Roger Evans Facebook Post on MovieStuff LLC Closure

Facebook post

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A lot of people don't really know how MovieStuff got started. Well, I'll tell you. Back in the summer of 2001, we lost everything in Tropical Storm Allison as it roared through Houston. We lived in an older, neat little neighborhood that was ostensibly in a no flood zone so, of course, we had no flood insurance. But that didn't stop nearly 3-4 feet of water from invading our home and taking everything we had. And then only a few months later, just as we were about to recover, 911 happened and the world stopped. I had been previously working as a freelance director doing music videos and commercials, with a few low budget films here and there to my credit. I had even won a number of awards, like the prestigious Lawrence Kasdan Award at the Ann Arbor Film Festival. That said, Houston was never the industry mecca for film and video production. In the days after 911, survival for my family became a serious concern as media related jobs dried up and work became even more scarce than before. I was broke, needed to find a way to make money, and quickly.

At one point the previous year, I had been working with a modified projector to digitize some old Super 8 films of mine. At the time, virtually all commercial 8mm transfers in the USA were being done on film chains that ran in real time using multi-bladed projectors feeding into standard definition NTSC video cameras. These worked "okay" but repeated and/or blended film frames via interlacing to smooth out the motion difference between the 60 fields per second of NTSC video and the 16-24 frames per second of the 8mm film. My background in the film industry included animation and building optical printers, both of which handled film on a per-frame basis. As such, the thought of blending film frames seemed crude, unnecessary, and a step backwards, in terms of getting the best out of any film image. I wanted to capture each frame by itself.

Thinking back about the optical printers I used to build, I modified an old movie projector from eBay by removing the shutter, slowing it down, and then installing a simple micro-switch to trigger once as each frame was pulled into position in the projector's gate. I employed a simple magnifying glass from an old drafting lamp as a field lens which, when

place between the projection lens and the camera at just the right distance, allowed the camera to look directly at the film surface in the gate. And, since no screen was required, the super hot projection lamp could be replaced with a cool, diffused back light behind the film. At the time, there were no animation programs for the PC that I could find so I used the stop motion animation feature that (used to be) present in early versions of Adobe Premiere. If you were feeding a live DV camera into your PC via FireWire (remember that?) then, any time you clicked the left mouse button, Premiere would grab and save a single video frame from the live camera feed. Obviously, that was still an interlaced frame with odd and even fields but, because the film frame did not move in the projector gate between the scanning of the two successive fields, the captured video frame looked and functioned as if it were a single, progressive digital frame.

That was sweet but the thought of sitting there and manually clicking off thousands of frames by hand sounded wicked boring. So the last problem was how to interface the modified projector's internal micro-switch with the animation function in Adobe Premiere. The solution, of course, was ultra simple. A standard computer mouse was modified by soldering a pair of wires internally to the left mouse button. That long wire was then connected to the micro-switch in the projector. Each time a frame landed stationary in the gate for a split second, the micro-switch would automatically "press" the left mouse button once, thereby triggering the capture of a single frame in Adobe Premiere. Once those frames were captured, they could be played back as a video file at any frame rate desired.

I remember the day I set it up for the first time. Aligning the DV camera on a tripod was a bit dicey due to the distance the camera had to be from the field lens, which was about 3 feet! Think of trying to line up a microscope from long distance without the benefit of precision rails or adjustment knobs. It was not intuitive and sometimes very frustrating. But, once aligned, the clarity was stunning and, honestly, far better than I could have hoped for. I placed the cursor of the mouse over the capture button of Premiere and switched the projector on. I had mechanically reduced the frame rate of the projector down to about 1 frame a second as I wasn't sure just how fast the PC could keep up. You have to remember, this was in early 2000 and the dual P2 processors on my 32 bit system were probably maxing out at a red hot 333 MHz, LOL. I watched as the frames appeared,

one by one, in the capture window of Premiere. It took about an hour and then the 50 foot roll was complete. I opened the resulting file in Premiere and hit play. The results were insane. A year before, as part of my research for a customer's music video, I had previously located one of the only two Rank transfer houses in North America that had an 8mm gate and submitted this very same 50 foot roll for a quality test. Admittedly, that interlaced, blended frame video from the Rank looked really good. I mean, really good. That said, the scan I just did on my home made, progressive scan system looked really, really, REALLY good. And it made no sense.

How could a scan using a $250 home DV camcorder blow the doors off a state of the art million dollar Rank Cintel scanner?

