

We were honored when *Brokeback Mountain* locations manager Darryl Solly graciously agreed to an interview. From his offices in Calgary, AB, Solly spoke with Jim Bond, Rob Freeman, and Steve Gin on July 27, 2006.



Tell us something about your early life and how you got into this industry.

Well, I spent my high school years in Vancouver and then I moved to Edmonton. In my high school we had a television course where they had VHS cameras and we were allowed to experiment and make programs. When our family moved to Edmonton there was an art school there, Victoria Composite, where I got into theatre and television production and was exposed to a lot more of the behind-the-scenes process.

From there, I went into technical theatre school, learning about lighting and set construction and seeing things evolve from an empty stage to a full blown production. I then decided to jump into filmmaking and went to SAIT¹ to study film production. Once that was done, I starved for a year. This is a fairly difficult business to get into; it is definitely “who you know.” *Cool Runnings* was my first show. From there, slowly but steadily, I kept working and getting to know more people to the point where I am now a locations manager on an Oscar winning film. It’s cool.

An understatement, no?

There are not many opportunities to, if you want to use the term, “climb to the top of the mountain” and it’s inarguable that Ang is one of the top directors on the planet. So I guess when you get the chance, you really know that this is something that is going to last forever. When you first read the script, you sort of look behind yourself to see if I am really in this position.

You don’t fully grasp the opportunity you have until you start. Then, as the film takes form, you realize you are going to be working with a legendary director on a truly great project. Everyone involved is an icon: that’s who they are, and they are doing their part. During that time you are only getting six hours of sleep a night, just trying to get the movie done, but when it’s all said and done, upon reflection you say, “That was an incredibly special time.” That’s why you do this, to be part of, to be given the opportunity to be part of, something great.

I didn’t know *Brokeback* was going to be as successful as it was. Of course, it was going to be a good movie, but I didn’t know how much the greater public would appreciate it. But I was certain that it would be around for a long time because Ang has always done remarkable things.

¹ Southern Alberta Institute of Technology, Calgary, AB.

What in your own approach to filmmaking helped you most in the context of making *Brokeback*?

Well, I think that when you make movies that it is very much a team effort. It should be a team-oriented thing.

What can you say about your approach to finding locations? Do any of the locations in the film have special importance to you?

I don't know if you read that *Chicago Tribune* article² where they came here and they went to Wyoming. There is a line in that article that is absolutely perfect. The author first drove to all the small towns and made his snappy remarks, and then he went to the Kananaskis Lakes.

In that article he says, "Now I know why I am here." That's exactly the reaction that you are supposed to get: you go there, and you know right away that this is where it is going to be done. This is it.



Upper Kananaskis Lake Peter Lougheed Provincial Park AB

Another example is the gas station at Carseland.³ I saw it on a perfect day under magnificent cumulus clouds which, as you know, give photos depth. At those moments you say, "Look at that, this is going to be it." You know. It's a good feeling, of course,

² "The lake was rich blue on the big screen and a spit of timbered land extended into it. It was all white now, except for the timber, but even though it wasn't like this when I'd seen it onscreen, I knew exactly where I was. And, for the first time, why I was here." Alan Solomon, "Going for *Brokeback*," *Chicago Tribune* 23 Apr. 2006.

³ This scene was cut.

that you don't have to scout for another three weeks, but more deeply, you know you've found a place that your boss will be happy with. You know. No problem, this is it.

A lot of sites in the Kananaskis area I knew would work right away but there are always political things that happen. You have to bring both an emotional and a logical approach to every place you find. There are some locations that we scouted that are amazing, but you just can't get there.

Frustrating?

Oh yeah, we went right to the Rocky [Continental] Divide. There was absolutely no way we could get a) permission and b) equipment and crews there for the amount of money that we'd been given. That was not going to make our movie.

But we wound up with Moose Mountain, which is relatively close to Calgary. The other place that we would have considered was actually near Cowley on the east side of the Livingston Range. In the story, Brokeback Mountain appears to have two steps to get to the peak but everywhere we found had only one step. The problem we had with Livingston Range was that although it is high, the base is high as well. From 3,500' to 8,000' is not enough distance for you to believe that it took them all that time to get from there to here. But on Moose Mountain it looks like you're on the moon. You're up so high you know you are above the tree line and that's important. The whole point of getting sheep above the tree line is that because sheep can eat anything, so it's more efficient to put the sheep up there and leave the cows lower down where there is more grass, allowing for more animals and yielding better returns in the fall. And when you get up there on Moose you can buy that. Once you get up that high, you realize, "Okay, it all makes sense."

