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“Fascinating.”

– Christopher Frizzelle, *The Stranger*

“A poignant film...”

– Alex Deleon, *filmfestivals.com*

# MADE IN CHINA



**Home is where you least expect it.**

a documentary film by John Helde

Sound Design **DAVE HOWE** Original Music by **ERIK AHO**  
Directors of Photography **JOSEPH HUDSON TANYA HUGHES**  
Co-producer **ADAM SINGER** Written, produced and directed by **JOHN HELDE**

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An untold story of Americans in China...  
 One son's journey to uncover his father's past.

★★★★ (out of 4) "Very moving...a story of a son coming to understand his father – and of what it means to be at home." - Moira MacDonald, *The Seattle Times*

"Fascinating." – Christopher Frizzelle, *The Stranger*

"...Takes a refreshing approach to the subject of home, homeland, [and] the powerful imprint of childhood..." - Belinda Acosta, *The Austin Chronicle*

> synopsis

At a time when the world's eyes are focused on China, **MADE IN CHINA** uncovers a rare glimpse of America's connection to Chinese culture. This critically-acclaimed documentary follows the filmmaker on an international journey to uncover his white American father's remarkable childhood in pre-Mao China. Through stunning home movies, photographs and interviews, **MADE IN CHINA** reveals an untold story of Americans whose cultural "double-vision" shaped their lives. Ultimately, though, **MADE IN CHINA** is the story of a son's search to understand his father – and a poignant exploration of the meaning of home.

> info

Running time: 70 minutes/53:30 minutes

Color/black & white

Shooting format video: miniDV; film: Super 8 Kodak negative film 100D, 250T

Presentation format: Sony HDCAM 1080i 16:9, Sony DigiBeta 16:9 anamorphic, DVCAM, DVD

Sound: Dolby Stereo

Cameras: Panasonic DVX-100A, Sony VX-2000, Sony PD-150

Editing system: Avid XpressPro

> what critics are saying

★★★★ (out of 4) “Like many of the best documentaries, John Helde's personal and **very moving** MADE IN CHINA starts out to be about one thing - a look at Helde's father's childhood as an American boy in 1930s China - and, in doing so, ends up being about something else...The result is both an overseas journey and **a thoughtful film...**”

- Moira MacDonald, *The Seattle Times*

“Family documentary is hard to do well. *Made in China*...marked the debut of a director with the subtle gifts needed to pull it off. Helde has **a sense of humor and a talent for drawing links between things...The quest**—Helde's search for details of his father's life that his father would never discuss—**becomes as interesting as the answers Helde uncovers.**”

- Christopher Frizzelle, *The Stranger*

“...Takes **a refreshing approach** to the subject of home, homeland, [and] the powerful imprint of childhood...”

- Belinda Acosta, *The Austin Chronicle*

“Helde finds a group of **extremely articulate storytellers**...With his wry sense of humour and gentle, easy-going manner, he lets the story unfold around him.”

- Kevin Griffin, *The Vancouver Sun*

Alex Deleon for filmfestivals.com calls it **“a poignant film...”**

Moira MacDonald also cited MADE IN CHINA as one of her **four top documentaries** of the 2007 Seattle International Film Festival.

> what audiences are saying

“One of the most honest films I have ever seen about someone in my generation finding meaning in the things we don't understand about our parents.”

- Lisa, 40, network administrator

“I totally related to the themes... when I was six, we lived in Sweden, and I learned the language and made friends. When we had to come back to America, I didn't want to go - it was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life.”

- Jay, 25, graphic designer, foreign service brat

“As an American who has lived overseas for many years, I am often confronted with the question of Where is Home? MADE IN CHINA brilliantly explored this theme...”

- Cheryl, 42, Peace Corps manager

“...a beautiful depiction of how, given curiosity and courage, relationships can grow even at the end of life. My heart was captured from the very start and I was moved to tears throughout.”

- Mindy, 30, volunteer coordinator

“The film exposed universal parallels that exist in father/son relationships, and how they cross cultures.”

- Kyle, 37, insurance sales

“Remarkable stories of Americans' experience in Asia - especially when they traveled back to modern day China...”

- Maxine, 45, marketing director for an Asian community health service

“Fascinating how the film visually conveyed the enormity of change - from the China of the “Y” missionaries to the China of today...”

