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In Search of Pandora Experimentia

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In Search of *Pandora Experimentia*

By Brian R. Hauser

For the majority of Wes Craven's biographers, the director's film career begins with his 1972 feature *The Last House on the Left*. A few, like Thommy Hutson, note his early days learning editing while working for Harry Chapin.ⁱ Craven himself also occasionally revealed his early work on various adult films (see for instance his appearance in *Inside Deep Throat* [Fenton Bailey, Randy Barbato, 1950]). However, Wes Craven's first film was actually a 45-minute student film for which he was Director of Photography while he was a faculty member at Clarkson College of Technology (CCT) in 1968. Curiously, Craven often tells or remembers the details of this experience incorrectly and even inconsistently. For instance, in one interview he recalls the title of this film as *The Searchers*, when in fact its title was the much more striking *Pandora Experimentia*.ⁱⁱ These erroneous details concerning Craven's early filmmaking experiences give us a curious picture of the development of one of the most influential horror filmmakers of the twentieth century.

Craven's brief sojourn in New York's North Country is no secret, but certain details have taken on the character of legend, especially locally. In the late-1960s, he was a Professor of Humanities who held an MA from Johns Hopkins University. Though Craven only taught at Clarkson for two years from 1966 to 1968, his time there, in light of his later successful film career, has provided fodder for numerous local stories concerning the origins of one of his best-known films *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. Like other towns in the United States, Potsdam does have an Elm Street; it is one of the main downtown roads, and it skirts the northern edge of what was the college's main campus in the 1960s. It has long been part of new students' informal orientation to Clarkson that they hear the story of how Wes Craven helped some undergraduates

make a parody-horror film called (you guessed it) *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, that the boiler room of Old Snell Hall inspired Freddy's boiler room scenes, and that the former Theta Chi fraternity house at 10 Elm Street was popularly known as the "Elm Street House" and had been used as a location in the student project.ⁱⁱⁱ In 2010, there was a brief and unsuccessful campaign to save this house from demolition by playing on its tenuous connection with Craven's legacy. The problem with all of this, as with most urban legends, is that virtually none of it is true. Though Wes Craven has passed away, a more accurate version of the making of *Pandora Experimentia* still exists by virtue of the students who made it with him (Ken Lyon, John Heneage, and Rob McConaghy), corroborated with and supplemented by various archival materials and the interviews the director also did with authors like Hutson, John Wooley, and Jason Zinoman.^{iv} The story that these sources tell is a fascinating and unexpected slice of underground film history from a time and place that few would have expected to launch such an important 'master of horror'.

The setting for most of this story is Clarkson College of Technology, a STEM^v-focused school nestled in the middle of New York's North Country in the village of Potsdam. Clarkson was and is an institution best known for training engineers. There is no film school there, and while SUNY Potsdam is the state university system's music and arts conservatory campus, there never has been a thriving local filmmaking culture. Film historians have chronicled the underground movie scenes in Baltimore, Florida, Los Angeles, New York City, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco in the 1950s and 60s,^{vi} but there is understandably less information about the kinds of shorts and features that were being created in more out of the way places across the country. Of course, the same availability of relatively inexpensive consumer motion picture technology that made those other underground film scenes possible were also being used

elsewhere. Though home movies were probably more likely to be shot in regular 8mm and Super-8 formats, a wide variety of consumer-grade 16mm film cameras and film were available to the public. In 1968, Wes Craven owned a wind-up Revere C-103 16mm camera that he had bought used. Craven was looking for an opportunity to become a filmmaker, and a couple of undergraduates at Clarkson provided the opportunity.

Though always a small village, Potsdam did not hide away from the counterculture and the bohemian atmosphere evident across American colleges in the 1960s. The village sported two student-run coffee houses (The Pendulum and The Cider Jug), where scholars and other locals could drink coffee and listen to live music and poetry readings. Potsdam also boasted a number of well-known musical acts such as Pete Seeger, Jefferson Airplane, and the Yardbirds. Clarkson even matriculated two of the musicians who later formed Blue Öyster Cult (whose music was famously used on John Carpenter's *Halloween* [1978]). At the time, the student-run Culture Committee of CCT hosted a program called "Cinema as an Art," which screened one or two films most Wednesday nights during the academic year in the theater of Snell Hall on Clarkson's campus.

