

**The Dan Schneider Interview 36: Rick Goldsmith** (first posted 4/30/12)  
<http://www.cosmoetica.com/DSI36.htm>



**DS: In the last year I have discovered a bevy of young and beginning documentary filmmakers that I believe are deserving of and in need of greater exposure for their often neglected art form. There are, also, however, any number of good, solid veteran filmmakers whose work would reach far less people in an earlier time, but whose works penetrate into culture via Netflix and other streaming video companies. With this in mind, this DSI is with a filmmaker named Rick Goldsmith.**

**I discovered his work with his 2009 film *The Most Dangerous Man In America: Daniel Ellsberg And The Pentagon Papers*, but in looking up his resume, found that he had also directed a documentary on journalist George Seldes, that I saw many years ago, *Tell The Truth And Run: George Seldes And The American Press*. Before I go into more detail on those films, and forthcoming documentaries or feature films, let me tell the readers a bit more about you. You seem to work exclusively with a company called New Day Films, and your page on their website states:**

RICK GOLDSMITH'S mission as a filmmaker is to tell stories that encourage social engagement and active participation in community life and the democratic process, and to stimulate young minds to question the world around them.

Goldsmith has produced three films in the New Day Films collection. **The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers** (co-produced/co-directed with Judith Ehrlich) was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, and tells the story of a leading Pentagon strategist whose daring act of conscience leads directly to Watergate and the end of the war in Vietnam. **Tell the Truth and Run: George Seldes and the American Press**, also nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature, chronicles the life of a pioneering muckraking journalist and press critic. It was broadcast nationwide on public television and has become a staple in college and high school journalism programs across the country. **Everyday Heroes** (co-produced/co-directed with Abby Ginzberg) is a behind-the-headlines look at AmeriCorps and a provocative look at youth, race and national service.

Born and raised in the suburbs of New York City, Goldsmith came west in 1975 and has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area ever since. Trained in architecture, music and community activism, he began working in films in 1979 and made his living for years as an editor. He is a member of the Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, and the Writers' Guild of America, West, and the father of two teenage girls.

**First, what drew you to New Day? Do you share a philosophy or outlook, as all your films seem in a political/polemical vein? Has working with one entity saved you time in terms of funding?**

RG: To clarify: New Day Films is a distribution co-op of filmmakers distributing their own social justice films (rather than handing that job to a traditional distributor) to the educational market. It was begun four decades ago by 4 pioneer filmmakers and now has well over 100 members and 300 films. So New Day is a place filmmakers go AFTER they've finished making their films—it provides no funding nor structure to MAKE films.

Having said that, I do embrace everything that New Day is about—its emphasis on social justice, the democratic nature of our work together, its business model, and most of all the dedicated and creative people within—and did so when I joined (was admitted) in 1996 with my first feature-length doc, *Tell the Truth and Run*. See more about the coop at [www.newday.com](http://www.newday.com).

**DS: Twice you have had co-directors and co-producers. Has this helped or hindered your 'vision' of the projects? What are the pros and cons of a second set of eyes on a project? How were disagreements, which seem inevitable, solved?**

RG: Answers to this question would fill a book. It is always important to have more eyes than just your own when making a film. In both my collaborative directing efforts (*Most Dangerous Man* and *Everyday Heroes*), the “co-“ part was both positive and problematic. It is difficult to combine visions, and there are constant disagreements, part and parcel of the creative process. What worked best was when we were frank and honest with each other, cleared the air asap after tension crept in, and each stayed open-minded about what the other had to offer. On *Most Dangerous Man*, everyone involved knows Judith and I fought hard and often. One benefit was that the almost-constant disagreements led to the bar being set high—i.e. neither one of us could “get by” with a so-so idea, scene or edit, since the other wouldn't stand for it. So, in a way, it forced us into making decisions that really passed muster. And it also led to us to ask for and embrace the creative ideas offered by others on our team—most specifically Lawrence Lerew and Michael Chandler, our co-editors and co-writers.

