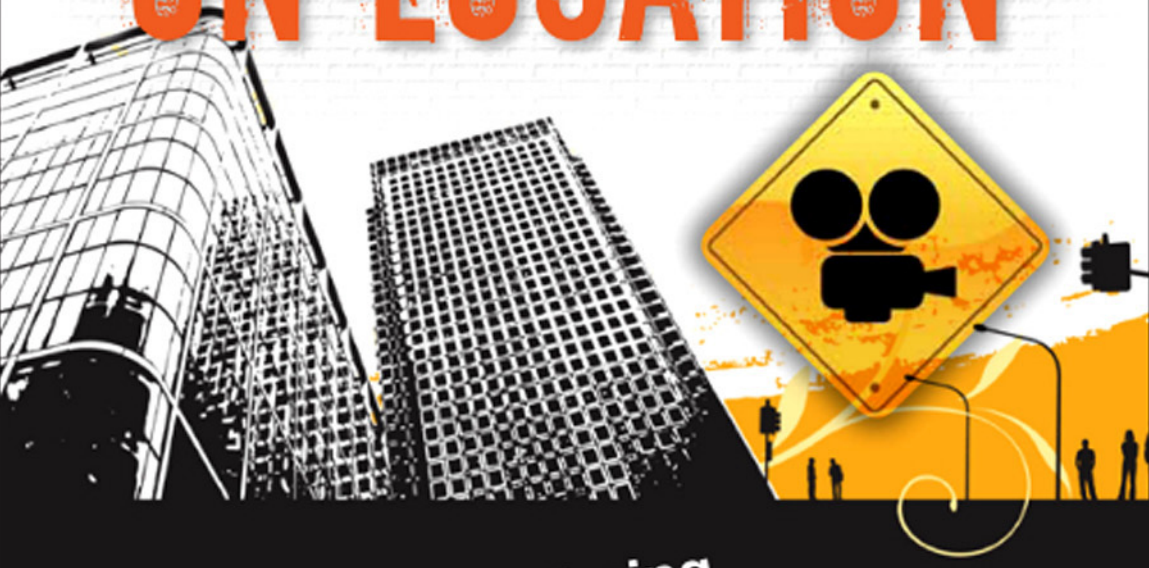
SHOOT ON LOCATION



The Logistics of Filming on Location, Whatever Your Budget or Experience

Kathy McCurdy

Focal Press

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This book is dedicated to my grandfather, Arthur P. Ballard,
the real writer in the family.

And to all people of vision who love a good story.

Contents

Introduction

Movie making has entered another amazing new era. The art and craft of creating the moving image is no longer only the stuff of dreams. Hollywood's major studios have dominated the world of filmmaking since the 1940s. Once, no one outside the system could hope to get close to a studio picture deal without a serious investment of time, money, and power lunches. But then the massive success of the Sundance Film Festival changed how the public looked at the movie maker. The actual festival began in 1978, but it was the takeover by the Sundance Institute in 1985 that elevated its status, and independent filmmaking soon moved into the mainstream. But all those indie films we enjoyed were still being manipulated and distributed by the major studios. So what has happened recently to liberate the filmmaker from the domination of the Hollywood studios? And who is this new breed of filmmaker taking advantage of these changes? *You* are this new filmmaker—the emerging filmmaker. You have picked up this book because you want to know what it takes to film out in the real world and on location. How did it become possible that you—a student, retiree, doctor, computer programmer, or stay-at-home mom—are planning to make a movie with every belief that you can accomplish it and people will see your movie?

Accessibility and affordability have changed the landscape of movie making. Two of the most expensive factors in any movie budget are camera equipment and editing costs. The rapid advance in digital camera technology has created a wealth of inventory available to anyone willing to rent or buy. New digital cameras from Panasonic, Canon, Sony, and the Red One bring professional quality that far surpasses the outdated technology of home movies. The new prosumer (professional consumer) cameras offer broadcast quality within a $1,000 to $15,000 range. Camera rental houses like Bexel have stores in almost every major city. Cameras are so affordable that you can easily buy them on eBay and Craigslist at huge discounts. Digital has replaced analog and has been the broadcast standard for U.S. television since February 2009. The affordability, ease, and efficiency of the digital camera have opened up a world of opportunity to the emerging moviemaker.

Advances in computer editing and special effects software now challenge the monopoly that Hollywood postproduction houses held over movie makers in the past. Final Cut Pro is the new standard for computer editing. The software starts at a few hundred dollars and is a

small investment in a very big part of the movie making process. Add After Effects and Pro-Tools and you have a broadcast-standard editing suite at your fingertips. Now you can make a very professional-looking film for an investment of as little as $5,000 in camera equipment and editing software. More and more people are finding the access and the means to make their movie. It's easier now than ever before in the history of entertainment. As Elvis Mitchell, film critic for NPR and the *New York Times* observed, "There's a new technology that is making this democratic."[1] Almost anyone can make a good, professional-looking movie. This fascination with movie making has become so mainstream that some high school students have been making movies for as long as they can remember. Now, anyone with a network of friends and family, a tale to tell, and a little cash can make a movie.

In addition to accessibility and affordability, there are emerging new distribution opportunities. Today, social networking sites like YouTube and Facebook have created a global marketplace where anyone can display their work or talent. The growing popularity of webisodes, podcasts, and blogging sites offer other venues within the reach of a keystroke. More and more independent filmmakers are burning their own DVDs and selling them after screenings at film festivals and on their websites. I know many independent filmmakers who have cut their own deals with independent video warehouses, Netflix, and Hulu.com, allowing them to get their movie out to a viewing audience immediately. These audiences may not be sitting in a movie theater, but they are buying, renting, and downloading independent movies. There is a definite and measurable audience outside of the studio system model, and they are looking for new products. And that audience can only expand in the future as we experience new creative and technological advances.

What that means to the multiplex theater chain and the weekend box office numbers on Monday morning is not of interest here. The shifting paradigm in the Hollywood business model will morph into something new in the future. According to the *Hollywood Reporter*, "studios will concentrate exclusively on expensive blockbusters while Indies and individuals take up the art cinema slack." The theater chains might try to reinvent themselves and perhaps become more of a broad "cultural hub," offering coffee-house atmosphere with concert performances on the big screen or large audience video gaming as part of the new attraction. The truly independent filmmaker will probably still not be a player in the new Hollywood. But in the meantime, thousands of people like you are approaching filmmaking with a new standard of quality and professionalism at your fingertips. And all of you are making thousands of movies in all types of genres and formats.

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[1] Interview of Elvis Mitchell. FRONTLINE: the monster that ate Hollywood. PBS. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/hollywood/interviews/mitchell.html.

This book is for you. You are the emerging filmmaker. You span all ages, all backgrounds, and all professions. This book is the complete step-by-step guide to filming on location—any location, anywhere. On-location filming requires the same universal practices and processes wherever you work. This book is about what happens when you leave the controlled environment in the filmmaking process. You might be a student leaving the classroom, the studio, or the college campus for the first time. You might be a frustrated professional investing your own money into a script you've been laboring over for years. Or you might be an experienced actor who decides to pull in all your favors and get your friends together to shoot a short film. If you have this book in your hands, leafing through the table of contents, you are at the perfect point to benefit from the information you will find in this book. You need these guidelines—the step-by-step process to mastering the logistics of on-location filming.

What happens when you go "off the lot"—when you leave the dorm room, your backyard, or office, and bring the vision in your head into the parks and streets and neighborhoods where you want to shoot your movie? There are certain elements in that transition that always apply—certain functionalities of filming out in the public that don't change. Whether the Hollywood studio gives you $50 million or your grandmother loans you $5,000, going out on location brings the same challenges and demands. How you address some of those demands will of course go back to the realistic limits of your budget. But in the end, people film on location whether they have a little money or a lot of money. And most of the challenges, logistics, and rules of implementation remain the same.

Working at the San Diego Film Commission, I had this same conversation over and over again for years. Students and emerging filmmakers always have the same questions, and the first one is usually, "Where do I start—how do I shoot on location?" People of all types came to talk to me about how to find a location, how to film in a street, when they need police, what if they need to use guns in the scene, when they need a permit. All these questions need to be answered in the context of "How do you film on location in the middle of people's everyday lives?" This book answers your questions. If you are a first-time filmmaker, the passion is probably still all about the art. And the last thing you probably want to think about is everything you need to know about going on location. That's usually somebody else's job. But on a small-budget movie, it could fall to you. Or maybe you've been on the set enough to know how things work, but now you're shooting your script and find yourself asking, "What did the location manager do on that last show to make things run so smoothly?" Or maybe you are a student wanting to learn all you can about the production process and you can't find a class on producing your on location film. So for all of you who are doing this

for the first time and care about how you do it, this book is for you. Stepping off the lot and on location and bringing your movie-making dance into the real world is a skill to be learned.

If you are like most independent filmmakers or first time filmmakers, you are going to wear many hats and function in many different roles. When you have to do everything, you need all the help and reminders you can get just to prevent things from falling through the cracks. Here in this book, you will find the answers to your questions along with lots of "free merch," including checklists, sample letters, guidelines, photos of real sets, and documents to help you fulfill one of the roles you've taken on—that of the location scout and location manager. This book provides a much larger overview to the reality of filming on location: the business applications, insurance and liability information, how to scout, permits, the shoot day, public relations, problem solving on the set, and how to leave the location better than you found it. And you'll find an entire Student Filmmaker's "411" chapter with quick FAQ-type information. Even if you read this book and hand it off to your production assistant, I know it will help your shoot go more smoothly. I know you'll find that everything in this book provides signposts along one of the paths you must master—how to shoot out in the public purview.

Be safe, be legal, be professional, be courteous, smile, and have fun out on location. And see you at the movies!

Chapter | one

You Don't Make Your Movie in a Bubble!

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The more I see of our film . . . the more I realize how much we have been kidding ourselves in feeling that we could get really effective stuff on the back lot that should have been shot on location. . . . Frankly, I am now terribly sorry we didn't build Tara on location.

David O. Selznick Memo, March 9, 1939

Every story takes place somewhere. Characters and their actions occur somewhere in time with a sense of place—that physical space that is the "location." However, the location always evolves into something so much more dynamic than that alone. Even the great director David O. Selznick realized this back in 1939 as he reminisced over what was lost by filming *Gone with the Wind* on a fabricated studio back lot. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the Hollywood studio system maintained a monopoly on making movies. The major studios owned the sound stages and held the in-demand actors to contracts over long periods of time. Movie making evolved into a more sophisticated business and the studios thrived. Producers experienced the advantages that shooting on a sound stage offered. No changing weather conditions, no

Shoot on Location.

sound problems, and no real-world surprises could affect a contained and controlled environment established within four walls. When scenes required a neighborhood street or a Mexican town square, the studio back lot provided whatever the script required—built to order. The back lot sets became permanent fixtures, where any project could benefit from the New York streets to bombed-out Italian villages, or to "Anywhere, USA" neighborhoods. The back lot provided that safe, controlled, private shooting location.

The bulk and weight of the early camera and sound recording systems also encouraged productions to stay on the lot. This was not a mobile business that could easily pack up and move around the country. Everything was on the lot as part of the studio's infrastructure: crew, props, wardrobe, carpenters, drivers, cranes, wind machines, and so on. Except for Westerns, very few movies left the Hollywood studio to film on location. Why leave the predictability and reliability of the studio lot? Just as we are experiencing new influences today, technological advances back then changed the standard in the industry and the movie making landscape was dramatically altered. As soon as smaller, more portable cameras and sound equipment were developed, the producer could more easily leave the studio stage or back lot and explore new, exotic, remote locations.

The first compact Nagra sound tape recorder usable for film work was engineered in 1962; by 1972, Panavision helped revolutionize filmmaking with the lightweight Panaflex 35mm movie camera. Lighter and more portable broadcast-quality equipment liberated the movie-making process from the confines and limitations of the studios. Though the Hollywood studio system would continue to hold the purse strings, the producer could take his or her film almost anywhere. Producers began to leave the studio back lots for real destinations—cities and states across America and foreign countries that would support and enhance the story's visual element. Moving "off the lot" and filming "on location" offered a new world to the movie maker. A movie's producer could now leave the studio, travel to a wealth of location "looks," and still maintain the highest standards of broadcast-quality picture and sound. Mobility also introduced a new value to what appeared on the big screen.

The accessibility of new locations brought new opportunities for visual enhancement. Shooting off the lot introduced the use of diverse and interesting locations that brought a deep, rich production value to the visuals on the screen. Advances in equipment technology contributed new developments in how a producer or director looks at the locations as they appear in the script. Production value became a new consideration when comparing the cost of shooting on the lot or shooting on location. What would bring the most extraordinary images onto the screen? Why leave the lot and shoot on location?

LOCATIONS ARE CHARACTERS

What do the serial killer's suburban garage, the Cape Cod bungalow, and the eerie Southern mansion have in common? Each location brings the importance of visually supporting and enhancing your characters and your story. Locations provide another layer to storylines and character development throughout the entire movie. They are key ingredients in the complex mix of producing a visually stimulating story played out on the screen. Locations are characters in your film. They add magic.

Every location serves a practical purpose and an aesthetic purpose. The characters in the story have to live somewhere, just as the action in each scene must take place somewhere in space and time. Location gives a reference point to people and activity throughout the story. Your characters and your actors interact with and within each location. There is a dynamic created between people and their environment that can be seen and felt on the screen. Every writer introduces a location with great thought as to how it relates to his characters and what they must accomplish or experience in each scene. There is the practical reality of each location and the creative contribution each location makes to the end product.

In reality, you have to shoot somewhere. Rare are the stories that take place in one room or any singular location for 100 pages. Though the popular TV show *LOST* centered on survivors marooned on an unknown island, that island had to have different areas, contrasting looks, and threatening aspects for story development to move forward week after week. You shoot where your script and your story take you. And you take your shoot to the most visually interesting locations. That is the creative side of on-location filming.

Location is one of the strongest visual contributions made within a movie. As location manager Dennis Williams told me, "Locations are an integral part of the artistic setting of your film. If scenes are set in the perfect site it adds to your story-telling ability." Locations offer everything from the exotic to the mundane and everything in between, each with a very specific purpose. A perfect location can transform the mundane into the exotic and make the ordinary sing on the screen in some unique way. Locations add depth, dimension, and personality to your story. Each location plays a role as significant as each of your characters and can contribute staggering production value. Breathtaking landscapes, rich architectural details, the moody shades of urban life—all can be dramatic additions to the background of a character's action or help drive a character's moment of epiphany. Location is the major visual vehicle upon which the entire film glides along.

Locations offer extremes and contrast. Locations allow us to escape to unknown, unexplored worlds. Locations can be a geography lesson, a history lesson, or a projection of what the future will look like in a

thousand years. Locations serve as a centering point—a connecting element throughout a story that helps us establish where we are, who's there, and what's happening there. Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* is a perfect example of how a location relates to the character, story, and visual esthetic of the film. The three key locations were San Diego, Tijuana/Mexico, and Cincinnati/Washington, D.C. Each city took on a character of its own established through a particular color and tone, as well as Soderbergh's stylistic camera work. A distinctive color palette was brought to bear in each city to immediately identify where we were in the story of three comparative lives in crisis.

The affluent La Jolla lifestyle of Catherine Zeta-Jones's character was always bathed in lots of bright natural light. The entire San Diego environment was bright light accented with crisp primary colors. Nothing dark could hide or survive in all that bright light. Monochromatic cold blue tones were used in Cincinnati/Washington scenes to complement the downward spiral of personal and political crisis that smothered Michael Douglas's character. Life was frozen in this tragic environment reminiscent of a morgue and its cold steel. Distance, death, and deception flourished in this cold, dark place. The streets of Tijuana and elsewhere in Mexico baked in a glaring, grainy, harsh sunlight that offered no relief. This harsh light allowed no escape and added to the oppressive conditions of the people who struggled to survive there. This was a brilliant use of location, characterizing each by its uniquely individual color scheme. This enhanced location look branded each characters' story and created a strong, symbolic, immediately recognizable transition as the story moved from person to person and from place to place.

Soderbergh Talks About *Traffic*

"That device [of shooting the film with a different style for each geographical location] is meant to help people orient themselves. As soon as I cut to one of the new stories, the viewers know where they are before they even see a character. I'm asking so much of them—there are so many characters, so much information—I thought: at least if they know where they are, I'm helping them a little bit. Plus those three places felt very different to me. My impressions of Mexico were different from La Jolla, California, and different from Ohio in the winter" (http://www.salon.com/people/conv/2000/12/20/soderbergh/).

Your locations deserve your attention. Honor your locations as important characters in your film and you will see amazing things happen on the screen.

THE BUBBLE EFFECT

So you've decided to take your film to the next level and leave the safe cocoon of your dorm room, house, office, or studio. For you, "off the lot" means leaving whatever safe environment you've shot in before and

venturing into the public purview: the real world. For some, it can simply mean leaving the safety of your computer screen and actually making the movie. Whatever led you to this point, you are now ready to take the words off the page and translate them into people and equipment out in the world someplace. Whatever your budget, background, or experience, you will encounter the same challenges when going on location. You are going to bring disruption and unusual activity into someone else's comfort zone. What you want to do on a sidewalk or in a park or parking lot may conflict with what other people expect to happen normally in those places. When you go out on location, you don't make your movie in a vacuum. You're not contained in a safe, protected bubble when you are out in the world. You make your movie in the middle of a whole lot of other people's everyday lives and activities.

Here's where the challenge begins. Filmmakers live in a different world. You are forced to create your own sphere of influence to accomplish your task and make your movie. I call it "the Bubble." It is the untouchable environment you create to house and protect your filming process from any and all things outside. You create your own vacuum or your own void in which only movie making exists. The Bubble is a powerful control factor, allowing you and all the cast and crew to completely lose yourselves in the world you're creating. It is necessary to a certain extent but dangerous in the extreme. The Bubble is at its best when on private property, onstage, or on a back lot, but it requires your sensitive awareness once you go out into the real world. The Bubble effect can hamper you when you go on location and your Bubble bumps up against the rest of the world that exists all around you. The most important awareness you can bring to on-location filming is that you must find a way to coexist with the rest of the world around you. And believe it: the rest of the world is definitely going to react to what you're doing.

It doesn't take much to intrude upon someone's routine. Any small disruption in normal activities or expectations can really set people off. The mail delivery gets briefly delayed or a detour forces a resident to drive extra blocks to get to where they're going. When people's everyday routines are disrupted or changed in even the slightest way, they react. That reaction can often lead to negativity and confrontation. If you stay inside the Bubble, you will experience one challenging situation after another, pressing harder and harder up against your reality. There is a delicate balance to be maintained between what you need in order to shoot and what other people need to do in their normal, daily lives. Be respectful and take into consideration the impact you are going to make on what may seem to you to be small or insignificant elements in someone else's life. The Bubble provides the sense of detachment and control you need to accomplish your work. But you must temper your isolation with awareness of your surroundings and sensitivity to other people in their normal activities.