Cinema as an Art brought interesting American and international films to Potsdam. Craven told author John Wooley, "There was an art house in the town that showed foreign films, and it was just at the beautiful fruition of the New Wave in Europe...So the first films I really saw that were grown up artistic films were the films of the New Wave—Buñuel, Fellini, Truffaut, all of those wonderfully inventive directors and writer-directors."^{vii} There is some evidence to suggest that Craven's experience watching these films encouraged him to think about filmmaking as an artistic alternative to novel writing, though he did eventually publish a work of fiction in his later life (*The Fountain Society* in 1999).^{viii} If this is the case, it would perhaps further explain his

choice of a 16mm movie camera. Such a camera, though purchased used, would come with higher film and processing costs which would not make a lot of sense for a young academic looking to make home movies with his family and/or friends. But if part of his goal was to learn filmmaking and make projects worth screening to larger audiences (such as his later *The Last House on the Left*), then a 16mm camera could provide that opportunity in a way that an 8mm home movie camera would not.

It is intriguing to think about the likelihood that Wes Craven took full advantage of Potsdam's cultural offerings. Craven grew up in Cleveland, Ohio before attending and graduating from Wheaton College in Illinois. From Wheaton (where his first wife, Bonnie Broecker, also went to college) Wes entered the writing MA program at Johns Hopkins University under Elliot Coleman, working as the Professor's aide during his period of study. Coleman, also a Wheaton graduate, founded The Writing Seminars at Hopkins in 1947, which over several decades ushered through such notables as John Barth, Russell Baker, Julia Randall, Joseph Whitehill, Richard Kim, and Josephine Jacobsen. Craven's thesis was the novel, *Noah's Ark: The Journals of a Madman*, which he hoped would launch his career as a serious American novelist.^{ix} Upon completing this work, Coleman noted to his student how intensely visual his writing was and that he should think of writing screenplays.^x Craven graduated from JHU and married Bonnie before beginning his first teaching job at Westminster College in Pennsylvania between Erie and Pittsburgh.^{xi} However, after that first and only year at Westminster, the Cravens left Pennsylvania for Potsdam, New York and the somewhat higher pay at Clarkson College of Technology.

Wes and Bonnie arrived in Potsdam with their one-year-old son Jonathan and found an apartment in the village's downtown area not far from *The Pendulum* and *The Roxy* movie

theatre and only a few blocks from CCT's main campus. At the time, Clarkson required its students to complete a sequence of humanities courses designed to give the school's engineering and science majors a generalized college-level introduction to history, literature, and the arts. These are the courses that Wes taught for the two years he worked at Clarkson. Among his colleagues at CCT, Wes met Stu Fischhoff, a young Psychology who was also the adviser to the new drama club and was busy stirring up dramatic interest among the budding engineers at CCT.

Fischhoff had long maintained an interest in both theater and film, and he did his best to spread this interest wherever he taught, including Clarkson. In the 1965-66 academic year, he helped to organize the first-ever drama club on the campus. That first year, the club put on a staged reading of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*. But in the fall of 1966, the club was robust enough in both student interest and enthusiasm to mount its first production on the boards. They also developed stage presentations of Jean-Paul Sartre's *No Exit* (with Craven directing) and Edward Albee's *The Sandbox* in the fall.^{xiii} An editorial in the first issue of the school newspaper for the following semester praised the club for its productions while also chastising it roundly for the cast and crew's conduct during a wrap party.^{xiii} Among the students working alongside Craven at the time were John Heneage and Rob McConaghy, who were also integral to *Pandora Experimentia*, and had been helping with production design and stage lighting.

Heneage was an electrical engineering major who made a name at Clarkson and around Potsdam more generally for being skilled at setting up stage lighting for musical and theatrical performances. John made friends with Ken Lyon after Ken responded to one of the drama club's advertisements in *The Integrator* in the late-winter or early-spring of 1968. Ken also came to Clarkson as an electrical engineering major, but he had drifted away from his studies. Engineering did not interest him anymore, and he quickly found himself doing poorly in his

classes. However, with the intervention of his parents with the CCT administration, Ken was able to make good use of his previous coursework and salvage his degree by switching to a mathematics major. In the meantime, Ken discovered that his real passion was for poetry and literature, which helped direct his attention to the new drama club.