**DS: The bio states you are a member of the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, so you likely see far more many documentary films than others in your field. A frequent complaint, especially in documentaries, is that it is too staid and political- like the Pulitzers and Nobels. The winners of Best Director and Best Documentary inevitably seem to produce safe, Leftist documentaries that preach to the choir. I recently interviewed a filmmaker, Matthew Pellowski, who did a documentary on a staple in paranormal circles- the Mothman- and made it a compelling journalistic probe of a sleepy West Virginia town and its history. This film was innovative and apolitical, whereas de facto infomercials, like *An Inconvenient Truth* are already outdated, scientifically, and are now seen as mere agitprop. Does any of this make your skin crawl, even if you may have political sympathies with most of the films that win? Thoughts?**

RG: Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, my friend. I take issue with much of your premise. An *Inconvenient Truth* was, without a doubt, one of the most influential docs ever—it took global warming out of scientific circles and into the vast American (and worldwide) public/political

forum—and it still resonates today. I often disagree virulently with the nominees and choices, but I will say that I know many of the Academy's Doc Branch members and they are almost all talented, thoughtful, creative and independently-minded people. I do find this year's rule changes—promoted by Michael Moore among others—very problematic, in the requirement for review in the New York and/or LA Times (journalists have no place in this process, Oscars are peer-awards) and, more importantly, the doing away with committees to create the shortlist, which, IMHO, will lead to unknown films and filmmakers not getting seen by enough members because of the sheer numbers (60-100) of films submitted. As a doc branch member, you can't watch them all, so only the high-profile films and filmmakers will get watched and hence nominated. So the process will be more political than before.

**DS: This from an online biography:**

Born and raised in Valley Stream, Long Island, I am the son of Kennedy / Stevenson liberal parents -- a pinkish-diaper baby, you might say, or a fellow-travelling toddler. I was brought up on Yiddish folk songs, the Weavers, Burl Ives and Nichols and May. I went to Hebrew school, got bar mitzvahed, didn't believe in god, and went to synagogue reluctantly, when at all.

In 1969 I enrolled at Brown University, transferred down the hill to the Rhode Island School of Design (Riz-dee), where I studied furniture design, architecture and got my first taste of filmmaking (super-8 silent). I also protested the Vietnam War, canvassed the neighborhoods, and finally dropped out, deciding that I'd been going to school since I was 5 but was drawn to Mark Twain's philosophy: "I never let my schooling get in the way of my education."

After gigs as a coffee-house blues and folksinger, psychiatric aide, Berkeley Free Clinic counselor and administrator, and prisoner rights advocate, I took a course in the basics of 16mm filmmaking and never looked back.

At the first Jewish Film Festival in 1981, (I'd been living in the decidedly goyish Bay Area since 1975) suddenly had the feeling I was at a family reunion, listening to other audience members debate, argue and expound on the fascinating array of films shown at the festival. My Jewish heritage began to resurface.

Unbeknownst to me until at least mid-way through the 7-year production of TELL THE TRUTH AND RUN, the making of this film tapped into my somewhat dormant sense of Jewish identity. Seldes's moral outrage at social injustice and apathy, resonated with my own feelings about similar themes. The outrage, I ultimately recognized, was decidedly Jewish in nature -- not religious in the least, but certainly according to the teachings and traditions of my parents and forbears. It was through this film, I hoped, that I could put that outrage into a productive form, one that could maybe make some social and political impact. You judge.

**The first thing that struck me in this bio is calling Kennedy and Stevenson liberals because, nowadays, they'd be considered moderates or center-right. Yet, oddly, America, and human culture, are getting profoundly more open and liberal with every year. In 25 years, gay marriage will be passé and it will be polygamy on the table, and in 50 years, it will be human-android sexual relations. Anything on this conundrum of perception vs. reality in political awareness?**

RG: Kennedy and Stevenson were definitely liberals of their day (albeit cold-war liberals). In contrast to your assertion, Nixon's domestic policies would be considered liberal today. We live in a country full of contradictions. Gay marriage will soon be legal everywhere, the writing is on the wall. Roe v. Wade, which legalized abortions in 1973, would never pass the Supreme Court in today's political atmosphere and because of the bias of today's Court.

