

BRIGHT LEAVES: DOCUMENTARY FEATURE BY ROSS MCELWEE

NARRATOR: So I had this dream that I was standing in a field surrounded by these immense prehistoric-looking plants. The leaves seemed to give off their own heat - almost a kind of body heat - and the air was very humid. I felt strangely comforted by these leaves - very happy to be surrounded by them. As I was telling my wife about this dream, I realized that the leaves were probably tobacco leaves. My wife then said she thought my dream might be about missing the South. She said that no matter how long I lived in the cold crowded North, I would always be a Southerner, that the South was in my blood, and in fact that lately, I'd been looking a little anemic - maybe in need of a transfusion - my periodic transfusion of Southernness. So I decided to head home for a while, back down South.

TITLE: BRIGHT LEAVES

NARRATOR: My ancestors settled here in the foothills of NC in the early 1700's, and I still have countless cousins here. One of them - John McElwee - got in touch with me sometime ago, saying that the next time I was down here, I should drop by because he had something he wanted to show me. Something of importance to the McElwee family. John's a small town lawyer who lives in that house on the hill there.

JOHN: I found these rolled up together, thrown underneath a table in a local theater.

ROSS: Right here in town.

JOHN: Yeah. Right here in town – the theater where I grew up. This is a variety of single door panels from the same general period. But once again, door panels are an unusual size. And you just don't run into them very often. You need a big wall to display them and this is about the only place in the house where they really work.

NARRATOR: Though John and I are second cousins and grew up in towns that were only an hour apart, this is the first time we've actually met. My cousin seems to like movies.

JOHN: I would collect stills on pictures (movies) that I had some interest in. I just have an interest in the movie and I'm anxious to pick up stills from these titles whenever I have the opportunity. Now this, just as an example, is a picture called “The Black Cat”, which is another horror film from 1934. This is, these are such gorgeous stills and from a time when still photograph on films was an art form. And it's long gone now. Like set stills, candid stills of Karloff and Lugosi having a tea break on the set. This is just the kind of thing that I'm looking for - portrait stills of Karloff. This stuff is just so difficult to come by. Now this film's 1934 and this the leading lady. Her name was Jacqueline Wells and she was 20 years old when she made this film. 12 years ago I sent a short note to her because I had found her address. I received a reply from her about a month ago. After 12 years she responded to the letter. I mean, I couldn't believe it. I stood in the post office. And here it is. Look at this trembling hand. I mean, she's like, she would be like 83 now. And she writes this letter.

ROSS: What in the world did she say?

JOHN: Well, it goes on and on. She talks about how she was sorry she had been so long in answering and she says she has a pilot's license in here and that she flies airplanes. It's just incredible. And there this letter was – a reply after 12 years from an 84 year old woman who had appeared with Karloff and Bela Lugosi in "The Black Cat". I mean, the whole thing is just one of those stranger than fiction incidents that occasionally happen in collecting.

These are trailers, previews. I love previews. Each reel contains probably 10 or so. I've got 400 reels of these in 16mm and probably another 200 in 35mm. But I love previews. This room is just filled with examples of movies that, well here's a black and white film called "Madam Satan". It's a 1929, sort of an odd ball musical with a finale aboard a zeppelin that crashes. It was directed by Cecile B. DeMille. Once again, I've only heard of one print of this and that's the print I have.

"Bright Leaf" is a melodrama that take place in post civil war North Carolina. And it's about tobacco growers and the rivalries between these cigarette manufacturers. The author of the novel on which the movie was based was also from North Carolina. Did the research based on stories involving North Carolina tobacco growers. It just seems very likely that our great-grandfather's story had to have been incorporated into this. And I really think it's the basic theme of this movie. It's the same. What happened to our great-grandfather is pretty much what happens to Gary Cooper in this film.

ROSS: Who were the co-stars with Cary Cooper in this?

JOHN: Lauren Bacall and Patricia Neal, Donald Crisp, Jack Carson.

ROSS: So, this was a major production.

JOHN: Oh yeah, this was an A picture. Directed by Michael Curtiz. He had done "Casablanca", "Yankee Doodle Dandy", "Adventures of Robin Hood". He's Warner's top director at the time.

ROSS: With our great-grandfather being featured....

JOHN: Exactly.

ROSS ...as Gary Cooper. Incredible.

JOHN: That's right. There we go.

NARRATOR: I have to say I'm somewhat amazed by all this - especially the discovery of a Hollywood movie that might actually be based on my great grandfather's life. If this is true, then I've found a sort of cinematic heirloom - a kind of surreal home movie reenacted by Hollywood stars.

JOHN: This is a still file from "Bright Leaf" that I have.

NARRATOR: Having just seen Bright Leaf, I'm now beginning to remember stories my father told me about my great-grandfather - how he made a fortune in tobacco, but then somehow lost it all to his rival, James B. Duke. The Dukes, of course, went on to become one of the wealthiest families in America - sort of the Southern Rockefellers - while apparently, my great grandfather died in bankruptcy.

So Bright Leaf would stand as a sort of record, a version - perhaps a tad melodramatic - but a version nonetheless, of my great grandfather's rise and subsequent fall to ruin.

ELIZABETH: Mr. John Harvey McElwee established and operated a tobacco factory in Statesville. He was the originator of the Durham Bull brand of smoking tobacco. His trusted foreman for many years confessed on his deathbed that he had stolen the McElwee formula and sold it to the Dukes, who manufactured it under the brand name Bull Durham. Mr. McElwee brought suit against the Dukes and fought it in the courts for years until the Dukes were awarded the verdict.

NARRATOR: I visit another of my cousins, Elizabeth King-retired school teacher, sole surviving grandchild of John Harvey McElwee and chronicler of the alleged injustices done to him by the Duke family.

ROSS: Why do you think we lost the case?

ELIZABETH: Because Duke had more money and he lasted longer than my grandfather did in the court.

ROSS: How do you feel about that now?

ELIZABETH: Well, I feel like they cheated my grandfather. And I feel like that the least they could have done was given him some stock (certificates of ownership in the tobacco company).

NARRATOR: This is the mansion that John McElwee built for himself here in Statesville, N.C.

And across the street there is where that mansion once stood. There's nothing left of it now, only a parking lot, which I guess you could say now stands as sort of a monument to how my great-grandfather was steamrolled by the Duke empire.

In addition to building himself a mansion, at the height of his success, John Harvey McElwee also built four of these houses, which he called "the little houses," and gave one to each of his children as they married. Only one of the houses remains in the family - the one on the right - where Elizabeth still lives.

**[10:00]**

ELIZABETH: I see it now.

ELIZABETH: I think my grandfather wanted to keep an eye on his family. I think he was a person who liked to rule. He liked to have them around and he liked to tell them what to do. So I think that's why we all ended up here.

ROSS: In a row.

ELIZABETH: He was never disagreeable about things, but I think they had so much respect for him that they just did what he wanted them to do.

ROSS: Did he have a sense of humor?

ELIZABETH: You know I didn't know about that then. I don't know whether he did or not. I know he lost his teeth.

CHARLEEN: 52 rooms.

ROSS: Is that right?

NARRATOR: I meet up with my friend, and former teacher, Charleen, to make a pilgrimage to James B. Duke's mansion in Charlotte, the town where Charleen and I grew up. The Duke Mansion is now used as some sort of conference center.

CHARLEEN: It's so much smaller than it seemed when I was 8 years old. I loved to be here.

ROSS: How did you come here, Charleen?

CHARLEEN: I rode my bicycle over here from my house. There's a black cat in the grass! I rode my bicycle over here. I was lonely. My father was usually drunk and nobody cared much where I was. And it was safe then. You know, a little girl was safe. I would wander over here, I wouldn't wander over here. I knew I was headed for this place. It was my favorite place in the whole city.

ROSS: Would they just let you come onto the grounds?

CHARLEEN: They never saw me. I was like that black cat. Unless you were looking for trouble they didn't see me and nobody cared. What kind of a threat was I, an 8 year old girl lurking in the shrubbery? Which is what I was doing.

