

From Slamdance with Love...

Signed Jordan Brady

by Jordan Brady



DP Armando Salsa helps Brady balance actor Nick Sadler's intensity with humor.

Slamdance is an old Navajo word meaning: "my film got rejected by Sundance."

You've heard the legend of how a handful of misfit filmmakers started their own festival in Park City. I found myself drawn to the customs and lifestyle of this tribe when my first feature premiered at Slamdance so many moons ago, in the pre-Google era.

October 2011. I get a call from Slamdance President Peter Baxter asking if I am interested in directing a short for the festival's \$99 Special series. His tranquil British accent is hypnotizing. He makes the whole challenge seem like a joy ride. With a budget of \$99 and 99 days to shoot, edit, score; I'm to deliver a compelling piece worthy of a world premiere.

"The story takes place in one location, over one day. Four actors." I am instantly flattered. Peter must think highly of my skills, or that I have an extra \$99. "Yes!" I say with the bold enthusiasm of a sea captain.

Then I ask to read the script.

"Harold's Bad Day" is penned by young R.J. Buckley, a whippersnapper in his twenties. I love his sharp, Tarantinesque-dialogue. The dark humor is exactly what I want. It's not jokey-joke funny, but rather, wry and subtle funny. I see this project as a tart, creative sorbet after my last two years of steady commercial directing. The obvious production challenge is shooting 15 pages in a single day.

My personal pledge is to include young R.J. in every phase of production. A writer myself, I often boast that without the writer, there would be nothing to shoot. As a director, however, I'm quick to point out that movies are more fun than book clubs.

Peter has suckered Nicole Arbusto into casting the film. It's got to be that British accent. His is the Jude Law kind, not that chimney

sweep kind. Nicole and I meet for coffee. When I casually drop that I'll be on a podcast called "Doug Loves Movies" hosted by comedian Doug Benson, Nicole perks up like Velma from "Scooby Doo" when she's solved the mystery.

"That's him! He's 'Harold!'"

"Who?" I ask, "Old man Whithers?"

"What about Doug as 'Harold'?" she says.

Done. Assuming he'll do it. Nicole and I laugh, exchange more ideas, and never see each other again.

We work via the internet.

My master plan is to get a commercial gig to make asking my regular crew for a freebie a lot easier. (Getting a job also makes buying groceries easier.) Within a week, I book a juicy three day shoot!

But it shoots in Missouri.

Damn.

Nicole posts reels and we trade emails. She asks me if I like Nicholas Sadler. I just watched Nick get hanged after his nice speech in "True Grit" so I think it's a long shot. And he lives in New York. Maybe we should just shoot in Missouri with unknowns?



"Harold's Bad Day" was shot with the Sony F3 system. RK Buckley watches in awe that his script is being made.

Before actors and your crew can say "yes" to doing your film, you need a date. After obtaining a great script, picking the start date is the most important decision. Friends will say "sure" and then ask "when?" Make note aspiring movie makers: pick a date.

Mid-November. Nicole needs to make offers to actors. No more stalling for that Los Angeles gig, the trigger must be pulled. I blurt out "Saturday, December 10th!" Crew members are less likely to be working on a Saturday, and surely a \$99 short film is more important than family time.

Next challenge: location. The film opens with two young men ran-



Zack Pearlman as Christopher and Curtiss Frisle as Stevey in "Harold's Bad Day"

sacking Harold's house. We are going to be breaking stuff. No one volunteers.

I'd offer up my house, but, um, it doesn't fit the character.

Doug Benson says "yes" and rearranges his stand-up tour. Over coffee, he poses an interesting question: "Can I ad-lib or should we adhere to the script, since the kid won this contest with his screenplay?" I want R.J. to have the truest Hollywood experience, so I insist Doug change the writer's words.

Nick Sadler says "yes" and he'll even fly out to Los Angeles! Two of Nicole's fresh offerings, Zack Pearlman and Curtiss Frisle say "yes". Phew! I've got a stellar cast. I only need a crew and a location.

Thank God for the phrase "Deus ex machina". Out of nowhere, the lovely advertising world needs me to shoot five spots. (I can't reveal the client, but it rhymes with "Roy Soda"). Yeah! My kids can eat. It's a two-day gig that shoots the week of the 11th. On the tech scout, I explain to my crew that we are all subject unto a higher power, and with great humility I beg them to help with "Harold's Bad Day". Instantly, many receive phone calls. But enough say "of course" that I visibly cry tears of joy. We have a crew. Not just any crew, the best crew working today, damn it. Knowing my trusty prop-master Bob Feffer is on board means I can start drinking.

Peter is striking out on a location and I begin to doubt if his accent is real. My producer Teresa Taylor, hearing our woes, casually offers her house like it's borrowing a pencil. I am stunned and question her judgment, but accept it graciously.

My DP Mateo Londono gets called to shoot in South America. Can't expect people to turn down paying work. Maybe I'll have to shoot it on my HD camcorder myself? I'll rationalize that it's a "choice". Then I picture young R.J.'s face showing up on set to discover me with a handycam, drunk. Turns out our talented gaffer, Armando Salas, has shot three gorgeous features in China. Peter taps the Slamdance family and fills the rest of the holes in our crew. This is a truly magical gesture by all these filmmakers: stepping in for the love of the process, the joy of filmmaking. I don't know how to say it in Navajo.

December 10th. The shoot goes great, chiefly because of all the professionals I've gathered. We get the entire script in one day. By 10 pm, Teresa's house looks like it did when we rolled up that morning.

Holiday break. I'm editing in my under-

pants, which is odd, because I don't normally wear underpants. I send a link of what I'm doing to Jeff Blodgett at Brickyard VFX and ask if anyone can help me add a little digital hocus pocus. Off my passionate pitch, VFX Artiste Mandy Sorenson spends her vacation enhancing a few shots. This little film is coming together nicely. Now, does it play?

Hybrid Editorial throws these quarterly socials ("Socials?" Am I in the 1890's?) They screen films, docs and cool videos. I've got a bottle of top shelf tequila I can re-gift, so I ask Gail Butler if I can screen my in-progress cut. I've always pre-screened for strangers, filmmakers, and editors to feel the room.

Last night. The make-shift test screening goes great. Doug Benson shows up and is happy. Always helpful to have your actors like their film. R.J. shows up and suggests even more



Nick Sadler as Marty in "Harold's Bad Day"



Doug Benson in "Harold's Bad Day"

trims. The kid turns out to be a cold-hearted killer of his own words. I love it. Everyone has compliments and suggestions that I soak up like a sponge. Mostly the compliments. I've got nine days to deliver a completed work, so I ask the most pressing question on my mind.

"Can anyone get me a sound mix?"

"Harold's Bad Day" premieres Friday, Jan. 20th at Slamdance 2012.

Jordan Brady directs TV commercials via Superlounge. With five feature films to his name, he's one of the most prolific Directors you've never heard of. See his spots at www.superlounge.tv, or catch his stand-up comedy act live at a seedy bar near you.

