

University of Virginia Center for Undergraduate Excellence
Arts Award

Outcome Report: *Farewell Old Stringy*
A Short Film by Alex Rafala
Faculty Mentor: Richard Warner

INITIAL PROPOSAL: To make an approximately 20-30 minute short film with the intent to submit and exhibit it at film festivals nationwide.

Farewell Old Stringy is an exploration of and emotional response to the suicide of a co-worker of mine this past summer. The subsequent thoughts and questions I had after that event influenced and informed the script, making it a plea for attentiveness, a promotion of mental health awareness, and a commentary on the closeness of our relationships in a world that is growing increasingly more isolated. Ultimately, it functions as a confession of my ignorance.

SYNOPSIS:

Farewell Old Stringy is the story of three men and their struggle to maintain their crumbling relationships.

Colin and Bradach are childhood friends who have grown to lead drastically different lives. Their friendship undergoes more pressure when they encounter Davey, an old homeless man, whose imaginary friend, Stringy, has decided to commit suicide.

Together, they throw a goodbye party for Stringy. Colin and Bradach, however, do not understand the reason or significance of Stringy's departure.

By the end of the day, the three men arrive at a critical juncture, and in the face of uncertainty, each try to understand what Stringy's death means to them.

Logline: An old homeless man recruits two young men to help his imaginary friend commit suicide.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT:

In the summer of 2013, shortly after I had begun the writing process, a co-worker of mine took his life. The news of his death was unexpected and unintelligible. A man I presumed would ceaselessly blip 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.

This script and this movie are 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: I didn't understand.

As we further developed the script, the theme of loneliness became increasingly relevant. 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 unique ways.

I think everyone can associate with loneliness and the pain that accompanies it. 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 an 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 *Farewell Old Stringy*, life is compared to music: 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 its 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.

I don't claim to know enough about this subject matter. It has only spurred questions. However, through 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 this endeavor. I will have the creative and productive minds of my cast and crew. I believe 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.

CAST:

Davey – Richard Warner, Professor, University of Virginia Department of Drama (SAG-AFTRA) (Faculty Mentor) (Biography featured on Website)

Colin – Taylor Ballard, Virginia Commonwealth University, B.F.A. Theatre Acting Concentration (Expected Graduation: May 2015) (Biography featured on Website)

Bradach – Ian Lindsay, University of Virginia Graduate, B.A. Drama (2014) (Biography featured on Website)

Chad – Daniel Prillaman, University of Virginia Graduate, B.A. Drama (2013)

Lester – Chris Bauer, University of Virginia Graduate, B.A. Drama (2014)

Grocery Store Clerk – Nathan Rafala, Virginia Tech (Expected Graduation: May 2017)

CREW:

Producer: Lauren Lukow, University of Virginia Graduate, Arts Administration and Media Studies (2014) (Biography featured on Website)

Assistant Producer: Alex Jones, University of Virginia, Arts Administration (Expected Graduation: May 2016) (Biography featured on Website)

Director of Photography: Michael Duni

Sound Editor: Max Krembs

Editor: Reid Kerley

Props Master: Julia Monahan

Additional Editing: Anne DeCorte

Make-Up Head: Morgan Toliver

Production Designer: Anne Donnelly

Best Boy: Dan Barr

Costume Designer: Ana Mendleson

Fight Choreographer: Brad Fraizer

Original Music by Nicholas Hurst

Cellist: Philip Munck

First Assistant Director: Jon Belka

Production Assistants: Nina Lukow, Elizabeth McCauley, Emily Zimmerman

Second Assistant Director: Kristina McCloskey

Graphic Designer: Arthur Wu

Associate Producer: Rachel Zucker

Stills Photographer: Chris Bauer

Camera Operator: Caleb Plutzer (House Cat Productions)

Craft Services: Tony Chef's Kitchen

Sound Mixer: Louis Handler (House Cat Productions)

EQUIPMENT:

(Rented to us by House Cat Productions, included with their cost of operational services.)