By the spring semester of 1968, the club was continuing to find its identity, although its selection of material remained more cerebral than popular. The troupe planned to stage a production of *Taliped Decanus* (or, “The Clubfooted Dean”), a parodic play situated in the center of John Barth’s 1966 meta-fictional novel *Giles Goat-Boy*, and they had progressed far enough to stage a preview of their effort late in the previous fall term.^{xiv} The novel is a satire of campus life, and the play-within-the-novel (shades perhaps of Craven’s later meta-movies) is a parody of both Freud and Sophocles. However, it never came to fruition, and it occurred to Heneage or McConaghy or Fischhoff that they might be able to make a film instead.^{xv} The film they set out to make was full of bawdy fun and slapstick humor, echoing in some ways the more literary humor of Barth’s play. John and Ken Lyon teamed up and wrote the idea for *Pandora Experimentia* in a couple of days on Ken’s portable Smith-Corona typewriter.^{xvi} The document was much closer to a silent film scenario than a screenplay for the reason that the duo knew that their film would not be able to utilize synchronized sound. The Revere C-103 was a fine 16mm home movie or documentary film camera, but its relatively loud wind-up motor made it ill-suited for using on location. Instead, they were forced to think visually as filmmakers had been for the early decades of cinema history before the advent of ‘talkies’. It is no surprise, then, that a prohibition on synchronized sound meant that the film probably would not follow the intellectual and philosophical path of the previous drama club productions. There is certainly a rich tradition of silent and/or experimental films that eschew dialogue while still plumbing the depths of

profound human thought and experience; words are not absolutely necessary to philosophical film.

Left to their own devices, John and Ken wrote *Pandora Experimentia* and also a possible project called *Sleeper* and chose to adapt a science-fiction horror story, “The Large Ants,” as their short film entitled *Remorse*.^{xvii} These films were not brooding and philosophical or arch and satirical. They were kinetic, chaotic, exuberant, irreverent, and above all supposed to be funny. The duo showed their finished scenario for *Pandora* to Stu Fischhoff, whose approval as the drama club adviser they needed if they wanted to be able to use his funds to produce their film. Fischhoff would sign off on the project and this approval released the \$300 drama club budget, which adjusts to approximately \$2,500 today. As early as March 27, 1968, *The Integrator* ran a short article about the film shoot already in progress. That article credits Ken, John, and Wes with co-writing the script, though Ken and John confirm that it was only the two of them who contributed to the scenario.^{xviii} The article also indicates that the club planned to make a second film in addition to *Pandora*.

With a scenario in hand and Fischhoff’s approval as their faculty adviser, Lyon and Heneage were able to begin assembling their cast and crew. First and foremost, they were going to need a camera and a director of photography. Heneage was aware that Craven had a movie camera, and Fischhoff asked him if he wanted to shoot the film with the two students co-directing.^{xix} Craven’s Revere was a rugged, metal, wind-up motion-picture camera with a rotating turret lens system with mounts for three lenses. Photos from the *Pandora* shoot indicate that Craven’s camera had three lenses mounted, which would normally include a 1’ mid-range lens, a 0.75’ wide-angle lens, and 2’ or longer telephoto lens, each with their own smaller viewfinder lens also mounted into the turret plate. The camera loaded 100’ daylight spools of

16mm film, each of which was good for between two and a half to four minutes of film, depending on the selected frame rate. Since *Pandora* was not a synchronized sound film, there was no particular reason to shoot at 24 frames per second (fps), so Craven likely shot at 18fps as an economizing measure. Even so, at over \$11 per 100' spool in 1968, the film stock and processing alone would have cost between \$150 and \$200 or more, depending on the outtake ratio. Given that Ken and John recall spending anywhere between \$300 and \$400 on film and processing, there was likely a higher outtake ratio in which only about half the shot and processed film was used in the final cut.^{xx} It is also worth noting that the club produced two additional short films, *Sleeper* and *Remorse*, which would also be included in their recollection of the film and processing costs.^{xxi} When asked about the processed film that they cut together, Ken Lyon did not remember any of it being muddy, out of focus, or badly exposed.

Principal photography took place over several weeks in March and April of 1968. The following is a description of sequences from *Pandora Experimentia* gleaned from the recollections of the students who produced it. They admit that their memories may not be fully accurate and that the scenes are not necessarily presented in the order they appear in the film; however, in gathering together their memories of the production, they did have the advantage of corroborating or challenging each other's contributions. Short of locating and reviewing the film itself, this is the most accurate description of the content ever published. Still, every effort has been made to note when a fact or detail is especially fuzzy. *Pandora* is not so much a narrative film as a sequential one. Most sequences revolve around someone looking for something (no doubt accounting in some measure for Craven recalling the title as *The Searchers*), in some cases the kind of mysterious box implied by the title, and often the sequence's action resolves itself

humorously or absurdly. Accordingly, the scenario is given as a list rather than a traditional synopsis.

