

# The Italian Connection: Looking for the Boldrinis and making a Film

Story by Josée Bonhomme  
Photos submitted

This summer, while snooping at the Women's Shelter fundraiser triathlon, I met an Italian film-maker. Antonio Senter was documenting all aspects of life in the Yukon, and especially in the Klondike Region. A communications gap prevented me from getting the whole story, but when Paola Rosà arrived to join her partner as the writer for the film, we were able to compare notes.

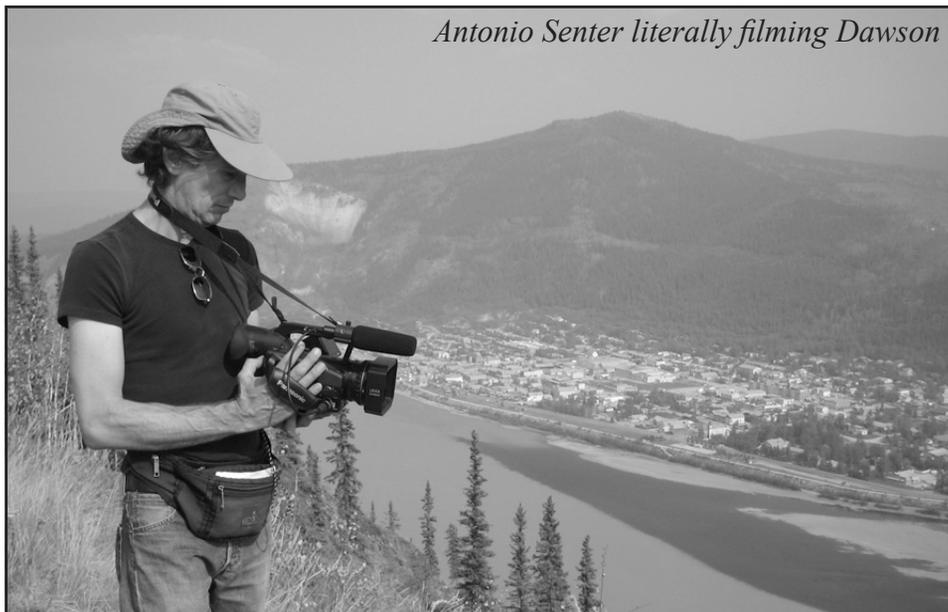
Antonio is a friend of Sandro Frizzi, an Italian geologist who has spent many summers here, and who was able to show the film-makers around on the creeks, and how prospecting and mining are done today. They were researching two Gold Rush Argonauts from their home province of Trentino-Alto Adige (Südtirol), who found claims on Bonanza Creek in 1898. As the World Gold Panning Championships were held this year in Biella, also in northern Italy, I thought this was a curious coincidence.

Their documentary film project is partly steeped in Gold Rush history, with modern life depicted in a sort of reality show. Their impressions and goals were transmitted later, once they had returned home. Paola Rosà is a freelance journalist, and has worked for a newspaper in Trento and is still working for the local Rai radio station. She is a translator, and is currently working on a book on the Berlin Wall. Antonio Senter is a freelance cameraman. Their one-hour documentary film project is supported by the Fondazione Museo Storico di Trento, a museum of local history in the autonomous province's capital. The region is nestled in the foothills and straddles the Dolomite Range in northern Italy, on the way to Brenner Pass and the nearby border with Austria.

When asked about their impressions of Dawson and the Klondike, Paola could not hide her enthusiasm: "Freedom and respect: that's what we have found in Dawson City. It is difficult to explain the surprise and the joy we felt to discover such amazing scenery,



Paola Rosà and Sandro Frizzi plan the day's filming and research.



Antonio Senter literally filming Dawson

with such nice, honest and helpful people. We were struck by the beauty of the natural environment and by the strength and softness of the people, always ready to give a hand, and so relaxed and calm in any situation."

In describing their film and research method, "We have come to Dawson City to follow the steps of two Italian brothers who came to the Yukon during the gold rush in 1898, Silvio and Clemente Boldrini. Our film documents Dawson City in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and today. Sandro Frizzi, who has been living in Dawson for years, accompanied both of us for almost a month, along the creeks, to Gertie's, to the Museum, to the mining office, and he has introduced us to all his friends and colleagues."