We also had difficulties obtaining permission to use sites from Provincial entities. Did you read that *Swerve* magazine article?⁴ That process took a whole lot of working through.

When we first started looking at Fortress Mountain and the Livingston Range in January, the authorities suggested that we look at Moose Mountain and the flats to the north of there and because the sheep carry a bacteria that can wipe out wild cloven hoof livestock. Everywhere we scouted we were frustrated. Fortress Mountain, the Livingston Range, a mountain in the southwest, way, way near the [U.S.] border that we looked at, those just didn't work out. One of them had already had an epidemic that had wiped out a lot of bighorn sheep five years ago because one domestic animal got out and wandered off. In the case of the Livingston Range, we were too close to ranchers so we thought "It's a hornet's nest." That is how we ended up with Moose Mountain.

⁴ Jacquie Moore, "The Real *Brokeback Mountain*," *Swerve Calgary Herald*, 3 Mar. 2006: 18-28. The article explains that domestic sheep carry a bacterium that could infect and jeopardize the wild sheep population of the region. A lengthy negotiation involving biologists, the filmmakers, and Provincial authorities was required to secure permission to use certain sites.



Moose Mountain

Moose is higher than some of the other ranges we had been to. It still had two feet of snow when we started in January and since no one had been crazy enough to try to drive the goat track up there, we had no idea what it was going to look like when it was time to shoot. We were shooting for three weeks before we actually got to see what Moose Mountain looked like under that snow and to make sure that it was green. We had no idea.

Our reactions to the film teach us things about ourselves. We would be honored if you would share with us some of your own reactions to the story.

This was the best script I had ever read. First, I obviously was into it already because I knew who was involved in the production. But there were a couple of moments when reading it I knew this was going to be agonizing, emotionally overwhelming.

Overwhelming?

Yes. You know, for me, it was the “I wish I knew how to quit you” scene, which on the printed page was horrible; it was just gut wrenching. Having to read that and know, oh so frustrating to be able to care for someone that much and not be able to control yourself.

Then at the end of the film, what really got me was Ennis’ chat with his daughter because in that scene he gives his advice. As he did it, from the way [Heath Ledger] gave the line, I don’t think that he realized that he’d given the absolute opposite advice of what he himself did. “Do you love him? Well then, you should be with him.” Totally not what he did in his own life. He loved Jack; he should have been with Jack.

I think that on some level, Ennis is a character all about regret. It is amazing; regret is a theme in a lot of Ang’s movies where true love is postponed for something *more important*. And the character always regrets it. Falls because of it. If you look at *The Ice Storm*, a couple passes over true love trying to get by in the suburban jungle. They could be happy but instead they opt for the politics of the suburban jungle. And in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the lead swordsman passes on true love for duty. Here, Ennis passes over true love for the judgment of other people, out of fear. It is a theme throughout Ang’s movies. When you read it for the first time, you can see it. It’s there. It’s jumping out at you. You’re enjoying reading it, but you are also feeling so bad.

The script had a “made-for-Ang Lee” quality?

As you know, that script had been around for a long time. For the longest time this was the “best screenplay that could never be made.” They didn’t think that anyone could tell the story in the manner that Joe Six-pack would be able to appreciate. Then Ang saw it, loved it, and knew that he could do it.

Ang Lee is the rare director that can make a film others deem impossible. First of all, movies like this are made to win awards – not to make \$175 million. So you know that if you are making this for awards you’ve got to have someone heading this project who will draw acting talent. You don’t necessarily have to find them, they will come to you.



Actors really want to work with Ang because he is a magnificent person. Not at all dictatorial...he’s just fantastic. So they are attracted to the project and when that happens, it’s a ball that just keeps rolling. Now everyone will do what it takes, not to make Ang’s movie or to act out of fear; you do this one out of pride and desire to make this film for the greater good. That’s his true genius, getting people to contribute to the project emotionally, as well as simply doing their jobs.

