

# In the Face of Demons

*by Robert and Donald Kinney*

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**MONOZYGOTE PRODUCTIONS** is the incorporated identity of independent video artists Robert and Donald Kinney. As independent producers who focus on creating gay and lesbian representations, we are involved in a constantly developing process that draws on our identity as gay men and our relationship as twin brothers. We have (in common) experiences and desires that stretch back, literally, our entire lives. Though our past productions have played with the popular cultural myths about twins and their relationship to one another, it has never been our intention to mystify our own relationship, the manner in which we work, or the products of our collaborations. However, when talking about our work we have resisted the inevitable comparison and individuation that occurs when discussing our role as producers: who writes, who directs, who runs camera? At a certain point the separation of these tasks becomes both tedious and impossible given the dialogue that occurs both conceptually and practically within the collaborative effort. At the same time, re-absorbing two individuals back into what was for all intents and purposes a kind of tongue-in-cheek identity (Monozygote Productions) can be alienating to ourselves as well as the reader. So, with the understanding that alternating references to "Bobby" or "Donnie" forces a shifting focus that can be both unmanageable and confusing, we have decided to use the less interesting though more compact "we," "our" and, of course, "us."

Within our work, the fictions we create come to represent not concrete narratives about exceptional individuals, but broadly painted characters seated in sociocultural and economic circumstances that allow for a measure of discussion and dialogue. The characters stand as ideograms through which the discourse on gay and lesbian representation can be pursued. Each of the narrative constructs represents a myriad of ideas that intersect and surface as a

collaborative effort. As the body of work develops, the videos are revealing similar characteristics that we, as producers, are trying to understand and sometimes can only brand as individually Monozygote-esque.

We grew up in the southeast corner of Iowa along the Mississippi River in the small, industrial city of Burlington. With a population of about 28,000, it is similar to a number of towns that dot the map in that area of the Midwest, while remaining a hub of residential, industrial and commercial activity within a specific rural location. During the 60s when we were in grade school, the town was economically very healthy. The main employer in town was the Iowa Army Ammunitions Plant (IAAP) which produced various kinds of military implements and munitions, most of which were being used in the war in Vietnam. War was good for Burlington, which meant it was good for the grocery stores, car dealerships, restaurants, day care centers, beauticians, waitresses and auto mechanics. It was also good for our father, who drove a truck in the area, and our mother, who worked on the production line at the IAAP manufacturing hand grenades. We lived in a cinder block apartment complex built during W.W.II to house the influx of workers for what was commonly known as "The Plant." Since then, the complex has devolved and been upgraded by commercial management into government subsidized housing.

During the 7's, when we were in high school, the town, like the rest of the country, went into a deep recession; the Vietnam war ended and "The Plant" all but shut down. Gas prices soared, industry moved out, beauticians' shops closed, and the unemployment rate in Burlington became part of some of the worst statistics in America. The trucking company our father worked for moved to Texas and he went to Greyhound to drive a bus cross-country. Like many women out of work in the area, our mother sought employment in one of the minimum wage "women's" factories producing wicker bathroom furnishings that ended up in the J.C. Penney catalog.

The two of us were privately sorting through the discombobulating though exciting discovery of our respective sexualities. This resulted in an endless round-robin from bathroom to bedroom; careful negotiations that



didn't go unnoticed. In the summer of '76, within days of our sister's death from leukemia, our family was evicted from the house we were renting. An aunt and uncle stepped in to help us move. Our mother, harried and self-conscious that so many of her belongings were being exposed and sorted through by her sister, found a private moment with us to ask if we had gotten rid of all the Kleenexes between our mattresses. We all blushed. The day had been hard on all of us.

While we both had part-time jobs through high school, classes were avoided at all opportunities (we each missed between 75-80 days in our Junior year alone). We hung out at the Country Kitchen, consuming a bottomless cup and a daily round of narcotics. Yet, we were absolutely estranged from each other regarding our sexualities. Our individual anxieties and fears separated us. Being our own worst mirror, we were content to be put into separate classrooms where the attraction to our similarities had less chance of drawing adverse attention. The verbal gay bashing on us as individuals and as twins was predictable, and much to our own consternation, true.