The Bubble acts as an imaginary zone of protection around your location, cast, and crew. Though a vacuum is an empty space, it is actually a closed system; nothing passes in or out. In the production process, a lot goes on inside the Bubble. It is a fragile shield that keeps the rest of the world out—or so you hope. Different from the vacuum, the Bubble must allow for an exchange of elements from inside and outside. Outside reality can intrude upon your structured, internalized, movie making environment. But most often the Bubble effect can create a false mindset of invulnerability. In the mind of the movie maker, the Bubble becomes impenetrable! There is an unspoken pervasive sense of being untouchable and in authority in a world where the only reality is: "We're making a movie!" Nothing else exists. This attitude has become a stigma in the industry, leading outsiders to automatically label movie makers as demanding, rude, and obnoxious. The cast and crew become immersed in a false security that they can make anything happen and no person and no thing will stop the process. Perhaps this is to be expected to some degree. Making a movie is a direct manifestation of something that is not real—a fantasy that plays out. But you are shooting your movie in the real world, which changes everything. There will always be something outside of your control.

I first learned about the Bubble while working as a location manager on several TV movies. Ed Milkovich was the down-to-earth, realistic producer on those movies who acknowledged the value of our long days of hard work. He brought the proper understanding and appreciation of the job we all did on and off the set. He kept the balance. He would often say, "This isn't brain surgery," while recognizing that we were doing real work that deserved our commitment and integrity. One of Ed's profound observations was to comment on what he called the phenomenon of "cinematic immunity"—a direct result of the Bubble effect. I don't know if he coined the term, but I will forever credit him with teaching me a new awareness of what happens on a shooting set. Ed's concept meant that cast and crew people can easily become oblivious to the mere existence of the outside world when out on location. It's comparable to a mob mentality in which the one, the individual, gets lost in the whole of the organism. When working under the influence of "cinematic immunity," crew people step out into the street not checking for traffic. Or if a truck is approaching, they honestly don't think they will get hit. The world stops for anyone making a movie. Being oblivious to real danger is only one of the risks. Crew people take ownership and that leads to taking advantage. Trash ends up on the ground, tree limbs get trimmed to clear the frame, equipment stacks up in a traffic lane on the street, and crew people block sidewalks, streets, and alleyways while working fully inside the Bubble. Garbage truck drivers are told to leave and come back another

day, production trucks block driveways, and flowerbeds get trampled. Or a crew person trespasses into a neighboring back yard to lay cable and position a light when no one has asked the location department or gotten permission from the home owner. It is not a behavior or belief unique to any one department. Cinematic immunity and the Bubble effect are common to the entire movie-making experience. The process creates its own extreme importance. Movie makers expect more and oftentimes demand more and nothing gets in the way. Some of this comes from the sense of urgency inherent in making movies. Everything has to happen *now*. But cinematic immunity combined with urgency and other pressures of the task can cause big problems and have long-lasting repercussions out in a community. Cinematic immunity breeds a sense of exclusivity, power, and exaggerated entitlement that is an illusion.

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Understanding the Bubble effect brings great responsibility. You are shooting scenes out in the real world, but you need to control all the outside elements that might affect your shooting schedule. So how do you maintain that balance? How does the fantasyland of the filmmaker coexist with the folks living on Main Street? Wherever you are shooting on location and whatever type of scene you're shooting, you are affecting people's everyday routines. Disruption is not an easy thing to manage. And as strange as it may sound, not everyone loves this business the way you do. Not everyone is enthralled with the glamour and excitement of movie making the way it is portrayed on *Access Hollywood*! In the normal course of events, you will encounter reactions from the public ranging from resistance to recriminations, excitement, and even apathy. So what's the big deal? Why all the fuss about going on location? This is the time to be proactive to prevent the public from becoming reactive. Much planning and anticipation must be done before you ever hit the street. Even as early as the first location scout, you should arm yourself with the proper questions and awareness, bring realistic expectations as to how much you can alter an environment, and start to cultivate your creative problem-solving skills to bring new solutions to old situations. All this work is done to try and achieve a happy medium where your filming activity can coexist in the middle of people's everyday lives. Your challenge is to find a way to help the public tolerate what you do and the impact it has on them and their normal routines. All this is done with good intention to avoid negativity and destructive reactions from the people who live and work in your location community. It's all about communication, planning, and preparation.

But I Can't Get to Work!

The mockumentary *A Day Without A Mexican* was filmed throughout San Diego, and I experienced firsthand how easily people lose their way when their normal routine is altered. The script called for a scene in which driverless cars veered through an intersection, crashing into each other, as all the Mexican drivers vanished due to an unexplainable phenomenon. The original recommendation from the police liaison was that this could be accomplished with officers conducting ITC (that is, intermittent traffic control), or holding cars for the roll, releasing traffic to reset and hold traffic to shoot again. After a few hours, it became evident that various stages of the crash would have to stay in the intersection, requiring a traffic detour. The officers on site regrouped to guide the detour. I called the Metropolitan Transit System to let them know the buses would not be able to get to their stop and production put production assistants at the bus stop to assist bus riders getting to the bus stop in the next block. The scope of the shot required more control for public safety, and now it created more of a public impact. While I was on the set, I received a call from an office on the corner complaining that their employees were calling in to say they could not get into the building's parking garage. They claimed the street was closed. I was able to explain that I was standing at the entrance to the garage, cars were moving in and out normally, and although the actual intersection was closed, the side street to the garage was open to traffic. The business owner insisted otherwise because several people had called to say they were not coming into work because they couldn't get to the parking garage entrance.

In reality, what happened was that some people could not tolerate the change. They were not able to accommodate the detour that took them on a different route and added three or four blocks of driving to get back to their building's parking garage entrance. Any delay or change threw them for a loop. People do not easily digress from a daily routine. Even though the businesses had been notified about the filming and told to expect some kind of delay or minimal impact, many people in the area could not handle the changes. And some people probably took advantage of the situation to call into work and blame their absence on the production company filming on their street corner. Disruption will be a part of every on-location shoot. Expect it, plan for it, and manage it in advance. One unhappy person can dramatically affect what you are trying to do, causing distraction, frustration, and lost time. Productivity can suffer. Tempers can flare and morale can fall to a disastrously low level. It's the balance between the protective isolationism that the Bubble provides and the coexistence you must maintain to work successfully in the real world.

How do you avoid negative reactions? Make friends with the residents near your shooting location, keep the crew in line, provide plenty of information up front before you shoot, and practice good public relations. Do your best to be prepared for whatever might develop on location. But no matter how well prepared you are, you can't control how everyone will react to your presence. People deal with change in a wide variety of ways. As a location manger, I knew that no matter how well I did my job, someone was going to go home, kick the dog, and yell at the kids. Don't take it personally. Treat people and locations with kindness and respect to reduce the potential for negative reactions. Maintain

an atmosphere of inclusion, curiosity, and interest, and most people will have fun watching you shoot your movie.

THE BUBBLE VERSUS PUBLIC PERCEPTION

The most powerful force against the resilient Bubble effect is public perception. No matter how well you prepare a neighborhood for filming, some stranger can easily appear within your safe zone and act or react to what she sees. A stranger walks the dog, the casual jogger takes a different route, the cabbie drives his customer into an unfamiliar neighborhood—any of these people can stumble upon your set uninvited and uninformed. They will react to what they see and hear. They will make judgments and take action on what they see and hear. This is public perception at work. And public perception can burst the Bubble.

So how does the public perception affect you? Isn't that somebody else's problem? After all, you're making a movie here! Perception becomes reality. Each person's view of the world is a construct put together based on past experience and data logged into the hard drive of the individual human brain. No two people see the world in exactly the same way. And each individual will process information and make conclusions based on his or her own patterns and formulas. So how can production affect the perhaps hundreds of people's points of view as they come in contact with your shoot over the course of a day? Be sensitive to the reality of the public perception. You are not alone when you are out on location. Be sensitive to the attitudes, trends, and even geographical lifestyle differences you may encounter. Adapting production to the times and the culture requires some planning, focused awareness, and sensitivity to the world around you. The post-9/11 atmosphere has instilled a certain amount of paranoia in our everyday approach to living. Anything can be seen as "unusual activity" or "suspicious" behavior. Anything seen as out of the ordinary can cause people to react in such a way as to burst the Bubble of protection and isolation you have built around your shooting set. And that will usually mean trouble for you, the filmmaker.

When you allow outside forces to intrude on your filming, most often it means that you haven't brought enough planning and preproduction to your location shoot. However, there will be times when no matter how well you have planned, notified, and prepped the location, someone or some circumstance will cause a delay, create an impact, or even force you to shut down the shoot, for there is potential danger lurking out in the public perception. The sidebars list some examples of how public perception can affect your work on location—in other words, how other people's reaction to what they see or think they see can affect the Bubble mindset.

Bank Robbers Get Big Break

A small production needed to film in a bank. A friend of the producer managed a bank branch out in the suburbs and agreed to let the crew in after hours to film the scenes they needed. Because they were on private property, the producer didn't think it necessary to get any permits. All the action was confined to the interior of the bank throughout the evening. They were contained and safely cocooned in the Bubble inside the bank. Well, what do people usually need to film inside a bank? Within minutes of starting to film the bank robbery scene, the local sheriff descended on the bank with a full SWAT team with guns drawn. The cast and crew were ordered on the floor with their hands behind their back while the officers retrieved all the weapons and started asking questions. Eventually the real story came out and the officers left the group, allowing them to continue filming only after covering all the windows with black drape.

What happened here? No one stopped to consider how the public driving by in their cars or people walking in and out of the stores across the street would react to what they saw, perhaps after just a quick glance or out of the corner of their eye. All those passersby saw were men in ski masks inside the bank with rifles in their hands in what appeared to be a real bank robbery. Strangers on the street did not see the camera or the lights; they didn't see the equipment trucks or the motor home. And they had no idea those were only plastic replicas of AK-47s! They saw in a fraction of a second what they believed to be a bank robbery in progress. Enough people called 911 on their cell phones to require a massive emergency response; luckily, no one was hurt in the aftermath. What had been a seemingly properly arranged location shoot on private property became a dangerous, life-threatening situation—all due to strangers' interpretation of what they saw and how they acted on it.

This scenario would have played out so differently if the producers had looked outside the Bubble. The best thing to do when prepping at any location is stand quietly and make a full circle, turning while observing everything and everyone in the vicinity of the location. Someone on the crew might have noticed that the windows allowed everyone outside the bank to look inside. The producer could have called the local government or permit office and told them that they are filming on private property and ask if they needed to get a permit. Often city governments won't require a permit in that situation, but will ask what you are doing and usually will offer to make contact with the local law enforcement with information about weapons on the set. At the very least, the producer should have made that phone call to the local police or sheriff. He or she should have introduced the project and given the officer the day, date, location, and times of the shoot. With that advance notice and detail, the officer is able to respond appropriately when a 911 call comes in to dispatch. Think outside the Bubble and look at your location from other people's points of view.

An independent film was shooting in a neighborhood using an actor in a police uniform and a standard black-and-white police car parked out front. Suddenly, the man living across the street ran out of his house hysterical, screaming for help that his wife had collapsed on the floor. He ran directly to the actor in a police uniform crying for help to save his wife. The actor had no way of calling for assistance other than to get a crew person on a cell phone to call 911. There was no emergency response for that man and his wife, which became a public safety issue. The call for help was delayed because the man's perception became his reality even in spite of the fact that a neighborhood notification had been distributed stating that there would be actors playing police officers. For this reason, most permitting governments require a real police officer assigned to the set whenever an actor in police uniform or police picture car is out in the public purview. The public's safety cannot be compromised by the activity of your shoot. Even someone's misinterpretation of what they see must be managed to ensure their safety.

This Is 911; What Is Your Emergency?

An indie movie arranged several days of filming in an abandoned building on county land. The old farmhouse had been the center of a large farming operation that had fallen into hard times. Scheduled for demolition, the house was in disrepair and offered the Art Department great raw material to create a "crack house," supposedly in the middle of the San Joaquin Valley. All the permits were in place and the house was dressed, complete with drug recipes taped to the wall, several hotplates as "cookers," chemicals and bags of raw chunks of crystal methamphetamine (drug props that were chunks cut from bars of soap slipped into small ziplock bags!) spread around on all the tables. While the crew was out filming some car scenes, the unexpected happened. An unknowing county inspector showed up at the house to conduct a survey for hazardous materials necessary to authorize the future demolition. He stumbled on more hazardous materials than he ever thought possible! Shocked to find a full-blown drug house in operation, he didn't miss a beat in calling the authorities. In no time, the scene was filled with police and fire personnel to assist the hazardous materials (hazmat) team. As the crew pulled up on site to continue filming, the producer was able to address the crisis, explain the situation, and prevent the police from confiscating all the props as evidence. Unfortunately, or not, the news media had picked up the call on the police band radio, so now there were news helicopters circling and remote news crews swarming the set for interviews. Damage control went on for hours.

The response was a testimony to the excellent work of the Art Department, but created bad feelings for some who felt that the taxpayer's money was wasted on an unnecessary emergency response effort. Although everything was legal and permitted, this situation proved once again that it is almost impossible to inform and prepare every single person who might interact with your shooting set. And every single person

will react in some way that could affect you and your work. After the incident, the production was required to keep a security guard on the set 24 hours a day.

As you see from these horror stories, you make your movie in the midst of everyone else's everyday life. And though you need to control that location, you also need to prepare and accommodate the folks who pass by or live in the area. Done well, almost everyone is happy. Done poorly, or not at all, you won't get your shots, you won't get your day, and the next filmmaker will not be welcomed at that location in the future. To do your best to ensure that you will have a great on-location shoot, begin by being aware of your surroundings, looking for anything unusual in your scene that might trigger a negative reaction, communicating with people in the area—and don't let the Bubble effect get out of control.

To Understand the Bubble Effect, Remember:

1. Locations are characters. Explore the wealth of creative contributions your locations can make to your film.
2. The Bubble effect can isolate you. Although you need control in your location, you also have to coexist with other people's daily lives and activities.
3. Communication with the residents prevents confrontation. PR is important. Make friends.
4. Have realistic expectations about what you can and can't accomplish in each location. This will most often be driven by your budget.
5. Become a creative problem solver—look for new solutions to any problems.
6. Remind the cast and crew to be courteous and respectful. Include the neighbors in the filmmaking process; engage them emotionally to have fun.
7. Be sensitive to the wide range of public perception. Not everyone will see what you're doing in the same way. Expect reactions from people.
8. Planning, attention to detail, good public relations, and a smile on your face will help you on location.

Chapter | two

The Business of Show Biz

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The desire to hear a well-told story will never leave us, but the way in which stories are created and delivered will change immensely in the next 20 years.

Kevin Kelly, *Wired Magazine* Founder, THR.com

People have been held spellbound by the fantasy world found on the silver screen since Thomas Edison started turning his hand-cranked camera and making moving pictures in 1910. Movies bond humanity through a universal language of emotions and experiences. The appeal of living vicariously through an actor's performance is like an unquenchable

thirst. We escape our everyday doldrums to pursue impossible travels through time, space, and our own fears. It can feel perhaps like a waking dream. It can feel that real. It's easy to get swept up in the magic of movie making. We all want to make our movies. It's the honored role of storytelling that goes back to the cave where our ancient ancestors sat around the flickering fire watching dancing shadows, sharing adventures, and drawing pictures on the cave wall. For us, the moviemaking experience now provides a personal outlet that allows us to move through a sophisticated fantasy world where we can control light, sound, and human behavior. It's a creative theme park in which any ride will take us into another world of human encounters and common understanding. We are creative beings. It is an intrinsic and important part of who and what we are as a species. This movie mystique is powerful.

All of this is so very true, yet there is a practical side to the aesthetics and to the art of movie making that unfortunately continues to be overlooked or outright ignored. There is a business side to movie making on even the most basic, rudimentary level, and this business side of making movies is one of the most neglected aspects of the production process among first time or emerging filmmakers. I'm not talking about distribution deals, investment capital, or points on the back end. Those are the business practices of the Hollywood studio model that have managed to bleed out into the real world. But most of you reading this book probably aren't involved in corporations, completion bonds, or big-budget studio blockbusters. You are one of the many types of new struggling filmmakers that are able to see how new trends and new technology open doors and make the dream that much more attainable. Student filmmakers, startup production companies, new producers, and passionate fans of movies try making their own movie for the first time. These are the people who are interested in learning everything about shooting on location. And that includes some basic business applications. You are among this group of "emerging" filmmakers who—regardless of age, education, stage in life, or professional background—will bring a different level of seriousness and commitment to the task. So to help you achieve all that, here are some basic business facts and protocols that you should put into place when you have reached this point and want to go out and shoot on location.

YOU ARE YOUR COMPANY

Although anyone can pick up a "flip" camera or smartphone, shoot a two-minute comedy short, and post it on YouTube, it doesn't mean that they are a filmmaker. Well—yes, it does, in a way, but only in terms of the current social networking folk culture. If you want to make a movie that can go to film festivals, possibly be seen by the public at screenings, be shown on the Sundance Channel, or be sold for cash to help you

make the money to finance your next film, then you need to adhere to good business practices.

First of all, the law applies universally to everyone. Whether you are a film student, a new producer, or a retiree spending your pension money to make your movie, legal issues are bound to arise. So it's in your best interest to be well informed and prepared to protect yourself, your movie, and your assets. As soon as you begin to ask people to sign something or you sign a contract agreeing to pay a certain amount to rent equipment or pay your crew, you have entered the world of laws and legal language. So start to think of yourself as a small company, because you are. And you will probably be conducting business like a small, sole proprietorship company. Perhaps you should get a business license, publish your fictitious name, and be really legal about it all. Or not. Either way, these are things you need to know and to apply, if not now, then in the future. Most importantly, behind every business—no matter the size—there is a business philosophy that, when embraced, will benefit you in every aspect of scouting, shooting, and making your movie.

You are your company. Regardless of whether you have a business name and a business license, you are going to go out and approach all kinds of people, asking them to work with you—in other words, to do business with you. How you conduct business will affect your business and everything you do. It will affect your business relationships, your success or failure, and your reputation. Your name will be attached to everything you do or create as well as reflecting upon everyone you work with, so there is a lot at stake. Believe in your professional status as a business owner. Your movie production might have six of your friends helping you with borrowed cameras and your grandmother's famous macaroni and cheese to feed the cast and crew. But it is still a small business venture in which goods and services are being exchanged with agreements in place. Whether through oral agreements or written contracts, deals will be made, terms will be set, and timelines will be agreed upon. Welcome to the world of the small business owner!

THE BUSINESS LICENSE

One practical way to drive home this idea of conducting business thoughtfully and make it a reality is to get a business license. A business license for a single owner—that is, a *sole proprietorship*—is usually very affordable and lasts for a year. A business license in San Diego costs $34 for a business with 12 or fewer employees. According to the City of San Diego, "All businesses operating in the City of San Diego are required to obtain a Business Tax Certificate. This includes home-based businesses, self employed persons, and independent contractors."[1] In the city of Los Angeles, a Tax

[1] http://www.ci.la.ca.us/finance/fina6a.htm.

Registration Certificate costs a minimum of $99 per year. The City of Los Angeles website states that "every person engaged in any trade, calling, occupation, vocation, profession or other means of livelihood in the City of Los Angeles must obtain a Tax Registration Certificate (TRC) and pay the required business tax due."[2] Some cities require a special event permit to film in the area instead of a business license or tax certificate. If you are going to commit to shooting projects frequently for the long term, consider establishing a separate business entity to be the name and the face of your work. But it does create a new responsibility and level of risk for you. Take the time to consider the legal structure of your business and what you are capable of managing at this time in your work. And perhaps this is the time to talk to a qualified attorney, and, for the big picture, an entertainment attorney who specializes in the business structure and the contractual paperwork side of show business.

