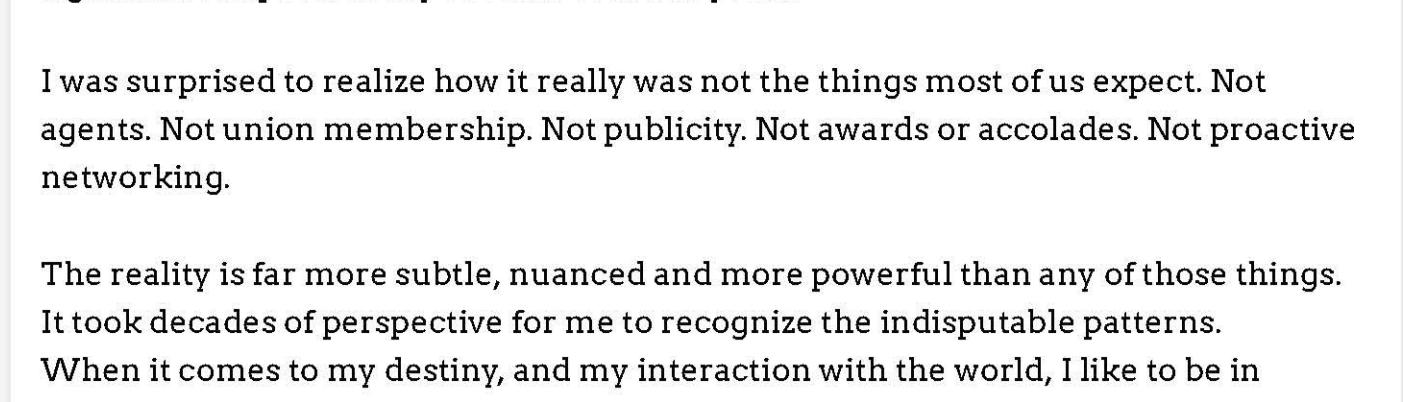


How to Network & Build a Lasting Career in Entertainment



Posted by Brad Rushing

I recently gave some thought to what actions and strategies had made the most significant impacts in my success over the years.

I was surprised to realize how it really was not the things most of us expect. Not agents. Not union membership. Not publicity. Not awards or accolades. Not proactive networking.

The reality is far more subtle, nuanced and more powerful than any of those things. It took decades of perspective for me to recognize the indisputable patterns. When it comes to my destiny, and my interaction with the world, I like to be in control.

I imagine that applies to most people.

Freefall is a scary place to be.

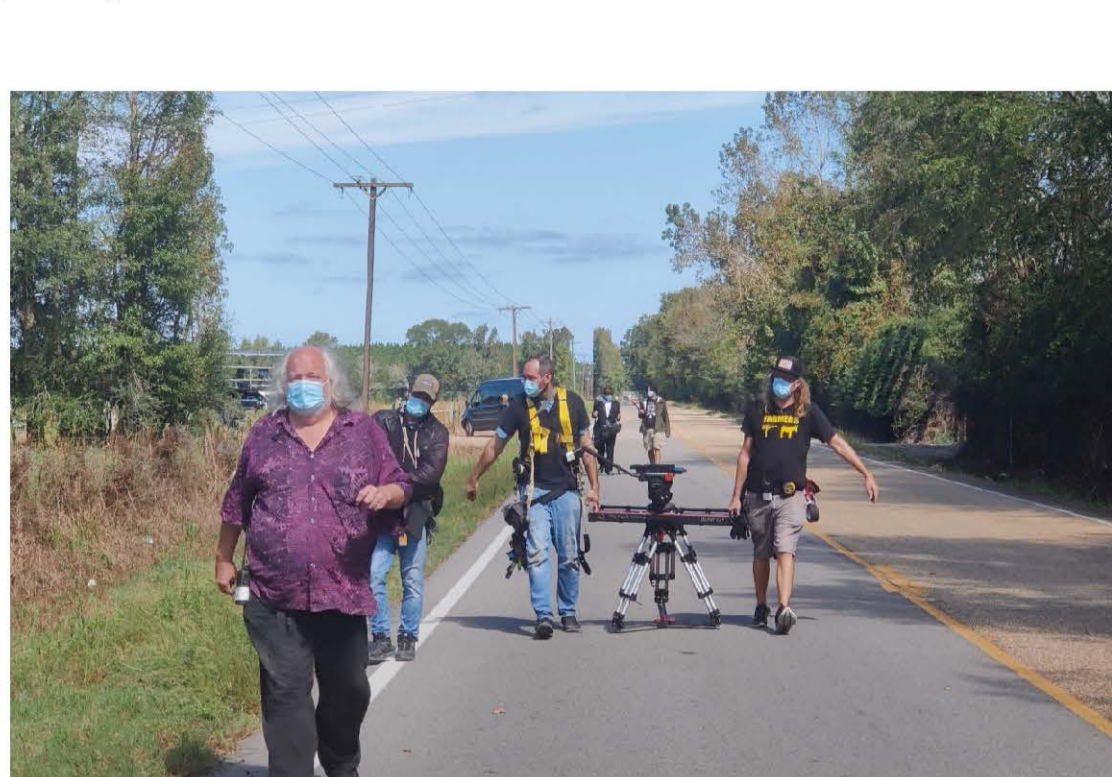
Limited - or NO ability - to influence an outcome is terrifying.

