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**MS. TEXAS SENIOR**

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**MS. TEXAS SENIOR**

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**Report**

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## **Abstract**

### **MS. TEXAS SENIOR**

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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This report will summarize my work as a graduate student in the University of Texas's M.F.A. program in Film Production and will chronicle the process of producing my short documentary thesis film, *Ms. Texas Senior*.

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## INTRODUCTION

I wanted to start out this report with a personal story about my relationship to beauty, but I had a hard time choosing just one. I could recount the time I asked my best friend to marry me when we were three years old. He said yes on one condition: I had to get rid of my freckles. I ran to my very freckled mother for advice, but to my dismay, she had no answer for me. She had tried and failed to erase hers for years.

I could tell the story about the time I was crying about not being as good of a softball player as some of my teammates, and my dad wrapped his arm around me. He said, “Don’t worry Shelby, they may be good athletes, but you’re going to be much prettier than them one day,” as if that was going to help me with my batting average.

I could also talk about how the kids on my street called me “five-head” or how I gained twenty pounds my first semester of college, or how I only started wearing shoes with heels a year ago because I was too insecure about my height.

This is just the beginning of my stories.

When I first heard of the Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant (MTSA), I thought, “I hope by the time I’m 60, I don’t care about how good I look in an evening gown. When does it end?” But what I’ve learned is that it never ends. It doesn’t end when we get married or achieve our career goals, or become seniors. As women, we’re taught from a very young age that our appearance is tied to our self-worth, and that never goes away.

In this film, I wanted to explore the intersections of beauty, age, and gender.

## FINDING THE STORY

The day after I had my pre-thesis screening, I received the email that I was nominated by the Radio-Television-Film (RTF) faculty to apply to the Princess Grace Foundation. I was extremely honored, but that meant I had a week to write a grant for my thesis. I barely just finished my pre-thesis. I wasn't ready to jump into the next thing.

For months I had been pursuing Barbara Harris, the founder of Project Prevention to make a film about her organization. Project Prevention is a non-profit organization based out of Harrisburg, North Carolina, that pays women who are addicted to drugs and alcohol to go on long-term birth control or get sterilized. I wanted to make a short film following Harris tour through West Virginia in her RV promoting the program.

At recent MFA grad Alison Boland's graduation party, I told her about Princess Grace and she offered to help me with my budget. She was an enormous help since I had never actually put together a budget before. I was also in pre-production for two thesis films – Amanda Gotera's *Middle Witch*, and Erica Pallo's *Mother of the Gods* – and having one less thing on my to-do list was a huge relief.

As I was sending in all my Princess Grace materials I asked Alison if she'd be interested in producing my thesis – whatever it was going to be. Alison and I were good friends and had worked well together on other films including her thesis documentary, *Night Shift*. She said yes, but she wouldn't be able to do much over the summer because she'd be in Mongolia for a language program.

As soon as I turned in the Princess Grace application, it was time to start pursuing Plan B. In her memoir, *Bossypants*, Tina Fey quoted Michael Lorne saying, "A 'no' is as

good as a ‘yes,’” when looking for celebrities to perform on Saturday Night Live. He meant that a “No” would allow you to finally give up on that idea you had your heart set on and fully move forward. I had finally come to terms with Project Prevention not being the topic of my thesis. I was now open to new possibilities.

Looking for a film subject is really frustrating, hard work. In a 2012 commencement speech at Goucher College, Ira Glass said, “Finding an idea is a job. It’s a task. You have to set aside hours in the day, and you have to be a soldier, and you have to fight for what you’re going to make yourself into.” He continues to talk about how finding ideas involves surrounding yourself with people and things that you are interested and excited about. It’s hard to do that when you’re working on other people’s theses films interning to keep learning and networking, and waiting tables to keep your bank account afloat. It’s hard to feel inspired and excited when you’re in the grind.

But finally, I found a free day! I spent hours in front of my computer reading articles in national newspapers like *The New York Times*. I read local newspapers and magazines such as *The Daily Texan*, *The Austin Chronicle*, and *Austin Woman Magazine*. I listened to local *TedTalks* and *This American Life* stories. I looked into online newspapers in places I used to live – Birmingham’s *al.com*, Tuscaloosa’s *The Crimson White*, Syracuse’s *The Post-Standard*, and Nashville’s *The Tennessean*. I came across an article about a beauty pageant in Alabama. It reminded me of an idea I had for my pre-thesis that hadn’t worked out.

During my first year’s End of the Year Review, I pitched a pre-thesis documentary idea about the Princess Pocahontas pageant. The pageant is part of the

George Washington Birthday Celebration held in Laredo, Texas, every February. Cindy McCreery, a screenwriting professor who was in the review, said, “Well, if you’re just interested in pageants, my mother was in the Ms. Senior Arizona Pageant a few years ago.” I checked out the website for the Ms. Senior America Pageant as soon as I got home. A few weeks later, I called Jill Beam, the director of the Texas pageant. While Jill was interested in the idea, they were not holding the pageant in 2014 because they did not have enough contestants registered to participate.

Once the idea resurfaced, I got really excited. I loved seeing wrinkles on camera – we live in a culture that rarely celebrates old age. I also loved the complexities that the pageant raised. As women in our culture get older, they become invisible and lose their value in society. While beauty pageants are a vehicle that promote the ideals of youth and beauty, these women were using it to empower themselves and push back against those very ideals. I also tried to imagine myself at age 60. Would I still want people judging how well I looked in a dress? ... I hoped not.

It was nice to find a topic that I could get excited about again. I felt really defeated by the Project Prevention idea. The pageant was scheduled for August – only two months away. Pulling everything together in time would be a challenge, but not impossible. I liked the idea of doing 3-4 shoots rather than shooting every week during the semester like I did during my pre-thesis and KA. This also meant that I could graduate on time!

## **PRE-PRODUCTION**

When I called the 2015 director, Lillie Madison, to pitch the idea, she was extremely excited I was interested in coming to the pageant, let alone filming it and sharing it with the world. Producing films about people who want the film to be made makes everything much easier.

She told me to call contestant coordinator Syntha West to iron out a few details. Syntha is very organized and by the book. That's a big reason why we get along so well, because I'm the same way. She asked me to write a letter that she could send to all the contestants informing them of my intention. She wanted it on University of Texas at Austin letterhead with Paul's signature to make it official. She offered to send it to all the contestants, and when I tried to take that responsibility off her shoulders, she reminded me that most of the women involved did not use email and she was happy to help.

The big question I had rolling around in my mind was whether or not to try to film at the Ms. Senior America pageant in Atlantic City in October. Don Howard, who I call my "honorary 5<sup>th</sup> committee member" encouraged me to go into our Dallas shoot with an open mind and just see what people, themes, and stories I was drawn to. I knew I wasn't interested in making a competition film, so I was leaning towards not pursuing Atlantic City, but I still asked my producer to look into getting access from the Ms. Senior America Pageant.

## Crew

When choosing a crew, I look for talent, work ethic, interest in the project, and availability. It also doesn't hurt if I've worked with them before or they work for free. Since Alison was on the other side of the world, Dio Traverso offered to produce the pageant shoot. Asking Sarah Hennigan to be my Director of Photography was a no-brainer. She is a close friend, we had already worked on lots of films together, and we had a language of our own. I decided to hire Matthew Bryan, a professional sound recordist, to come on set as well. I would have to pay him \$200 a day, but I decided he was worth the expense. There are not a lot of serious sound recordists in the RTF program and since we were filming an event that only happens once a year, I couldn't afford to have bad sound.

## Equipment/Visual Style

Sarah and I wanted a very clean, glossy, polished aesthetic to mirror the glamour of the pageant. We discussed our options and considered shooting on the Canon C100, SONY EX-1, SONY FS100 and SONY F5. We ultimately decided to shoot on the SONY F5. RTF had just acquired a zoom lens that would outfit the camera to be conducive for documentary shoots. It had multiple frame rates, which was important to us so we could shoot stylized slow-motion shots. We chose the SONY FS100 as our B camera since it was smaller and would have a similar look because it was also a SONY camera. We brought the Canon 7D as well to take still photos.

## References

I took any and all film suggestions to watch related to beauty, age, and pageants. I loved the tone in *Beauty Knows No Pain*, (1972) a short documentary about the Kilgore Rangerettes. I also liked how contained the story was; it all took place over the course of a season. Everything was shot in tryouts, practice sessions, and performances.

*Young@Heart*, (2007) a feature documentary about a chorus of senior citizens was hilarious, joyful, and moving. It's clear in watching it that the crew enjoyed filming it and cared about their subjects. A note I wrote down to take from this film was: "MUST HAVE FUN."

*Pretty Old*, (2012) the feature film about the Ms. Senior Sweetheart Pageant, followed the structure of the pageant and interspersed sit-down interviews with the women in their homes. I did not think this worked very well. The interviews really slowed down the pace of the film, and my favorite part of the pageant – that they were up and moving so much – was undercut by them sitting down in stale interviews so often.

