

**[Pierre Tremblay, *Brokeback Mountain*'s first assistant director, was among a very select group of expert filmmakers who collaborated during the summer of 2004, believing that they were making a "limited-interest" "specialty" film. How very wrong they were!**

**Tremblay generously agreed to share some of his recollections from that special time with Lauren Gurney and Jim Bond.]**

## **Interview with Pierre Tremblay**

July 21, 2007

### **Tell us something about your background.**

Well, I did a little bit of acting in high school, and small school productions at the University of Alberta, but I actually found my way into filmmaking through news.

I'd intended to pursue a career in news. Being bilingual and having a degree in political science, I gravitated towards journalism where I thought I'd be able to make a contribution.

Once I got into journalism I realized that it was more of a business than I had initially realized. The training I was receiving was really about maximizing audience ratings. I became somewhat cynical about it. At the same time, and at the same school, we had a production department; it was headed by a man who had graduated from USC [University of Southern California] Film school and was well connected in the industry. He ended up corrupting me and pulling me away from journalism and towards production. [Laughter]



**Pierre Tremblay**

Eventually I slid into production. Right out of school I started as a production assistant, which is the bottom rung on the ladder, an entry level position, and I worked my way up to assistant director over the course of a couple of years.

### **Share with us some of the other projects you have been involved in.**

There have been many features and TV commercials, some of them well known, some not known at all. There was a small Canadian TV show, *Jake and the Kid*, which was significant to me only because it was my first long-format job away from commercials, documentaries, and news. There I really got to see how a professional set works. I worked very hard on that show for very little money, but it was a great training ground.

Eventually I moved to Calgary and became a second assistant director. I worked on *Rat Race*, which was another big step for me. It was a massive American feature film. I'd not worked on a film of this scale before, so it was a big step for me, a huge step, to see how a production of that size worked.

There were also many television movies; we make a lot of them in Canada for the major networks. I've worked for all of them at one time or another. They involve short, intense assignments, which are excellent ways of learning the craft because you are in a constantly changing environment. The situations—every one is unique—force you to figure out ways to make things work. That is the great thing about my job, but it is also the bad thing about it—you must constantly think about how you're going to accomplish what you must achieve.

I have also done a number of TV movies. I did one ABC miniseries, *DreamKeeper*, as a second assistant director, which aired over the course of two nights in 2003. It was notable for me because it was among the most difficult shows I have ever worked on. We had to tell native stories set all over North America. The logistics were demanding. We had to change tribes, actors, locations; we had different everything—art departments, for example—for each tribe.



Scene from the 2003 Miniseries *DreamKeeper*

In the typical film, the start-up period tends to be quite difficult because you are figuring how everything is going to be done and how much time you are going to take, but eventually, after the first week or two, you are rolling and you have everything resolved. But with *DreamKeeper*, once we would get settled, we had to completely change everything. We had to start up all over, again and again. We had to move across the province together. In fact, still, whenever people who worked on *DreamKeeper* get together, we act like veterans who fought in a war together. We invariably end up telling stories about how difficult it all was!

Then there was *Brokeback Mountain*. That is undoubtedly the highlight of all of the projects I've worked on, and possibly of all of the projects that I will ever work on.

### **How did you learn that *Brokeback Mountain* was going to be made in Alberta?**

From Tom Benz; he was the production manager. I had just returned from Austria, where I had been working on a production. As soon as I arrived there was a message from Tom saying he wanted to arrange an interview. I did not completely understand the message, so I called him. He explained the situation: he wanted to bring somebody in to be able to work with Michael Hausman and Ang Lee so that some of their knowledge and expertise would remain in the province after the filming was completed. That would benefit the film industry in Canada on another level, apart from the economic advantages and the obvious notoriety associated with

having the film made in Alberta. I was interested, but there were other candidates for the position as well.

So we arranged an interview. I was slightly jet lagged when I showed up. I'd read the script, which was phenomenal. That was when I realized what I could be in for. The opportunity I was being presented was incredible. I had done some other research. Of course, I knew of Ang Lee, but I learned more about Michael Hausman, Scott Ferguson [co-producer, and unit production manager], and Diana Ossana. I immediately recognized the caliber, significance, and quality of the project before me.



***"I immediately recognized the caliber, significance, and quality of the project before me."***

**Rodrigo Prieto, Michael Hausman, and Ang Lee Morley, AB**

The interview itself was very interesting. It's difficult to describe. Michael Hausman conducted the interview and it was very casual. Tom Benz and Scott Ferguson were there. Ang Lee stopped in to meet me; he was there for only a couple of minutes. They made me feel at ease right away as they told me about the project. They were very clear about what they planned on doing.

I think the reason that I got the job was that when they asked me if I had any questions, I asked if they had an idea of what they wanted me to do on the show. And they were not very clear about that, so they asked me what I wanted to get from the show. I told them I did not want to be what is known in the industry as a "match," that is, somebody that, under union rules, they have to hire locally because they are bringing in an outside person. I didn't want to simply show up, put in the time, leave, and pick up a paycheck. I genuinely wanted to make a contribution. I did not want to end up a match, which has happened on other shows with other assistant directors I know.

The interview did not last very long, maybe 20 minutes, and I went home and I told my wife, who was, of course, very interested. I explained that they were going to take a couple of days and that there were other candidates. Tom had told me that they were planning to discuss it among themselves and then they had to vet their selection through the hierarchy. So I told her, “We’re going to forget it ever happened.” Then, about 20 minutes later I got a call from Tom Benz, and he said, “They want you.”



***“They want you.”***  
**Unit Production Manager Tom Benz**

I was overjoyed; an extremely happy day!

### **And then?**

It was not very long; I think it was two weeks. That just gave me enough time to become a little more familiar with the script and the cast, and figure out who was going to be involved. You never really know when you go into these types of projects what your role will be. You really can’t know unless you have worked with everyone before. I did not know Michael Hausman, Ang Lee, Scott Ferguson, or Michael Costigan [executive producer] at all, and, since they were my direct supervisors, I didn’t know what I was in for. It was “to be determined.”

