

Interview with Archie Borders Transcript

Marissa: How did you know you wanted to be in film?

Archie: Well, let me tell you how I wanted to be in film. I was 8 years old raised on television at that point and I started seeing previews to the movie *The Poseidon Adventure*. My parents weren't sure if I should see it because it was a big disaster movie. They thought it might be too adult, so my sisters would see it, and when they would see it I would beg them to tell me about the movie afterwards. They would come home from the movies and I was like, "Tell me about it" and they would tell me about the whole movie and I would sit there just enraptured with it. Finally my parents took me to see it. I begged them, and of course I was blown away. Up until that point I was watching *Bugs Bunny* cartoons and *Rudolph the Red Nose Reindeer*, and I had just seen this very adult, massive spectacle, and it just blew me away. Just in sheer size. And I had talked to Dad about it and he's like, "People make that", because it just seemed when you're 8 that it just comes out at some place. It doesn't seem real, you know, that people put it together and create it, write it, that there's all these people working on it. I started figuring out that not only do people make it, that it's something you could do. So that was kind of the flip of the switch.

Marissa: Tell us about people or films that inspired you to start writing and directing your own films.

Archie: Once you figure out you can make films you start figuring out who does inspire you. And for a while there was a lot of traditional people you hear about like Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, Francis Coppola, people who were making the big blockbuster movies at the time. And as a kid in Kentucky you look at that they all went to California film schools and it just seemed so exotic and other worldly. I don't know anybody in this world. How do you meet people in this world? And very frankly, I was probably too terrified to go out there by myself not knowing anybody. And then I started hearing about filmmakers who were doing things regionally. John Sayles, who wrote scripts originally and books was getting hired as a script writer, who was taking his own money, and financing his own little films. The first film he did was a movie called *Return of the Secaucus 7* made in 1980, I think? And it was made for \$60,000. But it was the first time I had seen a movie that had people in it that looked like people I would actually know that you could walk right up to and that was new to me. I'd never seen anything like that, and it was exciting because the movie was good. And I was like, "Wow, this is talking about things I [know] and the conversations they were having are not about defusing bombs and stopping asteroids from hitting [earth]. They were having conversations about how they were going to pay their rent or what they wanted to do for the evening." And that was new. And it was exciting. I hadn't seen film like that before. So, you see that, you see some of your own day-to-day life reflected back to you, you go "Well this is something accessible. Now I see, so that's interesting." So that was happening and at the same time there was a theater in Kentucky, in Lexington called the Kentucky Theater and back then they had this film program and it showed films from 40s, 60s, it showed foreign films from France, Chaplin movies, it showed all these types of movies that just weren't showing [anywhere else] This was way before video cassettes and all that. So those movies were, you would read about them in books, but you wouldn't get a chance to see them, at that theater you got a chance to see them. That's the kind of stuff people were watching in film schools. I didn't know it at the time, but if you went USC film

school the films they were showing at the Kentucky were the ones they'd be showing you. So I'm sitting there falling in love with all these crazy different types of movies. It's a whole new world opening at that point, right? It's not just the big blockbusters you're seeing. Suddenly movies from everywhere and that gets you excited and inspires you. So it wasn't just one or two filmmakers, it was people like John Sayles, Spike Lee, Robert Altman, all these people making very distinctive individual movies. And a lot like if you have a favorite writer, you can see their personalities in each of their films. He's not politically correct now, but Woody Allen was making a lot of interesting films then. Those kinds of filmmakers were suddenly fascinating.

Marissa: How did you come to Eastern Kentucky University?