After watching *Beauty Knows No Pain* and *Pretty Old*, I wanted to challenge myself to make a more observational film, rather than relying on interviews or a main character to guide the audience through the story. I had always used a lot of interviews in my past films, and I wanted to try to focus on letting the story, character, and themes to come out naturally in real moments. So Sarah and I incorporated that into our shooting plan. We'd get interviews of women in the rooms that they were already in, for a safety net, but we'd focus on capturing drama in real time.

### Moody Innovation Grant

A week after deciding to pursue the Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant, the email about the Moody Innovative Grant was sent out. The Moody Innovative Grant is an RTF competitive grant for thesis film production funding. The deadline was less than a month away – during my shoot.

Even though Alison was in Mongolia, she helped edit my budget remotely. When I was telling my close friend Allie Townshend, who works in development and fundraising, she said, “I’ll help you.” “I’ll help you,” are possibly the three most beautiful words to a film student’s ear. She edited my drafts and provided invaluable feedback.

Writing the grant proved to be a very fruitful exercise in forcing me to brainstorm, watch movies, and articulate my vision – all things I needed to do before day 1 of shooting. With Alison and Allie’s help, I was able to turn it in the day before my shoot.

### Tech/Location Scout

A month before the pageant, Sarah and I drove to Dallas and met with the women who served on the MTSA board at the DoubleTree Hotel where the pageant was going to be held. It was an amazing meeting.

I noticed Wanda (86) in the lobby, wearing a black shirt with MTSA written across the front in rhinestones. She wore sparkly crown earrings and bright red lipstick that matched her fiery red hair. She put on her MTSA sash, adorned with crown pins and other jewels. Wanda told us that the word “retire” is not in the Bible. A young German king was the first to use the word in order to pay people to step down, allowing him to

claim more power. We ended up hearing this story many times over the course of our time with them.

We were soon joined by the famous Mary Frances Hanson (79). She is a tiny woman, but her voice, presence, and hair were huge. Mary Frances insisted that this was not a “beauty” pageant. “The evening gown component is not about the gown, it’s about poise and stage presence. Though, a great dress doesn’t hurt,” she said.

All the ladies brought scrapbooks, photos, ribbons, and other memorabilia from their lives in pageantry to show us. It also gave us the opportunity to ask questions about the pageant, get a copy of the pageant schedule, and get to know the board members a bit. Sarah took photos that we used to discuss framing and composition, and Syntha West, the pageant’s contestant coordinator, gave me a list of contestant names who might make characters. The board would not provide me with any of their contact information because they didn’t want to compromise the integrity of the competition. But Syntha promised to help me get started.

I followed up with Syntha a few days later and we spoke on the phone for over two hours discussing her list of contestants. Three people stood out as potential main characters: Jill Beam, Sherry Dodson, and Shirley McKellar.

Syntha described Jill Beam as being “pageant wise,” meaning that she knows the ins and outs of pageantry and what judges are looking for. After serving as the director of Ms. Texas Senior America in 2013 and 2014, Jill turned 60 in 2015, qualifying to participate. Syntha said Jill has “talent coming out of her ears.” Her talent in the pageant

would include tap dancing, singing, and playing the piccolo. She also had been teaching Jazzercise classes for over thirty years.

Sherry Dodson (65) was crowned the winner of at MTSA's rival pageant, the Ms. Texas Senior Classic two years before. She had been trying to enter MTSA ever since, despite the discouragement from the Ms. Texas Senior Classic director. A fun fact about Sherry: she once turned down a date with Elvis Presley.

Dr. Shirley McKellar (68) is a motivational speaker, human rights activist, a retired soldier and nurse. In 2014, she ran to represent the First District of Texas in Congress. She had never participated in a pageant before and even when the pageant was only a couple of weeks away, she still didn't know what she was going to do for the talent portion of the competition.

#### August 5, 2015 – The Day Before

The day before our shoot, I turned in my Moody Innovation Grant first thing in the morning. I finished writing my list of interview questions and picked up Jay Hubert's case of LED lights. Dio and I picked up the UHAUL and went grocery shopping at HEB. Sarah and Matt met us at equipment checkout and everything was going smoothly until I realized we needed walkie talkies.

I called Ben E-F, who had a set of walkies, but he had already promised them to Amanda Gotera's thesis pickup shoot. I called Erica Pallo, who had recently bought some, but she said that our 2nd AD from her set, Ian DeVoglaer, had them at his apartment. I called Ian. He was in Colorado on a family vacation, so he gave me his

roommate's contact information. I made plans to pick them up from her that evening. They live on the other side of town and traffic was unusually bad that day, so it took an hour and a half just to get from Hyde Park to Riverside. As it turned out, it was worth the extra hassle. I spent the rest of the night charging batteries, organizing, and packing.

## PRODUCTION

### Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant

Day 1 – August 6, 2015

I woke up that morning with a crippling panic attack. I couldn't get out of bed. Something about the word *thesis* was terrifying. It meant something greater than the rest. The other films were just practice for this one. Film 4 of 4. And what had I learned? Who was I? I still felt like I had no idea what I was doing. I was a fraud.

Allie came over before she left for work to pull me out of bed, give me a big hug, and a pep talk. I don't know what I'd do without Allie. She is my best friend, sister, therapist, grant writer, and cat sitter all rolled into one. But she will have to settle for a simple "co-producer" credit.

Although I had worked hard on all my pre-production, I didn't feel ready. I don't think documentary filmmakers – or any filmmakers – ever do. I think the feeling was exacerbated by the fact that no one in my cohort was even close to start filming their theses. Was I rushing this? I tried to remember an Amy Poehler quote; "Great people do things before they're ready. They do things before they know they can do it," to keep thinking positively. That would become my mantra.

Everyone met at my apartment and we loaded up the UHaul and my car. I called the two hotels before we got on the road in order to get an early check-in time. Jessica Myles, our contact at the DoubleTree, had told me that check-in wouldn't be a problem because they were "dead" in August. Both hotels were sold out the night before so we

didn't have any room to set up in. I should have spent the money on a room for the night before.

We set up in the lobby, despite the opposition of the DoubleTree's general manager. I convinced him to give us a 3-hour grace period though. While we were setting up, I realized that it was taking longer than we had planned (as it usually does). To make matters worse, all the contestants were so eager to get started they all came very early to check-in and we missed them arriving and unpacking their cars. I wished we had a little more help.

Ross Clark, an RTF undergraduate who we had all worked with before, was in Dallas that weekend visiting his parents. He had offered to work on set if we needed an extra hand, eager to work on a documentary shoot for the first time. I didn't think we needed him. I hadn't budgeted for another mouth to feed and I was worried the crew would be too large in such small hotel rooms. But in that moment of setting up, I called him and asked him to come, and he was there within the hour. His main focus is camera department, so we made him Sarah's first AC. The F5 took a lot of time to setup and it was large and heavy, so moving it from shot to shot required two people. We quickly realized we were going to need him for the entire weekend, and he graciously agreed to spend the time he intended to spend with his parents with us instead. I don't know how we would have gotten through the weekend without him. The universe really provided that one.

By the time we got set up, the only person we had caught unloading her car was Jill Beam, and then we were able to load everything into our hotel room.

During orientation, Syntha introduced me and I explained to the room of contestants what we were doing there and how we would use the footage. I had already sent them a letter that had explained it before the pageant, but I wanted to take any questions. Everyone was very excited about the film.

We then filmed the recordings of the philosophies of life. They moved very fast through them. Those women don't mess around with their schedule – they wait for no one! We had a hard time keeping up, but we were able to squeeze in a few interviews with Joan and Sherry. Sherry started crying when I asked her how she defined beauty. I was really taken aback when it happened. I panicked and didn't follow up on why she was crying because had just met her and I was not expecting that reaction at all. Usually I can anticipate what questions will prompt someone to get emotional, so I felt very uncomfortable when it happened.

We also got interviews with Jill and Shirley McKellar at the beginning of the evening reception. Jill then set up her speaker and iPod for a dance party in the LOBBY of the hotel! It was amazing to see these older women dance in public like that. Jill even taught them how to do “The Wobble.” Most people joined in, but Tina watched from the sidelines. “I'm too much of a lady for that,” she said. They went crazy when “The Twist” came on. The best part was when Jill brought Ross onto the dance floor for “Uptown Funk.”

Pat told us multiple times that they were starting the interviews with the judges at 9 am sharp on Saturday and they would not wait for us – we were to have the camera set up in there at all times. Pat loved to say “no” to me. Luckily, Lillie would always say yes,

and she had the final say, so, I made sure to always ask Lillie for permission when I needed it.

When we finished shooting for the day, we had a crew meeting where we discussed the schedule and made plans for day 2. Copying footage to my hard drives took forever because my computer didn't have USB 3. Sarah and I were up for most of the night, but we were able to talk a lot about how the first day went and what shots we wanted to get on Saturday.

