



## **P.O.V.'s "The Chances of the World Changing"**

By Eric Daniel Metzgar and Nell Carden Grey

Tuesday, July 17, 2007 at 10 p.m. on PBS (Check local listings)

### **Filmmaker's Statement**

It was the middle of winter in New Jersey, and we had been filming all day. Richard, our subject, was weary, but he still had so much to do. In his care were 1,600 turtles and tortoises, most of them endangered, and every one of them needed food and fresh water.

I was alone upstairs, filming close-ups of one of my favorite species — the Cuora galbinifrons. Their shells look like painted mountain ranges. Richard was wearing a remote microphone, so in my headphones I could hear him downstairs, shuffling between chores and talking to himself, working under the great weight of his responsibilities.

Richard had taken as much as possible upon himself, into himself, and it often appeared that the investment was painfully lopsided. The rewards for his devotion seemed few and far between. Occasionally an egg was laid by a very rare species, and we'd have cause for a brief celebration. Or a group of turtles would arrive from overseas, and they would be rehabilitated, their life prolonged. But the penalty for Richard's inattention or carelessness was severe: the loss of a life. But such a loss was tremendous. In the conservation of endangered species, a single animal may possess a substantial percentage its species enduring DNA — its future.

I was used to the sounds of Richard's labor in my headphones. Often, he'd quietly say, "Eric, come see this...", knowing that I was monitoring him, and that I'd come right away to witness and film something special.

But suddenly, he fell quiet. I waited, wondering. Richard was rarely silent. "Please don't be dead," I heard him whisper. I headed downstairs. When I got to Richard, he was putting a dead turtle in a plastic bag. This happened every once in a while, and it always shattered the day. If the turtle was especially endangered, its death could ruin an entire week.

Without a doubt, death was the commanding presence, because extinction was the finale that Richard was trying to suspend. But gloom certainly wasn't the commanding feeling.

It is far too easy to talk of extinction using a series of leaden adjectives. Extinction, of course, has tragic meaning, but the manner of one's attempts to prevent extinction bears no such tragedy. In fact, a film about extinction is really a study of its opposing force: survival.

When one is fraught with immeasurable responsibility, an excess of strength, not gloom, powers the day. And that strength, again and again, in the face of all obstacles, is what we filmed. Each day hovered on the next, and from an urgent story emerged a grand narrative.

**The Chances of the World Changing** documents two years in the life of Richard Ogust, a writer whose life curved into strange territory where he found himself struggling to save hundreds of lives, including his own.

— Eric Daniel Metzgar