YOUR BUSINESS STRUCTURE

In general, most startup businesses begin as a sole proprietorship or partnership and then transition into the corporation structure through growth and expansion. The sole proprietor retains sole responsibility and control of all aspects of the business. It is the quickest and easiest way to start a business. Although it is relatively simple to do and is generally affordable, it is a structure that still holds you personally responsible for capital, cash flow, and claims against the business. And you are required to file business income taxes as well as personal income tax. The next level is a *general partnership*, which is a merging of two or more owners; then the limited partnership; the corporation; and the limited liability company (LLC). Each of these business structures involve ever-escalating levels of investment capital, cash flow, and tax obligations, so take the time to educate yourself. Many local governments provide toolkits and helpful hints for small business owners or startup companies. Your local government or Chamber of Commerce can be a great resource in answering questions to help you start a business. The U.S. government Small Business Administration (SBA) has very complete information on their website, http://www.sba.gov/smallbusinessplanner/index.html, that covers everything from planning and starting your business to information on business plans and new business development.

If you decide to start a small business, you can keep it simple by establishing your business with a business license and basic liability insurance and move on from there. If you start a business, be sure to educate yourself regarding the different status of employees and independent contractors. These are two very different work agreements that affect you on a legal basis and on a tax basis. Most people in the

[2] http://www.losangelesworks.org/startBusiness/register-your-business.cfm.

production side of the entertainment industry work "freelance," which means they work on a project-by-project basis as an independent contractor and they are bound on each individual job, usually by signing an Independent Contractor Agreement. That means those individuals work for themselves; they are not employees; and they are responsible for reporting all income to the government on their tax returns. They are responsible for contributing to their own Social Security taxes, but you are responsible for reporting your payments to them to the IRS. This can become a slippery slope as a business owner, so investigate the details thoroughly and know your legal rights and the legal requirements to protect you, your business, and the people you work with.

Independent Contractor Status

The U.S. government (http://www.irs.gov) defines independent contractors as people such as lawyers, contractors, subcontractors, and auctioneers who follow an independent trade, business, or profession in which they offer their services to the public and are generally not employees. However, whether such people are employees or independent contractors depends on the facts in each case. The general rule is that an individual is an independent contractor if you, the person for whom the services are performed, have the right to control or direct only the result of the work and not the means and methods of accomplishing the result.

In other words, you hire your gaffer to light the show (the result of the work), but you don't tell him how to light it or where to put the lights (the means and methods). Get good guidance from as many sources as you can when setting up your business and when hiring your crew or asking crew to work for free. Credit, copy, and a meal are most often the terms for many independent filmmakers. But strive toward some business structure in the future.

MARKETING YOU AND YOUR COMPANY

Once you decide how to represent yourself or your business, it's time to invest in some promotional materials. Get some business cards and letterhead stationary to help best represent you when approaching property owners, insurance brokers, or the permit office. How you present yourself is an important part of marketing yourself, your company, and your movie project. Business cards are an important leave-behind item when you are out scouting. And they definitely make you appear more professional and legitimate, so people will take you more seriously and more people will respond favorably and be engaged with your movie and your requests. Then create a website, a fan page on Facebook, start advertising in the local Film Commission directory, and search for other affordable marketing methods to get your name out there. Networking should become a full-time job for you. You will build better business partnerships if you present yourself as a professional representative of your movie project. Basically, you have a product to sell. Your movie is your product, so now it's your job to create some kind of demand for

the product. Get people interested to the point where they want to be a part of it and participate. This is how you get businesses and homeowners to say yes when you are out scouting. But it requires a strong, underlying foundation of belief in yourself, your movie, and your ability to do professional, ethical work. You market yourself in everything you do. You are probably the entire marketing department for your company (that's *you*) and your movie. Be excited and passionate about your work! Talk about it all the time, to everyone and anyone who will listen. You never know where you will find support and interest.

Networking Brings Easy Money

This is what networking is all about. Self-promotion is a good thing, and you need to be marketing yourself, your movie, and your skill at all times. Be proud and secure in your role, your work, and your ability to influence and attract the people and support to help you be successful. People are going to make judgments based on a first impression and will respond to you first before they ever hear the details of your location request. "In $\frac{1}{6}$ of a second, we assess whether someone will harm, help, or hurt us" (Markey Stein, Monster.com). So package your message well and get it out there.

I love to tell the story of some student filmmakers who had the unexpected surprise of their life during a trip to the store. Two young student filmmakers were in line at the grocery store reading tabloid headlines out loud and laughing about how the celebrity's antics were a good fit for their short movie script. As they discussed some of the details of their production schedule, the man in line in front of them turned around and asked if they were filmmakers. Yes, they said, they were local students finishing their big senior project, which was already over budget, and they hadn't even started shooting. The stranger showed interest and shared with them that he had been a student filmmaker once and he knew how hard it could be. He asked about the script, showed interest, and seemed impressed. As he finished checking out, he gave the students his card and told them to call, as he thought there might be something he could do to help them out. The students called, had a meeting where they perfected their pitch, and found a new friend in the stranger—who proceeded to write them a check for $2,000 to make the best movie they could make.

Marketing is a full-time job. There should never be a time when you aren't promoting or marketing your film. I think this is one of the most neglected areas for independent filmmakers. It's the one time that the studio model holds true for any indie project—no matter the budget. Always have some marketing money in your budget. For studio movies, 30 percent of the budget goes to above the line: That's the script, actors, director, and producers. Another 30 percent goes to production—that is, actually shooting the movie. And 30 percent goes to marketing. The only indie filmmakers I know who have done well or extremely well on the festival circuit are the filmmakers who had a marketing budget from the very beginning. Your marketing budget should include the cost of festival submissions, travel and housing at festivals and marketing

materials: posters, postcards, buttons, balloons, refrigerator magnets, or whatever you decide to invest in to spread your name around the festival cities. But it's not just festival marketing. It's the money for the website, trailers, DVDs, postage, envelopes, and the like. To have a great product in your hand and not be able to spread the word is a waste. Social networking and viral marketing is powerful, but don't limit yourself to that alone. Keep current with new trends, but don't neglect the broad platform of marketing avenues available to you.

LIABLITY AND INSURANCE

Just mention the words "it's the law" or "that's not legal" and filmmakers get nervous. Or at least they should. These words and the concepts behind them are going to come up over and over again. Talking about the different laws and legalities of filmmaking naturally leads to a discussion about the scariest of all the "L" words: *liability*. Directly tied to liability is the other "L" word: *loss*. There is much to be lost if something goes wrong on your set and you don't have the liability insurance to cover you or the damage. I know insurance is the last thing people think about and the last conversation a filmmaker ever wants to have if it means money out of the budget and money not seen on the screen. But there is much to be said for at least exploring all the possibilities of what is at risk, how much can you get away with, and how much can you afford to lose. The world of insurance is a foreign country with a language all its own. You must explore that world and get comfortable—or at least familiar—with the culture. It's not surprising that some of the most horrific production stories come out of the world of insurance. There are a few bone-chilling examples through this chapter that should convince you of the value of insurance coverage.

Don't Drop the Camera

Mickey Harrison is a filmmaker and a gifted mentor who works with students and helps produce their films, bringing her experience to their work. On one such student film, she was urgently called to the set to see her student director lying on the couch, ball cap covering his eyes, with tears streaming down his face. She didn't have to ask what happened as everyone in the room announced, "We broke the camera!" Someone had dropped the 35 mm motion picture camera. Mickey's networking skills came to the rescue, as she was able to find a local DP who could replace the parts to get through the shoot. But seeing the director still distraught, Mickey asked what was wrong. He told her that he hadn't taken her advice to get full insurance coverage—he'd only gotten $1,000 coverage, because it was cheaper! She made each of the two camera operators who dropped the camera pay one-third of the repair, and the director had to pay the final third. Lesson learned: always network and always get full insurance coverage on your equipment.

DEMYSTIFY GUERILLA FILMMAKING

Determining how much you can risk in financial loss means asking whether you can risk losing everything. It all goes back to the foundation of professionalism and sound business practices. Even if you still wholeheartedly believe that guerilla film making is the purest form of artistic expression and that permitting creates limitations and stops the energetic flow of your expressive self, stop and think again. If you really believe that you'll be fine just pulling the van up to any location as crew and cast jump out to steal the shot, jump in the van, and drive away, you are taking a chance—a very big chance. You could be risking everything. You are taking a chance that someone gets hurt; you are taking the chance that someone calls the police; you are taking the chance that someone reacts to your actions in a violent way, causing pain or injury; and you are taking the chance of not finishing your day's work, not getting the shot, not making your day. The worst risk a filmmaker can take is to intentionally risk that they won't get their shots that day. Yes, there is a stage in filmmaking at which you "guerilla-film," but it is usually a sign of the beginner or someone in the early stages of development. *Guerilla filming* usually means you are filming without insurance, without permits, and without any communication with government, public safety, or law enforcement agencies. And yes, we have all guerilla-filmed at some point in our career. But then there comes a point at which we all grow out of that mindset by realizing that guerilla filmmaking brings limitations. We grow and move on to elevate our work to a higher level of production value and a higher level of professionalism. You will have to make this decision in your professional development. At some point, guerilla filmmaking is no longer your badge of honor. It can cost you too much.

Filmmaker Pays For Police Response

Nassau County Police, who were called to the scene of what they believed to be an armed robbery at a local store, were shocked to learn the gunman was actually an actor shooting a scene for a movie. Seven police cars and several unmarked cars responded after passersby on the street alerted authorities of suspicious activity. "They saw people with handguns, people on the floor, and other customers with their hands up," Nassau County Police Detective Michael Bitsko told PIX 11 News. Convenience store manager Sanjay Patel, who plays himself in the film, thought the cops with guns drawn were all part of the production. "The officer showed great restraint in disarming this individual and nothing happened to anyone," said Detective Bitsko. The movie is about a Nassau County police detective. The producer admitted to not filing any paperwork to start production on the independent film in Nassau County and confessed, "Even though it was on private property, I should have contacted Nassau County Police." Charges were not filed; however, officials warn that it's possible the producer may get billed for police time in response to the incident.

WPIX-TV.

How much do you think it costs to send seven police cars with two officers in each and several unmarked cars with officers to report to a crime scene? I'm guessing thousands of dollars. I would like to know if the producer had the appropriate insurance coverage for his production in the event that something unforeseen happened.

How much can you risk losing and what is liability? Liability means accountability and responsibility to another. Liability insurance is "insurance against loss resulting from liability or injury or damage to the persons or property of another" (says *Webster's Dictionary*). Liability insurance guarantees that you are protected to some extent from an outsider's claims against you or your actions. Every time you step out onto public property, you are assuming responsibility for your actions and their effect on you and all others in that place. So if you take a small crew out to a city park to shoot a scene and someone in the park gets injured due to your presence, you are liable. The website http://www.investorwords.com explains that "insurance coverage is meant to protect against claims alleging that one's negligence or inappropriate action resulted in bodily injury or property damage." If you are on public property with no permit, that would be considered an "inappropriate" action if it led to injury or damage.

Serious financial loss and personal damage could come to you as a result of this neglect. It's so easy to say nothing will happen. But bad things happen to even the most well-prepared, optimistic people. You know the old adage of Murphy's Law: "If it can go wrong, it will go wrong." Murphy and his law are always present on a movie set. I like to say that Murphy was born on a movie set. That's because this crazy business of managing all the filmmaking variables requires controlling the invisible, anticipating the unknown, and planning for all contingencies. Liability and loss are variables that you can and should control and guard against. Protect yourself and your work, for you can suffer from a financial loss even when you are shooting on private property.

Where's My Rug? And I Don't Mean My Hair!

A TV movie was shooting in the raw space on the 32nd floor of a modern high rise, using the unfinished cement and steel beams as part of the production design for a love tryst. The production designer created a fantasy bedroom with exquisite furnishings, reminiscent of a sheik's desert tent. As we wrapped out of that location, the Art Department realized that one of the expensive Persian rugs was missing—the $5,000 Persian rug rented for the scene. The floor had secured access, meaning that only the building management, custodial staff, and security could get on the 32nd floor. The investigation went nowhere, and production had to pay the $5,000 for the lost rug. The location manager didn't lose any hair over this one, but definitely saw some new gray hair as a result of the ordeal.

INSURANCE: GET COMPETITIVE BIDS

Loss and liability know no boundaries. Whether you're working on private or public property, you can lose. If you are out in the public with no permit and no insurance, you are at risk if there is injury or damage. That's a fact. You need to know the risk and understand what is really involved in that. Do not make a decision about insurance without complete and accurate information; ask all the questions you need to ask. Take the time to do the research and approach several insurance companies and get a bid for coverage on your project. Your local film commission should be able to provide a list of established insurance companies or brokers in your area who are experienced in putting together a producer's package. The bid will depend on what you want covered by the insurance. One way is to request a bid based on insuring your company for a year with an annual premium for general liability. That would be basic insurance to cover you as a business entity. A second type of coverage would be to get a quote specific to your project. Not all companies or brokers deal in short-term "shoot days only" insurance coverage. But be sure to ask. For a project-specific bid, the insurance agent will ask you several questions about the project, such as the genre, whether there is any unusual activity, whether there are any special effects or stunts, how many shoot days there are, the size of the crew, and most importantly what your budget is. There is no one general plan for insurance coverage in this industry. It all depends on what you're doing, where you are doing it, and who is involved. Insurance coverage for a movie with a major star actor is going to be very different from an indie film with no celebrity names. Everything in the equation affects the final outcome in terms of coverage and cost of insurance. Here are the most common areas of coverage found in a short-term production package:

$1,000,000 Commercial Liability
Rented Equipment and Owned Equipment
Props, Sets and Wardrobe
Negative and Faulty Stock
Third-Party Property Damage
Office Contents
General Liability
Automobile Liability and Physical Damage
Workers Compensation (required in many states)
Umbrella

(Umbrella insurance refers to a "liability insurance policy that protects the assets and future income of the policyholder above and beyond the standard limits on their primary policies," according to http://www.wikipedia.com.)

You will immediately notice that this coverage does not include anything out of the ordinary. No stunts, no animals, no driving. No fight scenes, no shooting in water, and no weapons (including prop guns,

squibs, blanks, or knives). All of those special, high-risk factors would certainly affect the cost of your insurance premium. Knowledge about insurance costs, permit fees, and public safety factors can easily affect your writing or help you pick the right script to shoot. Filming an action adventure movie on a micro budget is much more challenging than shooting a romantic comedy with a budget under $20,000. Much of the time in filmmaking, you have to make the best decision based on the information at hand. Just be well informed and then make your best decision based on what you know and what is at risk in your particular situation. I suggest making insurance and permits the first item in any budget and taking it from there. When you do decide to invest in your future and buy insurance coverage, see Figure 2.1, which contains a sample form so that you can become familiar with the look and information contained in the ACORD paperwork.

There will be many additional pages of detail that accompany the ACORD (Association for Cooperative Operations Research and Development) form, but at least have the ACORD with you at all times on location and in meetings. You need to be able to provide a copy for any one who might want to see proof of your insurance. If they are a property owner, they will want a *rider*, a separate page that names them, the owner, as additional insured, to protect them and reduce their liability. Private property owners will be anxious and will need to be convinced that your insurance company will cover the cost of any damage to their home or business. This is called *third-party liability insurance* and is usually part of your coverage. Third-party liability insurance protects property owners from any loss or damage the production crew might cause. And in Murphy's world, things can go wrong no matter how much you try to prevent damage to a location.

No, Not the Gaffer's Tape

On *Accidental Meeting*, we needed to shoot in a high-end restaurant to set up the meeting with the as-yet-undisclosed murderer. The Art Department went in the night before to tape down "layout board" to protect the mahogany wood floors. Layout board is heavyweight cardboard that is used to protect carpet and floors and is connected in overlapping panels and taped to the baseboards or floor edges. The shooting went well, but when I went to follow up and do a walk-through with the restaurant owner the next day, he was not happy. Someone had used gaffer tape instead of the kinder paper tape and the floor was ruined. The gaffer tape had stripped all the mahogany stain off the wood floor in a crazy abstract pattern that extended everywhere. I brought in three different companies to get bids for repair that all hovered near $5,000. The owner wanted his original people to do the work and demanded $10,000. When production took the claim to their insurance company, it made more sense to just pay the owner the cash because of the high deductible. So many times even attempts at good practices can go wrong and end up costing money.

In this instance, the insurance was the safety net, but the company still used the most cost-effective means to restore the damaged floor. And it was better for them not to have to file a claim with their insurance company.

ACORD™ CERTIFICATE OF LIABILITY INSURANCE

DATE (MM/DD/YY): 01/01/2011

PRODUCER

Gaslamp Insurance Services, Inc.
1111 6th Ave Ste 300
San Diego CA 92101

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INSURERS AFFORDING COVERAGE

INSURED

Production Company Name
Street Address
City State Zip

INSURER A: St. Paul Insurance Company (Rated A XV)
INSURER B: Everest National Insurance Company (Rated A+ XIV)
INSURER C:
INSURER D:
INSURER E:

COVERAGES

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INSR LTR	TYPE OF INSURANCE	POLICY NUMBER	POLICY EFFECTIVE DATE (MM/DD/YY)	POLICY EXPIRATION DATE (MM/DD/YY)	LIMITS	
A	GENERAL LIABILITY ✔ COMMERCIAL GENERAL LIABILITY ☐ CLAIMS MADE ☐ OCCUR GEN'L AGGREGATE LIMIT APPLIES PER: ☐ POLICY ☐ PROJECT ☐ LOC	SP31657874-03	01/01/2011	01/01/2012	EACH OCCURRENCE FIRE DAMAGE (Any one fire) MED EXP (Any one person) PERSONAL & ADV INJURY GENERAL AGGREGATE PRODUCTS - COMP/OP AGG	$ 1,000,000 $ $ $ $ 2,000,000 $
	AUTOMOBILE LIABILITY ☐ ANY AUTO ☐ ALL OWNED AUTOS ☐ SCHEDULED AUTOS ☐ HIRED AUTOS ☐ NON-OWNED AUTOS				COMBINED SINGLE LIMIT (Ea accident) BODILY INJURY (Per person) BODILY INJURY (Per accident) PROPERTY DAMAGE (Per accident)	$ $ $ $
	GARAGE LIABILITY ☐ ANY AUTO				AUTO ONLY - EA ACCIDENT OTHER THAN AUTO ONLY: EA ACC AGG	$ $ $
	EXCESS LIABILITY ☐ OCCUR ☐ CLAIMS MADE ☐ DEDUCTIBLE RETENTION $				EACH OCCURRENCE AGGREGATE	$ $
	WORKERS COMPENSATION AND EMPLOYERS' LIABILITY				✔ WC STATU-TORY LIMITS ☐ OTH-ER E.L. EACH ACCIDENT E.L. DISEASE - EA EMPLOYEE E.L. DISEASE - POLICY LIMIT	 $ $ $
	OTHER					

DESCRIPTION OF OPERATIONS/LOCATIONS/VEHICLES/EXCLUSIONS ADDED BY ENDORSEMENT/SPECIAL PROVISIONS

Certificate Holder is named as Additional Insured, as respects to General Liability for operations of the named insured.

