

Series shines light on human goodness

Oakville filmmaker doing it his way

Psychoanalysts who consider guilt a destructive — or at best, useless — emotion might change their minds after viewing a new group of television documentaries.

The seven-part series *Tender Souls* shines with the light of human goodness, the very best that we as a species can attain. Yet the man who masterminded the series says guilt had something to do with why he produced it.

Vladimir Kabelik has been working in Canadian television and film since he left Czechoslovakia illegally in 1982. In order to support his family of four, the graduate of Prague's Academy of Film and Television Arts accepted any Canadian assignments coming his way.

As he joked in an interview, the scent of developing fluid was a rare but welcome aroma during those tough, early days in his new country. Standards were a luxury he could not afford.

Becoming more critical and more selective came gradually, just like his fluency in English. He began to balk at merely supporting the mediocre programs that proliferate on most television broadcast schedules.

"I started realizing I felt I wasn't doing anything for myself or my own development."

Ten years ago, he stopped all commercial work, dissolved his partnership and started producing independently. The decision carried painful financial consequences. But the producer and director was a happier man.

Since then, he says he has not shot a single film that does not reflect his personal morality. "Revenues are down but I felt life makes sense."

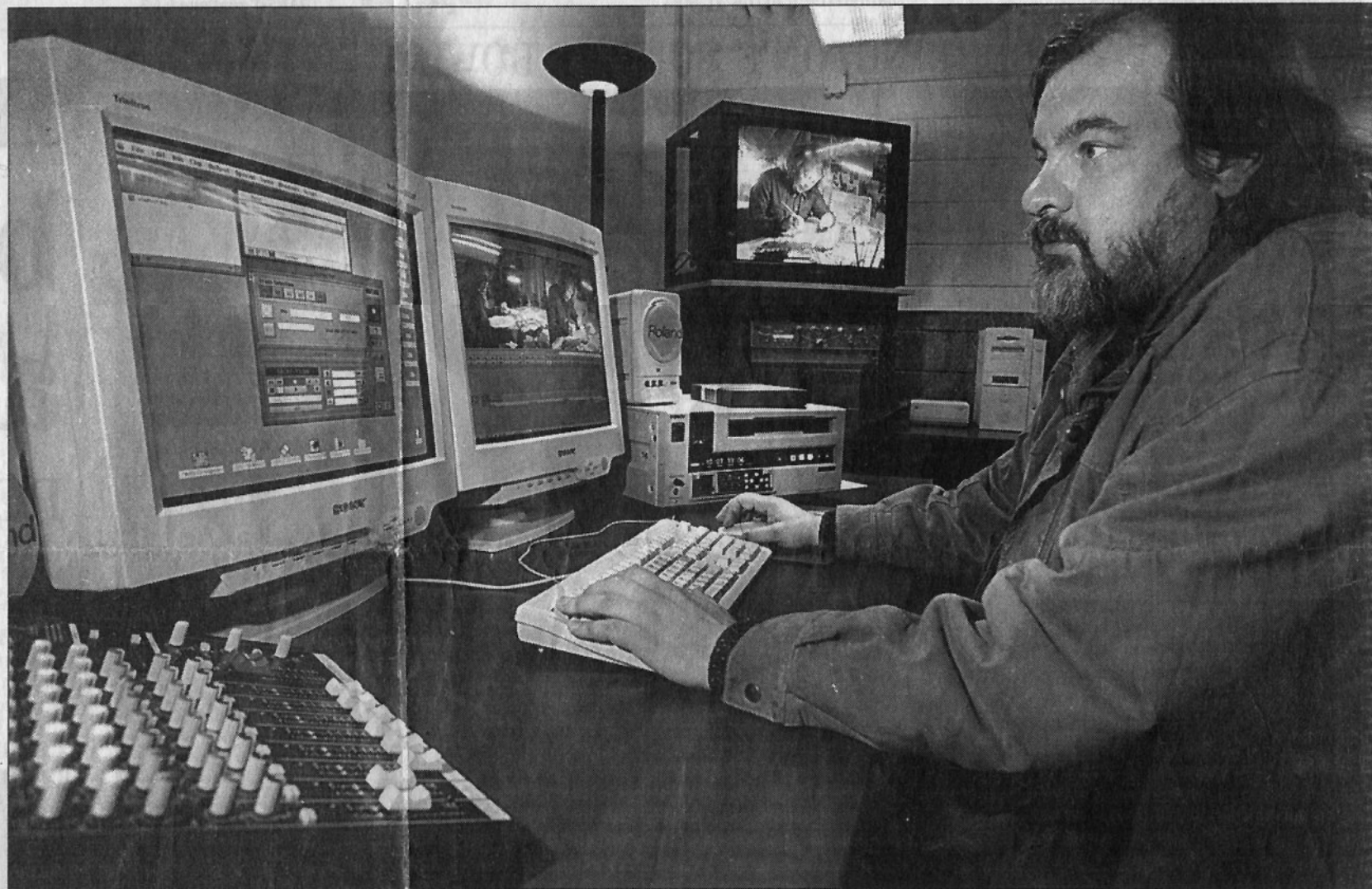
That simple article of faith reverberates through the episodes of *Tender Souls* airing on Vision TV. Thursday's film examines volunteerism, what motivates those who work for no pay and the astonishing impact they can have on other lives.

