

# THE CHAPARRALIAN

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Ryan Donowho  
in the upcoming film,  
*Rites of Passage*

# The Chaparralian #36/37



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*The Chaparralian* is the quarterly journal of the California Chaparral Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to the preservation of native shrubland ecosystems and supporting the creative spirit as inspired by the natural environment. To join the Institute and receive *The Chaparralian*, please visit our website or fill out and mail in the slip below. We welcome unsolicited submissions to *The Chaparralian*. Please send to: [rw@californiachaparral.org](mailto:rw@californiachaparral.org) or via post to the address below. You can find us on the web at [www.californiachaparral.org](http://www.californiachaparral.org)

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**Cover photograph:** Actor Ryan Donowho during the filming of *Rites of Passage*. Photo: Jimmy Callian

**Photo upper left:** The Frog, a Chumash Indian pictograph painted on an old greenhouse window pane.

All photos by Richard Halsey unless indicated otherwise.

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## NASCENT THOUGHTS

This past year has been quite a challenge for us at the Institute. While we have won significant victories in our efforts to protect the chaparral, we have been reminded that we still have a long struggle ahead. There remain a lot of folks who fail to understand the importance of nature and are driven instead by the six deadly vices: shrubphobia, indoorphilia, mosaic madness, biomalice, spiritual Novocainia, and institutional myopia.

However, continue the fight we will. A quick review of 2010...

**A solid win:** Despite efforts by a well-organized group of anti-chaparral zealots in Monterey County who claimed that “clearing brush” was a constitutional right, we contributed to a successful effort to protect nature and include science in the region’s fire plan.

**A win despite frustration:** After years of attempting to bring science into the land management process in San Diego County, we found that many of the county’s political leaders and land planning bureaucrats are more than willing to disregard the truth in pursuit of their own objectives. It takes court action to force them to pay attention. And even then, they must be constantly monitored to make sure they follow the law. As a result, our approach to participating in comment periods and workshops is to prepare for the inevitable lawsuit. We do not expect them to listen to the input they are required to solicit. Currently, we are watching San Diego County’s attempt to ignore legal obligations to protect habitat with a massive backcountry tree removal project. Their announcement for the environmental impact report we forced them to conduct repeats many of the same fallacies and errors they have been promoting since 2003.

**A disappointing loss:** Our intense efforts to protect Joseph Diliberti’s rights from the excessive use of power by local fire officials and indifferent county officials have been unsuccessful. As you may know, the San Diego

Rural Fire Protection District hired a private contractor to inspect, issue violation notices, and perform vegetation clearance work on properties questionably deemed fire hazards. They arrived at Diliberti’s home when he was away on vacation, cleared less than a half acre, and charged him \$27,000 (we found dozens of similar cases). As a result, Joseph will lose his home in a forced tax sale at 9am on March 18, 2011, at the San Diego Convention Center. Everyone involved, including Fire Chief David Nissen, County Supervisor Dianne Jacob, Tax Collector Dan McAllister, and state and federal politicians have acknowledged that what is happening is wrong. Yet all of them have turned their heads and have refused to protect the rights of the citizens they have sworn to serve.

**The future:** You won’t be surprised to know that there have been a lot of pensive moments for me while contemplating this past year’s experiences and what the future holds. Although it’s been easy to fall victim to maudlin moods, they don’t usually last long because I’m surrounded by so many remarkable people. For inspiration all one needs to do is follow the lives of activists like Denis Trafecanty, Donna Tisdale, Dianne Conklin, and Van Collinsworth. Year after year they continue to challenge us all to do the right thing – value the natural environment.

Despite the whirlwind of events this past year I was still able to follow a long-delayed dream of mine: I helped make a Hollywood movie. I’ve shared the experience with you in this special double issue.

Due to my new adventure, a few folks have wondered about the future of the Institute. Don’t worry – the Institute will continue to grow, inspire, and protect. One of my most fundamental values is generativity. Following dreams and helping the next generation actualize theirs has always been my life’s purpose. The Chaparral Institute will continue to be a reflection of that purpose.

To a great 2011,



# Poetry from a Kindred Spirit

Nancy Jordan

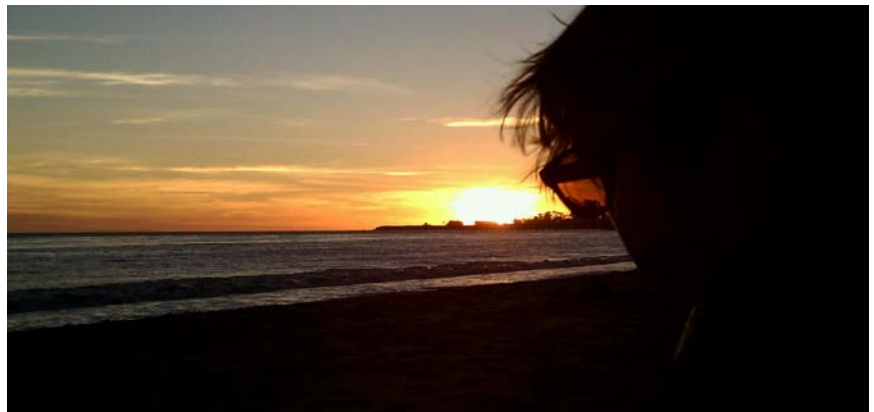
## Awakening Passion

"What do you want to say?"  
 "To whom do you want to say it?"  
 "Why does it need to be said?"  
 It dawns on me  
 That my writing  
 Is naturally obscure  
 Because  
 It's a reflection  
 Of my life,  
 And that I've lived  
 Essentially  
 In secret.  
 I do not speak  
 From inside of my insides,  
 Nor from the bottom of my heart.  
 Intuitively I know  
 There's too much  
 Intensity and passion  
 From those locations.