He has that keen eye and an observer’s mentality. In fact, he really does not say very much. He’s very, very quiet. As such, when you do get something out of him, it’s always a treat. You find that his favorite restaurant is Dairy Queen because when he got off the plane from Taiwan, that was the first restaurant as he was leaving the airport and he went in there. It became his emotional connection to his new life in America.

I tell that story because it says something about him. Dairy Queen, whatever, is a big deal for him. If you think about it in the big picture, it symbolizes his new life. So, he treasures things like the bus station. When we walked in the bus station, we knew this was going to be our diner. Where we’d encounter potential problems, Ang’s reaction was, “Don’t worry about it, this is going to be it; it’s perfect. We are going to do some stuff [set dressing] here and there but this is going to be it.” He walked around, loved the whole thing-the cafeteria line, everything is stainless steel-you know, fantastic.

Another thing, he likes is to take his time. There is no rush; there is no panic. We’d show him all these places but he wouldn’t commit to anything until the next day. He’d sleep on it. I’m used to working with the “General” type of director who walks in and makes a decision on the spot. Ang is not like that at all. For instance, take the bus station; everybody knew that was it, perfect, right? But we learned not to say anything, even though everyone was bouncing off the walls with enthusiasm inside; nobody said anything. We waited until the next day when Ang said it was going to work. Then we knew everything was going to be okay.

Were the choices he finally made close to the ones you had anticipated?

Well, there were a few locations that were kind of different from where I thought we were going to go. I think a lot of that had to do with a tour they made of Wyoming during prep

so they could get an idea of what things look like there. There are differences between Wyoming and Alberta, which is odd because Alberta was largely populated by Americans emigrating north from Montana.

In most of the bars located in smaller Alberta towns the bar setup is oriented around beer as opposed to Wyoming where it is about liquor. Our bars, I am sure you have been to them all, typically have a cooler [refrigerated display cabinet] behind the bar; the focus is not on *the bar*. In Wyoming, the culture of the bar *is* about *the bar* and commiserating with your bartender. The bars they saw in Wyoming were simply *the bar* and two pool tables; that's it. There was no real table-and-chairs setup. In southern Alberta, it's all about the tables and chairs. So we had to figure out how to make that work. All of the bars we could find were way too small, way too small and we did not have the money to make this monster bar that everybody felt we needed.



Electra (Clown) Bar King Edward Hotel Calgary, AB

It became sort of a mad adventure where we kept digging. The definition of insanity is where you repeat the same action, again and again and again, expecting a different reaction that never happens. “Okay, let’s keep looking for bars,” “No, they all look exactly the same, the tables, the cooler,” “Okay, then I got an idea; let’s keep looking!” “No, they all look exactly the same, the tables, the cooler,” “Okay, let’s keep looking.” [Laughter] We went out, and we went out, and we went out and still nothing. It was unbelievably frustrating. Eventually we had to pull the brake, someone had to pull the brake, and we had to give up and figure out something else.

When you are making a movie on a smaller budget you need to group things together. The way you guys did your maps on the website [see: FindingBrokeback.com, “Geographic Locations”] is exactly the way we had our pre-production meeting. [Executive producer] Michael Hausman showed us a map of Alberta and said, “Guys, we are going to find everything in these three places.” He puts a tack on Canmore; he puts a tack on Fort Macleod, and then points to Calgary. “That’s it; we’re not going anywhere else.” We had to house people at Fort Macleod, and we had to find everything there. We had to find everything in Canmore, and we had to house everybody there. And Calgary, everything had to be a drive from Calgary which is why that square is bigger; you are able to drive out to some of those places.

By doing that, he enabled Ang to make a better movie because instead of spending money on hotel rooms, we spent it on cranes and film. It allowed him additional time to make better shots and more time with the actors. I think that is what Michael and then Ang needed. This was a drama. In drama, you need time to make performances work.

The choice of Moose Mountain, with its proximity to Calgary and accessibility, gave Ang so much time everywhere else because he was able to get that hour of overtime in order to make sure that he got those extra two shots for a scene, to make it just right; that extra hour with the actors to make sure that the sun dropped just a little bit more; that extra day or two of Second Unit so we could have truck shots.