**DS: How did furniture design, and other earlier forays into creativity, help or hinder your later goals in filmmaking?**

RG: The whole atmosphere at RISD helped me learn to be creative and trust my own judgments on what that meant. I spent only 2 years there, being young, headstrong and often quoting Mark Twain, "I never let my schooling get in the way of my education." Like Gates and Jobs, I'm a college drop-out.

**DS: It's been years since I saw the Seldes film, but on looking up your filmography, I immediately recalled it. Who was Seldes and why did you want to make a film on him?**

RG: A pioneer muckraking journalist, who was a foreign correspondent in WWI and 1920s Europe, kicked out of the Soviet Union by Lenin's Bolsheviks and of Italy by Mussolini's fascists. He spoke truth to power, influenced the likes of IF Stone, Ben Bagdikian, Ralph Nader, Victor Navasky (long-time editor of The Nation), Studs Terkel and Daniel Ellsberg. I heard him at age 98 on the radio, was struck by both the freshness of his ideas and his gripping and funny story-telling, and interviewed him for the film five months later. His life had much to say about censorship and suppression in America's news media, and the need for a truly independent and free press in our democracy. That's the who and the why.

**DS: When young, I read a few books by Seldes, as well as some works by Howard Zinn, but neither struck me as much as the work of Studs Terkel. While Zinn seemed to be the most historically minded, and Terkel seemed the most in touch with individuals, rather than movements, Seldes seemed to be the least objective. His works, even when good, are often lessened by his biases and rah-rahing, rather than strict reportage. How do you reconcile his subjective style to journalism, and is this a trait you favor in your work or not? Why?**

RG: Seldes' "subjective" style is one that not only worked for him, but had much resonance among his audience in the 1930s-1940s (his heyday as an independent). As the great Washington Post columnist Colman McCarthy said about Seldes, "He was criticized for only giving one side. Sure he gave you one side—the side you never got elsewhere." The newspapers of the day were VERY conservative, more so by a long shot than today. It was said about Seldes's publisher at the Chicago Tribune (now paraphrased for Rick Santorum), "He had the greatest mind of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century." At any rate, it's true that my style is more balanced if you will, and less strident. But Seldes was very effective and influential, and isn't that the point?

**DS: The Seldes film is awash in Left-leaning personages: Susan Sarandon, Ed Asner, Nat Hentoff, Ralph Nader, and Daniel Ellsberg. Is it easy to get in touch with, and hire, such folks if they are in sympathy with your film, politically? And, does that make the film better, or not? I mean, suppose a Right-leaning actor, like Tom Selleck, would be better to**

**voice a certain personage, than, say, Asner. Would you pursue Selleck first? And, have you ever been turned down for a film because of your, or its, political views and content?**

RG: I picked Sarandon for her voice and delivery, and Asner because he seemed to embody the Seldes combativeness, sense of humor and sense of outrage. The fact that they were left-leaning was definitely part of the equation as well: it gives them (and their voices) a sort of “moral authority.” As to getting in touch with them, it is a misconception that Hollywood stars are hard to reach. I have more trouble getting a return call from my dentist. Hollywood stars have agents whose business is to get them work! As to landing them, think of it from their perspective: why would a right-leaning actor work for essentially no money for the kind of film I would make? Most actors who lend themselves to documentary films do it because they believe in the films and the filmmakers. They certainly don’t do it for the money, so what else do you have to persuade them?

**DS: Let me turn to *The Most Dangerous Man In America*, but before I explore that, let me state that I watched your film, and a bevy of other good and interesting documentaries after I got Netflix’s streaming option. My opinion is that while Hollywood is killing American fiction films, and indy films are in a state of hibernation, the American documentary film may be one of the few areas in all of the arts, in this country, especially, that is NOT in the tank. Do you agree? Why or why not?**

RG: Again, a barrel of contradictions. There are more docs now than ever. They are more sophisticated and/or creative in form than ever, and the bar keeps being raised. However, there is more junk out there too. Almost no distributor will offer an advance or anything beyond a service contract (where the filmmaker pays for everything, including P&A), so the theatrical track is more CLOSED (at least financially) than it was say 5-10 years ago. But the internet has opened things up. YouTube has been a boon and a bane at the same time. The world of “reality shows” has bastardized the art form to a great extent, and probably adversely affected what “non-fiction” people will watch.