Teenage volunteers at Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital are part of the story in *Sharing Words of Friendship*. When they deliver books and magazines to patients, they also deliver the unspoken message of selfless caring. Spending time with the patients and talking about the books creates precious personal oases in what can be a frightening, lonely time.

Other volunteers profiled in the documentary share words by teaching literacy in the Kingston Penitentiary and teaching Braille.

On Dec. 10, *Life Beat* tells the story of a musical production which began in a Toronto Western Hospital cafeteria 14 years ago and now runs at Harbourfront to sold-out audiences.

Every Day's Little Pleasures on Dec. 17 is a Christmas gift worth taping and sharing. It's a portrait of an ordinary Cambridge couple who do extraordinary things every day with their five



Vladimir Kabelik has been spending a lot of time in a TV editing suite, preparing his documentary series.

John Rennison, *The Spectator*

adopted children.

Ingrid and Bruce Campbell and their two grown sons Nathan and Bart work miracles with family additions André, Patrick, Allyne, Matthew and Teddy. The children's special needs, including fetal alcohol syndrome, cerebral palsy, spina bifida and autistic behaviour made them readily available for adoption.

There are on-going medical emergencies in this household and a constant financial squeeze. Bruce, an instructor at the Toronto Fire Academy, mentions that wheelchairs are "enormously expensive". They relocated from Toronto to be able to afford a larger house. Bruce spends three hours a day commuting, as a result.

Vladimir and his crew followed the family's daily routine for nine months to distill 22 minutes of "little pleasures". The understated, straightforward telling of the Campbells' story only heightens the drama of their superhuman efforts and the incalculable rewards they reap.

To understand Vladimir's mission to create work reflecting his interest in spirituality and humanitarianism, we need to rewind his own

life's film a few decades. He's now 51. He was 17 when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia in 1968. Living in Prague near the heaviest attack, the sensitive teenager registered lifelong memories.

"I remember the night when there was suddenly a tremendous noise in the streets, helicopters, tanks, bombing and sporadic shooting. People were rushing to the hospital to donate blood. Soldiers were everywhere."

That was the physical ugliness. The more damaging psychological cruelty came later. In '68, Vladimir wanted to stay and fight. By the late '70s, he was personally feeling the decay of "endless compromises". He says the Communists understood the power of the media to undermine their takeover. Like other artists, he tried to fight back with double messages. Film was no longer just entertainment. "It was something much deeper."

The filmmaker has come to look at teaching from the same perspective. He began to teach television production at Sheridan College in '84, another way to pay the bills of a struggling immigrant family.

Later, he realized it was more than a job. "You don't teach about buttons — you're shaping human lives. That's when I started loving it. It's very responsible to teach and produce the kind of programming Vision is interested in."

Vladimir's Canadian credits include produc-

tions for CBC, CTV and media in Saskatchewan, Alberta, B.C. and Québec. But when it comes to television which doesn't talk down to its audience, he's lavish in his praise of Vision.

"From a director's or producer's point of view, there are only a few lights in the tunnel and Vision is one. They have so much guts you don't see anywhere else. There are no words how to appreciate them. It would sound cheesy."

The producer is equally generous when he talks of the teamwork needed to make films. He is principal owner of Artcore Productions in Oakville. But he urges that this piece emphasize the huge contribution of all the players, including: directors Gita Hosek and Heather Ross; directors of photography George Hosek and Allan Piil; editor Tim Reid; music composer George Guerrette and audio recordists Patrick Rowan and Peter M. Miller.

Peter Gzowski has a memorable line in the film: "Books open the world to people and because of that, you get better people."

The same can be said of the films in *Tender Souls*. Episodes air at 10 p.m. on Vision on Dec. 3, 10, 17 and 31 and Jan. 7.



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