THE JOUNRNEY TO BEING A DIRECTOR

David Yates
Director, Harry Potter Five

Q - How did you get into film making?

David - I grew up in St. Helen's in Merseyside. It was seeing *Jaws* in the cinema that really made me want to direct, I wanted to do what Steven Spielberg did. I went back and obsessively saw *Jaws* fifteen times. After the first three or four times, I went back just to observe the audience and the way he was able to keep them involved. It just made me want to be a director. Then when I was fourteen, my mother bought me a cine-camera, so I started making little Super-8 films with my brother. I just went back home to visit my mother's grave and my very first film, *Premonition,* was shot in that cemetery, and it starred my brother who was about eight. It was about a dream he had where he walks into this graveyard and suddenly he comes across this grave and the soil started to shift and a hand came out. It was very funny. It got a laugh when I screened it to my horror. It was my best friend, Paul's hand and he was slightly overweight, so it was this pudgy hand that came out of the soil. He runs away in slow motion and then he wakes up, gets dressed and gets run over. It was a very simple horror story. I got a runner up prize on a young film maker program on TV. I became a member of local Cine Clubs and read Movie Maker magazine, which in one issue, had a three page article about the National Film and TV school and it said that if you get in, you get £2k a year to make films for three or four years. And I thought, *'Right, that is where I am going.'* You had to be in your mid-20's to get in, so I went to get a degree in politics and made little documentaries and other films. I applied as soon as I could, failed to get in, and spent a year at Media Arts College in Swindon, which was an avant garde workshop place - not like the conservative cine clubs. Then I made a film at Media Arts that got me into the Film School.

Q - How has your slower, determined path aided you in how you approach things creatively?

David - It is a marathon. I've been doing it since I was fifteen, and professionally I started in TV in '92. I think it was healthy. I think the problem with suddenly getting there is that you know less. You haven't had time to make sense of anything. For me the last four years have been very useful because I have made six or seven hours of TV a year, which is the same as three or four movies a year - that is time on the set with actors, time with scripts, time in the cutting room. It is like a hothouse for exploring how you can experiment with each stage of the process. It allowed me to make mistakes in small ways, mistakes that aren't career damaging. A young film maker getting to make a feature off the back of one short is a pretty precarious situation because they might have the talent, but they might not have the level of craft, or the stamina to do it properly. Every year I learn new things, which has been incredibly useful.

Q - What was it like going to the Film School where you could talk movies 24 hours a day?

David - It was an odd thing because we didn't talk as much as we ought to. When I went it was an unusual environment. For example, we trained at a Drama School for a week or two and there it was about working as a collective and inspiring each other. The Film School had you specialise as a producer, director, editor, etc. and it was a tricky environment. It was competitive. And I made the mistake of not going to seminars or deconstructing classic films. I just wanted to make things, so I skipped out on a lot of that stuff. I regret not taking advantage of that now, but I made things - I was very practical. My heroes were Spielberg and Forsythe and I didn't care about having this encyclopedic knowledge of intelligent European film makers. I was much more driven to tell stories and that is what I did. Also, I was there when I was 27 or so and I didn't appreciate things then as I do now. I was much more populist in my taste. I wanted to make big movies.

Q - Was that populist leaning part of your cultural upbringing?

David - Yes. I come from a part of the UK where you go to the cinema to be entertained and eat popcorn. It wasn't until my 30's that I realised that there were different ways to tell stories that were intriguing. Still at film school, I felt privileged to have those resources and get money to make films. It was an amazing experience.

Q - Tell us about some of the pivotal moments in your TV directing career and how it lead you to feature film making.