When I was little I never got this close to the house because I was afraid of the Dukes. And I didn't know them, never did ever know them. But the stories about them and their power were intimidating. The story about Mr. Duke was that he went to the Catawba River, which is 20 or 30 miles from here, and diverted the river, changed actually the course of the river in order to put fountains in his yard. The farmers hated him because they never got rich while Buck Duke was domineering in owning all of tobacco in the state.

NARRATOR: As we wander around, it does occur to me, to put it quite bluntly, that if things had gone slightly differently, this would have been all mine. I'd now be sitting on top of an enormous family fortune. Duke University would be known as McElwee University.

In a way, for me, it's the worst of both fates: I mean, without reaping any of the financial rewards, I'm free to feel all the guilt I want over the fact that my great grandfather, in helping to launch the tobacco industry down here, probably made some measurable contribution to global tobacco addiction.

CHARLEEN: I started smoking when I was 13 and I smoked until I was 50 years old. At least a pack of cigarettes a day, every day. My brothers and sisters still smoke a pack of cigarettes a day. My sister Rebecca who's 10 years younger than I am was told by the doctors just a few weeks ago that she has a very short life span, 3 months. They comforted her to say maybe 3 years. I don't think so. But Becky stopped drinking 10 years ago and she substituted for that smoking 3 packs of cigarettes a day. And she's killed herself. She's committed suicide with cigarettes. There have been more than Becky in my family who've committed suicide with cigarettes. I almost did it myself.

NARRATOR: Charleen and I go to see the house where I grew up , which is actually just around the corner from the Duke Mansion. I haven't seen it in years.

CHARLEEN: Come back to where we came or go straight here?

ROSS: You got to go to the right here. Straight, straight, straight.

CHARLEEN: Ok.

ROSS: And then bare right up there.

CHARLEEN: Ok. This is the house where you grew up?

NARRATOR: In one way, I'm grateful that my family isn't still tied to the tobacco business, but in another way, I'll admit it does bother me that James "Buck" Bucannan Duke is an important historical figure down here, while no one remembers John Harvey McElwee.

CHARLEEN: Seven.

ROSS: It's on the left here. Keep going.

CHARLEEN: This house?

ROSS: That's it.

CHARLEEN: This house?

ROSS: That's where I grew up.

CHARLEEN: Well, you certainly could have seen the Duke fountains from here.

ROSS: Yep.

CHARLEEN: It's in your backyard.

ROSS: I had a very happy childhood here.

CHARLEEN: It's not but a block away. It's a little house. It's a beautiful house, kind of Buke Duke's outhouse. ("outhouse" = a shed with an outdoor toilet and no plumbing, found in rural areas). Your fortunes were intertwined. You better do some more research on this, Ross.

NARRATOR: According to family lore, John Harvey McElwee's tobacco factories were repeatedly torched (set on fire) by mysterious arsonists during his court battles with the Duke family, and I want to try to learn more about this.

MAC: This particular building was set on fire on at least 3 different occasions and was burned to nothing was left except the outside walls. Each time he rebuilt it.

NARRATOR: This is Mac Lackey, the sort of unofficial historian of Statesville.

MAC: The building as you're seeing it is basically all original on the exterior with the exception of some repair work. Very much like it was after each one of the fires. And of course this building was built in the 1800's by Mr. McElwee for the manufacture of tobacco. The product that he was famous for was his Durham Bull and he ended up in a lawsuit over the use of the term Durham and bull. He was broke basically after 15 years of spending over \$100,000. And we're talking about the 1870's, the 1880's when a \$100,000 was like millions today.

ROSS: And why do you think he lost?

MAC: You know, he won many of the battles. He won many of the findings in court only to have them overturned later in appeals. And we think there were payoffs and stuff going on. He always felt there were things going on under the table and behind the scenes that he had no control over at all.

ROSS: Are you involved in this historical preservation in Statesville?

MAC: As one of the earliest preservationists here, since the early 1970's, yes I am.

ROSS: And this park is part of your activities?

MAC: That's correct.

ROSS: Can we at least get rid of that weed?

MAC: I'd be glad to.

NARRATOR: So there's actually a park, sort of a park, named after my great-grandfather.

The park is even equipped with benches.

Until now, I didn't even know this existed and I have a sense that not many other people know either.

As it turns out, the factory building no longer belongs to anyone in my family. It's been rented out to a thrift store (a store that sells used clothing, furniture, etc) to store its extra junk.

I guess I should feel grateful to Mr. Lackey for his preservationist efforts on behalf of my family, but what exactly is being preserved here? What's being passed down?

NARRATOR: This is my son Adrian on the Carolina Coast, during one of our trips down here for a family reunion.

My parents used to bring me here every summer when I was a boy.

**[20:00]**

There's Adrian in the blue shirt with his cousins...

The event has always been thoroughly documented by my camera-crazed family, including my wife.

MARILYN TAKES PHOTO OF ROSS

MARILYN: Hey Ross.

ROSS: Hi Marilyn.

MARILYN: I got a perfect picture of you.

JACK: Hey Ross.

ROSS: Hey Jack.

I always loved going to these reunions, and even after I settled in Boston, I continued to bring Adrian and Marilyn back down here every summer.

MARILYN AND ADRIAN IN SURF

But after my mother and father died, and as the years have gone by, I've found myself returning to North Carolina less often.

## ADRIAN ON POND

My son seems very at home in New England...

NARRATOR: And I keep filming him as he gets older here - collecting more and more footage - as if the sheer weight of all of these accumulated images could somehow keep him from growing up so fast, slow the process down.

But of course filming doesn't slow anything down.

Here's Adrian, age 12.

When I return to Boston, from my trip down south, I tell Adrian all about his great-great grandfather, and the loss of the family fortune and the discovery of the Hollywood movie, but he's only mildly interested.

I keep wanting him to connect to his family's Southern heritage, but at this point in his life, predictably enough, I guess, he'd rather research skateboard techniques...

## ADRIAN IN KITCHEN

NARRATOR: As Adrian gets older, he seems to want to spend more time with his friends and less time with his parents, and I've been trying to think of things he and I can do together, so I decide to take him to work with me...

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Kerry, how many days without cigarettes?

KERRY: This is the third day.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Do you miss them?

KERRY: No. Morphine hides a multitude of sins, you know.

I wish everybody had morphine to get off cigarettes. I'll tell you that much.

NARRATOR: This woman, whose name is Kerry Walter, has just had cancer surgery, and is being treated by a friend of mine - Dr. Susan Bennett.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Is that your phone?

KERRY: Yeah.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Want to get it?

KERRY: Can we break for the bathroom too?

This is an unusual place for a father-son outing. But there is this other, more serious aspect of my family's Carolina tobacco legacy that I feel I have to explore, and I've brought Adrian along to assist me.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Did a lot of people around you smoke?

KERRY: Oh everybody did, sure.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: In your family too?

KERRY: Yeah, at the time my mom and dad both. And my dad quit. Now unfortunately my mom didn't quit until about 3 days before she passed away. She went into the hospital and then she died.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Was the smoking related to her death?

KERRY: Yeah it's kind of sort of the same reason I'm sort of here.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: She had thrombocytosis?

KERRY: Yep. I've tried the patch. I've tried...

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Wellbutrin?

KERRY: Wellbutrin.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: What happens when you try to quit?

KERRY: Well, life steps in and I find an excuse to smoke again.

DR. SUSAN BENNETT: Is that all there is to it? So what happens? You know what you're dealing with. You're smart. You don't want to die. Kerry, what is it?

KERRY: I don't know really.

NARRATOR: This is a pretty intense situation to put Adrian in -

ADRIAN: I hope you feel better.

KERRY: Yeah me too.

NARRATOR: Perhaps I shouldn't have brought him along. I mean, ordinarily, I record my own sound.

But actually he seems to be handling it okay, and it's probably not a bad thing for him to see the

effects smoking can have on a person.

I also sort of like the idea of us having had this chance to work together.

ROSS: Slate.

ADRIAN: Oh yeah.

NARRATOR: Back to my home state...

I love North Carolina, but the Carolina tobacco connection does complicate things somewhat.