The sense of utter helplessness that situation creates must be what first compelled humans to seek out religious and faith-based belief systems. If we cannot directly hedge our bets, then we will settle for a hotline to a benevolent deity who will grace us with favorable intervention, or perhaps a malevolent one who we might hope to appease.

I have lived most of my life within the illusion that I am in control. Being an ambitious and driven person in an insanely competitive industry it's kept me very busy!

Now, a "few years" into my career, I have the benefit of perspective. I am able to review the results of cause-and-effect, energy wisely applied, alongside my regrettable mistakes.

I have had terrific career highlights. I have also been humbled more times than I care to remember, a flag most of us choose not to hoist and wave about.



On set early in my career in Houston, TX

I have always believed idealistically that I have tremendous power to affect outcomes. While that has made me feel empowered and given me an often false sense of security the penalty for believing it is that I blame myself when things don't go the way I expect. If I am so powerful, but - oops! - then I must have messed up. It's all on me.

It's only an artificial construct, often untrue and wholly unfair to myself.

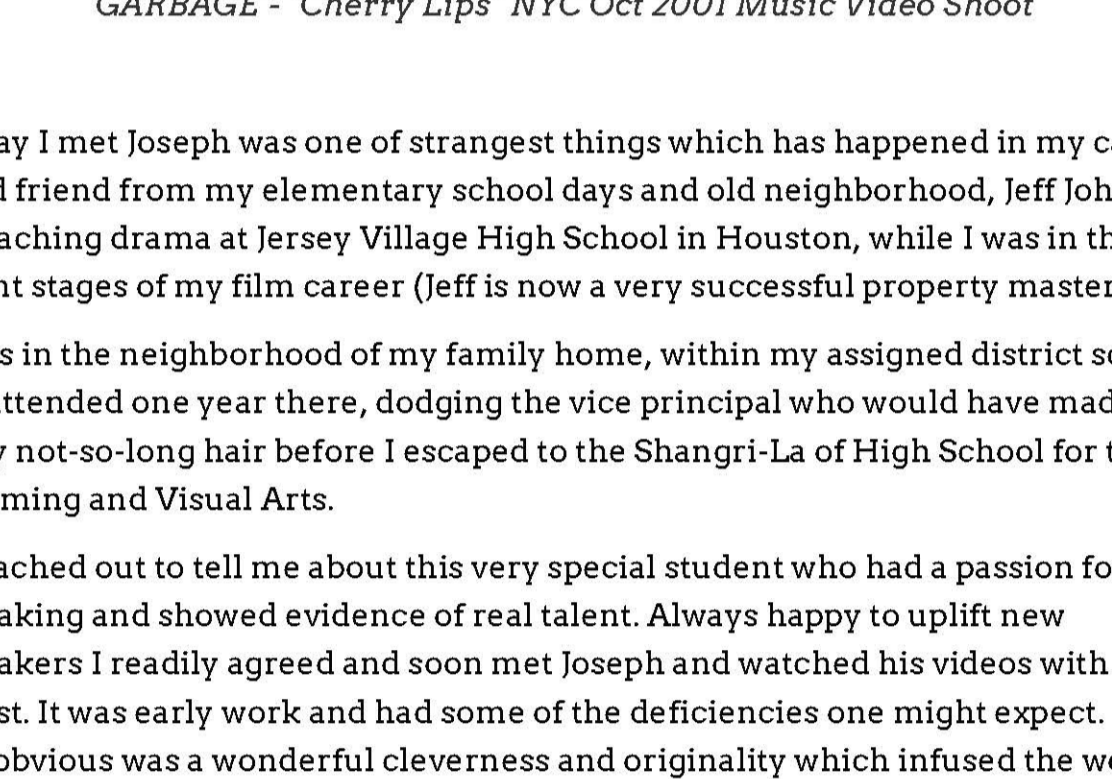
Examining my most cherished, productive and lucrative relationships a surprising pattern emerges.