CERTIFICATE HOLDER ✔ ADDITIONAL INSURED; INSURER LETTER: ___

City of San Diego
County of San Diego
San Diego Unified Port District
San Diego Film Commission
c/o San Diego Film Commission
1010 Second Ave Ste 1500
San Diego CA 92101

(Certificate Holder must include all Additional Insured as named on this example.)

CANCELLATION

SHOULD ANY OF THE ABOVE DESCRIBED POLICIES BE CANCELLED BEFORE THE EXPIRATION DATE THEREOF, THE ISSUING INSURER WILL ENDEAVOR TO MAIL _____ DAYS WRITTEN NOTICE TO THE CERTIFICATE HOLDER NAMED TO THE LEFT, BUT FAILURE TO DO SO SHALL IMPOSE NO OBLIGATION OR LIABILITY OF ANY KIND UPON THE INSURER, ITS AGENTS OR REPRESENTATIVES.

AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE
Emilio Figueroa

ACORD 25-S (7/97) © ACORD CORPORATION 1988

FIGURE 2.1 Sample Insurance ACORD. This is a typical insurance form showing coverage at $2 million general comprehensive and $1 million per occurrence. *Reprinted by permission: Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

THE PERMIT PROCESS

Now that you have insurance handled, the next logical item of business is permits. The first question I often hear is, "When do I need a permit?" The automatic answer is that you always need a permit. You should have a permit to shoot within any and all cities, counties, states, and larger government jurisdictions. You should have that broad permit even if you are shooting on private property. When you shoot on private property, you will probably be parking trucks on a city street, which is public property, and you will be using a public sidewalk to access that private property. Even on private property, your filming might easily affect other people in adjacent or nearby private properties, who could call the police. And if you are on private property when the police arrive because of a neighbor's complaint and you have no permit, chances are very good that they will shut you down. Private property exists within some other larger public domain like a city or county. And rarely are you ever completely contained on private property unless there is a lot of acreage to hold all the trucks and vehicles. That often translates into a more remote, isolated location for which you would think might not need a government permit. But it all depends on what you are doing at that location. If you are on private property that's a 1,000-acre ranch and you are shooting AK-47s and driving tanks with missile launchers, you need to permit through the proper channels to make sure the area is safely prepared and to guarantee that the police and news media don't show up on your doorstep. Always get the proper permit, even when on private property. A permit is your guarantee that you will be able to do your work as described in the permit. It protects you and provides you with the authority to continue filming as long as you are not in violation of the terms of the permit. You have partnered with an authorized government or government agency and you have that in writing. It's the perfect partnership; that is why insurance and permits go hand in hand. They protect you. Once you introduce unusual activity, equipment, and intrusive impact to a public space, you create risk. Risk then translates into liability, and when you are out in the public the liability affects you personally and also falls back on the government that oversees that public space. All parties involved in the permitting partnership need to share the liability. That's the business of government.

Why would you not want to get permits? Most often I hear people say they are worried about the cost, thinking that it will be too expensive. Other times producers think it's cumbersome or difficult or takes too much time—too much paperwork and bureaucracy. When you see the professional benefits of permitting, you'll realize why it should become standard business practice to secure all the permits you need. Once you do the research and get the cost of permits into your working budget, there shouldn't be too many surprises. Yes, there will be forms to fill out

and paperwork to collect within a time frame unique to bureaucratic processes—and that usually means slowly. Plan for those factors, because it is important and it is the right way to shoot your movie. And permits are absolutely required to shoot on any public property. The cost will vary from city to city and from state to state. In some regions, you might be lucky enough to shoot where there are no permit fees—yes, in some places permits are *free*. This is one time "free" can be guaranteed by a government office. Although the permits can often be free, keep in mind that there could be additional cost for police officers or other personnel assigned, so be sure to ask the right questions. You don't want to be surprised by hidden costs when it's too late. This kind of *cost recovery*, or paying for assigned personnel, is detailed in Chapter 4.

The bottom line is that this is a very competitive business in which cities, counties, states, and regions are offering tremendous bonus incentives to get you to shoot in their area. Don't neglect whatever incentives, credits, rebates, or discounts might be available to you right in your own backyard. Although not every project will qualify for the many cash incentives or tax rebate programs offered by most states, many can benefit from the cities, counties, and states that have *free* permits. San Diego, Las Vegas, Austin, Houston, Paris, Denver, Atlantic City, and Dayton are just some of the cities that have free filming permits. The growing global marketplace has created some very cut-throat competition among governments even down to the smallest details. The New York City website used to point out that "LA charges $625 for two weeks of filming, with additional fees for services like cops on set, parking, and street closures." The site made a selling point of this because NYC had free permits up until May 2010, when the tough economy forced the city to start charging a $300 fee per project. When you search even more, you'll find that the states of Mississippi and Tennessee don't even require permits of any kind! So take the time to look for the most cost-saving, best possible location for your project when you are researching permits. And if you are shooting a micro/low-budget project, that most often ends up meaning you will stay close to home.

LETTER OF INTENT

Contact the local film commission as soon as you move into preproduction. The website should provide all the basic information about permits and everything you need to know about shooting in that area. Many film commissions do not actually permit but only promote the area to welcome and assist filmmakers. So be sure to find out what office provides the actual permit in your area. Don't be surprised to find out that every permitting process starts with the insurance question. Expect the permit office to start out by asking you what type of project you are shooting (commercial, music video, TV, or movie), what your budget is,

and whether you have insurance. As mentioned earlier, the insurance standard is $2 million general comprehensive with $1 million per occurrence. If you're doing complicated stunts, physical special effects, or using weapons, then the insurance requirement will be higher. As the risk increases, the insurance requirement increases. That's the business of insurance. After that, you can expect that the permit office will need to see your script to fully understand and evaluate the scope of what you plan to shoot. Then it usually requires a one- or two-page questionnaire that you will complete, including as much detail as possible. Usually there is a designated area on the paperwork where you are asked to describe the scene and activity including the amount and type of equipment, special parking, traffic control, and so on. Often permit offices will request a separate *letter of intent (LOI)* to provide that kind of detail; all the basic who, what, when, where, and how of the scene or scenes you want to shoot at each location (see Figure 2.2).

From there, the permit office might require a meeting if you're permitting a long-form project over an extended period of time. If not, the paperwork can most often be processed over a few days with the required conditions or limitations spelled out in the permit—then you are good to go. For example, the Film LA Permit Application is ten pages long, covering three different locations, and the first two pages are the general information sheets. San Diego's Film Registration Form is a single page usually requiring an LOI for each location requested. The official New York City Motion Picture Television permit form is a single page with some elements requiring additional forms (such as when you are shooting with child actors). Every permit is slightly different in terms of how it's processed, but every permit usually states right on the paperwork that the permit is not valid until insurance is on file and the permit is signed by the person of authority for that particular office. It will vary from place to place; in some smaller towns or rural areas, the only requirement to film is often just a special events permit (which still usually require insurance coverage). Investigate the permit process where you live and get familiar with costs, time frames, and anything else that might be required. Plan on getting your permits, budget for any costs, and plan for the time it takes to permit in your preproduction calendar—and relax in the knowledge that you will be able to shoot your scenes legally with the cooperation of local government.

OWNERSHIP: GET IT IN WRITING

I have to wonder, what about the rest of you? Many of you reading this are not going to have insurance and will not be going through the permit process. I get that. You're going to be better educated by the end of this book even if you don't use all the suggestions right away. But in this chapter I am committed to giving you all you need to know to be safe,

Next Time Films, LLC

LETTER OF INTENT

To Whom It May Concern: October 10, 2010

Next Time Films, LLC, is shooting a short film throughout the San Diego area. *Better Luck Next Time* is a romantic, comedy/drama that depends on the southern California lifestyle. This letter of intent is a part of our filming request for the Mission Beach area with the details to follow.

Our crew of 45 people will be filming interior CJ's Beach Break Bar at 1234 S. Mission Blvd. on Monday, October 25, 2010. The cast and crew of 50 will arrive at 7 AM. We are requesting to park our crew vehicles and support trucks in the city Park & Recreation parking lot across the street. In addition to crew cars we will have one 34 ft. motor home, one catering truck, two pop-ups with tables and chairs, 2 cube vans and a process trailer. The process trailer will be used later in the day for driving shots so in addition to parking vehicles, this area of the parking lot will be used as a staging area from 12 noon until 7 PM. We also request curb parking in front of the location for working trucks including two 5-ton trucks, one 15 ft. box truck and one cube van (see attached map).

The interior work involves dialogue and a fist fight between bar patrons. We will have a stunt coordinator staging the fight and we will have a medic on the set. We plan to leave the bar at noon and begin to stage the picture car for the process trailer in the parking lot. I have requested two SDPD officers to start with us at 2 PM when we plan to go out onto the street. The driving shots will take place north bound and southbound on S. Mission Blvd from Belmont Park to the south Mission Beach jetty where we can easily turn around in both parking lots and re-set to shoot again. We plan to finish the driving shots at sunset, 6:30 PM.

Please call with any questions or concerns. I look forward to working with you on this film and making San Diego a character in our film! Thanks for all your help.

Best regards,
Kathy M. McCurdy
Location Scout
619-555-1212

555 Central Ave. Ste. 5 San Diego, CA. 92121
619-555-5555 www.betterluckmovie.com

FIGURE 2.2 This sample LOI provides the basic information you need to include in any permit process or permit paperwork.

professional, and as legal as possible, however you plan to shoot and regardless of your budget.

The world of entertainment products remains a hard-core business and everything must be documented when you are dealing with other peoples' properties and other peoples' talents. You will be contracting with physical elements, like a house location, and with intangible elements, like an actor's performance. Get everything in writing. Verbal agreements might feel solid to you when your best friend or your brother is telling you that you can shoot in his office on Saturday. But getting it in writing is the absolute, only professional way to do business and brings another level of legality to your agreements. Even when you are shooting in your parents' house, get a written contract. Your neighbor is loaning you his backyard furniture; get the terms in writing. A crew member loans you her coolers and coffee maker for craft service; get it in writing. A written agreement guarantees some level of clear and agreed upon understanding. It helps reduce or eliminate the "he said, she said" rebuttal when the other person all of a sudden doesn't remember the agreement the way you do. And it's just a good habit for you to get into as you begin the long hard road of the career filmmaker. But there's actually a lot more to it than just getting your agreements in writing.

At the root of all things legal in the world of filmmaking lies the one great ultimate truth. You must own every image on the screen. Nothing in your film can belong to anyone else—you need to be able to prove that you rightfully own every image, sound, facsimile, and representation of anything and anyone as seen in your film. That means you need to own every element of every image seen in your film. This is a very big issue that touches everything from music to wardrobe to original art work within your film. So let's start with a simple overview. No logos, no trademarked names or symbols, no recorded music, no brand names, no products (unless you've secured a product placement deal), nothing copyrighted, no famous artwork, no proper names (unless cleared through legal), no recognizable architecture; in other words, don't shoot anything that you don't own. That means that you can't let your actor wear a Nike T-shirt while drinking a Monster energy drink in front of a McDonald's sign.

None of this thought process is in your script. But it needs to become part of your production sensibility. This legal concept of ownership bridges across all departments, including Wardrobe and the Art Department, as well as locations. So what does this really mean? Can you show a street name, can you shoot the stores' signage in a mall, can you see a reproduction of the Mona Lisa on a doctor's office wall? It's better if you don't. In the real world of TV and Hollywood films, these trademark copyright issues have an entire team dedicated to getting the permissions, licensing, and final deals in place to allow you to film such content. But if you don't have access to an entire legal department or you don't have a lawyer on retainer, just don't get in the bad habit of

shooting elements that you don't personally own when you don't have permission from the owner. So many visuals in everyday life would require permission on a corporate level that it's hardly worth your time and energy. Don't set your story in a franchise restaurant or a world-famous hotel. Don't make the story dependent on a classic piece of music and lyrics if you don't have the budget to cover the royalty fees. Just don't write these things into your script and don't casually shoot without looking at all the detail in your scene, wherever you shoot.

You must own every image and you must have the written permission to film any element that you do not own. Owning a Hollister T-shirt doesn't mean you own the name Hollister. Even if you are a student filmmaker, just don't do it. So often students will say, "Why not? It's just a student film." I've seen student films full of contemporary music and brand-name props on the kitchen table, car names in close-ups, or designer names on designer jeans. It just becomes a bad habit that you are going to have to break. And it could actually keep your student film from going farther than just being a class assignment. Some students send their school films onto festivals and there is even an Emmy category for student filmmakers. But don't expect to screen your student film at any commercial event or on any cable channel without all the written documentation to prove that it's legally yours. There's a reason every phone number in a movie starts with 555 and the reason is that the sequence has been cleared and established as the fictional standard for inclusion in any commercial entertainment product. It guarantees the phone number doesn't really exist and no real person is going to be bothered with crank phone calls because their number appeared on a FOR SALE sign in a scene. There's a reason the Art Department creates a mocked-up license plate whenever you have a picture car in the shot. No one wants their real license plate seen by thousands of people and running the risk of perhaps becoming the object of identity theft, bad jokes, or harassment.

DELIVERABLES

These contracts, permits, licenses, and such are all part of what are called the "deliverables" for your film—and the same rules apply to everyone. No exceptions. You have to be able to prove that you own the images, sounds, and performances in your film and that you have adhered to all the laws that apply. This can come as a shock to a producer who has just bulldozed through the production process fast and furious to get the movie made. And unfortunately, this type of contractual, legal documentation is one of the first areas where a first time filmmaker thinks he or she can cut corners to save money and time. Not a good idea. At some point along the way, you will be disappointed by not having the right paperwork and much more.

Deliverables Defined

Deliverables are the materials that a distributor needs in order to release a film. Without a negative of some sort, the distributor can't create theatrical release prints. Without a color-corrected video version, the distributor can't broadcast it on TV or release it to your local video chain. Without a legal trail proving that the producer in fact owns the film and all its elements, the distributor won't undertake the legal risk of releasing it. And without a good many color slides, black-and-white prints, and quirky anecdotes about the shoot, the distributor won't have the means to publicize the film's release. Deliverables fall into those three categories: print materials, legal documents, and publicity materials, and the bulk of the expense for the deliverables process lies in the first of them.

FilmMaker 2010.
The Myth of the Seven Thousand Dollar Film: Overcoming the Deliverables Process.
Anthony Bregman and Mary Jane Skalski.

Here's one perfect example. A group of indie filmmakers made it into a fairly reputable film festival. Surprise, surprise—their short film was well received and they were approached by a small distribution company. Upon producing their deliverables, the only thing missing was licensing for music. The producers had filled the movie soundtrack with contemporary hits, and in the rush of finishing the film they never approached ASCAP to license the music and pay the fees required to use someone else's creative property. (ASCAP is the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers, a performing rights organization that collects royalty payments for use of its member's creations; see http://www.ascap.com.) The distribution company investigated the costs and told the producers they still wanted the film but wouldn't pay the $30,000 for the music. If they wanted the distribution deal, the producers would have to pay to license the music. They couldn't raise the money and lost out on what was perhaps the chance of a lifetime to break into the real world of distribution. So there are two important issues here. First, they didn't own the music and used it anyway. Second, they found out how important all the deliverables are in the next level of filmmaking: getting your movie seen through distribution. Even if they had their friend's band crank out a so-so version of the hit songs, they would still need to pay to license the music and lyrics in their own original version. Ownership of the film is not the case; elements in the film do not transfer to you just because you own the film. Unless you own the right to show another's logo, trademark, brand name, company name, famous piece of art, or famous architect's work, do not put it in your film. This is one of the most important jobs of the producer, and for most of you reading this book, that's you: you are a one-man band trying to do it all. Begin to appreciate the depths of each position on the crew and start planning to release yourself from doing it all on your next movie.

Legal Realities

First, the producer must make sure that the production company is in compliance with all applicable laws (whether local, state, federal, or international). Second, the producer must navigate the legal waters to minimize the company's risk and avoid all possible liability that could arise from their activities (i.e., the production of the film). Finally, after having satisfied the governmental authorities and dodged any liability bullets, the producer must also make sure that he or she has all of the legal delivery requirements that any distributor will demand before accepting the film for distribution.

David Albert Pierce, Esq.
MovieMaker Guide to Making Movies, 2006. MovieMaker Publishing Co., Inc., NY. www.moviemaker.com

WAIVERS, RELEASES, AND CONTRACTS

You could fill a book with all the paperwork you need to keep track of when shooting your movie—and you actually *should* fill a book. Every show will have a huge notebook binder filled with paperwork like crew deal memos, talent releases, SAG contracts, location contracts, work permits for minors, music clearance, product placement agreements, pyrotechnic permits, sponsorship agreements, any and all permits, call sheets, production reports, and accident reports—and the list goes on. Everything should go in the show binder to serve as a type of internal audit, helping you keep track of the paper trail to prove that you own every image in your film. Some of this paperwork will document that you had permission to use a property, show its name, or change its appearance. When on location, you will always have a location agreement with the owner of any property you are using as a shooting location (more on location contracts in Chapter 7). You should also have a written agreement if you are using a neighborhood church parking lot or neighbor's empty lot to park trucks or crew cars. Any time you are using someone else's property in any capacity, get a written agreement that explains the activity and the terms and includes both parties' signatures. You will also want the property owner to "sign off" on a statement that the property was restored as agreed upon after you wrap. All kinds of situations will come up when on location, and you will have to come up with a creative solution that might involve making a deal with someone else. If you give the lady next door $20 because you ran a stinger (an electrical extension cord) from her garage for extra power, get it in writing. Every transaction is a business agreement, whether verbal or written, and the written form lasts much longer, translates more clearly, and confirms that the agreement exists. If your movie becomes a huge viral blockbuster and the homeowner comes after you for more money, claiming you didn't have permission to shoot in his house, you will be

very happy to have a location contract that spells out the terms, includes the agreed-upon amount paid, and the cancelled check to prove it.

Waivers, releases, and contracts are the most common types of written agreements that you deal with as a filmmaker. A waiver is a distinctly different type of agreement because with a waiver, the person signing the waiver is voluntarily relinquishing (giving up) a known right or claim. Indie producers often tell me they had their SAG talent sign a waiver to appear in their non-SAG film. That would mean the actor is intentionally abandoning their claim to SAG rates and terms for payment and all the other contractual details required by the guild when an actor works in a film. I don't think that kind of waiver exists because the guild would not allow that kind of outside negotiation without the guild being involved. The actor would be paid according to SAG rates on a deferred basis, but he or she is not relinquishing the right or claim to payment. The most popular use of a waiver is among volunteer cast and crew. So much of the indie film formula requires free labor and free actors. Indie films are the incubator for passionate performers who just want to act every chance they can get. Indie films offer the apprenticeship for grips, gaffers, makeup artists, and costumers every time they can get on the set, meet new people like them, and learn more about their craft. The indie formula creates a training ground for so many up-and-coming artists and artisans. But how do you protect yourself as a producer against vindictive, exploitative behavior if someone on your crew cries foul? There's no solid easy answer to this question, and it can become a big problem for any filmmaker. I suggest that when you invite volunteer cast and crew onto your set, you create some type of agreement for them to sign. Although it might not stand up in a court of law, I believe that if you can demonstrate that you did your due diligence in addressing the issues and offered terms that your volunteers agree to, it's an honest agreement. If there is no written agreement, I believe there is much greater risk of abuse, miscommunication, and possible claims against you. Though I certainly am not an attorney, I can make suggestions based on my experience. I have seen many such waivers used, and they all contained the same essential elements. If you decide to go this direction, your waiver should include these points: acknowledge that the signer is a volunteer, that they are participating to pursue their craft and artistic development, that they are not being paid, that you are not their employer, and that they understand you have no liability insurance or worker's compensation insurance. Of course the legal world has its own perspective on volunteer labor and doesn't put much validity, if any, into such a waiver. But it is significant for you to be able to demonstrate that the volunteer status was discussed and agreed to by all who signed the waiver. What more can you do when people are willing to work for free or for a credit, copy, and a meal? Put it in writing.

