

WHAT'S ON
**Film festival has
movie for everyone**

Detroiter chronicles his city

Gary Glaser's works include documentaries you can see tonight

By Catherine Serrin
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Documentary filmmaker Gary Glaser used to work for mainstream, commercial television in Los Angeles.

"That got less and less rewarding," Glaser said. "I couldn't look at myself and think I make my living making 'The Dating Game.'"

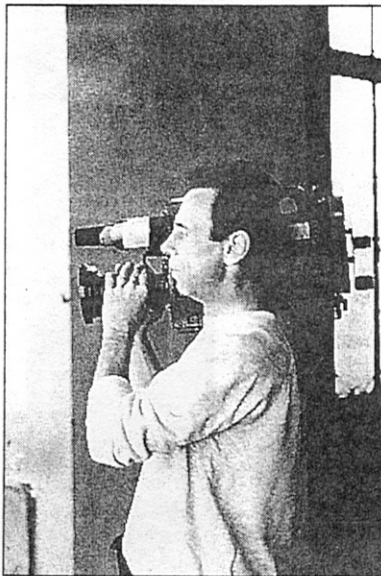
Glaser, a graduate research assistant in communications at Wayne State University and a native Detroiter, instead decided to focus on issue-related projects. The documentary film world should thank its lucky stars.

Four of his documentaries, "Bombing L.A.," "The Hudson's Building," "Borderline: The 8 Mile Road Story" and "Justiceville" are featured tonight at the East Lansing Film Festival. Glaser will be on hand for the screenings and a discussion session afterward.

Two of Glaser's earlier documentaries tackle urban issues in Los Angeles. "Justiceville" tells the story of group of homeless people who create their own shanty town community. In "Bombing L.A.," Glaser takes on the world of graffiti writers.

The project was partially a reaction to a New York-based documentary about graffiti that focused on adult reaction — police officers, teachers and the like — to graffiti. "Bombing L.A." tells the story more from the angle of the artists — or vandals, depending on your opinion. It also illustrates that, in some ways, graffiti can be a positive thing.

"Graffiti really unites kids across



Detroiter: Gary Glaser's documentaries include one about the demolition of the Hudson's building.

racial lines," Glaser said. They are like "fraternities of the street."

The controversial film reveals the sort of double life that some graffiti writers lead. They are chased by cops at night and by movie directors and commercial directors, who value their artistic skills, during the day. A few graffiti writers even have received art scholarships to prestigious art schools, Glaser said.

After coming back to Detroit in the early 1990s, Glaser turned to his hometown for inspiration. It was a time when Detroit's national image was suffering. In his own way, he wanted to contribute to defining Detroit, rather than seeing it defined by outsiders on the national news, Glaser said.

One of his Detroit documentaries,

Glaser's documentaries

- East Lansing Film Festival
- 7 p.m. today
- Fellini Theatre, MSU's Wells Hall
- \$5, \$3 for students with ID
- Discussion follows

"Borderline: The 8 Mile Road Story," won an Emmy in 1997. Glaser grew up just south of 8 Mile Road, which, he said, served as a social and cultural border between Detroit and the northern suburbs. It worked well as a documentary because it was a subject that interested him.

"I really operate all of these out of my self-interest," Glaser said. "If it's not something you really care about, it becomes agonizing."

The movie that most captures the heart of Detroiters is "The Hudson's Building." The documentary traces the history of the famed downtown building.

Glaser, who completed the film before the building was demolished, has added footage of the demolition in time for the East Lansing Film Festival.

"It really begs to have that final scene in it," Glaser said.

While Glaser finds himself drawn to local stories, he is torn between wanting to reach a national audience and continuing to focus on Detroit.

Glaser's Detroit documentaries paint a realistic view of the city and its problems.

"They're not love letters," he said. "I don't get calls from the chamber of commerce."

That said, he remains cautiously optimistic about Detroit's future.

"It used to be a joke city," he said, but "I do love it here."