

## For Neglected Video, A Hollywood Touch

Humble home movies, languishing unedited, can have DVD production values, for a price.

By ROGIER VAN BAKEL

**I**F a tree falls in a forest and someone records it but never views the video, did the tree really fall?

As home video accumulates, many prolific tapers are pondering a close-to-home variation of the old Zen brainteaser. They have acquired a trove of family scenes, but are daunted by the tedium and time involved in playing it all back.

After all, searching for the good parts means sitting through the boring ones, too. Other sections may be marred by camera shake, exposure problems or wind gusts thundering into the microphone. But just letting the tapes pile up won't do either; home movies that are neither viewed nor inventoried can be said not to exist at all.

"The problem people have with their home movies is mostly one of retrieval," said Mark Smith, a co-owner of Pergamon, a video-editing business in Portland, Ore. "They have all that raw material, but no clue where the good bits are. In which case, there's little practical use they'll ever get out of having it in the first place."

To address the quandary, a growing cottage industry has sprung into action. Companies like Pergamon take customers' raw video and turn it into short movies containing highlights. They convert analog tapes to digital data, weed out the boring bits and stitch the remainder together, often to a music soundtrack.

Most companies will include a selection of customers' slides and photos, Ken Burns-style, if asked. The finished product is usually presented to the customer on a DVD, complete with menus, chapters and

instant scene access. Typically the cost runs from \$400 for a five-minute movie to \$2,000 and up for a half-hour one.

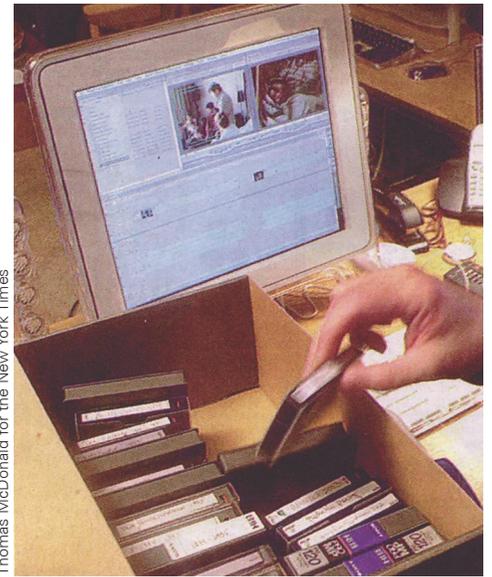
Carolyn Alexander got into the business three years ago, when she founded Family Memories Video ([familymemoriesvideo.com](http://familymemoriesvideo.com)) based on the growth potential she saw. The enterprise, based in Sunnyvale, Calif., seemed more solid to her than the Silicon Valley high-fliers that had begun crashing all around her.

"I took a good look and saw that the demographics were on my side," Ms. Alexander said. "The boomers are almost 50, or older, and their parents are dying. They're getting sentimental about being the holder of the family knowledge, about the huge quantities of photos and footage they possess, and they realize they should do something with all that material."

The importance people attach to home movies is increasing, others agree. Marco Greenberg, founder of Reel Biography ([reelbiography.com](http://reelbiography.com)), a Manhattan-based firm that produces broadcast-quality personal biographies, finds that more of his clients want to incorporate old family video. He speculates that recent documentaries like "Capturing the Friedmans" and "My Architect" - both heavy on decades-old scenes recorded with imperfect consumer cameras - may have opened people's eyes to the possibilities.

"Old home movies are proving to be an authentic, well-received touch" in his company's work, Mr. Greenberg said.

Although Ms. Alexander's company, too, produces original video biographies,



Thomas McDonald for the New York Times

**Pick and Choose** *At video-editing businesses like Little Dream Pictures of Weston, Conn., the boring parts of customers' home videos are weeded out to create a short movie containing only highlights.*

the bulk of her business comes from clients who want her staff to edit existing video. The advent of easy-to-use home editing programs like Apple's iMovie and Pinnacle's Studio has not seemed to affect her revenues, which have doubled over the last two years, she said.

"Boomers are in the habit of hiring someone to do their chores," Ms. Alexander said. "They don't mow their own lawns, they don't change their own oil and they don't clean their own homes. Why would they edit their own video?"

While hiring a professional video editor results in a slick-looking, customized product, most people choose a more budget-friendly approach. They send the tapes to be digitized in their entirety, then preserved on DVD's. As a primary advantage, the discs are generally expected to last "many times as long as videotapes," said Bob Wilson, the vice president for sales and marketing at YesVideo in Santa Clara, Calif. ([yesvideo.com](http://yesvideo.com)), whose own 13-year-old VHS wedding video, to his dismay, has gradually shed all its color.

But many customers require more than a simple analog-to-digital transfer

for preservation. They want an easy way to find and view all the different scenes in their digitized video. To that end, YesVideo has developed patented software that automatically identifies natural scene breaks.

“When you turn the camera off and on, our computers flag that as a chapter point” on the DVD, Mr. Wilson explained. “When the light in the scene changes, maybe because you walk from one room into another, that’s another chapter point.”

