

UNLUCKY: A STUDENT FILM

A Liberal Studies Essay submitted  
To Kent State University in partial  
Fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Masters of Liberal Studies degree

by

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May, 2016

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B.S., Kent State University, 2014

M.A., Kent State University, 2016

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## Acknowledgements

To Traci Williams and David Smeltzer, thank you for your years of dedication, teaching, and always pushing me to be better. You've always found the perfect balance between teaching me how to fly and letting me fall flat on my face. I can't possibly thank you enough.

To Keegan Larwin, thanks for sticking by my side throughout this incredible journey. You are the best friend, co-director, and backbone I could possibly ask for. Through all the blood, sweat, tears, and expired bags of "Combos," we've finally made it.

To my wonderful family and friends, and my darling Emily. Thank you for always supporting my endeavors no matter the scale, risks, or amount of time I'd be away from home. Without your support, none of this would be possible.

## Chapter I: Introduction

### My Pregnancy

It is spring 2013 and after several advising appointments, emails, and phone calls, I am finally registered in “HD Film Preproduction.” As a newly declared Electronic Media major, I really didn’t know what to expect. All I knew was that we were going to be making a full-length feature film entitled “Hell at Heathridge,” and that I could barely handle my excitement. The professor, Traci Williams, walks into the room for the first time and addresses the class with these profound words, “Making a film is like having a baby.”

At the time, I was unsure what she meant by this metaphor. Over time, however, it made perfect sense. Making a film is grueling, painful, and nerve-racking, but at the same time amazing and beautiful. You will be exhausted, short-tempered, and depressed, yet exhilarated, confident, and energetic at the same time. The worst part about it is: no matter how much planning you put into it, there is no way to completely prepare yourself for the journey you are embarking on.

There will be confrontations. You’re going to feel nauseous almost all the time. Things are not going to go according to your plan. There are days where everything is

going to go completely wrong, and you'll have to pick up the pieces and roll with it.

There's no turning back, and you keep asking yourself "Why did I do this?" However, it is all worth it in the end.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, and it is when your baby is finally brought into this world. All your blood, sweat, and tears lead up to that wonderful moment when you're standing in the back of your sold-out premiere, surrounded by family, friends, cast, and crew, all watching your hard work pay off.

Luckily for me, this is not my first pregnancy. I had learned from "Hell at Heathridge" what problems could potentially arise and how to fix them. I learned that you're going to make mistakes, and that's okay. I learned that your body is going to go through hell, and you're not going to get much sleep. I learned that when you upset your producers, don't apologize, just fix it.

Even after everything is said and done, I am still learning from working on these films everyday. "Hell at Heathridge" was my first-born, and now "Unlucky" makes me a parent of two. I'm more experienced, but I still don't know it all. The truth is, you can't learn how to make a film in any class or textbook. You can learn the filmmaking process, obviously, but you never know what it's like until you've actually made one. Just as you can read all the pregnancy books in the world, but you don't know anything until it actually happens to you.

Even though we finished shooting "Unlucky" in August, I still find new things to take away from this experience every day. Just because the cameras are done rolling doesn't mean the learning process stops. I am very proud of "Unlucky," but there are many things I wish I could travel back in time and change. I am proud of my magnificent

cast, my hardworking crew, and my co-director Keegan. However, all of us have grown and improved drastically since we started working on this film nearly two years ago.

We made a lot of mistakes. We didn't prepare enough. If this were a multi-million dollar film in the "real world," a lot of us would probably have been fired. Thankfully, at the end of the day we learned. We know what we did right, what we did wrong, and how to improve for next time.

"Unlucky" was the most rewarding experience of my life. At this point, we are working on audio sweetening, visual effects, music composition, and marketing for our red carpet premiere. Much like an expectant mother looking at sonograms, I see the film inching closer to completion each and every day. I am well into my third trimester with a due date of April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

## Chapter II: Development

### Picking the Script (December, 2013-November, 2014)

On December 5, 2013, I announced to a crowd of over 800 in attendance at the “Hell at Heathridge” premiere the genre for our next script competition. The film would be romantic comedy, with some sort of environmental twist or subplot. The competition started that day, and all scripts had to be turned in by October 2014. The next several months were full of anticipation for me. I was excited and ready to begin working on another film.