During our Senior year, our mother filled out financial aid papers with dubious information, and we received grants to attend the University of Iowa, representing the first generation in our family to receive more than a high school education. Iowa City was 90 minutes from home and too close to wrangle ourselves out of the web of family difficulties. Within a year we were forced to quit.

Upon leaving the university, neither of us wanted to return to Burlington. One of us bought a train ticket to New Jersey and the other a plane ticket to Japan. For nearly ten years we stayed away from the Midwest, from our family and each other. There was no reason to be part of the narrowness, the lack of choices, the homophobia, the racism, the misogyny, and the poverty. We left separately.

**IN 1992, WE WERE TOGETHER AGAIN** in San Diego producing a video entitled *Agora*, which was based in part on our experiences growing up in Middle America. During the final stages of that project, we received a generous grant from the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio. For the first time in 10 years, we were heading back to the Midwest. So with a great deal of nail-biting, we loaded up the car and headed east. Somewhere around Phoenix, we stopped at a roadside pay-phone and brought ourselves out of the family closet. As it turned out, coming out was a wonderful experience and we both felt as if we were, for the first time in many, many years, actually a part of the family. While our father hates to hear us use the word "queer", our

mother is sure, we're convinced, that having two gay sons makes her inarguably middle class.

Our entire family attended the opening for *Agora* in Columbus, where they were surrounded by more queers than they had ever knowingly encountered. After the show, our father had an anxiety attack and forfeited the post-screening party for the relative calm of his room at the Holiday Inn. Our mother, who had just finished reading a bio on Rock Hudson, was anxious to attend her first homosexual party; a little fresh lipstick, a nervous re-adjustment of her shoulder pads, and she was in the car.

After *Agora*, we knew we wanted to produce another piece about the Midwest and decided to return to our home state to do so. This was a difficult decision to make. Returning to Iowa meant settling back into the place we had fled years before and confronting many of the monsters that still lingered, threatening to undo the strength and esteem we had spent years nurturing. At the time of this writing, after 1 1/2 years, we've managed to maintain our goals. *Demons* is now in the post-production phase. Working as data-entry operators, we've squeezed out of the premium rate of \$5.50 an hour about \$4,000.00 to produce the video and anticipate completing the project by early Summer.

#### THE FOLLOWING IS A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF DEMONS

*Demons* is a dramatic horror story set in the rural Midwestern town of Spery, Iowa, in 1961. The narrative focuses on Allie, a woman recently widowed and struggling to operate a small hog farm with the support of her teenage son, Dip. Allie's autonomy is repeatedly challenged as she staves off the vulturous opportunism of a corporate land prospector and the debts her husband left behind. In the midst of her difficulties arrives her brother-in-law, Gray, returning to the farm he fled years earlier. A suspect individual with rumors of mental illness in his past, Gray's attempts at incorporating himself back on the farm are repeatedly thwarted by Allie. Circumstances begin to knot as Gray pursues Dip, who reciprocates with the full passion of his burgeoning sexuality. In desperation, Allie devises a plan to circumvent the desire between Gray and Dip, an effort as much to maintain control of her son as to maintain control of the land she tenuously possesses. *Demons* is a story of three individuals caught in the struggle to survive, fighting for their own autonomy and the often competing strength of sexual desire. *Demons* was shot over a period of twenty days on Hi-8 video and is currently in post-production at the cable access station (PATV) in Iowa City, Iowa. Running time is approximately 70 minutes.

