

# Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



(T-Ro-6D)O5C

## Unfamiliar face

### Weisburg is the man behind top TV documentaries

By Kevin Lawrence  
special writer

**Y**OU WOULDN'T KNOW his face if you passed him on a street of his native Bloomfield Hills.

But through his award-winning work, millions of Americans, including many of the most important decision makers in Washington, D.C., better understand the often-complicated issues we face today in the United States. His most recent film premiered in early October on Public Broadcasting and was hosted by the dean and news anchor emeritus of American news reporting, Walter Cronkite.

The amazing thing is this — Roger Weisburg, 36, actually began his award-winning career as a documentary filmmaker by accident.

"I actually stumbled into this career by default," Weisburg said, from the office of his company, Public Policy Productions, in New York City. "After attending Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., I was on my way to a Ph.D. in comparative literature and life in academia. I taught Introductory Philosophy and Spanish for a year at one of the Friends Schools in Manhattan and realized that teaching really wasn't the direction I wanted to go in."

WEISBURG LEFT teaching and began working as a consumer activist with a consumer agency in New York City. He was soon pointed out to television producers as a consumer expert. By 1977 he was helping to provide stories and background on consumer law to PBS Station WNET, New York.

"My first work was very consumer-oriented," Weisburg said. "But



Walter Cronkite, producer Roger Weisburg (center) and other members of the TV crew work on "Can't Afford to Grow Old," about

long-term care for the elderly. Hosted by Cronkite, the documentary recently was shown on PBS television stations.

that's how I made the transition to filmmaking — through consumer reporting."

By 1978, he was working full time as an associate producer. Weisburg was a producer of the Emmy-Award-winning consumer series, "Help Yourself." His segments dealt with aging, child abuse, wife battery, divorce, consumer fraud, housing, credit and money management, and neighborhood revitalization.

His first full-length documentary, "Backward to Back Streets," about the de-institutionalization of the mentally ill, was the first in the string of highly regarded award-winning films written, produced and directed by Weisburg.

**'You couldn't work with anybody better than Walter Cronkite. He is the most-incredibly congenial, personable man you could ever meet. He puts everyone at ease.'**

— Roger Weisburg

Social documentary combines journalism's incisiveness and the sensitivity of film, to create — if well done — a very compelling story. Weisburg's documentary-making philosophy is at the core of his success.

"I BEGAN TO OPT for the documentary format because I wanted more control over the final product. And I needed more time to convey the story because the issues are so involved," he said.

"Of utmost importance is to have something worthwhile to say — knowing exactly and concisely what you want to get across. You have your message. But you have to fairly narrowly define what you hope to achieve because, one, an hour is a lot of time for a TV news story, and two, it's not when you get into the complexities of the issue.

"Documentary combines the rigors of journalism with the creative side of filmmaking, merging the two so that the viewer is not conscious either that they're listening to a news report or seeing a movie. Hopefully the viewer gets involved with the story and doesn't feel

they're being preached to the way they might on the evening news.

"I try to get the viewer hooked on the story, and slip in the reporting — and the broader implications of the story they've been drawn into. My goal is to subtly weave the story and the reporting together, so that the viewer doesn't notice where one begins and the other lets off."

Weisburg writes, produces and directs all his films. "No Place Like Home" examined the long-term care options of the frail elderly, and received numerous awards. "Old Enough To Do Time" scrutinized "get tough" juvenile justice policies and received several awards and an Emmy nomination.

"HEALTH CARE on the Critical List" concerned health-care cost containment and "Who Lives Who Dies" looked at how health care is rationed in the United States. Both received awards too numerous to name.

Other Weisburg documentaries include "Power Struggle," on alternative energy sources, and "To What End?" a 1988 documentary on the role of nuclear weapons in national security.

**'Of utmost importance is to have something worthwhile to say — knowing exactly and concisely what you want to get across.'**

— Roger Weisburg



His most recent project, "Can't Afford to Grow Old," hosted and narrated by Walter Cronkite, examined long-term care for the elderly and the reasons why each year a million Americans are forced into poverty by the cost of long-term care. The program also explored different approaches to providing assistance to this fastest-growing segment of American society.

Weisburg currently has two projects in the works (physical production — location shooting, editing, takes six-nine months). The first is on national health insurance and the second is on preschool children in America growing up in poverty.

"For the first time in history, children are the poorest segment of the population," he said. "In the U.S. there are 3.5 million kids living below the poverty line. Today's kids are the first ever downwardly mobile generation that this country has brought up. The report will be on the competition between the generations for scarce social dollars."