**DS: Are there any doc makers that you’ve discovered on Netflix, or elsewhere that you think are good? Who, and what works would you recommend, and why?**

RG: Michael Moore’s stuff, to me, is generally strong, bold, watchable, and influential even if he takes liberties with things like timeframe and context. He’s like the muckrakers of 100 years ago put to film—like a bulldog he locks his jaws around the leg of his subject and doesn’t let go. Barbara Kopple, Bill Jersey, Jon Else were influences, for their mastery of form and story, and of planting questions in the audiences mind both during the film, and that they would take away from the viewing. Steve James, Stanley Nelson, Joe Berlinger make consistently great films. Errol Morris is always interesting and creative, even if I take issue with much of his point-of-view and approach. *Buck* by Cindy Meehl was one of the great docs of 2011 and should have been nominated for an Oscar—terrific story, treatment of central character, tone, and message.

**DS: I think the studios want to destroy Netflix, and also things like Hulu, because, just as with cable tv, they want to be able to force people to pay for crap they don’t want with bundling, rather than let the free market play out and allow bad channels and shows to fall**

**away. Do you think that this is the ultimate goal of the Hollywood studios and television networks, to monopolize and deaden the minds of its viewers, to turn them into zombie consumers?**

RG: The ultimate goal of everyone involved here is to make money and more money, and to extend reach. There's no conspiracy to deaden minds—that's been done far too effectively by the "free market" and needed no conscious coordinated effort.

**DS: Let me turn *The Most Dangerous Man In America*. First, I mention that I did not know much of Ellsberg, other than this guy helped toppled Nixon. What drew you to him. I realize he appeared in the Seldes film, but to do a whole documentary on him. What new info does the film present that was previously unknown?**

RG: Well, the entire internal story, as told by Ellsberg and others—we had more than 20 on-camera subjects, all first-person actors in the story (no "experts"), and the White House tapes—was never done before. But let me point out one thing that popped out—we did not consciously do this-- while we were busy editing: there appeared in our film a "contagion of conscience" that involved most of our characters. Randy Kehler, a draft resister gave a speech at a small conference that he was going to prison to protest the Vietnam war. Ellsberg heard Kehler and said "what can I do, now that I'm ready to go to prison?" Tony Russo was called to testify against Ellsberg, refused, and went to jail; Dan's wife and son faced decisions that would likely involve Ellsberg going to prison for the rest of his life. Hedrick Smith, Max Frankel, and Jim Goodale of the NYTimes faced the prospect of going to prison for publishing (and/or the demise of the Times as an institution). Congressman McCloskey and Senator Gravel, the same. Egil Krogh and John Dean (from the other side) faced prison time depending on how they acted in the wake of Ellsberg's Pentagon Papers actions. And on and on. They all voiced this moral dilemma when on camera in our film. Pretty amazing, eh, what happens when one person takes a stand? (And, of course, President Nixon's reaction to Ellsberg was his political undoing and changed history.)

**DS: My dad was a working class, union man and liberal. Ellsberg was more of an elitist liberal sort. Yet, my dad loved Ellsberg's taking down of Nixon, as he hated both Nixon and LBJ. Nixon is understandable, but LBJ's 'crime,' against liberalism, seems to be solely with the Vietnam war. Had he not escalated that war, and stuck with social agendas, how do you think history would differ, and how do you think history would view him?**

RG: A big question, I can't do it justice. Clearly LBJ was courageous and brilliant on civil rights, and criminally deceitful in re: Vietnam. Again, a bundle of contradictions.

**DS: The film seems to imply the Gulf Of Tonkin incident was a 100% fabrication. Do you believe that, and, I'll admit, I only read, decades ago, a paperback condensation of them, and this while young. What do the papers say about Tonkin specifically?**

RG: There was an attack on a US ship (fact). It was undoubtedly provoked by the US actions, likely purposely. There was no second attack (fact, as we say in the film). There was intentional deception of Congress and the American people around this (fact that came out later, but

Ellsberg and others knew it at the time.) The incident was used as justification for convincing Congress that LBJ should be authorized unconditionally to attack N. Vietnam (though not a declared war), much like the (phantom) WMDs were used by Bush. I don't think there is much debate, now, about this history.