David - TV has been fantastic to me. I have been able to tell some complex and interesting stories on some pretty good budgets and tell those stories with a lot of creative freedom. You can only call yourself a director if you are doing the gig though. It's like writing. I think it is really unhealthy and precious to think that the only way to fully express yourself is on celluloid and showing it in a big theatre. It is a tough business to break into and then to maintain a long term career, which is the real goal. Not to be a flash in the pan who made a single film. My ambition is to have a career across several decades. The great thing about TV is that it allows you, in an intense way, to get better at direction. I directed eight hours of high end TV shows with really good scripts, really good actors and terrific crews, every year, over a five a year period. It is the equivalent to twelve movies! On those productions I am making the same decisions that I am on this film. I get to push things - the crew, the actors, in different ways. There are some colleagues of mine who have taken a different route and said, *'I am going to develop this because it is a movie and don't care if it is going to take one year or two years.'* And in that five years they have made one film and it has come and gone. You have a creative lifespan and there is nothing worse than wasting those years. If there is a piece of advice I would give young directors, it would be to, by all means hang out for that single film that you are desperate to make, but in the meantime direct documentaries, direct dramas, direct commercials, direct TV. Just direct! It will feed what you want to do. The danger in waiting five years to make a film is that it becomes a precious thing. It becomes do or die. And if it fails or isn't the success that you want it to be, then it is a dangerous thing. I love being prolific. It enables me to get better.

Q - Why do you think there is a snootiness towards television by some film people?

David - I don't know. They are both storytelling. Before I was chosen for *Harry Potter* by David Heyman and Warner Bros, I would go to British funding places who would tell me that they love my television work and that they would like me to do a film, but it is *'slightly different and not easy to make the transition...'* But David Heyman and Warner Bros didn't think that. They thought it was great storytelling and film making. But there is that snobbery and it is unnecessary.

Q - Why is one able to be prolific in TV and not in film?

David - In TV there is this machine that needs to be fed. Getting into that slipstream meant that I could overlap things and I've been fortunate in getting material that I want to do. Film is harder to be prolific in as there is no need for product to feed the machine.

Q - What can a film school graduate expect on their first day of their first TV directing job?

David - They are going to find a lot of people who have lost a little bit of spark. People who have been doing this for week in week out, month in month out, and they have lost the energy to raise their game. That puts the director at an immediate advantage because they are going to look at every single shot and performance, sound design, whatever, to find a way to make it better. And that mindset is going to lift them up above all the other directors who have been doing it for weeks, or months or years. When I got out of film school and was doing *The Bill*, the actors were not used to a director coming up to them and getting into the psychology of their characters or the depth of the moment they were playing. The actors found it refreshing and stimulating that someone cared, quite passionately, about making them better or more dynamic. If you go into a long running series that has a certain level of acceptance, that is where you can push it and shine. Someone said to me, *'If I do Casualty, then I am going to get stuck doing Casualty.'* I said that yeah you might get stuck if you do *Casualty,* like everyone else does *Casualty.* But if you go in and make the acting better or if you shoot it in a way that is more expressive or dramatises it, or if you make the script better in the week you have to do that, you will be noticed. And then you will get the next step along.

Q - So it is a lifelong commitment to excellence?

David - It is always pushing the envelope a bit. They shot it like that last time, but is there a way to make it

more vital? You have to make the script come alive. I have never done *Casualty*, but you have a traumatic situation and all these people running around, which is an extraordinary situation. If you were there in reality, what would you observe? I bet that what you would experience as a human being would stay with you for a number of months. To try and bring a truth and reality to that is what I would do.

Q - What are your thoughts on someone being a writer-director versus having a writer and a director?

David - There are very few excellent writers out there, let alone writer-directors. It is a difficult combination. I don't know of any really in Britain in the younger generation who do it well. It limits you, too. It takes three years to direct a movie, it takes five years if you are writing it yourself. And development is the most soul damaging process in the world. When you are shooting something or you are editing something, you have something finite in your hands. When you are developing something, there is an intangibility about it. Is it going to happen this year? Oh, no the year after that? And that can destroy you if you are not careful. My attitude has always been to work with several writers and let them carry some of the load. Stimulate them and let them stimulate me. That is one way I have been so prolific. It allows me to be industrial. I have a dozen projects in development all with really good writers. When I finish *Harry Potter*, I have a line of stuff I can do instead of one thing if I was a writer-director. I have great mobility in the marketplace. If you are a writer-director, by all means continue with that because you can't ignore it, but I'd encourage you to develop other projects with other writers because that can only stimulate and challenge yourself. You get a sense of how other people do things. Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Q - What about directors who are too technically oriented?

David - I empathise with that type of director because early on that was me. From St. Helen's to film school, all I cared about were lenses and how to move the camera. It took me five to seven years to realise that the two most important things are the screenplay and the performances. The rest is craft and an expression of that. Before I realised that, I got lost in the joy of lens types, of camera movements and crane shots. Then you discover that those things are only tools and they are limited. It is the icing on the cake. I would encourage directors to spend time at a drama school working with actors and making improvisational films. That would be a great process. You don't even need a camera. Just engage the actor. I am intrigued by the process of bringing a character to life.