- Black Magic 2.5 K
- SSD 250gb x2
- Rods and Mount with follow focus and matte box
- fluid head tripod
- Canon 2.8 all the way through 70-200 zoom lens
- Canon 2.8 all the way through 16-35 lens
- 6hour batteries x3 which power both camera and our led light (car scenes etc.)
- Sennheiser MKH 416 shotgun mic
- Sennheiser ME64 Cardioid Microphone Capsule and K6 phantompower
- Sennheiser Lav (1) ew 112-p
- Sound devices 302 (3 channel) field mixer
- Zoom h4n
- Boom pole, blimp dead cat headphones

PUBLICITY, ARTICLE FEATURES, ETC.:

Cavalier Daily: <http://www.cavalierdaily.com/article/2014/03/farewell-old-stringy-lacks-nothing-but-funds>

Culpeper Star Exponent: http://www.dailyprogress.com/starexponent/news/local_news/farewell-old-stringy-debuts-sunday/article_662cce9a-66bc-11e4-bbe4-001a4bcf6878.html

Featured in inaugural edition of the UVA Arts Magazine.

I was nominated and have been scheduled to speak at UVA Public Day this year on April 10, 2015.

WEBSITES:

Official Website: <http://www.farewelloldstringy.com/>

Facebook Page: https://www.facebook.com/farewelloldstringy?ref=aymt_homepage_panel

Kickstarter Page: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1756759642/farewell-old-stringy>

IMDb Page: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4205574/?ref_=fn_al_tt_1

TIMELINE BREAKDOWN:

Pre-Production Phase and Duties (May 2013 – April 17, 2014)

- Developed Script in Independent Study with Playwriting Professor, Doug Grissom
- Weekly Production Staff meetings
- Auditions and Casting
- Artistic Staff and Crew Interviews
- Original Music Composition
- Design Meetings
 - Topics included: Cinematography, Costumes, Props, Production Design, Original Music, Editing and Sound Editing, and Fight Choreography
- Location Scouting and Negotiations
 - Locations included: Water Street Parking Garage, The Bluegrass Grill, Foods of All Nations
- Created LLC
- Made Bank Account
- Press Kit and Info Packet
- Created Facebook Page
- SAG-AFTRA negotiations
- Scheduling
- Props, Costumes, Make-up assembled
- Storyboarding
- Funding
 - Kickstarter Campaign Period: 3/3/2014 – 4/2/2014
- Rehearsals
 - 5/10/2014 – 5/17/2014

Production Phase (5/20/2014 – 5/27/2014)

Post-Production Phase and Duties (5/28/2014 – Present)

- Visual and Sound Editing
 - Currently in our second round of both.
 - Shortened film by ten minutes.
- Additional Dialogue Recording (ADR)
- Color Correction
- Poster Design and Printing
- Weekly Post-Production Meetings
- Kickstarter Rewards
- Publicity
- Created IMDb Page
- World Premier: *Official Selection of the Virginia Film Festival* 11/9/2014
- Film Festival Exhibition

CURRENT OBJECTIVES:

We were very honored and excited to have *Farewell Old Stringy* premiere right here in Charlottesville as an Official Selection of the 2014 Virginia Film Festival. We received a great deal of positive and encouraging feedback from friends and filmmakers alike, which we used as the driving force behind the next round of editing. We knew further edits would improve the film, so we set a goal for ourselves to shorten its run time from approximately 33 minutes to 20

minutes. By trimming the fat and getting to the core of the narrative we would increase the pace and overall quality of the film.

From a business viewpoint, the decision to shorten the film also served a vital exhibition purpose: Although many film festivals will accept short films up to 40 minutes in length, it is sometimes understood in the film community that every minute after 15 hurts the film's chances of being selected to screen at a festival. This is because all narrative short films at a festival, aside from those chosen to screen before a feature length picture, are screened consecutively in a package and advertised as a single event. More often than not, festival programmers choose to screen many 8-15 minute short films rather than a few longer films in the interest of showcasing more filmmakers.

We started the second round of editing in December of 2014. On March 14, 2015 my editor and I agreed to a final cut: The final length is 22:49 minutes. We succeeded in cutting about 10 minutes from the film.

Simultaneously, we started a second round of sound editing in order to smooth out kinks and add more aesthetic texture. On April 23, we completed the second round of sound editing.

We are hiring the service of a Mad Box, a Richmond based company, to apply a second round of color correction. Appointments have been set, and the color correction will be finalized on May 21.

Once the sound and color correction have been mastered the film will be complete. At that point we will start submitting the finished product to other film festivals across the country. We expect to begin the submission process by the end of April. This will continue throughout the next year (that timeline is dependent on festival submission periods and deadlines: schedules of which we are not in control).

