all the work that has gone before, addressing issues, exploring situations, engaging viewers in ways that will continue to instruct and please, move and compel” (Nichols, Introduction to Documentary 252). There have been plenty of skateboarding documentaries, and other similar biographies, and I needed learn from them to further enhance my film.
Just as previous films influenced my final product, other films that the viewers have seen in the past will influence their preconceived notions about my topic. “What are the assumptions and expectations that characterize the viewing of a documentary? To the extent that they can be generalized, they will be the product of previous experience rather than predispositions conjured on the spot” (Nichols, *Representing Reality* 24). A viewer who has seen, for example, *Dogtown and the Z-Boys*, will have various feelings about skateboarding culture as a whole, before I am even given a shot to present it to them in the manner I would like to. These preconceived notions can both help and hinder the effectiveness of my film.

Luckily for me I was producing this film as an independent, with no corporate involvement. But if I were to pitch this film to corporations for financial help, I would run into a lot of complications. “Along with sponsoring agencies for the production of documentary work, a distinct circuit of distributors and exhibitors function to support the circulation of these films” (Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* 18-19). These distributors can make or break the film, helping to get it seen in the proper venues/mediums. “They often impose standards and conventions of the work they support, and their goals and criteria change over time. Without them far fewer documentaries would reach their intended audience” (18-19). Of course, a distribution company wants to put their influence onto the finished product, as it represents them after it is distributed. A compromise must be reached to maintain the film’s integrity, while satisfying the distributor’s needs.

**Films That Related Stylistically and Thematically**

*Dogtown and the Z-Boys*

*Dogtown and the Z-Boys* is about the birth of skateboarding as we know it in southern California during the 1970s. Jay Adams, Tony Alva, and Stacy Peralta were among those that began “surfing the streets” in a manner that none had before. This evolved into what we now consider modern skateboarding.

The editing style of the film is very fast-paced, keeping the viewer interested at all levels of the film. Exciting video clips are blended with still photographs, which are manipulated to simulate movement, keeping them from being dry in this documentary context. My film is similar, as I have an archive of photographs, as well as every ad that
Chad has ever been displayed in. I blended these into the film with the video clips in a similar manner.

I also have an archive of footage of Chad skating from the time when he was an unsponsored kid in Ohio, through his entire pro career, and even some of him skating after his retirement. The footage varies in quality from low-grade Super-8 video to clean high definition video from newer, 3CCD and DSLR cameras. Similarly, *Dogtown and the Z-Boys* uses a lot of archival footage of the Zephyr team skating back in the 70s.

**Woody Allen: A Documentary**

*Woody Allen: A Documentary* tackles a completely different topic than my film, yet I feel its biographical style has influenced me. The interviews are very clean and professional, clearly in a controlled environment. Yet there are a lot of fly-on-the-wall type interviews as well. Woody’s intimate thoughts are captured in the car, while he is being driven around the city. The combination of these two drastically different styles seems to take the film to another level, exploring Woody’s thoughts in different scenarios.

In my film I make my interviews look similar, but also use some of the fly-on-the-wall interview techniques to ensure that Chad is comfortable when discussing some of these possibly emotional topics.

People from all periods of Woody’s life were contacted to be interviewed about his life; from the beginning of his career up until recently. In my film, I interviewed people from two periods in Chad’s life. Most notable are his team manager from the 90s, who had to make the decision to cut him from the team after his injury, as well as his team manager who picked him up after he made a full recovery. Both have different insights into the life of Chad, and I feel they worked well and enriched each other.

Footage throughout Woody’s career is highlighted throughout the film. From his early years as a guest comic on *What’s My Line*, a playwright, a standup-comic, and his career as a film-maker. The majority of his life is chronicled and enhances the story being told. The same is true for Chad’s story. Footage throughout his career was highlighted, from his youthful days skating, and even his appearance on *American Gladiators* as a celebrity guest. All of these complement his compelling story, adding credibility to the film.
**Underexposed**

*Underexposed* is a documentary about the exposure, or lack thereof, of female skateboarding. Amelia Brodka started skating at a very young age, with her goal set on competing someday in the women’s X-Games. Her dream came true when she was invited to the X-Games, only to be let down finding out that the women’s division was canceled, due to lack of fan interest.

Another skater in the film, Gaby Ponce, won the gold medal at the 2010 X-Games. Yet even with all of her successes, she still works a regular job and struggles to pay her rent. She is also in college, recognizing that her career in skateboarding may not be enough to sustain her, even though she is a premiere athlete in her sport.

