

Farewell Old Stringy
A Short Film by Alex Rafala

Goal: To make a short film and submit it to film festivals. Potential Film Festivals: Sundance Film Festival, Cannes Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, Telluride Film Festival, Virginia Film Festival, and many others.

Logline: An old hobo recruits the help of two young men when his imaginary friend decides to commit suicide.

Director's Statement: This past summer, a co-worker of mine took his life. That news hit me with unnatural force. A man I presumed would always be at the edge of my radar suddenly vanished. A man I was fond of no longer existed.

I didn't know much about his life and regretfully so. He was a quiet man, but his calm and quiet nature didn't breed worry. He never seemed depressed. Just contemplative. And if there was ever a lull in business you could certainly get him talking.

However, when I return to the last night I saw him, I recall our final shift together being haunted by a different kind of quiet. I assumed that he came to work in a mood, perhaps the aftermath of an argument with his partner. I never considered any other possibility. I was, ashamedly, too busy bussing tables to do so, as if they were more important. I left that night completely oblivious to what would happen in the upcoming days. I wasn't paying attention.

This script and this movie are very much motivated by the subsequent thoughts I had that month. I tried to understand what had happened. I came up with questions, but no answers: Why did he do it? What was he thinking? How was he feeling? Is this real? And most importantly: Could we have prevented it? Writing this script was an attempt to find the answers to those questions that buzzed around in my head. Ultimately, it became a confession of my ignorance. The last line: "...I don't understand..."

As we further developed the script, the theme of loneliness became increasingly present. It seeped in through my self-reflection. A script I wrote about mental health awareness revealed itself to be a commentary on something simpler: Relationships, specifically the inability to form intimate ones (for what are movies and plays if not explorations of relationships?). The three main characters all possess that ineptitude, and it manifests inside them in three unique ways.

I think everyone can associate with loneliness and the pain it motivates. We have all felt it to some degree. Even in small doses, it contorts our innards and weighs us down. Maybe, if we can get the audience to connect remotely with the isolation these characters feel, we can promote mental health awareness and treatment, an issue that doesn't garner enough attention in our society.

I cannot say that I was emotionally compromised by this ordeal. I wasn't. It was a very sad event, but I would be lying if I said I suffered. I didn't. It just made me think. It made me

aware. Aware of what? Right now, I can only say “death.” What *that* means is still beyond my reach.

But I do know that death should never come too soon. In the script, I compare life to a song: An early death is a song cut short. Unfortunately, I was not listening to my friend’s song. But many people were, and it pains me to know that they never heard the beautiful ending.

That’s what this story has become to me: a plea for attentiveness, regardless of the closeness of your relationships, so no song ever goes unfinished.

As I’ve said (and adequately so, I hope), I don’t claim to know enough about this subject matter. It only spurred questions. But, during the production of this film, I hope to learn by exploring the interactions between these three, lonely souls. Fortunately, I will not be alone in that endeavor. I will have the creative and productive minds of my cast and crew. I think enlightenment is inevitable when a group of dedicated artists work together. Through collaboration and interpretation, we are sure to make discoveries about life and death, grow as human beings, and in turn, make a beautiful piece of art.

Methodology: I plan to use the knowledge I acquired in a two day workshop on making short films that I took while attending Michael Howard Studios this past summer. I will pair that intensive with the critical understanding I’m gaining in my “Cinema as an Art Form” class, which I am currently taking here at UVA. The class details the techniques used by four famous film makers: Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, and Martin Scorsese.

There are four other directors that have had a major impact on my writing and vision: Quentin Tarantino, The Coen Brothers, and Shawn Christensen, who directed the academy award winning live action short film *Curfew*.

My film deals with suicide, mental health, and the inability to establish intimate relationships. I’m contemplating how cinematography can be used to enhance those themes. Right now, I want the cinematography to be unbalanced and enforce a sense of distance. The unbalanced aspect can be achieved by framing each shot as if Stringy, a non-existent character, were visible. Because he is not, the weight of the shot will shift to one side.

Distance can be achieved by using a wide angle lens, which appears to stretch space. Simultaneously, a wide angle lens can distort the edges of the screen by slightly bending straight lines into curves. Stanley Kubrick used wide angle lenses to great effect in his films. These strategies are of course liable to change depending on the input given to me by our, as of now, undecided Director of Photography.