We are living in a time  
 When "simplified" and "diluted"  
 Are the most that we can bear.

## Authentic

Actually, it is all you ever wanted, to  
 Understand what life is about, to be  
 Thankful for having a part in it, to be  
 Happy to learn what needs to be learned,  
 Endeavoring always to go for the metaphor.  
 Now is the time to dare to see  
 Through and beyond; and to stand  
 In one's truth  
 Calmly, strongly, lovingly.



# A J&G with My Dreams, Please

By Richard Halsey

*Editor's Note: The Chaparralian has been, from the very beginning, a deeply personal publication. We have explored a variety of topics over the years that have always emphasized the importance of following one's dreams, whether it be in protecting fragile habitats, sharing the wisdom learned from wildness, or helping others discover their own life's vision. The following article continues down this path.*

From the little couch where I sat writing, the young man appeared as a Benedictine monk completely immersed in rock and roll.

Wearing a grey, hooded sweatshirt under a black leather jacket, he sat in a white chair facing a large, flat screen filled with graphic images of dials, toggles, and graphs. He had risen that morning with a rhythm in his head. His task now was to make it grow by adding sounds to complement the original music of percussion that poured from his heart. At breakfast, at dinner, while moving throughout the day and night, the music was always there. His fingers drummed constantly.

A small musical keyboard along with another for a computer rested on a desk in front of him. His fingers floated between keys and mouse as he spun notes and volumes into an intricate web. Sometimes he would flip one of the control panels to a side screen to make room for another. In smooth precision, images whipped back and forth, vanishing from one place and then suddenly appearing in another. All the while, morning light filtered through a set of double French doors with window glass made at a time when the glass itself was still considered part of the view.

The room in which all this transpired was a small portion of an old Los Angeles apartment building built in 1913 when average people could afford the skill of a finish carpenter. Dark mahogany panels, closet doors, window frames, and recessed book cases provided relief between cream-colored walls. When the sunlight hit just right, the hands of the masons still spoke from the subtle imperfections in the plaster. A small kitchen near the front door and a loft bed a couple feet from the ceiling provided the only real divisions in the

room. Otherwise, the space existed for just one thing, the music.

♪Watching where the wind blows the rain goes.♪

The path that brought me to the home of my new friend Ryan was unexpected. In fact, I had to crash through a wall to get to it. I really didn't intend to do that – disrupt boundaries and alter my life's course. But once it happened, I became intoxicated by the change. Previous expectations no longer had meaning. The judgments of others that had influenced older perceptions of self, flaked off like a stale sunburn.

Latent dreams have a way of being uncovered during such times, dreams that have been delayed, pushed aside, or buried under piles of obligations.

It's easy to be pragmatic about it all, forgetting about one's dreams. Although we're urged to follow our hearts in graduation speeches and poems, such well wishes are equivalent to courtesy laughs at cocktail parties. The message we get as kids is to get real, grow up, and get a job. Dreams don't pay the bills. Eventually we succumb and allow the quiet disappointments to accumulate until one day we look in the mirror and wonder what went wrong. Or sometimes, if we're lucky, we get shoved off our path and are given an opportunity to take a new one.



## Peter Iliff

When my friend Pete and I were in college, we'd occasionally disappear together for a couple days to write and study at my family's vacation house on a piece of land near Santa Barbara where the family business was growing greenhouse roses. The place sits on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Because no one's usually around, it's a good spot to think.

After graduation, Pete and I continued to go there to create while I taught high school biology in northern California and he pursued his goals in Los Angeles. He was busing tables, washing dishes, and playing gofer for an upstart film production company, all with a single vision in mind – to become a successful screenwriter. “I wrote every chance I had. Nothing was going to stop me.”

It took about a decade, but Pete finally got his break at 29 after selling a script originally entitled *Johnny Utah* to Ridley Scott, whose credits included *Alien* and *Bladerunner*. He promptly quit waiting tables. The resulting movie, *Point Break*, a story about a bunch of surfers who robbed banks to fund their endless summer, did really well. So did Pete. Pete's success wasn't gentle on him, however. The excesses of fame consumed him for more years than he cares to remember. Fortunately, he came out the other side a much wiser, humbler man.

...the way back is a tenuous affair.  
It took time to descend into hell,  
and hell tests all the way back out.

“It's arrogance, pride, and ego,” Pete said to me when we were discussing his experience with fame. “All the money, all the attention makes you feel that you're invincible. You go places in your mind that you would have never thought possible, including self-destruction.”

It took one particular hellish night before Pete finally came to understand that he wasn't likely to see his children grow up. “I had to be completely broken before acknowledging the nightmare I was in.” Through Alcoholics Anonymous he tackled sobriety by surrendering his ego and putting faith first. Helping

others escape from their own nightmares has been one of Pete's primary missions ever since. He has been responsible for saving dozens of lives.

But the way back is a tenuous affair. It took time to descend into hell, and hell tests all the way back out. Relapse is an ever present threat. Failures continually challenge. “It's a constant test,” Pete warned. “That's why it's one day at a time.”

Pete is in his seventh consecutive year of sobriety.

## Crossroads

I'm a writer too, but I've never made much money at it. That seems to happen to a lot of people who try to do art for a living. It's hard to break in. I mostly write for free. Well, I've made a few hundred bucks for several newspaper editorials, but that's about it.