The work is accomplished on the road, the trail or the archives. Rosà explains, "Antonio was in charge of the shooting, with a Panasonic mini DV video camera, trying to film every aspect of living and working in Dawson City. He arrived in Dawson two weeks before me, went to a remote camp outside Dawson for some days with some prospectors, and he filmed some mining places along Eldorado and Bonanza. We met dozens of people."

They interviewed "the mayor, the nurse-in-charge at the nursing station, the chief of the forest fire department at the airport,

Laura Mann as director of the Dawson Museum, the announcers of the local radio station, the man in charge of the cleaning up for miners (inspector), the owner of the Trading Post, the reverend at the St. Paul Anglican church, the police officers", says Rosà.



Silvio and Clemente Boldrini

"Everybody was really nice and helpful. We researched at the archives, bought some historical pictures from the museum. Thanks to the help of Susan Twist of the Yukon Archives in Whitehorse, we were able to find the original claims of the Boldrini brothers. Like many people coming from all over the world, their names were changed, so we have a claim certificate for Clement Baldwin with Clemente Boldrini's original signature. This discovery was a great achievement for our work."

On their tribulations, Paola continues, "It is not easy to plan a trip in such conditions, because you have to be ready for surprises and last-minute changes. But in the Yukon, you always find a solution; that's the point. An example: it was difficult for Antonio to come from Whitehorse to Dawson on the day he had planned to do so. There is no public ground transportation and his luggage (with video camera, tripod, etc.) was too heavy for flying, and he had not booked a seat in advance during the busy summer schedules. So he had to stay a few more days in Whitehorse, wait-

ing for a friend to pick him up. But in the end it worked.

"Another thing we had to get used to was the climate, with such a great difference in temperatures in one single day. We simply dressed, as we say in Italian, 'like an onion', with many different layers, including a heavy jacket and also

a T-shirt. It's easy. Antonio was struck by the light, he was in Dawson since the end of July and it's really an experience to see daylight at midnight. Life seems to flow like the Yukon's big river, slow and strong without a stop!"

Paola talks about the people they met, "Many people we interviewed spoke about freedom, the mayor did, many prospectors did, a miner did. In Dawson, you can feel this freedom in the way people approach you on the street, they say 'good morning, hi, how are you?' (which is "strange" if you come from Europe, where people walk with stressed eyes not seeing anybody on their way). In such a hard situation, with difficult roads so far away from anywhere, people help each other, it's a matter of surviving and has become a habit, they stop if they think you need something, and you too soon get ready to help others. You forget all the mistrust and suspicion you are used to in Europe."

In Dawson, freedom combines with respect, and you feel people respect your freedom. It's not easy to explain, it's something we have felt when we were there. Coming from Europe, coming from the tiny and chaotic little Italy, you feel all this room around you, but you are never afraid. We forgot the fear, the artificial fear that you



Inexpensive filming equipment helps Antonio adapt to Dawson's wet weather

are supposed to feel when you meet "strangers". In Dawson City we felt at home, we had accommodation in a flat and we didn't get the key: 'What do you need the key for? You just risk to lose it!' And we felt reassured, fearless."

Still receiving the final touches, the film is to be published imminently by the Fondazione Museo Storico di Trento. It will be shown on several occasions at the Museum, and will probably be broadcast by Rai television. It has taken a few months over the fall season to finish cutting and editing. The premiere is expected in January.

"We would love to return to Dawson City," says Rosà, "maybe with another project if possible. In Italian there's a lyric taken from a famous traditional song, Ho lasciato il mio cuore a Firenze (I left my heart in Florence), and it reflects the nostalgic feeling for a beautiful place where you experienced something unforgettable. So, we can say, we left our heart in Dawson!"

Paola and Antonio hope to send a preview of their film to the Dawson City International Short Film Festival. We hope to see their work next spring. They know the deadline for submitting films to the Festival is December 11, 2009!



Cameraman Antonio Senter and writer-translator Paola Rosà of Trento, Italy