Fast forward to the next fall semester, where I’m sitting in a brand new class designed specially for determining what script will be chosen. “Digital Film Development” was a particularly frustrating class for me. I looked around and saw many students who had never worked on a film before, let alone a feature film. It made me scared. However, I had faith that the class would be able to choose which script would be the best fit for us to make. Above all, I trusted our teacher Traci’s judgment, and I knew that she had the final say no matter what class ultimately chose.

We received about 20 scripts for the competition, and now it was time to get reading. The scripts ranged from decent to extraordinarily bland to simply unreadable.



Some of the scripts I read were downright atrocious. Then came “Unlucky.” My best friend and classmate, Keegan Larwin, had actually read this script a couple days before I had my turn with it. He told me the story was completely unlike anything he had ever read, and that it had to be the film we would make.

With high hopes, I went home that night and cracked open my copy of “Unlucky.” The next hour or so of my life was a turning point. The story was unique, and even made fun of the typical tropes you’d tend to find in a romantic comedy. It poked fun at the “love at first sight” mindset, and the idea that everything will work out nicely with a fairy tale ending. “Unlucky” found the perfect balance between parodying this mindset and embracing it.

In essence, “Unlucky” leaned more towards comedy than it did romance. However, it also encompassed several other genres. It was part comedy, romance, thriller, horror film, espionage tale, adventure story, and even had a road-trip movie feel. It even managed to work in an environmental subplot. It was the fact that it contained all of these genres put together that made “Unlucky” truly special. On top of all that, the script just had a ton of heart. You cared deeply for the main and subordinate characters, and their determination and good will made for a truly heart-warming tale.

After a few weeks, we narrowed down the 20 scripts to our final three. “Unlucky” made the cut, but now it was up to the interview process to decide which script would be chosen. The reason we interviewed the writers was to make sure they were good people to work with. They needed to be willing to compromise their original vision to what the producers and directors wanted. They also need to be willing and available to

do several rewrites depending on how much work the script needed. Lastly, they needed to understand the filmmaking process, and be easy to work with.

Thankfully for us, “Unlucky” was the script that was picked.

#### Getting our Second Draft (November-December, 2014)

The rest of fall semester involved brainstorming what changes could be made to the script. Although “Unlucky” was the best story we got, it still needed a vast amount of work. There were too many characters, storylines and plot points that didn’t add up, and it was a little too short. We called in the writer, and the class pitched him various different ideas. In my opinion, this was a completely awful idea.

When it comes to changes in the script, it should be left to the producers, writer, and directors. Unfortunately for me, the decisions were up to a class of 20 or so students who had little to no film experience at all. This process took several weeks, and many conflicting ideas were brought to the table. The main problem with this method is we had too many heads clashing together at once. Too many cooks can spoil the broth..

Some students wanted to see more colorful characters, some wanted to see characters removed. Some felt that the main cast needed more flashbacks showing their background, others felt it should be left up to the viewers’ imaginations. Some students even felt that love interests should be swapped, which would have ruined the main driving force of the story. The list would go on forever of all the ideas that were being thrown at our poor writer, who had to just sit back and take it all in.

After a few weeks of discussion, it was time for Christmas break. Our writer, Nathan Mitchell, took all the notes from the class and worked over the next several weeks to develop a new draft of the script that would carry over into pre-production. It was a couple days after Christmas when Keegan and I received an email from Nathan with the brand new script.

I canceled my plans for the evening, locked myself in my bedroom and opened the fabled PDF file known only as “Unlucky: Draft 2.” What followed were 160 pages of utter disappointment. Not only did the script double in size, it seemed as if Nathan had tried to cram in every single idea the class threw at him into a Frankenstein’s Monster of a screenplay. I sat back in pure astonishment and immediately began to reflect on what I had just read.

There was a nearly 20-page flashback involving one of the characters and her grandmother that added absolutely nothing to the overall story. New characters and storylines were added that made the plot even more convoluted, and made the script difficult to even understand. Not to mention, there were countless plot holes and aspects that made absolutely no logical sense. In addition, the dialogue was extremely rough.

I was flabbergasted. The script that I had had so much passion for was gone, and this monstrosity was put in front of me. It was not Nathan’s fault that the script was a disaster, it was that the script was now the product of over 20 different opinions, and not the opinions of a writer, director, or producer. The worst part about it was, this was the script we were going to be stuck with for the next several weeks until pre-production officially started and we hired all of our crew members. This was also the

script we were going to have to use when we had our open auditions. All of this sounds extremely negative, but it gets better, I promise.

