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Passion for film transforms university

KEIARA CARR | The Journal Gazette

Like most other teenagers, 17-year-old Lance Clark decided to rebel against his parents' rules. But unlike most teenagers, he had no plans to hide it. Clark placed it in the middle of the living room.

It was a TV that he bought in downtown Fort Wayne so that he could watch the 1980 Winter Olympics, the year the U.S. hockey team upset the Soviet Union – the “Miracle on Ice” – and went on to win the gold medal.

“I forced it on my family,” he said. “I literally brought it into the house and said, ‘We are going to watch the Olympics.’”

It's a bit puzzling when Clark, a Huntington University professor and chair of its digital media arts department for more than 20 years, explains that he spent most of his formative years without a TV in his house.

A Huntington alumnus, Clark joined the faculty in 1993 and over his 22-year tenure has helped the program become the largest department on campus, with nearly 150 students enrolled in animation, broadcast-fusion media, film production and film studies.

He also runs his own production company, LC Media Inc., which specializes in wedding, corporate and event videography.

“In many ways, the digital media arts department has transformed the campus,” Clark said. “There's more digital media arts students running around than any other major, and it has had a positive impact by bringing the arts to the campus in a way that probably wasn't thought of before.”

Clark said his parents, both teachers, had strict rules about TV, but it wasn't completely foreign.

He had always had a fascination with film, but he didn't have such an attachment to TV.

“And you have to remember, there weren't that many options on TV,” he said.

Now, Clark, 48, meets students who can't help but stare at any number of screens throughout

Profile

Lance Clark

Age: 48

Title and employer: Professor of digital media arts film and communication and chair of digital media arts, Huntington University

Time in current position: 23 years

Education and professional experience: Bachelor's degree from Huntington University, master's in radio, TV and film from Regent University and Ph.D. in communication from Regent University; produces videography projects through LC Media Inc.

the day.

“In a way, I’ve kind of respected not having the television, because I think it allowed me to have a fresh voice with some of my ideas,” he said. “I wasn’t going to the common thing on TV, and I see that with my students now, where they have just grown up with ‘CSI,’ or whatever the shows are, and those ideas are just carbon copies of what they watched.”

Growing up, it was the screening of 1981’s “Raiders of the Lost Ark” at Georgetown Theater that brought his fascination with film into focus. From the opening sequence in which Indiana Jones, played by Harrison Ford, has to outrun a gargantuan boulder, Clark said he had a “come to Jesus” moment.

“It was like, ‘I don’t know what I just experienced here, but I want more of this,’” he said.

He knew he wanted to be around the camera, maybe as a movie director or as a director of photography. He enrolled in Huntington University, majoring in communications.

“The (VHS) cameras were starting to come out, so I started a little film club, and we were doing some short films, but there was no real program in film, and it was that way at most colleges,” Clark said. “You would have to go to some of the bigger schools because it was still 16 mm traditional film.”

“I kind of rode that wave of new technology into cinema with tape-based mediums through the ’90s into the 2000s and saw it change completely to digital. Now we’re filming with little SD cards. That’s why I’m a big believer in digital; it has allowed our program to explode,” he adds.

After graduating from Huntington University, Clark began working toward his master’s degree in radio, TV and film at Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia. He continued his studies at Regent for his Ph.D. in communication.

His dissertation was a narrative analysis of the TV series “The X-Files.”

Although Clark thought he was set to go to Los Angeles, he took a class on teaching film and communications at a college level that changed his course of travel. He decided to become an educator who can also make his own films.

“I’m just wired for it. I’m a real people person, and I love coaching,” he said. “I love coaching students on the equipment and storytelling, and just all of the aspects to go into media and production.”

Thanks to YouTube and social media, students are far more savvy about film production than Clark was at their age, but there’s still plenty to learn.

“We just did freshman registration, and I got some real hot shots coming in. They’ve worked on a lot of student films already, they kind of know the vernacular – they know enough to be dangerous,” Clark said.

“We have to unpack some of what they have learned on YouTube and get them up to speed a little more with professional standards and practices, but at least they’re coming in ready to take some risks. Story is probably the biggest area that we really have to focus on.”

Adam Widener, a WANE-TV reporter and one of Clark’s former students, said Clark’s positivity and passion for storytelling is contagious. Initially a mathematics major, Widener said he was considering switching to broadcast when Clark asked him on the spot whether he wanted to be the weatherman for the department’s news program.

Widener still keeps in touch with Clark and serves as an adjunct instructor for the department’s news program for the Forester Digital Network.

“I never really thought about it as storytelling until I talked to him about it,” Widener said. “Because you think, ‘Oh, I like to make videos,’ but as you start to think about it as storytelling,

it clicks in your mind. You think, ‘I like sitting down with people, telling stories, and being excited about that.’”

Clark said he now finds himself moving away from the classroom and into more administrative responsibilities, but he makes up for it by investing time in directing films.

Clark recently directed the film “Polaroid” for the film production department; the student film premiered at Huntington University in May.

Clark said he is not looking to leave a legacy, but as long as digital media arts continues to flourish past his tenure, he’ll count it as a job well done.

“I love Huntington. I love the size of the university, and it’s been fun to grow a program from seven students to 140 students over the last 20 years – it’s just fun to watch it grow,” Clark said. “I’m always flexible; I’m always open to new opportunities, but I don’t know, I guess God just wants me here, and that’s where I’m going to be for a while.”

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