Q - What is the service that agents provide for you?

David - Agents for young film makers is a tough relationship that doesn't always work. I had a frustrating relationship with my agent when I started. You expect the world. You want them to go out and get you that first feature film gig. You want them to get you that bit of TV or script development. The truth is the agent will only take to the marketplace what the marketplace will buy. And the marketplace is quite conservative. If you have two or three little award winning shorts, it is a start, but you need some luck. I think the best thing an agent can do for you besides toting your stuff around, is be there for you as moral support and encouragement. A lot of agents have so many clients, that they can't do that. All I wanted in my early stages of career was to get a call once a week to see how it was going. How is that bit of writing going? It doesn't take much to do that, but in my experience and talking to others, that doesn't happen often. It is a conservative business because things take so much money to make, even a low budget film can cost £500k! That is a lot and many financiers are reluctant to give even very talented people that chance. It is very important to be persistent and hopefully lucky. Having an agent helps at my level. I am lucky that my agents are terrific. They look long term and are script oriented, which for me is very important. They sift through the stuff that comes to me, which is often not very good, and they will pick things for me that are interesting. I value that enormously. For a young director, you need someone who you feel comfortable with and if they are not getting your work in the first instance, they are at least there for you. You want someone who is there for the long haul.

Q - Harry Potter seems to defy the usual Hollywood way of making safe bets on its film maker choices. Why do you think that is?

David - David Heyman who makes these films and Lionel Wigram, who is a Senior VP at Warner Brothers, have huge creative ambitions for this project. And Warner Brothers recognise that in order for it not to run out of steam, you need new blood to come in and push it a little bit. It would be so easy for them to be conservative and they are quite opposite; I am knocked out by them. They are inspiring people who just want this series to get better as it goes along. That is a really exciting environment to be in because

Lynne Ramsey
Film Maker

Q - Why did you start making films?

Lynne - *Whilst in my final year of fine art photography, I saw Meshes in the Afternoon by Maya Deren and it really affected me, so on a whim I submitted a portfolio of photographs to the National Film School. I was going to go on to do an M.A. in photography at the RCA. But I really blew the last interview and didn't get in. I was surprised to be accepted on the cinematography course at the NFTS, I think mostly due to the fact they wanted more camera women. So without expecting to, I ended up in film school. I knew nothing about film making. I'm glad I went without too many preconceived notions and everything to learn.*

Q - So did your stills experience help you in your film making?

Lynne - *Yes. People who I studied photography with can see the influence of what I was doing in my stills, in the films I make. Through naivety I would do things at film school that people told me were mistakes, like use the same size lens for every shot. Or frame in a particularly oblique way. I started to recognise that these 'mistakes' could change the whole meaning of the scene, that they could be useful if used in the right place for the right reason. In Gasman the whole of the first scene is shot without seeing any of the characters' faces, only their body language which I think says a lot more about how this family interact with one another. We took the film to America where it was screened by the First Film Foundation, and a producer asked if the scene was intentional! She must have thought the camera had slipped or something. I was thinking My god she must think I'm totally stupid! But the film has been the most well received of my short films.*

Q - So film school was good for learning the ropes?

Lynne - *Yes. The first things I shot were absolutely rubbish! But I learnt as much as I could. I hate the attitude of camera people who think great shot, fuck the sound. You have to try to understand as much as you can about every facet of filmaking. So everything works in unison. I actually wanted to move to the documentary course because it was closer to the work I wanted to do, I often find documentary more inspiring than fiction, and on that course you were taught all-round filmmaking. But they wouldn't let me. Bastards!*

Q - Two of your films won first prizes at Cannes for the shorts section. Did it change things for you?

Lynne - *Gavin Emerson, the producer of Ratcatcher had the foresight to send Small Deaths, my graduation film, to Cannes. When it was accepted I was over the moon, I'd never been to a film festival before, so I took my mates who had worked on the film with me, we had a laugh and blagged our way into all the parties. Coppola was on the main jury who were also judging the shorts. I was just thinking, wow! this is madness! When I won the Prix du Jure it gave me the access I needed to make another film, before that it had been a case of don't call us, we'll call you. When Gasman won the same prize two years later it helped get Ratcatcher into production.*

Q - Did anything come out of that?