I see remarkably little evidence that these concentrated efforts, initiated by me in a calculated and deliberate way have yielded many tangible benefits.

Wow! There are little-to-no traces of that sort of "busy work" creating any measurable effect on my career. Really? I have been so diligent, tireless and persistent. Well, damn!

I should add a disclaimer: Your experience and results may differ. Perhaps you are not as shy as I am. Maybe if I was gregarious I'd see different outcomes here. For sure I have had to learn to work around and push past my shyness, which held me back in the most incredible and insidious ways. But my strategies are work-arounds, not cures.

I am still an innately shy person and often confused by social interactions with strangers. For instance I have the unfortunate impediment of being completely oblivious to innuendo and subtext. If people don't say actual words to me I will never pick up on any non-verbal communications.



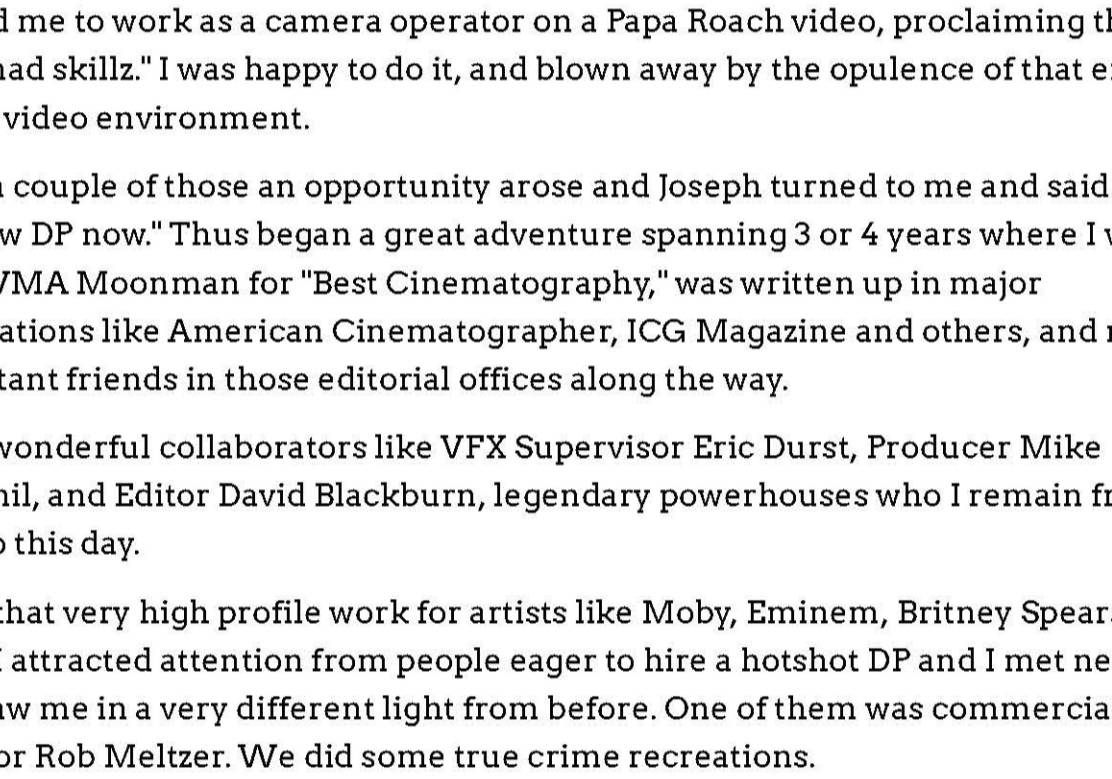
Behind the Scenes of 'Jeepers Creepers: Reborn' (Baton Rouge LA)

The other variables are the times, people and places who have passed through my life. It would be impossible for anyone to replicate any other person's life path. So direct comparisons are misleading. This is an analysis of my journey in the hope that aspects may be informative and helpful to you.

In spite of my illusion of control and committed efforts to direct providence, it turns out I have mostly been in freefall (albeit with VR goggles strapped across my eyes showing me a fiction) as if I were a hapless coyote tumbled over a precipice in pursuit of a feathered nosh.

There HAVE been successes. Some really, really great and high profile ones. When I trace those back, along the meandering lines of related people and opportunities I discover some surprising things.