I showed up on my first day and it was then that I realized I was going to be very much involved in the production. I was handed the script, and the schedule, by Michael Hausman and was told to do the breakdown, which is essentially taking the script and putting it into its tiniest components—for instance, specifying the trucks that are to be used—in a program called Movie Magic, which is a computer program that tracks all of that information regardless of where you put them in the schedule, and it generates reports that go to individual departments. Then, in my example, there are meetings to determine exactly what kind of trucks, to see what the art department can offer, discuss the options, and find out what the director expects. There are *lots*

of meetings: truck meetings, art meetings, stunt meetings, special effects meetings, meetings within every department. Oftentimes more than one department is involved.



***"Hell yes, we've been to Mexico!"***  
**Brokeback Cast and Crew Photo Juarez Alley Calgary, AB**

I was given a big part in organizing those meetings and making sure that everyone got their time to raise and address issues. So I was very pleased that from the get-go I was making a contribution. I certainly wanted the education as well, which was also great, because Michael Hausman made certain that I was in his office for all of the high-level meetings with the executives, actors, and agents. All of the high-level meetings. I was invited to be a part of, not to contribute to, but to be there and learn from a master of film how decisions were made. And I appreciated it, and I deeply appreciate it to this day. What I learned there has had a profound influence on the way I do my job today.

**Both Lee and Hausman have had praise for the professional expertise and craftsmanship they encountered in Alberta.**

Michael Hausman is an instructor at Columbia, and I came to realize that he is a natural-born teacher. When you meet someone who is a natural teacher, you instantly recognize that they love to connect and share with young people. That's the way he is. He volunteered to put on a master class, in fact he "coerced" Ang, and Tom, Scott, and Diana, to come up with clips from their projects. They brought them to a special seminar and explained their importance, which was unprecedented.

Of course we have made many other films here, but nobody has ever gone to the trouble of putting on that kind of educational presentation for the film community here. It was incredibly generous and so very typical of his approach to filmmaking. So it was not just us trying to please him. He made a point of giving something back to the community. Very special.

**With whom did you work most closely?**

As an assistant director you have to work with everyone; that is your job. But my direct supervisor was Michael Hausman. Even though technically the production manager would be my immediate supervisor, there was never any question as to who ran that show. *Michael Hausman ran that show.* And because of that, everything, every decision, went through him. Of course, creative decisions were made by Ang Lee, and script decisions by Diana Ossana, but every decision went through Michael Hausman, and the duties I had, everything I did, came from him.

He made it very easy; he was very encouraging and he was very generous in letting me do my job. He could have quite easily made unilateral decisions regarding just about everything, but he did not. He always included the production team in those decisions. He would gather us together and ask our opinions on anything that came up, and it gave us a good feeling to be able to contribute. He certainly didn't have to run things that way, but he did.



*“Michael Hausman ran that show.”*

**Hausman and Lee Divorce Courtroom Fort Macleod, AB**

## Can you capsulize what you learned from working with Michael Hausman?

I think the most important lesson I learned from Michael Hausman is that our position is basically one of management. A film is a hard thing to manage; it is, at best, an artistic endeavor. Especially *Brokeback Mountain*, which is one of the purest artistic endeavors I have ever been a part of. Management does not just mean the schedule, or the paperwork, or being a good communicator, or doing all of the basic things properly, or being thorough. The most important thing about management is that you are working with people—producers, crew, cast, artists—and that you need to hire people to do their best. People look to leaders to be examples. If people respect who they are working for, they will give their best.

Michael Hausman opened my eyes. Rather than adopting authoritative style, he showed me a better way to manage—by inspiration. That is the best way to manage. If people are inspired, they will give you their best. I believe to this day that you can actually see the difference on the screen. I certainly know that there are many films that are not run that way, but I think that the ones that are made by inspiring the cast and crew have a certain special quality, because people give that extra bit.

I've known and worked with many of the (*Brokeback*) crew members for years. Eventually any crew will start to complain, after working for many days, lots of long hours, God knows where, in awful weather conditions. None of that necessarily shows up on the screen, but it invariably happens. It's only natural for crews to grow weary and complain. In *Brokeback Mountain* nobody complained.



***"In Brokeback Mountain nobody complained."***  
**Michael Hausman with Heath Ledger Sheep Staging Morley, AB**

We have done many westerns here, all sorts of westerns, but in this case there was a definite realization that we were doing something important. There was a sense that we were not part of some money-making machine. We were not here for that. In fact, many of us did not expect that the movie would make much money; we thought we were making a contribution to film. As

pretentious as it may sound, we truly believed that we were doing something artistically important. So there was something more in our thoughts than just doing our jobs. Michael Hausman made us feel like we were doing something important. He was the best kind of leader. That's what I learned. Yes, I learned about leadership.

### **Ang Lee?**

Because Michael Hausman was the producer he was, Ang Lee left the non-artistic matters to him. Of course, Michael always consulted with Ang, but Ang did not have to worry about production issues because Michael took care of them. And Michael always consulted with others—Diana Ossana, Tom Benz, and so forth—in making those decisions. He held meetings with everyone; everyone was part of the effort.

That way, Ang Lee was able to concentrate on performance, story, visuals—all of the things a director should do. He didn't get caught up on production, technical, and budgetary things that tend to be distracting.

Ang Lee was really very firm about what he wanted. He was always quite clear about his expectations, then he let Michael Hausman take the reins as the guy out front. Michael "led the charge." Because Ang was so clear about what he wanted, I learned that if you are doing your job as an assistant director, the director won't be distracted. If you do your best as an assistant director, a good director will give you his best. Ang Lee is the standard of what a good director should be.



***"Ang Lee was really very firm about what he wanted."  
Childress Dance Hall Calgary, AB***

I read that Ang Lee said in many films he had to be a director who pulled people along, but in making *Brokeback Mountain* he felt as if he was being pushed along by the crew. There is some truth to that. That is ultimately what you want to happen. It speaks to him as a person,

and as a professional, that we wanted to do that for him; that we felt the desire to support him, and his creative spirit, in every way.

### **Scott Ferguson?**

Again, it was very educational to work with him. I'll tell you a story. When he first handed me the schedule and started to talk about it, I asked him questions. He did not have a copy of the schedule in front of him. I asked questions about days I thought might be too light, or too heavy, or where travel between locations might pose problems. It was amazing; he was discussing it without anything in front of him. He had absolute knowledge of the material, a detailed document some 20 pages long covering some 50 days of shooting, hundreds of scenes, all across the province; it was all in his head. And he knew it all cold.