Over my career as a teacher, I choreographed hundreds of students in my classroom and ended up getting an award for it all – a golden apple on a wooden base. It's on a bookshelf now. I wrote when I could. Eventually I worked for a principal who didn't appreciate my independence. She tried to get rid of me. We got rid of her, but the battle wore me out. I still loved the kids, but the adults were another matter. I left teaching, spent a year recovering, and then became an environmental activist. My objective was to protect the environment I knew best, the chaparral, that underappreciated assemblage of wildlife and shrubbery inhabiting California's coastal mountains. I wrote a book, established a non-profit, and went on a whirlwind speaking tour for seven years. Protecting native shrublands was a hard sell. It still is.

I also got acknowledged for my work protecting the shrubs, but again, the battle took its toll. Politicians and their bureaucrats have all the time in the world to force compromise from well-meaning, but naïve activists, until the last *Truffula Tree* is taken down. That's when Pete called me and suggested another rendezvous at the beach in early fall, 2009. He had just been screwed on a movie deal and decided it was time to take more control of his career. I was just generally feeling screwed.

It was a crossroads of sorts for both of us. Our son Nick had just gone off to college. I'd handled it well for about two weeks, but then all hell broke loose while I was driving up the coast one morning, alone. And I was becoming increasingly frustrated over my advocacy work. The politicians were beginning to

wear on me. Vestiges of dreams delayed were welling up inside. I needed a break.

Pete's son Dane was about to go to college the following year. The prospect of that event and reflecting upon his own career frustrations (Hollywood turns away from older screenwriters despite their talents), Pete came to the conclusion that it was time to follow his dream of writing and directing his own film.

"Let's do that movie we've always talked about," he said to me after wandering around the old greenhouses and warehouse on the Santa Barbara property. We sat down at the kitchen table in the house on the cliff, I popped open a beer (Pete had an O'Doul's), and we started bantering ideas back and forth.

### Evolution

I first met Pete in 1977 in a political science class as part of the Environmental Studies Program at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where our movie is based (UCSB officials would not allow us to use the name so we flipped it to USCB). The class simulated the political process of getting a bill through Congress. Each of us had a role to play: politician, lobbyist, citizen activist, etc. Beyond the hours of study and the process of understanding a part enough to be convincing, the class introduced me to something every thespian knows. Acting with others can create friendships and lovers as intense as any other situation in which one is required to bare the soul.

Although Pete and I have shared a lot of experiences since that time, the foundation of our friendship is based on those first few months. While its permanence has been confirmed by our ability to maintain it over the years, its strength was proven while we chased our dream of producing a movie. Only the strongest relationships can survive the baring of one's soul more than once. Only the strongest can withstand the evolution of one's dreams.

By 1997, the promise I had made to myself about my teaching career began to haunt me: if I lost my passion and stopped looking forward to going to my classroom every day, I'd leave the profession. I was determined not to become one of those teachers who were just putting in the time for fear of change. Kids deserve better.

"I don't know what to do," I said to my wife, Vicki, while burying my head in my hands at the dining room table.

"Just follow your dreams, honey," she replied.

My dreams had evolved. I needed to evolve with them. I took a leave of absence and never went back. A little more than a decade later, in the fall of 2009, my dreams had evolved again. "Can we invest in this movie adventure, you and I?" I asked Vicki. "I might be gone for about a month."



The old greenhouses.

She smiled and said, “Of course.”

One month turned into three and our post production work has required my presence in Hollywood nearly every week since. Vicki’s support and encouragement have only grown stronger.

### Film Notes

At the small kitchen table in the beach house, Pete and I developed our story and characters:

- Nathan, UCSB anthropology student disillusioned over the loss of connections, common ceremonies, and rites of passage rituals in modern society
- Hart, Nathan’s buddy, is a US Marine just back from Iraq
- Dani, a beautiful girl of Chumash Indian descent whom Nathan loves
- College culture in Isla Vista obsessed by sex and drugs
- Mojo, an edgy film student, falls in love with an online porn actor, Sandee
- Roxy/Carly friends of Sandee
- Each character is dealing with some personal issue to be resolved
- Nathan takes friends to property to re-create ancient Chumash Indian ceremony
- Anthropology professor Nash
- Castillo (later changed to Benny): caretaker/brother turned kidnapper/killer
- Industrial cooler where murders occur
- Delgado, meth addict lives in greenhouses
- Werebear, Chumash animal spirit seeking revenge for destruction of Chumash people

Over the next couple months Pete hammered out the screenplay in his small studio office at home in Los Angeles. I would drive up from San Diego every chance I had to offer suggestions and edits. Our first draft was finished by early February. Within two months we had a solid script that was given the thumbs up by those in the business who read it.

Then the search for actors began. The first two who we felt exemplified our characters best were Ryan Donowho for Nathan and Travis Van Winkle for Hart. Guy Burnet became the perfect Mojo. We found Ashley Hinshaw to play Sandee, accompanied by her two sorority roommates: Sharon Hinnendael, who plays Roxy, and Carly Schroeder, who plays Carly. We tapped Daniel Cudmore and Angelic

Zambrana to play Moose and Squirrel, two characters we added to provide important comic relief to the story. Wes Bentley became Nathan’s brother, Benny. Christian Slater played the maniacal Delgado. Penelope, one of Benny’s victims, would be played by Briana Evigan. Stephen Dorff became Professor Nash. We signed Kate Maberly for the role of Dani a bare two days before we started shooting on October 13, 2009.

The financial support for it all came from friends who believed in our dream: Bill Johnson, Jerry Chamales, and Douglas Econn. Pete and I put up a few dimes as well.