For instance, the opening shot. The amount of time it took for us to get that shot organized would boggle your mind. We filmed it in late July or early August; it was near the end [of shooting]. We were trying to schedule it earlier, but the problem was that we were again trying to find the perfect road, even though that was the first place we thought of. We needed a north-south road so we could look east-west and see the sunset, pretending it is sunrise, and it will look fantastic shot from up high: the little, tiny truck so you could put credits here [gestures] in the negative space. I am trying to remember if they did credits or not, I don't think they even bothered; it was too perfect, right? But that is the sort of thing you take [still] pictures of. The reason that our pan [panoramic] photo of that shot is not in there [gestures to a book of production photos] is that it is so big. We did that to show that you could hold that shot for a really, really long time to establish both where you are and how small they are in the whole grand scheme of things.



Hwy 22, south of Longview, AB

Once they decide "Okay, this is going to be the place; it will work," then you have got to get permission from the government to control the highway so we don't have any bogeys in the shot and that was [inaudible]. That is why I whispered it to you so you wouldn't get it on tape. Then the other thing we needed to do was to get one of our guys out there to do what we call a photo test. Say the sun is going to set at nine o'clock, we get to the camera location at seven with a battery operated clock and take the picture looking toward the mountains at 7:00, 7:15, 7:30, etc. and keep going until it is black. That helps the DP [director of photography] to decide when he wants to shoot this. Once we knew that he wanted to shoot during a particular period, we had to make sure that we had all the vehicles and that the parking was going to work. We talked to the neighbors so they knew what was going on...all three of them! [Laughter.]

Little things like that just take forever for some reason, and sometimes major challenges prove to be quite easy. When I read the script for the first time, I thought, “How in the world are we going to find a supermarket that we can afford to be in so she [the set designer] can dress it to look period?” Supermarkets nowadays, they ring in \$100,000 a day. How in the world are we going to get that? And within two days we had found two! One supermarket in Beiseker that was closed down, had all the shelf space, all the old registers, the old, if you remember way back when they had the spinners, instead of the belts, and wow! And then we went to Crossfield and they still had all the stock! When I got there it was two weeks before the closing and the move to their new store. I thought that was going to be the nightmare of the show, finding this supermarket and being able to afford it, and two of them fell right into our lap absolutely perfectly. Meanwhile, the scenes where you go “No problem, no problem, we’ll be able to do this,” those are the ones that take forever! That is a lot like life. Some things, some opportunities fall right in your lap; some you’ve got to work for, and they are rarely the ones you think of, you know.

In your answer, you made the transition from the mountain locations to the flatlands. When we talk about the flatland locations, we often use the word “gritty.”

Yes, what we found very early, like in the first three days of our scouting, is to avoid the highways. It made a lot of sense given that the way that rural North America was built was first with agriculture and when you had agriculture, then you had railroads. We wound up focusing on rail towns, off the highway, because all of these rail towns basically have been “on pause” for development since World War II, which is roughly when the rail stopped being a primary source of transportation. After the war, the defense factories needed to make something else. So instead of building tanks, they produced cars. Then highways started getting built. The towns that were on the highways have moved on, but the towns that do not have highways, for example Blackie⁵, have not changed since the '40s. They have not changed. Cowley⁶ has not changed. Fort Macleod, even though some might argue that is on the highway since it is on [secondary] Highway 3, I would say since it is not on the [major] Highway 2 corridor, it has not changed.



Blackie, AB

⁵ Thanksgiving Fight Bar.

⁶ Signal Streets, Aguirre Trailer.

Our alternative to Fort Macleod, Lacombe [railroad, off the highway] is exactly the way that it has been since the '50s. Lacombe still has the awnings over every building; it is mind-boggling. Lacombe did not work because there is nothing else around it. Fort Macleod had Claresholm⁷, it had Cowley, and we were able to find things around it. That is how we searched; we took a map of Alberta and highlighted every rail line, current and former. These were the areas where we scouted, and that approach paid off. We found all the period stuff we needed, boom, boom, boom; it was so much easier then. We had tons of stuff that is not in there [gestures to volumes of pre-production photos]. The stuff we did not use would be three times higher!

It really shows how smart Ang is. In his head, he was able to make Fort Macleod, parts of Cowley, parts of Carseland, Blackie, Crossfield, Rockyford, and Calgary all one town. As we did this we all were trying to figure out how it would look when it all came together. Well, it does work.