My directing style will be heavily influenced by my education at Michael Howard Studios and my UVA acting professor Richard Warner. I will create a very comfortable environment where I encourage my actors to explore and discover their characters without judgment. As an actor, I have found that drawing from personal experiences can improve a performance dramatically, and I will encourage that among my cast. However, I also understand

that the same methods do not work for all actors. Ultimately, my job is to discover how I can help my actors, and then to guide them. I have an array of exercises that will do just that while facilitating discoveries.

This is my directorial debut, so it will, of course, be a learning experience for me as well. Before rehearsals start, I will meet with Richard Warner to talk about his approach to directing. I am also enrolled to take “DRAM 3651 Directing I” in the spring semester.

Potential Problems: My biggest concern is sound. Sound quality can make or break a movie. Especially difficult scenes to record will be the ones that take place outside where traffic may cause overpowering background noise. I’ll be seeking advice from Michael Rasbury, who can surely give me tips on how to manage the sound quality in my film.

Locations: The film will be shot in Charlottesville. While specific locations have not been determined yet, my production team is already at work searching for the perfect places to shoot. Locations include: A diner, the street outside of the diner, a grocery store, a park, and a rooftop.

Equipment: Camera movement technology (Dolly, Track, Crane, Tripod, etc.), lighting equipment, and sound equipment (particularly a boom microphone). We hope to borrow most of the equipment from cast and crew members, and the Clemons Media Lab. Anything we are unable to acquire through those means will be rented, and the necessary costs will be added to the budget.

The specific camera will not be decided upon until we have a Director of Photography in place, whose input is critical.

Outcome Report: Because the shoot dates are in May, I will not have a completed project to present by April 1, 2014. Instead, I will detail the budget, the cast and crew, the storyboard, the pre-production journey, any challenges we faced along the way, and what our next steps will be as we approach the filming phase.

Project Timeline

Already Attached Crew:

Writer/Director: Myself

Producer: Lauren Lukow – Long time friend, double majoring in Media Studies and Arts Administration here at UVA. *Farewell Old Stringy* is serving as part of her Interdisciplinary: Arts Administration Major Thesis Project

Assistant Producer: Alex Jones

Already Attached Cast:

Colin: Taylor Ballard – Long time friend, BFA student in the VCU Theater Program.

Davey: Richard Warner – UVA Drama Department Professor (SAG-AFTRA)

Pre-Production (Fall-Spring)

The Script has been written, and has gone through many drafts. It will continue to be revised this semester as I workshop it in my independent study (DRAM 4599) with UVA Drama Department Professor and playwright Doug Grissom.

- 10/11/2013 – Charlottesville SOUP Grant is due. Lauren Lukow is applying.
- 10/21/2013 or 10/26/2013 – Audition dates for Chad, Lester, and Bradach.
- 11/12/2013 – Charlottesville SOUP Dinner (should we be a finalist).
Major storyboard drawings will be completed.
- 12/17/2013 – We should have a Director of Photography in place by this point. We would preferably like to have other major crew members in place by this date as well (Camera Operator, Sound Supervisor/Mixer, Assistant Director, Hair and Makeup, Costumes, and Editor).

Once major crew is in place, we will begin having regularly scheduled design meetings.
- 12/18/2013 – 1/13/2014 - Launch Kickstarter/Indiegogo campaign to fund project.
- During Spring Semester – Acquire necessary shooting equipment (Camera, Dolly, Crane, Track, Lighting, etc) with the Director of Photography's input and assistance.

Interview and secure crew members for any positions that have not been filled yet.
- 4/1/2013 – Progress Report Due

Production (Spring-Summer)

May 10, 2014 – May 17, 2014: Rehearsals

May 20, 2014 – May 27, 2014: Shooting

Post Production (Summer)

Involves Editing, Marketing, Submission to Film Festivals, etc.

No specific dates can be determined at this point because it is too far in advance to know the submission dates of the film festivals. The 2014 Sundance Film Festival's submission dates for short films were: Monday, July 29, 2013 (Early Submission Deadline), Monday, August 26, 2013 (Official Submission Deadline), and Monday, September 16, 2013 (Late Submission Deadline). These dates can be used as a guideline.

Pre-Production and Production Budget

A budget chart has been attached to the email. It is liable to change and will most likely increase.