- *Pandora Experimentia* begins with a credit sequence painted onto several large sheets of paper. These sheets were then filmed one-by-one while each sheet was set on fire, using the burning away of each sheet as a natural visual transition between the credits. One of the sheets did not burn adequately, so a crew member threw gasoline on it.
- A large gathering of men in suits and wearing white armbands arrives at a farm in several cars. The men gather inside the farm's grain silo to receive their instructions. These were all of the men who would be searching for the eponymous box throughout the film. This scene and the opening credits prior to it were screened with the theme music to *Mission: Impossible* to emphasize suspense.^{xxii}
- There is a sequence involving cadet corps marching across a field.^{xxiii}
- The Pool Hall scene focuses on a student smoking a cigar while playing pool in the Vernon (a popular student bar in downtown Potsdam). This scene was set to Dave Brubeck's "Unsquare Dance" lending it a particular atmosphere of contemporary cool.
- A bank robber in a red and white horizontal striped rugby shirt, domino mask, and a cabbie cap holds up the Marine Midlands Bank on Elm Street in Potsdam.^{xxiv} The bank gamely provided the student filmmakers with one hundred one-dollar bills that could be thrown in the air when the robber's plans went awry.

- The robber from the previous sequence is marched into the Potsdam Village Jail. When the door to the cell is opened, a gaggle of bikini-clad women come bursting out.
- In a sequence that uses some creative editing, a male student is waiting to cross Market Street in downtown Potsdam, but the light indicates, “Don’t Walk.” When the light finally says “Walk,” he steps into the street and is run down by a train.
- The bathtub sequence involves a female student lounging in a bubble bath. Several men in suits and ties enter the scene and search the bathtub while the woman is still in it.^{xxv}
- The radio tower sequence involves Ken Lyon climbing halfway up a 400-foot radio tower. Ken plays a man climbing the tower to get a look into the distance (searching, always searching), while being pursued by others. The sequence features what appears to be the falling death of Ken’s character, which was achieved by having him haul a straw-stuffed dummy up the ladder with him and throwing it off when he got a signal from the ground. This scene was intercut with the next one, suggesting that the appearance of the woman waving from the window causes the fall.
- A woman (played by Joyce Simpson), in a bathrobe, waves to the camera out of her second-story apartment window before turning her back to the window and walking out of view. The scenario called for Joyce to remove her bathrobe after turning away from the window, but she refused to do so.

- The Mystery Box scene features a large colorful box situated in the middle of a field. The crew had repurposed the box from a theater set. It was collapsible, and when the box falls apart, a group of women hidden inside come running out of it.
- In the college laundry, workers are picking through a large pile of loose laundry when suddenly a young woman in a skirt and bra bursts from the pile and runs off.
- There was a hospital scene in which Ken portrays a doctor (in gown and mask) performing body transplants. The hospital generously supplied the use of a gurney for the scene.
- One sequence was filmed at the local downtown grocery store (Donah's "Big M"), which features students pushing shopping carts up and down the aisles, jamming the carts into one another, and upsetting merchandise including broken bags of flour. This scene featured some mobile camerawork involving Craven being pushed around inside a shopping cart while he filmed.
- Another scene inverts the popular "How Many Students Can You Fit into a VW Beetle" challenge by using a simple framing set up to depict a hoard of students emerging from a single car.
- *Pandora Experimentia* ends with shots of a student clambering over some rocks and finally discovering "the box" hinted at in the title. The film runs out with a countdown leader, cutting to black.

This list of scenes gives a relatively detailed picture of what *Pandora Experimentia* may have been like both to shoot and to watch. Since there was no synchronized sound for the film, the

scenario that Lyon and Heneage wrote relied heavily on simple visuals and comedy. As a number of alumni who recall seeing the film in the spring of 1968 reported, the greatest impressions it left were of scatological humor and irreverence.

