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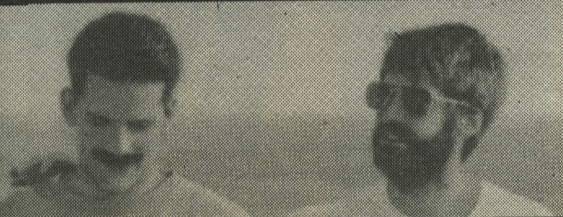
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**A R T S A N D
E N T E R T A I N M E N T**

**Sara Diamond storms
post-war cliches**



Sara Diamond, producer, writer-director of *The Lull Before the Storm*. Photo by Skal Fowler

***The Lull Before the Storm* illuminates the lives of Canadian wimmin during the forties and fifties**

by Margaret Knight

Sara Diamond has been doing feminist video production for a long time now, but with *The Lull Before the Storm* she has truly come of age. This 98 minute video, produced with the assistance of the Wimmin's Labour History Project, documents the experience of Canadian wimmin during World War II and the fifties.

The video is divided into two parts, The Forties and The Fifties, and follows the life of one womyn, Dorothy, from a young girl working in a diner to a model 1950s housewife. Dorothy meets and marries George Sanderson, a logger. Soon

after their first child is born, George joins the armed forces, against Dorothy's wishes, leaving her stuck. Dorothy moves back to Vancouver, leaves Billy with her mother, and goes to work in an armaments factory. After joining the union and becoming shop steward she meets and has an affair with Bill Carter, a friend of her husband's. When her husband returns she settles down into the housewife role, although not without some discomfort and complaints. The second part sees them continue their attempts to live the post-war dream, something that is thwarted by economic and personal considerations.

Although the work is fiction, it is treated as documentary, with clips of war-time propaganda and fifties commercials throughout, and bracketed by scenes from a panel talk show on the changing role of wimmin. The head of the panel, Dr Spark, moves through the piece, narrating and interviewing from a position of male authority. Part One is in a fairly straight historical style; Dorothy relates her story to Dr Spark, talking about the freedom and independence she experienced during the war. When George returns he, too, talks to the Doctor, but his stories are about Dorothy, and how she cannot readapt to married life. For Dorothy, there seems to be no real problem, but George is uncomfortable with a new, adult Dorothy. In Part Two, their problems continue. George is underemployed, money is tight and Dorothy wants to go back to work. Here the piece becomes viciously satirical, with clips of television commercials showing Dorothy dancing with her vacuum cleaner. This vision of materialistic bliss belies the difficulty of life for these people. Dorothy and her friends discuss going back to work, union battles, and persuading husbands to do housework, all without resolution. Even the most "feminist" panel member accepts that motherhood is the most important thing a womyn can do.

The story is fairly simple, and it is hard to believe that it has never been told before, but this video is one of the first to relate the story of ordinary wimmin during World War II. To a modern feminist it may seem as though these wimmin were capitulating, that they should have fought harder, but they were the germinal feminists, it was they who formed the basis of the 1960s wimmin's movement. Their concerns were mainly with money and family; they were middle class wimmin who wanted something better from their lives, and they have a lot in common with the feminists of the eighties.

This is the second of Diamond's works to deal with the wimmin of that period. The earlier piece, *Keeping the Home Fires Burning* (1988), was concerned mainly with wimmin's work during WW II, in *The Lull Before the Storm* she has expanded that analysis to include the effect it had on life after the war.

Sara Diamond has been producing video since 1979, focusing mainly on wimmin's cultural history, and has won many awards, including best documentary at the 1984 International Cable Television awards for *Fight Back: Transition House*. Other works include *Ten Dollars or Nothing*, an analysis of wimmin cannery workers in the 1930's, and her current work-in-progress, *The On-to-Ottawa Trek*. Her most personal work is *Influences of My Mother* (1981) in which she explores her relationship with her mother who died when she was ten years old. That video is rather disturbing, dealing as it does with Diamond's rage at her mother's rejection of her, but although it was intended to be extremely personal it speaks to many wimmin. She teaches at Emily Carr and will be displaying an installation to be called *Paternity* at the Vancouver Art Gallery in early 1991.

The Women's Labour History Project, which co-produced *The Lull Before the Storm*, is a non-profit society consisting of artists, photographers, historians, and sociologists committed to the preservation and presentation of wimmin's history in Canada. Sara Diamond's work is crucial to the representation of wimmin and wimmin's history in Canada. In *The Lull Before the Storm* she has succeeded in illuminating yet another aspect of wimmin's experience in a new and exciting way.