And scheduling was just one of Scott Ferguson's enormous responsibilities. He worked with Michael Hausman on the budget. Primarily the budget and negotiating with the unions. He also negotiated with the park authorities to get permission to bring domestic sheep into the parks, which is completely illegal for good reason. I don't know if you are aware of this but domestic sheep carry diseases that kill Rocky Mountain sheep, and there were many long negotiations over that issue. All of that was Scott's responsibility, along with Murray Ord, who is a local producer. It was a challenge to get that access.

Scott's ability to manage and retain huge amounts of detailed information, and yet be an incredibly personable guy, taught me that a great production manager or assistant director should have complete knowledge of the show. Scott had complete knowledge of the show. Michael Hausman had complete confidence in him, as he should. Scott Ferguson is among the most capable production managers I have ever encountered.

### **Diana Ossana?**

First of all, she is a joy to work with. *Brokeback Mountain* was not the first opportunity I had to work with her; I had met her on a small miniseries that they made here, *Johnson County War* [2002]. I had a smaller role in that; I just helped with second unit.

Diana Ossana was so great in keeping us focused on the story. I hope that we didn't need too much reminding, but that was her role. Whenever there was a change that needed to be made it was done very smoothly and, of course, the craftsmanship was unparalleled. I say that not only from a creative perspective—she is a superlative writer— but also from a production standpoint. Pages came out in an efficient manner; she has a good knowledge, an excellent knowledge, of production.

Oftentimes there are problems in production. You do not have access to a certain location, or certain actors are not available; it happens. Some writers do not understand the production implications of what they are writing. They will respond to a problem by writing something that makes a situation even worse. But Diana is not like that. She has an excellent production background so she will rewrite a scene that both makes the story better and also helps production. We admire her quite a bit around here. She is one of our favorite people; I hope that she comes back.



*"She is a joy to work with."*  
Diana Ossana at Cassie's Bar Fort Macleod, AB

### **Rodrigo Prieto?**

He's one of the finest people I have ever worked with: a gentleman, incredibly talented, soft-spoken, down to earth, approachable. You won't find anyone who will have anything other than the highest praise for him as a person or as a cinematographer. What else can I say?

You know the scene in the Mexican Alley, which we teased him about—he was happy to do it! To have that lack of ego and be willing to go to that extent to make a contribution to the film, recognizing that he had already made a massive contribution to the film, it is astounding. He is a remarkable person in every way. I wish he would come back to Alberta.

### **His technical knowledge is said to be extensive.**

You are right. To his credit, Rodrigo Prieto has publicly acknowledged the beauty of the Alberta locations, but he did not give himself nearly enough credit for the difficult job he had to do. There were distinctive technical things about that film. So much of it was shot outdoors, meaning that there were different kinds of challenges involved than there are in a film which is mostly made inside the studio. And there are issues with natural light.

Natural light can be a very difficult thing for a director of photography to deal with, especially in the summer in Alberta. You may have noticed how quickly the weather can change here. Of course, you could be shooting a scene for a day, or two days, but you must match the sky light for a scene which will be on the screen for only a minute or two. So that becomes the director

of photography's issue. The sun will be passing through the sky, and I remember specifically that we often encountered clouds. Inconsistent clouds.

Consistent clouds can be fine, because they alleviate the problem of varying brightness and shadows as the sun passes among the clouds. But, unfortunately, we did not have those. The clouds would pass in front of the sun, and I remember specifically many times at the Goat Creek campsite [Campsite #2] when we had to wait for clouds to shoot.



***“A gentleman, incredibly talented, soft-spoken, down to earth, approachable.”***  
**Prieto with Lee at Campsite #2 Spray Valley Provincial Park AB**

Sometimes we would even do two versions, one in the clouds and one in the sun. Then we'd wait to see which version we had to match! That was very hard on the actors because they had to sustain their performances under both situations. And, at one point, we were literally running between two different parts of a scene, one we had established in clouds, the other we had shot without clouds in sunlight. Fortunately, at that point we were shooting with hand-held cameras, so when the sun came out we would move to the sunny area, and when it was in the clouds we would rush back to the other area. It was the only way to move forward with our day. This kind of thing is very tricky for the director of photography, the actors, and the director. They all know what they were doing.

Of course, clouds were not Rodrigo's only challenge. When we did the Mexican Alley scene, which was very elaborate and extensively lit, he was able to deal with the complexities of that as well!

### **[Script supervisor] Karen Bedard?**

I love her; she is fantastic. Script supervisor—that is a job for which there will never be any kind of Academy Award, and there absolutely should be one. A great script supervisor, or continuity person, will save your keister several times in any movie, because directors are not necessarily thinking about continuity in a movie.

But a great script supervisor will also point out continuity issues in story or performance, and Karen is at that level; she is one of the top script supervisors. Directors will trust her to tell them when scenes might have some kind of incongruity. I am not referring to just the physical elements, which of course they will point out as well, but also how actors are playing a story line.

I've known Karen for many years, and she is incredibly respected by all of the directors for whom she works, and she has worked with many of them because they come from all over the world to shoot here. She is a consummate pro.

### **Commentators have related the clothing patterns and colors to themes in the story. Yet there is nothing in the script itself about the clothing.**

The people who were involved in that decision were Marit Allen [costume designer] and Ang Lee. Ang would probably inform the creative people, but they would be the only people, other than the actors, of course, who would know why they are wearing those colors.

I wouldn't assume that those are all conscious choices. It could be a case of people infusing things into the film that are not there, though that does not mean that it did not happen. This issue arises in all artistic criticism. I was a student of film criticism early in my career, until I realized that sometimes people put too much faith in the filmmaker, crediting him with incredibly deep decisions when really, much of the time, what appears in the film is simply what looks best. It may not have to do with the story, just that it looks good.



***Brokeback* Costume Designer Marit Allen  
Childress Rodeo Rockyford, AB**

That having been said, a director chooses a color palette for the scenes in a film. The director, the director of photography, the production designer, and the costume designer all engage in very serious discussions and decisions about colors. For instance, Mexico obviously required a different color palette than, say, the rodeo or the dance hall sequences. They are very specific about choosing those colors, and, because *Brokeback Mountain* is a movie of many individual frames, they are very conscious of the ways in which colors are used in those frames. You can never know with certainty, but Ang Lee is a real artist. He may have gone that deep, but I never heard any discussion about that.