In Rockyford, a block down [from the Childress Dance Hall exterior, Riverton Post Office, JT's Bar, and phone booth locations], there was a period gas station right there. We could have used that. We could have saved a gazillion by shooting there instead of going to Carseland, but the gas station in Carseland⁸ was too perfect. That was the *hill to die on*. It's fantastic. Those are the ones where you say, "It's worth it to come here for this" and there were compromises for a lot of other places which we knew were too far to go, like that Texas gas station⁹. It looked great, but it was too far to go.

On the other hand, we still felt it was worth it driving out to Dorothy¹⁰. It was a long way, but it looks great. I asked, "What would you like, Ang?" He told me "I would like it very dusty." Okay, that's no problem; we just went out and scouted everything that was within two miles of Dorothy.



Dorothy, AB

⁷ Divorce Cabin and Lonesome Ranch.

⁸ This scene was cut.

⁹ This scene was cut.

¹⁰ Ennis's Flashback.

Describe your first meeting with Ang Lee.

Um, at the Palliser Hotel [Calgary], and it was quite funny. I was worried that this was a big-time Hollywood director: very demanding, very *I am the star of this show*. Our production manager Tom [Benz], told me, “Don’t worry Darryl; you would not spot him in a line-up, so unassuming, so unlike the stereotype. Everything is going to be fine.” When he came up to his room, he was just a regular person. I knew they were in the elevator, and I knew it was our floor. And I knew that it was him coming out, but I still looked in the elevator [laughter] to see if there was somebody else in there! Where is this big-time director? Where is he?

Reserved?

Yes, a very big thing in their culture. I would not say shy, I think reserved. I almost want to say shy because there were some times when he did not want to meet everybody, though he does like meeting people. I’ll say reserved.

Then there was the producer [executive producer Michael Hausman], what a contrast. You could tell the leadership just bounced off of him, right, “Hey, you guys allow New Yorkers [expertly accented] in here?” That was his big line to break the ice in all of the smaller communities and right there, they thought, “You are okay.” “Yea, we’re not from here; we’re from out of town. Just get that over with; I know, you know, okay.” And it was.

Walk us through the process of securing a site. Once you have found a location that works for you and works for the producer, what do you do?

Well, even before a site gets selected, you have to filter some things yourself. The big question you have to answer before you show it to anyone is can you physically get the cameras, the trucks carrying all of the equipment, the sheep; can you get all of that stuff there in an amount of time that will make it reasonable for you to film there?

Next, are there any things about the site that are going to cause trouble? As I am sure you witnessed in Carseland, trains go through there quite a fair bit, and so those are the things that are on your internal checklist.

Sometimes our scouts were showing things where that was not necessarily the case. And as beautiful as those places were, it would mean having an eleven-hour shooting day with your actors instead of an eight-hour shooting day with your actors. Yet, you know it is all about getting that ideal performance. So there are a lot of places that you must eliminate before you show them to anyone.

Once the site gets selected, outdoors and indoors are two very different scenarios. Outdoors is a little bit easier. Usually, when you present locations you already have a plan in your head of what you are hoping to do. For example, we’ll use Mud Lake which was one of the camping scenes¹¹ with the stream that flows right beside it. We were

¹¹ “Gonna snow” Lake.

driving down the road and said “You know what? This is a pretty spot here,” and we parked and walked out. We started wandering around and quickly we saw the spot. Inevitably, always, you gravitate to the spot. You usually see the spot right away. You wander over, and you find a position you like and begin feverishly taking pictures.



Mud Lake Burstall Pass parking area Peter Lougheed Provincial Park

Once you get an idea of where they are going to be, you put a plan into place. For instance, at Mud Lake you are close to the road, really close to the road, the dusty road. So as you see in the movie, we had 40 or 50 trees that we had spiked right beside the road overlapping each other a) to hide the road and b) so the dust hit them first. We were watering the trees and the road with a Hudson sprayer because all you need is to drive over it once on a dusty road for it to be dusty again. Then if you wet the trees, the dust will stay on the trees. That is how we were able to keep the dust down there. I made contact with Jim Dennis¹² and he and I did a little dance. I made a proposal to him saying, “This is our plan; this is what we would like to do,” demonstrating how we will not be in the public’s way, or that the public will have access to the area. Since we were filming at night, there was little-to-no issue there.