One of my greatest bounds forward was working with Joseph Kahn shooting music videos. I remember on our first collaboration, a Garbage video called "Cherry Lips" which we filmed in NYC only a month after 9/11 I asked Joseph who I should hit up for some petty cash to pay for a cab back to the hotel after we wrapped. He laughed and said with a smile: "You have no idea how much money you are going to be making." And he was right. The golden heyday of music videos was an incredible run.



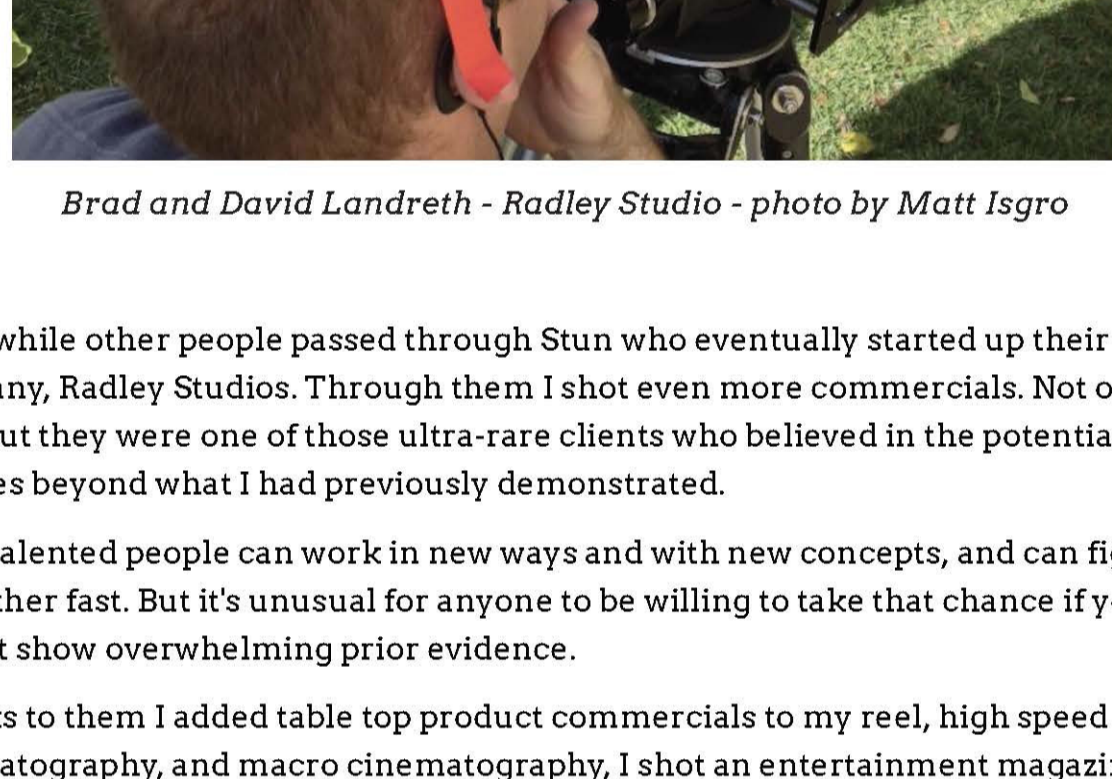
GARBAGE - "Cherry Lips" NYC Oct 2001 Music Video Shoot

The way I met Joseph was one of strangest things which has happened in my career. A good friend from my elementary school days and old neighborhood, Jeff Johnson, was teaching drama at Jersey Village High School in Houston, while I was in the nascent stages of my film career (Jeff is now a very successful property master).

JVHS is in the neighborhood of my family home, within my assigned district school, and I attended one year there, dodging the vice principal who would have made me cut my not-so-long hair before I escaped to the Shangri-La of High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Jeff reached out to tell me about this very special student who had a passion for filmmaking and showed evidence of real talent. Always happy to uplift new filmmakers I readily agreed and soon met Joseph and watched his videos with great interest. It was early work and had some of the deficiencies one might expect. But far more obvious was a wonderful cleverness and originality which infused the work and demonstrated intuitive understandings and daring experimentation. I could tell immediately that this chap had potential.

I started out mentoring him and offering him some gigs on set. Soon he departed for NYU, and I moved to Los Angeles. Joseph made a few trans-continental visits and I welcomed him to stay at my sub-palatial apartment at Vermont and 101. Joseph was very smart, brave and talented and before long he had made a great name for himself directing music videos for major artists.



BTS of "Divorce Invitation" - photo by David Landreth

Meanwhile, I was stalled in the world of low budget indie features. One day, Joseph invited me to work as a camera operator on a Papa Roach video, proclaiming that I had "mad skills." I was happy to do it, and blown away by the opulence of that era's music video environment.