### The Opening Shot?

We did a lot of planning for the opening shot of the cattle truck, not knowing exactly what it eventually was going to be like. As it happened, we did the opening after we were done with everything else. Just a small crew—Ang Lee, Peter Wunstorf [second unit director of photography], and myself.

It was possibly my favorite day on a set, ever. [Wistfully] We struck out through the mountains, and we had doubles riding on ridges. We did the cattle truck on the highway near the end of that day.



***"It was possibly my favorite day on a set, ever."***  
**Opening Shot near Longview, AB**

*Brokeback Mountain* was the kind of film where every frame was a painting. During post-production they quite literally painted with visual elements, such as mountains and skies. We were gathering those elements on film that day. I think Peter and I got most of what [Ang Lee] needed, but there is always more. Once you get into the [post-production editing] suite you see things like, "It would be great to have a mountain in this corner."

There was one scene in particular that did not make it into the final film, although we talked about it considerably. It was shot inside the cab of the truck. We had a montage of all the pieces of the truck cab. We had the whole inside of the cab decked out, you know, with the tchotchkes and all that stuff. There was the ashtray on the dashboard, and we went to great

trouble to find a bobble hula dancer from the 1960s. We had to have that made! And Peter Wunstorf and I went inside there and shot all the pieces to put this thing [the montage] together. When I saw the film I was a bit disappointed because I was looking forward to seeing what we had done, and there, in its place, was this big truck.

I was waiting, and waiting, and waiting, and then I realized that this was a much more organic way to get into the film, because they did not do the classic credit sequence at the beginning. You get into the story without bothering to do the big, slow introduction to the environment. Instead, Ang Lee opted for the wide vista which was, of course, a much better choice than to begin inside of a truck cab. But I was kind of disappointed not to see my hula dancer on the dashboard!

### **Where is it?**

I'll bet Michael Hausman has it! [Laughter]

### **The [deleted] Signal Gas Station scene?**

That [Carseland, AB] was a great place to shoot because it was so quiet except for the occasional train that goes by. When you go to these small conservative towns, everybody knows your business, and you are never sure how they are going to react. I was consistently surprised at how accommodating everybody was, even when they knew our story.



***“When you go to these small conservative towns, everybody knows your business.”***  
**Signal Gas Station (deleted scene) Carseland, AB**

This is a good example of a small Alberta town letting us change their town around for our purposes.

## Sheep Procession #1 and the Creek Crossing?

Yea, that is all real. Sheep are not crazy about running water, let me tell you that. The crossing took a bit of coaxing.

It was the wranglers who told us that to get them to cross the creek Jake should carry one of the sheep in his arms and the others would follow. It worked. What they say about sheep is true. Sheep are sheep; they follow other sheep.



*"Sheep are not crazy about running water, let me tell you that."*  
Creek Crossing Canyon Creek, AB

## The Mule Hill?

This was shot near Goat Creek with a photo double. There was a lot of background or sky replacement in the film. Much of what I did during that time was going with Peter Wunstorf, a photo double, and the horses, and we would shoot a little part of the story in whatever area we were in.

## Who does the sky changes?

That is done by the visual effects company. In the editing process you make what we call a "rough cut," which is essentially everything in the film together in the sequence you want. After that, you do the effects. There are various levels of effects. There are the simple dissolves, wipes, and other transitions. Then there are the more complicated visual effects; sky replacement is one of those.

Once the film has been edited, the director goes through and says, “I want to change the sky in this shot and the lighting in that shot,” and the visual effects people endeavor to achieve that. Where an image, such as a sky, is required, the director goes through the library material and picks out what he wants. Hopefully, it is there. Sometimes it is not, and you have to send somebody out to get a still photo. The final production ends up looking smooth, but the process is not always smooth!



*“There are various levels of effects.”*  
Hailstorm at Campsite #2 Spray Valley Provincial Park AB

### **The Mosses?**

This is near Goat Creek also. I remember Ang saying that this was a “magical spot.” It is such a beautiful area and it did not look like a lot of the other places where we were shooting.

This is actually a very sensitive area that they were good enough to let us shoot in. If you go to where the creek is, near the log bridge—is that still there? [Yes] OK, if you are standing there it is to your right, in sort of a forest that divides the road from the actual campsite. If you go into that forest, you have to go deep into it, and you find springy moss. It is like walking on sponges. You will know by the moss. It is very dense in there and there are a lot of little trails.



*"A magical spot."*  
Mosses Spray Valley Provincial Park AB

### The Elk?

That was tricky; we had to hit an elk and get it to fall down the right way. That is incredibly difficult, since they are wild animals. We did that several times.



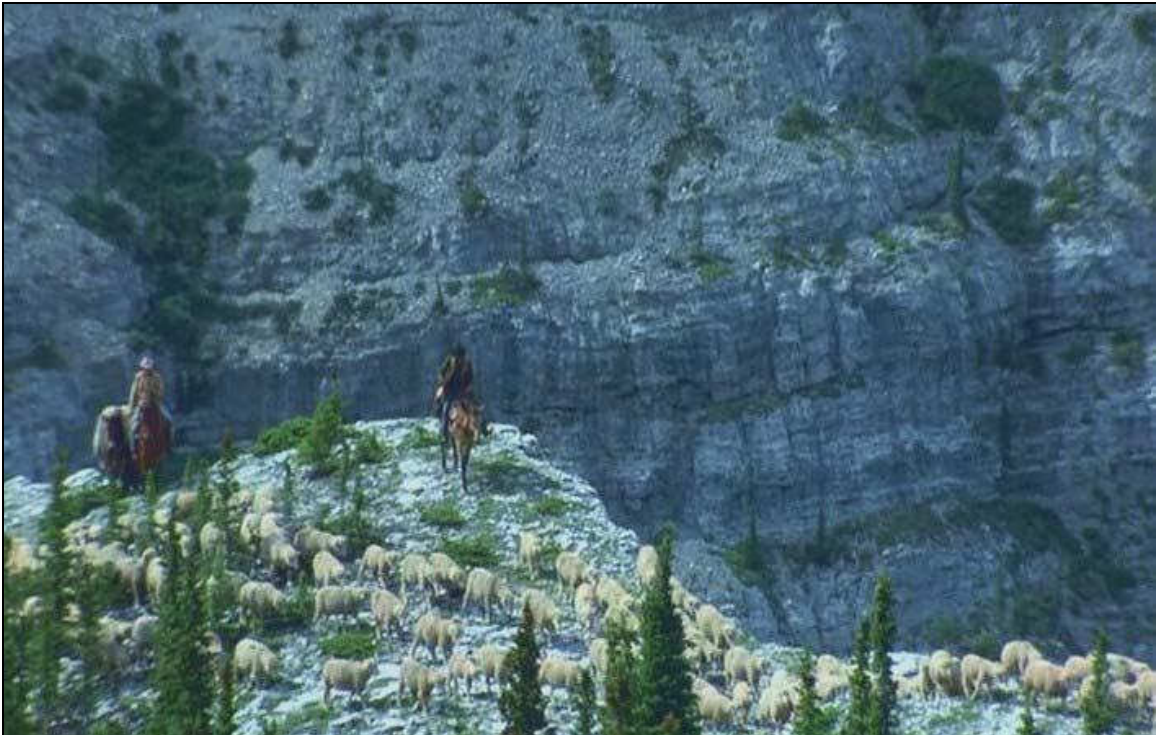
*"That was tricky."*  
The Elk Jarrett Elk Farm Caroline, AB

