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<u>Artist Statement: Foreverwood</u>

When I began my project, the only thing I knew for certain was that I wanted it to focus on the television and film industry. My ultimate career goal is to one day become a screenwriter, so I wanted to choose a topic that could potentially help with that, or at least provide insight that could be helpful with that goal.

My original idea was to create an interactive online script, inspired by Louise Satwell who had created an interactive screenplay using Adobe InDesign. In doing research, I found a great deal focused on how fans interact in online spaces. I quickly became intrigued and chose to switch my project's focus to examining how fans congregate around shows online.

Will Booker noted in his 2001 article "Living on Dawson's Creek," that network based websites for television shows tend to restrict the creativity and interaction of users to their corporate limitations, and that viewers of the show used the official website more as a tool for information than a means for creative expression. (Booker) Websites for television shows can also provide a new way of connecting with your favorite shows and characters, as Margaret Mackey points out in her article, Television and the Teenage Literate: Discourses of "Felicity"." (Mackey)

For my interactive media project, I chose to create an interactive fan website for the television show "Everwood". The show aired on the WB network from 2002 to 2006 and followed renowned neurosurgeon Andy Brown as he uproots his family from New York City and moves across the country to small town Everwood, Colorado at the request of his recently deceased wife.

In a 2006 article shortly after the series finale, the New York Times described the show's fanbase as "They're too gentle, too discreet and too modest for that kind of fuss. Instead, they'll keep reminiscing online about the poignant show, holding the DVD's like a ring from a lost love, and one day—maybe years from now—they'll just forget all about it." (Heffernan)

In deciding what show to focus on for my project, I found that reporter's opinion to be somewhat true. While there are many articles dedicated to reunions of the cast and speculation on a reboot, there is a definite lack of modern fan content. Other WB shows like "Dawson's Creek" and "Gilmore Girls" have an abundance of Instagram accounts, Facebook pages, and dedicated podcasts. For "Everwood," no such content exists. I wanted to design a website that would fill those gaps for a show that I felt was somewhat of a pioneer for its time, tackling controversial issues like abortion and interracial marriage.

The idea for the project was primarily inspired by a chapter in a book on the television show Gilmore Girls. In it, David Scott Diffrient examines how fans of the show interact and create their own content via podcasts. This book was written in 2010, and

since then podcasting has seemed to be a steadily growing niche. I went on Apple's Podcast app and searched for several of my old favorite shows. Almost every show I searched already had multiple podcasts dedicated to it—Buffy the Vampire Slayer, My So-Called Life, Felicity—except Everwood. I decided to focus my project on this particular show for that reason.

The website, called Foreverwood after the series finale, hosts a blog, podcast, and interactive message board. The blog consists of my thoughts on topics and themes within the show as I rewatch the show for the first time in 14 years and allows readers to comment and reply with their own ideas. The podcast features an episode by episode review of the show and is linked to the website via an RSS feed. The podcast is also available through the SoundCloud app. The message board includes a space for fans to congregate and discuss various topics such as fashion, music, and characters of the show.

One of the first things I did was create a logo for the project. To do so, I used Adobe Spark. For the background, I chose an earthy green color that I felt matched the vibe of the show. For the logo itself I overlapped an icon of headphones over an icon of a mountain range. Since the television show takes place in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, this imagery seemed fitting.

In creating a website, I wanted something that would promote interaction with the audience. In their article "Adventures in the blogosphere: From blog readers to blog writers," Lara Ducate and Lara L. Lomika found that blog readers tended to linger and interact with websites that had a pleasing aesthetic design and were easy to navigate. (Ducate) I knew that creating an inviting web space would be important to the success of my project.

When designing the website that was going to be the main hub of my project, I decided to use a website building service, Wix, over coding the whole thing myself using HTML and CSS. Having only a few months to pull everything together, using a website builder was the most time-friendly option. It also is the most budget friendly, since I didn't have to pay for a domain or website hosting.

Wix also offered options for creating a message board that has a simple user interface that is easy to navigate and understand, which was important in making my decision on which website builder to use. In setting up topics for the message board, I tried to cover all bases. I included "appreciation" threads for each of the main characters and couples on the show as a way to hopefully jumpstart conversations. I also included a "general" topic for more generalized thoughts on the show itself. There are sections for discussion on the fashion seen on the show, and the music that was played on the show.

The website's background is a similar green color to the logo background, and I enlarged the mountain and headphone graphic to make it a prominent feature on the header. The main page of the website is the blog, which is the main information hub of the site. The blog features thoughts on topics surrounding the show like fashion and the stylistic evolution of characters to how grief is portrayed in the show.

From there, you can access the podcast and forum via links in the header. At the bottom of the page are links to social media accounts created for the website. I set up Instagram and Twitter accounts to post updates to the site and also bring attention to the website's existence. I followed the main cast members and the series creator and used relevant hashtags when posting so that fans of the show would be able to easily find my accounts.

Podcasting is an area that is entirely new to me and was very daunting when deciding to take it on for this project. Having limited financial resources at my disposal, I rented out a podcasting microphone from the university and recorded everything using Garage Band on my Mac. It was impossible for me to not feel self-conscious and silly while sitting in my living room talking into a microphone about a television show that has been off the air for nearly 14 years. I feel that podcasting would have been a smoother and more enjoyable experience if there were a co-host to talk with and bounce ideas off of rather than just one host alone.

Given that podcasting was a foreign concept, I relied heavily on researching how to accomplish it. I used SoundCloud to upload the file, since it offers a free service and has an easy to understand interface even for podcasting novices such as myself.

Overall, I hope that this project will be able to bring together long-lost fans of a show that was torn from the airways too soon. I want it to bring people together and ignite conversations. I hope that a fan community emerges and congregates on the website.

Works Cited

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