**DS: Ellsberg worked for the Rand Corporation- a think tank. The film, rightly, I think, shows the utter silliness of such think tanks. Yet, these, and corporations, dominate politics, not the people. Ellsberg was there at the beginning of the think tank mindset. What are his and your views on them? Are they net positives, negatives, or washes?**

RG: I don't think our film "shows the utter silliness of think tanks." Great minds work at think tanks. As a concept, they serve a purpose. Most think tanks, maybe all, have a political leaning (yes, often because of who funds them), and their "thinking" tends to reflect that leaning, much as the individuals involved would like to think they are independent thinkers.

**DS: To quote my film review:**

Ellsberg and a Rand Corporation co-worker, Anthony Russo, who photocopied the documents, stood trial for espionage, yet were both let go after a mistrial was declared. What is odd is how, decades later, there are still people who declare Ellsberg a traitor, and guilty of treason, when any objective glare at the facts reveals it was all the Presidents, from Truman through Nixon, who were guilty of- if not outright treason, then being traitors to the best interests of the nation, due to their own macho impulses over not wanting to 'lose' Indochina to Communism, which they did, then regained bloodlessly, making the whole of the wars in that region one of humanity's greatest losses of life, time, materiel, and human dignity. And Ellsberg exposed all that, yet it still took four years for the war in Vietnam to end; a testament to the utter sloth of the American public who, decades later, would not turn on the Iraq War, after its premise was utterly rent.

**First, the whole concept of treason and being a traitor. Nothing that Ellsberg did, as far as I know, or the film shows, could legally be called treason. As stated, he showed possible treason (i.e.- the reckless and casual disregard and endangerment of the lives of military men) by five Presidents- two Republicans and three Democrats. How do you reconcile this oddity? Clearly, Ellsberg was the white hat in this morality play, and Nixon, of all the Presidents, was Black Bart. And, do you view Nixon as evil, or fatally flawed, or a decent guy with absolutely no self esteem (what one would call the Oliver Stone take on Nixon)?**

RG: Too big a subject to tackle here. Suffice it to say Nixon was a "bad guy" and in his resignation in the face of impeachment, he got what he deserved.

**DS: Second, what do you think it took so long, after the release of the Pentagon papers, for the war to end? Is it inertia, a will to be deceived, even when shown one is lied to, ala Bush and the lack of WMDs in Iraq.**

RG: Look at history and two-and-a-half centuries since the so-called "French and Indian Wars" in the mid-1700s, America has not gone a generation without a) someone in power proposing that we consider going to war, and b) the nation saying "yes" to that war, and c) opponents of those wars being called traitors. Many of those wars the United States won, none did we lose.

Vietnam stood to be the first. What is more remarkable than the war lasting so long after the Pentagon Papers is the fact that there was, finally, enough opposition to the war in this country to end it.

**DS: Your film lacks the razzle and dazzle of some other docs, but it seems to have a relentless focus. Was this your idea, or a natural consequence of Ellsberg as the subject? And why did you make Ellsberg the narrator? Some would claim this descends the film into agitprop.**

RG: This was the subject of great internal debate among our team. The argument against Ellsberg as narrator was the possible loss of credibility or believability. The arguments in favor were that he was uniquely at the center of all these events and inside the halls of power, that the film was about his decision-making and his conscience rather than the “facts” of the events, and that his voice gave the film both an urgency and an intimacy we wouldn’t have gotten otherwise.

**DS: What is your ultimate filmic goal? Do you want to continue with documentaries?**

RG: I’m comfortable with, and good at, the documentary genre. But if I had any guts, I’d take a risk and go to fiction. As one of my daughters has constantly asked me, for the past decade or so, “Hey, dad, when are you going to make a *real* film?”

**DS: Having watched, now, numerous documentaries, it’s clear that most are done by folks who lack the fiscal resources of an Errol Morris or Michael Moore, therefore their output is spare. Most of this is due to limited finances. How do you finance your films?**

RG: I feel fortunate that for the past twenty years or so, I’ve made a living (such as it is, enuf to put food on the table and raise a family) by staying inside the documentary community. That includes editing and writing other filmmakers’ films, which I’ve done intermittently and between my own projects.

