**THE THINGS WE KEEP**

Press kit

A film by Alessandro Cassigoli and Casey Kauffman

Produced by Christian Popp, YUZU Productions

France, 2017, 75 minutes, HD

In coproduction with Al Jazeera, in collaboration with ARTE France La Lucarne, VGTV.

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**Synopsis**

In the age of non-stop news feeds, disposable media, and the constant self-documentation of our lives, we exist in a perpetual flow of impressions of the world. What remains on the retina? What do we decide to record? What do we preserve as memories and what shapes who we are? *The Things We Keep* is a kaleidoscope of stories and images drawn from 15 years of tapes and hard drives containing personal and journalistic footage. It plunges you into the back of smuggler trucks crossing the Sahara and into all night parties in Berlin. It leads you from a carefree student life in Rome, to the sniper alleys of Aleppo, and into a homeless shelter in Detroit. What begins as charming filmmaking by two friends who meet in the naiveté of their early twenties, quickly evolves into a broader meditation on what it means to go out into the world, and eventually come home.

**Interview with directors Alessandro Cassigoli and Casey Kauffman**

**How did you meet?**

ALESSANDRO: We met when Casey rented a room in the flat I was already living in. I had moved to Rome from Florence to look for jobs on film sets. When a room opened up in my flat, my friend told me an American guy from Florence was coming to Rome to look for a job in journalism. Casey and I were very different but started hanging out a lot. Casey would meet people from all different walks of life, at all times, and I would enjoy filming the encounters. Everything seemed like an adventure. It was a great period, we got our first jobs, had tons of parties in our flat, and we were always meeting new people. But then it all ended when Casey got a job and left for the Middle East.

**This story spans over the last 15 years. When did the idea for a documentary emerged?**

CASEY: The film was Alessandro’s idea and he has been the motor behind the project, especially at the beginning. Since Ale loved filmmaking and I was starting out in journalism, we had a common interest in filming things. We talked a lot about video cameras, about characters, about how to capture special moments, verité moments. When I started working as a one-man-band reporter/cameraman for Al Jazeera, Ale wanted to see the footage. And I wanted him to have it. An old cameraman once told me to always keep my own footage, otherwise it would be lost in the archives of whatever TV network you might be working for. So I wanted Ale to have my footage and I wanted his feedback. He started going through all of my rushes with the patience and eye of an artist - something I would never do.

ALESSANDRO: I felt there were special moments in the footage, I felt I could relate to all these people in the Middle East and Africa, people I would never even meet. I was was moved by the footage and thought it was wasted on TV news, that something more could be done with it. So that’s how the first idea of making a documentary emerged. Not even myself knew what kind of documentary would emerge but I was moved and knew I had to do something to communicate my feeling to others.

**This film is as much about “the world out there” as it is about your encounter and friendship. You are both in the film but with very different roles. How did you work together on this documentary?**

CASEY: Yes, we have very different roles and we are very different people! Totally different personalities. I was basically the delivery boy. I was out there going from story to story, country to country, sending Ale all my footage after I was done editing my TV news reports. He would then go through it, think about it, let it sink it, process it, experiment with some editing. He dove into the footage in a way I never did. At time I thought he was being more affected by my experiences than I was. I was simply off to the next story, thinking more logistically and practically rather than emotionally. Then we would have Skype conversations that Ale started recording. It was mostly me talking about what I was doing. That was the basic work flow, but that was all before we actually sat down and decided to make a feature length film. When we decided to use our friendship and personal lives to bring together all the stories and images and impressions from the world out there, that’s when we started working in the same room, on the same things, together. We wrote the film together with the help of our editor Claudio Hughes and producer Christian Popp.

**Most of the images in the film is raw footage filmed by Casey for his journalistic work. How did you used it, Alessandro, to transform it into something bigger, the core of a creative documentary?**

ALESSANDRO:

As said, I was affected by Casey’s footage. I felt I knew people personally in places I would never go to. Casey was having big experiences, in Africa, in the Middle East, and many other places. The people I met in his footage were amazing. Maybe they were a rebel fighter, a smuggler, an immigrant, a priest, but when I went through the footage, I felt these people were more similar to me than I expected. The way I knew people in Casey’s footage was different than the way those same types of people were represented in the usual news media. At the time I didn’t know if it was the way Casey related to them, or because I had the raw footage (probably both) but I had a different view and I needed to share this view with other people. Otherwise this footage would be wasted in the regular TV news format that Casey was filming for. So when I started going through more and more footage, I just kept my original reaction in mind and looked for all those moments that stood out for me personally. Many times they were the moments that were not related to the straight news story but the ones on the sides. The messy footage, the “backstage footage”, but many times I felt they had the most humanity, or humanity where you would least expect it.

**Did you, Casey, changed your way of filming as a journalist knowing that Alessandro was planning to use your images for a documentary?**

CASEY: Yes. I filmed more and took more chances because of Ale’s encouragement. If you are a cameraman working in the news industry, the less you film the better. You don’t want a lot of footage, because then it slows you down in the editing. You don’t want so many choices. You want clean shots that get right to the point of the story you are telling. But Ale was was convincing me that the experiences I was having went beyond my TV news reports. He told me to film a lot. At first I resisted, I thought it was unprofessional. But since I was working alone most of the time, filming and editing my news reports in the field, I was the only one to suffer going through huge amounts of footage. I even started to give my camera to people I was meeting, who didn’t even know how to film. If I liked a situation or a person I started filming, even if I didn’t know exactly if it would be important for one of my reports. This was all because of Ale’s influence. He had a different sensibility, he was looking for special moments, not just “the story” and eventually I started to look for them too.

**How did you choose from the huge amount of material? To paraphrase your film title: what was the process of deciding what you finally kept in the film and what was less important?**

ALESSANDRO:

I still have a headache. Finding the common thread that brought all the material together and deciding what to keep was definitely the hardest part of the creative process. Casey filmed so many sad and also inspiring stories of people around the world and we spent so much time editing these people’s stories that it was hard to let go of some of them. It was a real battle. We really had to keep in mind the original motivation of the film. This was a highly subjective and personal documentary because I was moved by the footage. We had to keep the moments that affected our personal lives and perspectives, nothing else. At times we had amazing stories of individuals doing incredible things, but if it didn’t relate to our personal lives somehow, it was like sliding down a rabbit hole into another film. We realised that not every story had to be explained as a full story to the viewer. Maybe just a few shots were special to us, maybe just one single moment, so we decided many times to trust the viewer and cut out the explanations, this was a subjective look at the world.

**Are you planning to continue working together?**

ALESSANDRO:

Casey and I both moved back to Florence for family reasons, and that’s when we started writing and editing *The Things We Keep*. We were finally in the same place at the same time so while we were editing *The Things We Keep*, we decided to start production on another film together back here in Italy. It’s called *The Butterfly*. We’re shooting it in Naples. It’s about a girl there who has the pressure of her whole world on her shoulders to succeed at the Rio Olympics (in boxing) and then ends up losing badly. She has to completely re-evaluate her life and build herself up from scratch. It’s also a bit of a coming-of-age story but in a completely different context and made in a different way. We wanted to work with a DOP from the fiction world, and stay purely observational to tell the whole story. There is more writing involved in our current film and we are trying to give it a more cinematic feel. So far, it’s had good response and is being produced by Indyca and Rai Cinema and coproduced by YUZU Productions.