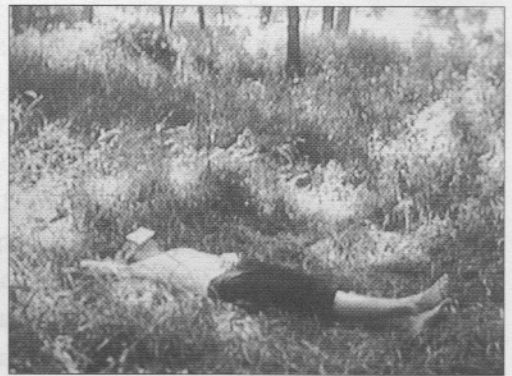
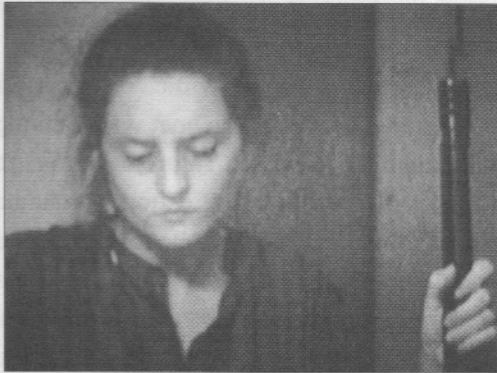
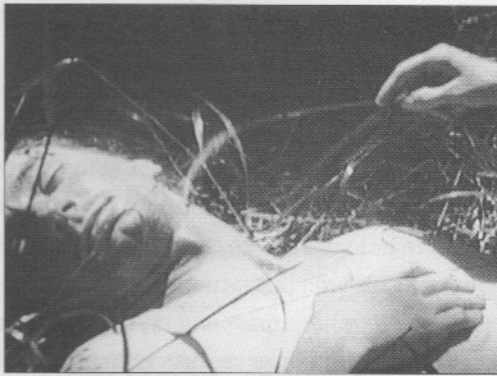
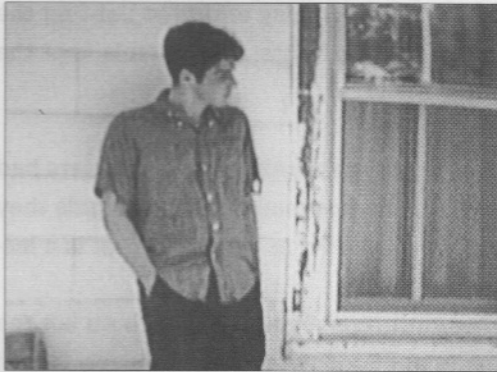
**SPERRY, IOWA IS A SMALL** farming community about fifteen minutes north of Burlington. Our younger sister, Angie, with her six children and boyfriend, Ted, live in Sperry where they operate a small hog farm. It was at this site that we shot the farm and house exterior images for *Demons*. Shooting on a weekend to weekend basis, amidst catastrophic flooding, June and July found our tiny production team negotiating a nearly impossible shooting schedule.

We had supplied Angie with a full script and storyboard of the intended production and stated clearly in our discussions that the piece dealt with gay issues. Our concerns were in part with the kids and the dramatized issues of sexuality that were going to be played out. Trusting our sensitivity to the issues, she asked that if material inappropriate for the kids was being shot we should ask them to leave the set. This we did on several occasions with the full cooperation of the children.

After the initial introductions between the performers, Angie, and her family, we began shooting. Everything was going well and production was a pleasure. We kept the gaggle of curious children occupied with small duties like holding up the clapboard and keeping the dogs from entering the camera field. Ursula, the actress playing Allie, became fast friends with Angie, while the other two performers were intent on exploring the farm. We ate lunch on the screened porch as the oldest boy delighted in introducing us to some of the gorier details of raising hogs, which involved an alarmingly sophisticated knowledge, for an eleven year old, of porcine sexuality.

For two or three weekends production went well. By the fourth, things began to go sour. The hour and a half to get to the farm from Iowa City was expensive and inconvenient. The heat and humidity were dreadful and the farm seemed to stink worse with every visit. The Midwest watched the Mississippi River rise to disastrous levels while the video project turned into a larger endeavor than the performers had anticipated. And as much as we tried NOT to interrupt the workings of the farm, we inevitably got in the way. Independent production seems to be about juggling and spreading out the inevitable financial strain, which means neglecting bills and meals for the sake of production. Time commitments became a problem as shooting started competing with other summer activities the performers and our single tech assistant wanted to attend.

Late Saturday night of the fourth weekend, we were shooting by the sow's pen. We were a two-man crew and Ursula was the only performer present. Monozygote Productions ran their four legs off trying to be everything the set needed. Ted and three of the kids were there too, partly help-



Which film was proving to be the most successful? The answer was the German Shepherd from a...  
the German Shepherd from a...  
to the first scene we saw...  
the dog. And the two other...

