

COMMENTS ON NORA JACOBSON and her VTIFF AWARD

■ By Greg EplerWood, June 22, 2022

I first encountered Nora when I was the executive director of Catamount Access Television's Community Media Center in Bennington back in the '90s. She was seeking ways to connect with as many of what we call PEG, or Public/Educational/Governmental, Access Centers around the State, that had connections with their local schools. As is typical of Nora, her film and film-related projects, then and now, are not simply stand-alone projects, but require community participation so they have meaning to and influence on people's lives---to make them better citizens and to improve their community.

What immediately drew me to Nora was a kind of philosophical kinship – her media methodology was virtually identical to that of I and several hundred other media-makers back in the 1970s and 80s as we worked to get the new Sony video Portapak into the hands of ordinary community members to allow them to tell their own stories, and then show the videos to their friends and neighbors, in groups, in order to stimulate discussion about important issues affecting their lives. The 70s witnessed the early birth of Public Access on cable television, and this effort to use video as a tool for change, culturally and socially, I recognized right away in Nora's film work.

Nora and these Community Media Centers – there are 25 of them in Vermont – eventually found a similar kinship, and in fact, Nora developed the closest relationship with one of them, CATV in White River Junction, enough so that last year CATV recognized Nora's community media involvement with an award, much like what we're awarding Nora with today.

My PEG Access contacts, who I interviewed regarding Nora, used such adjectives as diligent, visionary, monumental and herculean! One example is how she, in the almost two-decade long development of the Freedom & Unity project, was able to surmount the many disparate and technical obstacles confronting her to edit together old and new media formats, film, video, prints, slides, analog, digital, low-definition, high-definition, shelf-archived, back-of-the-dusty-drawer hiding places -- into a coherent and meaningful whole. Perhaps you must be a media-maker to appreciate this, but it is extraordinary that Nora maintained her grand vision through all this, and after all the hard work did not stop there. She then mounted an ambitious campaign to distribute it, make personal appearances and organize discussions so that viewers of the project would learn and absorb the importance of what Vermont has given us over the years, and to sustain and continue its work.

A Thank You to Nora seems somehow too small and limiting of an expression of gratitude, and so an award from VTIFF might help us get a bit closer to the truth of her grandness.