Although the new script did have many negative elements, it did introduce a few key things that would carry over into the final draft. The most magical elements of the second draft were: the inclusion of the mystical “Haggity Bones” character, giving the main villain more time to shine, and making the environmental message much more subtle. Only a couple more weeks were left until pre-production hit us with full-force.

During this time, I was also working on cutting together a solid demo reel in order to interview to become the director of the film. Although it was hinted that I got the job in advance, I still needed to go through the interview process and be hired by the professors. I took time going through all the projects I had directed, and put together what I felt was a really solid representation of what I could do as a director. When it comes to the film industry, a good reel is absolutely necessary if you want to get a job. Anyone can look good on a resume, but it is those who really stand out with a good reel who get hired.

## Chapter III: Pre-Production

### Fundraising, Casting, and Beyond (January-May, 2015)

Pre-production is perhaps the most important step in the filmmaking process. It is consists of, but is not limited to, raising all your money, scouting locations, collecting props and set dressings, creating a shooting schedule, and deciding upon your cast. Pre-production on most films is a very long process, but we only had one semester to complete everything. In reality, it is a miracle that we were even able to finish on time.

As soon as spring semester began, crew interviews were held for department head positions. The jobs ranged from tech positions such as Director of Photography (head of the camera department) and Gaffer (head of the lighting department), to business positions such as Unit Production Manager (in charge of scheduling) and Assistant Director (in charge of the set on a daily basis.) After around 30 people interviewed for key positions, we had our select team of department heads, with Keegan and myself hired as the directors of the film.

The best thing about having two directors is that you can essentially be two places at once and get twice the amount of work done. When it came to the pre-production class, I typically devoted most of my time to working with the production

department, as well as our casting directors. Keegan, who is a genius with gear, preferred to work with our tech crew to prepare them for what would lie ahead in the next few months. This worked out extremely well because we weren't scrambling to talk to every single person during class time. We would meet with the departments we were working with, and then come together at the end of class to discuss how things were going.

The most important part of pre-production for "Unlucky" was raising the money to make it. It doesn't matter how talented your crew is, how awesome a script you have, or if you have an A-list actor, without any money your movie isn't going to get made. In an effort to get the required funds, we decided to launch a crowd funding campaign on a website called "Indiegogo." We set our goal at \$10,000, which is an extremely small amount of money for a feature film. Not only did we need to buy equipment, but also we needed to secure locations, secure funds for the premiere, and buy tons of food for the cast and crew. On a union film, everyone must be fed for every six hours of work. On "Unlucky" we would be shooting 12 hours a day, so that means at least two meals a day. Food accounted for about 80% of our budget.

After two months of our campaign, we managed to raise \$8,656 from 109 backers. Although this was a lot of money, it was nowhere nearly enough. \$10,000 was the minimum amount we were looking for, and were actually hoping we would be able to get at least \$15,000 or so. From there, we knew we had to pull other resources. Our producers made some calls and we were actually able to get some rather sizable donations from some of our connections. We also held a few "Dining to Donate" nights

for the film, at which local restaurants gave us a percentage of their profits. At the end of all of this, we raised about \$18,000. This was a workable amount for us.

The next important part of our pre-production process was selecting our cast. Our casting directors set up a few open casting calls, at which we had an overwhelming number of talented actors and actresses come in. “Unlucky” is what I like to call an ensemble picture, where there are many characters on which the plot focuses instead of just one or two. For a film such as this, I am fortunate we were able to have such a wonderful pool of people to select from.

Some roles were a no brainer when it came to deciding on an actor, but some roles required multiple rounds of callbacks to select the perfect person. After several weeks of callbacks and deliberation among the casting directors, Keegan, and myself, we had our cast. It was difficult turning some people down, and we even asked our writer to add a few more characters to fit some of the actors who did not receive main roles. One of these characters was “Alexis,” a rather peculiar shopkeeper. Once we had our cast, we were able to move ahead with other aspects of pre-production.

As soon as the winter weather started to disappear, we began scouting for our locations. “Unlucky” required many unique places to shoot, and we knew it would be a struggle finding the perfect spots. We needed an abandoned warehouse, several restaurants, office spaces, grassy fields, a frat house, a prehistoric-looking forest, and many other interesting places. We needed to find places that were relatively close to Kent, and places that would allow us to shoot there for very little, or even free.

