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Brad Rushing [Interview]

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Hello Folks! Welcome to the 2020 edition of our Month of Horror. It's almost humorous that we are showcasing the motion pictured displays of horror when it seems as though we simply have to look around us to see the natural horror that is enveloping our daily lives. But nevertheless, a quick escape from the surrealism of our daily lives is often appreciated. In this vein, we honor these wonderful folks who seek to only entertain us with a good scare and a break from the actual horror that is all around us. We have assembled a wonderful batch of actors, writers, directors & beyond, who have worked on so many different projects that you know and love. I am beyond excited to share them with you all throughout the month of October. Enjoy!

Today's guest for our Month of Horror is another absolute legend in the world of horror and beyond. For over 30 years, Brad Rushing has been working as a cinematographer & director on some of the most terrifying films to be made in the last few decades. Including the super cool voodoo doll horror movie directed by Jeff Hare with VFX by Spooky Dan Walker, shot as *Unbound*, but released on Lifetime for Halloween in 2018 with the title *Killer Under The Bed*, featuring the wonderful Kristy Swanson. Others include 1998's brilliant David DeCoteau-directed *Shrieker*.

Beyond the world of horror, Rushing has also done some very amazing work in the world of music videos having worked with some of the biggest names in pop music from the likes of Eminem, Moby, Dido, George Michael, Nelly, & just so many more.

We are so pleased to have Brad joining in on the Month of Horror with his very thoughtful and inspiring words. So Folks, please enjoy some words from the great Brad Rushing!

What inspired you to get into the world of entertainment? Was it an early aspiration you can always remember having since your youth, or did you just find yourself in this world one day?

One of my earliest favorite pastimes was drawing. My parents were talented artists and they encouraged me. Growing up I studied art in school and eventually began to learn music. I attended Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts surrounded by diverse artistic peers where I majored in fine art, indulged in musical collaborations, and was introduced to making moving images.

The first time I recall aspiring to an entertainment career was while writing and recording my own music during and after college at University of Houston. I decided that, between art, music and filmmaking I would go with the career which paid me first. That happened when I learned of a local home shopping channel which was looking to hire camera operators. I left college without graduating to start work and have never looked back.

What was your first paid gig in the world of entertainment? And were there any kind of lessons learned from this project that still affect your work today?

The camera operating job with the home shopping network was my first paid gig. When I started the camera operators were young people, fresh out of college like me while the directors and producers were more experienced. Those more experienced people soon left for better paying opportunities and my peers and I began to rotate through the jobs of Directing, Technical Director, Tape Operator and so on. It truly became a case of the inmates running the asylum. To be fair everyone learned quickly and we all did great. On the few occasions where someone slipped up it wasn't a catastrophe; after all it was only home shopping and we would all laugh it off.

It was a great training ground to learn to see the live TV production process from the perspective of the different roles. The lack of strict supervision left the path open to some fun experimentation and to break the formulaic monotony I would often try out ambitious camera moves, encouraged by my peers. I learned by experience the process of attrition and moving up the ladder which is such a fundamental part of the business.

When the company folded after about a year and I was considering what I wanted to do next I decided that it was NOT live television. I had been drawn to motion pictures to tell stories. So I set out to meet some local filmmakers and found myself volunteering in a variety of capacities on a 16mm film that was being made on credit cards.

Beyond the world of feature films, you have worked on several music video projects featuring the likes of Blink 182, Eminem, Mariah Carey, and many more. I am always curious to know how the experiences differ? What would you say is the biggest difference between a feature film with more time than a quick shoot of a music video. And do you have a preference?

There are two big differences from my perspective.

The first is that with a feature film, usually, the images are going for a certain "reality" even if that is fantasy or illusion or unreality. You want to capture the imagination of the audience and keep their suspension of disbelief engaged. On music videos anything goes. The imagery is motivated to appeal, surprise and arrest attention, ideally searing iconography into the audience's brain to build the artist's brand. You can make images that simply look terrific with no worries about grounding them in a context of reality. You can break continuity wildly in ways you would typically never do in a narrative structure.

The second difference is time. Usually your prep on music videos is limited to a few days and a single day of tech scouting. Then you shoot one day, or maybe 2 or 3 if the production is extra ambitious. With such a tight schedule it's imperative to have a tight game plan and execution.

On a feature you usually have a week or two to at least to prep with multiple scout days. There is time to discuss, consider, meet, reconsider and revise to an extent not possible on a short music video. Once you begin shooting a feature because of the much longer schedule we can often make adaptations as we go like shuffling the schedule.