In my film, Chad has similar struggles with income. In the 90s he was one of the biggest names in skateboarding, yet he barely made enough money to pay his bills. When he was injured, he was also without health insurance and found himself $45,000 in debt. An athlete of his caliber, or Gaby’s for that matter, should be paid much more.

*Underexposed* also explores how women can change things. Beyond competing in contests, that regularly get canceled, they can, as a group, create skateboarding companies for women, by women. In Chad’s case he changed things for himself, by pushing himself to do rehab, and finding new sponsors. He also, like Gaby, decided to go to school to supplement his career as a skateboarder, in case it didn’t pan out in the long run.

**Ricky Whitlock: L-1, T-12**

*Ricky Whitlock: L-1, T-12* is an inspiring documentary about professional surfer Ricky Whitlock and his battles with injuries throughout his impressive career; especially his most recent traumatic back injury. Ricky paddled out on Oahu’s North Shore, tumbling though a large wave that slammed him into the reef. He broke two vertebrae in his back. The film is named after the vertebrae he broke.

Similar to Chad’s story in *Knight Before Dawn*, Ricky strayed away from traditional team sports in high school, choosing surfing instead (as Chad chose skateboarding). “I was born into it, and it’s just been part of my blood ever since,” said Whitlock in the film.

Ricky’s family moved from the desert to just across the street from the beach, which sparked Ricky’s surfing career. Similarly, my subject Chad left Ohio to come to the
skateboarding Mecca, San Diego. Both location changes allowed these athletes to excel in their respective sports. “Everything that I own, I worked for and has all come from the work I put into surfing . . . we didn’t have a lot but I had enough to make it,” said Whitlock. This is a similar theme to Chad being underpaid as a professional athlete; surfers are in a similar boat.

Ricky’s career was in jeopardy after the injury, as he could have been paralyzed for life. He went through a vigorous rehab, working day-in and day-out trying to get back to the level he had once achieved. “My main mindset is getting a big barrel, a redemption barrel,” said Ricky. Inevitably he did make it back, redeeming himself seven months later in Puerto Escondido, Mexico.

Unfortunately Chad was put in a similar situation, one where his career was all but over. His leg injury was one that most would not recover from, at least not to skate again at the same level as a professional. But Chad dedicated himself to rehab, and similarly redeemed himself by regaining sponsorship and introducing a new pro board. He made it back into the industry. I anticipated that my film would have a similar narrative and convey the same emotions when it concludes.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

PRE-PRODUCTION PLANNING

When my film was conceived, I was eager to get the ball rolling and assemble a crew ahead of time, to cover all my bases. I pitched the concept to my friend Trevor Elliot, who owns the San Diego based production company Colfax Films. He liked the idea and agreed to help on the project, granting me access to his extensive warehouse of film gear. The most notable of his gear is his RED camera, which I shot the film on. This gave the film a sense of professionalism that took it beyond the general stigmas associated with student films.

After securing the crew, I wanted to be sure I had enough footage to work with so I contacted my subject, Chad. Luckily, he is very tech-savvy and has an external hard drive full of stock footage of his skating, from his childhood up until the end of his career. He also has all of the ads he has been in, digitized and ready to be used. This saved me a lot of time, as many of this made excellent b-roll for my film. I also shot a few days out skating with Chad, on the RED; the quality of the stock footage he has assembled varies from poor Super-8 video to good clean HD video.

MISE-EN-SCÈNE

Beautiful San Diego County set the scene for the telling of Chad’s story. This area is considered the Mecca for skateboarding, as it originated and blossomed right here. Chad also lives, and spends a lot of time skating, in San Diego, so it seems fitting. Chad’s pro career, injury, and comeback also all took place here; the only part that isn’t local is his origins, a skate rat from Ohio. Some archived clips were featured from Ohio, but the bulk of the scenes were in San Diego.

Chad currently resides in a nice, upper class area of San Elijo Hills. He has part-time custody of his son. We also shot some scenes at the local private “Syndrome” skatepark. This
park is for team riders only, and is associated with many companies Chad rode for in the past. Since this park is private, we were in a controlled environment and able to get the shots we wanted, with no time limit.

