



By Margaret Evans, Editor

Our little film festival is growing up so fast, y'all.



I remember when it was just a gleam in (executive director) Ron Tucker's eye. Sniff, sniff. . . Where's my hankie?

Seriously, I get emotional on this subject. Truth is, the Beaufort International Film Festival's not so little anymore. It's not so *young*, either. Our boy BIFF turns ten this week, and as Ron always says – and it's never a lie – “this year will be bigger and better than ever.” The first festival a decade ago drew about 500 people to screenings over three days. This year, they're expecting 10,000.

How's that for a growth spurt?

The film festival is probably my favorite thing about winter in Beaufort – not counting

Christmas – and hands-down my favorite thing about February. Every year it rises from the cold, dead earth like some exotic flower, blasting away my winter doldrums, reminding me that I, too, am a living thing . . . that springtime's on its way.

If you've never been to BIFF, it's possible you have a distorted impression of the event. I did, back in the early days, before we at *Lowcountry Weekly* became integrally involved as media sponsors. My idea of a "film festival," back then, was kind of a caricature . . . and not a very generous one. I envisioned lots of pretentious intellectuals and fancy starlets preening around in dark glasses, making us locals feel like hicks and rubes.

I love

movies,

I thought.

But movie

people

?

I don't know...

This was me being a hick and a rube.

As it turns out, the filmmakers who come to BIFF are some of the warmest, most wonderful folks I've ever met. From screenwriters to directors to editors to actors – from student filmmakers just getting started to professionals at the height of their careers – after repeated exposure, I've been forced to acknowledge that "movie people" are, for the most part, very nice.

(Yes, I'm sorry to say it's true. These smart, interesting people – who are often better looking than the rest of us – are also very nice.)

But here's what I love most about the BIFF filmmakers: They just can't help doing what they do. It's an uncontrollable urge. Most of them will never be rich or famous – though, certainly, some will be, and a few already are – but they make movies anyway. Because they have to. I love that!

And as a small town columnist, I *get* that. Oh, man, do I get it.

But making movies is so much harder than writing columns. Even the shortest “short” is this enormous collaborative effort. I’m always astounded when the credits roll at the end of a BIFF short film, and I realize it took 50-plus people to make those 2 or 3 on screen look so good for those 7 riveting minutes. When I think of all the inspiration, ingenuity, discipline, commitment, cooperation, technical skill, talent, and just plain *sweat* that goes into the making of a short film, I’m mind-boggled and humbled. And don’t even getting me started on the *full-length features*.

And here’s the real kicker: For independent filmmakers, it’s all done on a very skimpy budget, with magically scrounged-up funds (who knows how!?), and often with little, if any, return on the investment.

While working on this special BIFF issue, I started thinking about indie filmmakers and wondering how they actually make a living. I considered asking my pals VW Scheich and Uyen Le – they discovered Beaufort through BIFF, then moved here from LA to make a feature film – but I was raised southern, so I’d sooner brush my teeth with a chainsaw than ask my friends how they make their money. It’s just tacky. (Ask my mom.)

So I did some reading up on the subject. In an online interview, Sheri Candler, an independent film marketing specialist with Film Collaborative, had this to say:

"Indie filmmaking isn't a job. Generally, no one is paying you to do it and very few people work making films exclusively. Many people teach, consult, write books, produce commercials, music videos, corporate films, increasingly content for YouTube or other online video outlets, or rework/polish scripts. Sadly, the return in indie film is very small and mainly comes in the form of satisfaction at having completed the vision. Most people do not make indie films for the return; they make them from compulsion. I am not kidding! An overwhelming need to tell a story in a visual medium is what drives an indie filmmaker. If you don't have this passion, you just won't take up indie filmmaking or you will quickly drop it."

Now, certainly, some of these filmmakers go on to bigger things. (Notice I didn’t say “bigger and better.” Just bigger.) An award-winning short at a high-profile film fest can get your proverbial foot in the proverbial door. Making blockbuster movies for some giant studio is an

ever-present chimera on the horizon, and sometimes it becomes a reality.

But the point I'm trying to make here – and the reason I adore these indie filmmakers who come to BIFF – is that the dream of “making it big” is *not* what drives them. No. They have an “overwhelming need to tell a story in a visual medium.” An

overwhelming

need

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That's just the kind of crazy that cranks my tractor.

Put simply, independent filmmaking is a labor of love. And every year, for a few splendid days in the bleak midwinter, these compulsive storytellers with their passionate obsession – their *overwhelming need* – show up here in Beaufort (from all over the world!) and lay the fruits of that labor at our feet. A love offering.

And what we give them in return is BIFF. Ron and Rebecca Tucker have created a unique (even boutique) festival that embraces filmmakers in a deeply personal way, welcoming them with the genuine hospitality – and profound quirkiness – for which the South is so famous. The Tuckers and their army of volunteers literally *and* figuratively roll out the red carpet for these folks, who – to reiterate – are typically

not

flashy swells, but hardworking, multi-tasking, moonlighting, nose-to-the-grindstone obsessive-compulsives who feel lucky to be here. (And who – let's face it – probably need a freaking break.) These filmmakers invariably fall under Beaufort's spell, and Beaufort is equally infatuated. The creative energy crackles, the joy is palpable, minds are blown and hearts are moved.

And many tears are shed before all's said and done.

So bring it on, you crazed, fanatical filmmaking maniacs! I'm ready to watch some movies.

And happy birthday, dear BIFF. Many happy returns.

The Beaufort International Film Festival opens Wednesday, February 10th at Tabby Place, and films will screened Thursday – Saturday at the USCB Center for the Arts. For more information and a complete schedule of events, visit www.beaufortfilmfestival.com

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