### Scene 23

#### INT/EXT. APARTMENT DECK

*Hung-over NATHAN walks through the party wreckage in their living room. A STUDENT is comatose. Nathan steps out to the deck, finding HART on a stool, eating a bowl of cereal. His shirt is off, in gym shorts, and flip flops. Beyond are the ocean and the Channel Islands. Camera pushes in on a SCAR on Hart’s muscular back.*

NATHAN

“What’s it feel like getting shot?”

*Hart turns to find NATHAN.*

HART

“Knocks the wind outta you. But it got me discharged. Otherwise I’d still be over there. Lots of us are forced to do three tours.”

NATHAN

“All through history most cultures had a Rite of Passage ceremony to turn boys into men. You fought a war. Mine is shot-gunning beers and trying to get laid and failing miserably. Sometimes I feel like I’m always going to be stuck, never knowing what I’m made of.”

HART

(raw)

“Nathan, what you think you want, isn’t all it’s cracked up to be.”



L to R: Ryan Donowho (Nathan) and Travis Van Winkle (Hart).  
Photo: Peter Iliff

## The Set

The glass greenhouses had been abandoned for over 20 years by the time we'd decided to shoot our movie. Weeds, growing unnaturally large due to the warm, humid environment, emerged from the decaying, concrete planting beds like alien beasts. Some grew tall enough to push against the glass ceiling; others spread thick tendrils along the ground like overfed octopi. White, fluffy down from seeds collected in corners and accumulated on spider webs. Old pipes of various sizes, most wrapped in crumbling plaster insulation, ran the length of the greenhouses, above a long, narrow concrete path. During the day, it's impossible to see the end of it. At night, it's impossible to see more than ten feet ahead.

North of the greenhouses was the old warehouse, dominated by two huge, cylindrical boilers lined with bricks. When operational, natural gas burned within to produce heat that turned water into steam. Through a series of pipes and valves, the heat flowed through the greenhouses, warming the air to maintain a constant temperature. The roses thrived.

Now, the boilers are quiet, their pipes filled with rust, valves frozen, and gauges silent. Roses flown in from South America are cheaper.

"We can have the girl in a chase scene run past the boilers and down the greenhouse path through the

weeds," Pete said. "You couldn't build a set like this."

## Light

Nighttime in the greenhouses: thousands of old glass panes at thousands of different angles, with shadows and light bouncing between the prisms. The greenhouses provided a photographic canvas that offered infinite possibilities. Alex Nepomniaschy, our director of photography, cared for each ray of light as if it was the defining brush stroke of a masterpiece. The lights included everything from simple spots to an array of high-intensity floods on hundred-foot cranes called condors that could light up several city blocks.

Unfortunately, the light had to be contained in ways that continually hampered our artistry. A crop of poinsettias on one end of the property and Christmas cactuses on the other supposedly required uninterrupted dark to bloom in time for the holidays. Equally disruptive was dealing with the growers and their particular personality disorders. One threatened a lawsuit and screamed at the actors on set, while the other, nicknamed "Creeper" for his habit of lurking in the shadows during our night shots, droned on with endless monologues about how light at night would ruin his crop. Think Ichabod Crane.

In the end, several scenes were compromised, but not terribly so. The flowers bloomed on time.



## Ryan Donowho

“I can give you this much,” Ryan said as he gestured with open hands while sitting on the edge of his bed, “but if you expect to go beyond that, you can expect this.” He whipped out his pocket knife and flipped open the blade. Both moves were as seamless as those of a praying mantis, spying, reaching, and dispatching unsuspecting prey. “That’s what you’ve got to make clear to people, your boundaries.”

I’d come to his motel room for advice. Although we were filming on my family’s property, I’d invested a good chunk of our savings into the project, and the entire enterprise depended on my ability to keep a lot of different people happy, I was feeling marginalized. The emotions, demands, and personalities on set were overwhelming my civilian sensibilities.

“In the end, remember, it’s all about 110 minutes of film. That’s it. Give Pete the help he needs to get it done. Everyone else, make it clear, you can put up with just this much, but if they go beyond that...”

I held out my hand, and Ryan gave me his knife. It was a beautiful piece of metal, about four inches long, encased by a curved handle. I knew there was a button somewhere to release the blade, but my fumbling failed to find it. “At the end,” he said. “Just push that.”

When I first met Ryan during our script’s table read in Los Angeles, it was clear that he had been living his dream for a long time. You could hear it in his voice.

“Acting and creating music are my release,” he wrote several years ago. “It’s what I’m meant to do and it’s where I find my truest voice. Taking on a role is complete freedom. It can be therapeutic even. When dissecting a character, I confront his issues and in turn identify some of my own. So by forcing myself to work with someone else’s emotions, I force myself to work through mine.”

### First Dreams

I was lucky enough to have captured my original dream after leaving college. There’s a ready-made bureaucracy for teachers that will take care of you, forever, if you let it. I did, for twenty years. Pete had to fight a bit longer for his spot.



Ryan Donowho, far right with Travis Van Winkle behind (R). Cinematographer Alex Nepomniaschy (L), talking with director Peter Iliff. Camera man Joseph Arena (back R). Photo: Jimmy Callian.

Ryan’s path was different. He jumped into his dream the moment he felt it. That’s not to say it was easy, but rather he got to his place early.

Growing up in Texas within an adult world of chaotic opportunities, Ryan dreamed rhythms before he could walk. He first pounded away on a little xylophone with wooden mallets his grandfather had made for him. Then in third grade he moved on to a drum set that was a gift from his dad. The drums fell apart by the end of the year after Ryan banged out the 90s hip-hop song “Funky Cold Medina” every day in his garage.

