

CASE STUDY:

“I Don’t Like Gardening”

Purposeful Directing and Empowerment Through Storytelling

Project Overview:

As a director, “I Don’t Like Gardening” was a milestone in my career, marking my first experience leading a large-scale project with a significant budget and a crew of 30. The film continues to resonate with audiences, serving as a frequent reference in my home film program for its purposeful directing and emotionally authentic storytelling. The project not only solidified my confidence as a leader but also strengthened my creative voice and demonstrated the power of women-centric narratives.

Impact:

- **Educational Recognition:** The film is now cited in my former film program as a case study in purposeful directing and authentic storytelling.
- **Empowering Message:** I Don’t Like Gardening serves as a poignant reminder of the unspoken bond between women, emphasizing empathy, compassion, and the strength found in solidarity.
- **Personal Growth:** The experience gave me confidence in my ability to lead, make bold creative decisions, and stand by my artistic vision.

One pivotal moment came when a directing teacher critiqued the plausibility of Raven’s willingness to help Bailey. I stood by the narrative, defending it as a testament to the innate compassion and solidarity women share. This moment not only validated my perspective but also reinforced the film’s core message.

Key Takeaways:

- **Authenticity Resonates:** Allowing actors to embody their characters naturally creates emotionally impactful performances.
- **Leadership Builds Trust:** Clear communication and collaboration foster a supportive and productive environment for the team.
- **Stand by Your Vision:** Staying true to your creative instincts can inspire both the cast and crew and leave a lasting impact on the audience.

Key Challenges and Approach:

Conveying Authenticity Through Performances

The script was dialogue-heavy with minimal blocking, meaning the emotional weight of the story depended almost entirely on the performances. Casting was critical, and I chose Johanna and Meeland for their natural alignment with their characters:

- **Johanna (Bailey):** Embodied a nervous, rambling energy that mirrored the character's vulnerability.
- **Meeland (Raven):** Balanced a dark, confident demeanor with underlying compassion and openness.

Rather than micromanage performances, I encouraged the actors to approach the script as themselves initially, allowing for an organic interpretation. From there, I gave notes framed as scenarios to ground them in the reality of the story.

Visual Storytelling and Cinematic Choices

The film’s aesthetic played a vital role in amplifying its themes of vulnerability and connection. I collaborated closely with the cinematographer to design a visual language that supported the emotional arc:

- Intimate close-ups highlighted the raw emotion in key moments.
- Muted, earthy tones in the production design reinforced the grounded, personal nature of the story.
- The library setting, with its interruptions and imposed quietness, symbolized societal constraints on women’s voices and autonomy.

In pre-production, I created initial storyboards to articulate my vision, which were refined collaboratively with the production team. These visual guides shaped everything from shot composition to set design.

Leadership and Collaboration

As the director, I took the lead in every phase of production:

- **Pre-Production:** Spearheaded planning, oversaw storyboarding, and worked closely with the team to develop the film’s visual and emotional direction.
- **Production:** Managed a large crew, ensured clear communication, and maintained a supportive environment for the actors and team.
- **Post-Production:** Sat with the editor during each session, refining the narrative flow, and worked hands-on with the sound team to address challenges in foley and ADR.