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## Final Project Report: "Lost in the Woods", A Narrative Short Film

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Final Project Report  
Professional Media and Media Management Studies Program  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Jan Thompson, Committee Chair  
MCMA-589 M.S. Report/Project  
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### **Final Project Report: “Lost in the Woods”, a Narrative Short Film**

For my Final Project in the Professional Media and Media Management Studies Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC), I decided to direct and produce a short narrative film. The film is based on a full-length screenplay that I had written many years ago. I have never directed, nor produced, a film before so the entire experience was an exciting challenge. From pre-production to filming and editing the film, I was presented with numerous obstacles along the way. However, each obstacle offered me an opportunity to make decisions and overcome hurdles. I will share with you what I learned during the process of making the film.

The logline for my script, “Lost in the Woods” is: Two ten-year old children scheme to go out into the woods to pretend to be lost, so that they can get rescued and sell their story for a million dollars. Problem is, once they get out there, they really get lost.

In 2022, I filmed three scenes from the script with two child actors for an Independent Study class. This was my first and only experience directing. I had a great experience and hoped that one day I would be able to make the story into a short film.

I went about casting the scenes by posting a ‘Casting Notice’ on several filmmaking sites on Facebook. I also solicited referrals by contacting local filmmakers and actors that I knew. I held in-person auditions for the two child actors and filmed those auditions with my iphone. By using this approach, I was able to review the audition footage at home and take my time making a decision. I also made sure to take a little time at the beginning of each child’s audition to chat with them, asking them how they liked school and what their hobbies were.

By doing that, I felt that I put each child actor at ease so that they would be less nervous during the audition.

I had originally worked on two different documentary stories for my Final Project at SIU. However, I encountered numerous issues with both subjects and had to cancel them. By the end of 2022, I had an idea to make “Lost in the Woods” as a short film. I got in touch with the parents of both of my original child actors who expressed interest in reprising their roles for the short film. However, after months of planning, I had to replace the female child actor at the last minute. This was due to her mother not being able to commit to any filming dates. It was a difficult thing to do, but it turned out to be the right move. So, I re-cast that part and then cast the adults in the story.

“Lost in the Woods” is a thirty-minute children’s comedy. I shot the film on equipment loaned to me by SIUC. The camera used was a Canon-200. The sound was captured via lavaliers, a boom mic and the camera’s mic itself. The film was shot on video using ‘SD cards’. The film’s resolution was 1080p. David D. Bowers and I edited the film on the software ‘Davinci Resolve 18’, the free version which is open-sourced and available to download online.

The film’s cast consisted of twelve actors, male and female. Two of the twelve actors were ten-year old children (one male, one female) whom both turned eleven during filming. A parent/guardian accompanied the children on set at all times (this was a requirement set by me prior to filming.) I had originally asked the parents if the children could work with me for fourteen days. However, due to other summer activities, the children could only commit to less than half that time. We shot the film in seven days. Out of those seven days, we had five days to work with the children. Both children have appeared in numerous school and community productions prior to doing my film. Due to the limited days we had to work with the children, the filming was very rushed. However, I had a good working relationship with both children, as well as the parent/guardian, so I felt confident that we could complete the film in seven days. In addition, both children took their roles and acting commitments very seriously by knowing their lines perfectly and not wasting time on the set.

One of the mistakes that I made while in pre-production on this film was waiting too long for the original female child actress to become available. I did

not want to hurt the child's feelings, so I hesitated too long to commit to replacing her. But had I not replaced her, I might have lost out on an opportunity to work with the male child actor, who is incredibly talented. Also, I put myself at risk of not being able to make my film and graduate on time with my Master's Degree.

There are many more lessons that I learned while making this film. Some issues that could potentially occur, I had already known going into the production. However, some challenges presented themselves even though I thought I had prepared for them. They are listed as follows:

1. Check footage and audio on a computer on set as often as you can to make sure that things such as 'lighting' are being communicated on video as you want them to be.
2. Storyboard every single shot. I did not storyboard every scene and it would have helped immensely to show anyone working camera exactly how the picture should be framed. Just explaining how I would like a scene to look and looking through the viewfinder to check on the camera person's framing is not always enough.
3. In my experience, I realized that filming a scene will take at least four times the amount of time I allocated to film.
4. In regards to editing, one can expect to get 15 seconds of film for every hour a person edits.
5. I surely could have used more money to cover expenses of the making of this film. So, I learned that I should have started saving money earlier for this production.
6. Having plenty of support while making a short film (or any film) is very important. There were two producers on this film: myself and my husband, David Bowers. I was also the director and Dave had a lead acting role in the film. I found myself in charge of craft services, including water and ice. Dave found himself doing all of the heavy lifting of equipment when we picked it up from SIU's equipment room to bringing it home and getting it into our house. From there, he also had to load the equipment in our truck for filming, along with bringing it back into the house after filming and returning it to the school. Having a Production Assistant would have helped both he and I immensely, both on and off the set. However, we did not have enough money in our budget to hire one. Also, with me being an

older graduate student, I didn't have many friends that I could call on to help us for free.