- The included travel cost is to assist Taylor Ballard's trip from Richmond to Charlottesville. This is liable to increase if there are any crew members who need to travel.
- Lodging expenses will be determined once we have the crew in place. All actors will be residents of Charlottesville, except for Taylor Ballard, who will be staying with me.
- Food/Catering includes coffee, water, and donuts for breakfast and a lunch for each member of the cast and crew everyday for the eight day shooting period.
- We hope to borrow most of the equipment from people involved in the project and/or the Clemons Media Lab. If we are unable to acquire all necessary equipment, it will be rented and the cost will be added to the budget.
- The type of camera will be decided when we select a Director of Photography. In a best case scenario, they will have a camera we can use. A stipend for the Director of Photography has been included in the budget.
- Locations: It is entirely possible that we will have to rent a diner to shoot in. Currently, none of the budget is dedicated to renting locations because we do not have a price range yet.
- Props and costumes will share a budget of \$550.
- The Office Expenses include printing scripts for cast and crew, etc.
- The total budget, as of now, is \$6006. It will most likely go up. This proposed budget exceeds the Arts Scholars Award. The difference will be raised with a Kickstarter or Indiegogo campaign, and potentially the Charlottesville SOUP Grant.
- The Post-Production phase will have a separate budget that will be funded by a second Kickstarter or Indiegogo campaign. Post-Production costs will include Marketing, Film Festival submission fees, etc.

Participation in the Arts at UVA

Declared Drama Major

Drama Classes Taken: DRAM 2010 Theater Art: Image to Form, DRAM 2020 Acting I, DRAM 2310 Costume Technology, DRAM 2330 Production Lab: Costume, DRAM 2620 Sound Design, DRAM 2810 Cinema as an Art Form, DRAM 3410 Acting II, DRAM 3600 Modern American Drama, DRAM 3652 Production Management, DRAM 4410 Acting III, DRAM 4593 Special Topics in Performance: Auditions, DRAM 4599 Special Topics in Playwriting, DRAM 4730 Advanced Playwriting

Drama Department Acting Credits:

- Main Stage Productions: Capulet Servant in *Romeo and Juliet*, Georg in *Spring Awakening*, Donald in *You Can't Take It With You*, George Ackleberg in *An Enemy of the People*.
- Luke in *Empty Cups*, written, directed and performed Off Off Broadway by UVA Drama Graduate and Undergraduate students.
- Jacques in the Premier Staged Reading of *Tito's Revenge* (Written and Directed by Ken Ludwig.)

Extracurricular

- Executive Board member of the Virginia Players: Reading Series Co-Chair
- Sang Tenor 2 in the Quartet in the First Year Players production of *The Music Man*

Participation in the Arts Scholars

I have taken the Arts Scholars seminar/discussion (CASS 1010/CASS 1011) every semester since my first year.

I am a member of the Arts Scholars Executive Board: Drama Representative

Production: _____

Budget Draft

Date: _____

Sheet

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Length: _____

Shooting Dates: _____

Page #

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Location: _____

Account #	Category	Specifics	Cost	w/Tax	Budget	Actual Cost
001	Script & Rights					
002	Producer					
003	Director					
004	Cast					
ABOVE THE LINE						
TOTAL:					\$0	\$0
005	Travel		50	60	\$60	
006	Hotel & Lodging		0	0	\$0	
007	Food		2550	2700	\$2,700	
008	Camera	Kit, Crew, Expendables	0	0	\$1,750	
009	Lighting	Kit, Crew, Expendables	0	0	\$0	
010	Sound	Kit, Crew, Accessories	0	0	\$0	
011	Locations	Fees & Permits				
012	Art Dept	Props, Wardrobe etc.	500	550	\$550	
013	Office Expenses	Paper supplies, fax, internet etc.	200	225	\$225	
014	Petty Cash		100	125	\$125	
015	Film or Tape Stock		0	0	\$0	
016	Lab	Developing, dailies, etc.	0	0	\$0	
017	Insurance		50	50	\$50	
018	Editing					
019	Shipping					
020	Still Photos	Photographer, film, developing, etc.	0	0	\$0	
021	Contingency	10% of production costs			\$546	\$0
PRODUCTION TOTAL:					\$6,006	\$0
022	Final Post Online	Conform, Color Correction, etc.				
023	Final Post Mix	Sound mixing session				
024	Marketing	Festival fees, screeners, postage				

POST PRODUCTION

TOTAL: \$0 \$0

GRAND TOTAL

ESTIMATE: \$3,650

GRAND TOTAL

BUDGET: \$6,006