Archie: When I was in high school my plan was very simple. I'm going to graduate, get into USC like George Lucas or Spielberg, and I'm going to move to California and make movies. And that didn't happen. I had no money. I was too afraid to go to California. I had no network. None. And by the way, when I mentioned my daughter earlier it's such a great thing to be a parent now and have a network. To be able to give her what I never had. That's another story. So I decided I need to—if I was going to do then I needed to save money and figure out how I could do it. And then I decided to go to Ohio University which had a film department. I thought I would start there and then transfer to USC. It was always my goal to get to California. I was going to go to California. And then I went to Ohio University, hated it, dropped out, felt like a failure, moved back to Lexington, all my friends are off at college, I'm a dropout basically, I went to working at Long John Silvers, and that's when I started seeing the films by John Sayles and those guys, and going, "Oh these guys are making films, I don't have to be Spielberg and Lucas, I can be this." And I thought I've got to go somewhere, I can't just sit around in my parents' house, so I enrolled at ECU kind of as a whim. I had two really dear friends who were already there and they said I should come up and visit. So I visited the campus. I went through the program and there in the program were film classes, and a film minor which at that time I had no idea. UK didn't have that, at least not that I was aware of and I didn't want to be in Lexington, I wanted to get out of Lexington. But they had a film minor and so I took classes there. There was a mass communications class, there were production classes, and I took those and I loved them. In retrospective they were great classes. As good as the film classes I took at a legitimate film school later. That suddenly made you go, "Okay now I can do this again." So suddenly I had a purpose again, and I took all the film classes they had to offer at that point. That's why I came here.

Marissa: I've been told that during your time at ECU that you actively wrote and directed your own short films. Could you tell me about that experience?

Archie: I did. I also did a lot of writing. I was technically an English major at that time, so I did a lot of short story writing. And it was a great time because it was a great time, but I didn't realize how great it was at the time, and that's something you learn as you get older is to be in the moment a bit more. But I was writing short stories, I had great roommates, I had friends, and that's really what you need to sustain you and give you confidence to try something. But through the curriculum at ECU I had already done a lot of film production on my own. I was very self-taught at that point, because when I was young I got a camera, went out, and shot movies, I did it all through high school. So a lot of the production techniques I already knew. I was able to experiment a little more not so much with the production techniques at ECU, but with the storytelling parts of it. That's where I became more of a storyteller. And the short story writings

and the studying—there was a great class at ECU that I took at the time called Literature and Film, and it was about movies that had been made from books or short stories or something like that. And that was a terrific class, it was great to see how a short story by Dashiell Hammett would be turned into a feature film script. So it really instead of the production part of it, it made me focus on the storytelling part of it. And that's where I really started becoming a writer was at ECU.

Marissa: Tell us about your big break moment or experience.

Archie: I finished film school, I worked on some sets, I got some jobs as a production assistant on films that were shot locally or in Kentucky. At this point I was starting to think you know I was trying to make the decision to stay here or move to LA still, but I wanted to stay in Kentucky at this point, but I didn't know how I could justify staying in Kentucky because I wasn't working. I got hired as a valet at a high rise condominium here in Kentucky, and there was a lot of very prominent people living there. I was sitting there each day writing. That's all I did was write my scripts. I met a lot of people who would come in and say "What are you reading? What are you writing?" And I would tell them and a lot of them were successful business people and I was developing stuff. One of them, a guy named Ed Hart, who was opening Kentucky Kingdom at the time said "I'm looking for people to work for me". So he hired me from that, and I ran their entertainment department. It was a start up business, they didn't have any money, they had taken a chance on me. For the first time I had to hire people, hire seasonal people, negotiate contracts for musical acts, so I was producing basically. So you take that combined with your writing skills and your love for that and I'm like, "I know how to put a budget together. Now I know how to do this part of it." It was just taking what was given to you and learning the aspects of production without even knowing it. I left Kentucky Kingdom because I got an assistant directing job on a KET movie that was shooting in Somerset. I assistant directed that film and I realized the whole film crew was from Kentucky. There was a whole crew here and I was like so people can make—nobody had made a feature in Kentucky since a guy tried it in the 70s and it was a disaster. So I had John Sayles in my head, I had ECU's storytelling, I had the production experience from Kentucky Kingdom, and I'm like "I can do this." I wrote a script, wanted to make it as small as possible, I wanted to come up with something weird about it to make it stand out. So I thought I'm going to make the whole movie take place in one room, and I chose a bathroom at a really nice upscale apartment, and the whole thing takes place at a wedding reception except the first and last scene. That's the whole movie, and people go in and out of this bathroom, and that was it. I made it for practically nothing, but I go it to—remember how I talked about Spike Lee? I knew his rep was a guy named John Pearson. He was in New York, he had a small production company, but he was repping all these independent little guys. And I thought that's the guy who needs to see my film. I sent him a cassette of a rough cut of the movie. I don't even remember how I got his address. I sent it to him and a week later I got a call back from him saying "This is John Pearson" and I'm like "Oh my god it's John Pearson." He was like "I just watched your tape. It's really good. I can do something with this." And you're like, "Oh my god. That's it! Okay, that's the moment." We went through a bunch of stuff, we were in the Hollywood reporter, we ended up selling the film to the Sundance Film Channel, which was on by Showtime, and it aired nationwide, and I got the check in the mail. I thought I'm a filmmaker now and I'm doing it in Kentucky. So suddenly those people I admired about making films regionally, I was one of those guys, and that was it. So that was the beginning and I took off.