By sixteen, Ryan found himself in Amsterdam for a two-week gig playing hand drums with a capoeira troupe, an ensemble of artists performing a musical dance art form created centuries ago in Brazil by African slaves. At seventeen he went to Aruba and played congas for three and half months. Shortly after returning to Texas, he headed to New York City by hitching a ride with his friend Flip. He spent the

next seven years playing buckets in the streets. Buckets: those plastic five gallon jobs that are originally filled with paint or drywall compound.

Watching Ryan create music on plastic throw-aways in a world filled with high tech gear and commercial composition is like encountering a primal beast: sinewy, sensual, unpredictable. The experience taps into atavistic emotions polite society attempts to hide.

He made nothing, moneywise, with his buckets at first. He was scared. Who the hell wouldn't be? But things finally came together. Living with an eclectic group of iconoclasts in a converted donut shop, he continued to drum in the subway and on the streets, often turning up with \$150 to \$200 a day from passersby and fans. It was his paycheck until about five years ago. His gift for acting kicked in during the process.

Ryan's story fascinated me. His raw creativity and independence were a refreshing change from the flat-lined bureaucrats I'd been dealing for the past ten years. The fact that he was playing a character based on my own past made his take on life even more compelling.

"Your family life must have been crazy," I asked him one night.

"Yeah, but I've settled all of that now. I really love my family."

I twirled the ice in my Jack Daniels and ginger ale. It had become my preferred beverage after hours. "I haven't talked to my sister for a very long time," I said with a measure of resignation.

Ryan looked up and stared at me. His eyes turned dark and he shook his head. "That's not right. You need to fix it."

I wasn't expecting that.

That's how he responded to me whenever I mentioned



something that compromised a value he held dear. Ryan's not a guy who's interested in just getting along. He sees the truth and makes sure everyone else does too, whether it's requested or not.

It was uncomfortable at first, being confronted by such honesty. But as the conversations continued, the truth he expressed became an elixir. "When I finally find out who the hell you are," I said later that night, "I'll uncover the fact that you're actually an 85-year-old guy who's been through hell and back."

His father, Wayne, later wrote me, "I am proud, but mostly humbled by my boys' transcendence of their haphazard upbringing."

I called my sister a couple weeks later. I think there were tears at both ends of the phone.

Acting and creating music are my release. It's what I'm meant to do and it's where I find my truest voice.

## Risks to Make a Difference

Working and living with actors, crew, and producers on a movie set is unlike any other experience in the civilized world, except teaching teenagers. High school students are young enough to still believe in their dreams and more than willing to let you know when you fail to recognize that fact. Their creative energy permeates a classroom. Taking risks is part of the adolescent experience.

On the set, dreams have taken over completely. Everyone is risking everything. Despite having been told during the holidays by family members and by society in general that acting doesn't pay, the artists have dismissed conventional wisdom and plunged headlong into a world filled with uncertainty, emotional turmoil, and constant opportunities to fail. No steady job, just a continual series of experiences that need to be sought out, measured, and finally accepted if properly aligned with one's passions, one's principles. The process selects only the most tenacious, the most creative, and the most idealistic.

Dave Lugo, Matt Schwartz, Steve O'Rourke, Janeen Hovnanian, and Shane Meredith drove to the set from New Jersey. Bill James came in a plane. "I'd lose my mind," Bill said, "if I had to sit in that tiny Cobalt for four days."

All were production assistants. They moved gear, drove actors from their trailers to the set, made sure snacks were available for the hungry cast and crew, secured the area so visitors wouldn't disrupt scenes, helped put tarps up to protect poinsettias, and made hot coffee. Each was willing to sacrifice for their dream of becoming an actor, a screenwriter, a producer.

"We are the entertainers of the world! We are supposed to create dreams that allow people to escape the everyday struggle," Dave Lugo said. "It's up to me and other future entertainers to bring order out of this chaos of remakes and shortchanged scripts. If I'm successful, I'll have enough money to focus on the problems our world faces. Fortunately, with that fortune will come enough fame or recognition that my voice and my words will mean something to others."

One night around ten, Ryan and I had wandered into a fish and chips place on lower State Street in Santa Barbara. Most of the other eating establishments had shut down. A bouncer at one of the bars said it was

because they wanted people to buy drinks instead. We ordered a beer and waited for a few other cast members to show up.

"I've turned down a lot of roles because they didn't support what I believe in," Ryan said. "I took this part because I feel a profound connection to the story. Much like Nathan, I also feel that the new singular societies we've adapted to, where there are no common experiences, just disconnected individuals doing their own thing, truly frighten me. Until the late, 80s you could still find groups of artists, musicians, poets, dancers, etc. who, through their art, would eventually gravitate to the same places, to connect. I fear, because of online social networking, we've lost the need to find those places, and the human connection that once transformed a young artist into a true craftsman.

"My dream is to become successful enough so I can use my voice to bring people together, to make a difference."

...the new singular societies we've adapted to, where there are no common experiences, just disconnected individuals doing their own thing, truly frighten me.

## Scene 116

*EXT. SECLUDED BEACH, BONFIRE - NIGHT*

*NATHAN*

*"We gotta have the tea! This is exactly our problem. We've done away with rituals and ceremony. We just do whatever. On our own. Whenever."*

*ROXANNE*

*"You can always get wasted on your 21st birthday."*

*Hart wraps an brotherly arm around Nathan.*

*HART*

*"Ceremony is important. There must be some herbal tea in that kitchen. Go up and brew some Chamomile instead."*

This is exactly our problem. We've done away with rituals and ceremony. We just do whatever. On our own. Whenever.