### Day 2 – August 7, 2015

We were set up in the Acacia room for the interviews at 9 am sharp. Sarah and Ross stayed in the Acacia room in the same corner to get all the contestants in their interviews on the F5. Dio and I shot on the FS100 that slipped in and out of the Acacia room. In the room, the FS100 was in the opposite corner from the F5 to get the reactions of the judges. Unfortunately the footage crosses the axis, but we didn't have many options, but it would be a quick fix in post.

Outside the Acacia room, we got rough interviews before and after their interviews with the judges. We didn't lav these interviews because I didn't want to spend the time doing that. I decided it was ok because these were a little more rough and spontaneous. We tried to always frame interviews with action happening in the background to show the source of the sound. This could lead to challenges in the editing room, because of sound and background continuity, but it had to be better than boring hotel wall after boring hotel wall. I unfortunately felt like I couldn't get all the interviews I wanted to get because it took so much to pull a contestant away, find a frame, set up the

camera and place a mic on them. There just wasn't enough time in the day to capture all the action and everyone's reflections.

Lillie approached me and told me that the contestants were noticing that I was filming Sherry Dodson a lot. She asked me to not interview her any more to prevent drama and jealousy. I told her I needed to interview whom I needed to interview for my film. I could try to make it less obvious, but I was going to do what I needed to do. My guess is that they all had their eyes on Sherry anyway, because in reality, I had far more footage of Jill. Sherry was a standout contestant who probably just bred a lot of jealousy on her looks and talent.

The full rehearsal in the grand ballroom started off with some more drama. Ana had changed the song she sang, which happened to be the same song that Sherry was singing. They made Ana pick a new song, which really upset her. I felt for her. She had worked so hard on that song and was ready to go, only to be told to change it the day before. At the time, I didn't think I wanted to include this moment at all because it felt like reality TV. However, we did use it in the edit in a way that felt appropriate and respectful.

The rehearsals were tough to watch. They were long and mostly not very good – even Lillie expressed concern backstage in an interview. However, watching the joy light up their faces brought tears to my eyes. My perception of the pageant was starting to change. It was really an opportunity for these women to stay active, practice their talents, try new things, and have fun with people their age. They stood taller, smiled bigger, and enjoyed every moment. It was incredible to witness.

### Day 3 – August 8, 2015

We spent the morning getting some interviews we needed – Sheila Klein, the 2014 queen, and Syntha. Syntha’s interview was amazing! Syntha has a doctorate in psychology, so she had interesting things to say about beauty, gender, and age. It was refreshing to get some honest, deep reflections. Since the contestants were in competition mode, their answers were a bit short and rehearsed.

The start of the pageant was really crazy. They could not decide where they were taking the group photo, which made it difficult for us to make a plan. After Syntha’s interview, everyone had dispersed and got ready in the own hotel rooms. We were counting on the fact that they would be getting ready communally in the dressing room, so we didn’t get a lot of footage during this time.

We filmed Joan getting her makeup put on by the Mary Kay representatives, who signed my release forms right away, only to tell me later that I couldn’t use the footage because they weren’t allowed to touch their customers. It never fails to surprise me how much you can explain to people exactly what you’re doing, and yet, they don’t understand it at all. I promised her if I used the footage, I wouldn’t include her name.

Meanwhile, our tripod’s tilt function broke, and since it was a Saturday, none of the rental houses in Dallas were open. We had a couple of small varizoom tripods, but they couldn’t handle the weight of the F5. We had to make it work, even if that meant that Sarah would have to record some footage hand-held, breaking our rules of always being on sticks.

Lillie told me that many of the women bombarded Sarah Senter about the fact that I hadn't interviewed *everyone*. So she asked me to speak to the group before the pageant began. Once we got in there, however, she took over. She asked everyone to gather round and said, "Lots of you have talked to Sarah about Shelby and the filming." One woman chimed in, "She hasn't even interviewed some of us yet!" Lillie responded, "Shelby is doing this for her grade. If she wants to interview the same person 2 or 3 times, that is her choice. Y'all aren't paying her. Y'all aren't paying her!" Later she told me that this really pissed her off. She couldn't believe they were acting this way. "They are grown women!" she said. What I love about Lillie as a persona and as a character is that she's obviously very involved in the pageant and loves the pageant very much, but she is also very grounded and one step-removed from the ridiculousness. Plus, she tells a great story!

We had some last minute change of plans. Lillie only allowed me to go backstage – I couldn't bring Matt because of the contestants didn't want him in their dressing room. So Matt set up a zoom recorder to the soundboard to get clean sound from the stage microphones. He recorded the pageant on a boom next to Sarah on the F5 in the corner of the grand ballroom. Dio recorded a proscenium shot from the back of the ballroom on the 7D. I had the FS100 and a 416 on the camera to record the action backstage and on the back corner of the stage. I got a lot of great footage backstage; I captured wardrobe malfunctions, last minute practice sessions, and costume changes. I was grateful for the walkie-talkies to be able to communicate with the rest of the team since I was backstage by myself. There was a point when I was having trouble with the FS100 and I was able to call Dio to come help. Driving through all the traffic that night was worth it after all.

Jill won the Mary Frances Hanson service award, Miss Congeniality, and Ms. Texas Senior America, which was a surprise to no one. She would then go on to compete in the Ms. Senior America pageant in Atlantic City in October.

We grabbed exit interviews with Gloria, Debbie, Jill, and Lillie and then I took the crew to Chuy's for a celebratory dinner. We left around noon the next day to go back to Austin.

When we got back to Austin, Sarah suggested that I bring someone on as my assistant editor to help sync and organize all the footage. I wasn't sure I needed one until it took three days just to transcode it all into DNxHD 36. She suggested Reid Kluchin. She had him as an editing student and he was available to do it. I gave him my drive before I left to visit my family in Nashville.

## September

By the end of the first week of school, Reid finished syncing all of my footage and I started transcribing it all. I always start with transcribing, which is an extremely time consuming and tedious process, because it allows me to familiarize myself with the material, learn my subjects' cadence, and create documents I can search and find keywords to make editing go more quickly.

Karen Trevit, one of the MTSA board members, called me about making pageant DVDs for the contestants. Usually, MTSA hired a company to film the pageant and put it on DVDs to sell to contestants. They couldn't afford that this year, and many of the contestants were disappointed that they were not going to be able to relive their

performances. Many of the husbands of the contestants hounded me the last day because they wanted copies of the footage. At the time it stressed me out, but after sleeping on it, I realized it was a good way to give back to the contestants as well fundraise for the film. Karen and I talked through some of our options. We agreed that Alison and I would create a Memorandum of Understanding that outlined what the board and the contestants were allowed to do with the DVDs. Reid and Alison would cut the pageant together to make a master file that they would make copies of once I had the signed order forms and money orders from the contestants. Karen would take care of all communication with the contestants and she would save us the trouble of mailing them out.

That week, Paul also offered to send Madli Laane, one of my classmates, and I to the New Orleans Film Festival Pitch Competition to pitch our theses for a chance to win \$750 and Movie Magic Budgeting software. I asked an undergraduate RTF student, Gina Carra, to edit a trailer to show at the competition. I handed her a hard drive and some notes and let her get to work.

My thesis committee really encouraged me to shoot more of the strongest characters at home. Alison agreed that we should get more footage. I identified the three strongest characters as: Lillie, Jill, and Syntha. Alison and I started making lists of what I wanted to get from each person. I wanted to film Jill teaching her jazzercise class, and practicing for the Ms. Senior America Pageant. By then I knew I did not want to pursue filming the Ms. Senior America Pageant because filming another pageant would not add anything to a film about the intersections between age and beauty. We decided that we could shoot Jill practicing her talent in a variety of ways so that we could have a few

different options in the editing room. We could use it at the beginning of the film to cheat her practicing for Ms. Texas Senior America, or use it at the end of the film as her practicing for Ms. Senior America.

I wanted to film Lillie at home in her normal routine since she lives alone and her family is spread all around the country. In an interview at the DoubleTree, Lillie told me that the pageant ladies were her family. I also wanted to film her singing at a nursing home to show how she uses her talent outside of the pageant and to create a contrast between her and the people at the nursing home, many of whom would be her age.

I knew Syntha's 77th birthday was coming up in October. When I called Syntha to talk about filming her birthday, she told me that she was going to have a party at her house with her friends and family. She also mentioned that she would be twirling during the Baylor University football game halftime show with the alumni band in a couple of weeks. My jaw dropped. I *had* to get that footage!

### Baylor Shoot

We had a lot to do to prepare for our Baylor shoot. I asked Sebastian Bisbal, a friend in my cohort, to record sound for this shoot. I had worked with him before and not only is he super talented, but he's lovely to have around. It was also nice to save money to not hire a professional, but I understood at the end of the shoot when Seb told me he wouldn't be able to come on more. He needed to focus on writing and producing his own thesis. Alison offered to make our food, do all the grocery shopping and get access from

Baylor University. Access was not hard to get, but she did need to coordinate microphone frequencies with Sebastian and Baylor.