On a music video I order all the equipment I will need delivered right from the start. While it happens a little on music videos it is more common on feature films that I will day play extra cameras or specialty equipment that I only need for certain days and scenes over a matter of weeks and I need to keep track of those comings and goings with production. Same with crew where I might day play a Steadicam Operator, Crane Operator or additional G&E and Camera Crew for heavier days.

In addition to feature films and music videos I also shoot commercials and television series. To choose a favorite would be like "Sophie's Choice." Each one has unique appeals and I do love them equally. To only have one would be like eating the same meal every day forever. Not my jam. In a perfect world I would shoot 3 – 5 narrative projects every year and in between a mix of commercials and music videos.

In your own personal opinion, what do you believe it is that makes the horror genre special? What sets it apart from other genres you have worked in?

The most enchanting thing to me as a movie fan is to be taken somewhere or some time that I cannot access by walking out my front door. So horror and science fiction and period films all hold a special place in my heart. That those genres often overlap is even more fun.

From a pure adrenalin point of view the thrill of horror is super fun – seeing fantastical, chilling, terrifying imagery, the thrill of dread, the rush of being shocked. I also like how some of the very best horror can be allegorical, like the ID creature in "Forbidden Planet."

My favorite genres of horror tend to be psychological and classic horror. I am not a fan of sadistic or cruelly misanthropic horror.

What is your favorite scary movie?

Like picking my favorite child (if I had children)! If you can keep it between us and not tell the others – it has to be *Alien* which is also my favorite movie period.

I saw *Alien* when it first came out, right at the beginning. This was in 1979 with no internet. Word of mouth was slower, and since I saw it immediately I hadn't heard or read anything. It was a genre I loved, a cool title, and intriguing poster – I couldn't wait.

I'll never forget sitting in that dark theater by myself experiencing the haunted-house-in-space world Ridley Scott created, watching Kane peer cautiously into the egg sack deep in the bowels of the derelict spacecraft. Then ... BAM!!! That fucking thing sprang out and scared the shit out of me!!! For the first time in my life I literally jumped out of my seat in the theater.

And you never forget your first time.

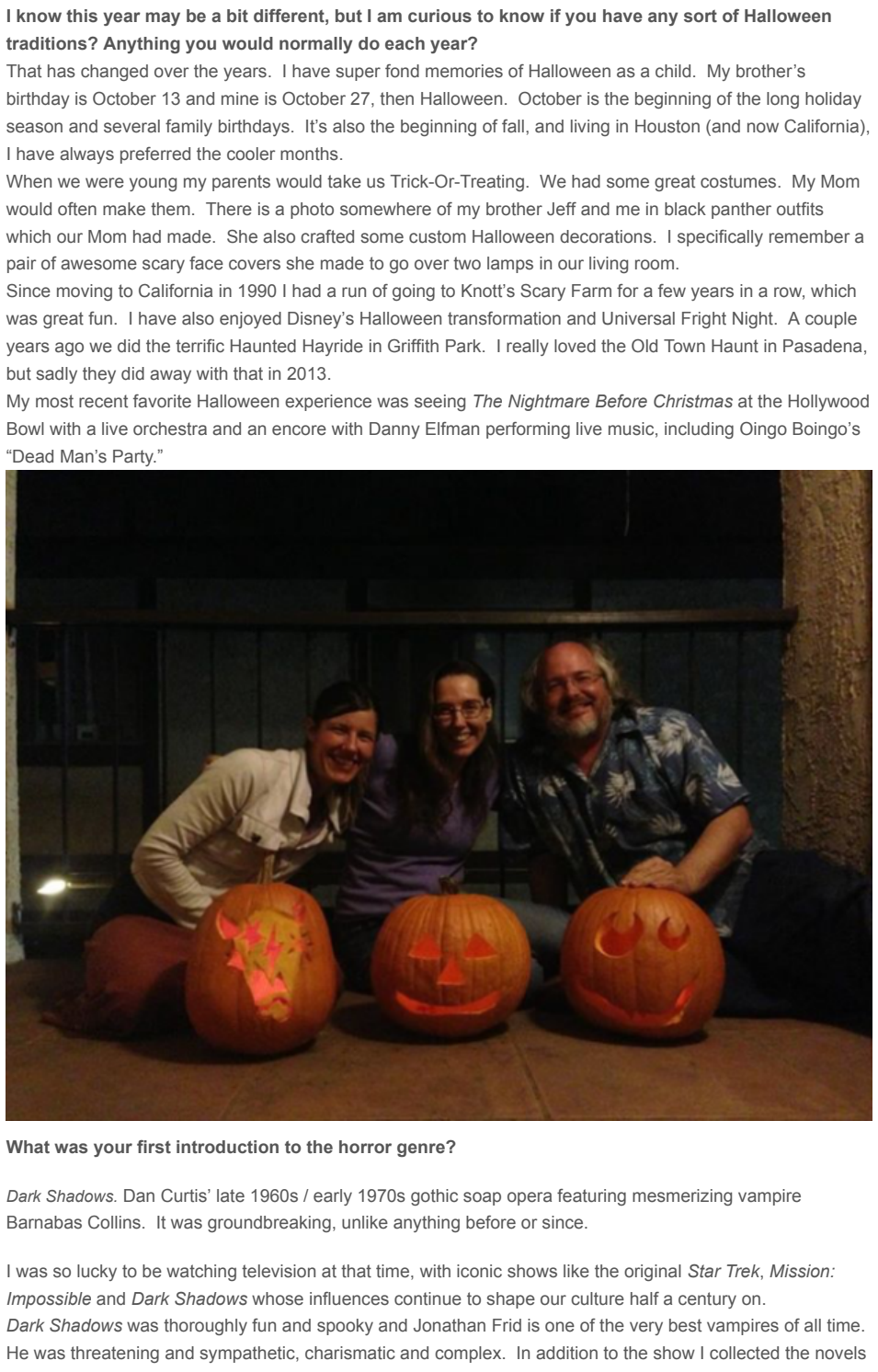
I know this year may be a bit different, but I am curious to know if you have any sort of Halloween traditions? Anything you would normally do each year?