The hardest location to find by far was the warehouse. For each one we saw, it was difficult to find or even contact the person who owned it. If we did manage to

contact an owner, they were usually skeptical about us shooting there. We did find a couple places that could have worked, but the owners wanted to charge us too much money, so we weren't able use them. It was also difficult finding a place that would allow us to shoot all night long unsupervised by their staff.

Eventually, we had to put our scouts on hold because there were many other important things we needed to get done before production started. We left it up to our locations team to continue searching, but ultimately had no luck during pre-production. It wasn't until mid-June, about 3 days before we were shooting the warehouse scenes, when they finally found a place. It was worth it though, because it turned out to be our best location in the entire movie.

#### Continuing Rewrites (February-May, 2015)

Throughout all of the madness of pre-production, we still needed to iron out the details of our monstrosity of a script. Since Keegan and I were now officially the directors, we were given the chance to really work with our writer in order to get the best script possible. Our producers trusted us with the script, and we wanted to do our very best to point Nathan in the right direction.

We began having discussions with him at least once a week about what changes should be made. What scenes should we cut? What do we need to expand upon? How can we cover up this plot hole? It was a long process, but each draft of the script got better. We were able to fix most of the problems in draft 2 within a couple of weeks.



From there, it was really just a matter of perfecting the story and trying to condense some of the storylines.

We wanted the script to be about 90-100 pages, and we were still close to 150 with every subsequent draft. One page of a script usually equates to a minute of screen time. We only had eight weeks to actually shoot “Unlucky,” so we needed to make sacrifices. After a couple of drafts, we were able to get rid of some of the filler scenes and eliminate some storylines that were unnecessary for the overall story. This worked out really well because it made every scene in film have a purpose. Eventually, we were able to get the script down to about 110 pages, which was absolutely doable.

With each draft, however, Nathan seemed to become less and less interested in the project. We kept giving him pages and pages of notes and looking back that may have been discouraging to him. Overall, though, it made the film better and all of his hard work was greatly appreciated. We had around 10 different official drafts for “Unlucky” and that is quite a lot to go through.

Even with so many drafts, the main problem with the film that never really got fixed was that sometimes the dialogue was weak. Nathan was fantastic at writing plot and developing character, but dialogue was not his strong suit. Fortunately for us, we had a phenomenal cast who were able to make the lines their own. Nathan laid down the foundation, but our actors took the framework and perfected it. We strongly encouraged them to say what felt natural to them, as long as they conveyed the general idea of what Nathan was trying to say.

## Preparing for Battle (March-May, 2015)

Once we had our final draft of the script, we were able to complete our shooting schedule. We broke the script down scene-by-scene, and our production team created a schedule that made the most logical and economic sense. Creating the schedule was an extremely difficult process for everyone involved. We needed to plan around our cast members' work schedules, locations, and weather. This was tricky because the majority of the time, if an actor was available the location we needed wasn't, or vice versa. It was also hard when actors shared a scene together but their availabilities were completely conflicting.

It was a long process, but we were finally able to get a shooting schedule. We knew it would inevitably change, but it was a decent foundation. On a film set, anything can happen. The weather channel could say it'll be a beautiful day, only to have it start pouring as soon as we set up all our equipment. Luckily for us, we planned ahead and made "cover set" options for almost every shooting day. A cover set is an alternative scene that can be shot instead of the one scheduled when something goes horribly wrong. For example, if it starts pouring on the day we have an exterior scene, there was always an interior scene we could do instead with the same actors.

Aside from the schedule, another very important step was planning how each scene was going to look once we filmed it. Directors have creative control of the film and it is their vision that brings the story and characters to life. Keegan and I had learned from the mistakes made in "Hell at Heathridge" and decided to plan everything ahead of time. Instead of planning in advance, the directors of "Hell at Heathridge"

usually spent 5 hours a night during production to plan out the next day on set. Keegan and I wanted to have our entire summer planned out before production even started.

We went through the entire script page by page and planned out what each shot was going to look like. We drew a blocking diagram for each scene in order to map out where our actors were going to move, and where our tech crew needed to be. We then took the diagram and created a list of every different camera angle we wanted for the scene. This was our shot list. Depending on the content it could range from three different shots, to over thirty per scene. If there were any shots in particular we wanted to draw out so we could get a better understanding of what it would look like, we would draw out a storyboard.