Since the scenario was not an intricate and coherent dramatic narrative with dialogue, very little rehearsal was necessary for the shoot. John and Ken would let the given actors in a scene know what they needed to do, and Wes would set up the camera (usually on a tripod and using a shutter release cable to reduce shake). Reportedly Craven was always on the look-out for interesting angles. And yet, things did not always go as planned. In the scene where a student waits for the walk signal to cross a busy street, only to be mowed down by a passing freight train, Ken had told the actor to look for his hand signal so as to begin walking at the right time. However, a passing group of friends prompted Ken to wave at the wrong moment, sending the actor out into the dangerously busy road at the wrong moment. These sorts of mishaps sometimes led to opportunities, too. In the scene that called for Ken and others to climb the radio tower, someone must have seen the students climbing the mast and called the police. As the car approached at speed, its lights and sirens blaring, Wes shouted for Ken to complete the shot quickly by throwing the stuffed dummy from the tower before the police arrived. Of course, this meant that the police worried that someone had actually fallen from the tower. The police were not impressed by the scene they found and hauled everyone present down to the village jail to charge them with trespassing. Eventually, they were convinced that the whole thing was for a student film, and they let the group off with a warning not to engage in any more dangerous antics. But Ken saw the jail experience as a valuable opportunity for the film and convinced the police to let them film a scene in the cells. Craven would take this renegade shoot-by-the-skin-of-the-teeth approach into *The Last House on the Left*.

With their film 'in the can' John and Ken and a few others members of cast and crew embarked on post-production, which consisted of two main phases. First, they needed to edit the processed film into a final cut. Clarkson did not have film editing equipment, but St. Lawrence University, a few miles down the road, did. John was able to arrange the use of their editing suite after hours, when the students and faculty would not be needing it. John and Ken pulled an all-nighter with their film and a box of doughnuts, surrounded by strips of 16mm film stock hanging from wires strung across the room, with Ken choosing and cutting the shots and John splicing them together.^{xxvi} As is often the case, the editing room was the site of some serendipitous art. When the pool hall scene with a student, called Bob Ballon, smoking a cigar was cut into the film, John spliced it in backwards and upside down. At first they were angry at their mistake, but they also thought it was funny, so they kept it that way rather than correct the edit.^{xxvii} By dawn, they had a forty-five-minute film, but they were not quite finished. The film still needed a soundtrack, even if it was not technically a synchronized one.

To tackle the soundtrack challenge, John and Ken turned to Rob McConaghy. McConaghy was a mechanical engineering major at Clarkson, who relished the chance to solve the technical challenge of recording a quasi-synchronized soundtrack. In the end, McConaghy chose to run the tape recorder through a Variac transformer to allow minor adjustments to the playback speed during screenings.^{xxviii} Creating the soundtrack itself was much more straightforward. John, Ken, and Rob met at a farmhouse outside of the village where Rob and John were roommates. They had a reel-to-reel tape recorder, a collection of about thirty records, and a mattress on the floor so that they could take turns sleeping while at least two of them handled the recording. Many of the songs they used are lost to time, but the trio all agree that

they used Lalo Schiffrin's main theme from *Mission: Impossible*, Ennio Morricone's main theme from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, and Dave Brubeck's "Unsquare Dance."

With the soundtrack now concluded, the film was complete, and the production team was ready to screen their work. They then began the marketing phase of their project, and the team proved just as creative with advertising as they had been with the film itself. John wrote and Ken edited a full-page article/advertisement, "The Potsdam Underground Surfaces with *Pandora Experimentia*," which ran in Clarkson's newspaper *The Integrator* on May 8, 1968 framed by over a dozen behind-the-scenes photos. The ad is full of hyperbole, billing the film as "the ultimate movie experience...able to conquer the wide screen in naked color, Ultra-Vision, and Vision-Vision." These carny-type claims, with hints to salacity ('naked color') were perhaps echoed by the infamous copy on the newspaper ads for Craven's first wide-release film just a few years later, *The Last House on the Left* (1972), which insist, "Warning! Not recommended for persons over 30!...To avoid fainting keep repeating, It's only a movie...only a movie...only a movie...Can a movie go too far?"^{xxxix} The *Pandora* ad quotes a fictitious "underground film guru" named Otto Muttner, a sort of impresario/producer character, praising John and Ken and Wes for their work, "Not once did my directors use any common knowledge or sense of decency, therefore I will be using them for all my films in the near future." There is reference to the crew being arrested, and the large number of students and locals included in the film, both knowingly and unknowingly. In fact, this became one of the main thrusts of the advertisement; come see the film, because you just might be in it...