RELEASE FORMS

Releases are written agreements usually used between actors and producers or production companies. Every person appearing in your film must sign a release giving you permission to use their image and voice in your movie. You need to own that other person's presence in your film. There are a number of good standard talent release forms available in books and on the Internet. Make sure everyone signs off with a release form (see Figure 2.3).

If you have all your crew people in the background of the party scene, have them all sign off as appearing in the film. "Background extra" is a different role than their crew position, and you need to have that permission in writing. Usually you can create an extras release with the agreement written at the top of a page and have all your extras sign below it: name, address, contact numbers, and Social Security numbers, all on one sheet. But what about the scene at the beach or a mall or the airport where you have lots of real people milling around you and possibly getting in your shot? This is the time to post a public notice called a *tacit release*. It will inform the people in the area that you and your production company are filming in the area and that by reading it they acknowledge they may be seen in the background and give you permission to do so. Some tacit releases are so long and full of legalese type language that they scare people and create outrage. Others are short and to the point and make it a friendly message that is much easier to accept.

It's best to have your lawyer or legal intern write your tacit release for you. But I recommend that when you are shooting in busy public areas you post at least some statement out in the public, at the camera, and at the edge of frame. And roll on it: film the tacit release in that specific environment in case you ever have to prove it was there and visible to all the people who might be in the area.

The business of showbiz is often reduced to liability, legality, and getting people to sign on the dotted line. But honoring the business side of your art positions you to go beyond the less-focused filmmaker willing to settle for less and compromise out of poor planning. You never want to do anything that will compromise the integrity of your film. Approach making your movie as your homegrown business that is bound to expand with every project you shoot. You are your company, and as a filmmaker, you depend on the expertise of everyone on your set or in your production office. Consider yourself deserving of honesty, hard work, and integrity from yourself and your entire production team. Surround yourself with the best people dedicated to the shared goal of making the best movie possible. You are on a mission, and it can't hurt to be the one to give the pep talk to keep everyone fired up, energized, and on the same page. When you begin to work from this place of

RELEASE

AUTHORIZATION TO REPRODUCE PHYSICAL LIKENESS

For good and valuable consideration, the receipt of which from _____ _____ is acknowledged, I hereby expressly grant to said _____ and its employees, agents, and assigns, the right to photograph me and use my picture, silhouette, and other reproductions of my physical likeness (as the same may appear in any still camera photograph and/or motion picture film), in and in connection with the exhibition, theatrically, on television, or otherwise, of any motion pictures in which the same may be used or incorporated, and also in the advertising, exploiting and/or publicizing any such motion picture, but not limited to television or theatrical motion pictures. I further give the said company the right to reproduce in any manner whatsoever any recordation made by said company of my voice and all instrumental, musical, or other sound effects produced by me.

I hereby certify and represent that I have read the foregoing and fully understand the meaning and effect thereof and intending to be legally bound, I have hereunto set my hand the _____ day of _____, 20_____.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Address: _____

_____

S.S.N.: _____

Witness: _____

FIGURE 2.3 This standard Talent Release Form needs to be signed by everyone appearing in your film in any capacity. *Reprinted by permission of Cathy Anderson/ San Diego Film Commission.*

Next Time Films is videotaping in the area of Law Street and Pacific Beach. Please be informed that your presence in the general area may mean you will be seen in the background. By reading this you acknowledge having been informed and accept and agree to the possibility that you will be videotaped. Thank you for your cooperation.

FIGURE 2.4 Sample crowd release statement: tacit release.

Next Time Films is in the area filming an independent short film. Please be informed that your presence in the general area may mean you will be seen in the background. By entering the area and reading this information you acknowledge having been informed and accept and agree to that possibility. All film, videotape, photographs and sound recordings will be the sole property of Next Time Films. Thank you for your cooperation.

FIGURE 2.5 Sample tacit release in greater detail, including "rights."

FIGURE 2.6 Tacit Release/Crowd Release Form posted in public view on a commercial set.

passion and commitment to excellence, it affects your entire demeanor. It fosters a professional stance and a professional presence—no matter what your level of experience is. Remember, this is a business that requires sound business practices. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, but make a commitment to keep your production safe, professional, and

legal in every way. You can be the new kid on the set and not know the difference between an apple box and a C-stand, but attitude says it all. It is never too early to set a professional standard for yourself, for your name, and for your work. This is a business built on relationships—as are all businesses. But the entertainment industry and the world of indie filmmaking is especially sensitive to word of mouth and stories from the set. Begin to think about how you want to be remembered from your last job and your last movie, and what happened on your last set. That's good business.

In the Business of Show Biz, Remember:

1. You are your company—represent yourself and your business well.
2. Get a business license.
3. Promote your business with professional business cards, letterhead stationary, website, and multiplatform marketing.
4. Market and promote your movie, yourself, and your company constantly.
5. Investigate the cost and benefits of insurance coverage.
6. Be aware of legal, liability, and loss concerns when making your movie.
7. Always have permits to film on private and public property.
8. Own every image in your film—keep track of deliverables paperwork.
9. Get it in writing—waivers, releases, and contracts.

Chapter | three

The Breakdown: Analyzing the Script

CHAPTER OUTLINE

If it doesn't work in the script, it won't work on the set.

Old Movie Cliché

You've made the decision. It's time to shoot your movie. You're ready to leave your comfort zone—the safe space of your house, your college campus, or your best friend's office—and venture out on location. But how do you actually do that and what is the plan? Where exactly do you begin? And where do you find all the answers to help you? How do you control all the mind-numbing questions about actually shooting your movie? "Where do I start?" That's usually the first question I hear from a new producer or first-time filmmaker. And it can be really overwhelming when first you see all the amazing amount of detail you need to organize and control.

Before you grab your camera to head out scouting—in fact, before you do anything that requires money or decision making—you need to analyze the script in excruciating detail. This is known as "breaking down the script" or "lining" the script, and it is a thought process that is essential to extracting every bit of information from each scene in the script. Every scene usually gives you the bare bones of who, what, when, and where: the general makeup of the scene. These basic elements will be present in the writing. But the breakdown process puts those basic elements under the microscope. In the breakdown process, you take the script apart word by word and end up with a depth of understanding that translates into specific data that needs to be organized and stored in some type of easy to access format. You will be returning to that specific information repeatedly through the stages of preproduction and production and even during the actual shoot days.

The breakdown process is very much like an archeological dig. It can also be compared to an autopsy in the world of police forensics. You are taking existing elements, breaking them down into smaller units, and then analyzing the data to discover what they tell you. You are decoding every little nuance of the information given to you in the words on the page. And often you will be reading between the lines, speculating about details that are unwritten but that need to be seen as visuals in the scene. You are going to take the script apart scene by scene, line by line, and word by word. Your job is to learn everything you can about every element in the story, whether written or inferred. It involves reducing each line of every scene to its separate and unique individual components. This is necessary before anything else can move forward. You don't know how to scout for the key house location until you know who lives there, what they do for a living, their personal style, how long you have to film there, and what action and activity occurs over the several scenes you need to shoot there. And those questions only begin to scratch the

surface of all the knowledge you have to acquire about each location. The details contained and often concealed within every line of each scene are the foundation of the visuals in your script that get translated onto the screen. And you are the forensic anthropologist trying to put all the pieces together to make perfect sense of it all and project the detail onto a future scenario that you will create on the shoot day. You need to spend some time getting to know each and every scene. You do this via the breakdown process.

DECONSTRUCTING THE SCRIPT

As Dr. Seuss said, "The more that you read, the more things you will know." And you need to know your script inside and out. Nothing happens until the script gets broken down. You can't create a budget or a shooting schedule without a breakdown. You can't schedule actors without a breakdown. And you won't know the intricate details of every scene in each and every location until you do the breakdown. Creating a good breakdown in the very beginning of preproduction is critical to your success at every stage along the way. So although it sounds like it might be a very specialized task, it is a methodical, structured, standardized process to be learned by everyone. Being familiar with the breakdown process is especially important if you are shooting no-budget/low-budget projects for which a few people are doing all the different department heads' jobs. The assistant director (AD) or production manager will usually do the breakdown needed for the production schedule. But chances are good that you will work on a project that never brings on an AD, so someone—most likely you—needs to get control of the details of the script, scene by scene and location by location.

Read the script the first time for the pleasure of reading the script; just read the story. Seeing the big-picture overview will help take you deeper into each scene. Every department head will analyze every scene from a different point of view with their own special interests in mind. The Art Department will be more concerned about set dressing and props; the Location Department will be most concerned about the fact that there is a dog in almost every scene! Eventually, everyone on the crew needs to look at all the details to create one consistent and cohesive big-picture view of what you need to see in every scene, at every location. The breakdown provides all that and more.

The original breakdown process was limited to paper forms, pencils, and pens. In the paper method, as each element of the scene is identified, it is underlined with a corresponding color and then the information is transferred onto the breakdown sheet. New technology allows you to read the scene and immediately enter the information into a

software database that saves you a tremendous amount of duplication and provides clean information integration. But not everyone can start their small film with hundreds of dollars invested in computer software. Because some of you will not have the luxury of owning breakdown software, it's a good practice to start with paper and pen. What's most important is that whatever system you use, paper or electronic, the thought process is the same.

THE BREAKDOWN SHEET

This is a good time to get familiar with the look of a simple breakdown sheet. You can find breakdown sheet templates on the Internet, in several excellent industry books, and of course, in the different software programs available. With so many options, there is still a consistency among all the different breakdown sheets you will run across. Sometimes elements are grouped differently or separated out, but all the same key elements will always be on the page. Breakdown sheets might look a little different, but the process and the organizational function will be the same. Break down each scene into its individual elements, isolate and define those elements, and categorize them in the boxes on the breakdown sheet. Figure 3.1 shows a generic blank breakdown sheet specific to doing a breakdown with paper and colored pens. Everyone can do a script breakdown even if you don't have the specialized software.

Look over all the different boxes and basic scene information needed on the breakdown sheet. Note that the boxes isolating each element also correspond to a color. That is the color you will use to underline that element on the script page. Then you transfer the element onto the breakdown sheet. One breakdown page is filled out for each individual scene. So for a feature-length film, you could have anywhere from 85 to 115 scenes and a corresponding number of breakdown pages. All the basic information about the scene is found at the top of the page. The body of the breakdown sheet contains 12 boxes labeled with the key elements found in most scenes. Traditionally, specific colors and boxes correspond to certain categories and departments, as described in the following sections.

Read and "Line" Your Script in Color

To begin the process, you are going to "line" the script. Begin by drawing a horizontal line all the way across the page at the beginning and end of each individual scene. Next, start with a collection of colored markers or colored pencils to underline all the elements and conditions in the script scene by scene. Each color or symbol will correspond to a category found on the breakdown sheet. Here's the established system to color

Color Code
Day Ext. - Yellow
Night Ext.- Green
Day Int. - White
Night Int. - Blue

Script Breakdown Sheet

Production Company:_____

Production Title: _____

Date:_____

Breakdown Page #
_____

Page Count
_____

Scene # | Scene Name | Int. or Ext.

Description | Day or Night

CAST Red	**STUNTS** Orange	**EXTRAS/ATMOSPHERE** Green
	EXTRAS/SILENT BITS Yellow	
SPECIAL EFFECTS Blue	**PROPS** Purple	**VEHICLE/ANIMALS** Pink
WARDROBE Circle	**MAKE-UP/HAIR** Asterisk	**SOUND EFFECTS/MUSIC** Brown
SPECIAL EQUIPMENT Box	**PRODUCTION NOTES** Underline	

FIGURE 3.1 The breakdown sheet.

coding elements, underlining each one with an assigned color or mark to match a specific category in each scene:

CAST MEMBERS: Red
STUNTS: Orange
EXTRAS/ATMOSPHERE: Green
EXTRAS/SILENT BITS: Yellow
SPECIAL EFFECTS: Blue
PROPS: Purple
VEHICLES/ANIMALS: Pink
WARDROBE: Circle
MAKEUP/HAIR: Asterisk
SOUND EFFECTS/MUSIC: Brown
SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: Box
PRODUCTION NOTES: Underline

The script page will fill up with colors and symbols to act as permanent designations so that you can refer to them easily and transfer each item onto a written breakdown sheet. You are going to isolate each and every factor in the scene. This can be tedious and time-consuming work, so be prepared. Get comfortable. Allow plenty of time to do this work and review it. If you want to have a strong foundation to your scouting and your on-location shooting, there is no way out of this process. Even if you spend hundreds of dollars on software programs to manage all the data you come up with, the thought process is what's critical here. Computer systems like Jungle Software are great tools to allow you to enter all your data at one time and then control it: move it around, integrate it, and export it in many different organizational ways. But the process remains the same. The words on the page have to pass through your mental filter to become measurable, quantifiable, real people and things that show up that day for that scene. You have to take every word and every phrase and decide what physical reality those words translate into on the day you shoot that scene.

The breakdown is the backbone of everything yet to come in the all important preproduction phase. And if the location manager hat is one of many you are wearing, you want to be knowledgeable about everything you must see in each scene and be comfortable with all the action taking place in each scene at every location. This is the intimate understanding of each scene that begins the location scouting and location management process and everything that follows. The breakdown is the first step in getting you organized to start scouting.

You are going to de-evolve the scenes. Once you have "lined" the script, you need to transfer all the details of each scene onto a separate breakdown sheet. All the basic information about the scene (scene number, scene name, location, day or night, and so on) is found at the top of the breakdown sheet. The body of the breakdown sheet usually contains 12 boxes labeled with the key elements found in most scenes, identifying

the actors/cast, extras, props, wardrobe, makeup, animals, special effects, and the need for any special equipment. Absolutely everything within the scene needs to be noted and accounted for on this breakdown page in some manner. Even though you might not be the one shopping for wardrobe or hauling in the props, you still need to be familiar with everything essential to every scene so that you won't forget anything or be taken by surprise when location scouting. And believe it or not, it is next in importance after budgeting and scheduling—all this detail affects your location selection to the greatest degree. How you scout, how you introduce the project to a property owner, how you describe the action in the scene, and how you negotiate and close the deal are all functions affected by what you discover and identify through the breakdown process. That sounds easy enough. But remember that you might have on average 85 to 115 scenes in a feature film, so there is a lot of work to do creating a bulletproof breakdown sheet for each scene.

Page Count

In addition to color coding the elements in each scene, another new element you will find on the breakdown sheet is the page count. Not everyone is familiar with the technique of counting the total length of each scene in pages or fractions of a page. The length of a scene or the number of scenes (and their combined total page count) at each location affects every aspect of your scouting. The page count affects how and where you scout, what the location will cost, how much security you need to hire, and every other detail of being in that physical space for the time you need to prep and shoot. The established rule is that script pages are measured in eighths of a page. An entire page is $\frac{8}{8}$, or 1 page; half a page is $\frac{4}{8}$; a quarter page is $\frac{2}{8}$; and so on. You will have some scenes with a whole number plus a fraction, but the fraction is always maintained in eighths.

You can train yourself to see the page in increments of $\frac{1}{8}$ page fairly quickly. It's not an exact science, but try to be consistent. To train your eye, place a plain piece of paper alongside your script page. On your blank page, mark off an inch from the top and an inch from the bottom as header/footer space. Within the space left on the page, make a horizontal line halfway through the body and mark it $\frac{4}{8}$. Then halve that again so that now you have $\frac{2}{8}$ near the top and $\frac{6}{8}$ near the bottom. Mark that in half again and you have $\frac{1}{8}$ at the top and $\frac{7}{8}$ at the bottom. In between and near the center line, mark off $\frac{3}{8}$ and $\frac{5}{8}$, and of course the end of the page is $\frac{8}{8}$ or 1 page. The lines you've drawn on your blank page become a page count ruler. You can use this cheat sheet to train your eye as you read each scene in the breakdown process. Hold the marked page of measurements alongside the script page—after a few times, you will have perfected estimating the length of the scenes. Don't reduce the

fractions except to convert to a whole number plus the remaining fraction. If your scene runs over the length of one page, you are going to be adding fractions as you go along until the scene ends, so keep it in eighths to save you time and reduce the amount of math work you'll have to do until the very end. And later, when you are organizing your breakdown sheets by location, you will be able to easily add the total page count you need to shoot in each individual location. From the locations standpoint, the page count is very important because it will determine how long you need to be in that location. And that is a very significant consideration when first introducing the work to a property owner. For instance, if the scene is 2 and $\frac{3}{8}$ pages long, you might think you can be in and out of there in a day or part of a day. But by the end of the breakdown process, you realize that you return to that location for 10 other scenes, and when you total the page count from those 11 scenes, it's over 21 pages. That changes everything. Now you have to be in that location for multiple days, owning it, controlling it in every way, and that affects how, where, and what you scout. But it all begins with a detailed single scene-by-scene analysis measured by the page count.

Yellow-Green-White-Blue Breakdown Sheets

The final new element on the paper breakdown sheet is the color-coded aspect of the paper itself as seen in the upper-lefthand corner. The breakdown sheet is available in four different colors to help organize this data scene by scene, and more specifically, by each location:

Day Exterior: Yellow Breakdown Sheet
Night Exterior: Green Breakdown Sheet
Day Interior: White Breakdown Sheet
Night Interior: Blue Breakdown Sheet

This scheme helps you see at a glance which of the four categories each scene falls into. If you are staying with the paper-only process, these breakdown pages will eventually be organized in stacks by location and then by color, by scenes interior or exterior at that location, and finally by the scenes as shot day or night at that location. The colored pages provide a quick visual reference for those of you using a paper-only process and make it clearly visible for people entering the details into any kind of database. There are entire books written on the breakdown process, but I hope this chapter provides you with at least a basic understanding of the importance of doing a sound, well thought-out breakdown. It is the important first step that will lead you to a well-planned and efficient location scouting experience.

So you've lined out your script, you have your colored breakdown sheets, and you've filled in the basic information across the top of the breakdown sheet for each scene. Now you're ready to interpret each

scene and create a breakdown sheet. Let's complete one breakdown sheet based on the scene summarized here from the fictional short film *Better Luck Next Time*. Figure 3.2 shows the script page for Scene 22:

> Synopsis Scene 22: Dylan and Matt go into a local beach bar to meet a private investigator. They start to walk across the bar to a corner table, when Dylan bumps into a big guy standing at the bar. The big guy just happens to be the ex-wife's new boyfriend, who recognizes Dylan, and that leads to name calling and a brief fistfight. The bouncer stops the fight and escorts the boyfriend to the front door. Dylan wipes away the blood and he and Matt join the private investigator for a business conversation.

Breakdown Sample Scene 22

So that you can see the difference between a standard breakdown and an electronic breakdown, the breakdown process for Scene 22 is done on Figure 3.3 breakdown sheet with Jungle Software, so the design will look different here and in the completed sample seen later. The big difference is that there are no color references for the categories and some of the elements have been broken out separately or added as new elements at the bottom of the page. If you are doing your breakdown with paper and pen, just stay with that method and fill in the boxes appropriately.