Lynne - *I had a few phone calls from American agents but at the time I was thinking, why do I need an American agent? I've made a ten minute film and I'm not planning to make a film in America just yet. If you want to be put together with writers etc, an agent is great. If you generate your own material you can get a lawyer to help sort out the contracts etc. Having said that, I do have an agent!*

Q - Our attitude has been to just do it, to go out there and make your movie, but you've gone a different route, making shorts, which do you think is a better route?

Lynne - *I think the spirit of what you're talking about was in what I was doing. You don't have to go to film shool to become a film maker. In fact I learned how to direct after I left film school. It's cheaper and easier than ever to make films, if you have a really good idea, then do it.*

Q - Did you find that you learnt a lot by doing your shorts so when it came to your feature you were better prepared?

Lynne - *I made shorts because I love the short film form, I could take risks and learn as much as I could by trial and error. I explored what I was interested in as a film maker. It was a huge leap from fifteen to ninety minutes. When you get to feature level there's more pressure on you because there's more money involved. I felt some pressure to change the way I worked; We really liked your shorts but...You have to be very clear about what you're trying to achieve. I knew the things I had learned had worked and it's a big mistake to try to completely reinvent yourself. If you're doing something really low budget, you don't have the pressure of the financiers on your back so you have nothing to lose and everything to gain from taking calculated risks.*

Q - How did Ratcatcher come about?

Lynne - *After Small Deaths won the prize at Cannes I was approached by a scout/script editor from the BBC. She encouraged me to write a treatment for a feature. I had no idea what she expected having never done this before so I wrote 55 pages, half a feature script. It was a bit of a mess, pretty unstructured but she recognised the potential in it and commissioned me to write the script. Coming from never having earned any money, being a poverty-stricken student and having never held a job down in my life, it was a big deal for me. When they told me they would pay me £25k to do something I loved doing anyway, you could have knocked me over. I phoned my friends and family saying I'm rich! Which was a big mistake! It took me a year to write, and during that time I made Gasman, my last short film.*

Q - How was it working on a feature and not a short?

Lynne - *I use non-professional actors and a small documentary-type crew. I have to be comfortable as a director and I hate a big machine behind me unless it's necessary for the film. I always worked with the same crew, none of which had ever made a feature before. I spent a year writing Ratcatcher and I had a focused idea of how I wanted to make it. But it became clear that the investors were pretty jumpy about all these first-timers and non-actors. I fought and fought to keep my vision intact and work with the people I wanted. I wasted a lot of energy on some battles probably not worth fighting and was already exhausted before I started shooting.*

Q - What have you learnt?

Lynne - *To look at your film in terms of how much time you need on everything, and budget accordingly. If you want more time editing, cut down other areas. I could have done with more cutting time on Ratcatcher though most directors will say that. I'm more aware of my needs for the next project. Tailor the budget to work in terms of the way you make your film. A lot of money is wasted on things that aren't necessary. Be aware of how, why and where you spend money.*

Q - What have you learnt about directing the camera and directing actors?

Lynne - *They work best when they work in unison. Knowing when a detail is economical enough to express more about the character than you could do in dialogue. Knowing when to just let the actors roll and not let the camera get in the way. Knowing where the sound will do more work than the images. Cinema is using everything in conjunction with each other until you don't see the joins. I work a lot on instinct. If you feel there is something wrong don't do it, trust your instinct.*

Q - How have you found it being a woman working in a male dominated industry?

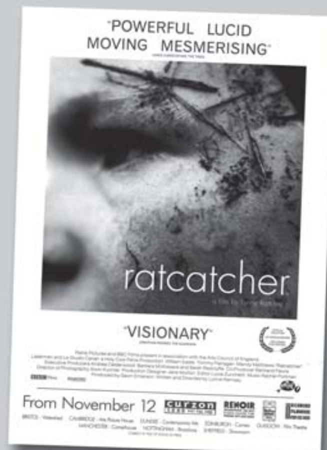
Lynne - *A few people told me I couldn't be a camera woman saying I wasn't tall enough (I'm 5'2"), but I'd tell them it was a benefit because I could see from a different perspective! It is a male dominated industry, but I think your work should speak for itself. I hate when people refer to me as a woman film maker, or worse, a Scottish woman film maker. You begin to feel slightly marginalised. I think it's great that more women are making films as they make up more than half the population. However that is not reflected in the number of woman directors. It will only make film making more interesting for everybody. The same goes for different cultures who have had little or no access to film making. The bottom line is, variety is the spice of life. I think male film makers can have a lot of pressure on them to be Steven Spielberg and that women in general are more able to communicate quickly if something doesn't work. If I make an arse of myself on a film set I'll accept it and deal with it. Leave your ego at the door. Make a good film.*