### Rite of Passage

Shards of amber glass from a broken beer bottle sprinkled onto the concrete. A few moments later, three more bottles. The last ricocheted off the boiler and smashed through the window at the back of the building. It was four o'clock in the morning.

We'd started shooting scenes at two o'clock that afternoon, and we kept shooting throughout the night. Multiple takes, multiple changes in lighting, and seemingly endless periods of waiting. Sleep patterns became conversation topics.

By 3:30 in the morning, my body ached for food. After four weeks of shooting and late nights, coffee wasn't doing it for me anymore. I walked into the warehouse and was greeted with open boxes of cold pizza scattered on the craft services table. I'd missed dinner, again. Sorting through to find the best piece, our key grip, Craig Riley, strolled in. "You can't have pizza without a beer!"

He tossed me a bottle of Bud Light, the ubiquitous beverage around the grip truck – the diplomatic immunity zone on set.

Grips move the camera dollies, set up shading so the light is just right, and provide the skilled labor needed to make sure the logistics are perfect for each take. Since lighting was continually an issue on set, Craiger was the man ensuring that the gaffers didn't spread their light in the wrong places.

"The damn flood on the condor is out of control again," I shouted. Without a word, Craiger grabbed a couple large, black shades and ran up the extended boom of the condor like a spider monkey. The boom was projecting out over the glass greenhouses, 100 feet above ground, above glass, vibrating like an arthritic arm.

"Got your back, Rickster," he shouted. He always added suffixes to people's names.

By 4am, after nearly fifteen hours of work and a few Bud Lights with cold pizza, I figured it was time to formalize our experience together. First one bottle flew, then another. Craiger threw the last. Its contact with the window pane created sounds of cymbals and soft rain. Afterwards, as our shaman, he awarded each of us a small green clip as a talisman. The grips had used them to hang up light shades, filters, and an assortment of other things. The clips were perfect tribal symbols, symbols of friendship, symbols marking our rite of passage.

A day or two later, during a cold morning on the beach, Craiger gave me his red sweat shirt. I attached my green clip to its long hood string. It stayed there the rest of the shoot.

### Last Clip

Since nights were melding into days, it was difficult for me to keep track of time, especially since we spent our rare days off, sleeping. But I believe it was an evening after the beer toss and a few days before the end of our shoot when Travis asked me whether or not everything had gone as I had expected.

"It must be fascinating to see your story play out in front of you."

"You have no idea." We walked awhile before talking again.

The prospect of our characters lives ending in the world we had created was weighing on me, on everyone. I've since learned that the emotional trauma of dealing with the sudden end of such intense experiences on a regular basis is part of the whole acting experience. It was a part that was new to me. It was a part I wasn't prepared for.

The next morning, Ryan was standing alone by the trailers.

"How are things going, buddy?" I asked. He didn't answer at first. I cocked my head and leaned over to look into his eyes. I didn't usually have to do that.

"It's sad, man."

Later on, while we were setting up for a scene on the beach house deck at sunset, Ryan came up to me.

“You doin’ O.K.?”

I turned before completing my answer and disappeared into the house. Words are sometimes like putting clothing on Claude Rains when all he wanted to do was remain invisible.

On the last night, I handed Ryan a beer and nodded toward the boilers. He had missed the first ceremony. We drank and talked, then left our empties for later use to join everyone outside to celebrate our final shot.

After the clapping and hugging, cast and crew members wandered back into the warehouse, talking and laughing. We found our empties missing, so I ran to the grip truck and stole a couple more. We waited. After awhile, it became clear that no one would be leaving the area anytime soon and that if we intended to complete our rite we would have to make room for flying glass.

“We gotta do this, man,” Ryan said.

“O.K., everyone out of the way,” I shouted. People scattered. Two bottles flew; a direct hit and a bounce. Glass littered the ground, again. I reached into my pocket and handed Ryan a clip.

## Wrap

Our wrap party was held at a bar and grill joint near downtown Santa Barbara.

After everyone had a chance to eat dinner, Pete got up and thanked the cast and crew for helping us make our dream possible. He talked about how he and I had decided to do this project less than a year ago, and that here we were, finishing up. “Such a thing is unheard of in Hollywood,” he said. “It’s what happens when two best friends are determined to make their dreams come true.”

Then he called me up in front of the group. We gave each other a hug and I whispered thank you – thanks to an old friend who gave another the opportunity to follow his heart. Then he handed me the microphone.

“In the end,” I said, standing close to Pete, “it’s about relationships.” Then after mumbling a few more things, I turned and glanced over at Ryan, “...and the best friendships are the ones made when you’re following your dreams.”

\*\*\*

In January, two months after we finished shooting, several of us went back to get some exterior shots of the greenhouses. I walked into the warehouse and wandered around the old boilers like Major Harvey Stovall at the beginning of the movie *Twelve O’clock High*, touching the rusted metal and hearing echoes from the past.

The glass was still there. The label of Craiger’s bottle remained in situ. I snapped a shot of the lonely shards with my cell phone and sent it to a few friends. It wasn’t long before I received a reply. Ryan sent back a photo of our talisman hanging from his sweatshirt.

Pete and I are currently editing our film. Ryan is back home making music at his desk near the double French doors. Between visits to West Hollywood, I’m writing a lot. I’m also dreaming about our next movie.