Shooting during the fall semester presented a few new challenges. For one, Alison and I had to be logistical geniuses to accommodate everyone's busy schedules. We were all juggling classes, TA'ships, internships, and other obligations like jobs, family, and friends. It surprises me that so many films come out of the RTF program every year. I don't know how we do it.

It also meant that our equipment options were limited. The only cameras allocated to our thesis class were: the Arri SR Super 16, the Arri Alexa, and the Arri 35. None of these are good options for shooting a documentary. I was able to check out the F5 that weekend because it was early enough in the semester that none of the second year students were shooting their pre-thesis films yet. However, we were going to have to piece together a kit. The F5 kit didn't come with a monitor or matte box because the monitors were in the Black Magic cases which was allocated to the undergraduate cinematography class. The matte box was in the C100 case, which was allocated to the undergraduate advanced narrative course. The undergraduate cinematography class also had priority over our B camera preferences – the SONY FS100 and Canon 7D. So we had to beg, borrow, and steal.

The shoot went really well. It was a blistering hot day and our parking spot was far away from the field. Alison tried to shuttle us the best she could through the crowds so we didn't have to lug all the gear the entire way in the heat. We started on the field getting footage of the cheerleaders, the game, and the crowd. There was a guy in the

stands heckling Ross about the University of Texas at Austin hat he was wearing. It was very distracting and annoying. I don't understand people's obsession with sports.

I found Syntha sitting with one of the women she was twirling with. We tried to get an interview with her, but we were pressed for time and it was too loud in the stadium. We had to keep stopping and starting over, so we decided to wait until after her performance.

We followed her out onto the field where she practiced among the current twirlers – the Baylor Golden Girls. One of them came over and practiced with her. We captured some really sweet moments between the two of them and the juxtaposition of the two was amazing on camera.

It was half time before we knew it. Syntha was front and center on the 50-yard line in front of the alumni band. She simply glowed in the limelight.

Afterwards, I got a great interview with Syntha. She said she wished that she could wear the “Skimpy, sparkly” uniform that the Baylor Golden Girls wore. She talked about how much Baylor has changed in the 50 years that have passed between now and when she was a student there. College was clearly a very important time in her life.

## October

### New Orleans Film Festival Pitch Competition

Gina cut an amazing trailer for me to take to the New Orleans Film Festival Pitch Competition. The trailer gave me some ideas for editing and it gave me a great short

piece to send to people to give them a sneak-peak as well as starting conversations with my post-production team.

The competition went really well. One judge said that he was not interested in the concept at all when I first introduced it, but after the trailer, he really connected with and cared about the characters. I got good feedback overall, but came in second place. It was a great exercise in articulating and sharing my vision, pitching my movie and myself as a filmmaker, and getting in front of a group of people and being vulnerable. The practice of writing it also gave me some language to include in future grants.

### Jill Shoot

Alison, Sarah, Matt, Ross, and I drove to Forney, Texas to Jill Beam's house. She greeted us with her bedazzled "MTSA" t-shirt. We filmed her putting on her makeup, practicing for the pageant, and showing us all her gowns and outfits that she was bringing to Ms. Senior America.

Directing Jill was like directing an actress. I had to pull stories out of her because she didn't give me too much to work with on her own. She'd often stop doing her makeup to look at me while she'd answer my question. Then after a short response, would continue applying makeup, rather than answering and putting on makeup naturally. But as we went along she started talking more. I got what I needed.

After the shoot we went to Ross's parent's house where we stayed the night. We went to Chuy's for dinner because Chuy's had become our tradition. When asking people to work hard for long periods of time for no money, you have to make it fun.

The next morning we had to be up at 3:30 am in order to pack the car and leave to go and set up for Jill's 5:30 am Jazzercise class. Jill was going on all cylinders wearing her "I don't sweat, I glow" tank top. Her class was really fun. We got a lot of great footage. She even performed her talent for the pageant at the request of her class.

From there, we headed back on the road to take our four-hour trip back to Austin. I spent the whole day running: unpacking, transferring footage, buying more hard drives because I ran out of space, and consolidating media. At the end of the night, I showered for the first time in two days and I had been awake for 18 hours. All I had consumed that day was a weird array of food: a Red Bull, mini blueberry muffins, three slices of turkey, three slices of Swiss cheese, a Dove chocolate bar, a handful of pretzels, and a whole package of cantaloupe. Filmmaking is hard.

### Syntha Birthday Shoot

I was very excited to film Syntha's birthday. Syntha and I had become very close. She called me her "adopted granddaughter." One of the greatest effects of documentary filmmaking is the relationships you make with people you'd otherwise never meet. In Michael Rabiger's book, *Directing the Documentary*, he says, "Making documentary is very, very rewarding. You enter people's lives, involve yourself in their issues and mysteries, and travel into new worlds with the best of traveling companions. Raising your own and other people's awareness, you never have to ask yourself whether you are using your one and only life wisely."

First we filmed Syntha putting on her makeup. The great thing about Syntha is that she loves to perform and tell you every detail of every story. That woman's memory is incredible. However, it sometimes proved challenging keeping her on track.

Afterwards, Syntha and I stepped in the garage and spoke about how to bring up Royce's dementia in their joint interview. I was not particularly close with Royce by that point so I wanted to be delicate. I suggested that I ask them, "How has your relationship changed over the years?" and then she would bring up his dementia. She thought that was a good idea. It worked out very nicely because I was very anxious about how to do this delicately and not make him feel ambushed. He seemed ok with it and it was really powerful and sweet moment.

Her kids came two hours late for dinner, so we tried to use the time the best we could. We ate our crew dinner while we waited. When the family arrived, they sang happy birthday to her first so we could get the shots of them singing/cutting the cake, and then they ate their dinner. That worked out well because I had Sarah and Eloise start breaking down the F5 and the lights while I shot B-roll on the FS100.

Alison actually took over an interview with Syntha's friends for me. I was so tired and didn't think we needed it, but she insisted. I'm glad she did though, because she had the right instinct. Syntha's friends said some interesting things. It was really great to have someone I trust conduct an interview like that for me.

## November

I covered someone's shift at the CMB proctor desk on Saturday, November 14, in order to make a little extra cash to celebrate my birthday later that night. The printer

wasn't working at the desk so I went upstairs to use the one in the graduate office. When I came back a few minutes later all of my stuff was gone. Someone had stolen my backpack with my laptop, wallet, and TWO of my thesis hard drives in it. My heart sank. Someone had all my footage – not just one copy, but TWO.

Fortunately, I had one more hard drive with all my footage on it at home, but it wasn't comforting at the time. Hard drives cost a lot of money! Getting that footage cost a lot of money! They could make any movie they wanted with it. (Later when I calmed down, I realized was a ridiculous idea that someone would want my hard drives for my footage. Movies take a long time and a lot of hard work, and the only person who is interested in making this film was me.) They had my laptop with all my papers, study guides, emails, and music. They had my wallet with my ID, credit cards, and cash.

The police came, I filed my report, I cancelled all my credit cards, and I left school a sobbing mess. Happy birthday to me. The police found my backpack in a men's bathroom a couple hours later. The only thing they left was my wallet with my driver's license in it.

They never caught the person who stole all my stuff. Luckily, my renter's insurance reimbursed me for the cost of everything taken. State Farm truly is the best neighbor I have ever known. The incident also gives me a good story to tell my future students why they need three copies of their footage. You must have backups of your backups!

The following week, we had our shoot with Lillie at her home. The whole ordeal took a lot of time to sort out so planning our shoot came together very last minute. Alison

helped pay for food and the van rental because I didn't have any cards or money yet. She's such a great producer for doing what needs to get done for the film to happen, but more than that, a great friend who always has my back.

### Lillie shoot

The Lillie shoot went well, despite what I call, "The Tripod Snafu of 2015." The Sachtler legs I was supposed to get from a pre-thesis shoot were broken and no one told me until 9:00 pm Sunday night. We were leaving for Arlington at 6:00 am on Monday morning. I called everyone I could possibly think of to see if they had tripod legs for me to complete an in-field transfer with them. No dice. I called MPS in Dallas on the road as soon as they opened, and they had some available. Once Alison dropped us off at Lillie's apartment, she went to pick them up.

We shot our first scene of Lillie showing us her evening gowns on a makeshift tripod made out of Lillie's TV tray, the sachtler head case, and the matte box case. When Alison walked in the door with the legs from MPS, we were setting up for our next scene which required some panning and tilting. Perfect timing!

I interviewed Lillie while she was sitting in a chair knitting. She was in her pajamas and wasn't wearing her wig. It was amazing to see her bare like that. I wish we could have spent more time with her. Her interviews are so beautiful and effortless. The moment that really stuck out to me was when she was talking about her ex-boyfriend who never called her beautiful and never supported her in the pageant world or pursuing her singing. Unfortunately she refused to let us film her while she put on her wig.