Q - What mistakes do you think you've made?

Lynne - *Wasting energy on battles that were hardly worth the fight. Choose your battles carefully. If something's going to cause you a lot of hassle for little or no gain, don't bother. Appear to compromise, if you have to, but with something that really matters to you, don't budge. Marketing and distribution were big eye-openers for me, remember you should know better than anyone else how to market your film. Go through the whole process even if it kills you. Be prepared for the unexpected - we had to dig up a site and make a canal, on doing so we discovered toxic waste which cost us £10k to dispose of!*

Q - What advice would you offer a new film maker?

Lynne - *Do something you believe in, and see it through to the bitter end. If you believe in it, other people will. Have the courage of your convictions - it comes through on the screen. Have a good idea and make sure its something that you really want to do because it takes a very l-o-n-g time.*



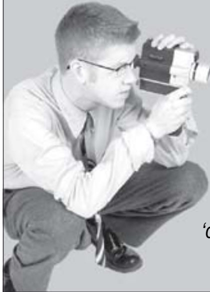
Directing – Basic Tips

1. Study films and why they work, mechanically, then recreate those sequences with a video camera and edit them. This will teach you the basics.

2. Get used to talking to actors. If you can, do an acting course so you know how to work with your cast.

3. The simplest way of covering a scene is to shoot a wide shot (master) first and then move in to your medium shots, close ups and cutaways. The wide shots usually require the most lighting and set dressing and therefore the most time setting up. When you move in, you will of course see less in the frame and therefore need to make minimal adjustments.

4. Keep consistent direction of movement. If a person walks out of frame from right to left, then they must enter the next shot entering from right to left. You may change the camera angle to make it appear that they have switched sides, but in fact, the on screen movement stays constant.



5. Do not cross the 'line of action' (see box).

6. Allow the action to send before calling 'cut!' as this will give the editor flexibility and often vital options when cutting the film.

7. Shoot plenty of cutaways, inserts and transitional shots so your editor has plenty of options to 'cut away' from the actor when needed, perhaps to help with a fluffed line.

8. Move the camera. If appropriate, tracking shots usually make the film more kinetic.

9. Change your angles. High and low shots can help create mood and break away from the CWH shot (convenient working height!)

10. Establish geography, especially with action sequences. Shoot enough wide shots so the audience can see where everything is. When you cut into the action it will have more impact.

11. Watch your rushes. You will see what is working and what isn't.

12. Learn to edit. Cutting your own work, or someone else's, is one of the best ways to learn about what to get, and what isn't needed.

13. Practice. Every time you pick up a camera, be it a full blown movie, corporate video or even your holiday video, is a chance to learn.

you are not fighting a bureaucracy. You are working with human beings. Warner Brothers have a terrific commitment to the UK and have done for a number of years now. There is a certain mythology about working with American studios and my experiences were not what I expected at all. It is very early days, but I have less execs on this massive movie than I did with my little movie with Richard Curtis. I had eight execs on *Girl In The Café, a*ll of whom were lovely and delightful to deal with and very supportive, but still there were eight! On this, I answer to several people who I respect and give me great strength. Not what I expected. I expected conflict and fighting for control. There is something about this particular regime at Warners, who have been there for a while now, who are being very successful, which breeds confidence and the ability to trust your instincts when someone comes in and does something. I'm sure if it were a studio that was struggling it would be different. The ones that struggle usually are the ones that are intrusive and lack confidence to let the people you hire to do what they do.

Q - In the lean years, what did you do to help keep yourself focused on the goal of directing?

