

SPY POND PRODUCTIONS
Presents

Pony Boys



Needham Boys Off For Expo Via Pony



A NEW YORK TIMES OP-DOC

Special Jury Award for Documentary Short
Independent Film Festival Boston 2022

PRODUCTION
SPY POND PRODUCTIONS
ESTANGE@GMAIL.COM

SALES, IMPACT & DISTRIBUTION
MARGA VAREA, TWIN SEAS MEDIA
MARGA@TWINSEASMEDIA.COM
(617) 710-5436

ponyboysmovie.com

 @ponyboys_the movie



LOGLINE

Summer 1967. Two little boys, 9 and 11, drive a pony cart from Needham, Mass. to Montreal on their own – 325 miles -- to visit Expo '67 – the World's Fair.



SYNOPSIS

Summer, 1967. Two Massachusetts boys – 9 and 11 -- are desperate to visit Expo '67 in Montreal – the largest World's Fair ever. But their parents can't take them. Then Mom comes up with the solution: hitch their pet Shetland pony King to a cart and drive 350 miles to Expo '67 – on their own – at 5 m.p.h.!

For Tony and Jeff Whittemore, it becomes the adventure of a lifetime.

PONY BOYS tells an extraordinary, improbable story about parenting, childhood, and adventure in a time not so long ago.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

About 10 years ago a neighbor told me a delightful story: when he was 9 years old, in the summer of 1967, he and his 11-year-old brother drove a pony cart from just outside Boston to Montreal so they could visit Expo '67, the World's Fair.

Of course I assumed the two youngsters were not alone – a parent or older sibling must have been along. No, my neighbor Jeff said. They were very much on their own. The journey was about 325 miles. It took them 27 days traveling at 5 m.p.h. And by the time they arrived at Expo, they had become celebrities!

I was full of questions: Where did they stay? Did anything bad happen? Were they ever scared? Why did they even have a pony and a pony cart?

But mainly I was intrigued by the biggest question of all: how could the boys' parents allow such a thing? I always thought of myself as a fairly laid-back parent, but I couldn't imagine setting two young boys loose in the world for nearly a month. Jeff replied, "My mother was different from most other parents. She trusted us to get it done, and we did."

As a documentary filmmaker the story struck me as pure gold. It raises so many questions that are as urgent today as ever. What constitutes good parenting, and how can we teach children resilience, capability, imagination and resolve? Did Jeff and Tony's parents do something hugely irresponsible and horribly dangerous? Or was it a brilliant move that gave their two boys deep reservoirs of self-reliance to draw on as they matured?

Equally intriguing, what does the pony boys' story say about how our world has changed in 55 years? Would the trip be riskier for the boys today than it was back then, or safer? In 1967 there were no cell phones for instant communication, and no tracking devices to keep tabs on children. Jeff and Tony called home most evenings from pay phones or from the homes along the way where they stayed for a night. But other than that, they were essentially out of touch. Does all our high-tech communication these days make children any more secure?

Years passed, but I never forgot the story. Jeff and I would cross paths occasionally and I always reminded him that I'd be in touch some day to film the pony boys story, and he always indulged me with a slightly skeptical chuckle.

Finally, two years ago, I told Jeff I was ready to shoot an interview with him if he agreed. We did a 90-minute session, and after a long Pandemic delay, I was able to shoot an interview with Tony as well. The "boys" also lent me the scrapbook of news clippings, letters, postcards and other materials their mother had compiled in the months after the trip.

It was when I went through the scrapbook that I learned how deeply the story had resonated in the summer of 1967; how it had captured the imaginations of newspaper readers across the country and even internationally. Papers followed the boys' daily progress, reporting on weather delays, steep hill climbs, and veterinarian visits. TV news shows and weekly news magazines featured the story -- older brother Tony became the official spokesperson.

When the cart reached the Canadian border photographers were waiting to capture the moment of crossing (which turned out to be more complicated than the boys had expected). And it was being reported on the same pages as horrific accounts of deadly urban riots in Newark and Detroit, a war in the Middle East, and escalating U.S. deaths in Vietnam. I came to see that during that tumultuous summer it's no wonder the pony boys' story appealed to so many millions of readers.

The conventions of parenting may have changed since 1967, or perhaps they haven't changed all that much. But at least one thing has remained the same: people crave a good adventure story with a happy ending – and for 55 years the pony boys' improbable journey has provided just that.

Eric Stange

Director & Producer

Eric Stange is an award-winning independent documentary film producer, director and writer who specializes in current affairs as well as cultural and social history. Recent public television credits include THE WALL and AFTER THE WALL – a two-part series about modern Germany; THE MAN WHO MADE WASHINGTON WORK – a profile of Republican icon James A. Baker III, and MURDER AT HARVARD that explores the process of historical inquiry through a compelling murder story (for PBS American Experience). He has been a research fellow at the Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History at Harvard University. He is a visiting fellow with the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation.



CREW



Rachel Clark

Editor

Rachel Clark is a documentary video editor currently residing in Boston. Born in Scotland and raised in England, she has been editing for the past twenty years, both in London, UK and Boston, MA.

