

Inspiration, Filmed

Anne after receiving the Moving Mountains Award at Telluride Mountain-Film for "We Still Live Here."



In Lakeville, Connecticut, tucked neatly amongst the beautiful Litchfield hills, lives Emmy-winning documentary filmmaker and Saint Margaret's School graduate, Anne Makepeace '65, who had just returned from a film festival in Amsterdam and was preparing for two more festivals in Provincetown and Nantucket. Upstairs is Anne's newly built studio, books and pictures line the walls. Several large windows allow the studio to be bathed in natural light, which she happily

describes as giving her the feeling that she's working outside. On each of the studio's two desks sit an Apple computer. It was in this studio that Anne completed her most recent documentary, a poignant tale of cultural re-discovery, entitled "We Still Live Here."

Nearly 400 years ago, English colonists arrived in southeastern Massachusetts seeking to establish a new society. Among the first native peoples the colonist encountered were the Wampanoag,

who are best remembered by history as the tribe who shared the first Thanksgiving with the Pilgrims. Through an increased colonial population and a concerted effort to convert the tribe to the English religion and language, the Wampanoag way of life began to fade, and by the mid-1800s the language of the Wampanoag was lost, some thought, forever.

Inspired by a dream to revive the "dead" language of her ancestors, "We Still Live Here" follows the extraordinary work

of Wampanoag Jessie Little Doe Baird who, with no formal linguistic training and little college education, set out to reestablish Wampanoag as an oral language, 150 years after it was last spoken. Jessie formed the Wôpanâak Language Reclamation Project and enrolled in a Master's program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, working alongside the late Kenneth Hale, an indigenous language scholar.

Jessie based the majority of her work off a King James Bible that seventeenth century religious scholars at Harvard had phonetically translated from English into the Wampanoag language. This Bible would come to serve the same purpose as the famed Rosetta Stone of ancient Egypt, and allowed Little Doe to begin work on a Wampanoag-English dictionary that now contains over 12,000 entries. Currently, more than 60 Wampanoag people are enrolled in classes to learn their native tongue, a feat that led famed MIT linguist Noam Chomsky to exclaim, "There is nothing I know of that's anything like the Wampanoag case."

Behind this fascinating film, of course, is the fascinating story of its production. Anne first met Jessie in 2006 when she was filming the first of a five-part series on

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Native Americans for WGBH, entitled "We Shall Remain." Immediately, Anne knew that the story of Jessie and the re-establishment of the Wampanoag language was a story she had to tell. Upon the completion of her part of the WGBH series, Anne made her way to Martha's Vineyard to begin production of "We Still Live Here" despite not having any funding arranged. Fortunately, financial backing quickly began to line up courtesy of the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, the Sundance Documentary Fund, the Guggenheim Foundation and the Radcliffe Institute, allowing Anne to film for the next three years, completing the project last November. From this remarkable project, Anne hopes that viewers will be encouraged by the heroic efforts undertaken by Jessie as she works to reclaim her people's ancestral language. In fact, Anne has decided to put aside

her forthcoming projects for a year so that she can freely tour with the film, and bring the story of the Wampanoag to other communities whose languages are disappearing. "If this group, who had no native speakers for over 100 years could reestablish their language," Anne says, "I hope that groups whose language have not yet faded will understand just how important the preservation of the their customs are, and that even if it seems difficult, it's never impossible."

Anne first considered entering the filmmaking business after graduating from Stamford University. She took a job as a teacher at a small school in northern California and loved to assign filmmaking projects to her students. Soon, though, it struck her, "Why should they get to have all the fun?" Enrolling in film school at Stamford, Anne took the first step on the path that has brought fulfillment and happiness not only to her, but also to the countless thousands of others whom she has influenced and inspired with her work. She maintains that many of the leadership skills that have allowed her to thrive in her field were gained in her Saint Margaret's classes.

"We Still Live Here" will be broadcast nationally on PBS's Independent Lens on Thursday, November 17, 2011. Be sure to tune in!