*Rites of Passage*

*Earliest estimated release date: Fall 2011*

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1745958/combined>



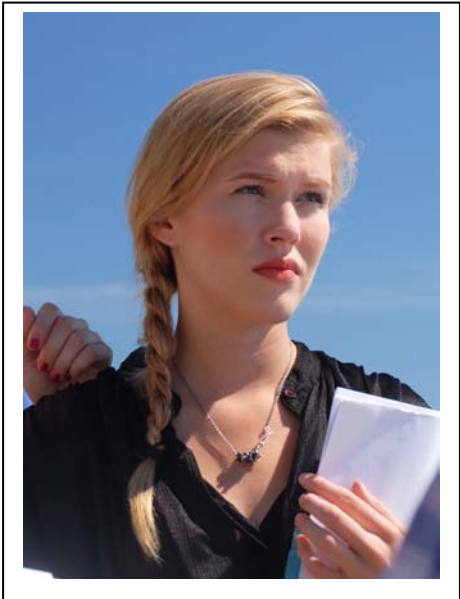


Above. Back row (L to R):  
 Bill Johnson, Daniel  
 Cudmore, Cooper  
 Donaldson, Rick Halsey,  
 Travis Van Winkle.  
 Front row (L to R): Craig  
 Riley Jr., Ryan Donowho,  
 Kate Maberly, Angelic  
 Zambrana.

Left (L to R): Ashley  
 Hinshaw, Carly Schroeder,  
 and Kate Maberly.



Above (L to R): Carly Schroeder, Ryan Donowho, Peter Iliff, Travis Van Winkle, Guy Burnet, Angelic Zambrana.



Above (L to R): Daniel Cudmore, Rick Halsey, Peter Iliff, and Angelic Zambrana. Right: Sharon Hinnendael.

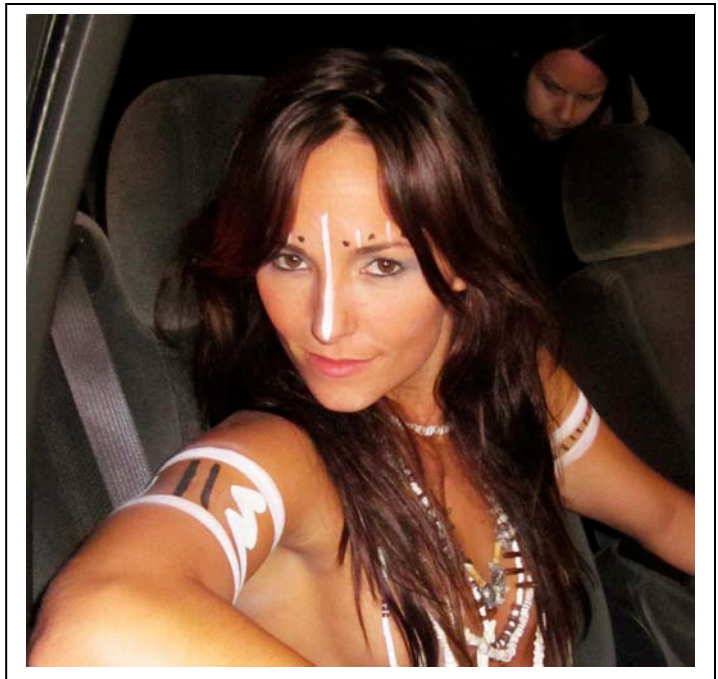


Above (L to R): The Grip Truck. Craig Riley Jr., Cooper Donaldson, Craiger, Justin Lostutter, and Miglet.



Above: Jeffrey Givens, production designer.

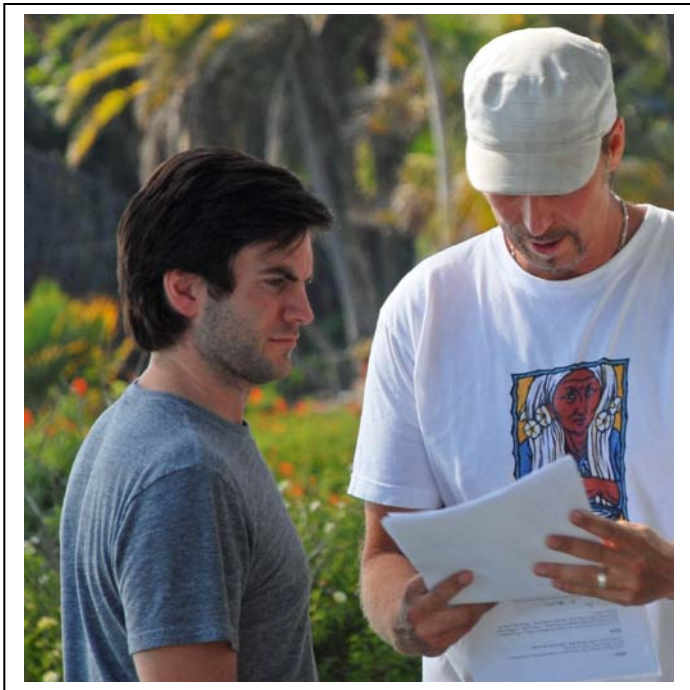
Right: Briana Evigan.  
Photo: Peter Iliff.





Above: David Schneiderman, sound mixer.

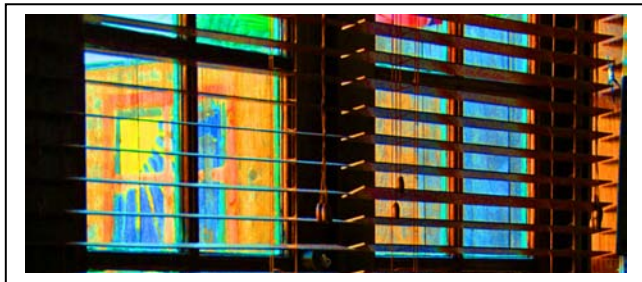
Below: Tom Funk (L) and Mark Young (R), with the second camera unit.



