

## THE ART AND BUSINESS OF MAKING MOVIES

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# Queers, Fears, and Crocodile Tears

*His and Hers tales of this low-budget indie prove nothing beats a good script and a hell of a lot of determination*

by Ted Sod and Sandy Cioffi

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The concept of making Crocodile Tears as an independent film came about when I saw Richard Glatzer's film, Grief at the Seattle International Film Festival almost two years ago. After the screening I turned to my friends and said "I'm going to make a film." I decided to adapt my play Satan and Simon DeSoto into a screenplay. It is a contemporary retelling of the Faust story which I wrote in response to my own HIV+ status. The story prods viewers to ask themselves, "How far would I go to spare my life if I faced an imminent, horrible death?"



**Brian O'Hare and Bill Salyers in Crocodile Tears.**

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I had sent the play to the Sundance Institute and was encouraged by being designated a finalist out of over 1,000 entries. I wanted to play the leading role and began talking with a local theatre director about the possibility of helming the feature. She agreed and the ball started rolling. Two years, five producers and three directors later, we are in the can. What I've learned from the experience is that you must have a good story/excellent script and terrific actors; money or access to thousands of dollars of in-kind donations; passion and a singular tunnel vision that compels you to make the film with whatever resources you can muster. We ultimately shot in 25 days, had 19 locations, 99 people on the crew, 35 in the cast, and nearly 200 extras by the time we finished. I'm not going to tell you what it cost because you wouldn't believe me. Considering the scope of the project it is phenomenal that this film was

made. Each one of the approximately 350 people who worked on it for deferred or no salary gave blood; donors gave, vendors gave, children gave. I can only think that people felt that the story's message was important - yes, this is a "message picture" - albeit with dark humor. Everyone's generosity and benevolence was indispensable - we are only halfway done. We need thousands more to do post. There are myriad post-production creative decisions to be negotiated, festivals to attend and deals to be cut with distributors (if we're lucky). It is a most exciting time and a terrifying one. But we would do it again in a flash. We made an independent film and no matter what the consensus of opinion about its artistic value, we got it done and that's what it's all about. - TS

**"All you need is a dollar and a dream."** So went the ad campaign for the New York State Lottery several years ago, and so goes the mantra of the independent filmmaker today. It seems everyone wants to get in line to claim their ultra-low-budget film was made for less money and more insanity. It's time for us, the producers of Crocodile Tears, to get in line. With the film in the can, our intentions are to raise post production funding, develop distributor interest, and see the film all the way to the festivals, the popcorn and the big screen.

This is a movie and, therefore, a miracle. Here comes the "less money and more insanity" than anyone else part. In a world where anything can be commodified, guerilla filmmaking is no exception. But beyond the romance and hype lies the fact that the chances of producing an ultra-low-budget film that will actually get distribution are slim. How slim? In the year of the Vegas film, it's difficult to avoid gambling analogies. They say it is more likely to be struck by lightning than it is to win Lotto; for the ultra-low-budget filmmaker the odds of getting from concept to distribution are probably about the same. (And when all is said and done you can count on your body feeling as if it's been struck by lightning.) What do you suppose the chances really are that:

- You can write or find a good script; I mean a really good script
- You can raise enough money to get your film to, at least, rough cut
- You can find a quality cast, crew, equipment for FREE!
- You can secure locations, permits, and everyone's time simultaneously
- You can count on the generosity of hundreds of people for food, money, in-kind donations and time
- You can get a church to agree to filming with over one hundred drag queens, leather queers, and a lesbian crew - or accomplish some similarly outlandish artistic requirement

You get the picture - I mean those odds have got to be at least 100 to one. Now, in the case of Crocodile Tears, it is as if your odds were bettered by being able to count cards at a Blackjack table. We had the support of Pacific Grip and Lighting, Kodak, Costco, the Q Patrol, and Starbucks just to name a few. We also had an unbelievable crew and cast that endured grueling schedules, uncomfortable locations and somehow managed to be the "one-take" cast that almost never cost us film because of flubbed lines. Their performances are extraordinary.

A great script is the categorically essential element of any outrageous film attempt - period. If you can couple it with indefatigable passion and intensity, with a single-mindedness that no matter what happens, you will get this film made, then you've really got a hand to bet with. They say that the harder you work, the luckier you are.

Because of our film's message, we had the support of the gay and lesbian community. That support translated into extras, production assistants, food, money etc. On any given day, the set for Crocodile Tears was the model of gay/straight relations.

We have our share of tales of woe: the generator that ran out of gas at 4 am; the trolley that ran over our heads for five days; the time our film stock had to be flown in minutes before our first shot, the inordinate amount of tomato sauce we ate because free food means pasta; the kitchen ceiling that fell in on our location; not to mention the born-again Christian who tried to talk me out of working on the movie while we were filming at Greenlake (she might want to call me now.) But mostly, our tales have been of good times, good will, and good fortune. **MM**

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