The most immediate festival submission deadlines are:

- CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL
 - Submission Deadline: June 19 (regular)
 - Festival Dates: October 15-19, 2015
- AUSTIN FILM FESTIVAL
 - Submission Deadline: July 10
 - Festival Dates: October 29 – November 5
- WASHINGTON WEST FILM FESTIVAL
 - Submission Deadline: TBA (open now)
 - Festival Dates: Oct 21-26 2015
- NASHVILLE FILM FESTIVAL
 - Submission Deadline: June 1
- TELLURIDE FILM FESTIVAL
 - Submission Deadline: July 1
- SXSW
 - Submission Deadlines: September 3, October 1, November 3

- Festival Begins: March 11, 2016

Other festivals we are considering include (in no particular order):

Sundance Film Festival, Salt Lake City Film Festival, Clermont-Ferrand Short Film Festival, Berlin Film Festival, Whistler Film Festival, Slamdance Film Festival, Raindance Film Festival, Aspen Shorts Fest, Toronto Film Festival, Sonoma Film Festival, Los Angeles Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival, New York Film Festival, Athens International Film and Video Festival, Woodstock Film Festival, Venice Film Festival, Portsmouth International Film Festival, USA Film Festival, Santa Fe Independent Film Festival, Palm Springs Film Festival, Chelsea Film Festival, Real to Reel Film Festival, Philadelphia Independent Film Festival, Seattle Short Film Festival, Sidewalk Film Festival, Brooklyn Short Film Festival, Soho Short Film Festival, New Orleans Film Festival, Williamsburg International Film Festival, Miami Short Film Festival, Austin Film Festival, DC Shorts Film Festival, Charleston International Film Festival, Filmfest DC International Film Festival, Manhattan Short Festival.

In addition, we have compiled a list of topic oriented film festivals that focus on issues such as Activism, Mental Health, and Homelessness.

Finally, here is a list of film festivals compiled by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. It is technically a qualifying list of festivals for eligibility to submit for consideration for an Academy Award. As of now that is not a goal of ours, and this list will mainly be used as a trusted source.

http://www.oscars.org/awards/academyawards/rules/87/pdf/87aa_shorts_festival_list.pdf

Our lists encompass a wide array of festivals that vary in size and prestige. They are subject to change, and the number of festivals to which we can submit is very dependent on the amount of money we dedicate to such costs. At this time, we have allotted \$1,300 to festival submission costs (To cite an example of costs, here are the prices for submission to the Austin Film Festival; Early Bird Deadline: \$50, Regular Deadline: \$60, Late Deadline: \$75. Festival costs are not standardized and vary from festival from festival, but this example illustrates the general price range of submission costs).

FUNDING SOURCES:

\$2500 – Third Year Arts Scholars Award (\$2000 granted to me, \$500 research stipend for mentor Richard Warner, who graciously volunteered to spend it on production related costs)

\$3000 – Fourth Year Arts Scholars Award

\$1000 – Office of the Vice Provost for the Arts

\$3,865 – Kickstarter Campaign

\$3000 – UVA Center for Undergraduate Excellence

TOTAL - \$13365

BUDGET:

Budgetary information below.

SELF ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE AQUIRED:

As a Writer:

I will start by citing my Third Year Arts Scholars Award Progress Report, in which I believe I concisely articulated my learning experience:

“Overall I am very pleased with my screenplay. Although I have written a fair amount plays and screenplays, this was the first to be produced, and it was enlightening to see which of my stylistic choices flourished on screen and which didn’t play as expected. Two scenes were cut significantly in the [first] editing process. Most notably was the first full scene, which, on paper, constituted one third of the pages. While it was entertaining to read, for a short film intended to be no more than thirty minutes in length, this scene stunted the flow and action of the exposition. Cutting a large portion of the interior dialogue increased the pace, shortened the film, and, overall, made it a much stronger experience. In future writing endeavors I will be less reluctant to cut portions of dialogue that disrupt the flow of the story, no matter how much I love them.

I’m hesitant to acknowledge what I think my strengths are because I feel a little conceited doing so, but if I’m obligated: I believe I devised an unrelenting journey, one that begins with a façade of happiness (crass, darkly humorous banter) that then descends into an even unhappier place. One where the characters, especially Bradach, take no reservations in releasing their brutally honest, relationship destroying thoughts. I also think the plot is an enticingly unique one, its originality providing a new means of addressing the serious social issue of mental health awareness.”