The weather in San Diego is almost always sunny, and allowed some cool lighting effects. The “golden hour,” as it is aptly named, is the last hour of sunlight in a given day. Many beautiful images can be captured during this time, as well as artistic silhouettes during a sunset. I utilized this light whenever possible. During interview scenes, I used a 3-point lighting setup to properly light the subject, making him pop out of the frame and darken the background. Inside of Syndrome skatepark is fairly well lit, and the colors of the ramps are vibrant shades of red. I hoped this would make for some stunning visuals as well.

Skateboarding filming traditionally encompasses very different styles of film-making. Extreme wide-angle lenses, also known as fish-eyes, are utilized here. Very low to the ground shots, that accentuate everything around the frame, help make the skater look larger than life, as well as the obstacles they are jumping over. I also used various dolly shots to broaden the angles available at my disposal. Rack focus shots help to artistically show a focus shifting from subject to subject, as Chad discusses the perils of his profession and the repercussions he encountered. I planned to use very fast lenses for fairly shallow depth of field shots. That added to the overall look of my film, and some beautiful b-roll shots were achieved. I also wanted to use some prime zoom lenses, to get some interesting skateboarding shots that don’t show the skaters full body, but only the board and the obstacle. This is not traditional by any means, as skaters like to see the entire situation, to compare their own skating to it and recognize how good the trick may be. But for my audience, I thought a mix of wide shots and tight shots would help keep them entertained.

Music can help make or break a film. Various fair-use rock songs were used during Chad’s skating, and some strings and other dramatic music were used during pivotal moments in the film, like when Chad is discussing his injury and the possibility of life without skateboarding. Beyond that though, it was pretty upbeat music that went along with the action sports genre.

My approach to the editing of *Knight Before Dawn* was a standard, linear format. It followed Chad’s journey from point A to point B, with some detours along the way. Although to make the beginning more interesting, and really hook the viewer, I opened the
film with something sudden about the injury, and its impact on Chad’s career. The film is geared towards the passive spectator, not looking to create any ambiguous undertones that might confuse the viewer. The transitions are mostly “invisible”: cross dissolves, fades, with some motion wipes and different effects we may played with. Various montages helped speed the film along, as well as showcase Chad’s talents as a skateboarder. The colors were edited to be very vivid and vibrant, giving the viewer a surreal feeling, but at other times they were gritty and dull, depending on the subject at hand. Photos were also edited in with the video clips, and were manipulated in a way that allowed them to give the feeling of motion to complement the videos they appear with.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

ASSESSMENT OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES ACHIEVED OR NOT

My primary goal was to create an entertaining film that inspires people as well as enlightens them about the dangers of being an athlete, especially one without health insurance. I feel that I achieved this goal, as the film covered the severity of Chad’s injury, and the impact that it had on not only his life, but also his family’s and friends’ lives as well. The film paints a very detailed image of what it was like to be a professional skateboarder in skateboarding’s golden years, the 1990s.

Another goal of mine was to make a modern style documentary about an extreme sports athlete. A lot of documentaries have been made over the years, but not many have a feeling of legitimacy that they were made by a filmmaker that knows the skate-world. It is hard to get the younger generations to watch documentaries, but if done properly I think I can attract a diverse audience. I think that my film appeals to today’s youth, who have short attention spans, as well as yesterday’s youth, who grew up in the same era as Chad and would remember him, or at least relate to the culture of skateboarding established in that time period.

SUMMARY OF LESSONS LEARNED AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE

Filming a full-length documentary can be a pretty daunting task. During the pre-production I initially scheduled two days of interviews, which seemed like it would be enough time. Once we got filming though the topics kept expanding and the shoots ran far longer than anticipated, we ended up having to shoot four days of interviews just to get through everything. In hindsight I should have scheduled a full day for Chad’s interview,
since the film was focused around him, and then scheduled the rest of the interviews based on how important they are to the film. Two a day would have been enough time to get all the information I needed without feeling rushed.

The biggest lesson that I learned working on this film is to back up data regularly. My film was shot on a RED in 4k, so the uncompressed files were very large. I bought a 4 Terabyte RAID drive to store everything on, and set it to RAID 0 instead of RAID 1, which was a huge mistake. RAID 1 creates a mirror image of all of your files, giving you an extra backup, but limits the drive capacity to only half of what it was meant to be. So had I used RAID 1, I would have only had 2 Terabytes available, which would not have been enough for my project. I set it to RAID 0 for space and speed, and didn’t think twice.

