

From Father to Daughter: The Cuba Film

The sections written by Germaine are in italics.

It all started with vintage reels of 35mm film

The video poem, 'From Father to Daughter: "The Cuba Film"' began when Germaine Burchard Welch acquired two reels of film that had been shot by her father in 1959 when Castro and his army were in the hills above Havana. His films had sat as idle possessions while she moved to St. Louis and then returned to settle again in Houston. Through Margo Toombs she knew that students at one of the Houston Community College locations were using 35mm films in their study of photographic history. It was when she was at HCC watching the films with Margo and Rick Harrington (teacher in the filmmaking department) that she knew she was not ready to let them go. It wasn't until 2015, in order to watch the films on her computer, that she transferred them to CD's.



Margo Stutts Toombs and Germaine Burchard Welch

Which came first, the film or the poem?

Margo had been submitting short videos to film festivals during this time. In 2019, her video poem "Ink Dancer" screened at the REELpoetry Film Festival in Houston, Texas. After the festival, she contacted Germaine to start a collaboration using the fascinating Cuba footage. Germaine would write the poem and give input about the footage she wanted in the project, and Margo would edit the film/video.

The Process

The Poem –

Germaine: As I watched the film, picking out some of my favorite clips, I realized I did not want to write about what people were seeing. It seemed tedious and boring for me and the viewers. Here was Gerard in the hills above Havana with the Communist leader who was soon to take over Cuba. Why? It wasn't the politics, Gerard being totally apolitical, and it wasn't the first time. He had been attracted to something for as long as I had known him and that "something" was hard to define but it took him all over the world, and, sometimes, put him in danger.

While I flubbed and dubbed around with what to write, Margo very quietly suggested that I write about me and my father. I never called Gerard dad, or pop, only father. And he called me daughter, always. How formal we were. Well, it turns out I know a lot. Not from talking, but from observations, from spending a year together going from one experience to another, and from genetic history thanks to one of my cousins. The ship builders? Gerard built two houses for and mostly by himself with intuitive knowledge and the sometimes help of illegal immigrants crossing the hills above San Diego. Each was large and had excellent photo labs.

As I worked, I asked myself questions. Hard questions, that I had never really asked before about who really was my father, about his mother, one of the most interesting women I have ever known and who was so kind to me, and even about myself. What took me so long? I don't know other than shutting down had become my primary form of defense.

The Video –

There were three main challenges:

1. Including as many visual images into a short video as possible. To address this issue, Margo used montages with split-screens and translucent layers.





2. Maintaining visual interest. Film and photos of Castro were chosen for their dramatic quality. Frames with red were used for splashes of color, because red holds up well in 35mm film.



Automobiles and landmarks were incorporated, because they added additional interest. Note the lovely shade of coral in the photo below.



3. Using footage that moved the story along. This was the trickiest challenge. Germaine's poem did not reference many of the scenes that Margo wanted to use. Her poem wove a story of traveling with her father and having life-changing adventures. Fortunately, there was a lot of footage of people traveling to see Castro – by train, boat, automobile, horse and on foot.



There was some delightful footage of men dancing on the beach. Margo couldn't find a place for that in the body of the video, so she put it in the credit roll.

In the End

After meetings and e-mails, "From Father to Daughter: The Cuba Film": was launched. It screened at the Houston REELpoetry Film Festival in 2020. Besides film festivals, Germaine is sharing this project with her family.

Dr Germaine Burchard Welch is a writer of academic research, prose and poetry.

Margo Stutts Toombs is a writer, performer and filmmaker. She enjoys working in all venues, especially humor and the avant-garde.

Family History

Germaine Burchard Welch

Sarah: In order to tell you about my father I need to give you a short history of his family.

Gerard Watson Burchard was my father. From what I have read the Burchard Clan was originally Celtic. They were known to roam far and wide and in the history books Count Burchard is located in Southern Germany in the 1200s. There exists a Burchard Coat of Arms attesting to their participation in the Crusades. In 1998 it still adorned the front of Hamburg's City Hall. That the family were ship builders is attested to by the crossed hammers on the coat of arms. The American branch of the family arrived sometime before our independence. For a long period, as I understand it, they owned a sizable portion of New York City. His mother, Adele, was a debutant at sixteen also living in New York City. Gerard lost his father when he was young, possibly seven or eight after his father had moved Adele and the four children to Venice, California. Even though the Burchard estate sent a stipend to Adele she went to work in a Five and Dime. Gerard would say: there were plenty of hard rock candy Christmases. It was in Venice, California that Gerard began his lifelong love affair with the Pacific Ocean.

Gerard was a well-built, blue-grey eyed, very handsome, slightly rugged looking man. Adele remarried Ward who was nice enough, but Gerard was too proud to take anything from him, even an auto when he was in high school. He paid for his own car. He was exceedingly independent like most of the Burchard's I have known. He went to USC on a football scholarship, became a high school football coach, and joined the Navy the day after WWII was declared. He was given a gunnery crew and assigned to the Merchant Marine Tankers that sailed the globe for the entire war. He was honest and forthright, very quiet, apolitical, attracted people constantly, but allowed almost no one to know him. The whole family seemed to me to be spiritually inclined, but not religious. God was something that was individually defined and a private relationship. More Gnostic than anything else. I have no memory of my parents until after WWII. The Navy had also tapped my mother, Meige, a college graduate with a teaching degree to work in their Seattle office with other literary types. I lived with her mother and

father, Eva and Ellis, in Bremerton, Washington, between the Navel dry docks and the Navel cemetery. My grandfather was in charge of battleship reconstruction. The war was real and at our doorstep and I became my own person very early.

After the war Gerard returned to Dorsey High School in L.A. to teach photography while curtailing the difficult male students who maintained gangs both in and outside of school. Dorsey had built Gerard a state-of-the-art photo lab. This gave Gerard a great deal of freedom to travel. His photography was interesting. He loved to photoshoot the ocean during strong coastal storms and would often take me with him to stand on the cliffs while the waves crashed beneath us. He photographed people, sometimes nudes, sometimes special requests, but especially faces during times of unrest. He was in North and South Viet Nam riding into the battle zones on medevacs until the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told him to leave. He was also in Laos during the Viet Nam War (I don't know why), Cuba and Columbia during their civil upheavals and continued to do a great deal of photography for the Navy. It was not unusual for him to be gone all summer sometimes to the base in San Diego.

During my elementary through high school years the household was quiet. Gerard would spend his evenings in the backyard dark room he had built; Meige would paint china plates, cups and saucers at the kitchen table; I would be squirrelled away in my room listening to the nighttime radio programs: The Lone Ranger, The Green Hornet, etc. When I finally examined my numerous rescues, I am amazed because he never once said I did this for you.

During WWII Meige sent Gerard divorce papers. He threw them overboard when she would not give up guardianship for me. He made me attend Dorsey High School when my friends were all going to Venice High. Apparently, he wanted to keep an eye on me. Keep me safe from the boys I attracted which he certainly did. When I graduated high school, he filled up a year with travel and experiences. When I returned I got an office job. One day, unexpectedly, he walked into the office and asked if that was all I wanted to do with my life? He could afford the tuition at UCLA, but I would have to work for extra money. It was three weeks before school opened and puzzled by my presence in the administration office the personnel allowed me to attend on a trial basis. I had to maintain a B average. This felt to me like a typical Burchard family experience.