That has changed over the years. I have super fond memories of Halloween as a child. My brother's birthday is October 13 and mine is October 27, then Halloween. October is the beginning of the long holiday season and several family birthdays. It's also the beginning of fall, and living in Houston (and now California), I have always preferred the cooler months.

When we were young my parents would take us Trick-Or-Treating. We had some great costumes. My Mom would often make them. There is a photo somewhere of my brother Jeff and me in black panther outfits which our Mom had made. She also crafted some custom Halloween decorations. I specifically remember a pair of awesome scary face covers she made to go over two lamps in our living room.

Since moving to California in 1990 I had a run of going to Knott's Scary Farm for a few years in a row, which was great fun. I have also enjoyed Disney's Halloween transformation and Universal Fright Night. A couple years ago we did the terrific Haunted Hayride in Griffith Park. I really loved the Old Town Haunt in Pasadena, but sadly they did away with that in 2013.

My most recent favorite Halloween experience was seeing *The Nightmare Before Christmas* at the Hollywood Bowl with a live orchestra and an encore with Danny Elfman performing live music, including Oingo Boingo's "Dead Man's Party."



What was your first introduction to the horror genre?

Dark Shadows. Dan Curtis' late 1960s / early 1970s gothic soap opera featuring mesmerizing vampire Brad Shadows. It was groundbreaking, unlike anything before or since.

I was so lucky to be watching television at that time, with iconic shows like the original *Star Trek*, *Mission: Impossible* and *Dark Shadows* whose influences continue to shape our culture half a century on.

Dark Shadows was thoroughly fun and spooky and Jonathan Frid is one of the very best vampires of all time. He was threatening and sympathetic, charismatic and complex. In addition to the show I collected the novels by Marilyn Ross (actually William Edward Daniel Ross under a pseudonym), I had the Milton Bradley board game and the MPC model. Recently I indulged by acquiring the prodigious deluxe complete DVD series housed in a coffin-shaped case.

Dan Curtis also directed the fantastic *Trilogy of Terror* written by Richard Matheson and William F. Nolan, and starring Karen Black which features that terrifying sharp-toothed Zuni fetish doll in one of the three stories. It was released on Blu Ray this year.

What is your favorite undiscovered or "lost" horror film?

Eyes of Fire. I saw this fantastic period horror film when it first came out in 1983 and was absolutely smitten by the subtle and supernatural atmosphere that pervaded the story set in colonial America.

I don't know what happened with that film. It was released on VHS, but never on DVD or Blu Ray. I wrote Criterion and several other companies to suggest they acquire the rights and release it. But so far no one has. I also have tried emailing and writing the director Avery Crouse who directed two more movies, his last in 1996. But I have never gotten a reply.

Eyes of Fire is a unique, fun and creepy movie. I highly recommend people give it a look. Search "eyes of fire 1983" to find it on YouTube.