The issue at Mud Lake was with the road and there we needed to contact a different Provincial entity, the Department of Transportation, to limit the traffic when we were filming. So, even though we were shooting at night, we had people blocking the road and doing stop and go traffic on a two-lane dirt trail. We also had to arrange for a donation to the parks community. We had to pay for a ranger. We had to make a deposit for the parks in case we spilled gasoline and lit the whole thing on fire. We had to make sure that the park was insured. We had to inform the rangers beforehand of our presence. Then we were more or less ready to go.

You said interior locations posed different challenges.

Yes, for instance in the case of the Laundry Apartment, there was a tenant and she was nervous about the whole thing. We gave her everything she asked for being away from

¹² Special Events and Permit Coordinator, Alberta Community Development, Parks and Protected Areas.

that place. We gave her money and she was able to travel to British Columbia and Nova Scotia and see her kids.



Fort Macleod, AB

The owners thought it was great because they knew they were going to get taken care of. Every day we shot we paid them to close [a Radio Shack store located on the premises], guaranteed their revenues, and paid all of their employees.

We also needed to make a deal with the Department of Transportation there because Highway 3 is right there.

Did you stop traffic?

We stopped traffic because for that shot out the window, no one could park in that parking lot. They had to park somewhere else and that caused problems. *Inconvenience* is an understatement, but it was okay. It was money well spent because we got that shot. Once we had that shot, everyone could park there again, and everyone was fine.

But again, everyone was looked after; all the businesses on that street were looked after. "What's your average? You'll get taken care of." If they did not believe me, we had our economic development coordinator there walk over and talk to them "If you do not want them [the filmmakers] to take care of you, I will take care of you. And that is fine. I walk by and see you on the sidewalk every day. You are going to be taken care of." So we doubled our deposit with the town. Everyone knew that the town had some "just in case money" from us. That was a long process because we had to talk to everybody, and with some of them, you have to do a dance.

There were some surprises. We really didn't expect a restaurant owner to say that he was losing business because we had rented every hotel room in town, and he depended upon tourist traffic. Since there were no rooms left for tourists and because we all ate

food supplied by our caterer, he was out money. That was something we could not foresee, but we looked after him.

During this period, when people asked you, “What is this movie going to be about,” what did you say?

Initially, because I was intimidated and had, as I later found, an unjust fear of the movie, we said it was a modern western set in Wyoming in the '60s, following two men from their 20s into their 40s and the trials and tribulations of their lives. I did not lie. Now, it does not take a wizard to find out what the story is. After we wound up in Fort Macleod, the paper published a nasty op-ed piece by a local pastor. Because we used local people as extras in the fireworks scene, the preacher felt that they had been taken advantage of. My response to that is, “You guys were there. Did you see anything offensive? Absolutely anything? Then what is your fear; what is your problem?” From my perspective, we offered everyone a chance to come by and watch a fireworks show and they saw Heath Ledger confronting two bikers who were infringing on his family. Where is the problem?

After that, we realized we needed to say more. We continued to describe the film broadly, but we did say that there were some undertones that might offend some people. I offered to make arrangements if anyone found they were offended by what they saw being filmed.

Only one person of whom we required assistance turned us down because of content, and that was in Carseland. There is that wood place across from the gas station across the railroad tracks, that funky kind of junk place. They had a teepee that the designer wanted to have taken down. One of my guys had asked the owner, and he said, “I am a good Christian man and I do not believe in what you are doing. So I don't want to participate.”

I told Michael, who told Ang, and they dealt with it. Although the designer, as always, wanted to be able to give the director a full 360° palette, I said, “If we can get away with having a 350° palette and avoid that teepee 150 yards away, we're fine.” I went over and talked to the owner and said, “Listen, I understand and respect your belief and I hope you understand and respect my job. I am not going to bother you; you have made it perfectly clear that you are not going to bother us. I hope you have a wonderful day.” We shook hands and he said “Thank you very much for talking with me and respecting my opinion.”

