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Cannes Court Métrage

## short film corner | Interview **2018**

Festival de Cannes

# Joshua Jamieson

## *Waiting Outside*

Canada | Fiction | Drama / Social / Youth | 2018, 7m

*Simon who cares for his young daughter. Scout while his husband Felix is deployed overseas. When Simon gets a serious diagnosis, his world is shaken and he must deal with it, and the future, alone.*

**Hi Joshua thanks for talking to tNC, how's everything going?**

Things are going well, thanks. And no problem, it's absolutely my pleasure!

I appreciate you getting in touch with me about my short film *Waiting Outside*... being at the Cannes

Short Film Corner!

**Congratulations on having *Waiting Outside...* part of this years Cannes Short Film Corner, what does it mean to have your film part of the festival?**

Cheers, thanks! It's very exciting for me, for sure. This is my third short film, but the first one that I've filled a producer/director role for along with being the writer. It's the first time I've written an original dramatic script for a film, so I'm proud to be taking that next step... and that the film will be available to watch at such a prestigious film festival. Hopefully, it will lead to additional successes with the other 25 or so submissions we've made to a variety of international and regional festivals. But to have *Waiting Outside...* in the Cannes Short Film Corner, it definitely is a bucket list kind of achievement that I've dreamt of and hopefully, it won't be the last! This short film is designed to be a bit of a calling card for my approach and style as a director, but it's also written to be an amuse-bouche for a feature-length film about these same characters that I'm developing.

**Are there any nerves ahead of the festival?**

I'm certainly a little nervous about *Waiting Outside...* being seen, and how people will receive the story. To this point, no one outside of the core production team has seen it, and even then there are members who still haven't. I remember in June 2016, the Newfoundland and *Labrador Film Development Corporation* (an arms-length government agency here in my province) selected me (and 9 others) to participate in a Film Development Mission to L.A. and I went with my *Waiting Outside...* project.

I was fortunate enough to be connected with some really talented individuals in the industry like Andrew Reimer who was one of the producers behind the Academy Award-winning *Crash*. We got to talk at length about my project and other things, and it was really incredible to have time with someone like that. We also attend the *Produced By* conference on the *Sony* lot that year which included sessions with *Elizabeth Banks*, *Morgan Freeman* and *Lori McCreary* (Revelations Entertainment), *The Russo Brothers*, and *Russell Simmons*.

Working on a film for a few years in the early stages of your career can be daunting, but it was reassuring and encouraging to hear from individuals in the industry with such vast amounts of experience, and hear that they have to overcome similar challenges along the way from initial pitch to production and then promotion. One of the biggest takeaways I have from that experience is that you have to know your story inside and out, and love it so much that you're willing to go to bat for it at any opportunity you get.

*"So, I extrapolated a bit from that and made some decisions to frame up how I wanted to tell the story."*

I certainly feel the story being told in *Waiting Outside...* is an important one about a community that's not often depicted on screen in this way - it's my interpretation of a poem I found in 2013 that just resonated with me so strongly that I wanted to write a film treatment. So, because of that, I have confidence in my film, which is great. But no matter how confident I may feel, I'll still be nervous about people seeing it for the first time, and hope that it resonates with audiences in a way that makes them think about life and how we treat one another.



Can you tell me about your book *Waiting Outside... how did you find it?*

My 'day' job is as a publicist for social media, and even though I'm on the council, *ArtsNL* and other events. The biggest event every year is the *ArtsNL* festival, the largest literary festival in the world. In 2014, I was a finalist for the *ArtsNL* *McGrath* award for *Velocity* (Cross Lane Editions).

In that book, there's a poem called *Outside Clinic 2B* and it describes a man sitting in a waiting room and the anxiety and boredom that comes with it. It talks about how he's watching the clock and pondering filling out a card for information on a luxury vehicle that falls out of a magazine, throwing caution to the wind and chasing a dream. He's drawn into his family memories by the "No Postage Required if Mailed in the US" that you see on mailer cards - remembering a vacation to Florida. That's paralleled with lines in the poem about his big thick folder somewhere beyond the doors, that tells the "secret of his cells" and moments before a nurse calls his name, he retreats from the notion of filling out the card feeling foolish, and he tucks it into his coat pocket.

So, I extrapolated a bit from that and made some decisions to frame up how I wanted to tell the story. It got me thinking about how many people are dealing with a lot underneath the surface. And that you can learn plenty about people by watching what they do and how they behave. I decided that the "secret of his cells" reference was in relation to a cancer diagnosis and that the person was there waiting for an update on his health. That was my starting point, and then I built the narrative around that - creating the man's backstory, the family around him, and so on. It wasn't until after I'd written the first draft (of what would eventually be nine) and shared it with *Carmelita* that I learned she wrote the poem while sitting in the waiting room of a cancer care clinic awaiting news on a family member of hers.