We did that at the Jarrett Elk Farm, near Caroline, Alberta. This is a beautiful area.

Kirk Jarrett was our stunt coordinator; the farm belongs to his parents. They are incredibly kind people.

### **Sheep Procession #2 (cliff's edge)?**

Those sheep were really there. Peter Wunstorf and I stayed up on Moose after they had finished shooting that day and we shot as long as we could. We stayed until they literally kicked us off of the mountain.



***"We stayed until they literally kicked us off of the mountain."  
Sheep Procession #2 Moose Mountain AB***

### **Moose Mountain?**

Because people are impressed by the rodeo, horses, and bears, we work with animals all of the time for western shows. But the biggest thing we did with animals in *Brokeback Mountain* was getting those sheep up on Moose Mountain.

This was the longest running logistical challenge we faced. First, we had to obtain authorization to get domestic sheep in the Rocky Mountains. That was a gigantic thing that they let us do there. Because there are only a few places in the Rocky Mountains that one, wild sheep don't frequent, and two, have some access. You see, at first they scouted for mountain locations by helicopter and looked at places that had no roads! Eventually they found Moose Mountain. At least Moose Mountain has that goat track [crude road] that goes up there.



**Jake Gyllenhaal Double Moose Mountain AB**

So then we had somewhere in the vicinity of 900 sheep to get up there. That was two 18-wheeler tractors full. They had to stop at the bottom of the trail and drive the sheep up in smaller trucks. No one else could do anything while they were doing all of this. Then they had to set up pens near the top of the mountain for the sheep.

Moose is an environmentally sensitive area. There was concern that the sheep droppings might carry seeds of invasive plant species. Among the conditions for being able to take the sheep up there was that the sheep feed did not contain any seeds. So T.J. Bews [chief wrangler] arranged this beforehand, of course, back timing for when we were going to shoot, making certain that the sheep were getting this special kind of feed.

On top of all of that, the sheep pens had to be lined with tarps which kept the droppings. Also, they had to do head counts every time they removed or returned sheep to the pens, and several other times during the day. If, at any point, there was a single missing sheep, we would be shut down until we found our "lost lamb." Completely shut down, which fortunately never happened, thanks to T.J. Bews and the wranglers we had. They did a phenomenal job.

**The "dog on Moose Mountain" shot appears to be a composite. The mountains in the background are reversed. There are other composite shots in the film, as well.**

There are many reasons why you can't count on those mountains being where you see them in the film. Ang is a fan of effects, effects which you do not realize are effects. Nowadays, effects are used in conspicuous ways, but Ang uses effects in such a way that you're not even aware that they are there. He uses them to tell a story.

It is all part of the art of composition. The director paints a picture, in this case composing the frame spatially. So if Ang wants to put a mountain there, you can cut it out and put it there. It is all done digitally. This is simple stuff. With computers today you can do entire sequences using animation. This is the simplest kind of stuff, but it can be the most effective because it seems real.

Ang had specific visual effects requirements dealing with mountains, roads, rivers, vistas—the large shots. *Brokeback* is not a film of moving cameras. It is a still film. Which means every frame must be perfect. Which also means that sometimes he had to “move mountains.”



**Sheep Staging Area**



**Staging Area plus “Brokeback”**

*“Sometimes he had to ‘move mountains’.”*

Everyone got a package [listing] of the visual effects he required. One of my jobs was to split away as a second unit, with the second unit director of photography and the B camera operator. We would drive down Highway 40 and Spray Lakes Road in the Kananaskis. We had discovered those places before and Ang had said, “OK, I want that mountain in this light and that mountain in this light,” and we would go back there and note the time of day and where the light was, so he ended up with what we hoped was a library of visual effects that he could use for post-production.

### **The Toboggan scene?**

That was done at the Fortress Ski Area. It is closed now; the new owner is trying to get it re-opened. It needs a lot of upgrading. But we shot many scenes at Fortress because the mountains are close and we had good access.

The first thing we shot there was the tobogganing, what you call “sledding.” Actually, the tobogganing site is not far from the parking lot. It is sort of above the parking lot. You pull into the main parking lot area. You go to the farthest corner from where you walk in and you keep on walking. It should be on your left. It is pretty steep actually, but it is great for tobogganing.

As you may know, we had to change the story. After Ennis and Alma get married, the script called for a little “happy times” scene of them doing “doughnuts” in the truck in the snow. But there was no snow in the towns we were going to be in. So we ran all of these tests, using all kinds of polymers, ice crystals, everything. Those poor special effects guys tried every trick well. So they could think of to make the truck do doughnuts, and, of course, it was a period truck which made it even harder because it was so heavy. We had done a bunch of tests but nothing worked we were standing around, we’d just sort of finished the last “kick at the cat” attempt at special effects, and Ang was saying, “I just need something for them to do that shows

that they are happy and having fun, something a little dangerous, something showing the good times.” I was a little shy, and I leaned over to Michael Hausman and said, “What about tobogganing?” and he looked back at me and I said “sledding.” Michael said, “What about sledding?” and Ang looked at him and said, “That might work.” Ang rarely answers right away; he likes to think about things. So we finished our meeting. I knew Diana liked the idea. A couple of days later, she wrote the scene. So that was my little contribution to the story there.