- Bob, 62, attorney

> bios

**JOHN HELDE** (director, writer, producer) got his start in film with the New York documentary-makers Maysles Films. An accomplished film editor, he has worked with notable directors Alan Rudolph, Julia Sweeney and Chris Eyre. John has directed several short films, including HELLO, starring Eric Stoltz, which won the IFP Spotlight Award production grant and the CSA Artios Award for Best Short Film Casting. In 2007, he was shortlisted for *The Stranger* (Seattle) Genius Awards. John's critically acclaimed feature documentary MADE IN CHINA premiered in 2007. The story of John's father's lost childhood as an American growing up in China, the documentary is currently on the festival circuit.

**ADAM SINGER** (co-producer) has been an associate of Chicago's Kartemquin Films and a member of the independent documentary film community for over eighteen years working both in the US and internationally as a producer, director, cameraman and sound recordist. His credits include *The War Tapes*, *The New Americans*, *Hoop Dreams* and co-producing *Vietnam Long Time Coming*, for which he won a national Emmy.

**JOSEPH HUDSON** (director of photography - China) began his award-winning career shooting social issue documentaries in Montana over 20 years ago. An avid traveler and outdoors enthusiast, he has lensed projects on 4 continents and in most of the 50 states.

**TANYA HUGHES'** (director of photography - USA) work as director of photography or camera operator has been seen in numerous documentaries, including the Margaret Cho film *The Notorious C.H.O.*, and *Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride*, a documentary about the unique cross-country bus activism of 2003.

**ERIK AHO** (composer) attended Berklee College of Music, and began his career doing instrumental and arrangement work for producers Rick Parashar (Pearl Jam, Nickelback) and Jonathan Plum (Candlebox). Aho has written music for *The Bachelor* (ABC), *The Amazing Race* (CBS) and *The Miracle Workers* (ABC). His film credits include the 2003 feature *Inheritance* and the 2004 feature documentary *Busting Out*, among others.

**BAD ANIMALS/SEATTLE** (sound design/editing/mixing) is an internationally recognized audio post production house specializing in sound design, original music composition, and sound mixing for feature films, television, radio, and interactive media. The creative team, winners of 21 National Emmy Awards, is led by sound mixer/sound designer Dave Howe, sound designer Mike McAuliffe and composer Tom McGurk. Recent credits include *Iraq in Fragments*.

> director's statement

Maybe it's because my own 1970's suburban upbringing was so completely uneventful by contrast – we never even moved once – that I became so fascinated with my father's childhood as a white American boy in China. Or maybe it's because he didn't talk about those years. So many of us grow quickly tired of our parents' well-worn stories; but in my case I was well into adulthood before I realized just how much there was to know.

My father Tom was, in fact, the family storyteller. A history professor, he understood the importance of delivery; he also loved a good laugh. But he rarely entertained us with stories of his childhood. It wasn't until I was well into my thirties that I opened a book called *Golden Inches*, the journals of Grace Service. Grace and her husband Bob were close friends of my grandparents George and Ruth Helde, and they all made Chengdu, Sichuan their home in the early 1920's, as Bob and George worked to establish a YMCA there. Inside the book, I found a photo of George and Ruth on the road to Chengdu, accompanied by a brace of smiling Chinese. I also found Grace's heart-wrenching story of my father's birth on Bailuding, a remote Sichuan mountain: my grandmother Ruth died there at the family's summer home three days after she delivered my father.

Seeing the story in print, the dramatic circumstances of my father's first moments fully hit me. The idea of this special place – a place deep in China, where my father burst on the scene, losing his mother in the process – lodged itself in my consciousness. Then I came across a stash of photos I'd never seen – my father as a boy in China, calmly holding the cook's hand on the porch, playing with his dog, exploring the marketplace, journeying up the Yangtze. The pictures felt like a window into another world. I realized I knew virtually nothing about my father's childhood. I also was beginning to realize how little I knew *him*.