A couple months into the editing my computer decided to stop recognizing the drive. After rebooting the drive it became visible again, but was unsettlingly slow. I began to panic, went and picked up another 4 Terabyte drive, and began copying the contents (about 3 Terabytes worth). I gave it a couple hours before giving up, as the estimated time remaining was over a month. My project was on hold, and I was in salvage mode. I had a lot of the assets to the project saved in different places, on different drives, but didn’t have the source RED footage on anything else, because it was so large. I contacted a couple of different data recovery companies, each of which quoted me figures in the two thousand dollar range. I didn’t know what to do. Inevitably I was able to remove the drive from its enclosure and plug it directly into my computer. From there I used a program called “SoftRAID” to transfer the files off, one at a time. This process took three days to complete, but was a small price to pay to have a complete backup of my project, and be able to continue from where I left off, with only a minor delay.

Lesson learned, I now plan to have a backup for all of my important work, instead of just thinking, “It won’t happen to me.” I was very fortunate in that I was able to continue to work on my project, as it could have been the end of it all. In hindsight, I am very lucky to be presenting this film to you. Next time I plan to avoid RAID drives entirely, and have a work-only drive, as well as a complete backup drive that is not in regular use, but is updated weekly.
CONCLUSIONS FROM PROJECT

Overall I was very pleased with how the entire project came out. The film looks good, and the story is as good as what I had hoped to capture. I was not expecting it to take as long as it did though; I began work on this film in 2013. After a few minor hiccups along the way, and one major one, I am proud to finally have a completed film I can present to the jury, and the public.

Fortunately, I was able to produce this film with a relatively low budget, calling in favors from many facets of my personal and professional life. Many people were excited to work on this project, mainly because of the subject matter. Skateboarding is a fun topic, and the characters presented in my film radiate a fun energy that seems to attract people to do film work for free, or much less than they would normally charge for work.

One major budget constraint was music for the film. I contacted a few composers that had been recommended to me, and got quotes from them in the ballpark of thousands and thousands of dollars. Some of the higher end ones wanted $400 per minute. Of course this is for completely original music composed solely to fit the film, but that was just too much for me to spend on this project. After frantically looking through archives and archives of royalty free music, and scouring “Pond5,” “Moby Gratis,” and other various music aggregators, I was ready to give up. Luckily, I found some of my old notes and had noted in the past that the website “Audio Jungle” had an archive of music that was relatively cheap to purchase the rights to. I found some good documentary style music, with tension and rising action for the more dramatic scenes, and mellow, happy songs for other parts of the film. Inevitably I would like to have the film scored again with original music, so I would have all the rights to it if I ever were to sell it, but for film festival purposes, the music acquired from the “Audio Jungle” website is perfect.

A Blu-Ray of the film is available for viewing at the Media Center of Love Library.
WORKS CITED


APPENDIX

TREATMENT, SCHEDULE, AND BUDGET
A professional skateboarder’s career is extremely volatile and fragile. Big jumps and hard concrete do not mix well, and if a skater finds he is unable to perform, he will quickly find himself looking for a new career.

In 1989 Chad Knight earned his first sponsor, SunSports Skatepark, and because of his talents inevitably became a professional skateboarder in 1997. His career was booming and his pro shoe had just come out from Osiris shoes, one of the industry’s biggest footwear companies.

In 2000 his son was born. While his career thrived, his personal life suffered due to an unhealthy amount of partying.

In 2001 things took a turn for the worst: Chad broke his fibula in ten places and his tendon ripped off the bone. He did not have health insurance and the stunt cost him $45,000. All of his sponsors dropped him and he found himself in serious debt. He went on a permanent hiatus while undergoing intense physical therapy and rehab. He gained weight, and lost his faith in a career in professional skateboarding.

He got a job at the Expo Design Center but after a career in professional skateboarding, it just wasn’t cutting it; both rewardingly as well as financially. He then decided to pursue a program in physical therapy at MiraCosta Community College to help other skaters/action sports athletes heal their injuries, and to still stay somewhat involved in the action sports industry.

In 2005 Chad suffered from acute liver failure from the excessive amount of partying he was indulging in. He had hit rock bottom. His career was in shambles, his life was a mess.

He quit partying and began to shift his focus back to skateboarding. He had many mental barriers to overcome. He started from scratch, proving himself and picking up all new sponsors. The most notable: 1031 skateboards, a company started by fellow 90s era
skateboarder (who had just been let go from his main sponsor): Kristian Svitak. Kristian knew Chad from their careers in the 90s, and decided to give him a second chance. Chad was a perfect fit and released his first skate video part in eight years with them.