*“What about tobogganing?”*  
**Toboggan Scene Fortress Ski Area AB**

I’ll never forget it; it was an eventful day because we were still prepping the show. We wanted to shoot the tobogganing while we had the snow. Ang wanted them to tumble out of the sled at the end. They did. At the end, they tumble out of the sled a bit. On one of the takes, Heath, who is a big guy, landed on Michelle, who is quite small, and twisted her knee, and it hurt a lot. In fact, they had to take her to Canmore to the hospital there. Heath felt terrible about it and he insisted on going with her, so he got into the ambulance and held her hand. I think they bonded over that injury.

To Michelle Williams’ great credit, she never let the fact that she was recovering from the injury and in such pain afterwards, weeks afterwards, affect her performance. We were worried about that, thinking about pushing [delaying] her scenes in the schedule; it would’ve been a huge readjustment for us. To her great credit, she said it was not necessary.

For the record, I want to say that all of the cast were superb professionals. They did not receive the “star treatment” on this show. Everybody was working in conditions that were much lower than those they were accustomed to in big budget films. And yet, nobody complained. They were superlative.

## **The Rodeos?**

Ang wanted a real rodeo so we set up a few events. It is easy to find cowboys around here. [Laughter] We just called ‘em in and brought in some extras. The rodeo shooting was almost a

documentary kind of thing until we got to the barrel racing. There we had to do specific shots to show Lureen at various angles. And, of course, there was the bull riding. There was also quite a bit of rodeo stuff that did not make the final film. We had steer wrestling and calf roping, as well.



*"It is easy to find cowboys around here."*  
Childress Rodeo Rockyford, AB

We had a distinct advantage because we are in Calgary and we do a lot of westerns. All I have to do is to go to T.J. Bews and Kirk [Jarrett, stunt coordinator] and have a meeting for an hour and we come up with suggestions, and we can go directly from there. Even though Ang Lee and Michael Hausman were impressed by how smoothly the rodeo scenes went, for us, this is simple stuff.

### **You mentioned T.J. Bews.**

Yes. His whole family is intertwined in the history of western filmmaking in Alberta. They are really a classic family; I have worked with them all. T.J. did most of the animal work on this film, including a lot of stuff you don't see. You know, all of those sheep on the screen do not come from one place. T.J. had to broker deals with the Hutterite farmers because they are the main suppliers of sheep in the province. He had to get them to trust him, essentially with their livelihood; there is a whole story behind that.



*"For us, this is simple stuff."*  
**Chief Wrangler T.J. Bews with Lureen's Horse**

Because we do a lot of westerns, most of this stuff is pretty well established—horses, cattle, and rodeo acts. But it was no piece of cake to get 900 sheep up a mountain, and T.J. Bews deserves a lot of credit for that.

The [Electra] and [Childress] rodeos were both shot in the same ring. One night and one day, of course, using different angles.

### **You actually shot it at night?**

Yes. I wish they would find a way around it, but you cannot fake night! In those old spaghetti westerns where they shot "day for night," it *looks* like "day for night." So it has to be the real thing.

That means that during summertime in Alberta you have about seven hours of darkness to get it right. When the sun comes up over the horizon, you're "wrapped"! So it is tricky. Whereas we have 18 hours of daylight to shoot in, and most directors love that, when we have a night scene we really hustle. This is especially true when, as we did here, there is stunt riding. Bulls don't always go where you tell them to. They go wherever they want to!

### **The Fireworks scene?**

I love this scene in the movie, but it was painful to shoot. It was pouring, pouring, and this again created a scheduling issue. We had to come back to this scene two times from the original schedule.

We had a fight sequence and a huge lighting setup. And then there were the fireworks! Also, it is usually very windy there. You have to be extremely careful in windy areas when you are working with fireworks. So there was a big question mark right up to the time that scene was shot as to whether it would be calm enough for us to shoot fireworks.



***"I love this scene, but it was painful to shoot."***  
**Fireworks Area Fort Macleod, AB**

Well, it was not windy at all, so initially we thought we were going to be lucky, but then it started to rain. And it rained, and it was wet—so wet. The babies were crying. Poor Heath. We had twin babies, and we kept trying to switch them out, but they were not happy, they did not like the wet and the cold. And they were screaming through the whole scene. I am sure Heath is an excellent father, because any time we had kids around, Heath was great with them. He felt so bad for those babies, he just wanted for them not to have to be there.

It is an intense scene. Heath's silhouette against the exploding fireworks is most people's favorite frame, if they had to pick a favorite frame. That took three nights. We had to move back to this location from other things we shot during the day. Because we were not scheduled to shoot this over three nights, we had to shoot what we were originally supposed to do during the day in two days over three days instead, and add to that the night shooting on this scene. We'd done the wide shot but we had to go back and do the smaller, tighter shots over the next two nights. It was complex, and it was a lot of work.

### **The Childress Bar scene?**

Another big scene. That was fun; that day was just fun. Ranchman's is an old cowboy bar down on Macleod Trail. It's the real deal. They have pictures on the walls of a couple of generations of cowboys, Stampede saddles, championship rodeo saddles, hanging all around there. There is a whole series of those, and the place has a deep history. Most of the people we used [as extras] in that scene were regulars, they were just a lot of fun to work with. Those are some of my favorite things about this kind of work.



*"Most of the people we used in that scene were regulars."*  
Childress Bar Calgary, AB

As a side note, Ranchman's is also where we had our wrap party. It was the best wrap party I have ever been to.

### **The Laundry Apartment?**

You have to imagine the cast, cameras, lights, and a small army of people, in and out of there constantly, in the middle of summer.

It was very warm and very cramped; after all, the space is quite small to begin with.

It certainly gives you the feeling it was supposed to, and it was great for that.



***“It was very warm and very cramped.”***  
**Laundry Apartment Fort Macleod, AB**

This was the first time that Ang Lee had made a film outside of its “real” location. So he was adamant about finding locations that looked and felt “real.” And that was true of the Laundry Apartment. That confined feeling does come across in the film.

### **The Rockyford Post Office?**

They did a lot of work there. When you are dealing with something like a post office, you need to be careful. There are subtle differences between a Canadian post office and an American post office that people will pick out immediately, so the art department had to be meticulous as to how they set that up. They basically started from scratch. I don’t think that building had ever been a post office before, so they had to do a lot of work there.