MADE IN CHINA sprang from the urge to uncover this story, a story that was much more personal than anything I'd done. But when I started filming, and digging into my father's past, I found that such things do not come naturally to either him or me. Talking - especially about things not usually talked about - was not the most comfortable activity for us; and although I thought we should go back to the country he left in 1935, he seemed content to leave the past in the past. Suggestions from my dad led me to some of his childhood peers, and I traveled around interviewing them, looking for answers to the big questions of the story: What did it mean to grow up in a country so different from your parents' "home" country? How did it feel to "return" to an America you hardly knew? What do you call "home" anyway? In their entirely unsurprising domestic surroundings, these aging Americans recounted a childhood far removed from what we think of as "American," often detouring into fluent Mandarin.

When my father died of cancer in December, 2003, just a year or so after I began shooting, I couldn't let the project end there. Going to China, even if on my own, felt like a way to linger in the connection we had formed, and to continue to explore the meaning of "home." I wanted to see what would happen when I tried to find his past in twenty-first century Shanghai, Changsha, and Chengdu; and I wanted to make it to Bailuding, his mountain birthplace – to see this mythical summit as real, and, hopefully, in some small way, close a circle.

-- John Helde

> about the production

When director John Helde opened a book from his parents' bookshelf and found a heart-wrenching description of his father's birth in the summer of 1920 on a beautiful Sichuan mountaintop called Behludin, he didn't realize he was beginning a new film – and a five-year journey bridging continents and family silences. His father, Tom Helde, grew up in China for most of the first 15 years of his life. It was this part of his life that John realized he knew the least about – and now, as Tom entered his eighties, it was also the part that John most wanted to understand.

John was an editor of features and documentaries who was beginning his career as a director with a few short narrative films under his belt. He had started in the film business with documentary-makers Maysles Films in New York City, but had until now focused his own career more on fiction filmmaking. As he talked with his father, and found more and more photos of Tom's early life in China, John began to feel that this was a film asking to be made – a unique story of a childhood lived among and between two cultures, and a story so unlike John's own childhood.

John went to visit his father in 2002, and shot the first interviews with Tom. Soon Tom offered his son directories and newsletters of groups that connected the community of Americans who grew up in China - a community of thousands, it turned out – and John widened his interviewing, tracking down several other Americans who shared his father's China childhood.

With good footage in the can, John returned to the editing room in Seattle to cut a trailer that would help raise funds to continue the project. Having explored the childhoods of his father and several other China-born Americans, John now felt that the second half of the story lay in the present. With China immersed in economic expansion and change, it would be an incredibly dynamic and poignant time to visit, and he began planning to travel to China to search for the places his father once called home. But Tom, unlike many of his contemporaries, felt otherwise – he had never been back to China since he arrived in the States in 1935, and had largely put that past behind him.

It was only eight months after beginning filming when John got the news that his father had been diagnosed with lung cancer. The search for funding for this new documentary was slow-going, and for many months the film sat untouched. In November of 2003, Humanities Washington made a major grant to MADE IN CHINA, an amount that would allow John to finish filming by going to China. But in December of 2003, Tom Helde died of complications from lung cancer.

BJ Elder, whom John had already interviewed for the film, told him of her plans to visit her hometown of Changsha after a Shanghai American School reunion in October of 2004. John found her plans dovetailed well with his to film in China: given that his father could not go, BJ's return to Changsha might provide a window into what it means to "go back." Her visit would tie the interviews to the present and serve as a bridge between John's personal story and the stories of American children in China. Director of Photography Joseph Hudson came on board, along with co-producer and sound mixer Adam Singer, and in mid-October 2004 the three left for Shanghai. Although Joseph and Adam had some experience in Asian countries, none of the three had been to China. To some degree, they would be winging it – as in many documentary situations, they had no idea what would happen. Two small Panasonic

DVX-100 video cameras and a professional microphone kept the filming team light and nimble.

The China filming was structured around the three key cities of Tom Helde's childhood: Shanghai on the coast, Changsha, the capitol of Hunan, and Chengdu in Sichuan. Although the crew spent a week in each place, each city has a different resonance in the film. Shanghai is a chaotic entry point into the country. Changsha, an industrial city of over five million, was the most important city of Tom Helde's childhood – the place where he grew from a young kid into a teenager. Here, the crew followed BJ Elder and her friends as they searched for the Yale-China hospital where they were born, and filmed an evening conversation with BJ and two friends as they reveal their feelings about their return to China, and the meaning of home.