This passage remains true a year later, and I wish to echo those points just as strongly again: After revisiting the story through a second round of editing, in which we cut what I initially understood to be irremovable, I learned even more about screenwriting. I learned how to strengthen a character’s voice, reduce didacticism and superfluous rantings, refine my personal style, and sustain an enjoyable pace. I also learned to pair my style of writing dialogue with an equally evocative and complimentary visual text. With such improvements, I believe my future narratives will shrug off useless fat and revel in the pure core of the story being told.

Since writing this short screenplay I have developed two feature length screenplays. In both I worked to improve the quality of my screenwriting by relying on images more and allowing my audience the benefit of assuming they are intelligent enough to perceive meaning through more realistic and less prescriptive dialogue. I attribute the success of both (noted by the

positive reviews of my professors and peers) to the lessons I learned through the process of making *Farewell Old Stringy*.

All that being said, it goes without saying that I still have much learn. I'm excited to see where the knowledge I acquired doing this project will take me as a writer and a storyteller.

As a Director:

I will start by citing excerpts from my Third Year Arts Scholars Award Progress Report (italicized), in which I believe I concisely articulated my learning experience:

"Many of my artistic choices were actor driven: That is, much of my focus was given to the actors' performances. This comes as no surprise seeing as I was trained as an actor. One such choice was to include as many lengthy shots as possible. I believe this gives the audience a sense of the moment and the authenticity of the actors' performances."

The actors' performances are perhaps the strongest element of the film (and many may even consider this to be an "actors' film"). While I cannot take credit for their incredible talent and intuition, I believe one of my biggest contributions as a director was the productive communication I established with my cast.

"There was a significant technical problem: We somehow lost a bit of footage from the first day of shooting in the data transfer process from one computer to another. Not so much that the film was rendered impossible, but some creative editing did have to be employed in one of the earlier scenes."

Through trial and error, I learned the ins and outs of set preparation and protocol. This is one example of an accident that could have been avoided had I been more thoroughly prepared. With those lessons under my belt, my efficiency on future film sets will increase significantly.

"In future endeavors I want to explore in more depth the possibilities of the camera and heighten the visual language, employ even more and even stronger aesthetic choices, and improve communications with my crew (which were not weak, but I think can stand to be even more artistically productive)."

There are many beautiful, evocative, and moving images in this film. Aesthetic qualities my cinematographer and I valued and utilized include (but are not limited to):

- 1) *"Motifs of symmetry and asymmetry and how the usage of unbalanced compositions could be representative of many things, most interestingly Davey's mentality and his perceived 'lucidity,' a term used frequently in our discussions of character analysis."*
- 2) The juxtaposition of extreme close-up shots and wide, all-encompassing shots. We felt the former explored character mentality and interiority, while the latter portrayed the

characters as overwhelmingly small and insignificant (The actors' entire bodies are within the frame and they are literally quite small in relation to it).

- 3) As mentioned above, I was very interested in using long takes as a means of emphasizing the present moment and the actors' performances within it. The "now" can be a scary, emotional, and beautiful place.

My next step as a director is to find ways to be bolder and more interesting with my choices: To really define my visual language and use images to craft a story without relying solely on the power of words.

One of the most exhilarating learning experiences this project had to offer was the opportunity to work with a professional editor. Of all the filmmaking arts, editing may be the medium I knew the least about. The conversations I shared with my editors were artistically fruitful and engaging. I learned how much influence an editor has in the shape and presentation of the narrative. We explored many options and played with different takes, angles, and techniques in order to craft the preferred experience. Through the investigation of different styles and approaches, we eventually settled on the interpretation that served this particular story the best.

"We have created an endearing and well-made film. My pride of our creation is even more so considering that this is my directorial debut. Of course mistakes were made, but this was a majorly successful enterprise that taught me a great deal."

CONCLUSION:

I have taken many film theory classes here at UVA. My appreciation and understanding of the power of editing (montage), composition, and other aesthetic film elements addressed in those courses has been magnified. By embarking on this project, through my mistakes and successes, I developed an even stronger grasp on the film medium. The skills and lessons I've learned will accompany me through life as I embark on further and larger and even more daunting cinematic projects. I have flourished as an artist, and this was a critical first step on my journey to becoming a filmmaker.

I want to give my sincerest thanks to the University of Virginia Center for Undergraduate Excellence for their financial support. I also extend my gratitude to the Miller Arts Scholars, The Office of the Vice Provost for the Arts, every single one of our Kickstarter donors, and each individual involved with this project. Your support - financial, moral, or otherwise - was greatly appreciated.