It is funny, there are certain things you wouldn’t think would require a lot of effort [to make them “pass”] but one thing we came across was bars. American bars and Canadian bars are laid out entirely differently. An American bar has a long bar that goes down one side of the room. A Canadian bar is not set up that way. There are more tables and chairs with a much smaller square bar.

So, for instance, when we were doing the [Electra bar] scene with Jack, we went through fits trying to find a bar with decent length to it, because Canadian bars are not set up that way. It may be a British influence, but it is a subtle difference between the places that caused us a lot of trouble.



**“Canadian bars are not set up that way.”  
Signal Bar Carseland, AB**

### **Perhaps Americans are less social than Canadians?**

No, I think it is smarter business. You guys pack more people into less floor space. [Laughter]

### **Ennis’ Flashback?**

That was a tricky one. This was difficult because we had kids there, and we didn’t want the kids to have to see [Earl], so we split it up, using something else for them to look at that was not too scary.

As for Earl, Ang did not want *Brokeback Mountain* to be a “speech” film. He did not want it to be a film about that. He wanted it to be about Ennis’ story. Ang didn’t want us to dwell on [Earl’s] image.

We did not spend a lot of time in the Drumheller area, but we got some other great stuff around there, visually.

### **The White Truck?**

It could have been done anywhere. When you get into the rolling wheat fields, it could be anywhere. This is one of the shots that linger on the schedule from day to day.



*"It could have been done anywhere."*

**Why wouldn't you just shoot this at the same time that you filmed Ennis looking at the truck?**

You have to understand that we're primarily responsible for getting the actors on camera, and sometimes we just run out of time. Those other little shots you need to have don't always get done at the same time. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it happens a lot.

**The [deleted] Ennis the Vet scene?**

This is where they wanted to show Ennis being a real cowboy. We wanted it to be clear that Ennis and Jack were still men; they were still cowboys. It was important to show that they were competent.

It was also important to show their separate lives, that they did not just spend their lives pining for each other. So, to highlight the differences between them, it became important to flesh out the characters, to show who they were.



***“They did not just spend their lives pining for each other.”***  
**Ennis the Vet (deleted scene) near Claresholm, AB**

On rare occasions we’ll shoot things which are not explicitly in the script. That scene was, I think I recall, on the “wish list” of things we tried to shoot when we could. I can’t tell you why that did not make it into the film. Ang knows!

### **The [deleted] Hippie scene?**

The Hippie scene was James Shamus’ addition. He was trying to add something that would show that they were good cowboys. It was not part of the original story. It was kind of controversial—well, not controversial, kind of questionable—as to whether it would be in the film or not after the first time we tried to shoot it.

This was also a challenge for the guys, Heath and Jake, because they had to do a bit of real cowboy work. And they are not cowboys. We held a pre-production “cowboy camp” where we sent them out to train with T.J. Bews, our chief wrangler. Heath had more horse experience than Jake. Heath was actually a very accomplished rider. Jake became a good rider eventually, as well. It sounds silly, but the Hippie scene was “cowboy technical.”

And, as it happened, we fell behind schedule because of that scene and we had to make that up later.

### **Tell us about some of the problems you encountered.**

Well, for all of our expertise, any film, especially a film like *Brokeback Mountain*, is essentially an artistic endeavor. So you’re trying to schedule things based upon your prior knowledge and experience, but, in the end, you can only make educated guesses as to how long scenes will take. If the weather is bad, if the horses won’t cooperate, if the river is too high, if the van won’t start, or a special effect does not work, well, there are so many things that can go wrong and throw your plans out the window.



***“So many things... can go wrong and throw your plans out the window.”***  
**Hippie Rescue (deleted scene) Jumping Pound Creek AB**

This was one of those things that took longer than we thought it was going to. The weather was not great, the river was high, getting that VW bus in the river and getting it ‘stuck’ so that we still could pull it out, getting the horses in the water—there were lots of little things we had to arrange to make the scene work. And of course, whenever you put a vehicle in water there are strict environmental rules; you have to make sure there is no oil or gas in it. That can be a big pain in itself.

It’s always the little things that cause you to fall behind. It happens on many productions; you fall behind and you have to make it up. It is a big part of your job as an assistant director to find ways to make it up without compromising anything.

Unfortunately, this is one of those scenes we went to a lot of trouble to do, and it did not make it into the picture. But in the end it is the best thing for the picture. You can’t argue with that.

### **The [deleted] Sneering Mechanics scene?**

We shot that very quickly, but it did not make it into the film, which I thought was an interesting choice. It leaves Jack’s demise open to question. You are not sure if you see Ennis’ fears or what actually happened.

I guarantee you that Lee did that expressly, the superb filmmaker that he is, so that there would be questioning. If he had included this scene, you would have known immediately what happened, and why, but because he didn’t, you are not sure if Lureen is telling the real story. You’re left to wonder about the truth behind Jack’s death.



***"Lee did that expressly...so that there would be questioning."  
Sneering Mechanics (deleted scene) Calgary, AB***

It was a way of making it less explicit, and leaving the story much more open to interpretation. I'm sure that was a big debate, a huge choice. It was a tiny thing, but a very important piece of the picture that he purposely left out.

### **The Thanksgiving Fight Bar scene?**

This was one of the times when Mr. Hausman turned the set over to me and said, "This one is yours, go ahead."

This is one of the few times in the film when something really brutal happened, and Ang wanted it to be horrific. There are two examples of this in *Brokeback Mountain*: the Fireworks fight scene, which is shorter, and this scene, which is one of the best fight sequences I have ever worked on because it looks so real. We did quite a few takes to give Ang exactly what he wanted.

This was difficult; we did not want it to look like a Hollywood fight. To achieve that, we had to do quite a few takes to bring it right up to the edge—not to go over the edge, but to go just far enough. What sometimes happens with performers is that they are so ingrained in how Hollywood makes movies that to achieve realism you must de-program them a bit.



***"We did not want it to look like a Hollywood fight."  
Thanksgiving Fight Bar Blackie, AB***

Heath Ledger actually broke the nose of Ken Zilka, the stunt man, in one of the takes. Heath's elbow hit Ken by accident, purely by accident. Zilka is a phenomenal stuntman, an absolute professional; it was part of the choreographed raw fight. It had such frenetic energy that when they were tussling, his elbow swung around and hit Ken in the nose. Although he broke it, nobody knew it. Ken didn't tell anyone. In fact, we did four or five takes after that. The only reason I know is that Ken told me several weeks later that he had had his nose broken.