What does the future hold for you? Anything you would like to plug to our readers?

Look for the feature film *A California Christmas* coming to a major streaming service this holiday season. I shot the movie starring Josh Swickard and Lauren Swickard (she wrote the screenplay) in Petaluma, CA with my friend director Shaun Piccinino in July. It was a nice break from quarantine and we followed strict SAG-approved COVID safety protocols. I had a fantastic time with the wonderful cast and crew, executive producer Ali Afshar and his production company ESX Entertainment. Shaun and I locked the color grade last week and I am incredibly happy with the result. There's a terrific variety of lighting styles in the movie, which appeals to my vanity. Ha ha. The feedback from audience previews has been overwhelmingly positive and I am super excited for it to be set loose soon.

What was the last thing that scared the hell out of you?

I wish I could share a "fun scare." The last thing to scare the hell out of me was the death of my father in November 2018. My mother had died prior in October 2011, and as sad as that made me it's not the same kind of completely ALONE as losing them both and being an orphan.

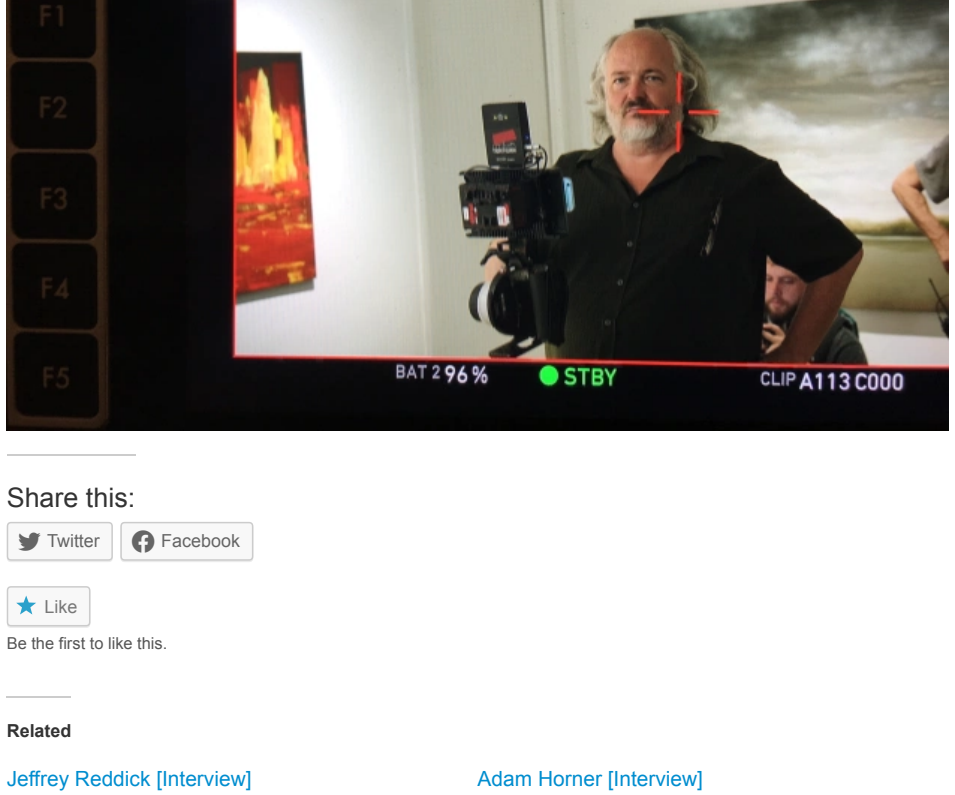
From the time I was a young child losing my parents has been a great fear of mine. As unsettled as a few years ago I would have nightmares that one of them had died and then wake up with the unsettling belief that it was only a dream.

I was always close with my parents and they were my first and best supporters and cheerleaders. It's a profound paradigm shift to live in a world without them. I am still disoriented at not being able to call them, which I frequently have an impulse to do, and heartbroken at the times something happens I'd like to share, or questions and advice I'd like to ask them. It always made me feel better to talk with them, no matter whether we actually discussed what was going on or just chatted about their day.

It's the most permanent scary thing that has ever happened to me and I get by so far by putting it out of my mind in a kind of denial.

What was the last thing that made you smile?

All the compliments I got from people for a *A California Christmas*. It wasn't even color graded yet and in it's raw form I felt it looked kind of crappy. Wait til they see the magic colorist Keith Roush, Shaun and I did it in the color grade. They may have liked it before, but now it goes to 11.



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