ON THE LIGHTER side is Weisburg's experiences with the big-name host/narrators he uses for his documentaries.

"When we cast, we're looking to match the message of the documentary with the prospective narrator's interests, or public service sensibilities. We, in effect, exploit their TV persona," he said.

"You couldn't work with anybody better than Walter Cronkite. He is the most incredibly congenial, per-

sonable man you could ever meet. He puts everyone at ease. And he's such a pro. I allotted three and a half hours of studio time for Walter's voice-over narration session and he completed it in 35 minutes. He read over 50 pages of manuscript. He just doesn't make mistakes. He's so good at what he does that everything he says seems to be his deepest most heartfelt conviction.

"Actor Jack Klugman was very energetic, eager to get to the guts of the issue, very interested in coming across as uncovering scandal — much like his television character, Quincy. We had to get him to tone it down a bit. Daniel Travanti, who was at the height of his 'Street Blues' fame as Captain Furillo, also had to let up on his TV persona when he hosted 'Old Enough To Do Time.'"

According to Weisburg, the most selfless host who gave of her time and effort was actress Helen Hayes. As a result of their working together, Weisburg and Hayes have maintained an active friendship. Hayes even offered her services for free but worked for scale because of union rules.

THE MOST DIFFICULT host to work with for Weisburg was James Earl Jones — who does indeed have the reputation in the industry of being somewhat cantankerous.

"But when all is said and done, and you're in the editing studio and you hear his voice coming out of the speakers, it's wonderful. It's like God talking," Weisburg said.

Macrus  
Sly Fox

A Thanksgiving Day  
Tradition!

Thursday, November 23  
12 noon - 7:00 p.m.

Featuring

Complete Turkey Dinners  
with all the Fixings. Includes  
Pumpkin Pie and Beverage.

Adults — \$14.95  
Children under 10 — \$5.95

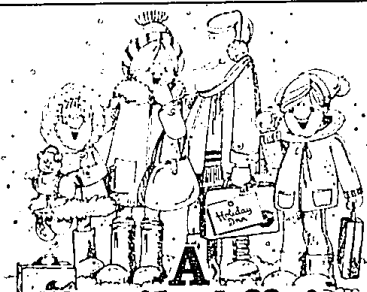
OR

Turkeys To Go . . .

Give your chef at home a break.  
Take out from our oven to your  
kitchen a roasted stuffed turkey  
(up to 22 lbs.) with a mouth-  
watering pumpkin pie for dessert.

For Reservations or  
Information Call 642-6900.

725 S. Hunter • Birmingham



## A Family Affair Weekend

Cure the weekend wearies with an affordable affair for the entire family. Our special Family Affair Weekend rate of just \$59 a night includes "a fair" amount of fun for everyone.

### Features

- Indoor & Outdoor Pools
- 2 Whirlpools
- Sauna
- Exercise Facility
- Poolside Snack Shack
- Multi-purpose Sport Court

### Kid's Korner

Supervised activities for the kids give parents some time on their own. Saturday and Sunday 10am-2 pm & 4pm-8 pm. Video Movies—Cartoon Festivals, Fun & Games—Balloons.

### Sunday Brunch

For the whole family with a special Children's Land buffet, including more fun and surprises for the kids.

**\$59**  
Per Night  
Fri. & Sat.



Holiday Inn Detroit-Fairlane

5801 Southfield Freeway • Detroit, MI 48228 • (313) 336-3340

Early stay (Fri. 10am) and late checkout (Sat. 11am) available. Full Kitchen equipped but children stay at own risk. Reservations made by phone only. © 1989 HIL

## SPECIAL HOLIDAY APPEARANCE!

TOM SCALLEN PRESENTS  
**TORVILL & DEAN**  
AND THE RUSSIAN ALLSTARS

"...impressive in their sinuous grace and shape, inventive choreography."  
—Variety

"Torvill & Dean exude an unmistakable aura that reaches beyond a single art form."  
—New York Times



"They embrace it, play with it and make it a thrilling, essential part of their ice wizardry."  
—Chicago Sun Times

© 1989 BBC

Sun., NOVEMBER 26 • 2:00 pm

JOE LOUIS ARENA

TICKETS: \$22.50, \$15 & \$10

Limited VIP Seats Available

Available at Joe Louis Arena Box Office and all Ticketmaster Outlets including Hudson's and Harmony House.

**CHARGE BY PHONE (313) 645-6666**

For general information (313) 667-6000. Group Sales Discounts (313) 667-7474. Mail Orders to Olympia Arons, Inc., c/o Torvill & Dean, 600 Civic Center Drive, Detroit, MI 48226. Include \$3 handling charge per order.