In Chengdu, William Hua introduced John to the beautiful 1920's YMCA building his grandfather helped design – here at last was something concrete of the past he can touch. William, the retired director of the YMCA, also revealed a surprise: he and his brother-in-law had driven to the foot of Bailuding, the mountain where Tom Helde was born. Over an hour's drive from Chengdu, Bailuding towers over tiny rural villages with a distinctive hump shape. It looked possible to get to the top, with the help of a guide. But there will be a little bushwhacking, William adds. On a clear day, the crew drives to the tiny town of Bailu. Everyone is interested in John's quest, and when they finally set off there are no less than five guides to accompany the crew. The day is beautiful, and the hiking easy at first. Nearer the top, the trail disappears, and the promised bushwhacking materializes. When the group finally makes it to the summit, the guides smoke cigarettes and pick bananas while John attempts to experience, and film, his father's birthplace. It's difficult to absorb the climax of a several-years journey in the space of half an hour. But there is lots of help – a group of children has scampered up the mountain and they and the guides finally surround John to pore over the photos of his five-year-old father on the porch of his parents' Bailuding cottage – irrevocably, and quite by chance, a small part of this place, and of China's past.

> credits

for Doc

written, produced and directed by  
JOHN HELDE

director of photography - China  
JOSEPH HUDSON

director of photography - USA  
TANYA HUGHES

co-producer  
ADAM SINGER

co-producer  
KAREN HELDE

associate producer  
AJ EPSTEIN

original music by  
ERIK AHO

editor  
JOHN HELDE

sound design and mix  
DAVE HOWE

additional camera  
ERICH ROLAND  
ADAM SINGER  
JOHN HELDE

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ADAM SINGER  
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assistant editor  
MATT SMITH

production coordinator  
SUSIE MOORE

archival research  
JOSEPH HARRIS, ABSOLUTELY ARCHIVES  
KRISTINE WONG

audio post production  
BAD ANIMALS SEATTLE

HD post  
FLYING SPOT

online editor  
SHANE DILLON

colorist  
JEFF TILLOTSEN



title designer  
JONATHAN BAAB

post producer  
KELLI GARCES

film transfer  
FLYING SPOT FILM TRANSFER  
PRO 8MM

legal counsel  
LANCE ROSEN, ROSEN LEWIS LAW FIRM

featuring  
(in order of appearance)

TOM HELDE  
CHARLES ROBERTS  
JOYCE ROBERTS  
MIRIAM C. LEE  
EVELYN BIRKEL THOMPSON AYE  
BEATRICE SCOTT STEVENSON  
BJ RUGH ELDER  
SYDNEY THOMSON BROWN  
RITA ALLGOOD TUBBS  
ANNE LOCKWOOD ROMASCO  
MARY CLARK HOWLAND  
ELSA ALLGOOD PORTER  
WILLIAM HUA  
JOHN LEE

“Little Piece of Henan,” “Listening to the Pines,” “Petrel,” “High Mountains and Flowing Water,” and  
“Homeward Prose” from The Hugo Masters: An Anthology of Chinese Classical Music  
(Celestial Harmonies 19901-2)  
courtesy of Celestial Harmonies

“Wheelbarrow”  
composed and performed by Andrea Wittgens  
recorded by Vincent Gates at Commontone Studio, Seattle

“Hui Xiang”  
music by Patrick Napper  
lyrics traditional Chinese  
performed by Zhang Qi and Patrick Napper  
recorded and produced at IQBeats Seattle by Patrick Napper  
executive producer Dennis Su

“Girl from Da Ban Town”  
performed by George Sapounidis  
courtesy of George Sapounidis

“I also love you, China”  
music and lyrics by George Sapounidis  
performed by George Sapounidis  
courtesy of George Sapounidis

family footage and photographs courtesy of

THE ROBERTS FAMILY  
THE THOMSON FAMILY  
THE HELDE FAMILY

THE STANNARD FAMILY  
BJ ELDER

archival footage, photographs and documents courtesy of

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KAREN HELDE

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GLADYS SWIFT  
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PEGGY THOMSON  
KATHLEEN THORNE  
ANNE TYNG  
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WANG XIYUE  
MARY STONE YAHNKER  
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THE FREEMAN FOUNDATION

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