

Travels with Harvey, on video

By Tracey O'Shaughnessy

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LITCHFIELD — Road stories are as old as Homer.

Before there were Bing and Bob there were Odysseus, Whitman, Steinbeck and Kerouac. "I take to the open road," wrote Whitman with characteristic élan, opening up a journey to self and country.

Harvey Hubbell V's journey may not have been as poetic or self-indulgent as that, but the very pedestrian quality of it — the wacky twists and bizarre riffs — gives it strange lyricism. Hubbell makes no pretention to poetry.

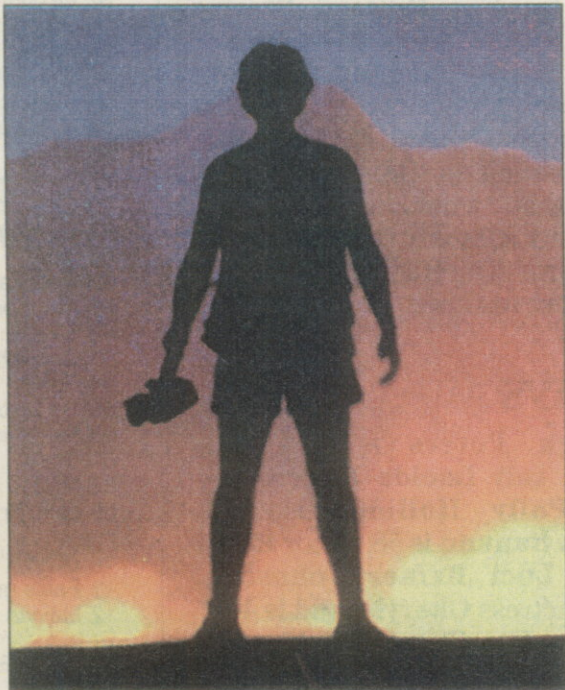
When his documentary, "Electronic Road Film: An American Odyssey," won a New England Emmy for outstanding entertainment program, Hubbell grabbed the statuette and exclaimed, "Am I an optimist, or what?"

Optimism floats through the 27-minute documentary, which will air tonight on CPTV at 10. Optimism also floats through the white clapboard 1812 farmhouse that Hubbell shares with his wife, documentary producer Andrea Hass Hubbell, and assorted guests.

A believer in the human spirit for hospitality, Hubbell has turned this old white farmhouse with its 36 acres of farmland and labyrinthine architecture into a home-cum-film studio-cum-hostel.

At the moment, in addition to producing a few documentaries and commercials, the house is hosting a couple of French travelers and one German, which is why the front of the house sports the American, French and German flags.

Please turn to 3D, HUBBELL



Harvey Hubbell V's documentary 'Electronic Road Film: An American Odyssey' can be seen tonight on CPTV at 10 p.m.

HUBBELL: Optimist hosts 'wildly different' passions

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Inside, while the two French brothers expertly dice up a few leeks and a German woman tosses onions into a large salad bowl, employees of the Hubbell's Captured Time productions are busily sending out letters to an assortment of ad-hoc employees, fundraisers and donors, editing a commercial and developing a new documentary on work.

"I'm an optimist," says the 38-year-old filmmaker, decked out in white short-sleeved oxford shirt, white suspenders, shorts, sneakers and a photographer's vest that holds two of their four phones. "Humans are basically people who like to study and learn things all the time. I believe laughter is the best medicine. It's good for you. You learn while you are laughing."

While Hubbell speaks, his wife, a tall blonde woman with a ready laugh, enters the slightly off-center room and announces, "Rain!" The two pull back the makeshift drapes and watch a lavender blotch of clouds soak sheets of rain down on their tidy lines of rather parched young corn. Andrea Hass Hubbell has a host of Emmys of her own. A lover of the documentary format since she first stepped into a Philadelphia public television station and began writing copy for a news program, she was the director of 1993's multi-Emmy-award-winning "The Roots of Roe," a historical look at the 1973 Supreme Court Roe v. Wade decision. She directed and co-wrote the script with Jeremy Brecher of West Cornwall. The documentary won 20 awards at 17 film festivals.

The two created Captured Time Productions when they married, eight years ago. "Electronic Road Film" is Harvey Hubbell's first directorial effort. In his resume, Hubbell explains that he is "an itinerant filmmaker who has survived production from the



Harvey Hubbell enjoys the moment in front of Mount Rushmore.

high-rise roofs of Warsaw to the banana boats of Peru" and that "When not tilling the soil, he annoys barn yard animals with his video camera."

As "Electronic Road Film" attests, the Newtown-born Hubbell has been doing just that for years. "Electronic Road Film" is an attempt to explore in a lighthearted way the quirks and commonalities of wildly different American types." But among the "wildly different" Americans has to be the peripatetic Hubbell family, whose vacation home videos animate this irreverent road trip like a welcome series of ironic asides. Hubbell includes footage of his great-grandfather taking a very similar trip across country in the 1920s. And when the Hubbells are in front of a moving camera, they

do what most of us don't — they move. They dance; they cavort; they pose; they sneer; they don costumes and wigs and hats, and if they aren't having the quintessential American good time, no one is.

"I grew up in a small Connecticut town where this guy was the milkman; this guy was the undertaker; this guy was the local newspaper reporter. I grew up in Newtown, where the air is clean and the grass is green. I lived three houses down from the flagpole in the center of town. You know the story. Thornton Wilder all the way."

But this was not enough for young Harvey. He wandered; he hitchhiked; he imposed; he proposed. When the United States wasn't enough, he went abroad. The hospitality he was ac-

corded has left him with an eternal gratitude that he reciprocates by allowing foreign visitors to spend a few nights chez lui. "I believe that nine out of 10 people are good people," he says. "I think there are so many people who are very much the same, more same than they are different. We all say the pledge of allegiance to the same flag.

"People who are different than us are not necessarily our enemies. That is not a bad message to hear right now when people are like, 'Hey, what militia are you in?'"

Not long ago, Hubbell was having an inauspicious career shoveling horse manure in a local farm before he started noticing that all life events, from politics to entertainment to business, were being videotaped. He wanted to get in on the ground floor and began traveling to New York to take any job he could in video production. Here is Hubbell's version of apprenticeship, "Hey kid. See that station wagon full of garbage? Drive it and park it on the peer."

"That's the way people crawl up the food chain of production," he says. "I got lucky and I worked very hard. Eventually, you keep cleaning up the director's cigar ashes up of the floor enough and he notices you and you get to do more important things. It is a weeding out period, the survival of the fittest."

For now, Hubbell is working on a documentary on a subject that has always intrigued him: Work. He says he finds it fascinating that people pick a career and stay with it for years. He is interested in what passion inspires people to keep doing one thing over and over again for decades.

"I always wanted to be in something where I wasn't doing the same stuff every day," he says. "As long as you wake up and say, nothing will surprise me today, you'll be all right."