That was it. We acknowledged his views and he respected the fact that we were trying to make a film. He was able to separate the content matter from the fact that my job was to set this up and make the movie. On that level I do respect the guy. His decision was wrong, but I am glad that he did not rally the troops and bring his air horn or do something else to ruin the shot. To me, that would have been the far greater evil.

In Rockyford, we told them there are some undertones to this that might be offensive to some people but, you know what, we'll give you the [scripts for the] scenes we are filming here and if you find anything offensive in them, tell me. Of course, that was when we were in Rockyford with the rodeo scenes, the post office scene, the phone booth,

and the T-Bird scene. They read all of that, and of course, found nothing wrong. We filmed the scenes, and they were happy. We raised \$6,000 for their Lions Club, much less paid the Town of Rockyford and everyone else.

We did have a couple of hiccups in Rockyford. We had to re-side three of the businesses because our painting technique did not work out the way it was supposed to.

Is the (Rockyford/Riverton) post office a real post office?



Rockyford, AB



"Riverton" Post Office

It was at some point. It was gutted, but it was a post office, and it was used as a storage facility by the local gas company. It is where they kept their hoses and tools. Obviously, we were able to put the phone booth wherever we wanted because it was our phone booth.

The Set Decoration department forgot to bring the phone booth to Rockyford the day before filming. The night before filming everyone wanted to know, "Where is the phone booth?" "I don't know. Where is the phone booth?" "Oh my God!" I drove back to Calgary in the middle of the night. I got the phone booth and strapped it in the truck, ratcheting it in there, and drove back up to Rockyford. [Laughter.] Thankfully, we were able to get it there in time.

There is a huge demand for a director's cut.

This is now basic strategy for movie companies. They put out as little as they can for the first one. The first DVD is literally a teaser. Look at *Star Wars*. There are all of these other DVDs that they know people are going to buy later.

That is what's happening with DVDs now. They will provide the absolute bare minimum on the release day and then Christmas or whatever, they'll come out with a Silver Screen edition. And then two or three years later, they'll come out with the director's edition, and they are going to keep doing this because that is what the market demands. When I saw the extras on the *Brokeback* DVD, I was disappointed as well. I am quite certain there is going to be more. This is now a part of the cultural fabric; it's not going to go away. And they know this is going to be a project that is going to go on forever.

I am quite certain that Criterion is going to get a license and you are going to see the Criterion Collection of *Brokeback Mountain*. I have been very tempted to phone Focus and phone Michael Hausman and offer to pay my own way to go down to do a commentary track. I will even pay for [assistant locations manager] Jay St. Louis to go do a commentary track just about the locations on the show. I would love to do that.

There is talk about tours and other *Brokeback* projects.

Yes, I would want to suggest that [prospective tour operators] talk to the private property owners first, for one reason, to offer better tours.

There are a few places that have already gone away like the Twist Thanksgiving Dinner site¹³ and the King Eddie,¹⁴ and Jack's parents' place is going to fall over at some point. This is too bad. When we did a tour with tour guides from Shanghai and Korea, who obviously think that the sun rises and sets with Ang Lee, they were stunned when they went to the supermarket in Crossfield to find that it was for lease. They could not believe it. They were blown away. They thought why is this not a museum? Literally. "This is crazy," they said, "In China the government would have bought this place and turned it into a museum." And then they went to the [Twist Ranch] house and when they saw that they could not see inside,¹⁵ they could not believe it.



"Twist" Ranch House

Making the *Brokeback* sites accessible will be a slow process but I think we will see progress. Every year come Stampede¹⁶ time there are going to be people who are going to ask for a *Brokeback* tour. There were this year, there will be next year, and

¹³ The Calgary house was condemned and destroyed for a road widening project.

¹⁴ Calgary's King Edward Hotel was the site of the Electra (Clown) Bar scene. It has been closed and boarded up.

¹⁵ The Twist Ranch near Beiseker, AB is also boarded up.

¹⁶ The Calgary Stampede is an annual festival celebrating western life and culture. It draws in excess of a million visitors to the city every July.

there will be the year after that. I am sure there are going to be tour companies that will do a *Brokeback* tour two or three times a year. But initially, that is going to be a slow process; someone is going to have to roll the dice first.

There are very few movies that connect to a specific niche market where people will go to the ends of the earth to follow it to its conclusion. *Lord of the Rings* is one. *Saving Private Ryan*, with its beach scene, is perhaps another. They have such remarkable impact that people say, "We have to go there."