To begin the breakdown for Scene 22, complete the information at the top of the breakdown sheet by identifying some of the obvious information like the scene number, script page, and page count. Next, fill in a concise scene description specific to the action as written in the scene, along with a subtle interpretation of what's happening and why. Add a little insight to reveal the soul or the essence of the scene. This should tell you in one sentence who is in the scene, what happens there, and often how or why it happened. The setting is a beach bar and the location is the actual shooting location address. "Sequence" applies to a continuing series of scenes and "script day" means what day this scene takes place in the timeline of the script.

Next, in the upper-right corner, put the date, the number of the breakdown sheet (which usually matches the scene number) and indicate whether the scene is interior or exterior and day or night, as written in the first line of the scene's introduction. These are all important details to help you approach a location, understand the scope of the work you need to do there, and be able to pitch the prospect to the owner.

Next, tackle the details in this scene specific to the different departments. Those departments and crafts are represented by the 12 boxes on the breakdown sheet. The following sections explain the 12 most common categories.

Sc.22 Pacific Beach Bar Day Int.

Dylan and Matt walk into a bar to meet the Private Investigator.

DYLAN Let's go sit someplace out of the way until we figure out where he is. Come on, lets'go to that table in the corner.

MATT Are you sure about this, dude? Hiring a private eye to watch your ex? That's creepy, can't you just let it go?

DYLAN bumps up against a big tattooed guy who turns with attitude all over his face.

BIG GUY Hey, watch it buddy or find another bar.

A flash of recognition and DYLAN realizes this is his ex-wife's new boyfriend.

DYLAN I guess if we're sharing the same girl we can drink in the same bar. What do you think about gettin' outta my way, big guy?

BIG GUY doesn't like this guy then realizes he's ELLEN's ex. One giant fist comes up from out of nowhere and connects with Dylan's cheek. They grab each other.

BIG GUY Let's see if there's something else we can share…like your blood on my fist!

BIG GUY and DYLAN briefly dance around while bear hugging, each trying to get another punch. The BOUNCER steps in, breaks them up and escorts BIG GUY to the front door.

DYLAN Yeah, run you weasel! And don't come back.

MATT Shut up, man. He could have killed you with one hand tied behind his back. Settle down. We've got business to take care of here. Come on and sit down, have a beer.

DYLAN and Matt walk toward the corner table where a conspicuously neatly dressed man is waiting for them shaking his head "no no" as if passing judgment on DYLAN's actions.

DETECTIVE You boys sure don't know anything about how to stay under the radar, do you? I'm glad I work for you and you don't work for me. I'm Jack Hubbard, Private Investigator, and you must be Dylan Franks.

DYLAN Hey, honey, can we get some service over here? I'm well overdue for a beer and it must be 5 o'clock somewhere…right?

FIGURE 3.2 The script page for Scene 22 from the short film *Better Luck Next Time.*

Scene #: _____
Script Page: _____
Page Count: _____

BREAKDOWN SHEET
Better Luck Next Time

Date: _____
Sheet: _____
Int/Ext. _____
Day/Night: _____

Scene Description: _____
Setting: _____
Location: _____
Sequence: _____ Script Day: _____

Cast Members	**Stunts**	**Vehicles**
	Props	**Special Effects**
Extras		
Costumes	**Makeup**	**Livestock**
Animal Handler	**Music**	**Sound**
Set Dressing	**Greenery**	**Special Equipment**
Security	**Additional Labor**	**Optical FX**

This report was created with Gorilla™

FIGURE 3.3 A sample of Jungle Software's breakdown sheet. This electronic version does not require the color coding of elements in the scene. The detail goes directly into the database and is integrated into several different reports.

ELEMENTS ON THE BREAKDOWN SHEET

Cast Members

The first box is CAST. Your major characters are usually listed by a number and prioritized by the total number of scenes they appear in throughout the movie. For our purposes, Dylan would be #1 because he appears in the most scenes, and so on. Because we are simplifying the breakdown for your location purposes, it's fine to just write in the names of the characters in the scene. For this scene, the characters are Dylan, Matt, Private Investigator, Big Guy (ELLEN's new boyfriend), and the Bouncer.

Stunts

The second box is STUNTS. Stunts can range from anything as simple as a young boy falling off his bike to more complex stunts such as a man falling off the roof, a fistfight in a bar, or the classic car chase. In this box, briefly describe the stunt and anticipate what you'll need to accomplish the stunt professionally and safely. A high fall might require a mattress or harness. This type of bar fight scene usually requires some level of fight choreography and perhaps stunt doubles. Anticipate everything you will need to shoot it efficiently while keeping it safe. Include trained people, props, and specialized equipment specific to the nature of the stunts.

Vehicles

The third box is VEHICLES. Here you will list any "picture car" used in this scene. If we were shooting an exterior establishing shot in which Dylan and Matt pull up and park in front of the bar, it could be Dylan's SUV written here. But for Scene 22, there are no vehicles, so we leave it blank. Vehicles in the broad production sense include cars, trucks, bicycles, motorcycles, boats, airplanes, helicopters, hot air balloons, and the like. Anything that provides some mode of transportation if seen in the scene is called a "picture vehicle" and must be defined here and planned for well in advance.

Extras

The fourth box is EXTRAS. These are the folks you see in the background milling about in the mall, crossing the street, or sitting in the bar. They add "atmosphere" to an otherwise sterile environment, and they do it without speaking any lines. They do not perform any other specific action other than be seen in the background. In Scene 22, how many extras will you see in the bar? Who decides and how is that decision made? That depends most of the time on your budget, but you have to start somewhere, so pick a number—enough to be interesting but not so

many as to make it difficult. If you are asking your friends or other crew people to be the extras, you still need to fill in a number to help you plan for the day. If you are casting and paying these extras, you need to know how many and what type of people you want when you are setting things up with the casting director. Either way you do it, you must have a plan. How many bodies are going to fill in the space in that frame line? Let's say five extras will be in the bar in Scene 22 as patrons drinking in the background. If the scene has a large number of extras, you need to plan for holding areas away from the set with cover, tables and chairs, extra parking, and perhaps shuttle vans, wardrobe and changing areas, crafts service and meals, and additional production assistants to manage the arrangements and wrangle the extra talent.

Props

PROPS are listed in the fifth box. Props, short for "property," are any item on the set that is physically handled by an actor. If a cell phone is used while someone is texting in a scene, it's a prop. If the phone just sits on the bar and is never used, it is part of the overall set dressing. If someone is drinking a beer, the beer bottle is a prop. What are the props in Scene 22 in the Pacific Beach Bar? This is where you get to bring some creativity to the process. Let's start with beer bottles, glasses, waitress trays, napkins, menus, and peanuts in bowls on the tables and at the bar to liven up the place. Sometimes an existing feature at a location may be added to the scene. For instance, the favorite bar seen by the director during the location scouting has pool tables. Then the appropriate props for shooting a game of pool need to be added to the breakdown sheet. Think through the action and identify anything an actor will physically interact with in the scene. Props are seen as an extension of the location and the production design. The props in this beach bar in Scene 22 will be very different from the props seen in a bar scene written for the Beverly Hills Hotel.

Special Effects

SPECIAL EFFECTS belong in the sixth box. Special effects, or SFX, includes any visual effect that needs to be created on site, on location, or in postproduction. If guns are fired in the bar, that is a special effect. Visual effects like pyrotechnics of any kind such as a kitchen fire, explosions, or even a fog machine are all special effects that are most often created on the set. Whatever the nature of your special effects, they most often need to be coordinated with how you shoot something on the set, often requiring more planning and time. Special effects can dramatically affect your schedule. But here we just need to make sure that there is fake blood on the set for Dylan's bloody face and Big Guy's bloody fist.

Costumes

COSTUME requirements are listed in the seventh box. What special clothes will the actors need in this scene? Ask your costume designer, production designer, and director what the vision is for each scene. After a meeting of the minds, let's assume that it's decided we'll need to see a bartender in a black T-shirt and black pants and waitresses dressed in short black skirts, black T-shirts, and white aprons. The customers could require special wardrobe, but Dylan and Matt are probably in nondescript beach attire. If it isn't written in the script description, someone has to specify this detail. What is the private investigator wearing? Is he in a suit or is he trying to blend in and not stand out in the beach environment? These are all things that need to be reviewed and discussed with the different department heads well in advance of shooting. As mentioned specific to props, every element in the Pacific Beach Bar will be very different from a bar scene written for the Beverly Hills Hotel, and that may especially apply to wardrobe.

Makeup

Any specific MAKEUP elements are listed in the eighth box. How does everyone look in the scene? Most often where they are and what they are doing will affect the look of the actors' makeup. Football players on the field will require different makeup than the cheerleaders on the field. In our scene, it has to be determined whether Dylan or his assailant need bruising, blood, or special makeup effects after the fistfight.

Livestock

Are there any animals in the scene? If so, list the animals in the ninth box. As the set is a beach bar, there could be a local surfer with his parrot or a biker with a large pet python snake wrapped around his neck. What is the persona of the bar and the people in the bar? If it's not clearly written into the scene, these elements can be inferred or developed, and sometimes that starts with suggestions offered by the director or production designer. Anticipate how you will have to deal with animals on location if they appear in the scene. Separate holding areas are required, and depending on the scope of the work, you'll want to include the SPCA (Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) Motion Picture Liaison on the set. Think about any restrictions, containment requirements, and safety issues that might arise in terms of protecting the cast and crew as well as keeping the animals calm and safe. Parrots on a location are going to be very different in many ways from wild boars on a set.

Animal Handler

If you have livestock or animals in the scene you are going to need a special ANIMAL HANDLER or wrangler to take care of the critters. Make a note in box 10. Whether it's snakes, elephants, horses, or chickens, all animals require special care in a safe, controlled environment. Animals and their safe housing is another important element that affects how you scout for the location for that particular scene. Talking to the property owner about the impact animals might have is something to do right up front. Make sure the animal handler is dealing with the proper health and transportation laws that apply to that specific animal and local government requirements.

Music

MUSIC elements get listed in box 11. Is there a jukebox in the bar? Is there a band in the bar? Is there programmed bar music heard in the background? Music always requires licensing and clearance. This means that you must have permission and usually pay a licensing fee to use any recorded, established music in a scene. In Scene 22, we hear generic surf music in the bar: maybe original music one of your crew people will create for a music credit! If the scene is a house party, there will probably need to be major "playback" in the scene at some point. Playback is simply prerecorded music played over a CD player or loudspeaker system. But it can be an important factor in the scene and at the location. A nighttime party scene with loud playback in the backyard of a quiet residential neighborhood can present its own challenges if you have to film into the night.

Sound

SOUND effects or special sound elements in the scene are listed in box 12. Sound can happen during live action while on the set or in postproduction. Sound effects could include a ringing phone, slamming door, or screeching tires as the car comes to an abrupt stop. Any sound that needs to be heard to enhance or explain an action in the scene needs to be noted here. The bar scene as written doesn't include any special sound requirement, but perhaps "breaking glass" with a question mark after it could be added here. (If so, you would want to go back to SFX and add "breakaway glass.") This is a bar fight, so what kind of special sounds might accompany that kind of action? Again, the breakdown process is about anticipating what you might need in the location on that shoot day. And the conversation needs to start early, when all your key crew people are sitting around the table, going over the breakdown and brainstorming.

Set Dressing/Greenery/Special Equipment and Security/ Additional Labor/Optical FX

The SET DRESSING, GREENERY, and SPECIAL EQUIPMENT categories are found in the next area along the bottom. List any obvious or critical elements here to help those specific departments—the Art Department and the Camera Department—stay organized. And the last category is SECURITY/ADDITIONAL LABOR/OPTICAL FX. This helps the Locations Department plan for security. It helps Grip and Electric plan for especially heavy equipment days with extra workers, and helps plan for optical FX. Optical FX are done through the camera. So if you are going to make someone magically disappear from the bar in a puff of smoke, then that effect needs to be described in this box. CGI and compositing special effects in the edit process should be listed here, as it often affects how you shoot the elements on the set.

That completes your breakdown sheet for Scene 22. Every factor on the breakdown sheet affects your location in some way—some more subtly and others more dramatically. But now you know. By the time you finish, you should have all the details right there in front of you on the breakdown sheet. Let's look at the breakdown sheet for Scene 22 as seen on Jungle Software's Gorilla breakdown sheet (Figure 3.4). There are some items missing on the Gorilla form. See if you can fill in the blanks.

On the Gorilla breakdown are a couple blank lines; we need to add the Pacific Beach Bar in the Setting line and the location address, if known. Early on in the breakdown process, you haven't even begun your scouting, so there's a good reason the Location line is blank here. We should add the bartender and two waitresses to the Extras box. This provides a good starting point for you to begin to look for beach bars in the area. You can talk to any bar owner in detail about what the scene involves and what the shooting activity will encompass that day in the bar.

You see all the detail at a glance. Every factor in the scene has been identified, catalogued, and defined. The breakdown process is the mechanism and the breakdown sheet (paper or electronic) is the tool used to reveal, identify, quantify, and analyze every factor in every scene. Nothing is overlooked. No detail is lost. You can access all the data in one place at any time. Someone has to begin to put a descriptive name and number on every thing inferred in the scene and you are sure to take a project where you have to be the one to start analyzing the script scene by scene. So now you can do your job whatever it may be. The breakdown requires layers and layers of analysis. It can be tedious and exhausting and exhilarating all at the same time. Pace yourself and be prepared to see things in a new or different light when you return to a scene to go over it again and again. What finally appears in the scene as location extras or props will ultimately be determined by the creative

Scene #: **22**
Script Page:
Page Count: 1/8 pgs.

BREAKDOWN SHEET
Better Luck Next Time

Date:
Sheet:
Int/Ext. INT
Day/Night: DAY

Scene Description: Dylan and Matt fight Ellen's Boyfriend
Setting:
Location:
Sequence:
Script Day:

Cast Members
5. BOUNCER
1. DYLAN
4. ELLEN'S BOYFRIEND
2. MATT
3. PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR

Stunts
FIST FIGHT
STUNT DOUBLES FOR DYLAN AND BOYFRIEND

Vehicles

Extras
FIVE BAR PATRONS

Props
BAR TOWELS
BEER BOTTLES
COASTERS
GLASSES
MENUS
NAPKINS
PEANUTS IN BOWLS
WAITRESS TRAY

Special Effects
BLOOD

Costumes
BLACK T-SHIRTS
PANTS & SKIRTS FOR BAR STAFF
WHITE APRONS

Makeup
BRUSING
SPLIT LIP

Livestock

Animal Handler

Music

Sound
SURF MUSIC

Set Dressing

Greenery

Special Equipment

Security

Additional Labor

Optical FX

This report was created with Gorilla™

FIGURE 3.4 Jungle Software's breakdown sheet for Scene 22, partially completed for the bar scene in the short film *Better Luck Next Time*.

LOCATION BREAKDOWN LIST

Location:____

Description:____
____
Number of Scenes __________ Total Page Count____________
Day ________Night ______Int. _______ Ext._________
Total days you need to be at this location: _______
(Prep___Shoot___Strike____)
Describe the activity including any unusual factors or action:_____________________
____
____

Location:____

Description:____
____
Number of Scenes __________ Total Page Count____________
Day ________Night ______Int. _______ Ext._________
Total days you need to be at this location: _______
(Prep___Shoot___Strike____)
Describe the activity including any unusual factors or action:_____________________
____
____

Location:____

Description:____
____
Number of Scenes __________ Total Page Count____________
Day ________Night ______Int. _______ Ext._________
Total days you need to be at this location: _______
(Prep___Shoot___Strike____)
Describe the activity including any unusual factors or action:_____________________
____
____

FIGURE 3.5 A sample blank Location Breakdown List to get you started location scouting. It provides a compact, compressed version of your breakdown sheets, showing every location's requirements at a glance.

decisions of department heads and the overall budget. But it's in your best interest, whatever your job on the crew, to know the script inside and out. Each and every nuance of a scene can affect how you do your job.

ORGANIZING BY LOCATION: CREATING A LOCATION LIST

Isolating your scenes by location leads to many levels of organization. For instance, the demands of a location affect how you schedule the shoot days, how you schedule your actors, special equipment needs, and any number of other considerations. The next step in preproduction would be to make a strip board on which every scene description is reduced to one narrow strip (paper or electronic data) that can be moved around within the full schedule during the ever-changing process of locking down a shooting schedule. But that is a process I'm not going to cover in this book. True, the breakdown is the beginning for every other process in preproduction. But the focus here is to get you ready to scout. Armed with your breakdown sheets, you can make a location list that includes everything you need to know about each and every location. This location list is a shorthand version of the breakdown sheets that provides you with all the location detail at a glance. You'll appreciate it when you've spent 12 hours looking for the perfect donut shop with a sit-down counter and booths and you unexpectedly drive by a spectacular Victorian house. You want to be able to shift gears and access all the details of what attributes that house has to have to work in the scene. The scouting location list keeps all that information handy and convenient. You want to be able to check out the details required of any location at a quick glance. It works as your reference page. This is just a sample list. Use whatever format works for you. A Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, a legal pad, a task list on your iPhone, or this itemized location list (see Figure 3.5) will save you time and headaches when you're out and about scouting the world.

You know your script inside out. You've built a strong foundation for location scouting through the breakdown process. You have an intimate knowledge of the script, scene by scene and location by location. You've organized the details of every location onto a handy reference list, and now you're one very big step closer to location scouting. You know what you need; now the next thing is to start to plan your scout.

To Breakdown the Script, Remember to:

1. Read for the story first
2. Assemble your materials: colored breakdown pages and colored pens/pencils, ruler, page count cheat sheet and/or breakdown software

3. Read and line the script—analyze every scene using colored pens to isolate and identify all the elements.
4. Paper or electronic systems use the same method: complete a breakdown sheet for every scene.
5. Organize breakdown sheets by location.
6. Organize each location's breakdowns specific to day, night, interior, or exterior scenes.
7. Fill out your location breakdown list—get ready to scout.

Chapter | four

Before You Scout

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Research is what I'm doing when I don't know what I'm doing.

Werner von Braun

You've finished the breakdown and you're ready to start location scouting. Taking the words off the page and making them real places, real people, real visual images is a gift. It is a thoughtful blending of creative insight, practical applications, and respect for the production process. Location scouts are magicians and location managers are much like the Wizard of Oz. In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, we're told to ignore the man behind the curtain, the wizard who is pulling all the levers, controlling all the bells and whistles, making everyone in the land of Oz content if not downright happy.

That's the amazing alchemy the location scout and location manager create. The Location Managers Guild of America supports the creative

Shoot on Location.

integrity that this job requires and recognizes the importance of both the location scout and the location manager. The LMGA bonds these professionals together to bring a voice to an otherwise greatly overlooked and underappreciated craft. The work of the Location Department is an integral part of the creative process on any project. It can be a movie, commercial, music video, corporate image piece, catalog shoot, or anything and everything in between and yet to come. The Location Department is an extension of the Production Design team and contributes in an esthetically visionary way, often taking a thumbnail sketch off the paper to search high and low trying to find that place and that look somewhere in the real world. The creativity, diplomacy, and project management skills necessary to do the job well are to be respected and admired. And the accomplishment of finding that real physical environment, that perfect location, will be appreciated by everyone seeing what you've brought to the project.