Above: Wes Bentley and Peter Iliff.

Right: Stephen Dorff and Christian Slater.  
Photo: Peter Iliff.





# Dreams

By Travis Van Winkle

*If a man hasn't discovered something that he is willing to die for, he isn't fit to live. -Martin Luther King Jr.*

What does it mean to follow your dreams? Is it something you are willing to dedicate your existence to? What if your dream takes a different shape once you've already dedicated many years of your life following the old one? What if your dream never develops the way you envisioned?

To have a dream dangling in the forefront of our minds pulls at our deepest, most authentic selves waiting to be realized. To have a dream is to have a purpose and honoring that purpose, is the catalyst to uncovering a fulfilling life that is attainable for every soul on earth. Without a dream to journey toward only sets us up for a life *without* a journey and, therefore, no life at all.

Because we must sacrifice and risk when following our dreams, we gain a greater understanding of ourselves and the world than we would have otherwise. If we aren't attempting to live our dreams in one way or another, we may begin to lose the edge this opportunity brings us. Struggles are the true makers of genius, and once we begin to realize and accept this truth, a new world of possibilities opens up to us. We will discover more about ourselves and slice through the barricades we have created that keep us from allowing our collective light of consciousness shine through. A life kept to the safe side of the road cannot offer this. Safe equals comfortable, comfortable means complacent, and complacency only halts the discoveries risk can provide us.

Although we may get caught up in the failures that following our dreams may temporarily bring, it only makes sense to trust that we will prevail in the end. We will end up where we need to be.

*What's for me, won't go by me. -John Osborne Hughes*

Sometimes we may start out with a dream that feels right to us, only to discover something more authentic along the way – something that we never would have had the chance to discover unless we'd had a dream to



follow in the first place. Our original dream sharpens us in ways that influences the development and outcome of our newest dream. With each attempted dream, we walk away with new, acquired skills that are the rewards of pouring our heart into something we believe in.

*My hopes are not always realized, but I always hope. -Ovid*

If our intentions and purposes are based out of love, then we create a world for ourselves that is always steered toward love. No matter the outcome of our original dream, our lives become what they wouldn't have been without having had that dream. This is what Epictetus meant when he wrote, "A ship ought not be held by one anchor, nor life by a single hope."

Without passion and risk fueling our lives, life can become just another day. I tire of hearing the response to the question, "How is your day going?" with "same shit, different day." Without dreams in our lives there is nothing to sacrifice or

risk losing. Without purpose we remain still and fail to evolve. Such a condition not only hurts the individual, but hurts the growth and awakening of society as a whole.

If we hope to see any positive change amongst the blind crowds we share our space with today, the collective dream of the human species needs to be an inward desire to better ourselves and coat the inner walls of our existence with happiness and self-acceptance. We can enjoy a fulfilling life if we uncover all the delusion, illusion, and falseness that has built up over the years and allow the undeniable, absolute truth that is constant in all of us to be present. Having a dream makes this

freedom possible. There is no such thing as a bad dream so long as you listen to your heart and maintain an open, and curious mind. If you follow your dreams, success will always be yours because you have pushed yourself for the undeniable sake of learning how to live.

*Because he believes in miracles, miracles begin to happen. Because he is sure that thoughts can change his life, his life begins to change. Because he is certain he will find love, love appears. All believers know this. - Paulo Coelho*

A life without dreaming is a life wasted. Dream.



# UNFOLDINGS

Never apologize for showing feeling. Remember that when you do so you apologize for *truth*.

- Benjamin Disraeli

One can live at a low flame. Most people do. For some, life is an exercise in moderation (best china saved for special occasions), but given something like death, what does it matter if one looks foolish now and then, or tries too hard, or cares too deeply?

- Diane Ackerman

If I were the man I was five years ago I'd take a flamethrower to this place.

- Frank Slade in the film *Scent of a Woman*

My movie is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected on to a screen, come to life again like flowers in water.

- Robert Bresson

Put yourself out there. How other people feel about it is secondary.

- Nancy Jordan

Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone, one question. Does the path have a heart? The trouble is nobody asks the question; and when a man finally realizes that he has taken a path without a heart, the path is ready to kill him. At that point, very few men can stop to deliberate and leave the path.

- Don Juan in Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of don Juan*

To fall in love is easy, even to remain in it is not difficult; our human loneliness is cause enough. But it is a hard quest worth making to find a comrade through whose steady presence one becomes steadily the person one desires to be.

- Anna Louise Strong

Art is prayer – not the vulgarized notations handed down to us in the scriptures, but a fresh vital discovery of one's own special presence in the world. Marc Chagall was once asked if he attended a synagogue; he answered that his work is prayer.

- Joseph Zinker

He who wishes to teach us a truth should not tell it to us, but simply suggest it with a brief gesture, a gesture which starts an ideal trajectory in the air along which we glide until we find ourselves at the feet of the new truth.

- José Ortega y Gasset

For Christ sake write and don't worry what the boys will say nor whether it will be a masterpiece nor what. I write one page of masterpiece to ninety-one pages of shit.

- Ernest Hemingway

I write, I act, I make music to know that I am not alone.

- C.C. Lewis via Jim Hart

When one is young one doesn't feel a part of it yet, the human condition. One does things, but they are not for good, everything is rehearsal... to be put right when the curtain goes up in earnest. One day you know that the curtain was up all the time. That *was* the performance.

- Sybille Bedford