Once we had the entire movie planned out, we sat down with the department heads of our tech crew to explain everything to them in advance. We wanted to get everyone on the same page so that there was no confusion about what was going on in each scene. We went through all our plans and described to them how each scene was going to look. We also took note if we were going to need any special gear on specific days, such as a crane, dolly tracks, or a steadicam.

It was awesome to be able to discuss our vision with our team, and even get some feedback and brainstorming going about some of our ideas. This was also a great way to discuss any concerns that our tech crew might have so that they knew what was expected of them. This was very beneficial to us. It saved us a ton of time in the long run by making sure everyone was aware of what was going on. During “Hell at Heathridge” there was a lot of time wasted because of confusion and lack of planning. We wanted to minimize the amount of time we sat around and maximize productivity.

Late into pre-production, about two weeks before cameras began to roll, one of our main actors unfortunately had to leave the production. This was extremely “unlucky”-pun intended-for us because he was one of the most talented cast members. We needed to act quickly because we couldn’t delay production and our schedule was already set in stone. We tried to see if any other actors were available on such short notice, but it was already too late in the game. It was decided that one of our casting directors would step in and portray the part, and that ended up working nicely. Since he had casted the film, he had a very good understanding of the character and the transition actually worked much better than expected.

My first trimester of “Unlucky” had come to a close, and now it was time for the fun part. Cameras were getting ready to roll, and nothing could control my excitement to begin shooting.

## Chapter IV: Production

### Starting off Strong ( June 8-9, 2015)

On June 8, 2015, over 100 students and volunteers gathered together in Franklin Hall for our first day of production. The room was overflowing with excitement and wonder. We were about to begin what would soon be the hardest but most rewarding summer of our lives. We signed all the necessary paperwork, watched safety videos, and Keegan and I gave our first of many pep talks to the crew. I was incredibly eager to start shooting our movie, but also was aware of the potential risks. I knew there would be many tough challenges along the way, but my enthusiasm outweighed my anxiety.

A typical shooting day for us actually started the night before. I would redraw our blocking diagrams and shot list on the board in our tech closet, and Keegan and I would have another meeting with our department heads so they understood what was happening the next day. We would then take a picture of the board and send it off to the entire crew. The next morning, we would show up a half hour before our call time, eat breakfast, have a production meeting, and then it was off to the set for six hours. We'd come back after the first half of the day, have lunch, and then shoot for another six hours. Rinse and repeat for eight weeks straight.

From our very first day on set, we faced some challenging obstacles. We were shooting a short exterior scene of Sam and Bob walking with a Frisbee, and it seemed like the odds were already against us. We were fearful of rain the entire day, and the clouds kept changing our lighting situation. The location where we were shooting also happened to have construction going on only a few feet away, which kept ruining our audio. Additionally, we were doing a steadicam shot and our cinematographer had underestimated how heavy our camera actually was. Unfortunately, this led to many takes because he had problems holding the camera steady. We anticipated the scene would only take about two hours to complete, but we were there for almost six.

Although the first day was tough, we managed to pull through and come out successful. Each and every day our crew seemed to be doing better as they became more familiar with each other, and we really started to find our groove. After a week or so we began finishing earlier and earlier. What began as 12-hour days were now reduced to eight. Our crew was moving very efficiently, and on some days we even had time to get some extra shots in that we didn't plan. We had time to experiment and were still able to end early almost every day.

I think a lot of this had to do with the morale of the crew. With a happy and dedicated crew, anything is possible. Not to mention, we were fortunate enough to have adjunct faculty member Bobby Makar on set with us to help us if any problems arose. Bobby is very knowledgeable, and an excellent problem solver when things start to go wrong. With a combination of our team's hard work, Bobby's guidance, and Keegan and my imaginations, it seemed as if anything was possible.

## Getting Behind Schedule (June – July 2015)

For the first three weeks, everything was going great, but I knew it was only a matter of time before the chaos began to start. Once July hit, each day became more stressful than the last. The worst part about it was that Bobby had to leave the production because of prior commitments, leaving all of us students on our own. We still had Traci Williams back at base camp with the producers, but we lacked any faculty members on set to help us solve problems. This was really detrimental to us because when a problem did arise, we weren't able to resolve it as effectively.

Also around this time, we seemed to be having many other problems surrounding the production. Our actors' availabilities kept changing, forcing us to have to rearrange our schedule many times. This led us to rush to get scenes done that we hadn't planned on shooting for several weeks. This also put an enormous amount of pressure on our actors, who had to memorize their lines with a very little time to prepare.