If you have any budget at all, hire an experienced location scout. Location scouts usually have deep files of established film-friendly locations. Scouts will be able to shortcut your searching and bring a library of photos to you. They are experts at what they do and that takes the burden off you if you are functioning in multiple roles spread thin over many departments. If you don't have the money to hire a scout, at least be sure to assign the job to one person on the crew so there is at least consistency and accountability. Set some basic guidelines along with the helpful hints in this book and send them off scouting. But where do you start?

A location contributes so much as a character in a film, but how do you find that place, that one and only place you must have? Most importantly, know the character and the tone—the persona that each location brings to the film. Now you have to get creative. Knowing your script inside out, assuming the responsibility to bring beauty and wonder to the film, and understanding the very real challenge of location scouting that means you are ready to scout! But where do you begin? The overwhelming detail on 100 pages describing the 85 scenes in your script spread over 15 to 25 locations can be daunting. Your nicely compressed location breakdown list will serve you well as you start planning to scout. But there is a world of other factors that affect where you scout and how you begin to plan your scout. So before you ever leave the house or make that first phone call, you need to analyze your locations based on your budget.

HOW BUDGET AFFECTS LOCATION SCOUTING

Any studio big-budget movie will leave the door wide open for the location scout. You will know immediately what amount of money you have in your location budget, and if you're lucky, it will be a healthy budget that allows you literally to explore the world for possible locations. In fact, you may be the person creating the budget based on your

previous experience. Every location has a line item cost in the budget and every scene at that location has a different and specific budget. A scene of dramatic dialog across the kitchen table will have a different cost than a scene in the same location requiring an explosion in a crack house or meth lab kitchen. Locations and location department budgets are not "one size fits all." Too many variables come into play in every scene to allow a standard approach to location budgets. If you are on the big studio movie, congratulations! But for the rest of you, there is a lot of work to do before you grab your camera, get in your car, and start shooting pictures of possible locations.

The first consideration is your budget. You will know your budget limitations to some degree right off the bat. This might be your own script, and you might have enlisted a group of friends to all chip in together for the project. It might be your thesis film and you want to take it over the top, run up your credit card, and make it rich with production value—make your reel stand out above all the rest. Or you may be interviewing for a paid or barely paid position on an indie film or web series. Whatever the scope of your project, know the movie's budget and know the exact total budget for the location department. Then start thinking about how you can match your locations to your budget. Location and budget is everything you focus on from now on—your new mantra throughout your scouting and preproduction.

But if you are venturing out on location for the first time, whatever your experience so far, you need to know how your budget affects your location scouting in a very practical way. You don't go out and approach the Hotel del Coronado if you have "no budget." You wouldn't approach any five-star resort hotel unless you have a really healthy budget, realizing that high-profile properties are always going to be expensive. That's just the way it is and even if you know the manager or someone high up in the management team, it is still probably going to cost you tens of thousands of dollars. Reconciling your budget to your locations is essential to help you avoid a very painful mistake that you usually have to make once to learn never to do it again. Don't show the director, producer, or Production Designer a location that is not available for shooting. You can all meet to look at images to consolidate the vision, to agree on specific elements that you draw from several different locations, and bring this research to the table to agree on different features. But don't show pictures of a location to your creative team until you have contacted the owner or the person with the authority to say that yes, you can film there. Do not show location pictures if the location has not been cleared. One of the worst things to happen on my first movie as a location manager was to show the important people an exterior house location that they fell in love with only to have the owner say no, absolutely not, they would never allow filming at any price. I realized that was a very unprofessional and unfair thing to do; dangle the

perfect location only to pull it away as if it was a sick joke. It never happened again.

Please don't say you have no budget. It is a crippling, limiting, unrealistic expression that will cause you to stumble and fall repeatedly thru the filmmaking process. It's not true and people won't believe you. You are going to have to spend some amount of money somewhere along the way if you are creating something out of nothing. Acknowledge and accept that reality as a fact right up front. Even on the lowest-budget movie, you need to know that there will be the cost of maintenance on equipment, locations, crew, and creature comforts. Then start thinking about what you might have to spend on your locations in the most basic, minimalist way. This brings me to my strong belief that there is no such thing as a free location. Even if your friend lets you shoot in his house "for free," the odds are very high that you will still have to spend some money replacing a broken window, shampooing the carpet, or donating $20 to his electric bill that month. Be realistic. Stuff happens and you are the responsible party to make things right. It can be a sound concept to approach certain locations as free—shooting in your own house, your sister's boutique, or your lawyer's office, for instance. If people are supportive of your film and want to help you, they will offer their places to you at no cost. It may be free when you start shooting, but that doesn't necessarily mean it will be free after you wrap. Chances are very good that each and every location will cost you something in the end. It may be as simple as painting a room, repairing a window screen, or replacing a fried houseplant that got too close to the lights. But it can ultimately be more expensive than you imagined if you need to dramatically repair, replace, or restore the location to its original condition. Filming takes its toll on a location—no matter how careful everyone is on the set. Carpet cleaning, new sod in the backyard, replacing a broken window, boarding the barking dog, putting the next door neighbor in a hotel so you can shoot all night, fake blood that stains the pool tiles, clogged toilets: whatever happens in that location will surely require some amount of cleaning or fixing up.

Order to Go, Please

Here's a great example of how an unexpected cost at a location can wreak havoc with your location budget. A location manager secured a high-end restaurant for a night of filming in the dining area and in the kitchen. The location fee was reasonable and the owner was happy to let them use linens and china in the restaurant as props. The deal was sweet. As often happens, the hum of the refrigerator was unacceptable to the sound mixer, so the refrigerator was unplugged to insure clean sound for the filming. Unfortunately, the refrigerator never got plugged back in. By the time the chef and kitchen staff reported to work another 24 hours later, the food was spoiled. The owner could barely open the restaurant that same day in time to serve dinner and the location manager had to deal with a very unhappy owner and spend hundreds of dollars restocking the refrigerator.

Plan on every location having some kind of cost attached to it. Start with what you can afford, even $50 per day or $100 per day or whatever amount you think you can find as a daily location budget. If you are shooting over four weekends, that's eight shooting days at $50 a day for locations, which means you have a locations budget of $400. To the best of your ability, actually have the $400 in your possession and don't fool yourself by thinking it works if it only exists on paper. You can shoot on a shoestring budget, but know what that means to you, put a dollar figure on it, and have the money in your checking account or in your petty cash envelope. You will have to spend money on something unexpected, so the more you plan for your known expenses, the better off you will be in the end. You would be amazed at how many producers have sat across my desk and announced that there's no location budget and they are getting everything for free, only to be shocked into debt when it doesn't work out that way. Knowing what you have in your budget affects how you scout on every level. You can rarely expect the owner of an estate home or gated mansion to welcome you into their abode for free. It does happen sometimes, but budget realities need to guide your location scouting, even in this early planning stage.

The most consistent element in all of this, regardless of the budget, is the knowledge and creativity you bring to interpreting your locations and what that brings to your scouting experience. Know your location budget based on the nature of the locations that you have organized on your location breakdown list. For example, the genre of any film affects the budget in some very obvious ways. If your film is a romantic comedy played in and around one house location, your location costs will be very different from a period piece requiring medieval castles. The action adventure filled with car chases, motorcycle stunts, and pyrotechnics usually requires a much bigger budget than the family entertainment story—unless the family movie has a live elephant as the main character! Budget and genre limitations need to be examined, evaluated, and established before you go out scouting. Expect to spend some amount of money for each location. Then it becomes a pleasant surprise if you really do get lucky enough to shoot for free. Be realistic about how people need to be compensated for being displaced or disrupted while you shoot in their house, office, or place of business. Besides the cost to use a location, you will also encounter other additional costs related to shooting on location. This will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 7, but start now to think about things like crew parking, security, tents, port-a-potties, permits, paying a neighbor to use their backyard or driveway, paying the gardener to not mow that day, and an ongoing list of other possible costs that will arise. Remember, there are no free locations. Even if they start out free, they rarely end up being free. If you use that as the rule, you will come out ahead with fewer surprises and probably save running up that credit card to get a cash advance.

HOW INSURANCE AFFECTS LOCATION SCOUTING

"Why do I need insurance? I can't afford insurance. We're a small crew. It's only five seconds on the screen. Nothing's going to go wrong." Famous last words, unfortunately. Insurance is required in any type of business. It is standard operating procedure. It's all about liability. It's not about the size of the project or the budget. It's not about the length of the scene, the time it takes to shoot it, or how long it lasts on the screen. It's all about liability. And it's a universal concern, especially in the United States, because we live in a very litigious culture right now—everybody is lawsuit-happy. It's exactly the same for you or anyone else filming in a park if a passerby trips over your cable, falls, and breaks an arm. What could happen? The injured party sues you, sues the city for allowing you to film there, and if you are a student, they sue your parents and your school. And that could be only the beginning of a long, painful, expensive court procedure. The reality is the same and the liability is the same. As a filmmaker, you are introducing new elements into normal environments creating disruption and possible hazards. No matter how small the intrusion, the chance of you putting someone else or their property in harm's way is real. You and your assets are at risk if you are out in the real world filming on location without insurance. That's a very big gamble and a terrible risk. Don't deny that insurance is a normal part of doing business; it is necessary in the entertainment industry and every other business. One film commissioner told me that in general, operating without insurance is poor business practice, and I agree.

Also, it's important for you to start thinking of setting a professional standard for yourself if you plan to pursue this as a business. As you grow your business and elevate the level at which you are filming out on location, you want to be able to take advantage of the locations and looks that every city and region has to offer. You want to get the greatest production value you can capture. You do that by going through the proper channels and established protocols. Everyone grows out of guerilla filming at some point, because it limits you. Insurance will become a necessity as you do more work. If you want to rent a camera, a crane, or more lighting equipment, those rental houses are going to need insurance coverage for their gear. When your projects grow in budget and scope, you are going to want to permit through the proper agencies and that requires insurance. Insurance becomes a normal part of your business growth and your business practice.

Though liability and insurance were discussed in Chapter 2, their importance can't be overlooked now that we are talking about going onto other properties, both public and private. If you are working on a big-budget movie, there's no problem. Even small commercial production companies will have insurance. It's a sure sign of professionalism

and experience. But for crew, first-time shooters, and startup companies, the status of insurance is something you should always inquire about. If someone is asking you to work for free or as a paid crewperson, you need to know about insurance on the project. Before you scout and after discussing or establishing the project's budget, determine the need for insurance. It is important enough to find the money to protect you, your crew, and your assets. If something goes wrong, the first instinct from most people is to sue, and that puts you, your possessions, and your project at risk. As one insurance broker always says, "Insurance is the last thing people think about." I know a huge number of people just skip this whole discussion about insurance because of the cost or because of the lack of sound information. I understand many projects are shooting this way, but it will eventually hold you back and could cost you so much more than the price of insurance if something goes wrong or there is a lawsuit.

General liability coverage is a good starting place. The price can range from $800 to $2,000, and of course the cost goes up if you are doing dangerous stunts or shooting underwater or employing any other risky practices. That seems affordable if you have a budget of $10,000 or more. If you can't afford insurance this time, at least start to plan for a time in the future when you will be able to afford it and start to make insurance a priority. Start putting it in the budget. Importantly, insurance is the first requirement for getting any kind of permit. Every city, county, state, and federal government will require insurance naming them as additional insured. No governmental entity will permit you unless you have insurance that can provide the coverage they need for public property. Insurance is part of your personal and professional portfolio if you are going to make a living or make a career in the world of production. As another film commissioner told me, "If a filmmaker does not have insurance, then they simply aren't prepared to film."

PRIVATE PROPERTY VERSUS PUBLIC PROPERTY

"What's the difference between shooting on private and public property? Do I need a permit to shoot on private property? I'm the public! Can't I just go on the beach and shoot my scene?" These are the most common questions when people start looking for locations. Private property is owned by an individual or by a business entity, such as a corporation. That person or business owner must give you permission to be on the property and must give you permission to actually shoot the property. And finally, the owner must give you permission to use the images and sound you take with you on film, tape, memory card, or hard drive. Even a private property owner will ask to see your insurance and most likely will ask to be named as additional insured. Most business owners are savvy enough to know that they don't want to be held responsible if

someone on your crew gets hurt. In addition, they will want to know that there is insurance to cover any damage or repair to their property after you leave.

Often private property is the best bet for low-budget projects. Private property locations are part of the philosophy of keeping your locations close to home. Find your locations from among your support group. Approaching family members, friends, co-workers, and friends of friends increases the odds of people saying "yes" to your request. And get the entire crew involved in asking favors from family and friends. These folks know you and they want to help you be successful. Also, they know what you're up against and they know your limits in the particular shooting situation, so they won't expect any unrealistic amount of money. And usually they will be more forgiving and patient—at least the first time around.

Public property is owned and maintained by a governmental entity. That entity can be a city, county, state, country, or agency of a government. Any public property will require a permit from that specific government and that government will require insurance naming them as additional insured. In 2010, the standard insurance requirement was usually $2 million general comprehensive and $1 million per occurrence. And there can be overlapping jurisdictions or even multiple government entities in control of any one location. For example, in the City of San Diego you might have to permit to be on public property managed by the County, Port District, State of California, or the U.S. government, depending where you want to shoot. Old Town Historic State Park requires insurance and a permit with the State of California, but you would need to permit through the San Diego Film Commission to park your trucks on the city street adjacent to the state park. Public properties usually include common use areas like streets, highways, sidewalks, parks, beaches, public government buildings, libraries, and so on. Every inch of land on the planet is owned or regulated by some government or appointed agency. And much of the waterways on the planet are under some entity's jurisdiction. Be prepared and get used to the fact that you need permission, and almost always you'll need insurance to shoot anyplace that you yourself don't own. You can't just park the car on the shoulder of the road and walk 50 feet into the adjacent field and shoot your scene. Everything is owned by someone. You will need to find the owner and get permission; most often, the owner or government is going to ask about insurance. Don't fool yourself into thinking otherwise. It's pretty universal that no property owner and no governmental entity wants to be liable for damage, injury, or death because they said yes to your film request.

Low-budget projects can actually benefit from filming on public property, as long as you have insurance. With so much global competition for attracting films, many cities, counties, and states offer "free"

public properties to the filmmaker. Free is always a good starting point, but, as discussed before, free doesn't always end up that way. Free public properties can have hidden costs depending on what you are physically doing in the scene and how it needs to be managed. For instance, a city beach in San Diego is a free location until you put people in the water, in the surf, in the dynamic of the open ocean. Then you will probably be required to hire a city lifeguard at $60 an hour to guarantee the safety of your actors and the safety of the public around your shooting scene. Now your free public property has acquired the cost of city personnel to monitor the shoot. Free government buildings most likely come with the pricetag of a custodian and perhaps a building security guard to oversee your crew while shooting. These public locations can still turn out to be very affordable in the end, but find out in advance. Do your homework. Ask questions about additional costs, administrative fees, or "cost recovery." *Cost recovery* is the term applied to charging the production company for staff time or personnel assigned to monitor the production on the set. Are there personnel costs for police, rangers, lifeguards, or a maintenance person added on? Investigate the permit process to determine whether there are application fees or administrative fees attached to the free location. Sometimes the liability and risk management that a government requires on its part ends up costing more for a supposedly free public property location than a private property would cost you. Do the research, weigh your options, and have some location budget to get you through the realities of on-location filming—even on free public property locations.

When talking in front of students, networking groups of filmmakers, or emerging filmmakers, someone always asks the question, "But the beach is public property, so that means I can just go and shoot there, right?" Not really. This whole concept of "public" when interpreted as meaning anyone can do anything as a public user is a bit off track. "Public property" means that it is common space maintained by a governmental jurisdiction that guarantees public access to all. It doesn't mean anyone can do anything they want on public land. The user always needs to take into consideration the point at which they start to affect the rest of the public in that space. You and your five friends with a digital camera might not create a disruption or attract attention, but there's no guarantee. You and your five friends with a digital camera filming a passionate love scene or robbery attempt on a beach or public parkland would certainly attract attention and affect the other people around you. A ranger, police officer, or lifeguard is very likely to ask you what you are doing and then consider that what you are doing as a liability to others, yourself, or the government in charge, and then ask to see your permit or ask you to leave. Assuming that you can film on public property as part of your first amendment rights applies only to the press and media outlets—and even they will be asked to show their press credentials on

occasion. That's why the press people always have their credentials on a lanyard around their neck. So don't oversimplify the idea of "public" to mean you can do anything you want on public land. Once you have an impact on the public, introduce new elements like actors and lights and a boom mike, and need to control or manipulate an environment in any way, you have exceeded the normal public use.

The differences, advantages, and disadvantages of private property versus public property are worth examining before you start to scout. Sometimes you just won't have a choice. It's a car chase, a party on the beach, or dramatic dialog on the sidewalk of a downtown urban canyon. You most often will have to be on public property to capture those looks. But there are advantages to being on private property where you "own" the location: "own" in the sense of control, not in the sense of "I can do anything I want" in an abusive or exploitative way. When comparing public locations and private locations, there are three key factors that are so intertwined you need to look at each very closely when evaluating your choices. These location factors are impact, control, and cost.

Impact

The moment you step out into the public arena, your film crew's activity is going to impact someone. No matter how small the crew, how short the scene, how simple the sight gag, someone else or perhaps many other people are going to be affected in some way or another. Remember the Bubble effect from Chapter 1? On-location filming doesn't take place in a bubble; you're intruding into other people's space and disrupting normal routines. If acknowledged and anticipated, the impact can be acceptable and tolerated well. If overlooked—or worse, not seen as important—public impact and the average person's response can make for a long, difficult day and undue stress. Even with the best planning and communication, your impact on someone can be unexpected and unfixable. There is some small percentage of the public who won't like what you're doing; they don't like movies, they don't like the commercialism of Hollywood, and some will attach responsibility for the moral decay in the world to the evil presence of Hollywood and your movie. There is always someone on the street or in the park who—no matter how well you do your job—will not be appeased. But the point is that there will always be some kind of impact when you introduce your film crew out onto public property. Be smart about it and be prepared.

The scope of the work will be the decisive factor in how much preparation and public outreach you have to do to keep everything running smoothly. Generally, it's true that the smaller the crew, the less of an impact there is on the public. But on the other hand, a small crew doing stunts, crashing a car, or doing anything that requires stopping traffic is

going to have a big impact. Even second-unit work that usually doesn't involve key actors can have a big impact. Filmmakers always try to minimize what they need to do when they talk about a scene or describe a shooting sequence. You do this to make the craziness of your job sound normal to the other people you are trying to convince to say yes and play the game with you! Don't fool yourself into believing your own rhetoric when you tell someone else "it's only five seconds on the screen" or "it's a small crew—you won't even know we're there." Someone will notice and how that person will react is an unknown. Your job is to eliminate all of the unknowns and anticipate and manage all the variables so you can shoot unhampered. That requires you to have an accurate and realistic understanding of the impact you have upon an area. There's a world of interpretation out there when you start to talk about impact. Impact covers everything from extra vehicles parking on the street to equipment blocking sidewalks or a street closure or the AD yelling "quiet on the set" before every roll. Any little thing you do differently from the normal daily routine will be seen as an intrusion to the folks who live, work, or play in that place. Know your impact, communicate the details to the people you will affect, and be friendly. You have to be able to coexist in these location environments.