It was then I realized the absolute power of democratizing the latest technology. My little Panasonic consumer DV camera was made by the hundreds of thousands and that economy of scale meant Panasonic could afford to employ the latest in CCD imaging chips. By contrast, "state of the art" for Rank really meant that, in 1998, it was still using tube technology from the late 70s and early 80s for imaging film. A lot can change in technology in 15-20 years. And, with a million dollar price tag, Rank didn't exactly sell their scanners in volume, nor were they replaced any more often than required, as each unit was nearly the size of two refrigerators (with refrigerators being far easier to install and set up). To be clear, despite the interlacing, the Rank test video had a slightly better contrast range - but - not a million dollars better. Plus, the CCD image of the Panasonic was simply crisper and more vibrant. Ultimately, once I replaced my single chip camcorder with a 3 CCD Canon, the Rank scan was visibly left in the dust. There simply was no comparison. Oh, sure, we could get into long, purest's discussions about compressed vs uncompressed and overall bit depth, etc. But, from a practical standpoint, any film transfer customer looking at the two scans side by side was NOT going to choose the more expensive Rank scan, even if it were offered at half price.

So, with that previous success in mind, and facing a financial crisis in the late days of December, 2001, I decided to put up a website and see if the world was interested in my little scanning system, which I had dubbed the "WorkPrinter". The name probably seems a bit odd so here's a bit of trivia: My first modified projector did not use a field lens and

simply projected each frame onto a smooth white piece of card stock because the previously mentioned music video client wanted that kind of nostalgic, projected look - but - free of any flicker or interlacing. I hadn't really anticipated the system being worthy of doing finished transfers but, by the time I decided to offer it for sale on the internet, I was already heavily involved in an online forum called Shooting8mm where I had been casually referring to the unit as the "WorkPrinter" for quite some time. So the name stuck because I figured my entire constituency of potential buyers was limited to forum members who already knew it by the name WorkPrinter. Had I any idea of its true commercial potential, I would have given it a cooler name. LOL.

Working out of my garage in Houston was nothing short of abject misery. During the summer, it was easily 95-101 degrees with constant, relentless 100% humidity, and the mosquitos would buzz in front of your face to the point of distraction. In fact, the humidity was so bad that I would have to pack shipping boxes in the house because, otherwise, the packing tape would not stick. So it was rough going. In early 2002, I had sold maybe a handful of units. The stumbling block was Adobe Premiere, which was numbingly expensive, even back then. Without the stop motion animation function of Premiere, there was no way to capture each frame of film individually to the hard drive. But then one morning I received an email from a customer named Jeff Dodson out of Tennessee who, by day, wrote computer code for his employer but, in his spare time, liked to monkey around with 8mm film. As a hobbyist, he found Premiere too expensive so he simply wrote his own frame capturing program to use with his freshly purchased WorkPrinter. I tried out the software and it worked great but needed some curb appeal for people who don't know how to install and work with open code. To be clear, I do not write code! LOL But Jeff was open to making his software marketable so he and I worked together to add useful features and simplify the U.I. We then struck up a deal where I would make and sell the hardware and he would make and sell the software. We've been doing that ever since and Jeff has written software exclusively for all my units, of which there have been dozens of different models spanning over two decades.

I won't go into all the trials and tribulations of the last 20+ years but, like any business, we've had our highs and our lows. Throughout, I have taken great pride in providing

individuals and businesses working on a limited budget a practical and economic means for preserving their cinematic past This little company that started out of desperation in my sweaty Houston garage Houston back in 2021 grew to become a success I never could have imagined. I've installed and/or provided scanners for the Academy of Motion Picture Film Archives, UCLA, USC, and a host of other organizations, both big and small. To date, we have built and shipped thousands of scanners all over the world to places as far away as South Africa and Asia. One of my earliest scanners, the WorkPrinter-HD, actually appeared in an episode of the TV show Alcatraz scanning old 8mm film as part of the shows plot! That's just how crazy this journey has been.

Unfortunately, as they say, stuff happens. And, after 20+ years of service to a market that I played no small part in creating, I now find myself on the outside looking in. I know that many will be disappointed - and understandably angry - but circumstances beyond my control have made it impossible to continue.

Effective immediately, MovieStuff, LLC is officially closed for business.

It goes without saying that this closure will affect many, including me. You don't walk away from something you spent over two decades building without it devastating you emotionally, physically and mentally. I loved the work I did, I loved my crew, and I was proud of everything we achieved. But, after putting everything I had into MovieStuff, it has impacted my health and my well being.

I am exhausted, I am sad. And, having filed for personal Chapter 7 bankruptcy, I am also officially broke.

I no longer have the energy or resources to continue.

I am sorry, everyone. Truly.

Roger