And boy, can she sing! We filmed her singing at a very nice nursing home on the other side of Dallas. There weren't very many people there, and unfortunately, I think I formatted the first card I shot on, which is ok because we didn't end up using any of that footage anyway.

## December

I turned in my Moody Innovation post-production grant, which was exciting. I was very proud of how it looked since this time around I had footage to pull stills from and I had a stronger sense of what my film was going to be about. There was a lot less guesswork than in the first grant.

I had a committee meeting at the end of the semester. I was anxious about it because I was worried that they would be asking me lots of questions that I couldn't answer, but it turned out to be awesome and energizing. They didn't have much of a response to the "home visits" footage, but they were captivated by the pageant material. Deb Lewis suggested to do a completely observational piece on just the pageant itself, which on one hand was great to hear because that was my original intention, on the other hand it was frustrating because not using that footage felt like those shoots were a waste of time. Though I'd like to think that nothing is a waste of time if you're learning from it.

I met with Anne Lewis to watch cuts of her advanced editing class's documentary assignments. Lucky for me, they cut scenes from footage of a beauty pageant, so thematically, they were good tests of what I was looking for. I was really taken with Raven Patton's cut, so Anne gave me her contact information. She told me the best way

to find the right working partnership is to choose someone who responds to the raw material in similar ways you do, who can see shots and moments that will create scenes, and someone who likes the subject.

Over the winter break, I contacted Raven and we planned on meeting when I got back into town. Meanwhile, Alison was cutting the pageant to put on the DVDs for the contestants. I made a few edits, but she did a really great job.

## POST-PRODUCTION

### January

When I returned to Austin from winter break, Raven and I had that initial meeting. She was amazing. We really hit it off and I could tell she had good instincts. She was also so excited and passionate about the project, which refueled my excitement. I knew I'd need that in a partner to help me keep motivated. I already felt burnt out from the editing process of my pre-thesis. I needed a pair of fresh eyes and fresh energy.

We began by pulling our selects and then making an assembly cut from the best material. This first cut was 50 minutes long – and we were in love with every second of it.

### April

We had a committee meeting in April, and they graciously told us that they were not in love with every second. The feedback was extremely helpful.

Their Suggestions/Notes:

- work on finding a “guiding” “central” character
- more behind the scenes during pageant itself
- focus on moments of transformation
- right now cut is too focused on mechanics of pageant weekend
- try “outside” pageant footage (“home visits”)
- need to work on transitions

Moments they liked:

- Anna’s song
- dancing scene
- costume malfunction
- Gwen falling
- Jill being director
- Jill’s baton drop

- Pat's ding and wink
- Elvis story
- Sherry crying got mixed reviews

I knew I didn't have a central or guiding character, because we didn't shoot it that way. No one was strong enough to be carry the film. I also still felt strongly about not using the footage from outside the pageant.

Editing is really hard, especially in documentary, because all of the work in "writing the story" happens in the editing room. And unlike writing a narrative script, you already have the footage, so you have to make something out of what you have. Sometimes that feels limiting, because what you have is what you have and what you're missing – you simply don't have it. On the other hand, the options are infinite. As Don Howard once told me, "The only limit you have is your own imagination." It makes it hard to know what direction to go – what decisions to make.

Having the Moody grants and pitch script helped me be able to return to my intention, which was invaluable when I got lost. I wish I had always been shooting on two cameras during the pageant. It felt like we didn't have nearly enough coverage. I tried to be strategic in limiting the amount of footage I was going to have to sift through, so I was decisive in how many cameras we shot with when. Since the F5 was so big and cumbersome, I should have had a smaller B camera going at all times to catch more angles of the same moments. My biggest regret in making this film – in possibly my life – was not following up with Sherry when she cried at the question of what beauty meant to her.

## May

For our May committee meeting, I decided to do was try to open the film with a scene of Syntha twirling at the Baylor football game. It was a fun, energetic opening, but ultimately didn't work because she wasn't featured throughout the rest of the film to justify starting with her. By this point, Raven and I had also decided that Jill being the director wasn't important to the story we wanted to tell, so we took it out. We were still working through all of the performances in the cut. We weren't sure if we needed to see every performance we used in the rehearsals "pay off" by showing them in the actual pageant.

The committee suggested starting with a performance. They recommended Gloria's modeling/dance to Diana Ross. Paul still asked for a guiding character, and Deb and Anne suggested to try to cut an entirely observational film.

I really struggled with the cut during this time. I kept getting tangled between the beginning, middle, end. Since there is no solid through line, I would start working on a scene in the middle and then not be sure what to do with it because it depended on how I opened the film, so then I'd try to edit the opening scene, but then feel like I needed to know how it ended in order to cut the beginning. It was very overwhelming.

## June

In June, we had an observational film. We took out almost every single interview. However, when we showed it to the committee, they hated it. Even Anne, who always fights for more observational footage, needed more interviews. She asked me what I

wanted to “say” with the film, but instead of answering, I asked her what she thought the film was saying in this cut. She said, “There’s a lot you can say with this footage. What I’m getting from this cut is the contradictions: how women have lost their beauty and they’re trying to get it back and failing, and yet it still empowers them.” She hit the nail on the head, so it gave me confidence in the fact that the cut wasn’t where I wanted it yet, but at least the themes I wanted to explore were already coming through.

So it was back to the drawing board for a new structure. Raven and I decided not to talk about the feedback and to just start cutting “new” films, meet, and see what we both came up with the following week.

That next week, Raven got a job on a television show shooting in town and had to cut down her involvement with my project. I was happy for her, and we knew that her getting work was a possibility, but there was a small part of me that panicked when she told me. Luckily, my friend Liz Perlman, loves to edit and she offered to jump on board.

Liz, Raven, and I met to look at our cuts. Raven cut a scene of Lillie at home knitting and talking about getting older. Both Liz and I really responded to it. I also liked how natural and organic it felt. When Alison saw it for the first time, she cried. That’s the beauty of working with an editor – Raven tried things that I wouldn’t. She’s full of great surprises, that one.

For a few weeks, I wasn’t sure how to transition from working with Raven to working with Liz. Raven and I had been working together for so long we had our own language and our own system. I let Liz familiarize herself with the footage while I continued to hammer out the structure. I started using index cards to represent scenes and

moving them around on my whiteboard to be able to picture how the scenes would fit together without editing.

## July

During the first week of July, I met with Paul and showed him my latest cut, which was very chronological and had lots of interviews and text to guide the story. He finally thought it was working! I was incredibly relieved. Now I felt like I could start a dialogue with Liz about fine cutting.

I only had one more month to finish. There was no extending the deadline any further. I hadn't applied for financial aid for the 2016-2017 school year and UT had hired me to teach RTF 366K: Documentary Production. The job was contingent on my having my MFA. It was time to buckle down, make decisions, and finish it out.

Alison and I finally agreed on a title: *Ms. Texas Senior*. We were worried about the legal issues calling it *Ms. Texas Senior America*, and it felt one word too long. *Pageant Wise* really didn't make sense any more since we no longer had Syntha's definition in the cut. Nothing else felt quite right.

I had hired my friend, Rachel Oatridge, to design the *Ms. Texas Senior* logo and poster. Rachel had designed my website a few years ago and she was the graphic designer for my high school yearbook when I was the Editor-In-Chief. She is extremely talented and I knew we worked well together, so I was excited to collaborate with her again. I sent her a Google Drive folder full of references and ideas. She created a simple, elegant logo that was *perfect* for the film. I also started meeting talking with my composer, John

Churchill about score. I usually hate this process but John makes it tolerable. He's scored all the films I had made at UT. He gave me a beautiful score and was incredibly helpful in making sure we got it done on time. Sometimes I had a hard time keeping up with HIM.

By the time I finished my cut, I had successfully gotten it down to 20 minutes, which had been my goal all along. Once a film is longer than 20 minutes, it's hard for film festivals to program it, so it often struggles to find its home. For a long time I didn't think that I'd be able to cut it down that much. It had been sitting around 25 minutes for a month or so. However, once I let go of the runtime for myself and just worried about the story and the edit, it came down to where I needed it to be.

## CONCLUSION

Producing *Ms. Texas Senior* has been a very rewarding experience. I am proud that I stuck to my plan of creating a portrait of a group rather than a single-character narrative, like I have done in the past. I came to graduate school to push myself as an artist, and I feel like I have with this film.

My time at UT has been invaluable. I have learned so much, had great opportunities, and was able to find people I enjoy collaborating with. Most importantly, graduate school has given me the time I needed to grow personally and professionally and I can't wait to see what comes next.

## APPENDIX A – FIRST TO-DO LIST

The following is a copy of my first to-do list after getting the go-ahead from Ms. Texas Senior America 2015 director Lillie Madison. Please forgive my terrible handwriting.