I mean, what's the figure? - almost half a million Americans die every year from smoking - not to mention the millions in other countries. I mean, everybody knows this, and yet we keep growing tobacco . And more of the stuff is grown right here in North Carolina than anywhere else in America.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: If I was with the cropper I'd be getting the little leaves. But they leave more. There's the way I like to see it, right there. Clean, I like to see it clean. I like it. But I'll pull them off.

NARRATOR: This is Howard McPherson, whom I met through a friend of my father's and whose family has farmed this land for many generations. A portion of his land has always been devoted to tobacco.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: I have to get in it. I have to get it.

NARRATOR: Tobacco grows so well here that the government has to manage who gets to grow it and who doesn't. Certain parcels of land are designated for tobacco, and those allotments can be passed down from generation to generation.

ROSS: That's your grandson there?

HOWARD MCPHERSON: Yeah. This is Matthew

Average tobacco is about 2,100 lbs per acre. And \$1.85 a pound averages out to – you're looking at \$3,000 per acre.

ROSS: Per acre. How many acres do you have here?

HOWARD MCPHERSON: This field here is probably an acre and a half.

ROSS: So that's \$5,000 just right here.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: Right, right. Well, that's gross now. That's not income.

ROSS: I understand.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: That’s not what you get at the bottom. By the time you do it all out you’ve got a living and you can do all right in tobacco. (You can make enough money to live.) It’s still a lot of hard work.

And this is the church right over here. The chimes work but we’ve not got them going today. But they work.

ROSS: And the preacher – what does he say about the present tobacco situation.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: Just about the rest of us. He actually don’t know what to say, but he’s got mixed feelings about it.

That tobacco looks green , don’t it?

My wife just loves things like that Ross, bird houses and flowers. She does, she really enjoys them.

ROSS: You’ve got a beautiful place here, Howard.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: Yeah. We’re proud of it. So thankful.

ROSS: What do you think your father would do if he could this?

HOWARD MCPHERSON: Oh my, he would be proud too. He would be proud of it just like we are. We’re sort of proud people anyway. Which I reckon we’re supposed to be. We’re proud of what we got, who we are and where we come from and where we’re going. And the place that we’re going is a better place than here. So that’s what we’re looking forward to.

HOWARD MCPHERSON: (singing) *Oh I can scarcely wait. I know I’ll not be late for I’ll spend my time in prayer. And when my ship comes in I’ll leave this world of sin and go sailing through the air. I’m going to take a trip in the good old gospel ship. I’m going far beyond the sky. I’m going to shout and sing until the heavens ring while I’m bidding this world goodbye.*

NARRATOR: This building was once one of my great grandfather's tobacco warehouses, but now it's a school for beauticians.

TV: Take one cool blue activator, one cool blue bleach activator and mix it in 8 ounces of warm water, dissolve it. **Come back to the shampoo bowl...**

NARRATOR: I wonder if any of these young women have seen Bright Leaf. Probably not. It's too obscure. But I think they'd actually like how it gets underway.

Gary Cooper plays the role of Brant Royle, a man who returns to his homeland in North Carolina to avenge the loss of the family tobacco business.

GARY COOPER: My father worked that land up from nothing. Sweated over it, 14, 15 hours a day. I know because I used to help him. Nobody in the whole valley grew better bright leaf tobacco. Then just when it started to pay off the major stepped in. It was a nice little farm once.

**[30:00]**

NARRATOR: The Major, of course, would have to be none other than James Buchanan Duke.

It's now hard to imagine the floors of this room piled high with my great grandfather's tobacco. Given the way that families stay rooted in this area, I'll bet that more than one of these women had great grandparents who actually smoked John Harvey McElwee's tobacco. And that those great grandparents unintentionally passed down their habit to their children, and so on.

HAIRDRESSER #1: Since I been here. I been here in December and they did this last year some time, you had to start smoking outside. There's Miss Vestal, one of the instructors.

HAIRDRESSER #2: Miss Vestal, did you know that this used to be a tobacco warehouse?

MISS VESTAL: No.

HAIRDRESSER #2: Yeah. His grandfather owned it.

MISS VESTAL: Oh really?

HAIRDRESSER #2: Yeah.

HAIRDRESSER #1: So we should be able to smoke inside.

HAIRDRESSER #1: I'm going to protest.

HAIRDRESSER #3: Do you smoke?

ROSS: No I don't.

HAIRDRESSER #3: Then you're not supporting the family business.

ROSS: Well, I know. The family sort of got run out of business. Do you all plan to quit smoking or do think you'll just keep doing it on a regular basis?

HAIRDRESSER #4: I'll quit whenever I graduate.

ROSS: When you graduate from here? How about you all?

HAIRDRESSER #5: Whenever I get lung cancer... I'll quit.

HAIRDRESSER #3: I'll quit one day.

ROSS: You trying to quit now?

HAIRDRESSER #3: When I have children.

ROSS: That's a ritual that hasn't changed since dad, has it?

TOM: That's true.

NARRATOR: My great grandfather might have been a tobacco baron, but the three generations that followed all produced physicians, including my grandfather, father, and here, my brother, Tom - a surgeon in Charlotte.

John Harvey McElwee may not have left my ancestors any money, but by helping to hook the local population on tobacco, he did leave behind a sort of agricultural-pathological trust fund (inheritance).

TOM: Hard as a rock. Barbecue and cigarettes, right there.

DAD: Go around the index finger and around the thumb. Around the index finger, around the thumb.

NARRATOR It seems like only yesterday that my father was teaching my brother how to tie sutures in preparation for medical school.

DAD: Now you have to play it down that way. Down, up.

NARRATOR: Tom took over my father's practice after my father died.

TOM: So what happened, we did his 12 years ago. And then he got an aneurysm right here that we fixed about 6 weeks ago. And he told me he was going to stop smoking then. He's cut down to 2 packs a day?

PATIENT'S WIFE: No he's cut down to about a pack.

TOM: So we got some blood going through here. He had a, like the size of a tennis ball, right here, getting ready to burst.

PATIENT: Sure was.

TOM: I fixed it. This thing's going to look pretty good. We almost made our 10 year warranty. But I had to charge him because he didn't have an extended warranty on it.

PATIENT: I was going to quit but I didn't. I play golf now.

TOM: You play golf? How'd you do?

PATIENT: Well, I shot...

TOM: Don't lie now. You're on camera.

PATIENT: No. I know it. I shot a 86, 18 holes.

TOM: 18 holes?

PATIENT: Yeah.

TOM: You've cut down to-

PATIENT: About half a pack.

TOM: If you could just stop that'd be better but I know that you're not going to do that.

PATIENT: No, but I'll cut back.

TOM: Now why you got a New York Yankee hat on? You from New York?

PATIENT: No.

TOM: You ever been to New York?

PATIENT: No

NARRATOR: This is my grandfather - the first of the doctors in our family. He's visiting my aunt's farm here.

I'm sure my grandfather would have been pleased that my brother decided to go into medicine.

But my grandfather died of cancer before Tom was born, probably because he smoked.

He's smoking here - ever his father's son - the son of John Harvey McElwee.

My father did not smoke. He once told me that watching helplessly as his father slowly died of cancer was the hardest thing he ever had to do.

My father began his medical practice not long after my grandfather died.

I filmed him at work a few times.

And at play.

Here he is at an earlier family reunion.

I wish I'd made movies of my mother, but she died before I began shooting film.

I say I wish I had movies of my mother, but in another way, I wonder what difference it would make...

I mean, even in these images, as time goes by, my father is beginning to seem less and less real to me - almost a fictional character.

I want so much to reverse this shift. the way in which the reality of him is slipping away.

Having this footage doesn't help very much - or at least not as much as I thought it would.

What does help is the land itself - being back here again. This little valley is about an hour from where I grew up.

North Carolina still seems, in a kind of understated way, like the most beautiful place in the world to me.

And woven right into this landscape that I'm so fond of is tobacco...

So many people I know down here have their own complicated relationship to tobacco, their own tobacco stories, and I set out to visit some of them.

ALAN: I remember being on my grandfather's tobacco farm and with a kind of pride he looked out over the field and he said some what sententiously, "You know son, the history of tobacco is the history of America."

NARRATOR: Alan Gurganus is a writer, and friend of mine.

ALAN: What used to be the tobacco farm is now Brooke Valley Mobile Home Park, the finest mobile home park home in Nash County. There is, I'm told, a waiting list to get in here.