Stills from  
**Demons**, 1994,  
by **Robert &  
Donald Kinney**.

ing out and partly being entertained by our clumsy efforts at lighting the night. The oldest boy and Ted dealt with the lights while Ursula kept the two little girls preoccupied and out of the way.

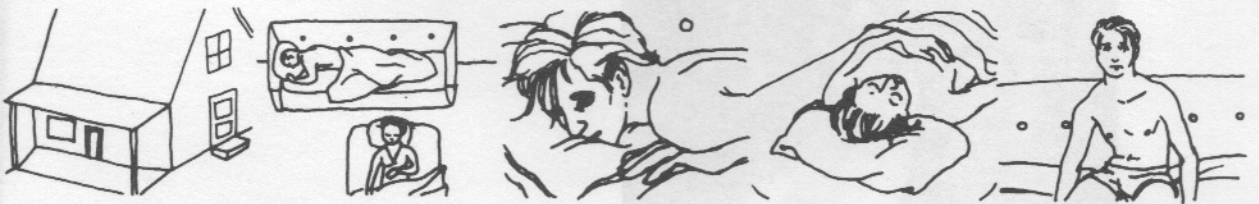
Now, apparently, this is what happened.

The two little girls wanted to know where the other two performers had gone. Ursula, in her usual generous and honest manner, told the girls they had gone to Chicago for the Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade. "What is a lesbian?" was their next question.

Ted and Nate apparently overheard the conversation. They both left the set immediately. All we knew was that suddenly and mysteriously two of our volunteers had disappeared. About 1:00 a.m. we wrapped up and headed back to Iowa City, exhausted.

The next Saturday we all arrived on the farm early and commenced shooting. By early afternoon the heat had gone into the high nineties while the humidity and bugs were almost unbearable. We had completed some work by the furrowing pen earlier in the morning and were setting up for a shoot in a field about a hundred yards from the house. To give the performers their call, one of us went to the small camper that was operating as both a dressing trailer and a set piece. Ursula was in the trailer, upset and crying. She was unwilling to discuss what had upset her, though later reports indicated that some angered exchange had occurred over lunch. Rather than allow the shoot to be interrupted, we decided to continue and deal with the problem later.

The scene was long and required a number of set-ups, which demanded a constant repetition of a difficult and emotional scene. The heat was draining everyone and the humidity was affecting the equipment. Tensions were high and one of the performers started to aggressively resist direction. The Radio Shack mic was proving to be nothing but a piece of shit. About that time, a large German Shepherd from a neighboring farm appeared on the path right next to the field where we were shooting. As suddenly as the appearance of the dog, Ted and the two older boys burst from the house with shot guns and



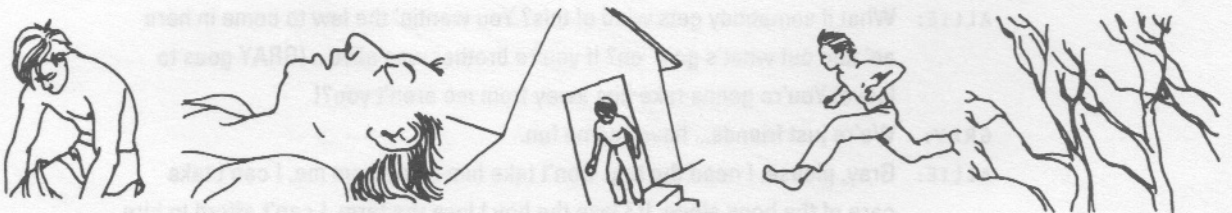
began firing over our heads at the trespasser. All of us hit the dirt.

The dog, needing no further prompting, fled the scene and we lifted ourselves off the ground and decided it was clear to resume shooting (the video). About this time, Angie walked onto the set with a pack of generic cigarettes in one hand and a lighter in the other. "Bobby and Donnie," she said, "we need to go and have a smoke."