### What was the inspiration behind your screenplay?

Being a gay man myself, I wanted my main character (*Simon*) to be gay as well and given the family vacation flashback in the poem, I decided I wanted him to have a family too - one that went beyond just having a partner. To that end, I gave them an adopted daughter, who I named *Scout* (inspired by *To Kill A Mockingbird*, because she is and will have to be a strong young woman). I knew I wanted one of the main scenes, or turning points, in the short to address my idea about observing people with the added consideration that its impossible to get the full picture of someone that way, so I created a character for *Simon* to interact within the waiting room who would make assumptions about him.

I also really want to drive home the idea that no matter how much time we have in our lives, it's important to ensure you cherish and make the most of every single moment and opportunity that is before you. For those reasons, the opening and at home scenes shared between *Simon* and *Scout* are very important.

I also wanted to challenge the typical composition of an LBGQT film (many of which are sex-charged or filled with cliches) and the traditional ideas of what a gay couple/family life can look like. So, on top of

giving Simon and his partner an adopted daughter (and not wasting precious film time explaining why and how their family formed), I also made *Simon's* partner - *Felix* - be enlisted in the armed forces. The intention there was to raise the stakes of the situation even further, along with being a touch-point for the idea that LGBTQ people are important members of any workforce, including the military.

### What has been the experience like for you working on this film?

The other film projects I've worked on followed different creative goals. My first short film called *FATE* was done as part of my post-secondary education. It was fun, and a challenge in its own right - to tell a story without words. Another of my shorts had a social and community focus, it's more of a short documentary. And, the other film I did was a full-length documentary that I was a producer and director for called *Just Himself: the story of Don Jamieson*. That particular one was personal, as it told the story of my grandfather's life and career as a broadcaster and politician in the years **Pierre Trudeau** was *Canada's Prime Minister* (1966 to 1979), after which my grandfather became the *Canadian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom* where he became a firm favourite of the Queen.

So *Waiting Outside...* was a completely creative project from start to finish - I had to write the source material based on the inspiration I found thanks to *Carmelita's* incredible poem. It was an exciting opportunity - and I'm proud of the work that's been done from 2014 to 2017 to make this happen. When I was awarded the Linda Joy Media Arts Society award for an original script not yet made into a film back in 2016, it gave me a huge boost - both in terms of confidence in the script and story, and providing us with some of the resources that were needed to make the production happen. I was also very lucky to be able to call upon a large number of individuals whom I'd established an excellent working relationship with who had worked on the documentary. That made working on this project a joy because we knew how to be a team from the outset.

### Any bad habits you need to break?

I probably stress about things privately a little too much, but I think that's because I'm so invested in the projects I take on. I always try to make sure that no individual on any team I'm a part of is ever held up from being able to proceed with things they have to do on my account. I like to make sure people feel empowered in their roles, and well supported.



I sometimes find myself worrying about the working experiences of others - wanting to ensure they have a positive one, that allows them to develop creatively too. I remember when I was working on my documentary, when a challenge came up one time, a producer mentor of mine asked me if I wanted to make a mountain or a mole hill out of it ... I hear her asking that question in my head to this day when I'm faced with new challenges. I think it's important to just take a beat sometimes and evaluate each situation as it comes.

**What was the most challenging part of bringing this film to life been for you?**

For this project, because cancer factors into the storyline, I had to do a lot of research. I had to make choices about the type of cancer, how developed it was, and I wanted to make sure that the language being used was accurate and reflective of real life experiences. I did that in a number of ways - I talked to a friend of mine who's an internal medicine doctor (who's actually an extra in the film!), and he helped a lot with terminology. Another member of the production team also had recently faced their own battle with cancer and has since overcome it, so I relied on that person heavily for the experiential side of hearing things from a doctor. And, last but not least, I approached the *Canadian Cancer Society's* Newfoundland and Labrador office to talk to them about the script. They actually felt it was so well written that they wrote a letter of support for the project that said the script accurately reflected the experiences of the clients they support - that meant a lot to me. All of the advice I received from these folks meant a lot. I wanted it to feel as real as I could, so the weight of these situations drew out the right emotions.