- Things to do
- Cf cards / SD / ~~WALKERS~~ EXPENDABLES
  - ~~Release for Double Tree (~~
  - ~~Fallout releases (75)~~
  - ~~letter from Ms. Texas Pageant to D.T.~~
  - ~~Equipment travel paperwork~~
  - ~~MAAT meeting~~
  - ~~Reserve sound eq~~
  - ~~hotel reservations~~
  - budget
  - ~~call about promist~~
  - call National
  - ~~eq questions ↓ - FS + 7D mounts~~
  - meals
  - ~~current reservation (Cold Shoe)~~ → ~~6D / SD~~
  - ~~email committee~~
  - ~~more hard drives~~
  - ~~Call Cynthia Synthe~~
  - ~~write cover letter for Paul to Sign~~

## APPENDIX B – FIRST EQUIPMENT LIST

This is a copy of the first equipment list that I created with the help of Sarah Hennigan and Matthew Bryan. I crossed everything out as we either bought it or reserved it on the RTF reservation system.

- EQ

  - CAMERAS FS 100
  - ~~tripods~~ - gitzo ~~cartroni / varigpan~~
  - ~~batteries~~ - lots of extras
  - ~~cards~~ ~~port non-priv~~
  - ~~Rita~~ - (2) - new daylight LED panels \*
  - ~~stands~~ \*
  - ~~extension cords~~ - 60 2x50 2x75
  - ~~black magic monitor~~ (any on-camera monitor for FS)
  - ~~cold shoe / shock mount~~ (FS 70) fil.
  - [FS mic mount] cold shoe

## APPENDIX C – CONTESTANT LETTER

I wrote the following letter to inform the contestants that the film crew would be at the pageant and explaining what we were going to do. Contestant coordinator Syntha West mailed this to all the contestants before the pageant.



DEPARTMENT OF RADIO-TELEVISION-FILM  
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

2504 Whitis Avenue, A0800 • Austin, Texas 78712-1067 • <http://rtf.utexas.edu/>  
(512) 471-4071 telephone • (512) 471-4077 fax • Graduate office (512) 471-3532

July 6, 2015

Dear Pageant Contestants,

My name is Shelby Hadden and I am a third year graduate student at the University of Texas at Austin, pursuing my Masters in Fine Arts in the Film and Media Production program. For my final thesis documentary, currently titled "The Age of Elegance," I will be filming the 2015 Ms. Texas Senior Texas America Pageant from August 6-9, 2015 at the DoubleTree Dallas Galleria Hotel. The purpose of this letter is to both notify you of filming and to inform you that I will be obtaining your consent to be filmed prior to the pageant's start in August.

During filming, I will be accompanied by fellow third-year MFA candidates, Sarah Hennigan and Dionisio Traverso, as well as a professional sound recordist, Matthew Bryan. The release, to be signed prior to the pageant, allows the crew to record your image and voice, and gives us full editorial permission to use them in the film.

Your privacy is important to us. We will not share any of the information included on the release form with anyone outside of the aforementioned Production Team. The release will include contact information specifically for the purpose of maintaining communication with you about the status of the film or in the event of follow-up questions. Should anyone other than Shelby Hadden (Director), Dionisio Traverso (Producer), Alison Boland (Producer), or Paul Stekler (UT Faculty, Thesis Committee Chair) contact you after filming, please notify them that you need to speak with your manager and immediately contact Shelby Hadden at the contact information listed below.

The expected completion date for the film (subject to change) is May 2016. The University of Texas at Austin will host a public screening, date to be determined. We will notify you when the film is completed and will invite you to attend the screening. In addition, we will submit the finished documentary to various film festivals across the country, as well as the New York Times Op-docs.

I appreciate your consideration of participating in "The Age of Elegance." If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (315)-727-5826 or [sghadden5@gmail.com](mailto:sghadden5@gmail.com). I look forward to attending the pageant in August.

Best,

Handwritten signature of Shelby Hadden in black ink.

Shelby Hadden  
MFA Candidate, May 2016

Handwritten signature of Paul Stekler in black ink.

Paul Stekler  
University of Texas at Austin  
Radio-Television-Film Department Chair (512) 471-6679

## APPENDIX D – TECH SCOUT PHOTOS

The following are photos we took at our meeting with the board and tech scout at the DoubleTree Hotel.



Ms. Texas Senior America Board: (from left) Mary Frances Hanson, Beth Weems Pirtle, Lillie Madison, Wanda Jones, Mary Virginia Tuinstra, Sarah Senter, Gaynelle Gray, Pat Housel, Paula Lee, Dr. Syntha West



Syntha and Wanda listen in.



Lillie telling me something important; Beth in the back is always camera ready.



Wanda writing something down.

## APPENDIX E – SYNTHA'S CONTESTANT LIST

This is the hand written list of contestants that Syntha West gave me to focus on.

- ↳ Olyve Abbott
- ↳ Jill Beam
- ↳ ~~Shawn Rodson~~
- ↳ Joan Michelle Hodge
- ↳ ~~Gloria~~ <sup>Shawn</sup> Mackie
- ↳ Janden Savage
- ↳ ~~Shawn Whitrock~~

FOCUS IN ON

From Syntha

## APPENDIX F – CONTESTANT NOTES

The following are my notes from the two and a half hour phone call with Syntha West about the contestants from her list.

- Sherry Dodson → piano (60s/70s) mid  
"winner"
- Singer
  - "into pageant" knows what it takes to win
  - won other pageants MS. Tx senior classic pageant
  - recruited herself
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> + only one
  - married, 3 kids
  - looking 4 something to expand gifts, glamour
  - "shine + sparkle"
- Sandra Subage mid-late 60s Dallas
- "professional"
  - fabulous senior follies
  - knock em dead
  - prefers w Dallas
- Oliver Abbott F.W. mid-late 80s → 6-8%  
curry on 50-60s
- returning
  - opera singer
  - knows the he got "celebrity status"
  - author! ghost stories MS. Congenital 2013
  - singer
  - last 4 (?)
  - usually wins 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> runner up

Jan  
mid-late 60s  
Sharon Whitrock - 4 pageants Garland  
runner up type

- usually 20s violin
- Mardella - 1 yr new instrument
- no children, focuses on community service, husband
- website, works on MSTA
- Ms. Garland serious a few yrs back
- Satellite pageants
- pageants around state; send winners to MSTA

Jill Bealm - just turned 60 Louisiana?

- story w/in herself
- director past 2 yrs
- just turned 60
- family line - mother Rosemary Runnelly

Louisiana?

Forney TX

- dad was prof. musician
- talent running out of her ears
- tap dance, flute
- pageant-wise
- recreation director of Dallas

- Jean Michelle Hodge leads <sup>the</sup> colony
- Razzaw raw - green
  - over the top enthusiastic
  - talent: clip of Juvenile Ball impression 4-5 months
  - gown: "Dr. Synthia I found THE dress."
  - fresh seeds

- Gloma to Jackson Marsh Place
- room in her home - nothing but brats
  - so bubbly
  - sold \$600 ~~worth~~ of tax

- Susie Holliday - Austin, mid-late 90s
- grandmother a few times over
  - want to hug her, cuddly, sweet
  - calls herself: Me. Sue
  - TALENT - don't know - Poem, readings
  - recruited her from daughter

Mr. Shirley McKelless

Tyler leos mid-late

→ ran for Congress

→ floundering in her talent  
too running late

→ running all over the place

→ political?

→ never been in @pageant before

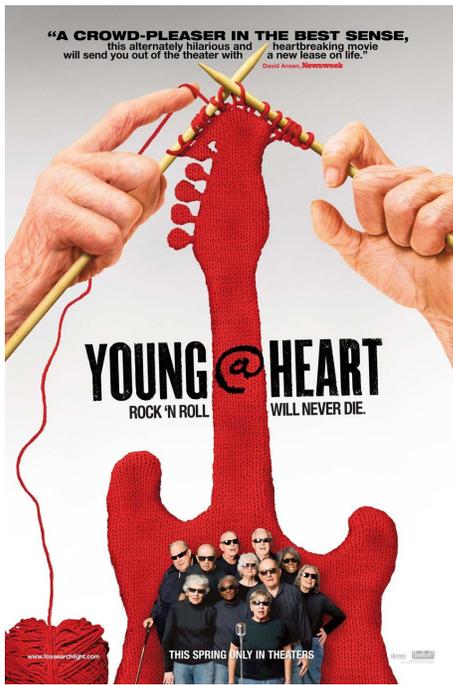
→ don't work

Blurbs - orientation

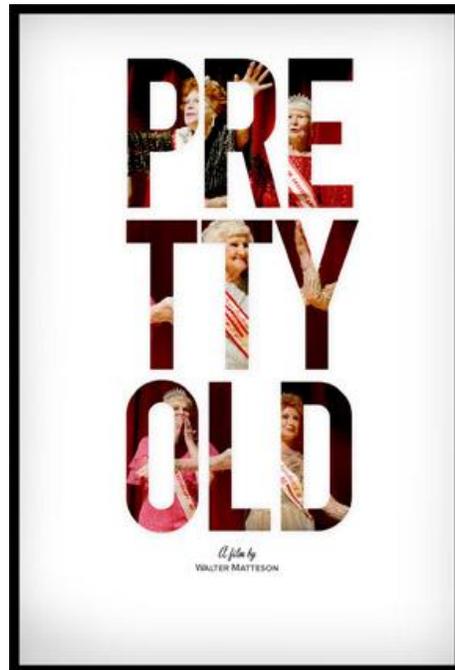
Sherry Dodson - turned down ~ dark w  
Elvis Presley

## APPENDIX G - FILME REFERENCES

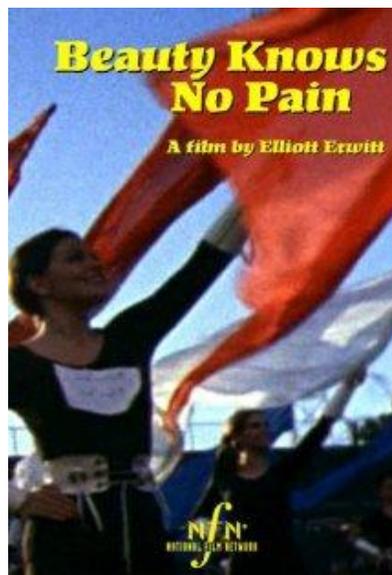
The following are my main film references.