ROSS: A waiting list?

ALAN: A waiting list. I suppose I should be glad that they aren't still growing tobacco plants. We're saving millions of cases of lung cancer, but it is a melancholy experience to drive around and look at what should just be acreage and now it turns out to be crammed with these modular homes. It's happening everywhere. Forbes Magazine and other national periodicals name this state as the great place to move and I swear the day after the magazine comes out you can a difference in traffic patterns. For me as somebody who grew up with a piece of property, albeit one that's now transformed into a trailer park, the idea that you would move to a place because a magazine you bought for \$3.95 told you to is the symptom of such sadness in the culture I cannot tell you. And it's also gumming up this place for those of us who love it. Brooke Valley with an 'e' on the end of Brooke.

ROSS: It’s huge.

ALAN: It’s huge. It goes on and on and on. But I remember standing up here with my grandfather when all this was planted in tobacco and remember him saying to me when I was about 10, “Aren’t they happy-looking plants?” That was the first sinking suspicion that there was a double standard going on, that these pup tent-sized green things had a secret life and a secret negative capacity. And he also urged me never ever, ever, ever to smoke them.

MAN: That’s what it takes!

**[40:00]**

NARRATOR: This tobacco auction house in Whiteville, North Carolina is operated by James MacDougal.

MACDOUGAL: It’s a way of life. I mean, we been doing this since the boys came over on the boat. (\*\* Since the first settlers came to America on the ship Mayflower.) It’s hard to change things of that nature if you understand what I’m talking about. But as far as whether it hurts you or doesn’t hurt you, cars hurt you too. They run over you. You got to be responsible for your own life. We can’t legislate responsibility for anybody.

JACKSON: This is where I guess all my dreams began, in this house, because this is the epitome of what my family stands for. My aunt and my uncle raised tobacco, my grandfather raised tobacco. As far as you could see there was tobacco and my parents continued raising tobacco so when I grew up, it was always a part of my life.

NARRATOR: Robbie Lane Jackson lives with her father on their farm. Her mother died last month from lung cancer.

She always smoked, if she wasn’t reading or preparing food, she was smoking. So yes, it was very much a part of her life, as far as it being a part of her character I don’t think it was really a part of her character, but if you want to say my mother was a character, then it was her prop.

NARRATOR: Do you miss her a lot?

JACKSON: More than life.

NARRATOR: But Robbie, how do you feel yourself about continuing to grow tobacco given that your mom died?

JACKSON: Emotionally, I am distraught that my mother is dead. I have not grieved at all, I have not come to terms with her death but growing tobacco has nothing to do with my mother dying. It has nothing to do with anyone who dies.

NARRATOR: I meet up again with Charleen and her husband, Mark.

CHARLEEN: It was terrible the way Becky died. I thought it had changed Becky's color. When she died she was an unearthly kind of sallow and she didn't look like herself anymore. She had surgery and they just closed her back up because she had cancer everywhere. My grandmother used to say that she was just "eaten up with it." Mark and I had been to her doctor out here on the island and he told us that she maybe at best had 3 years to live. What she actually had was 3 weeks.

ROSS: Was she still smoking up until the end?

CHARLEEN: Yes she was. Yes she was. She was at our house, wasn't she Mark? But she loved to smoke. Becky loved to smoke.

MARK: See I think this placard is facing the wrong way. It should be facing where the grave is itself.

CHARLEEN: Is that the way the rest of them are?

MARK: Of course.

CHARLEEN: Yeah that's a lot better. I think that now makes sense. Yeah.

MARK: You can't walk behind it really.

CHARLEEN: That's better, honey. That's better.

NARRATOR: This is a place I've been meaning to visit ...I can't help but notice that the State of North Carolina has certainly given the Duke family a nicer park sign than was given to the McElwee family.

Considering how differently the Dukes and McElwees ended up, it's remarkable how similar were the humble beginnings of their tobacco businesses.

The two patriarchs, John Harvey McElwee and Washington Duke returned penniless from the Civil War, yet both had faith in a new strain of tobacco called "bright leaf" because it could grow where few other crops could grow well, in this silica laden Carolina soil, a soil that seemed to crave tobacco.

Neither Duke nor McElwee could know, of course that Bright Leaf tobacco would soon kill many times more people than did all the battles of the civil war that they had just survived.

All they knew was that they had families to support, and with the ruins of the War all around them, Bright Leaf tobacco, represented a chance for salvation, a way to start over.

Tourists come to the Duke Homestead to watch the authentic recreation of a tobacco auction.

The obliging auctioneers chant at half speed so the tourists will be able to understand them.

NARRATOR: As I wander around here, my thoughts flip back and forth between this reenactment and the reenactment of my great grandfather's story.

MAN: 80.

ACTOR: How high are you prepared to go, sir?

GARY COOPER: You'll know when I stop bidding, major.

NARRATOR Brant Royle battling to build up his business until he is in a position to challenge his mortal enemy, Major Singleton.

AUCTIONEER (IN MOVIE): You all done? Sold, Singleton.

AUCTIONEER: \$2 bid. 5.

NARRATOR: So the Duke family may have a meticulously maintained historical site, but my family has a movie - a Hollywood movie - and I set out to learn more about it.

NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOL FOR THE ARTS, MAIN STREET

I'm in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, but this is not really Winston-Salem. It's a permanent movie set used by film students at the North Carolina School of the Arts.

The noted film theorist and historian Vlada Petric has been invited to deliver a lecture here and I want to talk to him about "Bright Leaf."

I'm hoping he'll call it a minor classic - one that's been unfairly neglected.

VLADA: You can use it or you can discard it. Let's try it. If it's not good you don't use it. But let's go here. You know that I adore low angle shots. Wellsian shots. Please let's try it. Why don't you sit here. This is a wheel chair. Now I have something.

ROSS: Vlada is this really necessary?

VLADA: I like unnecessary things because only from unnecessary things in art you can expect something unexpectedly to occur, something special. Ok. I think it's now good. So can you tell me why did you invite me? Why do you need me in your documentary film? I have nothing to do with Carolina-

ROSS: Because you're a film historian. You come here to do a lecture.

VLADA: Yes.

ROSS: on film theory and I have a film that I'm very interested in, "Bright Leaf" and I want to know what you think of it.

VLADA: Well I, let me continue with this, to be your grip. Is that how you call the guy whose moving?

ROSS: Grip. (\*\* on film crews, the person who pushes the camera on its track)

VLADA: Grip. So, I like that. So what is most important? All these devices which are interesting per se, like composition of the shot, like hi-con photography, lighting, using of the foreground, background. They are not successfully integrated. That is the most important rule I think in cinematic art. They are not successfully integrated with the narrative because this is a narrative film. So I think it remains separate, you know in contrast to Orson Welles' "The Magnificent Ambersons" where these long tracking shots are so powerful. They reveal something not about the environment or the facades of the building, or trees, clouds, but these somehow express what is going on within the characters, what is the essence of their conflict. He didn't succeed that, you know.

Curtiz simply didn't have cinematic vision.

NARRATOR: I'll admit that due to my excitement about discovering "Bright Leaf" I may have been somewhat blind to its artistic limitations - like this cheesy rise-to-success montage.

But still, I think Prof. Petric is missing my point.

VLADA: Why you are so attached to that film? What prompted you? How you found it and why you are so interested in that you want to make an entire film? Is the film about that film?

ROSS: Well, because Gary Cooper plays the role of my great-grandfather.

VLADA: So what?

ROSS: So it's become a kind of an example of a fiction film becoming a documentary, a kind of home movie for me.

VLADA: How are you going to insert, incorporate the sequences of "Bright Leaf"? There will be 2 different textures, 2 different styles. Karl Freund's photography is expressionistic. Don't you think?

ROSS: Yeah.

VLADA: And your film, as I'm doing it now, is less expressionistic. It's more documentary, spontaneous like Vertovian. You are shooting. We haven't really prepared all this.

ROSS: Why are pushing me in a wheelchair Vlada?