“It’s a great way to share those tapes without having to make individual copies,” said John Larsen, the company’s chief executive. “We recently had one of a wedding that took place here in the U.S., and some family members living in Israel couldn’t attend. But they spent hours watching the footage from halfway around the world.”

HomeMovie.com will store up to 20

hours of video for \$10 a month, although customers are welcome to decline the offer and walk away with a \$15 DVD of their final edit instead (there’s also a fee of \$5 per digitized tape). Mr. Larsen, of course, encourages clients to keep their videos on his computers indefinitely. “Not only have you now stopped the march of time on your deteriorating tapes,” he said, “but you have a backup copy if your house burns down.”

Last October, exactly that calamity befell Barbara Nyegaard, a co-founder of a San Diego data collection company. Ms. Nyegaard’s home, along with more than 400 others, was destroyed by a wildfire. Six months earlier, she had had her home videos transferred to DVD’s by HomeMovie.com, but it didn’t do her any good when the fire struck; the brand new discs were lost to the

flames along with the original tapes.

Because HomeMovie.com did not offer the video-storage option at the time, the company had promptly erased Ms. Nyegaard’s video files - and a good deal of her tangible past. “It was a very strange feeling, as if I suddenly didn’t have a history,” she recalled recently. “My whole life before the fire had dissipated.”

Whether driven by the fear of data loss or the desire to retrieve favorite scenes in no time, consumers have been lining up for digital video duplication services. YesVideo says it has created more than a million unique DVD’s since its inception in 1999. HomeMovie.com boasts that it has “ten of thousands of hours” of video stored on its servers.

At the smaller video-editing outfits, personal touches may further fuel the customer’s satisfaction. Mr. Craft of Little Dream Pictures, an amateur musician, has been known to write and record original music, customized to the client’s video, at no additional charge.

As for the final products, “they’re all very different in feel and pacing,” he said. “Some turn out very joyous and light-hearted. Others are slower and almost mystical in character. I could do the cookie-cutter thing, work from a template, but that wouldn’t be any fun.” He and Ms. Jeffrey ship the finished DVD back to clients with a beribboned bag of popcorn, to enhance the movie-viewing experience.

Meanwhile, Ms. Alexander, of Family Memories Video, has lately seen a new, younger breed of customer coming through her door. “We’re now not only doing video résumés, but audition tapes that people send to the producers of shows like ‘Survivor’ and ‘The Apprentice,’ she said, clearly amused. “I don’t think any of the candidates have been picked yet.”

But there’s always hope - and always more, better video to be shot.

*Article Reprint courtesy of*

**Family Memories Video** 

**www.familymemoriesvideo.com**  
**(800) 339-8433**

*Slight modifications to this article have been made for formatting and accuracy purposes.*

#### Now Playing

*Services to polish and preserve your home video range from a simple DVD transfer to elaborate productions.*

COMPANY	SPECIALTY	COST	COMMENT
<b>HomeMovie.com</b> (877) 576-8777	Converts camcorder home movies to DVD. No editing service available (but customers can edit movies online). Also offers off-site hard-disk storage of digitized home movies.	DVD’s start at \$19 for up to 120 minutes of transferred video; storage is \$10 a month for up to 20 hours of digitized video.	Tapes and DVD’s are sent by mail. Online editing requires broadband connection. Finished movies can be shared online as streaming video.
<b>YesVideo</b> www.yesvideo.com (877) 817-5375	Converts camcorder home movies to DVD, creating chapters and a thumbnail index. No editing service available.	\$25 for up to 120 minutes of transferred video.	Tapes can be dropped off at Rite-Aid, Target, Wal-Mart, Kmart, CVS, and other major retailers.
<b>Memory Lane Productions</b> www.mlvp.com (888) 831-0389	Creates customized video tributes based on videotapes, film reels and photos. Also offers tape duplication and film transfer to VHS and DVD.	Minimum for any job \$60. Editing time is \$40 to \$60 an hour. A typical five-minute production might cost \$400.	Material must be submitted by mail at least six weeks in advance.
<b>Pergamon Film and Video</b> www.pergamondesign.com (503) 320-9887	Adoption videos, edited to songs of the family’s choice. Company accepts camcorder tapes, pictures in any format.	A two-song production (roughly six minutes) on DVD costs \$550. Includes a backup VHS copy.	Customer must submit chosen songs on original CD to avoid copyright problems.
<b>Family Memories Video</b> www.familymemoriesvideo.com (800) 339-8433	Film-to-DVD transfers, photo montages, tribute videos.	Film transfers 15 cents a foot. \$100 per hour of editing time. A typical five-minute production might cost \$500.	Shoots original new scenes for biographical videos at customer’s request.
<b>Little Dream Pictures</b> www.littledreampictures.com (203) 226-3782	Video and photo montages of any length, from material submitted by customers. Special occasions, especially adoptions.	A five-minute movie on DVD costs \$600.	Offers custom-designed DVD menus and inserts at no extra charge.

Source: The companies