7. Having experienced, qualified help is also very important for a successful production. We had to train one of our sound people because he had never worked in that position before. Although he ended up doing a good job, there was a learning curve which took time. In addition, Dave had to train him. This meant that Dave had to spend valuable time checking audio quality frequently, which meant less time he had to spend on other things.
8. In addition to recording audio on professional equipment, always set the camera's audio to record while filming for back-up audio. We always set the camera's audio to record sound and it is fortunate that we did because our separate, professional audio equipment failed us in one scene. But because we had back-up audio, we were able to use the camera's sound for one particular scene.
9. Always record to two separate chips/cards for both audio equipment and camera. We did this as back-up and it gave us peace of mind, although we did not have a chip/card fail us during our shoots.
10. It's very important to use a slate in every single shot. We used a slate in every scene except for the last day of shooting when we were much too rushed to deal with re-labeling the slate between takes. This made it more difficult to edit the scenes from the last day.
11. Always do at least a second take for safety reasons. We strictly followed this rule and it paid off.
12. Start pre-production as soon as you can for best results. I should have begun pre-production one year prior to the first day of shooting.
13. Always have waivers signed before any filming begins.
14. Make sure to have a high-powered computer for editing your film. Make sure to have plenty of Ram and Cache, a fast processor and adequate space in your harddrive.
15. YouTube is very valuable for learning how equipment works, how editing software works and many other things you may need.
16. Do not trust editing software to perform as expected. My co-producer, Dave, and I downloaded the free version of Davinci Resolve Eighteen. We learned it as we edited the film, which is not ideal. However, once we were familiar with the editing software, post-production went much more smoothly.

17. Directors must be very assertive. I do not feel as though I was as assertive in the beginning as I could or should have been. However, I overcame that and learned that the more assertive I was with my cast and crew, the easier the shoots went.
18. I have taken a lighting class and it helped immensely. But I found that having a camera person who knows lighting very well that you can work with really helps to improve the look of the film.
19. If you have children in your cast, always have a designated child wrangler on set to work with them. From start to finish, I required that there be a parent on set to accompany the children at all times. This was not just for safety and liability reasons, but also to make the children feel more comfortable.
20. Obtaining natural sound/room tone for every location filmed is a must.
21. As a director, do not be afraid to operate the camera. I was fearful that I would somehow break the camera, so I did not touch it for some time. However, the best way to overcome a fear is to do it, so I finally learned to operate the C-200 (the basics) and it made me a more confident director.
22. Always get at least two different angles of every shot. Also, make sure to get close-ups and wide shots. These were our rules going into making the film but we had such limited time to film with the children that we had to forfeit many shots on our shot lists. Unfortunately, it was impossible to acquire all the shots that we hoped for and needed. Therefore, there are a lot of two-shots and group shots in my film.
23. When casting actors, make sure they are already in the acting community and have good experience.
24. I also learned that daily video shoots should be watched on the full screen mode.
25. Take the time to organize your video and audio clips before you begin to edit. This will save you time in searching for clips. Although we had organized our clips beforehand, we did not label each one of the audio clips, which meant we spent more time looking for audio than we should have.
26. If possible, hire one person to take detailed notes about each scene while filming.
27. I cast some actors and hired a lead camera person whose work I was already familiar with, making the process of working with them much easier.

28. Filming outside is a challenge in many ways. Clouds move over the sun, changing the lighting situation on a constant basis some days.
29. Filming outside during the summer in southern Illinois can be brutally hot. I made sure to have plenty of sunscreen, ice and bottled water for my cast and crew.
30. A working bathroom with running water is a must, especially with a cast of twelve actors. I knew this ahead of time and chose my filming location close to a clean, working restroom with running water, soap and paper towels.
31. The old saying, “We’ll fix it in post” is actually a last-resort. It is important to try to solve any video or audio problem while on set and while filming.

In conclusion, I am, overall, pleased with the outcome of making “Lost in the Woods”. There are numerous changes that I would still like to make to the film. One of those changes would be to add music to the film. Once that is accomplished, I would like to submit the film to some film festivals to see if it garners any attention. I am also looking forward to receiving feedback from the public, SIUC and industry professionals about the quality of the film. In addition, although it was a ‘tough shoot’ with the time constraints, I learned so very much about filmmaking and had a terrific time while doing it.