Her complaints were serious and direct. Ted was concerned that we were interrupting his ability to chore the farm. We had to understand that they were as busy as we were and that there were certain things that had to be done. The farm was their livelihood and had to be given priority over our project.

Further, as we probably already knew, she had had words with Ursula and the other performers earlier in the day. She didn't feel it was appropriate that the children know that two of the performers on the set were gay. We had made certain choices about our lives, about who we were, but she didn't want that affecting her kids. They would go to school and invariably they would talk. She, Ted and the kids had to live in this community with a lot of people who weren't sympathetic to our concerns. They were people they had to socialize and do business with. Further, things were shaky enough for her already since she wasn't, and refused to be, married to Ted. It caused her to be a suspect individual amongst neighboring families, many of which were relatives as well.

The reason we've tortured you with this story of what could be considered a kind of pragmatic homophobia, is that the scene we were shooting that afternoon reflects the same issues our sister was addressing. On one level, the similarity of these two events, the confrontation with Angie and the performed fiction, is reassuring to us as producers in that the narrative we have contrived is suggestive of the circumstances around us. It is, at the same time, obviously difficult to confront these prejudices and their guarded parameters, especially when they are coming from someone you grew up with.



In the case of our sister's concerns and in the following segment from the production script, the issue of homosexuality exists within a knot of circumstances and issues that include gender, economic survival, knowledge and sexual desire. It is precisely this kind of complexity we have tried to bring to our narrative.

Day. Shot of ALLIE walking along a path. The camera follows her to GRAY's trailer. She goes up to the door, looks inside and walks away. Cut to overhead shot of GRAY lying in the grass, the camera pans up to see ALLIE walking toward him. She stops and ties a yellow scarf around her neck and unbuttons the top button of her dress.

ALLIE: Lazy ass. Gray. GRAY! Enjoying an afternoon nap?

GRAY: Only time to sleep.

ALLIE: How about sleeping with me?

GRAY: Aww, Allie! Yo don't want to sleep with me.

ALLIE: Don't tell me what I want or don't want.

GRAY: I'm goin' for a swim.

ALLIE: Wait! I understand what a man's needs are...

GRAY: Well, I'm needin' a swim.

ALLIE: Look. I'm no idiot. I've seen you. With your own nephew.

GRAY: He came to my place.

ALLIE: So what! You encouraged him. It's indecent. You're a growed up man.

GRAY: How old's the boy?

ALLIE: Not old enough to know what he's doin' is wrong.

GRAY: He knows what he's doin'. It ain't hurtin' nobody.

ALLIE: You're sick. You disgust me. Why don't you go away and leave us alone?

GRAY: This is my home, too.

ALLIE: Then leave the boy alone. He didn't know nothin' of the likes of your kind till you showed up.

GRAY: You're tryin' to keep the boy behind a fence. It'll drive'em crazy.

ALLIE: Then stop encouragin' him!

GRAY: Can't expect us to be strangers.

ALLIE: What if somebody gets wind of this? You wantin' the law to come in here an' find out what's goin' on? If you're brother was alive... (GRAY goes to leave) You're gonna take him away from me aren't you?!

GRAY: We're just friends... havin' some fun.

ALLIE: Gray, please. I need the boy. Don't take him away from me. I can't take care of the hogs alone. If I lose the boy I lose the farm. I can't afford to hire

nobody. I got no place to go. I'll starve. I can't just take off like you can.

GRAY: I can't do nothin' about that.

ALLIE: You no good louse. There's not a respectable bone in your body. You are crazy. I'll get you.

GRAY: What'll you do?

ALLIE: I'll turn you into the Sheriff. They'll lock you up again. Pervert.

GRAY: That's not gonna keep the boy here. Besides, seems to me you're in no position to be askin' the Sheriff for favors. Why can't you just let things be. The boy's happy. I'm happy. An' you got your help.

ALLIE: Come on, Gray. It can't be so different. Remember, I've been a married woman!

GRAY: So find a marrying man. (He pushes her away)

ALLIE: Shit. (She spits) I was a fool once.

GRAY: I'm going for a swim.

ALLIE: Pervert! Cocksucker!! QUEER!

END SCENE