**DS: Let me now turn more basic. How do you define your job, as a documentarian or filmmaker?**

RG: Good question. Both, I guess.

**DS: Did you have any heroes in filmmaking or screenwriting (or any other form of writing) as you grew up? If so, who and why?**

RG: My filmmaking heroes and role models growing up and in my formative filmmaking years (I got into this business when I was 28) were all from the narrative side: Chaplin, Hitchcock, Capra, Kazan, Costa-Gavras, de Sica, Lumet, Woody Allen, Coppola.

**DS: What of your parents? What were their professions? Did they encourage your pursuits?**



RG: I grew up in Valley Stream, Long Island, a suburb of NYC. My mom was a music teacher of violin, viola and guitar, and a folk singer of some local renown. She sang international folk songs in the 1960s, inspired by the likes of The Weavers, Theodore Bikel, Miriam Makeba, Peter, Paul and Mary and Bob Dylan (loved his songs, hated his singing). She was my first guitar teacher. More importantly, her daily life infused me with the notion that art, music and culture were as important and essential to anyone's well-being (and society's) as air, food and shelter. My dad (also a musician by avocation) was an electrical engineer whose work was in guidance systems used in both the space programs and the military. Not surprisingly, there was a certain tension in my household during my teens as the Vietnam War approached its peak (circa 1968)—my mom was the first one in my household to oppose the war, while my dad's firm had military contracts. Nonetheless, everyone in my immediate family—my older brother and I, both away at college at the time, and both my parents—ended up in the nation's capital in November, 1969 with a million other Americans, protesting the war (singing, with Pete Seeger "All we are saying, is give peace a chance"). My parents were supportive of my switch from Ivy League academics (Brown University) to more creative pursuits (I was a budding architect and designer at RISD), and while they were against my dropping out of school in 1972, they supported my decision once I made it. My mom, at 88, continues to be my biggest fan, and unceasingly gets her friends from around the country to see my films.

**DS: Having spoken of truth and its need in documentaries, whether or not you are in political sympathy with him or not, this inevitably brings up the top financially successful documentary maker of our time, Michael Moore. What is your take on him? My opinion is that he is a brilliant technician, but he wastes his time pandering to the liberal choir rather than, like Errol Morris, seeking out a broader audience. Agree or not, and why?**

RG: Michael Moore hardly speaks only to the choir. \$120 million in Box Office for Fahrenheit 911 debunks that notion, and he has the broadest audience by far of any documentary filmmaker in the world.

**DS: Art *speaking a truth* is fundamentally different from its *being a truth*. But, it can also illumine aspects of existence utterly disconnected to truth, like emotions, bad ideas, politics, etc. Do you also find the '*art is truth*' equation laughable and silly?**

RG: Art is at its best, I think, when it uses the tools of the artist—beauty, form, insight, creativity, music, poetry, prose, passion—to move people in ways that mere factual or prosaic approaches cannot do. I prefer art that uses "truth" or "essential truths" to art that is propagandistic, because I think most propaganda is based, at least in part, on falsehoods or the bending or stretching of the truth, and I think most propagandists know that. But I still appreciate propaganda, which is often artful. If you're using propaganda to move people in a certain direction, there can be value in that. And the line between truth and propaganda isn't always clear—sometimes it's just a question of point of view. Artists of whatever stripe, have passion, and strong points of view, and have something to say. They're pushing boundaries and trying to influence. They're not NY Times reporters following Elements of Style and rulebooks. Michael Moore, Oliver Stone, Costa-Gavras, Vittoria de Sica, John Steinbeck, Lillian Hellman, Susan Sontag, Alice Walker, Pablo Picasso, Arthur Miller, Lenny Bruce, Paul Robeson, Charlie Chaplin, Martin Ritt, Spike Lee, John Lennon, Gil Scott-Heron, Phil Ochs, Woody Guthrie, Pete

Seeger, Holly Near, Richard Pryor just to name a few, are all political artists who have influenced me and whom I admire. I think they all have pushed their visions of what the world is and what the world COULD be. They've all been "truthful" in that they all, IMHO, have a valid perspective

