

# Winn-Dixie brought to life from child's POV



**B**ecause of *Winn-Dixie* is a novel that tells the story of ten-year old Opal, who has just moved to Naomi, Florida with her preacher father, who is played by Jeff Daniels. At the local Winn-Dixie, a grocery store, Opal befriends an ugly mutt and names him after the store. Together, they encounter a series of likeably eccentric characters and solve the mystery of what happened to her mother. The book was named a Newbery Honor Book and a Smithsonian Best Book, among many other accolades.

Director Wayne Wang and Cinematographer Karl Walter Lindenlaub, BVK, ASC, the team behind the *Joy Luck Club* and *Maid in Manhattan*, teamed up once more for the film version of Opal's story.

"I was drawn to the characters, the refreshingly different writing and

the opportunity to shoot in a small Southern town," says Lindenlaub.

The filmmakers chose a small town called Napoleonville, Louisiana, to stand in for Naomi, Florida. During pre-production,

Lindenlaub made extensive tests, first using a still camera loaded with various Kodak stocks to shoot the actual locations. He also put images through a beta test version of the Kodak Look Management System and used the prints to help discover and communicate his vision. The Kodak Look Management System uses a laptop computer, software, printer and images from a digital still

camera to allow filmmakers to pre-visualize the effect of various stocks, and post processes on their images. Information and images can be sent to collaborators to help ensure a consistent look.

"I think it's the future," he says. "With today's digital post-production tools, almost anything is possible, making accurate communication more important than ever. This tool allows the dailies timer, editor, producers and later, people seeing test screenings, to see images that closely approximate the look I imagined for the film. There are no surprises and everyone's on the same page from beginning to end."

## Trailer home

Many of the film's scenes take place in a small trailer home. These scenes were photographed in an actual trailer.

"We had a big living room and kitchen space that was our main playing area for the father and the girl. All the windows were placed where I wanted them, and that was a big help. I hardly had any lamps inside. The ceiling was so low that I couldn't hang anything anyway, so we put some strategically placed practicals in the kitchen area. These acted as small spotlights that I could point in different directions to get an accent on a wall or some backlight on the actors.

For front light inside the trailer, I rarely had anything more than a China ball inside or a bounce card," he says. "The rest came through the windows, for both day and night situations."

A combination of small HMI lamps and Maxi-Brutes provided daylight through the windows. Lindenlaub chose Kodak Vision 250D 5246 film based partly on its ability to gracefully handle the mixed color temperatures while retaining strong blacks. "I mixed tungsten light and daylight quite ruthlessly on this film," he says. "We didn't have huge HMI lights because I knew the crew would be relatively small. We had some PAR lights and a couple of Maxi-Brutes, which I like to use anyway, because you can make broad sunlight sources very easily and get hot spots. I always used checkerboard on the Maxi-Brutes, and with medium beams you can direct them to get an interesting sun effect."



## Night scenes

For night scenes, Lindenlaub used an overhead source from outside the windows with a bastard amber gel. "It was a light that we established outside on the trailer," he says. "A whole section of the trailer was bathed in that warm yellow color, which I thought was interesting. It gave me one other color instead of just white and blue."

Night scenes were photographed on Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 film. Lindenlaub says limiting the number of stocks to two helped maintain simplicity on the set and consistency in the images.

"Since the whole film is basically told from the girl's POV, the key thing was always to keep the camera on her eye level," he says. "That made a big difference. It's very different if you stay on the kid's POV, even if you cut to a grown-up and back to her. We look up to the grown-up, but then we're always on her eye level, even when we look back at her. That's an enormous effect through the whole film, especially considering the fact that she's in every scene.

"It's a touching story," says Lindenlaub. "Nobody is quite what they seem at first. The girl grows up a little. It's not just a girl and her dog. That's what attracted me to the story in the first place."

*Because of Winn-Dixie* is slated for a February 2005 release from 20th Century Fox. ■

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**Above:** (L to R) Actress Annasophia Robb and actor Dave Matthews in a scene from *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

**Above:** Annasophia Robb in a scene from *Because of Winn-Dixie*.

**Centre:** Cinematographer Karl Walter Lindenlaub, ASC shooting a scene from the film.