David - Right after film school, for a year, I didn't get any work. That was terrible. I had won all these awards, San Francisco, Chicago, and won some cash. I had a few meetings and I was terrible at it. That was one thing that film school never taught us. I would go in and get too nervous and fumble around. I got nothing for over a year and it was a difficult time. You just keep going. So I developed scripts and directed a documentary for a series called *Moving Pictures,* and that was when I got back in. That was the period where I realised it was bad to not be directing for a long time. It had been a year and a half between graduating and doing the documentary and the morning I turned up for the Moving Picture shoot, which only had a crew of two and a few interviews, I was nervous and it was tough to get back into it. So don't leave it too long. The next downtime was after I made a film called *The Tichborne Claimant*, which got some good reviews and came out in fifteen theatres and then went away after three weeks. It took me two years to make that film. Again, after a few film festivals, I thought this was it. I can make a feature film that looks good, has good performances, a good story and is told well. Here I am. I felt like I earned it now. And my phone didn't ring for another year. You just have to keep going.

Q - How much of being successful comes from just working hard?

David - I think that has a lot to do with it. I also think judgment is another thing which comes from talent. Knowing what is a good idea. Knowing what is a good script. Knowing whom to put in front of the camera. Knowing how to tell a good story. That way, when you get the break, you know what to do with it. I think all the hard work gets you through the door without question. And if you make the right choices you can get to the next stage.

Q - How do you differentiate between good and bad advice or opinions?

David - To be honest, I only ever trust my own instincts about things. Especially in choosing material. It doesn't matter what my agent thinks. It doesn't matter what my partner thinks. It doesn't matter what my mates say. I will listen to them, but ultimately there is this little voice inside me that says, *'This is the one!'* And you can't ignore it. I have had arguments with my partner and I have turned things down, and she has said, *'Are you crazy? This is going to be the next Full Monty!'* And I say, *'I can't feel it', 'I can't see it'* or *'I don't like it'.* So I go with that.

Q - Given where you came from, tell me what the moment was like when you got Harry Potter? Did you still feel like that 14 year old from St Helens when that script landed on your doorstep?

David - It was the sense that I've done it. When I saw *Jaws* I realised that was a big story, it is reaching a global audience and it is beautifully crafted. It has comedy and pathos and emotional depth. And now, they are giving me a camera with the same resources. It is an industrial process of film making that is rare in Europe because these things are so big. On this one I am learning about visual and special effects, I am learning how to manage a crew of not fifty or sixty, but three hundred. So you are gathering all that new experience that makes you grow muscles that you didn't have before. The truth of it is, and you can ask all the actors and crew I have worked with, I am still that fourteen-year-old kid. I do skip on set. I just enjoy it. There is a joy to the process because I think we are incredibly privileged to be able to tell these stories on film. Actors have told me, *'Don't lose it because that is what makes us want to do that bit more for you.'* I get moved by the stories, frequently, and the crew and actors know when you care. So if you can find that in your work as a film maker, it will pay dividends.

Q - So you are lead by your passions on set, as opposed to a tyrant who doesn't want to hear 'no'?

David - Completely. I think it is about respect and empowering people to do their best. Getting people to believe in themselves. Pushing people and taking fear out of the process. I think fear is a terrible inhibitor. I know the mythology is of the big director who scares everybody. I think that is bollocks. I think what you do is you make people feel safe and then you really push them.

Q - What are the common mistakes that you see or that you have done?

David - The biggest mistake that I see a lot of young directors make is that they feel they have to prove that they are the director. They become micromanagers. I see it when they work with actors. They seem to treat actors almost as if they were puppets rather than this extraordinary resource. It comes from fear that you will lose control if you step back a little bit and let people contribute to the process. It doesn't always get the best results. The really interesting directors have good instinct and judgment, they know what they want, and they draw things out performance-wise. They empower rather than control. The second big practical mistake that I made early on is when you choose a DP (camera person), make sure that DP is able to deliver what you want in good enough time. I had a frustrating experience where I had a very good, young DP who was all about the lighting and not necessarily about the story telling. He put lights in the actors' faces, which didn't allow them to find the truth or reality in the scene. You need to find a DP who is there for you and not for their showreel. And that can make the difference between getting your second film, in terms of the coverage that you get. If you get someone who is obsessed with lighting and slowing you down, it can work against you.

Q - What advice would you give a new film maker?