Both of the fight sequences were meant to be brutal and hard. I think we achieved that; I hope we did.

### **The Three Mountains and the Creek Jump?**

Peter Wunstorf and I shot this. We had a list of mountains Ang specifically wanted in the film and this was on it. This mountain is called "The Fist." You come around a little more and it looks like a fist from that side.

I would not trust the sky; it may have been replaced. I remember we did spend a couple of days drifting around in the rain trying desperately to find something beautiful to shoot. [Laughter]

Sometimes, weeks ahead of time, we would go out and shoot from Ang's list. Of course, you can't simply take a camera and go. You must organize it. You must have what we call "craft services" with you, the grip equipment, and so on. You have to organize these things. Then, hopefully, you'll have the right weather. If everything comes together you get a great shot.

**You had special responsibilities for the crowd scenes. Tell us about the Childress Dance Hall Interior scene.**

Initially, I want to give a huge amount of credit to my colleague, Travis McConnell, who, unfortunately, does not get credit high up enough on the list when the credits roll. Although his title is “trainee,” he is an accomplished assistant director and he does extraordinary work with extras. Mr. Hausman was kind enough, generous enough, to basically allow Travis and me run of the extras, and that became our domain.

There were not a lot of crowd scenes in the show, but they each had to be meticulously worked, because Ang wanted everything to be absolutely picture perfect. So scenes like the Rodeos, or the Childress Dance Hall Interior, had to be choreographed. Something such as this requires a lot of preparation because, when we have dancers on the floor, they have to be choreographed, to a certain extent, with the music we are going to play, so that it all looks organic. We don’t want them to be crashing into each other while we are trying to shoot the actors. And there is the costuming. Because it is a period piece, the costumes all have to, again, be picture perfect. The haircuts, as well. Everybody did a fantastic job of making this scene very real.

**It is my personal favorite.**

Really. I love it, too. It is quite subtle and the story takes a dramatic turn there. And I think the performances were extraordinary.

**The [deleted] Twist Cemetery scene?**

That’s an Ang Lee question. It had to do with how he wanted to finish the scene, maybe he wanted him to walk away [from the Twists] and not have that final moment.



*“It had to do with how he wanted to finish the scene.”*  
Twist Cemetery (deleted scene) Beiseker, AB

***Brokeback Mountain* received astounding critical acclaim.**

I was not surprised by the critical reaction. It was obvious to me from the first time that I read the script that we had the potential to make a truly great film. I didn't expect it to do anything commercially. I thought it would be a reparatory sort of thing. It might do well in major population centers, and possibly in Europe. I saw it as sort of a long term film, an enduring, serious film, but not a broad one.

I was certain that the critics, the good critics, would see *Brokeback Mountain* for what it was. But I did not anticipate that it would be reviewed so broadly. There are many films that are reviewed only by a few critics; the others don't bother. In this case, I was surprised by the number of reviewers that gave it attention. And it happened immediately. I thought it would take longer for the film to receive attention. In fact, I expected that it would be one of those films that developed word-of-mouth recognition, rather than review-driven publicity.



**Ang Lee accepts 2005 Screen Directors Guild Award for Outstanding Directorial Achievement in Feature Film**

**The wave of awards?**

My feeling, and the feeling of many of my colleagues at the time, was that we were working on an important film. I think we knew from the beginning that it was significant and unique. We didn't know if we would ever have such an opportunity again as filmmakers. You know, you want them to come around, but they are very rare. Very rare. And so to get the chance was a privilege.

As to the awards, I had no clue. That was completely surprising. I thought maybe it would get festival awards if it turned out well. We were all thinking maybe the European festivals, but we never guessed that it would earn mainstream Oscar or Golden Globe nominations.

**It was denied Best Picture.**

I was not surprised that it didn't get Best Picture. I was pleased, so deeply pleased, that Ang got Best Director, and just as sorry that the cast did not receive better recognition [in the Academy Awards] because Jake and Heath did an extraordinary job in very difficult roles.

Those are two exceedingly difficult roles to play well. They were nominated, and they were certainly given critical acclaim elsewhere; it would have been nice.

Quite honestly, I am not a big fan of the Academy Awards because I don't think that they consistently reflect the best in motion pictures. So I was not completely surprised that it did not get picked. I was hopeful because of all of that momentum, but that's the way it goes. The Academy Awards are a lot about publicity; it is often a publicity contest to see who puts on the best campaign.

I don't think that you can say that *Brokeback Mountain* was in any way inferior to any other film released, not just during that year, but in any subsequent year. It would count as one of the best films in the history of American cinema. At its heart it is a romantic tragedy, but it explores a situation that has never been addressed before. So whether it won Best Picture, or not, does not really matter. In the end, it is—will always be—an important and unique film, a story superbly told.

**You are a young man, but it must have occurred to you that this may well be the film that defines your career.**

We spoke of that as we worked on this film. Karen Bedard and I actually talked about this. Kind of half joking, but half crying, too, we considered that this may be the highlight of our careers, and we will look back upon it for the rest of our lives.

This may be the peak. And if that proves to be the case, I accept that, because *Brokeback Mountain* will be very difficult to top. Not just because of the material, although it is a rare thing when you have the opportunity to work on a film that is so important, of such quality, a great story, and with a team of gifted professionals.



***"This may be the peak. And if that proves to be the case, I accept that."***  
**Brokeback Cast and Crew Photo Moose Mountain AB**

That last piece, the people, is the hardest part of all; you can have great material but it only takes a couple of people to make things miserable for everybody else. That didn't happen here. We had such outstanding leadership from Ang Lee, Michael Hausman, and Diana Ossana; they are such fantastic people to work with. And the cast—superb actors, all of them.

You know, you have several hundred people working on a project like this. To have them all be so great at who they are and what they do, it was incredibly fortunate that we all came together for this film. The stars aligned themselves. It's going to be tough for that to ever happen again. Even if we come close, I'll be overjoyed to even get near that again. People who are older than me will say the same thing, that they never had such joy as they did working on that film.

**Thank you. We are overjoyed by your generous gift.**

It has been my pleasure. You are doing important work.