

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

'The Most Dangerous Short Film in America'

Bob Pondillo · Thursday, October 25th, 2012

I'm a college professor — that's my day job — and I'm also a filmmaker. I've been writing and directing short narrative movies since 2005, and have had considerable success on the national and international film festival circuit — in fact, two of my earlier short films were chosen as “Official Selections” at Cannes. So, moviemaking is part of my job here at [Middle Tennessee State University](#) (near Nashville), where they hire professors for both teaching academic subjects (my area is media and culture) and “creative activity,” like writing books, doing research, or in my case writing and directing short, fictional films.



In 2010, I wanted to use the medium of film to add my voice to the national discussion on same-sex marriage, and wanted to do it in a unique and unusual way. This is when I hit upon the idea of telling a story of marriage equality in the “codes” associated with a children’s book, a literal “fairy tale” if you will. I wanted to make it fun and funny, over-saturated with color, and give it a clear and definite moral, like most fables. And I wanted to use kids. That’s right, I wanted to tell a story about gay love using child actors, 7-12 years of age. Moreover, I knew using children would be the key to making such an audacious idea come to life. No one had done such a thing before (at least as I had envisioned it), and I knew without a doubt it would work. The only problem: I live in Tennessee – arguably one of the reddest, most conservative states in the Union. Would it be possible to find a cast and a crew to make this happen?

For months I scurried about the mid-State visiting community theaters, taking to parents, tracking down leads. Every time I’d explain the concept to a stage parent, I’d get looked at as if I had three heads! “No, no,” I’d say, “It’s not as creepy as it sounds!” After which I’d explain the idea in greater detail, get polite “thank you’s” (most of the time), then be ushered to the door.

I came back discouraged and said to my student producer, Diana Rice, and student casting director, Lauren Plum, “Looks like we’re going to have to use puppets or marionettes, or animation, or even adults dressed as kids playing adults! I can’t find parents willing to let their kids do it.”

Diana said, “Don’t worry, Dr. Bob, we got this!” And indeed they did! Diana and Lauren conducted open acting calls and we found 30 of the best child actors (and their parents!) willing to be part of this grand experiment. In the summer of 2010, we filmed our movie called *The Miracles on Honey Bee Hill*.

But that’s just the beginning of the story! While *Miracles* was still in previews, [word got to State Senator Bill Ketron](#) about its story, and he initiated a “full investigation” of the film by the Tennessee Board of Regents. The claim was, among others, that we had “exploited children.”

Not true, of course, the parents were on the set, had read the script, and signed releases for their

kids. One local minister (Pastor Darrel Whaley/Kingdom Ministries Worship Center) compared the film to “a lie of Satan.” He wrote in the Rutherford Reader, an uber-conservative newspaper, “[T]his film is a direct assault on God, the Bible, Christians, Jews and the Church.” Our sweet little film had suddenly become “the most dangerous short film in America!”

The controversy is not limited to the South. We were banned in Wisconsin from Wisconsin Public TV; the reason given: our film would present “too many issues” for the station. In fact at the premier this past May, I spoke to an Eric Holmberg, a man who identified himself as a former fundamentalist preacher, who told me the film was “disingenuous.” He said, “You cannot separate love from sex.” It mattered little or how much I explained that *Miracles* is a very unique *love* story, not a *sex* story — and it appears many of those who disagree with the film’s message simply cannot separate the two.

Since its premiere in May 2012, *The Miracles on Honey Bee Hill* has been chosen as an “Official Selection” at more than 20 national and international film festivals, and has won awards across the country: Best Short Narrative Film, 2012 – Big Mini Media Festival, Brooklyn, NY; Best Romantic Short Film, 2012 – 2012 16th Annual International Indie Gathering Film Festival, Cleveland/Hudson, OH; Best Short Film, 2012– 2012 Real to Reel International Film Festival, Kings Mountain, NC; Outstanding Screenplay in a Short Film, 2012 – Northwest Ohio Independent Film Festival, Lima, OH; Outstanding Actress in a Short Film, 2012 – Lucy Turner, “Millie” – Northwest Ohio Independent Film Festival, Lima, OH; GLBTQ Film: Best Short Film, 2012 – La Jolla, CA; Special Jury Award for Social Change, 2012 – Social Media Film Festival, The Mirage Hotel, Las Vegas, NV; Best Director – Short Film, 2012 – Long Beach QFilm Festival, Long Beach, CA; and previously, Outstanding Screenplay, 2010 – SoCal Independent Film Festival, Huntington Beach, CA – 2010.

If you’d care to view what some have called, “the most dangerous short film in America,” you can find it [here](#). Give it a watch and you be the judge!

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