**DS: Following in that claim, as a documentarian, are you even interested in 'truth,' as a concept, or is your concern more multivalent- to affect mind, heart, eyes, ears, etc.? And, if so, what are the pros and cons of this approach vis-à-vis the more blatantly promotional sort of 'documentaries' a Michael Moore does?**

RG: My style is one in which I have rigid standards of "objective fact" if you will, in what I use as the pillars, the foundation, of my documentaries (and then I build my story, my arguments or implied arguments, or food for thought, around those pillars). I just feel that if I'm going to influence, stimulate thought and discussion, and inspire, that I need to be able to defend—to myself, and hence to others—every choice I make in the edit room. What that means is that if I imply cause and effect by my juxtaposition of shots/scenes, or my choice of a sound-bite, and certainly, by any narration I write or use—then I stand by that cause-and-effect implication as an unassailable fact or truth. For me—and I don't take a holier-than-thou position on this—it is both the most honest AND most effective way I can make films.

**DS: If someone points out what you left out of your Seldes or Ellsberg films, as a possible distortion of a greater reality, is that fair?**

RG: "What is left out" is an interesting discussion, both in the edit room and in public. In both Seldes and Ellsberg, of course there were many things "left out." Here are my guidelines: Like any good novelist, playwright, screenwriter or film director, you pick your STORY, composed of a plotline and a theme. "Capote" wasn't the life of Truman Capote, it was a story built around one short (5-year?) period in his life. Tell the Truth and Run was a story built around censorship and suppression in the press. At Most Dangerous Man's core was the internal story of Ellsberg and his decision to leak the Pentagon Papers laid on top of the related journalistic and political ramifications of his act. So every decision made in the edit room, of what to put in or leave out, has to be filtered thru the question, "does this enhance the story?" That question might further mean, "does this make the story, the dilemmas, the audience's vision of what is right or wrong, more complex, richer, more interesting, more thought-provoking?" or "does this distract from the main theme and plot-line and muddy the waters?" Be clear, every documentary film is a manipulation of the audience, but no more so than a well-written and constructed non-fiction book or biography. The most highly-regarded works—film, literature, theater, music, fiction, non-fiction, whatever—are highly-regarded because they pull the audience, reader or listener thru a story that is coherent and powerful, and hence it affects that audience profoundly. Especially in film, where you have two hours or less to grab your audience and wow them, you stick to a through-line, at the same time you are stringing together your most powerful material.

**DS: Let me ask you of something I see as deleterious to both the appreciation of film, and the purveying of good criticism, and that's what I call 'critical cribbing.' If a Kenneth Turan or Roger Ebert said A, B, or C about Film X, then the same ideas, with the slightest variations, are propounded on hundreds of blogs and newspapers. Have you ever felt a**

**work of yours was unfairly maligned, not just by a single critic, but especially so by the repetition of the wrong meme by critics who lazily ‘picked up’ on the initial critics’ misread?**

RG: Our very first review for *Most Dangerous Man* was by David Denby in *The New Yorker*. Can you believe that? The day it appeared, I got calls and emails from friends, colleagues and relatives from all over the country—*The New Yorker*! You? Wow! It was, by and large, a positive review, but it called some of our animation, or maybe it was the re-creations, “cheesy.” I still stand by both the animation and the re-creations, they provided an important role in the film, were well done, and we’ve had many, many compliments on both. But if I had a dollar for every time “cheesy” re-appeared in subsequent reviews, I could fund my next film. (Jon Stewart could string all the “cheesys” together and get a few laughs, like he does with the Republican/Fox News catchphrases of the day.) It’s unfortunate, but it goes with the territory. In general, I’m happy to get reviewed, and the more the merrier, and what they say is what they say. You can’t have a thin skin around reviews, it’ll kill you, or worse, stop you from making movies.