**Have you always been interested in filmmaking?**

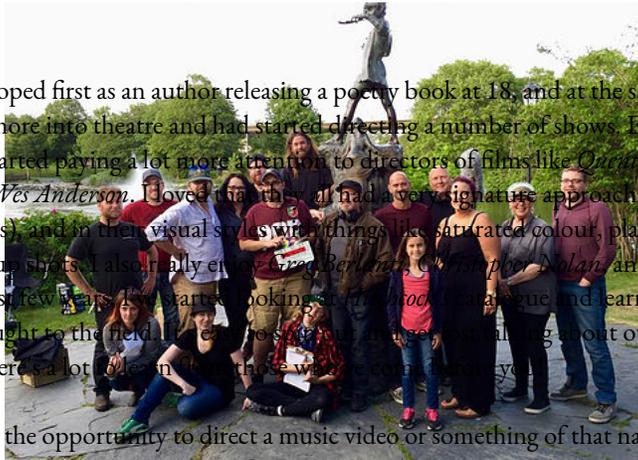
I think so. I've certainly always loved the movie-going experience - how it opens your eyes to new ways of thinking about things, people, places, and cultures. Cinema can give audiences access to so much - areas of the world they'd otherwise not get to or see an opportunity to learn about people and their experiences. I feel like cinema has the power to help us feel connected, and it can help everyone better understand each other. I appreciate projects that aim to do that on some level.

For me, I think my interest in film started with music, really. I was born with severe hearing loss (over 80%), and it was restored slowly over time through 14 operations. My mom still talks about the moment my face reacted to the sound of a bird. (*Consequently one of my favourite films ever is It's All Gone Pete Tong, because I spent years being a professional DJ, but cared deeply for my hearing because I knew I was lucky to have it.*)

So music means a lot to me - and I've always felt very connected to the emotional quotient of music, and how in stage/concert performances, tour video walls, or music videos - the story of a song and the rhythm of the music can be synchronized with visuals.

I also especially love strong-willed artists who are committed to their vision - people like *Madonna, David Bowie, Prince, Bjork, Tori Amos, Janelle Monae...* they're all powerhouses who are wholly invested in their project's messages and aesthetics. They know what they want, and go about their work in ways that motivates those around them to want to deliver the absolute best. The music video was a huge thing in the years of my youth, and I was always very keen on watching channels like *MuchMusic*. I have a lot of respect for directors like *Mark Romanek, Michel Gondry, Spike Jones, Jonas Akerlund* and *Steven Klein* in more recent years. Watching their work, and that of others. gets me thinking about creative approaches to video and film.

Artistically, I developed first as an author releasing a poetry book at 18, and at the same time I was getting more and more into theatre and had started directing a number of shows. Eventually, everything converged, and I started paying a lot more attention to directors of films like *Quentin Tarantino*, *John Hughes*, and *Wes Anderson*. I loved that they all had a very signature approach to telling their stories (like Hughes) and in their visual styles with things like saturated colour, playing with symmetry, and extreme close up shots. I also really enjoyed *Fred Berling*, *Christopher Nolan*, and *David Fincher's* work, and in the last few years I've started looking at *Her* by Spike Jonze and learning more about the innovation he brought to the field. I've also been watching a lot of other directors whose work I admire... there's a lot to learn from those who've gone before you.



I've still yet to have the opportunity to direct a music video or something of that nature, but at the start of my foray into film directing it was a bit of a bucket list item; maybe someday! I did get to co-author the lyrics to the original song that closes out *Waiting Outside...* with the incredible award-winning composer (**Rosalind MacPhail**) who worked on the project with me and that was a real collaborative treat.

### With the film being complete what would you say is the biggest lesson you've taken from this?

I think it's always important to be prepared. That's something you always say to yourself and strive for, but no matter what - the more prep work you do before production, the better off you'll be, always. I also learned through this project that sometimes you have to be patient with the process, but other times you need to push to keep things moving. Knowing when to take either approach takes a bit of talent and experience.

### Now you can be reflective do you have any advice you would offer a fellow director?

I would just encourage any emerging director or young person interested in the field to get out there and start collecting as much experience as possible. Look for organizations in your community that are designed to support your filmmakers and the filmmaking industry where you live. And, go out and film things, try different approaches, don't be afraid to take a chance or experiment with something. I've also found it beneficial to take opportunities to participate in film projects in a variety of roles. For me as a director, I like to understand as many of the different roles as I can so that when I'm talking to various professionals on set we can have a conversation where we're both able to understand one another a little better. Being fair about expectations is important, and one important thing I've learned is that one of the best qualities of a leader or director is knowing where your pitfalls are. You can't be an expert in everything and it's integral that you step back and let the real specialists in a given area do what they do best. You'll come out better for it in the end.

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