David - Appreciate that the longer it takes, the more you can benefit from that journey. It is a marathon, not a sprint. You need to figure out who *you are* in the world if you are going to say anything valuable. Get through the technical stage of enjoying the lenses and the cranes, then realise it is about a sense of understanding soul, people and stories. It is a beautiful thing to be a storyteller.

Community Based Micro Budget Film Making

Q - Why make a children's film?

Janis - *We've done a lot of Music and Art Therapy for kids in foster care. Many of the kids are from incredibly abusive backgrounds and have survived things that most adults couldn't tolerate. Most of these kids love films and love to escape into them. Films are often what has given them another perspective and has let them know that another kind of life exists elsewhere. Often the kids parents are drug addicts, and are mentally ill (often as a result of drugs). These kids can use films as an escape, for inspiration, to help them to make sense of the world, or just to make them laugh and enjoy the moment. Kids need to see positive reflections of themselves and to know that they're not alone, and that life can be better and their future can to an extent, be what they make it. They just have to hang on in there for a while longer. Film is a way of seeing into someone else's mind, or living someone else's fantasy and it can also be an incredible escape from reality. In the way that you can put on an album and lose yourself in the wildness and pure raw emotion of the music. Music can change your mood; a film can change your mind. To take people out of themselves for even a few hours and to possibly change their perspective on life, seems to me to be pretty special. It really appealed to me to make happy films with lots of music and to include some social comment without hitting people over the head with it. After reading your book, The Guerilla Film Makers Handbook, I was inspired and it made me believe that I really could go out there and make a film with very basic equipment.*

Q - Why did you choose to tell this story?

Janis - *I originally wrote a song entitled 'Lunar Girl' which was the inspiration for the film. It's about a girl who is happy living in her dreamworld until she is diagnosed as having mental / emotional problems. She's then taken to a psychiatrist and put on medication. Her view of the world changes and she becomes sad and unhappy. The theme of the film is whether 'being normal' and being a realist is preferable to being a slightly mad (but happy) dreamer. I wanted to make 'Lunar Girl' because I was sick of seeing negative, depressing independent films, many of which always seemed to me to be trying to use shock value (drug addiction, violence, abuse etc). Many independent film makers and critics seem to see poverty, mental illness and physical disability as 'arty' or 'worthy', or at least that's how they try and portray it. These kind of independent films often win awards, the more depressing the film, the more 'arty' they apparently become. I personally think they're often a false portrayal of the reality as they don't show the humour that exists in those communities, or the dreams or the struggle to survive. Those films rarely show the extent of corruption of many of the people regarded as middle / upper class who are part of the establishment. 'Lunar Girl' was intended as a sort of musical drama for children and was never intended for the big screen, it was always a 'community project'. I wanted to make a children's film (slightly surreal) with lots of music. I ended up including some social issues including true stories of how kids became homeless and ended up living on the streets. My hope was that I'd learn a bit about film making and editing. My dream was that it would be good enough to be shown on television and that at least some scenes would strike a chord, create a bit of magic and hope in people's hearts and have some heart warming moments.*

Q - How did you finance Lunar Girl?

Janis - *I borrowed money from a credit card company. It cost around £8k to make and took three weeks to shoot.*

Q - How did you deal with locations and permits in London?

Janis - *We shot on the road in Covent Garden with hand held cameras avoiding the need for a permit. We didn't always look like a film crew so we could get away with more. The Police did move us on in Covent Garden because we were obstructing the pavement, but they turned a blind eye and told us they'd be back in about half an hour giving us the time to finish our scene. The Royal Festival Hall wanted to charge us £3,000 a day for shooting on the terraces outside their building even though we told them it was a community non profit making film, so we moved along a few yards. The security men from the Royal Festival Hall escorted us off the terraces but we got the shot first!*

Q - What did you shoot on?

Janis - *The Sony VX 1000 and Sony VX 2000, miniDV.*

Q - How much lighting did you have?

Janis - *Negligible, none mostly. We would use what lighting was available in locations most of the time.*

Q - How did you deal with casting?

Janis - *We advertised in Stage and sifted through hundreds of photos and CV's. We then shortlisted on look and gut feeling. Then we hired a room in Jackson's Lane Community centre (church) in Highgate for a few days, filmed the auditions and chose who best suited the roles. A very straight (and nice) actress*