*Young@ Heart*, 2007, dir. by Stephen Walker & Sally George



*Pretty Old*, 2012, dir. by Walter Matteson



*Beauty Knows No Pain*, 1972, dir. by Elliott Erwitt

## APPENDIX H – PAGEANT SCHEDULE

This is the pageant schedule provided by the Ms. Texas Senior America board.

## **Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant 2015 Schedule**

### **Thursday, August 6, 2015**

**1:00- 2:30 p.m.**

Check in Doubletree Hotel, 4009 Valley View,  
Dallas 75244 - 972-385-9000

(Your room may not be ready, but the hotel will hold your  
things until it is)

**3:00- 4:30 p.m.**

Orientation for contestants **ONLY**  
**Acacia Room (1st floor)** Bring your two CD's for talent  
and give to **Sarah Senter, Production Coordinator**

**4:30- 6:30 p.m.**

Recording Philosophy of Life – **Acacia Room (1st floor)**  
**(Please bring written copy of your Philosophy of Life with  
you)**

**7:00 – 9:00 p.m.**  
**floor)**

Contestant's reception - Fellowship time - **Gazebo (1st**

**Lite Hors d'oeuvres will be served**

### **Friday, August 7, 2015**

**6:00- 9:00 a.m.**

Breakfast (on your own)

**9:00 -12:00 p.m.**

Interview with the Judges - **Acacia Room (1st floor)**  
(Business Suit, Pant Suit or Dress)

**12:00 – 1:30 p.m.**

Lunch (on your own)

**2:00 – 5:00 p.m.**

Full rehearsal in **Grand Ball Room (1st floor)**

**Appendix I Continued**

**Bring your pageant shoes and props**

Dress Casually - **This is not a dress rehearsal**

**Dressing Room - Ebony Room (1st floor)**

**5:00 – 6:30 p.m.**

Dinner (on your own)

**6:30 p.m. until?**  
costume

**Dress rehearsal** – Bring formal, pageant shoes, & talent

**Ebony Room – Dressing Room (1st floor)**  
**Contestants will vote for Ms. Congeniality**

**Saturday, August 8 ,2015**

**6:00 – 7:00 a.m.**

Breakfast (on your own)

**7:30 – 10:30 a.m**

Final rehearsal – Dress casually  
**Grand Ballroom**

**10:30 – 11:50 a.m.**

Rest, get help with makeup  
(lunch on your own)

**12:00 p.m. (Sharp)**  
evening

All contestants report to Debbie Carroll Boyce in your  
gown.  
(Bring your clothes for your talent)

**12:15 p.m. (Sharp)**

Group picture will be taken by professional photographer

**1:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

Pageant and crowning of Ms. Texas Senior America 2015  
Pictures of finalists & individual pictures taken by  
professional photographer

**5:00 – 6:30 p.m.**  
visiting

Reception honoring Contestants, MTSA 2015 and Court,  
dignitaries and former queens – **Gazebo**

**Sunday, August 9, 2015**

**8:00 -8:45 a.m.**

Devotional - **Ebony Room (1st Floor)**  
(Non-denominational for those who want to attend)

**9:00 – 10:30 a.m.**  
Queen,

Cameo Club Breakfast honoring 2015 Contestants, 2015  
her Court and Guests. **Cypress Room**  
**(Reservations for guests must be turned in by Thursday,**  
**August 6.**  
**Cost is \$30.00)**

**We do hope all of you will attend the Cameo Club Complimentary Breakfast to show your support for the new queen and her court.**

**APPENDIX I – CONTESTANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

The following is my list of questions I created for the contestants.

Name

Age

current/Former job/career

Why MTSA?

Have you ever been in a pageant before?

What type of person does this pageant? or any pageant?

What did you do to prepare?

What are you most excited for/ nervous about?

Do you think you'll win?

Why do you want to win?

What's your philosophy of life?

What's the best part of aging?

Why celebrate age in this way?

How do you define beauty?

inner beauty?

why does beauty = value?

what does it mean to be a Texas woman?

## **APPENDIX J – ASSISTANT EDITING NOTES**

The following is a list of notes to tell my assistant editor, Matthew Reid Kluchin.

Notes for Reid

- yellow - don't worry about it (Neil diamond!)
- pink = already synced.
- FS100 footage - in blue, not priority <sup>except 4</sup> <sub>end</sub> \* audience reactions \*
- copy pageant sequences
- \* (S on project files - don't copy!) \*\*

Day 3 - FS100 won't be synced or anything

Master Pageant  
EG - Morning gown  
Reel over

Pageant  
- intro  
- EG  
- Talent  
- ~~ND~~  
- names

DMD 1  
Day 2

Scanned by CamScanner

## APPENDIX K – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HOME VISITS

The following are the lists of questions for Jill, Lillie, and Syntha when we visited them in their homes.

Jill Questions:

**makeup**

- beauty
- do you always wear makeup? Why?
- did you always want to be a beauty queen?

**practicing POL**

- why is this important to you, why is this your POL?
- how does it tie into the MTSA?

**Practicing routine**

- why this routine? Story behind it?
- always twirled/dance/sang? (when getting costume on?)

**showing programs/photos from previous pageants**

- history with pageants
- history with MTSA
- contestant/director

**Life after winning MTSA/ going to Atlantic City (outfit change, sash/tiara)**

- experience with MTSA
- What did it mean to win?
- What's life been like since? What have you done as queen?
- What's it like to be queen?
- nervous for Atlantic City?

Syntha Questions:

SYNTHA HOME QUESTIONS (tell her we will be repeating some Q&A from pageant)

- what's something in society that you would want to change?

-something exciting/hard this week?

### **BREAKFAST**

- When did Royce get dementia?
- What's it like being his caregiver?
- how has your life changed since?
- in what other ways has your life changed as you've become a senior and gotten older?
  - friends dying, own mortality, becoming invisible,

### **MAKEUP (what's the difference between daily makeup and pageant makeup?)**

- Do you always wear makeup?
  - Why?
- who taught you?
- do you think beauty is tied to women's value?
- definition of inner beauty
- why keep wearing makeup at your age?

### **PAGEANT STUFF**

- did you always want to be a beauty queen?
- why do you do MTSA/still twirl?

**God says, use your talents or they'll dissipate, so I'm using my talents and I thank the lord every day that I'm still flexible, still receiving an invitation. I hold my breath every year that the band directors continues the invitation. - Best selves – Not being taken care of, not being in nursing homes, etc.**

- streamline history of pageant story
- what does it take to win
- what does pageant wise mean?

**Pageant Wise, knowing the ins and the outs, knowing what to do, what not to do, knowing what to say, what not to say. Being yourself, but yet projecting, when you step on that stage, that you own it.**

- What does the ideal woman look like? What does a MTSA winner look like?

**It looks like beauty, not per se, a pin-up girl so to speak, or Miss Universe wearing a bathing suit. It looks like a sparkle in**

**the eye, it looks like a warm smile that's not fake. It looks like a person you'd like to go up to and have a conversation with. It looks like somebody you'd love to have as a neighbor. It looks like somebody who knows who she is.**

**SYNTHA & ROYCE (photo albums? Tour of house? Interview with both of them?)**

- Baylor story
- moving to FW
- what do they like to do together?

**SETTING UP FOR DINNER**

- why friends are helping her (**I never learned how to cook!**)
- what's today? How old are you? How old do you feel?

**DINNER (want audio monitor during dinner set up & party)**

- hugging, laughing, eating, SINGING HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Lillie Questions:

**MTSA**

Why did you start participating in MTSA?

How has your life changed since being a part of MTSA?  
(bling, confidence)

It's not a beauty pageant...

How do you define beauty/ inner beauty?

Goals as director: What are you hoping to bring to the pageant or change about it?

### **Family**

What does your normal day look like?

talk about her family, where they live, etc.