In 2007 his son picked up skateboarding and has stuck with it ever since. Chad began touring with 1031 skateboards and designed a new pro shoe for NSS Footwear. A pro shoe in the skateboarding industry is where all the serious money is made. A pro with a shoe is worth a lot more than one without.

In 2008 Chad appeared as a celebrity guest on the NBC show *American Gladiators*. Although he lost, I still think it is an interesting sub-tale and will make for some great B-roll.

In 2011 Chad Knight officially retired from professional skateboarding; a choice he made on his own, not one due to unforeseen circumstances. He is now working as a 3D shoe modeler at DC Footwear, and raising his son. He still skates, but only for fun! Many pros inevitably work in the offices for their sponsors after their careers are done. It’s a great way to stay involved and continue to make money after their athletic years are done.

Chad hit rock bottom, and luckily was able to salvage his career and end it on his own terms. But not every skater is quite so lucky. Many are forced to cut their careers short due to injury. And since most sponsors do not provide health insurance, and the costs of purchasing your own health insurance (for an action sports professional) are so high, many do not have the foresight to get it before they need it. Their medical bills deplete their savings, and in some cases put them in major debt.

Interviews will include:

- Chad Knight, the subject.
- Kristian Svitak, fellow 90s pro who gave Chad a second chance.
- Ed Dominick, Maple skateboards team manager who was a huge part of Chad’s initial career, in the 90s.
- Dan Nepscha, fellow professional skateboarder and teammate in the 2000s.

The story will chronicle Chad’s life from when he got his first skateboard in 1986, until his retirement in 2011 and post skateboarding life to-date. Locations will range from his
hometown of Ohio (stock footage) to his pro career in San Diego. He currently resides in Encinitas, CA.

Plenty of b-roll footage of Chad’s youth in skateboarding can be compiled as well as clips from his career, all the way from the 90s to this year. He was also the subject of many ads in skateboarding magazines that would be excellent as b-roll. We will also be shooting some high quality HD footage of Chad skating now to showcase how far camera technology (in the skateboard realm) has come.

The target audience for this documentary will be individuals in their mid 30s who will recall Chad’s pro career in the 90s, as well as younger skaters who know Chad solely from the second half of his career. I fall into the middle of the two, as Chad was slightly before my (skateboarding) time, but I was still very aware of who he is. Especially due to the resurgence of his career more recently.

The structure of the film will be chronological. It will follow Chad through the ups and downs of his interesting life.

It is hard to say how the film will end, but it will hopefully it will send a message about the companies’ apathy towards the wellbeing of their athletes, who keep the industry alive. This will be the theme behind Chad’s personal story.

The style of the documentary will be very clean and slick. It will be shot on a RED Scarlet (hopefully) during the interviews as well as some skating. Some of the stock footage from the 80s and 90s will be grainy but the audience will forgive it because of the time period they were shot in as well as the overall quality of the interviews.

Music will vary from upbeat, fast paced music during the skating to slow, mood setting music during the lows of the documentary.

The voice of the story will be primarily Chad’s. His recollection of various events, as well as his peers, will steer us through the adventure that is his career. The viewer should feel as if Chad is telling his personal story to a psychiatrist, as in some cases the camera can be the best listener. The viewer should feel closely connected to Chad as they learn more and more about the hardships/struggle that is the seemingly glamorous life of a professional skateboarder.
## SCHEDULE FOR *KNIGHT BEFORE DAWN*

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### Crew:

- **Director** – Jeff Zimmerman
- **Producer** – Ryan Smith & Jeff Zimmerman
- **Director of Photography** – Trevor Elliot
- **Audio** – Jose Valdez
- **Editor** – Ryan Smith & Jeff Zimmerman
- **Special effects/coloring** – Ryan Smith
Budget

Knight Before Dawn
15 minutes

**ABOVE THE LINE**

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**BELOW THE LINE**

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**SUBTOTAL**  
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<td>15750</td>
<td>1850</td>
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### Services General

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<td>11900</td>
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### Finishing

|                          |          |        |      |       |
| Sound Mix                | 1        | Week   | 375  | 3850  |
| Masters and Protection   |          |        | 3475 | 1000  |
| **SUBTOTAL**             |          |        | 2475 | 1375  |

### Other Costs

|                        |          |        |      |       |
| Skate footage           | 2475     |        | 500  |       |
| Insurance               | 1975     |        | 1000 |       |
| **SUBTOTAL**            |          |        | 975  | 1500  |

**TOTAL**

|          | 975      | 40900  | 49025 |
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