VLADA: Why? I wanted it to be kinesthetic. That's the most important, my quote unquote theory – that every shot must be kinesthetic and not only because to move. But that movement has to somehow reveal, expand and enhance what we are doing. And I feel very kinesthetic, very kinesthetic. My whole body is working. Imagine if everything would be now. You wanted me to do this whole interview like this, you know. You wanted to do it in the theater. We even rented the theater. That would be boring. Anyway that's kinesthetic. It means when you watch images and I hope that viewers who are going to see what we are doing now – that they will feel kinesthetic, that they will feel something in their body, in their muscles, what Vorkipich calls kinesthesia, that will be simply not be like a roller coaster. I can throw you now into this hole and that would be kinesthetic, but I think that this decision to shoot me with movement...

**[51:00]**

NARRATOR: As we circle the block for the fifth time, I find myself wondering how I managed to get myself in this situation --bound in a chair and lectured at close range by a rabid film theorist.

VLADA: But there are documentaries which succeed to transcend, direct, photographic recording of an event, however interesting. It has one element cinematic I would say, which is ontological authenticity on which you insist so much – that everything is real, authentic and that they believe that it happened, as Vertov said, that it's life as it is caught unawares, events in everyday life caught unawares. But then what do you do with it?

NARRATOR: I return to McElwee Park.

I just sit for a while, waiting perhaps for someone to come along and enjoy McElwee Park with me.

And while I'm waiting, I think about what Prof. Petric said about transcending the mere photographic recording of reality - how -- elusive this can be in documentary. And, as he also said, even if you succeed, then what do you do with it?

I mean, that's what my father would always ask me. What will you do with all this footage you're shooting around the house?

ADRIAN WITH CHIMNEY SWEEP/ ROSS' FATHER

Adrian was born a year after my father died, and I've always been sad that he never got to know his grandfather.

FATHER VISITING PATIENT

Many of my father's patients got to know my father quite well, and, it now occurs to me, many of them must have come to him in the first place because of tobacco related illnesses.

I decide to try to track down some of those patients.

DOOLEY STRANGE: Good. Did that go down?

MAN: Yeah.

DOOLEY STRANGE: That's just like your doctor would have done to me 20years ago. As long as you're living he'll never die because you got a voice just like his. When you speak to me I think I'm talking to him.

ROSS: How many times did you end up going to him for different things?

DOOLEY STRANGE: 30 or 40, maybe more. We were real close. He looked after me like he would you.

ROSS: How did you cure your mouth cancer? What exactly did he have to do to you?

DOOLEY STRANGE: I went over to see him. I had to go see him every 6weeks at first after my first operation. And one day, I was scared to death just knowing tomorrow would be the last day. I think everybody has a horror of cancer like that. And he'd stop when he'd be looking in my mouth and I'd say, "Doctor don't slow down. Don't stop like that." He'd say, "I've got to check you close because I don't want to lose the source of my country ham."

There's no teeth on my right side. Your dad said he'd do that to keep me pretty. And I've been eating for 15 years with it now. The dentist said we couldn't but your dad said we could. And so he and I won out.

ROSS: When he thought he was right he didn't change his mind.

DOOLEY STRANGE: He didn't change. And he was a guy who would have a smile every time. He was a caring doctor. He was not there just to make money. He had feelings for his patients.

WHYTSELL: This gentleman -- I'm pretty sure I told everybody about Doctor Ross McElwee that operated on my face and the next day he had a heart attack and died.

MAN: Who was that?

WHYTSELL: His father.

MAN: Oh it was his father?

WHYTSELL: His father. Sure was. I'm telling you that hit me the hardest of anything in a long time.

MASSIES' DAUGHTER: Prior to the surgery, the night before the surgery he came in and talked with Daddy and he knelt down beside the bed.

ROSS: My father did?

MASSIES' DAUGHTER: Your father knelt down beside my father's bed in the hospital. And he prayed with my dad. My father is a praying person. And your dad and my dad were together that night.

ROSS: I never heard that story. He never told me.

MASSIES' DAUGHTER: Daddy didn't tell you?

ROSS: No. Neither did my father-

MASSIES' DAUGHTER: Oh well you know sometimes daddies don't talk about things like that. But my dad did and he told me about it. And maybe that was a part of why he and mom called him, or called them every Christmas.

ROSS: Yeah.

MASSIES' DAUGHTER: This is why and they did "Silent Night" for them.

MR. & MRS. MASSIES (singing): *Holy night, all is calm, all is bright.  
Round yon virgin mother and child.  
Holy infant so tender and mild.  
Sleep in heavenly peace.  
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

ROSS' FATHER: Massies you all are might good to call and to sing for us. We thank you.

ROSS' MOTHER: Thank you. Merry Christmas.

NARRATOR: So here's my father with his wife, my step-mother Ann. Right after I filmed this, I meant to ask my father why he, a staunch Presbyterian, was wearing a yarmulke here. Was it just a somewhat odd Christmas present from a grateful Jewish patient? I kept forgetting to ask him, and now it's just one of those things I'll never know.

WOMAN: Who wants this one?

BRIAN: I'll take it. You want it now I see.

WOMAN: I'll trade you.

NARRATOR I go to a party given by a friend of mine who lives in Chapel Hill - Brian, the guy on the left there.

I don't smoke now, but years ago I did take it up for a brief period of time.

I guess I'm as susceptible as anyone to the entrancing allure of smoking - the gently erotic possibilities it offers to bring to our everyday lives.

WOMAN: And so I went out to get the mail. There happened to be 5 pack of like a promo of Satin cigarettes in the mail. So I pocketed them, took the mail in and went down to the basement and took my first drag of a cigarette underneath the house.

BRIAN: But they probably matched your little sun dress.

WOMAN: That's right, at the time in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

BRIAN: God.

ROSS: That was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade?

WOMAN: That was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

NARRATOR I remember the visceral sensuality of smoking with other smokers - how the smoke from someone else's cigarette -- enters your lungs, your bloodstream and how strangely intimate this is --deadly perhaps, but intimate.

NARRATOR: Smoking could put me in kind of a trance state - make me feel both that time has stopped and that time would go on forever.

WOMAN: There's a balance to it. I've cultivated that for so long.

NARRATOR: In a few years, my son will be going to parties like this one. How should I expect him to be able to resist this, when in fact there was a time in my life when I couldn't.

When in fact, it's still, in some ways, slightly tempting to take a cigarette?

The next night I meet up again with Brian and his girlfriend, Emily.

ROSS: You still ahead?

EMILY: I'm way ahead.

NARRATOR: Brian has asked me to film as he and Emily make a pledge.

ROSS: So do you mean literally that these are the last 2 cigarettes or do you mean just soon you're going to quit.

EMILY: When we wake up tomorrow morning we're not smoking.

BRIAN: We'll be non-smokers.

EMILY: We tried this once before.

ROSS: Why didn't it work the first time?

EMILY: Well...

BRIAN: We didn't want to.

EMILY: I'm not going to blame you, but-

BRIAN: Don't. It was a lot of my fault.

EMILY: But I mean, I could have stopped.

**[62:00]**

ROSS: Well congratulations.

NARRATOR: Emily and Brian are getting married soon, and they ask me to check in with them before the wedding. They hope that if I'll document their attempt to quit, they'll actually do it.

In the meantime, I set out to talk to other people I know down here who have managed to quit smoking.

GOAT FARMER WHO SWAM ENGLISH CHANNEL, WANTED CIG

David Williamson lives outside Hillsboro, NC.

DAVID: I think the biggest nicotine fit I ever had was trying to swim the English Channel. I'd trained for a whole year, got up to 20 miles in the Duke swimming pool and then out in the middle of the channel it's 2 o'clock in the morning. It's cold, freezing cold. I'm nauseous from the waves, the diesel fumes that I can smell. And above all that I can smell the captain's pipe tobacco.

ROSS: Even through all that?

DAVID: Through all that I could smell it coming down over the water. My wife's sitting on the rail of the boat. She's pregnant with our first daughter. And I had the most intense nicotine fit I've ever had in my life and I wanted to stop and ask the captain to lend me his pipe. And I wrestled with myself for 10 minutes about that.

ROSS: And you're still in the water at this point?