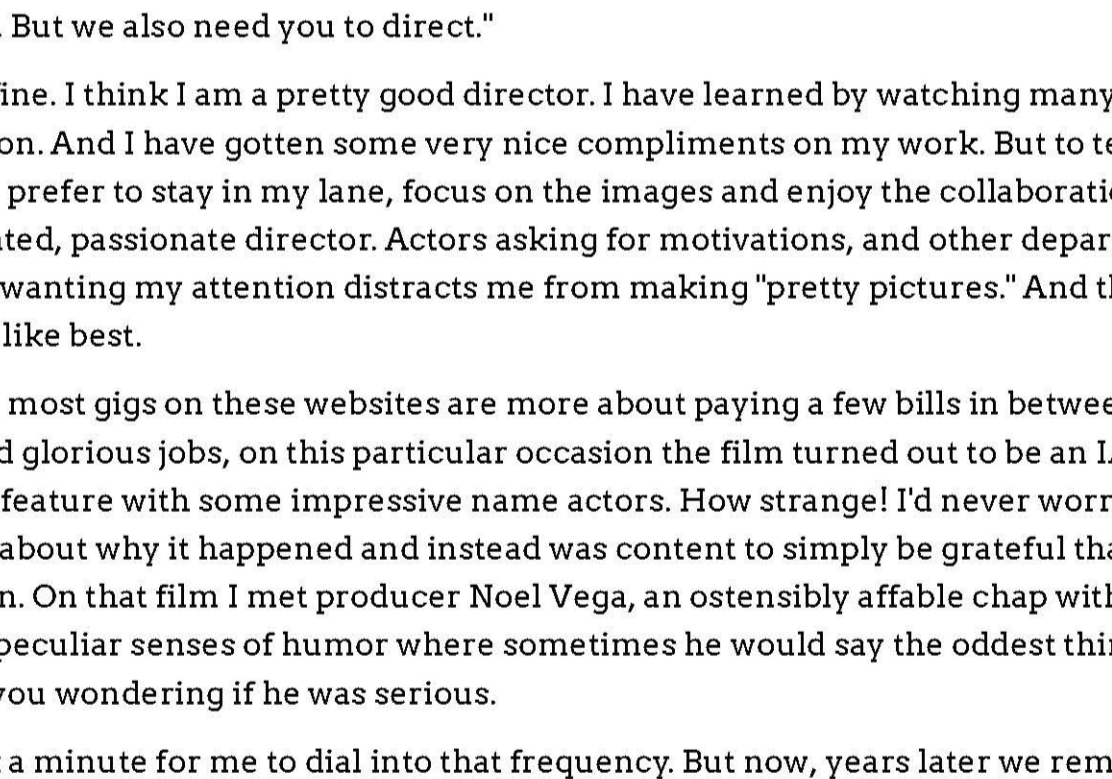
After a couple of those an opportunity arose and Joseph turned to me and said "You're my new DP now." Thus began a great adventure spanning 3 or 4 years where I won an MTV VMA Moonman for "Best Cinematography," was written up in major publications like American Cinematographer, ICG Magazine and others, and made important friends in those editorial offices along the way.

I met wonderful collaborators like VFX Supervisor Eric Hurst, Producer Mike Rachmil, and Editor David Blackburn, legendary powerhouses who I remain friends with to this day.

From that very high profile work for artists like Moby, Eminem, Britney Spears and more I attracted attention from people eager to hire a hotshot DP and I met new folks who saw me in a very different light from before. One of them was commercial director Rob Meltzer. We did some true crime recreations.

I remember that producer called me out of the blue asking if I drove to available the same day to take over for a DP who had the personal emergency. I drove to set and as I walked in the door, without a clue as to what was going on, someone quite literally dropped a camera on my shoulder, pointed and said "shoot that scene over there." That was it. I had parachuted in behind enemy lines straight into a firefight.

As Rob's career took off he brought me with him to Stun Creative where I became a go-to DP, so much so that at one point I could have used their website as my demo reel. They are great people who I love working with and admire to this day.



