

Michael Semak - Clip 4

Working as an Assignment Photographer

The importance of the Stills Division of the National Film Board in the 60's and 70's. To me it was something Canada should have again...

In those days they gave people like me, young people, young photographers, a chance to develop. It doesn't mean I never would have been a photographer, but I had access. I had assignments, I sold photographs which I did on my own assignments or grant projects. The assignments usually came from...Mrs. Lorraine Monk, who was the executive producer in the 60s and 70s. And she would say, "I want you to do teenagers, and how they live, what they do in their spare time, in their social life." Or, "I want you to go to this institution for emotionally disturbed children." Or, "I want you to go to Vancouver, or Saint John's, Newfoundland." So usually they're open-ended. She trusted me enough that I would find my themes. She knew I would get enough material that she would have enough work, whether it's for an exhibition, for individual images, single images. For example, when she gave me the first assignment on the Italians in Toronto, she just said, "Go shoot Italians in Toronto." My first out of town assignment was shoot Ukrainians in the Prairies. And that's it. So, in that way I was very fortunate. She did not tie me down to anything.