How often do you see them?

Do you have any friends who [take care of you]?

Is it hard to live alone?

Are you lonely?

### **Getting older**

What are you looking for in a new home?

What's the best/worst part of getting older?

In our society, women and older people in general are expect to go to a nursing home, and/disappear. How do you feel about that?

As you've gotten older, do you feel like you've disappeared? is MTSA a push against that?

What do you look forward to these days?

**01:34:13:17:** It's the inner beauty. It's not that outward beauty, it's the inner beauty that we as seniors try to express. (?) ... all the pageants you see on television and stuff - it's all about the beauty. It's all about that outside beauty, but we're dealing with the inside. Because this day in time, especially with the way society is now, and especially with our young people. It's almost like anything goes. You gotta have that foundation to know

who you are and to be able to deal with what you feel from within and be able to promote that to someone else.

## **APPENDIX L – MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING**

This is a copy of the signed Memorandum of Understanding between Lillie and me for the production and distribution of the pageant DVDs.

## MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

This Memorandum of Understanding is entered into effect September 10, 2015, between Shelby Hadden ("Hadden") and Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant (the "Company"), a Texas nonprofit corporation.

### RECITALS:

Hadden is a graduate film student at the University of Texas at Austin. The Company organizes and performs an annual pageant to select Texas's representative in the Ms. Senior America Pageant. With the Company's permission, Hadden filmed the Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant held August 6-8, 2015 (the "Pageant"). Hadden intends to use her film footage of the Pageant in the preparation of a film with the working title *Pageant Wise* (the "Film"). Hadden intends to use the completed Film as her Graduate Thesis and also to submit it for entry in various film festivals.

Pageant contestants have expressed an interest in purchasing from Hadden a film record of the Pageant in DVD format (each, a "Pageant DVD"), and the Company wishes to facilitate the purchase of Pageant DVDs by interested contestants. Hadden wishes to help finance the production of the Film with proceeds from the sale of the Pageant DVD, and is therefore willing to edit her footage of the Pageant to create the Pageant DVD and make copies available for sale. However, many film festivals will only accept films that have not been previously released and require that the person entering the film in the festival have ownership of the film and its content. Although the content of the Pageant DVD will be distinct from the content of the Film, Hadden is concerned about the possibility that the two will be confused and, accordingly, wishes to ensure that the Pageant DVD not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise distributed except as provided in this Memorandum of Understanding.

Now therefore, in consideration of the mutual covenants hereinafter set forth, the parties agree as follows:

1. Hadden will:
  - (a) edit her Pageant footage to create a film record of the Pageant;
  - (b) put the resulting film in a DVD format; and
  - (c) provide the Company with three (3) master Pageant DVDs.
  
2. The Company will:
  - (a) promote the sale of Pageant DVDs to contestants;
  - (b) create, distribute and collect order forms for Pageant DVD purchases;
  - (c) make duplicate copies of Pageant DVDs for the purpose of filling purchase orders;
  - (d) handle the packaging and shipping of Pageant DVDs to purchasers;

- (e) remit \$30 to Hadden for each Pageant DVD sold, with the first such payment to be made on or before November 15, 2015, and subsequent payments, if any, to be made monthly thereafter; and
- (f) provide Hadden with a copy of each purchase order.

3. The parties acknowledge that the footage of the Pageant shot by Hadden (the "Hadden Footage") and the content of the Pageant DVD are and will be the property of Hadden. The Company agrees that it will not, without Hadden's written permission, upload any Hadden Footage or the content of the Pageant DVD to the internet or make copies of the Pageant DVD except as necessary to fill purchase orders. The Company shall cause the purchase order forms for the Pageant DVD to include an agreement by the purchaser that such purchaser will not, without Hadden's written permission, upload any content of the Pageant DVD to the internet or make additional copies of the Pageant DVD.

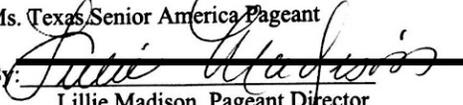
4. The parties may use the following contact information for purposes of communications and correspondence with one another:

**Shelby Hadden, Director**  
4539 Guadalupe St. Apt #A105  
Austin, TX 78751  
[sghadden5@gmail.com](mailto:sghadden5@gmail.com)  
315-727-5826

**Lillie Madison, Pageant Director**  
817-209-4268  
[lilliemadison@prodigy.net](mailto:lilliemadison@prodigy.net)

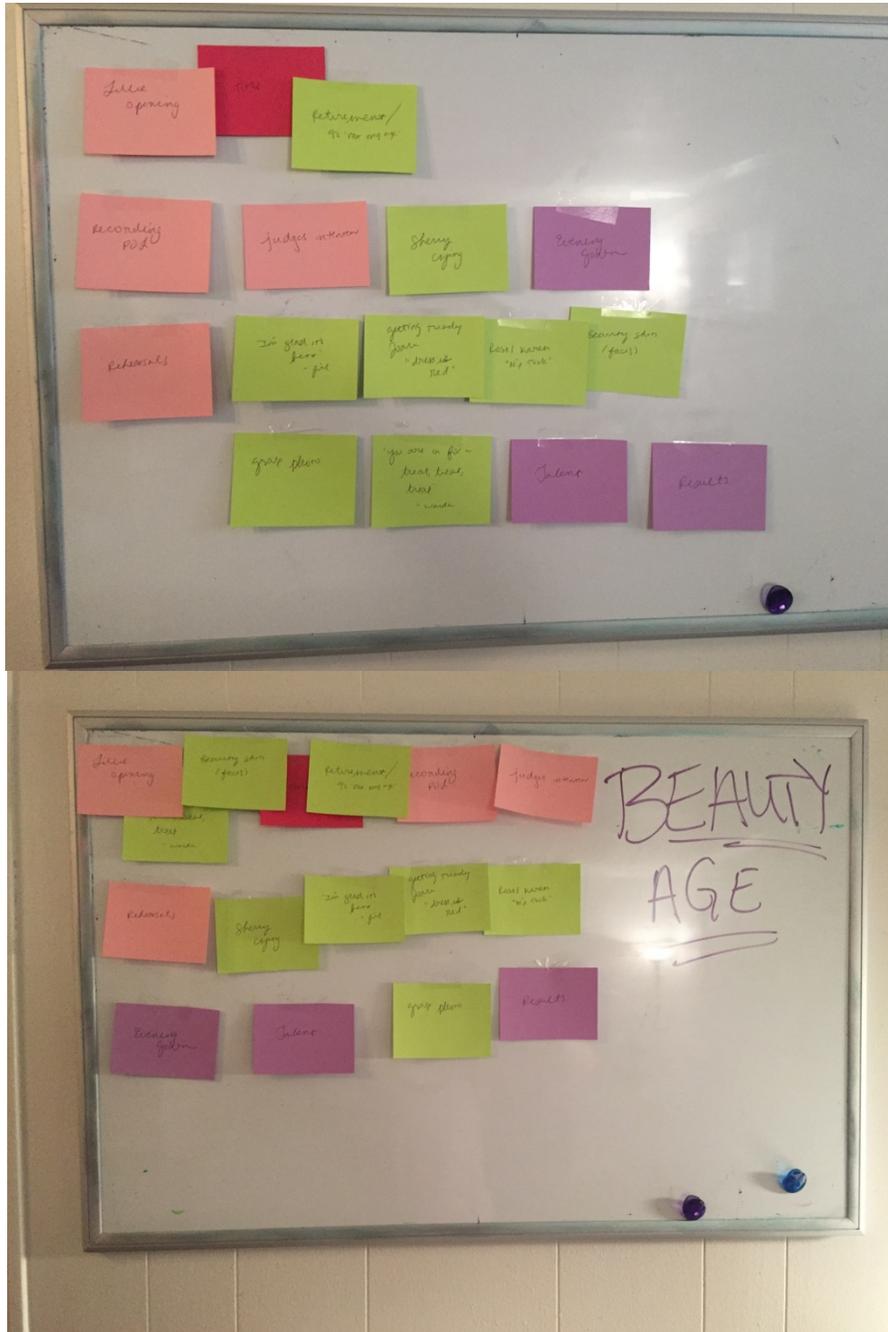
Dated the day and year first above written.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Shelby Hadden

Ms. Texas Senior America Pageant  
By:   
\_\_\_\_\_  
Lillie Madison, Pageant Director

## APPENDIX M – POSSIBLE STRUCTURES

Here are a few narrative structures I tried in editing during the summer.



## APPENDIX N – LOGO REFERENCE

Below is a reference I sent to Rachel Oatridge to design the logo.

A black rectangular box containing the text "MS. TEXAS" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with "Senior" in a white, italicized serif font below it.

**MS. TEXAS**  
*Senior*

**APPENDIX O – FINISHED LOGO**

The following is the film's finished logo designed by Rachel Oatridge.



**APPENDIX P – POSTER**

The following is a mock-up of a poster designed by Rachel Oatridge. We will make the final version after the film is turned in.