**DS: Let me speak of editing. How much footage do you shoot for films before editing them down to a final length- in terms of hours and minutes? How does a feature fiction film differ from a documentary?**

RG: I start with an idea for a story, and shoot as much as I have to in order to tell the story. Hopefully, the original idea gets altered, bent, detoured, enhanced and hit with surprises on the way. For *Tell the Truth* I think I shot maybe 25-30 hours of interviews for a 111-minute film. For *Most Dangerous Man* we shot more than twice that (for a 90-minute film), and had probably 100 hours of archival material at our disposal as well. For *Everyday Heroes*, which was “a year in the life,” and hence we weren’t shooting to a story or script, but were capturing everything to *make* the story, we shot over 300 hours of footage for what ended up to be a two-hour film, and later re-cut a one-hour version. And by the way, you never “edit down” from all that material. Rather, you pick the candidate material for an assembly and go from there. My first assembly for *Most Dangerous Man* was six hours.

**DS: How often do you strive to get a narration and an image consonant with each other? Or do you seek to have them, more or less, play off of each other?**

RG: Writing narration for documentary is an art in and of itself. I learned from Sharon Wood, one of the best, who wrote most of *Tell the Truth* and *Run*. It’s a back and forth thing. You cut to story, write narration to the pictures of your cut, then re-cut, re-write, etc. Never write anything that is not supported by what you see on screen, IOW don’t have the words and the images at odds with each other, or try to “tell” with words while your picture is pulling the audience elsewhere. Be economical and succinct, never flowery. Use “but” a lot—you want the film to turn, turn, and turn again, rather than “and, and, and” which gets boring in a hurry.

**DS: As an editor on others’ films, do you usually get assigned routine cuts, or are you allowed to improvise, suggest? How is your approach different on a work for hire than a film you conceive?**

RG: I use the same approach on someone else's work as on my own. The difference is that you need to get "in sync" with the director, with another person. My best situations, sitting in either chair, is a collaboration where each person is free to create, argue, defend, enhance.

**DS: I started this interview series to combat the aforementioned dumbing down of culture and discourse- what I call *deliteracy*. Old tv show hosts like Phil Donahue, Dick Cavett, David Susskind, Tom Snyder, even Bill Buckley- love him or hate him, have gone the way of the dinosaur. Intellect has been killed by emotionalism, simply because the latter is far easier to claim without dialectic. Let me ask, what do you think has happened to real discussion in America- not only in public- political or otherwise, but just person to person?**

RG: Good question. We've degenerated in America, I think, in two ways: 1) the advance of TV, commercials, MTV and now the internet has made attention spans shorter and shorter, and, in general, the culture less interested in discussion and complexity. 2) Most recently, there has been the rise, on the right, of disingenuous and dishonest "political discourse"—and I'm talking Limbaugh, Fox TV, the Tea Party, Religious Right, and every prominent Republican in both houses of Congress—so that lies are presented as fact, facts are attacked as deceptions, science is derided and dismissed, learning is denigrated, history is distorted beyond recognition, all in the service of a political agenda—and a dangerous one at that. It is commonly referred to as a problem of "both the right and the left" or "both sides of the aisle", but in fact there is no "equivalence," and it is really almost solely coming from the right.

I like to think (back to a previous Q&A, above) that my films are grounded in fact and history, and that my "value added," what I bring to the table, is a stimulating narrative based on that foundation—for ALL audiences, and especially for young (under thirty) audiences. Because without discussion throughout our society, and across class, racial, sexual and ideological lines, we're dead as a culture and as a democracy.

**DS: A few less intense queries. That old chestnut- name a few folk from history you'd like to break bread with, and why?**

RG: Shakespeare—let's discuss your approach to art, drama, conflict, themes. Damn, man, how do you do that????

The Polynesians from hundreds of years ago—how and why did you set out in boats to lands hundreds and thousands of miles away? How did you find Hawaii, in the middle of the ocean, and how did you even know it was there? What was it like on your boats, months on the water without decent food and limited fresh water?

Lewis and Clark, and the Indians he met. Let me understand this whole clash of cultures thing, manifest destiny and all. Don't you guys see that genocide is in your future?

Jefferson and Madison—Give me the skinny on how this Declaration and Constitution really came about, because these are amazing documents. But I've got to ask you about this whole 3/5 thing, the property, the slavery. I know you were going for political compromise, but, slavery? Please. C'mon guys, give, what is that?