

## Film News: Cinematographer, Oscar Winner Haskell Wexler of ‘One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest’ Dies at 93

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on December 27, 2015 - 6:26pm

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LOS ANGELES – At the 2013 Chicago International Film Festival awards ceremony at the Ambassador East, an older man started shooting me with a video camera in the bar area. Later that same man, Haskell Wexler, picked up a lifetime award at that ceremony. Haskell Wexler died on Dec. 27, 2015, at the age of 93.



Haskell Wexler, Oscar Winning Cinematographer

*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

Wexler won two Oscars for his cinematography, for “Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf” – the last separate Oscar given for Black & White cinematography – and “Bound for Glory,” which was also notable for the first use of the Steadicam. The rest of his resume isn’t too shabby either, with Best Picture winners or nominations for “In the Heat of the Night,” “One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest,” “America America” and “Coming Home.” Wexler had five Oscar nominations, including his wins, during his career. He was also given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the American Society of Cinematographers in 1993.

Haskell Wexler was a son of Chicago, born here in 1922, where he attended the progressive Francis Parker School. He lasted only one year in college before joining the Merchant Marine during World War II, and decided to become a filmmaker thereafter. He started in television (“The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet”) and made low budget documentaries. His break came with Elia Kazan and his film “America America” in 1963. The stunning look of the film meant Wexler would work in Hollywood for the rest of his career. Besides the aforementioned Oscar films, Wexler was cinematographer on movie favorites and cult films like “The Best Man,” “Days of Heaven,” “Matewan” and “Mulholland Falls.”

Wexler’s first feature film as director was also one of the best ever shot in the City of Chicago. “Medium Cool” was a fictional story shot in Chicago in the summer of 1968. That was also the summer of the infamous Democratic National Convention and hotbed protest over the Vietnam War. Wexler had his fictional characters walk through the reality of that summer, blurring the function between art and actual life. It still can evoke an emotion.



Wexler won his first Oscar for ‘Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf’ (1966)

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

His last mainstream film as cinematographer was “61\*,” the Billy Crystal-directed HBO film on the 1961 home run race between Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris. His final released credit as director and cinematographer is “Four Days in Chicago,” a documentary about the NATO protests here in 2012. Haskell Wexler died in his sleep at his home in Santa Monica, California, and is survived by his third wife, Rita Taggart, and three children.

He once gave some very good advice to potential filmmakers...“I’d say to anyone trying to break into the business: Don’t just be interested in movies. Be interested in life. Be a person. Be in touch.” When I realized that he shot video footage of me at that awards ceremony, I felt in touch. “Watch out Haskell, it’s real.”

*Sources for this article from Wikipedia and imdb.com. Haskell Wexler, 1922-2015.*



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