The debut weekend screenings were standing-room-only affairs in the auditorium of Damon Hall on Clarkson's downtown campus. There were three showings per night at 7:00pm, 8:00pm, and 9:00pm.^{xxx} The ads and word of mouth did their work. The first night's receipts

totaled around \$350, and the second night's totals were similar. In all, *Pandora Experimentia* turned a profit on the drama club budget. Continuing the legacy of exploitation carnies (think *Mom and Dad* [William Beaudine, 1945]) one member of the cast even dressed up as Otto Muttner and mingled with the audience in character. Stu Fischhoff, as the faculty adviser to the drama club, acted as the announcer/narrator for the evening. John and Rob set up the projector, and then Rob also handled the sound with the tape recorder and the Variac to keep it more or less synched. Since the only copy of the film they had was the reel they had spliced together at St. Lawrence University, it was almost inevitable that the film would break at some point. When it did during one screening, they simply let it unspool onto the floor of the projection booth while the film continued playing.

After the screenings were over, the cast and crew used the proceeds to throw a beer bash cast party at Bill Sherman's farm a few miles outside of the village, where they had already filmed inside the grain silo and the rocky fields. Sherman is featured in one of the behind-the-scenes photos on the full-page ad in *The Integrator*. The photo is captioned "Party Director," but this is rather a reference to his general reputation rather than to the cast party, since the ad of course ran a week or two prior to the party. He opened his barn and the group built a huge bonfire and partied into the night.

According to myth, once Pandora opens the box, all of the evils contained within it are released into the world except for hope. Hope is all that remains within the box. On the one hand, there is an interpretation of this ending that focuses on the fact that hope is listed among the other evils of the world. In this view, gifting humanity with hope is a kind of cruelty that either prolongs suffering or at least distracts people from the reality of the ubiquity of suffering. But then there is the more positive (mis)interpretation in which our wishes, aspirations, and

ambitions are sometimes all we have to hold onto, and that motivation can sometime prove enough to carry us when other support is absent. The people who made *Pandora Experimentia* were mostly very young. There were college students, but Wes Craven and Stu Fischhoff were by then in their late 20s when they helped make the film. And they made *Pandora* at a time of social, political, and artistic turmoil... and possibility. Potsdam, New York did (and still does) have a music scene largely by virtue of the Crane School of Music at SUNY Potsdam, but the small North Country village never had an underground film scene. For a brief season in 1968, the men and women making *Pandora Experimentia* were that film scene. They perhaps unleashed something by making that film, something that would continue to echo throughout the rest of their lives.

Wes Craven's future following this premiere is well-documented. His interviews with Wooley seem to indicate that it was his experience going to the cinema to view art screenings, held on Wednesday nights at Clarkson, that inspired him to imagine himself as a filmmaker. Perhaps Wes Craven viewed *Pandora* as a kind of boot camp. The college was providing money for film and developing, the students wrote the scenario, gathered all of the actors, and did the editing and soundtrack. Wes put in the time and effort and in return got a crash course in underground filmmaking. It does seem clear that his experience shooting *Pandora* accounts for a change in his thinking about his artistic future. When his department chair at CCT told him that he needed to spend less time running around making movies with undergraduates and more time pursuing a Ph.D. if he wanted to advance in the academic world, Wes took that advice to heart and quit academia.^{xxxii} Craven traveled to New York City and attempted to get a job in the film industry. His initial attempts were unsuccessful, and he was forced to return upstate and teach high school for a year not far from Potsdam. However, he was more successful the following

year due to a connection with Steve Chapin, a friend and former student of Craven's at Clarkson. Wes taught during Steve's junior and senior years, and Steve recounts to author Jason Zinoman how he and Wes used to hang out together and smoke a lot of pot.^{xxxii} Steve Chapin is brother to Harry and Tom Chapin of the famous musical Chapin family. At the time, Harry Chapin was also involved in documentary production through his studios in New York, and Steve helped put in a good word for his friend and former professor. Harry was able to show Wes how to perform some rudimentary audio editing, and that helped him to secure some of his initial jobs in film production from 1969-71. As mentioned, Craven himself indicated during interviews for the 2005 documentary *Inside Deep Throat* that several of his earliest jobs in filmmaking were part of the "other Hollywood" of the adult film industry.^{xxxiii} Ken Lyon's recollections of several meetings with Wes in New York City in the 1970-71 timeframe corroborate that account. It is from these beginnings that Craven was able to work with Peter Locke on *You've Got to Walk It Like You Talk It Or You'll Lose That Beat* (1971) as one of that film's editors, which attracted the attention of Sean Cunningham, later of *Friday the 13th* (1980) fame. Sometime during this period, possibly when Cunningham and Craven were attempting to convince their financial backers that Craven could direct as well as edit, Wes borrowed the only existing copy of *Pandora Experimentia* from John Heneage. Despite decades of attempting to get in touch with Wes about the film, neither Ken nor John has seen the film since then. Ken tried to locate the film after Wes's death in 2015, but Craven's estate indicates that it is not among the late director's possessions.

