

A magical lesson in the process of filmmaking



Joshua Kinne, a senior studying film and video at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) in Allendale, Michigan, recently had his first celluloid storytelling experience. While writing the script and preparing to shoot his thesis film, Kinne had assumed a video shoot.

"At the time, I wasn't convinced of the benefits of shooting on film," Kinne recalls. "I had shot a project on the Panasonic DVX100a and was convinced that video can pass as film if lit and shot properly."

Kinne's thesis film, *Lady Sunshine*, was chosen by his peers to be produced as part of the advanced 16mm production curriculum. His professor informed him that color 16mm Kodak film was available to shoot his 15-page script.

"After talking with my director of photography and a few other sources, I decided that shooting film was a privilege," recalls Kinne. "So I chose to take advantage of the opportunity."

With seven rolls of Kodak film in hand, Kinne and his student

crew and cast had four days to complete the project. "On the first day, we shot for five hours and had only covered one page of script," Kinne says. "With only 30 feet of film left on the roll, my heart sank. I wondered how I was going to shoot the rest of my film with only six more rolls."

Previsualization

That night, Kinne and his producer reassessed the production plan. Kinne selected the shots he wanted as close-ups, and decided which coverage was essential for wide shots. He says this previsualization process was ideally educational: it elevated his self-confidence and improved his directorial skills.

With Kinne's new-found hope, the next day's shoot went more smoothly. He also started to see a transformation in the crew and talent. "Everyone knew when the camera was rolling," he says. "There was little room for error because of the limited film supply.

After we covered an entire scene, doing only one take on every set-up, everyone was keenly aware of the film difference."

Kinne also believes that the actors pushed themselves to a higher performance level much more quickly. "Knowing their characters were being immortalized on film helped with their overall approach," he says.

On the third day, Kinne admits that he made his biggest mistake as a nascent director. He was informed that the roll of film they had just shot was flashed. He blames himself for pushing the crew too hard. He was trying to get the story's climax in the can, but the 18-hour day took a toll.

"That was one of the worst days of my life," he laments. "The irony is that we potentially lost everything because I pushed so hard. I told Colorlab (in Rockville, Maryland) that the roll was flashed and to just do their best with the transfer. When I got the film back, my cinematographer and I were watching the DVCAM tape, and about 15 minutes into it we realized it was the roll of flashed film. It was

amazing. Because of the latitude of film, you couldn't even tell! This phenomenon proved to me how magical film really is."

Permanent art

Kinne believes the entire process taught him more than he ever anticipated. "Filming a story demonstrated the passion of directing for me," he says. "I loved standing next to the camera every time we rolled, listening to the film whirr past the shutter. I loved calling 'action' and watching the video assist flicker, reminding me specifically of every picture I was taking. I loved the idea of creating permanent art. It forced us all to have purpose in everything we did."

In the end, Kinne says that the look of *Lady Sunshine* exceeded his expectations. He's planning to submit the film to festivals.

1 Writer-director Joshua Kinne (foreground) and director of photography Aaron Ruby (behind) discuss composition while shooting an exterior of a vintage theatre in Holland, Mich. Photo courtesy of Joshua Kinne