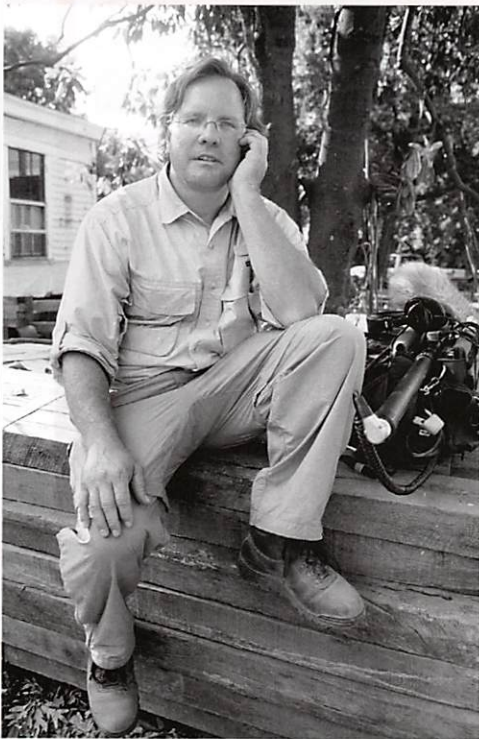


[ALUMNI PROFILE]

Moving Picture

Jay Spain '80 documents history, relocation of plantation house.

Filmmaker Jay Spain '80 made his first documentary just out of college while working at NC State's Creative Services, shooting footage in Japan. *Sound and Silence: A Japanese Experience* focused on four professors from NC State, Duke



University and UNC-Chapel Hill who were adapting to the language and culture of Japan while studying there. It has aired on UNC-TV, the Discovery Channel and PBS.

"For my whole career, I have been trying to get back to that kind of work," he says. "In a documentary, you get to tell a real story [instead] of something made up."

With his newest film *Moving Midway*:

A *Southern Plantation in Transit*, Spain shot the true story of the relocation of the antebellum Midway Plantation house in Knightdale to a more secluded setting.

Written and directed by film critic Godfrey Cheshire, the movie documents the changing South by connecting Cheshire and his relatives to the descendants of slaves who worked on the plantation. Among the descendants featured in the documentary is Robert Hinton, associate director of Africana studies at New York University, whose grandfather was born into slavery at Midway.

"Jay is what I would call a triple threat: part producer, part cinematographer and part creative director," says Vin Farrell, one of the film's producers. "He could easily earn a living within any single discipline."

As the cinematographer for *Moving Midway*, Spain oversaw the camera crew and even hung out of a helicopter to get shots of the plantation house, which was relocated to make way for a new shopping center. As a first-time producer, he also helped secure funding from private investors.

Moving Midway premiered at the 2007 Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in Durham and first opened in theaters in September. *The New York Times* called it "a fascinating and complicated story of regional identity," and *The New Yorker* described it as a "fascinating, touching and intellectually tough-minded documentary." It will be released on DVD in February 2009. "The odds against a documentary getting a theatrical distribution are very high," says Spain, adding that the film cost less than \$1 million to make.

A Raleigh native, Spain was fascinated with films and cameras at an early age and remembers always wanting to be a director so he could control what goes on the



LEFT: Jay Spain talks on his phone between setups during the filming of *Moving Midway*, which documents the relocation of the Midway Plantation house in Knightdale. Spain was a producer, cinematographer and creative director on the documentary. ABOVE: Spain directs as Brad Kaplan uses a camera crane to capture Midway Plantation's landscape.

screen. After honing his television production skills at NC State as a student and then as an employee, he and two partners formed cgroup productions in 1982 and produced films, commercials and videos. Three years later, he bought out his partners.

Since then, his projects have included directing *Live and Let Go*, a 2002 documentary that focuses on a 76-year-old terminally ill man who decides to end his life on his own terms. It aired on the South Carolina public TV network and won the Best Documentary award at the 2003 Asheville Film Festival.

Soon after, Spain began filming *Moving Midway* and spent almost four years working on the production. "The best thing for me coming out of this is that I have gotten my chops," he says.

Now, he's directing and producing a documentary about the life of Lucy Daniels, a clinical psychologist and writer in Raleigh who authored *High on a Hill; Caleb, My Son; The Eyes of the Father*; and the memoir *With a Woman's Voice: A Writer's Struggle for Emotional Freedom*.

What does Spain hope will come out of such documentaries? "My trite answer would be to appear on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*," he says. "But I would really like to do something that can change the world, which would get me on *Oprah*."

—Ann Green

Re Midway

See Knightdale