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Program Notes  
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### **The Art of a Life Well Spent: An Exploration of Death in a Creative Context**

*The Art of a Life Well Spent* is a drama short film about a young man who creates art inspired by the journal entries of his recently passed grandfather. Along the way, he gets to know his grandfather after he is gone, whilst figuring out how to grieve for family that he hardly knew. Losing someone distant and getting to know someone after they are gone are both topics close to my heart because I have experienced and struggled with them myself. As the writer and director of this short film, I sought to explore these subjects through this creative medium. *The Art of a Life Well Spent* blends animation and live action in order to tell a unique story that will impact others in a meaningful and positive way.

While embarking on the challenge of making this story go from page to screen, there were several areas of research required to make it happen. All phases of production required different areas of study in order to utilize the best methods to tell this story. Many different forms of research were conducted in the writing, pre-production, and post-production phases of making this film come to life.

During any writing process, I always conduct research. Whether it be searching for synonyms to best convey the feeling I want or immersing myself in a different time period, opportunities of research always present themselves. In order to write some of the grandfather's journal entries, I did some research on the time period of the 1960s to better inform my world building. For this film in particular, I also did a lot of immersing myself in other stories that were similar to mine. In order to get the story structure mapped out, I watched other short films and

constantly studied the three-act structure in order to craft a well-ordered story. Surrounding myself with examples of what I wanted to accomplish and getting a good grasp of story structure, I was able to order the events of my story more easily. Being a student and only a beginner of this craft, it is useful to study others' work in order to learn the basics of storytelling. Despite this research in the writing phase, however, there was another that required significantly more: pre-production.

There are many processes involved in pre-production for any film—no matter how low-budget it may be. In the months leading up to our shooting dates, my producer and I had to research different locations, housing, actors, and ways to accomplish on-set necessities. We scoured local businesses to try to find places to film, places for crew to eat, and locations to house actors. Research was required in the budget-making process as well. Comparing prices, relocating funds, and crafting the budget itself all required research. In the script, we had a scene where it was raining but the week we were shooting, there was no call for rain in the forecast. Therefore, after researching ways to make it happen, my producer and crew were able to throw together a makeshift rain machine using a garden hose and c-stand.

During pre-production also houses most of my work as a director. I studied different directing techniques through any interview I could find as well as the book *Directing Actors* by Judith Weston. I learned efficient directing techniques that could best convey what I wanted to my actors, as well as better ways to treat them on set. All of the pre-production meetings I had with different crew members required research in order to be the most informative and efficient. Aesthetics were very important to study. I researched which shot types to use when, and compiled examples from different films of what I wanted for my director of photography. Some of the films I studied included *The Farewell*, *Martha Marcy May Marlene*, and *Lady Bird*. Since

they had similar genre and stories, I could observe what colors and compositions they used in order to inform my own film.

Currently, we are in post-production for *The Art of a Life Well Spent*. One of the areas I have had to research the most is animation. Since I am not an artist nor an animator, I had to figure out how I was going to do a simple animation for those sequences. I found an illustrator to make still images for me, but I have to figure out the rest on my own. I have used the short film on YouTube, “Space Kid” as a reference. I have been continually watching the video “How I Made Space Kid”, researching Adobe Animate and Procreate, and testing different animations with a projector in order to flesh out how I will make these animations.

Post-production also required me to study music. I want the music placed in my film to be meaningful and impactful, and I need to be able to clearly communicate to my composer. In order to prep for meetings, I have studied many different films and the way that they use music to create associations and enhance emotion. Since I have never done this before, I also had to research things such as spotting sessions in order to be knowledgeable on the post-production flow of creating a score.

As one can see, there are many facets of research that go into this type of artistic expression. I learned this firsthand by having to conduct these facets in every stage of production. Not only has creating this short film given me useful experience in the marriage of research and art, it also has the potential to touch others in a meaningful way. Something unique about *The Art of a Life Well Spent* is its exploration of grief in a way that has not often been depicted. Moving forward, I hope that my short film can not only impart a positive message to its viewers, but also increase awareness of what it is like to experience this type of grief in a unique and impactful way.