There was also plenty of on-set drama, and our crew's morale was generally pretty low. As a director, you always have to be in a good mood and try to make the best of a situation. You have to stay motivated because if you aren't giving it your all, your crew won't either. No matter how bad the situation is, the director must always at least pretend that everything is going according to plan. Keegan and I did our best to keep our crew motivated each day, but we could only do so much.

The majority of July was just troubleshooting problems. We'd show up to our morning production meeting, and it seemed as if every day there was a new issue. Whether it was the props department dropping the ball and forgetting something essential, an actor bailing out at the last minute, or a location falling through, there was almost always an issue. Most of the time, it was a combination of issues. No matter what happened though, we had to make it work.

This was an extremely stressful time for Keegan and me. We had to change our original plan to fit the complications that were arising. A lot of decisions had to be made on the fly, and a lot of changes needed to be made to the script in order to make everything work. We ended up falling really behind schedule, and the quality of the film began to suffer. Instead of adding extra shots and ending early, we were pushing our time limit and cutting shots every single day.

The biggest problem at this time was the lack of solid communication. Part of working on a film, much like in the work place, is learning how to communicate with different types of people. Things get lost in translation, and not everyone communicates the same way. This led to a lot of confusion and anger with one another. As a director, I tried my best to learn how to speak to everyone and communicate what I was really trying to say. Still, the problems continued.

Crewmembers were showing up less frequently, and some stopped showing up all together. Not only did this put stress on those who had to pick up the slack, it made fall farther behind schedule. On a film set, you get hired to do a very specific job each and every day. If that job fails to get done, it causes a chain reaction and ultimately



affects everyone on set. No matter how small a job may seem, a failure to complete it could potentially lead to the collapse of the entire production.

For me, it was extremely hard to focus on the characters and story when there were so many other problems going on behind the scenes. This is another case where having more than one director was a blessing. While I was talking to the actors, Keegan could be talking to the production department trying to figure out how to make the shooting schedule work. Alternately, while Keegan was helping set up the next shot, I could be on the phone with producers trying to figure out how we could find a new location or prop that we needed. The list could go on and on.

Throughout all of this, I still managed to display a positive attitude no matter how frustrated I was on the inside. There were days when I felt like giving up, but I still pushed forward. Just like being pregnant, no matter how much you prepare for something you are never truly ready. Most of the shot lists Keegan and I made during pre-production were now rendered useless. We didn't have time to shoot the scenes the way we wanted, we had to shoot them in a way that was going to be quick and easy. We had to finish the movie on time, and that meant we had to sacrifice our original vision.

Race to the Finish (August 2, 6:00 A.M. – August 3, 6:00 A.M.)

It was the night before our final shooting day, and I was filled with anxiety. Despite our best efforts all summer long to stay on track, we were incredibly behind. Because of our various complications, we had to book an enormous amount of content to film on our very last day. Finishing it all in 24 hours would be an absolute miracle.

Under union rules, cast must have a 12-hour break in between shoots, and crew must have at least eight. Also, we were restricted, only being allowed to be on set for 12-14 hours at a time. For the last day, we were required to shoot a scene that takes place during the day, and another one that takes place at night. These scenes are Liz and Jane's introduction to Haggity, as well as the entire finale inside the television studio. However, if we started at around noon, giving us 6 hours of sun and 6 hours of moon, we wouldn't be able to finish. We had to think outside the box, but we came up with a solution.

It wasn't pretty, but what was decided was have two different shooting calls in one day, one early in the morning, and one late at night, with enough turnaround to meet union rules. Even then, this was pushing it. Ultimately, we had about 5 days worth of content that we needed to finish in one day. What followed was one of the most challenging days of my entire life.

I reluctantly woke up to my alarm at 4:00 in the morning and rushed to set. The idea was, we would get to set early and set up, so as soon as the sun rose we'd be able to start filming. We got to our location, set everything, and began working on the scene. The plan was to get this scene done as quickly as possible because we knew we had a whole night ahead of us. We shot until about 10:00 am, in order to have enough turnaround for the crew to come back at 6:00 that afternoon to shoot all night long.

