"Voices of Cabrini

On Film: as Cabrini emptied, the cameras rolled

THIS ISSUE IN FOUR SECTIONS

onit Bezalel decided to come to Chicago to do her graduate work in film after reading Directing the Documentary by Columbia College professor Michael Rabiger. Soon the seeds of her own documentary were planted. "People would say, 'Avoid the projects, avoid Cabrini. And that was yery strange for me that there were these areas that you had to avoid, and I didn't understand why," she says. "I saw Cabrini when I took the train to school every day on the Ravenswood line, and when I saw that they were tearing it down I wanted to learn more about it." She decided to cover the dismantling of the housing project for a class.

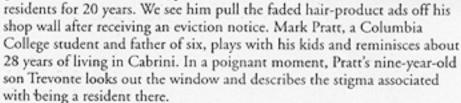
Bezalel got her undergraduate degree in Canada—at Montreal's McGill University—where the national film industry gives healthy support to documentarists. After graduating she took a job at the National Film Board of Canada, and one of her first assignments was as assistant editor on Manufacturing Consent, the acclaimed 1992 documentary about linguist and professional dissident Noam Chomsky.

When it came time to make her own movie, filming proved to be more of a challenge than Bezalel had expected. She first visited Cabrini-Green in November 1995. "I was scared because it was so unfamiliar and [the residents] didn't know who I was." She filmed throughout that winter, getting mugged one day when she went alone. "That was a turning point, where I got educated pretty quickly." With codirector Antonio Ferrera and 30 or so fellow grad students from Columbia College, she continued filming over three years and at an estimated cost of \$10,000, largely provided by grants. The need to scramble for funding in the U.S. irks her.

"Documentary film here is so undervalued," she complains. "You really have to fight to get a little bit of money."

In the 30-minute video Voices of Cabrini, outraged residents and local activists-aware of the potential windfall to developers if they can clear out and convert the 71 acres of prime real estate on

which Cabrini-Green sits-demand to know where and how the city plans on moving the project's 10,000-plus inhabitants. In one scene Cabrini dwellers heckle David Tkac, special assistant to Mayor Daley, as he presides over a Chicago Housing Authority question-and-answer forum, studiously avoiding the subject of where Cabrini's current residents will live. For the most part Bezalel emphasizes the human face of the controversy, observing the effects of the razings on a small cross section of the people who lived there. The film follows George Robbins, a soft-spoken older gentleman whose barbershop served Cabrini



Since completing her film, which served as her MFA thesis at Columbia, Bezalel has been working part-time at the Community Television Network, a not-for-profit organization that teaches inner-city teens how to make videos, and she's planning to go to Cyprus in September to help produce a friend's documentary. She continues to promote Voices

of Cabrini, but already her work has garnered praise from its subjects. "It was a fantastic idea, to finally get the voices of the community," says Pratt. "Before, we'd always been faceless voices in sound bites or nameless faces on the news."

Voices of Cabrini will be screened at 6 PM Thursday, July 8, at the Chicago Cultural Center, 78 E. Washington (773-744-6630), and at 3 PM Friday and Saturday, July 9 and 10, at the Chicago Public Library's Near North branch, 310 W. Division (312-744-0992). Admission to all showings is free. -PATRICK LOHIER