**FAREWELL OLD STRINGY, LLC
PRODUCTION BUDGET**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Specifics</u>	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>	<u>Red/Black</u>	<u>Dev.</u>
Locations	Rental Fees + Parking	\$1,250	\$883.00	Black	\$367.00
Food	Craft Services for a cast/crew of ~25 people – between 4 and 7 days depending on weather (breakfast and lunch)	\$1,000	\$867.38	Black	\$132.62
Equipment	Sound, Camera, Expendables	\$2,000	\$2,077.59	Red	(\$77.59)
Art Department	Props	\$200	\$215.79	Red	(\$15.79)
Costumes		\$100	\$49.53	Black	\$50.47
Make Up		\$100	\$88.82	Black	\$11.18
Petty Cash (Miscellaneous)		\$200	\$137.02	Black	\$62.98
Insurance	Production Insurance, LLC	\$600	\$600.00	Black	\$0.00
Social	Wrap Party, Dinners	\$200	\$200.63	Red	(\$0.63)
Contingency	~10% of production costs	\$650	\$0	Black	\$650
	PRODUCTION TOTAL	\$6,300.00	\$5,119.76		\$1,180.24
	(POST PRODUCTION TOTAL)	\$7,313.00	\$8,493.24		
	FINAL TOTAL	\$13,613.00			

**FAREWELL OLD STRINGY, LLC
POST-PRODUCTION BUDGET**

FOS POST-PRODUCTION BUDGET	
Film Festival Submissions	\$1,300
Sound Editor/Supervisor	\$250
DVDs/BluRay Engineering	\$500
2nd Hard Drive	\$170
Shipping Materials	\$139
Colorist	\$1,000
Editor	\$3,300
Annual LLC Registration Fee	\$52
Contingency	\$500
<u>TOTAL</u>	\$7,210

farewell old stringy

2014 – 2015 Funding Outcome Report

SOURCE	AMOUNT	GRANT/ FUND/ CASH	ITEM(S)	AMOUNT SPENT TO DATE	DEVIATIO N
Arts Scholars Round 1 – Alex Rafala	\$2,000	Grant	- Housecat Productions (camera & sound equipment) - 1 TB USB Hard Drive (equipment)	\$2,000	\$0
Arts Scholars Round 1 – Richard Warner	\$500	Fund	- Costumes - Props - Hair & Make-Up products	\$500	\$0
Arts Scholars Round 2 – Alex Rafala	\$3,000	Grant	- Anne DeCorte (Editing Services)	\$3,000	\$0
Vice Provost for the Arts	\$1,500	Fund	- Parking Garage (Location Rental) - Erica Arvold (Production Insurance) - Food (Craft Services)	\$1,500	\$0
University Arts Award (Center for Undergraduate Excellence)	\$3,000	Grant	- Festival Submissions - Max Krembs (Sound Editing Services) - 1 TB USB Hard Drive (equipment) - Madbox Post- Production (Colorist Services)	\$420	\$2,580
Kickstarter	\$3,613	Cash	- Wrap Party - LLC Registration - Petty Cash - Marketing (Graphic Design & website set up) - DVD & Poster Production (Kickstarter Rewards) - Food (Craft Services)	\$2,559	\$1,054

farewell old stringy

2014 – 2015 Funding Outcome Report

<u>Total</u>	<u>\$13,613</u>				<u>\$3,634</u>
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Current bank account balance ^^^

Highlighted = to be purchased

taylor ballard

richard warner

ian lindsay

farewell
old stringy

FAREWELL OLD STRINGY STARRING TAYLOR BALLARD, IAN LINDSAY, AND RICHARD WARNER
MUSIC BY NICHOLAS HURST SOUND SUPERVISOR MAX KREMBS COSTUME DESIGNER ANA MENDELSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANNE DONNELLY EDITED BY REID KERLEY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL DUNI
CO-PRODUCED BY ALEX JONES PRODUCED BY LAUREN LUKOW WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ALEX RAFALA



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FAREWELL OLD STRINGY STARRING TAYLOR BALLARD, IAN LINDSAY, AND RICHARD WARNER
MUSIC BY NICHOLAS HURST SOUND SUPERVISOR MAX KREMBS COSTUME DESIGNER ANA MENDELSON PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANNE DONNELLY EDITED BY REID KERLEY DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL DUNI
CO-PRODUCED BY ALEX JONES PRODUCED BY LAUREN LUKOW WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ALEX RAFALA



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OFFICIAL SELECTION

VIRGINIA

FILM FESTIVAL

2014