Marissa: So you're very versatile in that you direct, produce, and screenwrite. Tell us about your relationship to each of those roles.

Archie: Here's what I will say about all of those. I love all of them, each of them are dependent on other people. The big thing about films it's a very collaborative art form. I think I'm a pretty good screenwriter, but I'm not a great screenwriter, but I can write a good first draft. It took two films to figure that out by the way. The first two films are okay, but they're not great. After you make a couple and one does well, but one flops, my second film was a total flop. It was a big budget and I realized the screenwriter let down the director, and I was both, so that's when you have to go back and you go "Okay what did I do right? What did I do wrong?" And I realized at that point I can do this, but to take it to here I'm going have to learn how to collaborate better until I either catch up or whatever. So I started collaborating on my screenplays. The last two were David Henry, and that took me here to here, so when you're a director it's also important to have a great relationship with your director of photography. As I told you I can't run a camera, so you find people who can run a camera. You tell them here's what I want, and they give it to you. You're still in charge of everything, you're still directing them. You're telling your screenwriter I want this. You're telling your actors here's the performance. I can't act very well, I do a little bit, but I'm not starring in my own films, so you find people who can star in your films. I love music, but I can't write music. I get a composer. I love that aspect of it, and producing is similar, but instead of doing the actual creative hands on, you're bringing the people together or finding the money and all that stuff, and that's another part. The part I enjoy the absolute most is that moment where you go "I love this idea. I want to make a script out of this." And you sit in a room, you shut everything off, you dedicate your hours in the morning or whenever you're scheduled to write, and you sit there, and you got that fire, and you write and it comes and it just starts writing itself, and you stop when you still got some so you don't burn yourself out, you get up the next day and do it again. That moment of pure inspiration still my absolute favorite part. Now once you turn in the first draft I know I'm going to turn it over to another writer and let them go "This is great. This is not great. Let's fix this." And I love that part of it, too, but that first moment where you're all by yourself and it's right there, that moment's magic.

Marissa: You've been described as a regional filmmaker because you showcase your home state of Kentucky in many of your films. Why did you decide to take this approach to your films?

Archie: Regional, but now international, too. That sounds incredibly pompous, doesn't it? There are so many films from New York filmmakers. You can sit down and run a list down Martin Scorsese, Woody Allen, all these folks. California filmmakers—Lucas, Spielberg, all those guys. There are more parts to the country than those two cities, and they're great cities, and they represent big chunks. But there are great stories in Michigan, Texas, Nebraska. Writers from all across the country write about the places they're from often times. Pat Conroy writes about South Carolina and that experience. As a filmmaker, I'm writing this experience being in Kentucky. Every one of my films, even the one that takes place in Paris, has a Kentuckian in it. He's a Kentucky Bourbon salesman, so that's a part of the film. I think that little bit of flavor just distinguishes. A lot of times that thing is played as a joke like "Hey he's from Kentucky" or whatever. That's easy. Anybody could make fun of a place, but to show a person who's from a place who has a full life and a rich experience and a perspective that's a lot more fun. You're seeing a lot of that right now with the emergence of female directors. You're seeing more of that

experience represented. Same thing with a regional filmmaker. I try to represent a more rounded version of this part of the country because people come in with stereotypes and what they think a place is and it's fun to bust those a little bit.