Brad and David Landreth - Radley Studio - photo by Matt Isgro

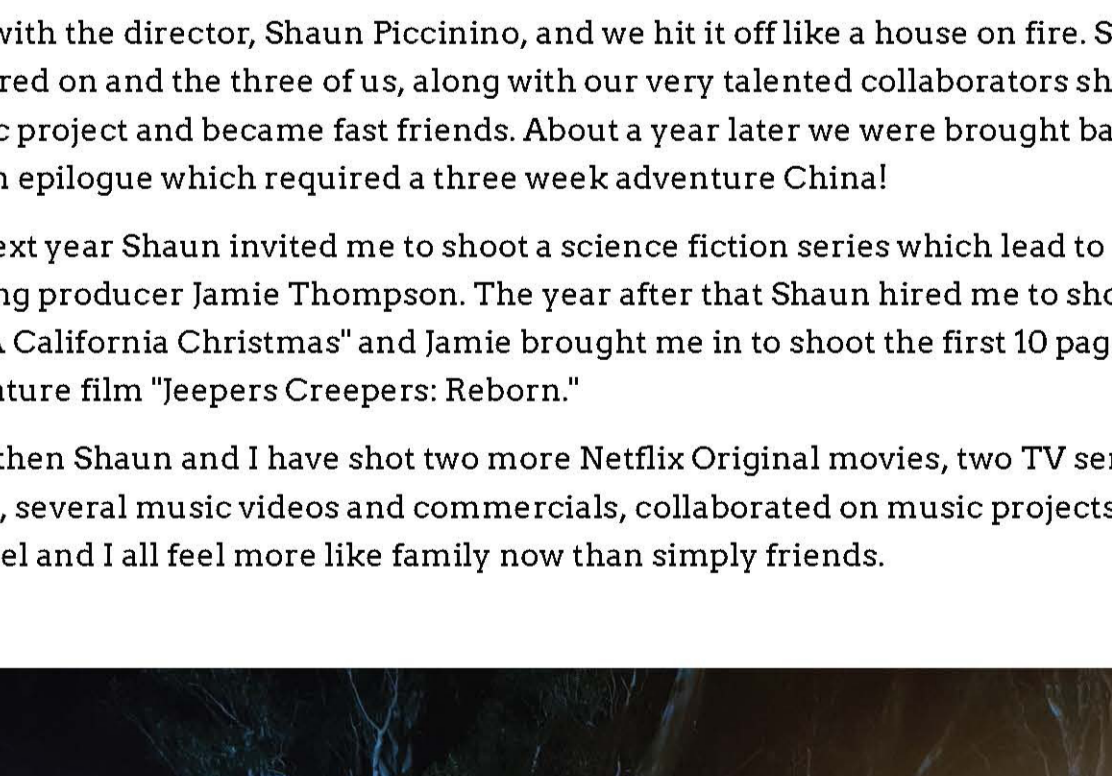
Meanwhile other people passed through Stun who eventually started up their own company, Radley Studios. Through them I shot even more commercials. Not only that, but they were one of those ultra-rare clients who believed in the potential of my abilities beyond what I had previously demonstrated.

Most talented people can work in new ways and with new concepts, and can figure it out rather fast. But it's unusual for anyone to be willing to take that chance if you cannot show overwhelming prior evidence.

Thanks to them I added table top product commercials to my reel, high speed cinematography, and macro cinematography. I shot an entertainment magazine pilot; I shot the first season of dramatic recreations for People Magazine Investigates -with David Fincher films given as a visual reference!

I had the opportunity to pee in Ozzy Osborn's toilet when we shot a sizzle for an idea his son Jack was pitching to a Hollywood channel featuring himself and his PopRok. That job then lead to other opportunities and new clients.

Meanwhile I kept up my own hustle. That may all sound like a very busy time, but those highlights are bridged by fallow periods which could range from weeks to months. I am a person who likes to stay busy, creatively challenged and empowered!!!



DP Brad Rushing and "California Christmas" lead Josh Swickard - photo by Mariah Tzoumbas