DAVID: I'm still in the water. Yeah, I could smell the pipe tobacco and the pipe smoke. And it just smelt like food to a man who hadn't had anything to eat for 2 weeks. So it was remarkable. And I finally decided not to do it because I thought if I didn't make the swim everybody would say it was because I'd stopped to smoke. And also I knew he would say no.

He'd say, "You must be nuts," or something. There were many times when I would have rather had a cigarette than a beautiful woman. That's not a joke. Not that that's a choice that I've had to make very often, but I would have preferred the cigarette. The urge was that strong.

And my daughter - when she was 5 years old I went into a convenience store to buy some cigarettes one time and when I came out and she's crying. And I said, "What's wrong, sweetheart?" And she said, "I don't want you to die, Daddy." 'Cause she knew that her grandparents had died from smoking. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't think about quitting smoking.

NARRATOR: Not too far from David's farm, I have another friend, Paula Larke, who has recently lost her mother to cancer. Paula's mother did not smoke, but she worked in an office where almost everyone else did...

PAULA: Winston-Salem, you know, bus driver smoked. Everybody smoked and she died of lung cancer. And I have a lot of anger about that. I was one of the smokers that blew smoke around her. And now I know what it's like to smell smoke from a block away. I used to think that mama was just trying to be on my case all the time. How you doing?

NEIGHBOR: Pretty good.

PAULA: They run you out of the house now when you have to smoke?

NEIGHBOR: Yep.

PAULA: We're sitting out here on the deck and the air's fresh, but not for long. The irony of it all.

PAULA (singing): *To North Carolina had to go  
I met a fine young man  
His name and age I'll never know.  
Never know.  
But when I'm dead and in my coffin  
with my feet tied toward the sun  
come and sit beside me, darling.  
Come and think on the wrong you done.  
Come and think on the wrong you done.*

NARRATOR: I drop by to see Brian and Emily the day before their wedding.

ROSS: So you're having rehearsal dinner tonight. Emily you got back on cigarettes. I'm surprised to hear that.

EMILY: Yeah.

ROSS: I thought this was the weak link here.

EMILY: Yeah. Well, one weak link kind of makes the chain fall to pieces. So I could blame it all on him but I'm not going to. I know that's not true.

BRIAN: I think a lot of it had to do with your exam, the stress and stuff.

EMILY: Yeah that and I lost 5 pounds.

BRIAN: That's not really-

EMILY: Well, yeah.

BRIAN: What's that?

EMILY: Getting married!

BRIAN: Oh yeah.

EMILY: I wanted to lose 5 pounds.

BRIAN: So you started smoking?

EMILY: No, that's why I kept smoking.

BRIAN: Right.

EMILY: That's why I kept smoking. Well, that's an excuse for why I kept smoking. I kept smoking because I love to smoke.

BRIAN: Yeah. I just want to get back on the horse. So a couple of weeks. That's the whole key, to keep trying. Right?

EMILY: You got to keep trying.

BRIAN: Yeah.

FEMALE MINISTER: Until death...

BRIAN: Until death...

FEMALE MINISTER: do us part according...

BRIAN: according...

FEMALE MINISTER: to God's will.

BRIAN: to God's will. So I'm having my post matrimonial smoke I guess. And I got 2 more weeks of this I think.

ROSS: 2 more weeks? Where you going on your honeymoon?

BRIAN: I'm going to sully up beautiful Anguilla, which is about 11 miles from St. Martin. It's a leeward island. And I can smoke like a fiend and then come back and try to quit.

NARRATOR: By chance, I've learned that Gary Cooper's "Bright Leaf" co-star, Patricia Neal, is scheduled to attend a film festival in North Carolina.

I check in with my cousin, John, to see what he can tell me about Patricia Neal before tracking her down.

JOHN: Just from what I understand about the period that Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal had this affair he had been married going on 20 years to his wife who was Catholic. So there was no way they were going to get a divorce. In fact they remained married until the end of Cooper's life. He was much older than Patricia Neal because I think she was in her earlier 20's when she did "The Fountain Head". And Cooper by that time was like 47 years old. So it was kind of a doomed relationship from the beginning. Even if it's an unconscious thing with this affair with Patricia Neal in "Bright Leaf" you see Cooper playing a much darker, edgier character than he had in the past. It's the kind of performance that when you are aware of what he was going through with the overall difficulties in his professional and personal life then almost in spite of himself these things come through in his performance.

ACTOR: Now I know what it is Brant. You're a man with a sickness.

**[71:00]**

JOHN: It really for me gives you qualities that go beyond the film itself and whatever limitations there are in the writing or the material. He brings to it this gravity that is the result of what he's gone through in his life and where he is at this point in his life.

GARY COOPER: If that's what you wanted I hope it's made you happy. Now get out of here!

PATRICIA NEAL: I will.

JOHN: Patricia Neal had wonderful success as an actress and yet these episodes in her private life that were so devastating. She had a child that died of measles. And then there was another child that was in a freak accident on a street corner and received brain damage from this thing. And Patricia Neal herself in the mid 60's when she was like in her mid 30's she has a stroke. So it's just this parade of misfortunes in her life. Really her relationship in the movie is very harsh considering how it ends and all. She leaves him and he burns the house down, that sort of thing.

NARRATOR: Back at my motel, I get a message from Patricia Neal's press secretary saying that Ms. Neal has actually granted me an interview tomorrow.

There's a lot to do . I guess I should probably get organized. I keep thinking about the idea that Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal's fictional performances might reveal truthful aspects of their real lives.

And so I begin reviewing my tape of Bright Leaf looking for photographic evidence of this. Her left hand, reaching up for her lover, than retracting.

Maybe that gesture - tentative, somewhat hesitant - registers how her private life is merging uncomfortably with the role that she's supposed to be playing here.

Does this not constitute a little documentary moment - a sort of secret home movie nestled inside a Hollywood production?

So here she is: Patricia Neal - the woman who played Gary Cooper's love interest in "Bright Leaf" - an actress who's actually won an Academy Award - though unfortunately NOT for "Bright Leaf".

ROSS: Patricia is that a little miniature Oscar that you have around your neck?

PATRICIA NEAL: Yes, that's what it is.

MAKE-UP GIRL: Oh wow!

PATRICIA NEAL: Somebody gave it to me. I forget who gave it to me, just after I won it. And I think you're not allowed to wear them. But I like it. And it says "Hud" and Patricia Neal and the year. I love it. You have to push it down. You know how?

WOMAN: Ok smile.

MAKE-UP GIRL: Push. You hold this part in.

PATRICIA NEAL: Yeah.

WOMAN: I'm sorry.

MAKE-UP GIRL: That's ok.

PATRICIA NEAL: Push.

WOMAN: There we go.

PATRICIA NEAL: Thank you.

MAKE-UP GIRL: And can I take one with where she's just sitting down.?

WOMAN: Ok. We have to wait until the little light (camera light) goes on.

MAKE-UP GIRL: Ok stand over here so you got a different angle.

PATRICIA NEAL: Are you pushing it in?

Look at that. What is that garbage? I'd like to know what it is. Photograph it!

NARRATOR: As it turns out, Ms. Neal has a busy schedule and only has time for a few questions...

ROSS: You know one thing I've thought is that if Margaret Singleton-

PATRICIA NEAL: My character.

ROSS: Yes your character and Brant Royal, the Gary Cooper character, had in fact had children that you would be my great-grandmother... from a fictional point of view.

PATRICIA NEAL: I'm sorry I didn't have that chance.

ROSS: Can you tell me what it was like playing with Gary Cooper in that role?

PATRICIA NEAL: Well I'd played with him before. I'd done "The Fountain Head" with him. And then I did "Bright Leaf". And I got along with Gary Cooper very well indeed, you know. He was the love of my life. Sorry to tell you that and sorry to tell everybody that. But it's world known that he was the love of my life. And I was with him for about 5 years. And that was the end of that and then I got married and had children, you know.

ROSS: When you look at films that you've acted in like "Bright Leaf" even though they're fiction films they have a certain documentary content in a way because you're looking at yourself as you were 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago. Does it help you remember things about your life then?

PATRICIA NEAL: No, I don't think about that. I just say was I good then? Oh how I'd do that? Why did I do that? Oh that's alright, pretty good. No, I don't even think that way.