We all went home, slept for a few hours, and then made our way back to base camp in order to complete our very last shoot. I decided it would be best if I headed to set early to make sure that everything was set up and ready to go by the time we got there. I knew that we had three separate scenes to shoot that night. They all took place

in a building on campus that was closed for the summer, but we were permitted to shoot there. I knew that it was really going to be a stretch getting everything done in time. For example, we originally had the television studio hallway scenes planned out for 3 separate days, but we were only given six of our 12 hours that night to complete it.

I arrived to set, and was stunned to find that the rooms in the building were not open as they were supposed to be. We had access to the building, but our locations team had forgotten what scenes we were doing, so they hadn't arranged to have the rooms open. Once I called campus police to open the room, we still had to wait for our set designer to completely set up the room, which delayed us another few hours. Luckily during this time we were able to continue shooting a different sequence in another part of the building.

When it came to our last six hours, we had to shoot approximately 11 pages of dialogue. This was a completely insane undertaking. We were forced to cut lines, remove blocking, and essentially just set the camera up and shoot everything in one long shot. Once we had a useable take, it was mainly just a matter of working up to the wire with other angles until we ran out of time. When you watch the movie, this scene sticks out like a sore thumb. If you're curious, this is the scene where all main cast come together in the studio hallway towards the end of the film.

In the end, though, we did it. We did the impossible. The crew hugged, laughed, cried, and experienced every possible emotion. We were finally done. It was at that moment that all of us truly realized that we were a family. We accomplished our goal, and as we packed our gear we watched the sun rise and a new day was born.

Production was over, and it was time to rest.

## Chapter V: Post-Production

### Picture Editing (September-December, 2015)

The last step in the filmmaking process is post-production. This is where your movie actually becomes a film. The editor takes all the clips together into a timeline, much like putting the pieces of a puzzle together. When it came to editing “Unlucky,” it was divided into two different sections. Picture editing was the first section, and took place during fall semester 2015. There were 20 editors working on the project, and each of them had about six minutes of the film to complete.

On a typical film you would only have one editor in charge of piecing the film together. You would think that having 20 different editors would make the process go a lot faster, but this was also a long and complicated process. Instead of having just one editor work with, I had an entire class of students I needed to constantly check up on. Keegan had graduated after we finished shooting, so I was on my own for the most part.

The main problem with having so many different editors is that each individual has his or her own unique style of editing. Everyone has a different set of eyes and can perceive a scene a completely different way than someone else. The problem is if you put all these scenes together, it would lead to very disjointed movie. My job as a director

was to make sure every student was cutting the scene together the way that I wanted, and a way that best fits the tone of the film.

Having to keep in contact with so many different people is challenging. Another extremely difficult aspect of editing this way is that certain people are more skilled editors than others. Although some students could cut a scene together with no problem, there were several students who had never even used editing software before. This led myself, my professor David Smeltzer, and our lead editor Fred Beery to really have to sit down and walk students through how to cut together a scene.

We worked for a few weeks until we were finally ready to show the first version of the film to a test audience. We had each member of the audience fill out a survey about the film so we could see his or her perceptions of it. At the first screening, “Unlucky” received pretty mixed reviews. This was to be expected because it was a very rough version of the film that was just made to make sure the story made sense. There were no special effects, no color correction or music of any kind. We just wanted to see how the audience responded to the characters and the story. In that regard, the feedback we received was very positive.

After our first screening, we began working on our “Fine Cut” of the film. This version would have minimal special effects, some basic color correction, and royalty-free music. The class worked hard on their edits, and our second screening was much more of a success. We took the surveys from the second screening and began working on our “Picture Lock” of the film.

“Picture Lock” basically means that the video portion of the film cannot change. We needed to lock picture so that in spring we could focus all of our efforts on the

sound portion of the film. Unfortunately, some students in the class lost interest in working on the film. They were in the class just for a grade, and they didn't care if the final version of their scene was up to my standards. This led to our lead editor Fred having to work on the film over Christmas break in order for the picture to be locked by spring.

Besides just working on cutting together the scenes, we also needed to make better scene transitions. Although the film flowed like a film, it was still jarring to cut from scene to scene. With the use of B-roll and establishing shots, we were able to create a version of the film that flows pretty nicely. When you watch it now, it is harder to tell that it was actually cut together by 20 different students. It now feels like a cohesive whole.

#### Sound and Scoring (January-April, 2016)

On "Hell at Heathridge" and some previous short films I have worked on, the sound is the weakest feature. An audience will sometimes forgive bad lighting or a bad camera angle, but bad audio usually destroys a film. It was very important to me and my crew to make sure the audio for "Unlucky" is excellent. Over the summer, we took extra time to make sure that we would have the best audio possible.