Pandora Experimentia also had an impact on many others who were involved in its production, even if they did not all wind up in Hollywood. The other person who did eventually make his way to Tinseltown was Stu Fischhoff. According to Fischhoff, Clarkson fired him not

long after for his anti-Vietnam War activities on and off campus.^{xxxiv} This was not at all deleterious to his career, however. Fischhoff went on to become a driving force in the field of media psychology with a long career as a faculty member at California State University, Los Angeles as well as becoming the senior editor of the *Journal of Media Psychology*. In addition to this highly successful academic career, Fischhoff became a screenwriter as well as a psychological consultant to film and television productions. He died in 2014.

Ken Lyon finished his math degree at Clarkson, and with Wes's help he found a place in the same Johns Hopkins University Writing Seminars where Wes got his MA. Ken threw himself into poetry while in Baltimore and then went on to become an English teacher in Vermont, Colorado, and Washington, getting his doctorate in fiction writing along the way, and finishing his career in public school administration. Ken still writes poetry and is about to start work on a novel. John Heneage finished his degree, as well, and went on to a long and successful career as a nuclear engineer. What Ken and John and other friends like Rob McConaghy took away from their experience making *Pandora* was that it was possible to have a big idea, something that seemed unlikely or even impossible, and they could gather together a group of interested people willing to see if they could make it work. John in particular sees this as emblematic of late 1960s.^{xxxv} The world was tumultuous, and people all over the world were reacting to the full gamut of evils they saw. And yet there was still hope, too, hope that people could come together to make something good after all.

Despite the fact that filmmaking was not seen as something easily available to anyone who was interested in it (certainly not in the way it is now to anyone with a smartphone in their pocket), a couple of undergraduates in a remote northern New York village were able to gather a minimum of resources and a maximum of willing volunteers to make their vision into a reality.

No one expected to make any money from it or to gain any kind of real fame. And yet, the experience and the accomplishment itself had a profound impact on a number of people involved. The experience of that shoot fired Wes Craven's artistic imagination and ambition in ways that only a couple years before would have been completely unthinkable (recall how Craven was crushed by his thesis adviser's comment that his novel read like a screenplay). And Craven's influence as a professor and mentor to students like Ken Lyon may be just as important. Certainly, Wes reached more people with his films than he did as a professor of literature, but he left behind a legacy in both careers that continues to influence others to this day.

We may never actually get to see *Pandora Experimentia* again. Wes may have destroyed it at some point after 1970, or it may have been thrown away inadvertently. If it has not been stored properly for the past half century, then it may not be in very good condition anyway. But maybe it is still out there somewhere, waiting to be found by someone who will recognize it for what it is. It is the kind of possibility that gives one hope.

i Thommy Hutson, *Never Sleep Again: The Elm Street Legacy—The Making of Wes Craven's A Nightmare on Elm Street*, (New York, NY: Permuted Press, 2016), 24.

ii John Wooley, *Wes Craven: The Man and His Nightmares*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 33.

iii Joe Bushey, "10 Things You [Probably] Didn't Know About Clarkson," Clarkson University, June 6, 2018, <https://diy.clarkson.edu/undergrad/10-things-you-didnt-know-about-clarkson/>. It should also perhaps be mentioned that with its theme of an older generation responsible for the horrors that now haunt a younger one, the 'Elm Street' in the title of Craven's iconic film could relate to that on which John F. Kennedy was assassinated (also giving us the title *A Nightmare on Elm Street*).

iv Jason Zinoman, *Shock Value: How A Few Eccentric Outsiders Gave Us Nightmares, Conquered Hollywood, and Invented Modern Horror*, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2011).

v STEM is an acronym for "science, technology, engineering, and mathematics."