NARRATOR: The interview is over. Patricia Neal has to go to her next appointment

I can't fully accept Ms. Neal's denial of my theory about the possibility of home movie content residing in a Hollywood production.

NARRATOR: But suddenly, I find myself just wanting to take BRIGHT LEAF on its own terms and, for the time being, simply to surrender to its wanton melodramatic power.

GARY COOPER: Let it burn! Stop it! I said let it burn! I want to see it burn!

NARRATOR: I surrender, and am consumed by the extravagant shimmering beauty of its black and white images.

MOTEL WOMAN: I'm a smoker myself.

ROSS: How much do you smoke a day?

MOTEL WOMAN: It depends on the day. If I'm sitting home bored I usually smoke 2 packs a day. But I been smoking for 40 years too.

ROSS: Really? When did you begin?

MOTEL WOMAN: When I was 13. Now that's giving away my age.

ROSS: Bye bye.

MOTEL WOMAN: Bye.

NARRATOR: Sometimes, I feel it's such a pleasure to film - especially down South - that it almost doesn't matter what I'm filming.

Even just shooting around a motel can be an almost narcotic experience -- I mean, I don't want to force an analogy, but come to think of it, for me, filming is not unlike smoking a cigarette.

When I look through a viewfinder, time seems to stop. A kind of timelessness is momentarily achieved.

Just fooling around here, playing with exposure, depth of field, mirrors - trying to see how many special effects can be created without the use of special effects.

I mean, I'm so immersed that I don't even notice the large rat that's about to slip by in the background there.

I guess next time I should consider upgrading my accommodations.

When I am on the road, shooting, I sometimes imagine my son, years from now, when I'm no longer around, looking at what I've filmed.

I can almost feel him looking back at me from some distant point in the future... through these images and reflections, through the film I'll leave behind...

I'm sure Adrian won't remember the day we filmed this. I mean, I don't even remember the exact circumstances...what happened just before the shot or just after.

Apparently, Adrian was just learning to tie his shoes, and apparently I just wanted to preserve the moment...

I guess he was at the stage where he was learning to tie all kinds of knots.

As usual, I didn't film this for any particular reason. It's just a little scene, just a little moment...

GOSPEL SINGING\_ *Over the river, shining forever,  
There is a city, I know  
Wonderful story, mansions of glory,  
Waiting for pilgrims below*

NARRATOR: I'm now in Durham, North Carolina, home of the historic Duke tobacco empire, with it's acres and acres of palatial tobacco factories and warehouses.

GOSPEL SINGING: (\*\* song about going to heaven, the "kingdom of God",etc.)

*Wonderful city.  
Beautiful city.  
Built without hands by our king  
Marvelous City.  
Glorious city  
Where we forever shall sing.*

NARRATOR: At the height of their success, the Dukes controlled the major tobacco markets in North and South America, Europe, and Asia, making Durham the tobacco capital of the world.

GOSPEL SINGING: *Home of the sages, Saints of the ages,  
Martyrs and angels of high  
Free of all sadness,  
City of gladness  
Always so peaceful and bright.*

NARRATOR: I can just imagine how my great-grandfather must have felt visiting Durham - kind of like a foot soldier standing outside a heavily fortified hill town, sizing up the ramparts of the Duke Kingdom.

GOSPEL SINGING: *Marvelous City. Glorious city where we forever shall sing.*

BRIAN: Our plan was when last we spoke-

ROSS: That was maybe 3 months ago?

BRIAN: Yeah, right after the wedding. And our plan was to stop after the honeymoon. There wasn't much debate going on. We came home and-

EMILY: We were enjoying it so much.

BRIAN: We were back home.

EMILY: Yeah.

BRIAN: And it was tough. So then, it's not like we've dropped it. Obviously that's why I'm still talking to you. We're still seeing you 'cause we're thinking-

EMILY: We're thinking millennium.

BRIAN: Millennium is what we're thinking, New Year's.

ROSS: New Year's?

EMILY: New Year's.

James B. Duke himself preferred cigars, but it was his cigarettes that made him wealthy, and one of the things he did with his money was to build a university - Duke University.

So if the McElwee's, in their humble way, made the shift from tobacco to medicine, the Dukes did the same thing on a considerably grander scale, building not only a college but a medical school and a teaching hospital, which is where I meet Dr. Steve Herman.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: This is Duke University Medical Center's nicotine den. It's one of several placed at strategic locations around. There's somebody, a patient with an IV(intra-vaneous) for their periodic nicotine fix. It's like air and water.

NARRATOR: Dr. Herman runs a smoking cessation clinic for patients undergoing surgery at Duke.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: It's really, yeah, I mean having a heart attack is probably the most powerful anti-smoking intervention known to medicine. Unfortunately the side effects are a little bit drastic.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: Have you been smoking while you're at the hospital here?

PATIENT: Yeah. I cut from 4 packs a day down to 3 or 4 cigarettes because I figure when I go through that surgery I don't want to be coughing or wanting a cigarette. Because I ain't going to be able to get one anyway. I thought it would be a good time to quit. I started smoking when I was 4 years old.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: 4 years old?

PATIENT: 4 years old, before I started school. My grandmother used to give me cigarettes.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: Oh my goodness.

PATIENT: She was a chain-smoker. She lived to be over 100. I don't know what killed her. But she died after a while. Maybe just old age.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: Yeah.

PATIENT: So I never felt cigarettes were totally harmful. If they had, they would have killed everybody who smoked.

DR. STEVE HERMAN: I would imagine that it would be pretty hard for you to believe doctors when they tell you-

PATIENT: It is. It really is. Yes it is.

NARRATOR: This is one of the largest cigarette factories in the world - or at least what you can see of it from here. It's located outside Winston Salem. I was denied permission to film here - both inside, and on the grounds - so I'm doing a little surveillance.

In the 1920's the US government broke up the Duke tobacco trust into separate companies, one of which was RJ Reynolds. I doubt that this ultimately mattered very much to the Dukes. They had made their millions by then. In fact, they got out of the tobacco business, took their money and began new industries in textiles and electric power. But even without the Dukes, the industry thrived and there was no turning back - no more than you could put smoke back into a cigarette.

NARRATOR: Acres and acres of these lovely leaves, with their mysterious, dangerous powers of seduction.

The deeper I wade into my home state's tobacco legacy, the more surreal it all seems, the more it seems like a fever dream.

GOSPEL SINGERS: *I'm walking with Jesus my savior as onward I go.  
I'm seeking a city with streets of purist gold  
He's walking me along my journey.  
He's walking me every day and each night  
And if I make it to heaven, it is because he walks with me.*

So all the tobacco leaves may be harvested, but there's still Bright Leaf, the movie, to consider.

NARRATOR: The author of the novel upon which Bright Leaf is based, Foster Fitz-Simons, died some time ago, but I've learned that his wife, Marian, is alive and well.

ROSS: How did you find her, Charleen?

CHARLEEN: It wasn't difficult to find her because everybody who'd ever known here remembered her vividly. And it surprised me whenever I would ask somebody about here because she's 90 years old!

NARRATOR: I'm hoping Marian Fitz-Simons will be able to recall some specifics about how her husband discovered my great grandfather's story, and maybe some details about John Harvey McElwee's real life - the life behind the novel and the film.

MARIAN FITZ-SIMONS: Well, it's an interesting story, the story of the writing of "Bright Leaf." Foster chose to write the story about the tobacco industry because he knew least about that out of a whole bunch of stories. So he thought that would be the one in which his imagination could work the most freely. So that's why he picked it. When they asked him, when they were making the movie, "Could you give us your research on tobacco barns." He says, "No. It's Durham County. Wake County. North Carolina. Look all over the place."

ROSS: But you know I have to tell you my family says that it was based upon my great-grandfather.

MARIAN FITZ-SIMONS: Who was that?

ROSS: John Harvey McElwee who was a tobacco-

MARIAN FITZ-SIMONS: I can promise you you're free of that maligning statement because it was not based on anyone that he had ever know.

CHARLEEN: Are there facts in the movie that confirm in your mind that it was your grandpa?

ROSS: Well just that he gets run out of town by a wealthy tobacco manufacturer and he comes back to avenge the loss of the family fortune.