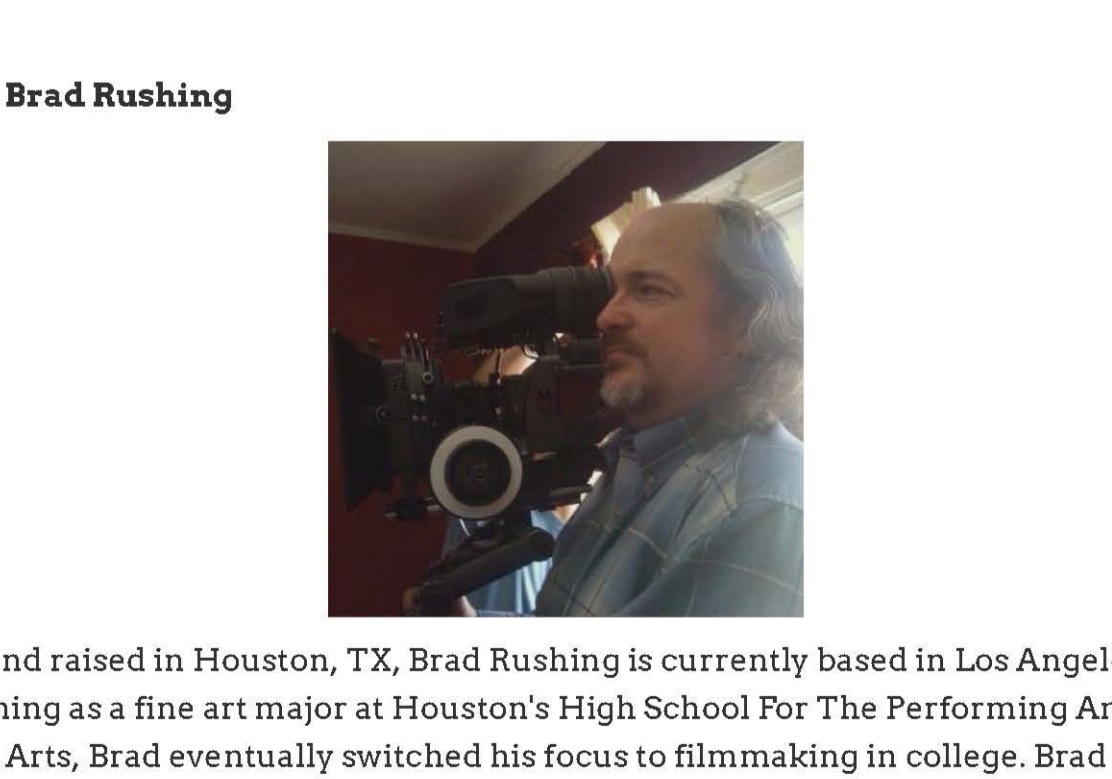
One of my moves has been checking Craigslist and Mandy film job listings. It's been years since I have matched with anything at all (perhaps I am overqualified now). But in 2011 I landed a feature film. Many folks deride and ridicule CL - and so it has always been. Honestly it is a total craps shoot. Like going to Vegas - and putting quarters into a slot machine. But if there is ANY guaranteed strategy for success I have yet to find it. No matter what I have tried, the ratio of rejection / no results to actual jobs remains profoundly imbalanced.

Around that time I landed two significant opportunities. One came from CL and the other from Mandy. I never can recall which was which. One was an indie thing where I was paid \$1000/day and I both shot and directed, and the other was a feature which imparted surprising momentum. Now I don't especially aspire to direct, but it has happened and what that conversation usually sounds like is: "Yes, we'd love you to shoot... But we also need you to direct."

Okay fine. I think I am a pretty good director. I have learned by watching many greats in the truth. And I have gotten some very nice compliments on my work. But to tell the truth I prefer to stay in my lane, focus on the images and enjoy the collaboration with a talented, passionate director. Actors asking for motivations, and other department heads wanting my attention distracts me from making "pretty pictures." And that is what I like best.

While most gigs on these websites are more about paying a few bills in between the big and glorious jobs, on this particular occasion the film turned out to be an IATSE union feature with some impressive name actors. How strange! I'd never worried too much about why it happened and instead was content to simply be grateful that it did happen. On that film I met producer Noel Vega, an ostensibly affable chap with one of those peculiar senses of humor where sometimes he would say the oddest things and leave you wondering if he was serious.

It took a minute for me to dial into that frequency. But now, years later we remain good friends and that is one of his most special and charming qualities. I enjoy being a spectator now and watching as he flummoxes the newcomers!



"California Christmas" Director Shaun Piccinino, DP Brad Rushing and 1st AC Lauren Peele - by Mariah Tzoumbas

After the movie wrapped, as I do, I stayed in touch with Noel. Years passed, and we would check in once every six months or so. We had some nice conversations and lunches, but there was no further collaboration. Eventually I realized we would just be friends and the chances of working together again were diminishing.

