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## A History of Skydiving in West Michigan

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A History of Skydiving In West Michigan  
An Honors Thesis Project  
By: Garrett A Mohney

**Abstract**

My Lee Honors College Thesis project will coincide with my degree in Multimedia Arts Technology to create a documentary production surrounding the sport of Skydiving. The film will have a run time of approximately 20 minutes, including introductions and the credits. The project will consist of historical background on the sport, real jump footage taken by myself and other experienced camera flyers, and interviews with influential people in the greater Southwest Michigan area involved with the sport. The project will involve video capture and interviews, video editing, and advanced technical video creation. After the completion of the video, I will write, compose, and perform a completely original score for the entire production using a variety of digital libraries, physical instruments, and other musical techniques.

**Reflection**

After nine months of shooting, editing, and performing, I finally completed my Honors Thesis and my MAT Capstone project. The project itself involved many challenging, engaging, and educational aspects that will certainly assist in future career fields and enrich my life.

The first step of the project involved actually obtaining the footage. While I had an initial database from some other skydivers, I still had to capture lots of aerial footage as well as conduct interviews. I am a C-Licensed skydiver under the United States Parachute Association, so I was able to actually film a large number of skydives myself. It was an exhilarating experience that involved safety, extremely high stakes, and a whole lot of fun. In addition to jump footage, I interviewed 4 different people utilizing a variety of equipment like DSLR cameras, lapel mics, GoPro side cams, and audio interfaces. These interviews themselves taught me a lot about conducting myself in a professional manner, and what techniques I could use to generate interesting content. For example, I often led the conversation in directions I thought would be useful for the project; however, sometimes the subjects just wanted to talk about their unique experience. This sometimes created organic stories that were extremely interesting, but unfortunately had no place in the documentary. Other times, it was like hitting a gold mine.

Moving onto the editing stage, I had no real roadmap of how I was going to tackle the film. I initially had to organize the over 5 hours of footage into a Premiere Pro project, and then rewatch all of the interviews multiple times. It was a time consuming process, and the content of the interviews drove the narrative direction of the story. I finally began to piece multiple ideas together in order to create a master timeline for the documentary. It was difficult to decide what to keep and what to cut. Sometimes, I felt like the amount of footage I had was simply not enough to sustain a film. Other times I felt I had so much footage that there was no way I could

possibly cut down to 20 minutes. Based on feedback from my Capstone group and my Thesis chair, I was able to hone in on what aspects were pleasing to the viewer and accentuate those. After 3 months, I had a rough completed timeline of events saved in Premiere Pro.

Now, in just under 4 weeks, I would have to write and perform over 20 minutes of original music. I was fortunate enough to use many instruments and technologies I had accumulated over the years to create everything at home. This meant whenever I had free time, I could play around with ideas. Some nights, I was only able to conjure 30 seconds of material. However, this built overtime to allow me to create multiple songs of varying lengths. I was also exposed to creating music that serves to accompany the documentary, unlike music functions for a concert or an album. I used synth libraries, orchestra samples with violins and flutes, ambient percussion, and electric guitar to create the majority of the sounds. Everything was recorded into Logic Pro X, and then exported to be added into the Premiere Pro file. There, I combined everything until I had a finalized and completed project.

My documentary taught me about client and customer relations, technical proficiency, filming in high intensity environments, and brought me closer to a great group of people here in Michigan. The film was very well received by colleagues and other skydivers, and will hopefully spur talk of other historical pursuits around skydiving. I am pleased to take this knowledge with me forward, and inspired to keep creating at high standards and incredible heights. Blue Skies!