Heather Merrill

Archival Research

Heather Merrill has worked in documentary production for more than 10 years. Her associate producer and research credits include work on numerous independent films, programs for Discovery, Showtime and the WORLD Channel, as well as work for the PBS series American Experience, American Masters and NOVA. Her favorite topics have included women wrestlers, the roots of the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict and disaster studies.



John Kusiak

Music

Since 1992, John Kusiak has composed and produced music for film, television, advertising and live performance – including several award-winning documentaries – through Kusiak Music. He won the 2012 Cinema Eye Honors award for Best Original Music Score for Errol Morris' *Tabloid*.



Marga Varea

Impact Producer

Marga Varea is the founder of Twin Seas Media, a Boston-based impact distribution boutique agency. With over twenty years of experience in film and television, Marga has a deep understanding of the industry and believes in the power of storytelling to engage and transform. Marga has worked with dozens of documentary films and film festivals over the years in a variety of positions from screenwriter to consulting producer to impact and distribution strategist.



FEATURING



Jeff Whittemore



Tony Whittemore



King

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Documentary short

Running Time: 24:49 minutes

Country of Origin: United States

Format: Digital 16:9

Language: English

Exhibition Formats: .MP4, Quick Time

Pro Res 422, DCP 16x9 HD, 23.98 5.1

5.1 Surround Mix, 2.0 S Stereo Mix



PRESS



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Notes and Comment

WE recently read in a French newspaper an account of this year's traditional Fourteenth of July parade in Paris which convinced us that the French military may be on to something important. Apart from complaining about the lack of color in the parade ("Les seules notes colorées sont les élèves des grandes écoles," it grumbled), the account was devoted to a description of some of the new French military hardware. Singled out for special praise was a monstrous new French tank, the AMX 30. (We have no idea what AMX stands for, or why this tank is 30, and not 27.) Among its other important virtues, it has an engine that can burn almost any hydrocarbon, from kerosene to crude oil. Or perhaps it has several engines, each one of which burns something different—we could not quite make out from the account. The special virtue of the AMX 30, however—and this is where we were so favorably impressed by the French military mind—is that it is *hermetically sealed*. Its four-man crew, snug as four bugs in a rug (if that is the appropriate image), can seal themselves in and thus escape poison gas, enemy bacteria, and radioactive fallout. Moreover, the thing actually travels under

large body of water, dive under, and stay there.

TWO Massachusetts brothers, aged eleven and nine, took off by pony cart a couple of weeks ago for Expo 67, without food, money, or advance accommodations. They were planning to do chores en route for eating money and to scrounge whatever lodgings they could for themselves and their pony. But they hadn't been under way forty-eight hours before the New England press pounced on their venture and began giving a practically clop-by-clop

five-week stretch beginning June 5th, when hostilities broke out between Israel and the United Arab Republic, and ending July 10th, when the Security Council agreed to send teams of observers to be stationed on both sides of the front lines. Who got the emergency meetings going? Did all those people sleep? Did they eat? How did they—especially the ones who had to sit for hours and hours in the Security Council and General Assembly sessions—manage to get through their ordeal? By last week, when we went up to the thirty-eighth floor early one morning to visit the Secretary-General's offices, a number of the people—guards, secretaries, assistants to U Thant—were looking rumpled and tired. But U Thant himself looked great—as fresh as green grass—in a crisp pin-striped blue suit and starched white shirt, and smoking a long cigar with quiet relish. He was very calm. The Middle East crisis had been the most difficult and most frantic period since he took on the job of Secretary-General, in 1961, he told us. The Congo crisis, in 1962 and 1963, had lasted a long time and had been exhausting, but it hadn't been an all-day-and-all-night affair, like this one, with Security Council meetings starting at three in the morning, or urgent telephone calls waking him up at half past four.

We asked the Secretary-General how he managed to look so well rested.

"It's my training," he told us. "During my whole life, in obedience to Buddhist precepts, I have been trying to concentrate, to contemplate, to meditate, and to eliminate all hatred, all anger, all bitterness from my being, to detach myself from mundane things and to achieve emotional equilibrium. Of course, it is very difficult to achieve. But this is my way of life."

"Well, *how* do you do it?" we asked.

"Normally, I used to meditate in the morning, as soon as I got up," he

chronicle of their progress. Moreover, Expo officials were saying, long before the boys reached the Canadian border, that when they arrived at the fairgrounds they'd be treated like V.I.P.s. The trouble with this era of comprehensive news coverage is that it's getting increasingly difficult to be adventurous, unless, like Sir Francis Chichester, one is prepared to go to extraordinary, and even perilous, lengths. Try to emulate Huckleberry Finn and you probably won't get around the first bend in the river before a television crew turns up in a helicopter.

Crisis

WE'VE been admiring those people over at the United Nations who, no matter how many beer cans or cushions are thrown at them for their "failures," keep right on working for peace. There are thirty-nine hundred of them, concentrated on the thirty-eight floors of the Secretariat Building, and we've watched some of them on television. They've been keeping long and late hours—particularly during that



water. While the account was too modest to make the point explicitly, we had no trouble at all in perceiving the brilliant strategy that the inventors of the tank had in mind for fighting the next war. At the first sign of nuclear combat, the whole Army is to get into these tanks, in groups of four, head for the nearest

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