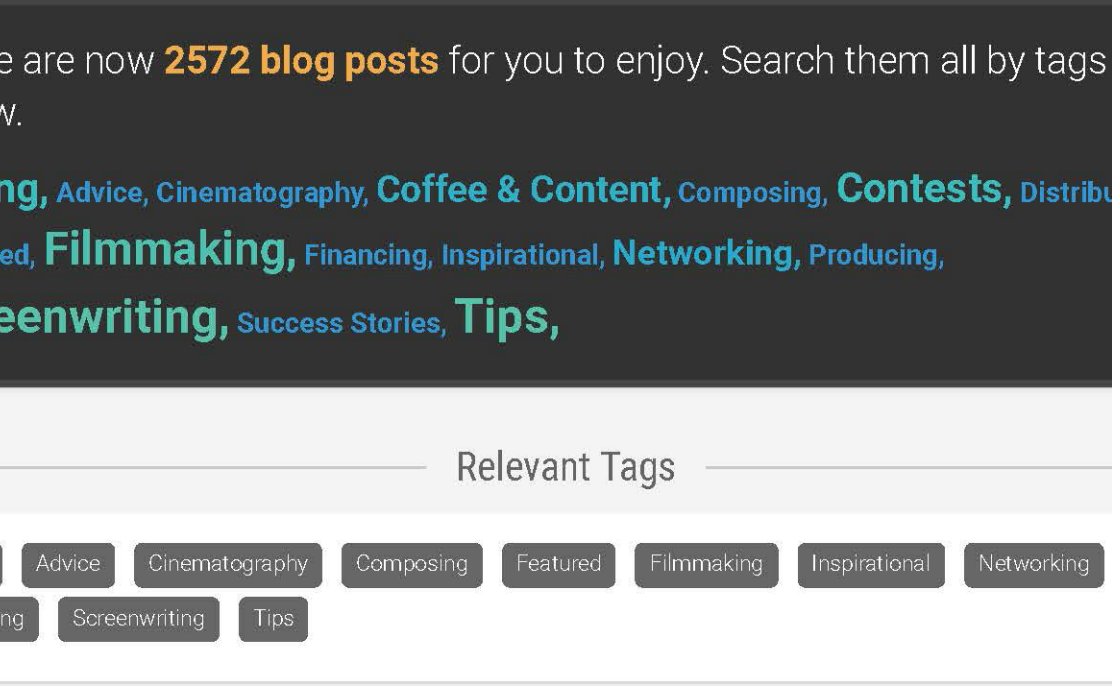
Then at the end of 2016 a good friend of mine DIT Chad Eicher expressed interest in transitioning into producing. I immediately suggested: "You need a mentor and I know just the guy!" I reached out to Noel and asked if he'd be up for a lunch at his favorite Indian spot on Ventura Blvd., and meeting my pal Chad.

About a month later Noel called to tell me he had recommended me for a WWII feature film. It sounded exciting, period pieces have always appealed to me and the script for the film was epic, with planes and aircraft carriers and very cool photographic opportunities.

I met with the director, Shaun Piccinino, and we hit it off like a house on fire. Soon I was hired on and the three of us, along with our very talented collaborators shot a terrific project and became fast friends. About a year later we were brought back to film an epilogue which required a three week adventure China!

The next year Shaun invited me to shoot a science fiction series which lead to meeting producer Jamie Thompson. The year after that Shaun hired me to shoot the first "A California Christmas" and Jamie brought me in to shoot the first 10 pages of the feature film "Jeepers Creepers: Reborn."

Since then Shaun and I have shot two more Netflix Original movies, two TV series sizzles, several music videos and commercials, collaborated on music projects, and he, Noel and I all feel more like family now than simply friends.



Brad with Josh Swickard and Lauren Swickard BTS of "California Christmas" - photo by Callum Barrass

Most of my significant career success did not arise from my hammering on rocks. It popped up in the most remarkable, unexpected and serendipitous ways.

Seeing that makes me wonder about all the changes I might make, and the seemingly wasted time I would reclaim, if I could do it all over again.

So what are my takeaway lessons? The process, while unexpected, was not passive. What was required from me was to lean into those opportunities.

What that looks like:

- 1) Say "yes" as much as possible and be open to new things, people and opportunities
- 2) Be kind and be generous
- 3) Be intentional to nurture relationships and keep them alive
- 4) Don't underestimate the value of promotion and publicity

About Brad Rushing

Born and raised in Houston, TX, Brad Rushing is currently based in Los Angeles, CA. Beginning as a fine art major at Houston's High School For The Performing And Visual Arts, Brad eventually switched his focus to filmmaking in college. Brad began his career in Los Angeles shooting films for Roger Corman's Concorde New Horizons, the indie producer and studio that gave first breaks to some of today's biggest names.

Brad photographed some of the biggest music videos of the early 2000s, including Britney Spears' "Toxic," Eminem's "Without Me" and Moby's "We Are All Made of Stars" for which he won the MTVVMA for Best Cinematography. Currently he shoots many commercials and tv promos, while still occasionally taking on a music video or independent feature film.

A lifelong animal lover Brad is a vegetarian. He is also a dual U.S./Canadian citizen and a full member of the Canadian Society of Cinematographers. In his spare time he is a musician and avidly follows astronomy and space exploration.

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