Now that we have our picture locked, we are focusing the same amount of effort on our audio. The sound portion of the film is also done in a class setting with several editors working on the same project. During this class they are responsible for dialogue editing, creating sound effects, and creating ambient noise. Right now, the class is still

working on the audio of our film. We premiere in almost two months, so we should have plenty of time.

While this is going on, Keegan and I are also working with our composing team. We do have access to some royalty-free music for the film, but for the most part “Unlucky” will be filled with original music specifically written for us. Luckily for us, we have the luxury of having the film’s picture locked so the composers can time everything out perfectly. They are able to see the film as the audience will, and can compose their music accordingly.

On top of our composing team, we also have music being provided by local artists. The opening credits music for our film was actually provided by a signed band called “Light Years” who let us use their music. “Unlucky” will also feature songs written by Keegan and a few other local artists.

Getting ready for the Premiere (August, 2015-April, 2016)

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, not only do we need to have a completed film, we also need to host a premiere for it! Planning for the “Unlucky” premiere started almost immediately after the script was chosen. However, these past two semesters have been where we have really had to crack down and plan this enormous event. This includes booking a venue, marketing, selling tickets, getting decorations, and various other tasks.

We booked Cartwright Hall on Kent State’s campus for our premiere because not only is it an excellent-looking location, it can hold a lot of people. Cartwright’s theater can sit 800 people, which is perfect for us. This way there is enough space for not only

cast and crew, but family and friends as well. Tickets went on sale March 1<sup>st</sup>, and we almost completely sold out on the very first day. This was very exciting, but also very nerve-racking.

I am very much looking forward to the premiere, but there is still a lot of work to be done. The film is still in the process of being finished, and the premiere is inching closer each day. I am confident everything will be finished in time, but I am still filled with anxiety. It sort of feels as if I am in the audience of a rock concert early, and just sitting in anticipation for the band to come out and play. My body is filled with tension, and I can't wait for the main event.



## Chapter VI: Closing Remarks

### Being a good director

An immense amount of pressure rests on the shoulders of a director. You are ultimately responsible for everything that affects the outcome of your movie. Whether or not it was even our job, the audience will blame us or praise us. Beside actors, the director is usually the one in the spotlight and in the line of fire. If something turns out marvelously the audience will give us all the credit. If the film is an absolute disaster, whether it was our fault or not, the audience will see it as our fault.

A director is only as good as his crew and his producers. You can't complete every task, and you have to learn to leave specific jobs for specific people. A lot of people have the misconception that directors are in control of everything in a film, and that simply isn't the case. Although we are in control of the creative aspects of the film, the producers and production department are really in control. The director's job is to make the film, and the producer's job is make sure we are able to make the film look pretty.

Sometimes a director's pride gets in the way of things, at least in my case. I feel that if I am not the busiest person in the room, I am not doing my job effectively. In

reality, sometimes a director needs to sit back and let things play out. If you want to be a good director, don't worry about things that do not necessarily concern you. Focus mainly on your crew, cast, and script. Let your producers worry about money, scheduling, and disciplinary action.

The biggest piece of advice I can give is to know how to do your job, and know it well. You need to know exactly what you want the movie to be, and be able to communicate it effectively to your cast and crew. Your crew is depending on you to give them proper guidance on how to set up a shot, and how everything should look. Your cast is depending on you to tell them how to deliver a line, or give them motivation. Actors have to put a lot of faith in their directors, and an unfocused director can misguide a talented actor. Similarly, a director can make a talented Director of Photography get terrible looking shots if he doesn't know he is doing.

Above everything else, know your script. You need to know it better than your producers, actors, crew and even your writer. For example, a script may say, "Sam and Bob are walking." To a writer, that may just be a way to set up a scene. A director has to know why the characters are walking, where are they walking, and what their motivation is for doing so. It is the director's job to convey this to the cast and crew, so they can understand what the vision for the scene is.

Working on "Unlucky" taught me so much about the art of filmmaking and being a good director. There is still much more that I need to learn, but being able to direct my first feature-length film while in college was truly a blessing. When I get out into the real world, students from different universities may have various short films to show their directing skills, but I have an entire movie. "Unlucky" was by far the most

important thing to happen in my life, and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. I am well prepared for my next pregnancy and hope it will be even better.