Marissa: 180 Degrees Production Company is based out of Louisville. How did 180 get started?

Archie: 180 got started because a film takes years to develop and in between that you got to make a living. 180 came together when myself, Mike Finser, and Aaron Warber decided to turn what was basically me making little videos and corporate commercials on occasion in between movies into something more rounded and full fleshed. When we came together we brought in advertising clients, marketing folks, sales, and in between the movies we do commercials for Ralph Forman, commercials for major advertisers. We work with ad agencies. We have a subsidiary company called Emerge, which provides training videos for school systems all around the region and country. That employs crew, production assistants, assistant directors, camera people. I used to do a lot of teaching at the Bluegrass Community and Technical College, Spalding, and places like that. I taught for three years at the Governor's School for the Arts. You have all these people coming up, where do they go if they're in Kentucky? They leave Kentucky. They go New York, LA, because that's where the business is. We get to employ those kinds of people now. It provides living for myself and my partners, but it also provides jobs for crew. In between a film, I don't want to sit around for four years. If you don't do what you love for three or four years you get stale. You want to keep working on your stuff. I get to produce. I get to cultivate talent. It's a life now. 180 is our vehicle for making all of this happen.

Marissa: Why Louisville, specifically?

Archie: Louisville is an incredibly artistic friendly city. It's a city very friendly to writers, musicians, artists. It's got a great history for nurturing artists. Actor's Theater is a Tony Award winning theater right down the street here. Some terrific playwrights and writers have come out of here. Steve Gagon who's a major screenwriter in Los Angeles, he's from Louisville. Having this company and having the films the films I do here, being able to have a life here, have a house, have a family, have a place where it's not totally—when you're in an industry town it tends to dominate everything. I want to not just be an industry person, I want to have a life outside the industry. That's what I draw to write upon. If all I know is making film bills, it's hard to write about other things. You get to have a regular life here and life is what's interesting and that's what I like to write about. Louisville supports that.

Marissa: Your latest film *Under the Eiffel Tower* was completed this past year. Tell us how that story of the film came to be.

Archie: Years ago before this company was launched, I was getting ready to launch it, I was working, I did a lot of production coordinating and line producing. One TV series came into town was called *Southern Bells Louisville*. It was a reality series. It was awful, just horrible. You don't wish that kind of work on anybody. But it's good work. You get paid well. We were acting as liaisons for the production company coming to town. They hadn't arrived yet. There was this big storm, power outage. We were setting up the office, myself and another producer named Stuart McOrder, and we were just swapping stories about failed romances. I was divorced, I had two kids, and he told me this story about when he was a younger man about inviting himself on his girlfriend's family vacation to Paris. It was a two week trip. He was very excited. It was her graduation present. He tagged along. On the first day there, they're under the Eiffel Tower, and

he's overcome with emotion. He gets his knees and proposes to her. It's this incredibly awkward moment. She's like "NO. We've only been dating a short—NO." It's awful. At that moment, what do you do? You can't go like, "Okay! Let's just go back to the vacation." He leaves. You've ruined the vacation. You have to go. He goes back to back to the airport. He's crushed and crying. He's sitting in a chair, he's real tall, like this, and the Scottish football team is coming off the plane, and he trips one of the guys. The guy's trashed, he's drunk. The guy threatens to beat him up. He starts crying, which is terrible, but it's funny in the retelling. The guy takes pity on him, and goes "What's wrong?" He tells him the whole story. This guy didn't want to go back either because his career was over. They were like "Let's just go somewhere!" Because he had already paid for the ticket for two weeks, so I mean he's already there. They just went off on this drunken agenda. I thought that's amazing. What a great story. That was the beginning of it, and we changed it around a lot. We shot it this summer. It's still in post-production. We're still working on the ending and playing with it. It was purchased by a studio called The Orchard, which they just bought a bunch at Sundance this year. They were going to release Louis CK movie *I Love You, Daddy* until all the Louis CK stuff happened. And that's a weird story because one of the people on the list of people he harassed was the lead actress in that film. That will come out maybe later this year. It just depends on the release schedules because once they get the cut the way they want then there's marketing and the advertising and a bunch of stuff like that.