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- vi See Wheeler W. Dixon, *The Exploding Eye: A Re-Visionary History of the 1960s Experimental Cinema*, (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1997). Xavier Mendik and Steven Jay Schneider, Eds, *Underground U.S.A.: Filmmaking Beyond the Hollywood Canon*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).
- vii Wooley, 32.
- viii Wooley, 32-33.
- ix The novel is narrated by Noah Songsti, the son of a parson. The Songsti family lives in a stone cottage in a cemetery overshadowed by an enormous bridge that arcs toward “the city.” Noah is essentially the madman in the attic of this cottage, and the novel evinces an intense Gothic atmosphere, which Kendall R. Phillips suggests is the driving aesthetic in Wes Craven’s film career. Though there is nothing overtly supernatural in the novel, the narrator perceives monsters and nightmares and seemingly marvelous events. Kendall R. Phillips, “The Gothic Dimensions in the Films of Wes Craven,” *Dark Directions: Romero, Craven, Carpenter, and the Modern Horror Film*, (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012), 73-74.
- x Zinoman, 68-69.
- xi Westminster later graduated Greg Nicotero in 1985, who went on to become one of the most well-known and influential horror make-up artists of the past forty years, including work on *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5: The Dream Child* and *New Nightmare* (only in the latter did he work with Craven).
- xii “Drama Club Soon on Stage; Extensive Work Has Been Done,” *The Integrator* (Potsdam, NY), Dec. 6, 1966. 1, 7.
- xiii “The Drama Club,” Editorial Section, *The Integrator* (Potsdam, NY), Jan. 10, 1967. 2.
- xiv “Notices,” *The Integrator* (Potsdam, NY), Nov. 15, 1967. 4.
- xv Though no one remembers precisely who had the idea first, the only candidates given what they do recall are Heneage, McConaghy, and Stu Fischhoff.
- xvi Ken Lyon, email message to author, Sep. 22, 2015.
- xvii Ken was not directly involved in *Remorse*; it was more John and Rob’s project.
- xviii “Drama Club Producing Films,” *The Integrator* (Potsdam, NY), Mar. 27, 1968. 4.
- xix Ken Lyon, email message to author, Nov. 18, 2021.
- xx Ken Lyon, email message to author, Sep. 22, 2015.
- xxi “Remorse,” adapted from Howard Fast’s 1960 science-fiction short story “The Large Ant,” was one of two short films that members of the crew made around the same time. The other was a thirty-second short titled “Sleeper,” which was also referred to in at least the September 1968 *Integrator* screening advertisement as “Kicks,” for which Craven again acted as cameraman. “Remorse,” in particular, is interesting, because it is a sort of science-fiction-horror story in which a man kills a fourteen-inch long ant out of an instinctive fear of the unknown, later regretting his hasty decision and what it says about human nature. It was precisely the kind of fear film that would continue to fascinate both Wes Craven and Stu Fischhoff as their careers unfolded over the following decades, though Heneage recalls that Craven only leant his camera for the film and was not himself involved in its production. John Heneage, email to author, Sep. 24, 2021.
- xxii Ken Lyon, email message to author, Nov. 18, 2021.
- xxiii The film was produced at the height of U.S. involvement in the war in Vietnam, as well as the height of war protests which had reached Potsdam, as well. The inclusion of marching soldiers in the film was almost certainly meant ironically/satirically.
- xxiv It would be nice if the shirt had been a red and green-striped sweater and the hat a fedora, a la Freddy Krueger, but alas no.
- xxv This is perhaps Craven’s primal bathtub scene of which we would see the descendants in *The Last House on the Left* (1972), *Deadly Blessing* (1981), and *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984). He was clearly drawn to this invasion of privacy and its evocation of vulnerability.

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- xxvi Ken Lyon, email messages to author, Sep. 22, 2015 and Nov. 18, 2021.
- xxvii Ken Lyon, email message to author, Nov. 18, 2021.
- xxviii Ken Lyon, email message to author, Sep. 22, 2015.
- xxix Hutson, 27.
- xxx "The Potsdam Underground Surfaces With Pandora Experimentia," *The Integrator* (Potsdam, NY), May 8, 1968. 5.
- xxxi Hutson, 24.
- xxxii Zinoman, 69.
- xxxiii *Inside Deep Throat*, directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato (2005; Universal City, CA: Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2005), DVD.
- xxxiv This may have been the academic version of firing which consists of a faculty member not being hired back for the next academic year on one pretext or another. Regardless of the details, Fischhoff's impression was that he was let go because of his political activities and speech. Jonathan Koenig, "Dr. Stuart Fischhoff," *Careers in Psychology*, Jun. 19, 2021, <https://careersinpsychology.org/interview/dr-stuart-fischhoff/>.
- xxxv John Heneage, email to author, Sep. 13, 2015.