MARIAN FITZ-SIMONS: Well if they like to think that let's not tear up (destroy) their beliefs. But I can promise you it ain't so.

NARRATOR: How can this be?

I suddenly find myself adrift - dogged by doubts as to my family's cinematic legacy, dogged, in fact, by a dog.

This small hound which came out of nowhere has ruined the shot.

Take two: As I was saying, I suddenly find myself adrift.

Is it possible that my great grandfather's story didn't even stay alive down here for the thirty years until Bright Leaf was written?

It's almost as if he's been "disappeared"- exiled from local history.

I think I need to do a little more research.

This museum is devoted to the history of tobacco.

I assume it's just another shrine to the Dukes, but maybe I can gain some perspective here, some insight into my great-grandfather's story ...

At least some of the elements of my John Harvey McElwee's life must be incorporated into Bright Leaf.

I mean, the legal battles alone were legendary down here.

Here - they've even displayed what I can only view as being trophies to the vanquishing of my great grandfather's business.

And here's a cigarette manufacturing machine, which for some reason is being attended to by an angry nurse.

At first, I first, I find myself somewhat distracted by this - the nurse. But then I start to think about the historical implications of the machine itself.

As the exhibit explains, this machine was the key to the Duke family's success.

Before the invention of this machine, cigarettes were hand-rolled and nowhere as popular as cigars or chewing tobacco. The first cigarette machine was very expensive and frequently broke down and besides the industry consensus was that no one would pay for machine-made cigarettes. But James B. Duke decided to gamble, and after a year of tinkering with this machine, he was able to make millions of cigarettes a day. Duke had created the ultimate consumer product.

But what never occurred to me about John Harvey McElwee was that he must have decided not to take a chance on cigarette machines.

Or maybe he was so strapped by the law suits he himself had initiated that he couldn't do anything but stand by as Duke's business took off.

Which would mean that if anything, Gary Cooper's role in Bright Leaf - as an innovative, risk-taking manufacturer - actually resembles a man more like James B. Duke than John Harvey McElwee.

And could this in turn possibly mean that Cooper's competitor – THE POMPOUS, ARROGANT OLD WINDBAG Major Singleton – is actually more like John Harvey McElwee?

SINGLETON: I'm afraid I don't believe in cigarettes, much less a machine for making them. It turns my stomach, sir, every time I have occasion to witness someone poking one of those vile concoctions into their face. I deal in cigars, sir.

But then JB Duke was never run out of business by a wealthy competitor. That was John Harvey McElwee's story.

I have to conclude that in poking around Durham county, Foster Fitz-Simmons inevitably heard the stories of both men and probably melded them into a single fictional character - the character played by Gary Cooper.

I have to say that in terms of my family heritage, this is a little disturbing - that the genteel John Harvey McElwee would be forever trapped inside a role with the driven, ruthless James B. Duke, their fictional DNA blended in a kind of Frankensteinian creation - a sort of McDuke.

When Washington Duke died, his son, James, decreed that this "chapel", as he modestly called it, be built to house his father's remains. The old man is buried here with his sons, James and Benjamin.

Washington and James had had their differences, to be sure. The father never fully approved of the son's ruthless business tactics - tactics that resulted in Congressional anti-trust hearings and a lot of bad publicity.

Right before he died, old Washington Duke said: "There are 3 things I could never understand: electricity, the Holy Ghost, and my son, James."

But father and son seem to be resting in peace now.

It was recommended that the chapel be built with stone from the famous quarries of Indiana, but James B. Duke insisted that Carolina stone be used.

Duke liked the warmer brown and gray tones of the local stone - and was probably pleased that it would come from the same hills that gently sloped down towards his tobacco fields.

For a final time on this journey, I go to visit my cousins. I should probably tell them that the movie, Bright Leaf, is not - or at least not entirely - based upon the life of John Harvey McElwee.

ELIZABETH: There he is.

JOHN: That's it. John Harvey.

NARRATOR: But I can't bring myself to do this.  
I elect to let this particular bit of erroneous family lore live on a while longer.

ROSS: The tombstone seems a little crooked. How did that happen, do you know?

ELIZABETH: I think it's the lawnmower.

ROSS: You think a lawnmower did it?

ELIZABETH: You know they have a riding lawnmower (\*\* tractor lawnmower) . And of course some of them are too lazy to get off the lawnmower and put it back where it belongs.

JOHN: That's very disrespectful isn't it? He must have hit this thing hard.

NARRATOR: So my great grandfather lies beneath a modest stone - a stone nudged by a careless lawnmower operator - while Duke sleeps in a soaring cathedral that bears his name.

JOHN: Well when my time comes I want them to burn me up.

NARRATOR: Both this marker and the stone from Duke Cathedral were taken from the same local quarries. I guess you could say at least they had this much in common – the Dukes and the McElwees: they loved the land of North Carolina – its trees and fields and stones.

Then at least they had this much in common - the Dukes and the McElwees: they loved the land of North Carolina - its fields and trees and stones.

ROSS: You all march in it every year?

GIRLS: Yes.

ROSS: And what are you celebrating exactly?

GIRL #1: The tobacco festival.

ROSS: Just the fact that all the tobacco crops are in and everything is over? You all going to smoke cigarettes when you grow up?

GIRLS: No!

ROSS: Why not?

GIRL #2: Because it's nasty.

GIRL #1: And it'll make your lungs turn black if you keep on smoking.

1947 MISS TOBACCO: When they asked me to be in the parade they asked me if I still had my

crown and I said, "No I don't but I can make it because it was cardboard wrapped in aluminum foil with Christmas tinsel." And I think it was even held together with a paper clip. Elmer's Glue was not invented.

ROSS: That was your first crown?

1947 MISS TOBACCO: That was my first crown.

ROSS: How long ago was that?

1947 MISS TOBACCO: That was 1947.

ROSS: Now which one of you is Miss Tobacco?

MISS TOBACCO: That would be me.

ROSS: And who are you down on your knees?

1994 MISS TOBACCO: I'm 1994 Tobacco Festival.

1947 MISS TOBACCO: Oh my goodness.

MISS TOBACCO: If it'll stay at all, I mean.

1947 MISS TOBACCO: This is the last Tobacco Festival. It's going to be Farmer's Day Parade from now on is my understanding.

ROSS: Why have they changed it?

1947 MISS TOBACCO: You think tobacco has a bad name?

MISS TOBACCO: It brings a lot of jobs and a lot of revenue but it has its health hazards. Everybody's going to die of something. So it might as well be - ----something that's going to help out the... What's the word I'm thinking of here?

ROSS: The economy?

MISS TOBACCO: There you go! There you go. Having a rough morning.

SOLDIER: Left , right. Left.

NARRATOR: This, the fiftieth and final Tobacco Parade, is an event that in a way marks a change of attitude towards a way of life - sort of the end of an era - and I do my best to record as much of it as possible.

The new recruits...

The creaky fire trucks...

Even this: some sort of lawn mower precision drill team. (\*\* as in a synchronized maneuver in a military parade.)

I wonder if these guys happen to practice in a cemetery...

And of course, the beauty queens.

MISS TOBACCO: How are you doing today? That's good.

NARRATOR: How can one small town have so many beauty queens?

ROSS: Which beauty queen are you?

GIRL: A princess.

ROSS: A princess?

NARRATOR: They seem to be getting smaller and smaller, these beauty queens.

I feel as if I'm being taken back in time and space to the origins of beauty queen creation.

WOMAN: How you doing?

ROSS: That's the tiniest one yet.

NARRATOR: So, for over 200 years, ships have sailed from Wilmington, NC with shipments of American tobacco.

They've sailed down the river and out to sea, destined for countries where people have always appreciated bright leaf tobacco and aren't concerned with the fact that it may slowly be killing them. A money manager in Hong Kong, a waitress in Marseilles, a travel agent in New Delhi pause from their day's work, light up an American cigarette, and inhale. Time stops momentarily, a dreamy calm envelopes them, and they smile, as if having been transported to a mysterious, far away place.

ADRIAN: And I'll do it like this because it can die.

GOSPEL SONG: "SHIP OF ZION" OVER TAIL CREDITS.