Marissa: Looking back, tell us about some of your favorite projects.

Archie: There are great memories associated with all of them. Your first film is wonderful because it was made in a burst of "I've got to do this, and I can do it." Everybody rallying around and sleeping crazy hours. The second film I did although it was a great time, it was a terrible flop. I went from a \$40,000 budget to a \$1,000,000 budget. Had everything, but the movie did nothing. It tanked, and I'm like, "What do you do?" You go back out and suddenly nobody wants to finance your movies anymore, so you go back to work. You put yourself up and I thought "Well I'm not going to stop. What am I going to do? I'm not going to give up." There's a radio show called *This American Life*, and I was listening to it one day and a story on it caught my attention. I'm listening to it and going, "This is a very simple story about a bunch of people who come to a music studio." They're picked out of the classified ads and they're brought together, they've never met, and they're brought together for one day only to record a cover version of Elton John's "Rocket Man." That's it. That's the whole story. And I was like, "Oh, that's wonderful." Then you look at it and go "That's kind of a metaphor for what I do." When you make a movie people come together, you may never see them again. Like in France, you're suddenly thrown together with these people for this thing, you make it, and then you go. That's it, but the experience itself is something. I thought "Wow, that's great. That could be a film." We wrote the screen play. David Henry co-wrote it with me. It's not a big budget film compared to the film before that, and we brought together all these incredible talents. Amy Mann, Low Lainright, Joe Henry. Grammy and Academy Award nominees who wanted to do it because they liked the script, and they liked Joe Henry who came on as a producer who's David's brother. They came to Louisville, we shot the film, it went beautifully. It was real down and dirty, but that worked for the type of movie it was. Then it came out and we got these great reviews. The movie sold and it's like "This is how we do it." And suddenly you're back up again. Because that movie wasn't a huge hit or anything, but it got the reviews and that's what got the next movie back up into the big budget area by my standards. I'm still low-budget compared to *The*

Avengers and stuff. But you're back up again. *Pleased to Meet Me* is kind of my darling right now.

Marissa: What's next for you and 180 Degrees?

Archie: More movies. We've got to get this one out and then we're developing 2-3 other ones. We're going to England for a soccer documentary and then I have two more features I'm hoping to shoot. Hopefully they will be shot here, at least part of them will be here. It will be nice to be back in Kentucky this time. We'll just continue to grow. Continue doing commercials, growing the other businesses. Just keep making good stuff hopefully.

Marissa: What advice would you give to an aspiring filmmaker at ECU?

Archie: First of all, love every minute while you're there. Don't do what I did and keep looking for— "As soon as I get out of here, I'll do something else." Be in that moment and take everything you can from that moment. Be as passionate about that work as you can. Then figure out what you want to do. A lot of students ask me "Do I have to go to film school?" This is not the right answer for a lot of people, but it depends on the person. Sometimes it's like "Just go do it." I got a film degree and I ended up as a valet, and what do you do with that? You look for the opportunities, and you always stay focused on what you want to do. I knew I have to make a movie. That was my goal. Do that. You have a lot of people go "Well while you're doing that maybe you should go back to school and get a backup degree in case this doesn't work out." You can do that. I don't agree with it. I say no, just do that. So what if you have to work as a valet for a while? Or if you have to work for an amusement park for a bit? Or if you have to do this? Stay focused and eventually—because if you work hard, and you're passionate, and not a jerk to people—it will line up, but keep working at it. Don't stop. When everyone else says "I can't do it," you go "okay". When your second film's a major flop, you get back down, you find your third film, and you get it made. Just keep going. No one is going to work as hard for you as you will. And don't work with a**holes, which is not always possible, but do the best you can.