Disability no obstacle to scriptwriter

By Janet Davison

It was not a big investment, but Peter Jackson says it is the best $20 he ever spent.

Jackson sent that money to the federal government in 1985 and received in return a copyright for a film script he had been working on for 15 years.

Since then, he has been polishing Alonzo, his silent film tribute to Lon (Alonzo) Chaney and the physiotherapists who have helped Jackson since he was born with cerebral palsy 40 years ago.

For the Cherry Hill resident, that script is an important step toward changing people’s perceptions of the disabled.

"I wanted to show that we can exercise our minds as well as our bodies," he said.

When his script is polished, Jackson plans to make the rounds of production houses and find someone willing to take Alonzo to the big screen. His script includes props and costume suggestions. He would like to direct the film, preferably in London. But he says he is facing a challenge.

"Did I because I wanted to show how much of my own money I’d be willing to spend rather than sitting here doing nothing. There will be nervousness about the fact that I’m in a wheelchair," he said.

"Disability is worldwide. Maybe by using silent film, you can get it across to everybody."

While his choice of subject matter for his film is logical, his choice of medium is also understandable.

Since his family brought home its first television in 1955, he has been fascinated by film and moving pictures.

"Of all the arts, film is the most heartbreakingly fragile. It is not like a painting where you know no one can cut a part out of it. Film is the twentieth century art form because it is a classic blend of science and art."

Jackson is immersed in that blend. Pictures of stars such as Greta Garbo, Boris Karloff, Stan and Ollie decorate his walls. He raves about his most recent trip to the theatre to see The Little Mermaid. And he places high praise on CBC’s Newsroom, a service which brings Marshall McLuhan’s global village into Jackson’s apartment.

"There’s a whole world out there—yes, you have to be on top of it," he said.

But while he says film and television are essential for learning about the world, Jackson says: 

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