[Steve Gin:] Being a resident of Alberta and running a gay and lesbian theater company,¹⁷ I am aware of the environment here and was happy to hear that you encountered so few problems. Are there any other stories you care to share? I know that in Fort Macleod when they first showed the film, people lined up for a block to see it.

People in Fort Macleod are really hopeful that this will create an opportunity. It has, it does, and it will. I believe that is how you make progress in those communities. They are going to accept you initially by your wallet. Money is an easy way to make that first inroad and to be accepted. That approach has worked in Vancouver, New York, San Francisco, and a lot of communities. We shop in your stores, we eat in your restaurants; if you accept us, we will support you. Then, you vote and that becomes a very important factor.

The *Brokeback* success story lies in the fact that a lot of people saw this film that you would not expect were going to see it. You can almost see a sociological pattern in the box office results from all over the US. It first opened in Los Angeles and New York and then Calgary. And then there was the event in Fort Macleod, which was a great triumph for the economic development coordinator there.

I think that in the grand scheme of things, as Roger Ebert's review pointed out, more than just the gay and lesbian community can identify with *Brokeback*. Anybody can recognize something that they regret passing up in their youth. "You know, I am going to wait until I am older before I do this." "I am going to work for a year before I get my masters, my doctorate, whatever," and you pass up that chance. "I wish I'd followed my heart and traveled to Europe that summer," but you never did. "I wish I had taken flying lessons," or "I wish I had tried to be a painter instead of being trapped in a cubicle." These are the sort of regrets that, just as at the very end of the movie when Ennis, having given advice to Alma, Jr., realizes that he did not follow that advice himself, are universal.

Additionally, although there are a lot of scenes in the movie with which the straight community might not connect right away, everyone feels judged at some point for something, anything; everyone does. The movie touches all people there.

When you chart how people saw this movie, *Brokeback* did not follow the expected pattern. In fact, in L.A. and New York it broke records for the amount of money generated, given the number of theatre seats available. Of course, for films such as

¹⁷ Steve Gin is the founder of Calgary's gay and lesbian theatre company, Teatro Berdache.

Pirates of the Caribbean they use, like, 3,000 theaters. For *Brokeback* they had to keep it small, but they were sold out everywhere. That started the talk, "Damn, it was sold out; we'll have to go back next weekend," and that created demand. Then the reviews came out and people were saying, "Wow, this is a good movie," and then it built and built.

When it opened in the red states, women saw this movie and identified it as a love story. They saw it in droves. Had *Brokeback* stayed in select theatres, this would never have happened. They [the distributors] were very smart.

You are a young man, but it has undoubtedly occurred to you that this might be the film that defines your career.

I would echo what our script supervisor [Karen Bedard] said in the *Swerve* magazine article.¹⁸ It is somewhat depressing knowing that you have already climbed to the top of the mountain. You've got this excellent film experience and everyone acknowledges the film's importance. It will be very difficult to top.

The movie we are now doing, of course we will do our best, but odds are, it won't do as well as *Brokeback*. But we are still aiming for the stars.

I know what you mean. Ten years from now I do not want to be saying "Life stopped in 2004. I remember when..." I want to be able to refer to things in the future, to anticipate.

It is a sad thing to realize that Ang is not going to be back. There is a chance that Michael might be back. He has a place in Montana and works on a number of different projects throughout North America, but when Ang is finished with a project, he likes to move on to different things. He likes to go from genre, to genre, to genre. The odds of him coming back here are very, very slim and it makes me sad.

But at least I got the opportunity. I suppose it is one of those things like on Oscar night when we were just devastated. You'd thought that you were going to be able to tell the whole world, "I worked on the movie that won Best Picture." Then you say, "Well, that is a nice problem to have. I worked on a fantastic movie that got nominated, that won a bunch of other awards, but it did not win Best Picture." What a shame, another Oscar-worthy show; bummer! [Laughter] In the moment you are crushed, but it is a nice problem to have.

Speaking of opportunities, we treasure this time. Thank you very much for making this possible.

¹⁸ Jacquie Moore, "The Real *Brokeback Mountain*," *Swerve Calgary Herald*, 3 Mar. 2006: 18-28.