

## **FINDING BLISS**

### **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

People are always asking me “how did you break into the movie business?” Well, sadly, I still haven’t officially broken in, at least in the sense that I currently have no agent, and have never gotten a movie made without raising some of the money myself. The question always reminds me of this great article written by John Sayles which I read in college when I myself was desperately pondering how I’d ever make it in the “movie business”.

Sayles was giving advice on how to get movies made. He stressed that everyone makes it in their *own* very unique way, there is no blueprint to follow, you have to make something happen on your own. That’s the only piece of advice that could apply to anyone and everyone trying to make a movie. Make something happen. Make something happen meant it was up to *me*, not others, to make my dream come true. Yes, it would be hard. But it was possible. And possible was all I needed.

I moved out to Hollywood a week after graduation and tried to “make something happen.” That consisted of answering every ad in the back of Variety for *any* job that remotely had something to do with movies. Unfortunately, I didn’t know anyone in the business so I couldn’t get a job even if I worked for free! My Ivy League degree meant *nothing*, in fact, it was detrimental. Only in Hollywood right? It was humiliating.

After a long year of becoming a full-time office temp and movie extra, I decided to go back to school to make some “connections”. I applied to the American Film Institute’s directing program. I was put on the waiting list and asked to come to their new editing program instead. I spent a year in the AFI editing program where I learned the Avid, and got friendly with my fellow filmmaker classmates and the tech support people who worked for the school. This helped me immensely, because now I had all the free equipment I needed to make some short films. On my own! I used my actor friends and AFI classmates as crew and made my first short for less than \$100. In the process I learned how to direct actors, set up shots, fix my mistakes in the editing room, mix my own sound, navigate the festival circuit, and ultimately book a theater to show the my shorts for an audience. Hey, Mr. Sayles would be proud – I made something happen!

Now what? AFI was over and I needed a paying job desperately. A neighbor who had seen me lugging editing equipment in and out of my apartment mentioned a job opening at the Playboy Channel, where they were looking to hire an editor for their promos. Hmm... I went to the interview. The office was beautiful, very corporate and ultra professional, not a naked girl in sight. I breathed a sigh of relief, after all, this was a *real* job where I could hone my craft in the editing room while saving enough money to make my first low budget feature. It was a job I could proudly tell my parents about!

It wasn’t until I was hired and stuck in a dark editing room surrounded by a stack of tapes with titles like “Witness for the Penetration”, and “Anal Invasion” that I realized exactly what I was going to be doing. As the first tape played I realized it wasn’t just a little harmless Playmate Centerfold video, no, it was a triple x hard-core porn film that I had to edit into a soft-core promo for the “classy” Playboy channel. I felt like Alice falling down the rabbit hole – a very dark, slippery and morally challenging rabbit hole. I was sweating as the movie played, part aroused, part disgusted, and very depressed – this was it?! My Ivy league education, my year at AFI, my dreams, hopes, ambitions to do

something meaningful with my life. And here it was – a hunky lifeguard saving a girl from drowning and then giving her mouth to vagina resuscitation. It would've been funny if it weren't so damn pathetic. I felt like the world's greatest loser.

Immediately I thought of John Sayles, his voice chanting in my brain “make something happen”. I had to make lemonade out of lemons, or at least write a screenplay about editing porn. And I did. I started writing “The Daily Grind”, the script for what would years later become “Finding Bliss”, the story of a hopeless romantic and aspiring filmmaker who edits porn to pay the bills while trying to make her own independent romantic comedy. I couldn't quite finish the script because I didn't have my plot fully developed, but in the meantime, I wrote another script, “*I Love You Don't Touch Me!*” and made it for exactly \$68,000, using all my Playboy savings. It got into Sundance and sold to Samuel Goldwyn. I had arrived!!! Well, not really. I still couldn't get a job.

I wrote another spec script, “Amy's Orgasm”, and raised the financing through an audience member at a film festival. Still super low budget, I was behind the camera again, telling a story that meant something to me, and the film had a small theatrical release. After that, I spent years writing for hire, but never getting anything made.

I knew I had to tell my story of editing porn, the movie I was still aching to make, after all this time. I went back to a rough draft I had written in 1997 and started re-writing. Of course, I had to come up with a real plot, which my own life didn't exactly have. So over the course of 7 years I wrote and re-wrote the story, selling it as an original series at Showtime, then writing it as a movie for Showtime, then having it die at Showtime when the network changed hands followed by a year of getting it out of turn-around at Showtime and pounding the pavement for 4 more years to raise independent financing to make this movie that I had been wanting to make for so long. To make something happen. I was starting to hate John Sayles.

I once read that before you write a script you have to ask yourself, “why am I the person to write THIS story?” If you can't answer that, then you probably shouldn't write it. The longer I struggled in the film business, the less I seemed to know. However, I did know I was the one to write this particular story because I had experienced wonderful dramatic conflict – porn turned me on, turned me off, turned me inside out and upside down. And the good thing was, it actually made me appreciate having real boobs.

After all the years that had gone by, all the rejections of this particular story, all the false starts – I felt like God was telling me NOT to make this movie. But I don't really believe in a higher power – I believed in John Sayles and those three magic words that had served me so well – *make something happen*.

And I did. I took the only offer available which was to shoot the film, (which is supposed to take place in the sunny San Fernando valley), in the dead of winter in Spokane, Washington where a local production company would put in financing in exchange for the foreign rights, which triggered other financing, etc...

I never would've expected to shoot “*Finding Bliss*”, in the worst snowstorm in Washington history, but sometimes you just have to make something happen. Thank you John Sayles.

-- Julie Davis