

# *How to Stuff an Artichoke*

**Directed by  
Cybele Policastro**

**Contact:**

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Visit *How To Stuff An Artichoke* on the Internet at:  
<http://www.howtostuffanartichoke.com>

## SYNOPSIS

Walking past the high-end boutiques that now line New York's West Village neighborhood, it's hard to imagine that just decades ago, pushcarts crowded the sidewalks and children played street games beneath the brick tenement buildings. But once you're in the kitchen of the Graziano family apartment at 347 Bleecker Street, those long-gone days suddenly seem as near and real as the garlic being chopped by Aunt Lillian.

In the documentary short, *How to Stuff an Artichoke*, filmmaker Cybele PolICASTRO invites you to have a seat and stay a while as Lillian prepares the succulent dish that's brought family to the table at Bleecker Street for generations. As the pot simmers on the stove, Cybele's mother offers an intimate look at old photographs and 8 mm home movie footage — with stories that take you right back to her Italian-American father's corner fruit and vegetable store, to her fateful meeting with the handsome artist she'd eventually marry, and beyond.

By sharing the experiences that have shaped their lives, both Lillian and Olga provide unique insight into both a family and a neighborhood in transition. And while things are indeed changing, *How to Stuff an Artichoke* reminds us that there is still plenty to slow down, relax, and savor.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*How To Stuff An Artichoke* is a portrait of my mother, my Aunt Lillian and Greenwich Village, the neighborhood that is their world.

The initial idea for the film came when my sister suggested that we should learn how Aunt Lillian makes her famous stuffed artichokes. I had an even better idea; I'd film her making them. I decided to film Aunt Lillian shopping, preparing and cooking artichokes. At the same time I'd interview her and my mother about our family's history and how things have changed in the Village.

Since the 1920s, my grandfather owned a three-family building with a storefront on Bleecker Street in the West Village. He ran a fruit and vegetable store there until he retired and raised his family in the apartment above. The neighborhood has long been home to immigrants, gays, artists, and, more recently, yuppies. Around 2004, high-end fashion boutiques like Ralph Lauren and Marc Jacobs opened along Bleecker Street. Changes in the neighborhood had never been more apparent. I found it interesting though that whenever I would visit my Aunt, I felt like I was being brought back to another era.

In 2004, my father passed away and my mother, Olga, moved back to Bleecker Street to live in the apartment with Lillian, who had never left. This turn of events sparked my interest: the combination of my mother and her sister living together again on Bleecker Street while the neighborhood goes through yet another incarnation. *How To Stuff An Artichoke* was born.

I wanted to make the film as quickly and inexpensively as possible, so I limited it to two days of filming. It would be a "day-in-the-life-of" documentary. In other words, whatever transpired in those two days of filming would be the film.

I realized that I needed an outsider's perspective to help tell the story. I found my editor, Kenton VanNatten, through an ad on Craigslist. It was a dream collaboration.

So, after about four months, the short became a reality. Through the filming I have connected to my family's history more deeply and in ways I never could have imagined. I consider it a love letter to my family and an homage to Greenwich Village. It is a very personal film that I am very proud of.

Cybele

## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

In September of 2006, Cybele Policastro had the idea to make *How To Stuff An Artichoke*. The shoot took place over two days. By January 5, 2007, the film had been completed. The filmmaker feels very lucky that various elements aligned, making it possible to make this film happen quickly and smoothly.

Policastro wanted to tell the story of one family's Italian-American experience in New York and their good fortune in America. She also wanted to make the neighborhood a character in the film and to show the timeless world inside the family building juxtaposed with the changing and vibrant world of the West Village.

Policastro asked her Aunt Lillian if she could film her making artichokes, and also asked her reluctant mother if she could be around to talk about her experience growing up on Bleecker Street in Greenwich Village, New York. She contacted the well-known market, Citarella, a few days before the shoot and received permission to film her Aunt shopping in the store.

Cinematographer Erica Freudenstein wanted to capture the essence of an earlier time by keeping things dark and old looking. She tried to capture what was happening naturally that day and allow "accidents" to be part of the film, as opposed to something to avoid.

Policastro, who has worked professionally as a video editor, decided not to be the editor on this film. She put a listing on the popular website "Craigslist", seeking an editor. She had numerous responses but immediately connected with Kenton VanNatten. VanNatten lives and works in Hudson, MA. The two devised a way to communicate via email and file sharing. Both felt the editing process was smoother than usual.

Cybele Policastro sees *How to Stuff an Artichoke* as a love letter to her family and to the Village that has long been home to them.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

### **CYBELE POLICASTRO, (PRODUCER/DIRECTOR)**

Cybele graduated from The School of Fine Arts in Boston where she studied documentary filmmaking. She is currently working for Good Morning America as an Avid Editor. Cybele has worked for Peter Jennings Productions, Thomas Lennon Productions, The Charlie Rose Show and Bloomberg News.

### **ERICA FREUDENSTEIN (CINEMATOGRAPHER/DP)**

Over the years Erica's photographs have been featured in such publications as Dwell, Metropolis, Washington Post Magazine, and The New York Times magazine. In her spare time she enjoys photographing places in New Jersey and is working on a book about it entitled, "The Garden State". Erica originally wanted to be an industrial designer until she found out it meant having to do calculus.

### **KENTON VANNATTEN, (PICTURE EDITOR, SOUND EDITOR)**

Kenton VanNatten has been a professional editor for over eight years with experience in short film/documentary, corporate/event video, and cable/broadcast television. Originally from the small, historic community of Lexington, Virginia, Kenton moved to Massachusetts in the fall of 2000. During the past five years he worked as senior editor at XY.tv, where he oversaw the post-production process for the reality docu-drama, "Roomies". Recently, Kenton worked as an offline editor/post-production advisor on a two-part episode about Washington, DC for the Travel Channel. He currently lives in the Metro West area of Boston with his wife and daughter and works as Product Quality Assurance Engineer for Avid Technology. He was also recently appointed Membership Coordinator for the Boston Avid User Group.

## **CAST**

Lillian Graziano  
Olga Policastro

## **FILMMAKERS**

Produced and Directed by  
Cybele Policastro

Edited by  
Kenton VanNatten

Director of Photography  
Erica Freudenstein

Sound Editing & Mixing by  
Kenton VanNatten

Additional Sound Mixing by  
David Linnenbank

Motion Graphics by  
Travis Johns

Still Photography by  
Erica Freudenstein

Treatment by  
Cybele Policastro