



Melissa Hacker '75

Documentary filmmaker

Melissa Hacker, a pioneer in the true sense, is a member of one of the founding families of MCS. Her memories include going with Gus to view Gordon Parks' 1971 film *S Shaft*, meeting Black Panther members, and trips to the Farm when milking a gallon in one sitting was a graduation prerequisite and where she became a vegetarian after visiting a slaughterhouse in eighth grade. She also remembers being at her mother, Ruth Morley's side while she designed costumes for movies including *Taxi Driver*, *Miracle Worker*, *Tootsie* and *Annie Hall*. These experiences shaped Melissa's future activist career.

Melissa's adventurous spirit guided her to Stuyvesant High School. She was the first MCS student to attend this large, highly competitive school. Although the new, male-dominated environment was a shock, MCS had equipped her with a developed sense of self and keen social consciousness. Having Frank McCourt as an English teacher may have helped steady her nerves. Melissa attended civil disobedience trainings and joined an affinity group that protested at a secret nuclear power plant. Their success led Melissa and friends to start an anti-nuclear organization; they planned and attended rallies and demonstrations throughout high school. Later, in college at Oberlin, she formed two groups that continued her protest work and participated in Peace and Freedom Week in Washington, DC.

Melissa and a few friends left Oberlin to continue to do political work and live as communitarian anarchists in Seattle. She volunteered to work with battered women and abused children, a particularly demanding undertaking because of severe budget cuts in social services during the Reagan era. She also took Cinema Studies classes at the University of Washington, where she observed similar budget cuts in higher education, particularly in the arts. Melissa found she loved film editing and decided to pursue her new interest at New York University.

In making a documentary film about her mother, she learned that her experience in the Kindertransports during World War II had been shared by 10,000 other European children. This discovery launched a seven-year journey to produce, direct and edit *My Knees Were Jumping: Remembering the Kindertransports*, which tells the stories of children who, in order to be saved, were separated from their families a few months before the start of World War II. Most families never reunited. Melissa's award-winning film was narrated by Joanne Woodward and nominated for the Grand Jury Award at the 1996 Sundance Festival. It prompted new dialogue about the Holocaust and gave others the courage to ask their parents about their lives. Melissa has gone on to do documentary work in Nepal and has edited works such as *Sister Rose's Passion*, a winner at the Tribeca Film Festival for best documentary short, *The Collector of Bedford Street* and *Beyond Conviction*.

Melissa believes that film opens up new realms for its viewers; she is happy to be doing work she loves while making a difference in the world. A lover of learning and giving, since 9/11 Melissa has volunteered with her dog to provide animal therapy at St. Vincent's Hospital. She is enrolled in an Integrated Media Arts program at Hunter College.

In my personal life, when I am confronted by an issue, I feel I've either succeeded or failed by whether I'm being true to what MCS taught me.

Liam Plevin '79
Journalist