There is, generally speaking, a big difference in the impact you make on private property as opposed to public property. The good part is that private property won't include hundreds of strangers who just happen to drive by or walk up and down the public street you are using that day. Private property guarantees some degree of limited impact (with the control you want), and it's always discussed with the owner well in advance. Frequently, a filmmaker will think it's no big deal when they shoot on private property, and it is always a good recommendation for no-budget or low-budget projects. Keep it simple and controllable. But remember that you can shoot on private property and still have a very big public impact. It might just be the neighbors next door or the people who live in the downstairs apartment that are affected. Or it might be the entire community within a five-block radius if you are firing automatic weapons all night. Or it might affect a much larger area or group of people on the move.

They're Blowing Up the Pig Barn!?

An independent filmmaker with a healthy foreign distribution deal shot an action adventure film in San Diego, all about mercenaries. And of course we all know that any decent mercenary group is going to shoot first and take things into their own hands. One scene required a huge explosion as the jeeps roared past the structure through the smoke with everyone's weapon drawn. The location manager found a large rural ranch where the owner had an old ramshackle pig barn that he wanted to get rid of. The owner and production company agreed to share the

(*Continued*)

They're Blowing Up the Pig Barn!? (Continued)

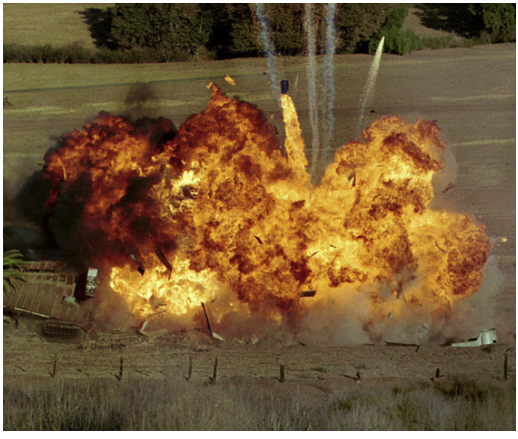
cost of blowing it up and hauling away all the debris. Perfectly easy, as it was on private property. Well, a rural two-lane county road passed through the property less than a mile away from the planned explosion. That meant traffic had to be stopped on the road in both directions leading up to and during the explosion so that no driver would go into shock and careen off the road or into another car. An explosion on private property became a public safety and public impact situation with a public relations outreach that required police, advance signs in the area, and lots of walkie-talkie time between the location manager and the police on the street. Timing was critical, as always in any kind of pyrotechnics, but the public tolerated it well and the scene was spectacular.

Evaluate the real impact that your presence and activity will have in your immediate and more far-reaching area, whether you're shooting on private or public property. Communicate and coordinate with all the other elements that might be even remotely affected by your shooting there.

Control

The second big factor to consider is how much control you need at that location. This can become very clear when looking at the difference between filming on private property or public property. A private property location is always going to offer more available control. With your location agreement, you are "renting" the property and you can pretty much decide who can and cannot come onto the property. Even if you are shooting the big party scene with 300 extras, you have more control on private property. In a park, on a beach, or on a sidewalk, you have the limits defined in the permit for shooting on public property. When shooting on public land, control usually translates into cost for assigned people and personnel that have to be paid by the production company to manage the set and keep the public safe. Controlling multiple factors out in the public is going to get expensive, so plan appropriately according to your budget. Also, you are more vulnerable when out in the public, and you can become the victim of the random loud-mouthed biker who takes great pleasure in disrupting your film set. True, all disrupters can be quieted or removed, but it always takes time, causes stress, and makes extra work for you. Movies and television shows stay on the studio back lot for many reasons. One good reason is control. The benefits of shooting on private property can be a big help in getting your shots. And private property can provide some unlikely locations. Consider a private property for its woodlands, manicured landscapes, ponds, private roads, and other attributes that would be much easier to shoot on private property than out in the public.

Public property requires a permit; oftentimes that permit includes law enforcement or other public safety officers to be on the set. That's a



FIGURES 4.1, 4.2, 4.3 The pig barn going up in flames. *Reprinted by permission Ernie Anderson/San Diego Film Commission*

good thing. True, it's difficult for filmmakers with no planned budget and no money to pay for that kind of personnel. It can be a condition of the permit, so that's another reason to have some kind of location budget. But any time you can afford an officer on the set, request it even if it's not required. The presence of a uniformed officer is the best public relations tool you can have out in the public. Police officers are allies and are there to give you the control you need and make your job so much easier. Without an officer you still need good, smiling PAs to ask pedestrians not to walk through the frame while they schmooze with the store owners and make conversation with everyone to keep the peace. But anytime personnel are assigned as part of the permit, it works to your advantage and guarantees that you have the control you need. They are people in positions of authority who can make things happen and protect your work environment from unwanted disturbance or disruption. They help enforce the terms of the permit when you are out in the public.

Cost

Finally, the cost factor is the third big difference when starting to scout and considering shooting on public or private property. Private property can be very expensive. But so can public property, even if it starts off free. Obviously the estate home, the corporate headquarters, or the museum filled with rare artifacts is going to cost thousands of dollars. But there may be creative ways to cut corners sometimes. Working with a realtor can help you find the mansion that is standing empty while the residents are living elsewhere, waiting for the house to sell. I've seen students get permission to shoot in a model home of a new subdivision if they promised some B-roll for the developer. Anytime you shoot on private property, the owner is going to expect to be paid fairly for the disruption. Compensation depends on the nature of the location, the degree of impact, and the reality of the cost of lost business. If you need to shoot in a restaurant or other business, try to go in after hours or whenever they are closed so that the owner doesn't lose any business. When you take over a house for several days, the only way the owners might get some peace and quiet is for production to put them in a hotel every night while security guards protect the house and equipment on site. Private property offers you more negotiating power when closing the deal. If you don't have money, there are often other ways to get the owner interested in saying yes. Does the owner or the family members want to be extras? Can you offer behind-the-scenes opportunities for the kids or does the business want a credit in the film? There can be a good emotional buy-in for some people if you can find the right angle to capture their interest when you don't have the budget to pay a lot of money.

Find the intangible something that will make it fun and easy for the owner to say yes.

Other than the "look," cost can be the most obvious factor in choosing between private and public property. What about that big party scene with 300 extras? That free park land with the million-dollar view could end up costing you more in set dressing, police, security, rangers, and maintenance than the estate home with the perfect backyard. This is an important analysis to make early on when you have a little budget. Cost can also be affected by the location's availability. A hotel lobby will rarely be a free location, because it is always open doing business on some level. But perhaps between midnight and 6:00 a.m., when it's not so busy, you can negotiate and make it affordable and available to you. And if you rent a hotel room for the day as a production office or filming location (of course with the manager's permission to film), they might throw in the nighttime lobby work for free. The lobby of a four-star resort is not going to be as accessible in terms of cost or negotiations as a more affordable average hotel. Be realistic and expect surprises when approaching a property. People will surprise you in any number of ways: some good and some not so good. Always ask. I've been surprised by how many producers can sweet-talk their way into shooting in the mansion for very little money. And many people still find the idea of being involved with a movie fascinating and exciting. Use the mystique and excitement to help you bring owners on board to be part of your movie. Be honest, considerate, and passionate about your work and take good care of your locations—whatever the terms. All these elements working together can bring some miraculous locations to your project.

Other Critical Considerations

After you've evaluated your location list by public impact, the amount of control you need, and the cost factor, try to isolate a few other specific location challenges that stand out. Evaluate your locations from these three critical considerations. For starters, ask yourself what your most challenging location in the script is and why. A location can be especially challenging if you're spending more time shooting in that location. Multiple days of shooting in one location is good because you usually can live there with no big company moves, saving you time. Your shooting becomes more efficient. But multiple days in one location is always challenging from a simple public impact and public relations point of view. The owners are displaced in one way or another and the neighborhood gets tired of seeing all those trucks and unusual activity getting in the way day after day. Multiple days in a neighborhood house location can get ugly really fast. I like to say it's like a good marriage gone bad! The first day or two is the honeymoon period. Everyone is

happy and excited to have a movie shooting on their street. Then it starts to get old when the trucks are always in the way, it takes longer and longer to back out of the driveway every day, and there's a constant buzz of activity with crew people scurrying about moving equipment and lights. After three or four days, the natives get restless and the grumbling starts. You'll hear them saying, "Why did we ever agree to this? When will they be gone?" often ending with the statement, "We'll never do this again!" It doesn't take long for them to want their neighborhood back. And the long-term suffering in a retail business community will soon translate into dollars paid for blocked storefronts and no parking places left for their normal customers and potential drive-by business. Multiple days spent prepping a location, shooting there, and the cleanup and days restoring the location means extra work for the Location Department. There will be many conversations and lots of TLC and handholding to keep the neighborhood happy or at least tolerant of the impact your work makes on their street and businesses. That makes multiple days and long-term shooting at one location both a blessing and a burden.

A second consideration might be how exotic, rare, or accessible the location is for a film crew. For instance, a zoo, a government building or prison cell, a research laboratory, or the Hearst Castle might bring tremendous limitations and restrictions when approached by a location scout. The challenge of such high-profile locations can sometimes be resolved with money. But that's not the case every time. Sterile environments, high-security businesses, and companies working with protected proprietary products aren't going to be very welcoming to a film crew. Castles on top of mountains are going to bring inherent obstacles in terms of physical geography and physical access. The insanely steep driveway up to the most spectacular futuristic home might prevent you from filming there. The very factors that make the location desirable or necessary in the story might create the challenge that makes it hard to secure that location and actually shoot there. Remote or isolated locations bring lots of extra travel costs, as equipment and support services will have to come from far away. Housing, food, and simple everyday supplies like bottled water will cost more when you have to bring everything from someplace far away.

A third challenge could arise based on the nature of the scenes you need to shoot at that location. This sensitivity ties very closely to the earlier concerns of impact, control, and cost. But it can go beyond even the logistical nightmare of big setups and lots of special effects. The big mob car chase and shootout, an Iraqi village assault, or a serial killer's backyard graveyard all bring a very different kind of challenge. Not only does each scene require different control and safety measures, but each of these scenes will generate different reactions from the people who will be affected by what you're shooting. The story line or specific action in a scene can sometimes trigger a negative reaction in people. And negativity

always makes a location challenging. Large recognizable commercial properties are often sensitive to their buildings being shown as the headquarters of a major drug smuggling operation. A property owner might not like the idea of murder and bloodshed taking place within their happy home. And home owners are very often concerned about how their neighbors will react to all the commotion and disruption of a shootout in their backyard. You will meet negativity that leads people to just say "no" to your request to film there. This is where your communication skills and people skills become very important. When I met that kind of resistance, I would ask the person to stop for a moment and describe their favorite scene in an action/adventure movie. Think James Bond films, *The Terminator*, *Mission Impossible*, or any *Lethal Weapon* movie. Be ready to remind them of a well-known classic scene if they can't come up with a favorite. Once you've identified the scene, remind them how amazing it was and how much they enjoyed it and marveled at it. Then let them know that as impossible and crazy as that scene must have been to capture on film, they had to shoot it somewhere. Every scene, every thrilling sequence had to shoot someplace, in someone's backyard. Eventually suggest why not take a chance and have some fun with this? Of course, certain subjects can forever remain taboo, but just be prepared to meet negative reactions with friendly conversation and you might be able to bring them around.

Understanding the challenges inherent in your locations will arm you as a better and more productive scout. Remember that the demands and needs of each location extend way beyond the words written on the page. The challenge of bringing people, trucks, equipment, and the organized chaos of production to a neighborhood near you is a logistical beast that is yours to tame.

MEET YOUR CREATIVE TEAM

Get inside your locations as deeply as you can. Does the house have to be a two-story house because of a particular scene involving a staircase? Does the police shootout take place in an urban downtown area or in a warehouse district? Is the high school old brick or a contemporary sprawling campus? All these factors become critical at this first stage in the beginning of your location scouting plans. You know the actual, real locations as written, but you also have a vision forming. Now is the time to bring your particular vision to the table with the other key people who create the look of the movie. Now is the time to begin to collaborate with other department heads. Meet with the director, producer, and production designer, and possibly the cinematographer as much as you need to in order to bring the individual ideas together into one cohesive vision. There needs to be some solid clear description attached to every location before you head out to scout. You need to brainstorm with

these key contributors to suss out the details you will bring to your scouting. There may be some room to play with early in your scouting, allowing you to bring a variety of looks for all to see. But as you bring pictures back through future meetings, the fog will clear and the exact, specific details of each location will take shape.

Know the Vision

When I asked location key TeriLee "TL" Huff to give one piece of advice to a student or first-time filmmaker going out on location, he replied, "Read the script, take notes, have a meeting on the needs of all departments then head out knowing what you need so you are not spinning your wheels. Also, check to make sure that the production designer and writer know the styles of the buildings or structures they are wanting. That can be time-consuming when they say Craftsman and want Queen Anne or Gothic . . . yes, it happens."

These key people will all have a slightly different understanding and personal interpretation of the characters' personalities and locations, and those ideas need to meld into one. At some point, everyone needs to be on the same page, in complete agreement on what the locations need to look like in every way. This concept can always be expanded upon and changes will be made. But you, the director, producer, and production designer need to be talking to each other constantly as you scout. For instance, the production designer will often bring a palette of colors that he or she wants to see repeated throughout the movie and its locations. You don't want to waste anyone's time scouting for days to show dark, earth-toned homes and office interiors when the palette is built around light primary colors to better complement the main character's personality. Once you start photographing possible locations, you will be presenting your photos to these key people for discussion and consideration. So get to know them as soon as you can and keep getting clarification on the vision for the visuals in the film.

Know in advance that your director and producer will have two very different ways of looking at the script and you will be affected by those differences. The director will bring very detailed descriptions that you need to note; write everything down and keep it close as a constant reference. Scene 22 from Chapter 3 presents a simple beach bar reference, but when you talk to the director, he or she could describe it as a shabby, well-worn surfer dive reeking of spilled beer with surfing posters all over the place and peanut shells on the floor. Or he or she could have a completely different vision. The director is going to provide you with critical creative descriptions of each location and insight into how the location compliments and enhances the characters and their story. Pay attention and stay true to the director's suggestions. When you present the first batch of location photos, things will start to evolve so that

all the players on the creative team can contribute and begin to create a cohesive vision for every location.

The director brings creative needs to your location scout; the producer brings more practical, budgetary concerns. And because you will be interacting more with the producer or production manager, get to know his or her attitude and philosophy—where your producer is coming from in terms of budget and specific costs. Your producer will let you know the boundaries for locations, even down to the point of asking you to show your photos to him or her first so that he or she can filter through them before the director sees them. It's happened to me. The producer is going to be very protective of the director, meaning that he or she is not going to let you or anyone waste the director's time or cause stress. It's worth mentioning again: one big rule of location scouting is never to show pictures of a location that hasn't been cleared. A location is "cleared" if the owner has been contacted and has agreed to filming—even on some preliminary level. The rule is almost always learned by everyone through some painful and often embarrassing moment when, under pressure, they show pictures, the director falls in love with the location, and the scout has to come back with tail between legs to tell the director that the owner said "no."

PREPARE TO SCOUT: KEEP IT CLOSE TO HOME

As many of you are going to be location scouting for low-budget movies, you should first try keeping it close to home. Get your key crew department heads together to go over the location list and ask everyone to brainstorm for family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, or anyone they know that they can approach and ask for a free location. Next step, after exhausting family and friends, is to expand your thinking and brainstorm in a more creative context. Make your circle of questions wider and wider, asking your family and friends to ask their co-workers, friends at the gym, and everyone they talk to for ideas to help you find your locations. For instance, ask questions when talking to your neighbor about different areas of town, or try jogging everyone's memory to recall seeing the type of place you're looking for, such as, "Have you ever seen an old clapboard Victorian house out in an orange grove?" Talk about your locations to everyone and you'll be surprised at how many leads will turn up. In this approach, one phone call can lead to five more phone calls. If you don't get the answer you want, don't hang up until you ask that person on the other end of the line if they have any idea where you might find the rustic A-frame cabin in the woods or whether they have ever seen one in your area. Always turn a dead end into the next possibility by asking for new information and new leads. Yes, it is complicated and complex, but go one step at a time and protect yourself from

overwhelm. Make it a priority to pull in all your favors and turn everything into a lead; it will help you scout and help your budget. If you are a student, film on campus as much as possible. It reduces your liability and encourages the school staff to cooperate in support of your class work. Think outside just classrooms on your campus. Most campuses are small cities in their own right. Consider the health clinics, institutional kitchens, a business office, executive offices, parking structures, private roads, coffee shops, park-like settings, physical plants with tunnels and exposed pipes, and on and on. Use what is close at hand and available.

START WITH WHAT YOU KNOW

Start with what is familiar to you. Don't make it harder than it has to be. Start with what you know and expand from there. There is a lot of research to do before you ever leave the house to go scouting. Expect to spend some time on the Internet, in books, and on the phone. Contact the local Film Commission, as they are required to have a location library that you can use to find locations. Many Film Commissions have their location library online or on their website so that it's even more accessible. Location service companies are one other source. These companies represent properties; they do charge money for their services in addition to getting a location fee for the owner, so they do add the cost of a middleman. It's probably not the right fit for every type of project, yet another instance of how the budget drives your location choices and your business decisions. Contact the local Chamber of Commerce; even the smallest towns and communities usually have a C of C that includes lists of local business members. Contact the BBB (the Better Business Bureau) and any other business associations and ask for a members list. For instance, if you need to shoot in a restaurant, you could contact the restaurant association in the area to see if there are any empty, out-of-business restaurants or film-friendly restaurants they can recommend. The business association might be able to send out your film request on your behalf to all their membership and help you in that way. If you're in a new city or area unknown to you, get a good map and talk to the locals like the shop owners, real estate agents, and local government.

TRICKS AND TOOLS

The Internet has changed how we do business in a hundred different ways. Take advantage of this electronic scouting tool and find out everything you can about your locations from the comfort of your chair with your laptop. Scout for images of different coffee shop exteriors or interiors before you ever leave the house. By now you know the style, tone, and personality that you're looking for at this location, so you can eliminate a lot of shops in your first few minutes of Google time. The few that look interesting should go onto your list for real scouting, at which

point you will make contact with the owner, introduce the project, and get permission to take photos. In addition to the images and information on the Internet, you can get some great books about a city or region that can be valuable in your prescout planning. Look for the Fodor's guides, architectural books about your city, tourism guides, hiking and wilderness guides, historical society books, and many other such sources that showcase specific types of points of interest or fame. If your city publishes a magazine or gardening journal, or perhaps an interior design magazine, these are all good leads to explore.

Make sure you have good maps of the area. Google Earth can help get you around and give a good overview of different areas. MapQuest and Google Maps are amazing resources, too, but I have found that Internet maps are not always accessible when you need them and are not always correct when providing directions. I once printed an Internet map for a trip to LA and foolishly didn't cross-check it against my trusted Thomas Guide. I spent 20 minutes navigating surface streets through a residential neighborhood in LA when I knew I was within a block of my destination on Wilshire Boulevard. Internet maps are not road-tested—unless you want to be the first one to confirm that the route is correct and is the fastest route to your destination. If you don't have a GPS in your car, invest in a Thomas Guide and a laminated fold-out City in Your Pocket or Streetwise map. Invest in a good compass as well. You will need it as a reference when taking your location photos, and it can help when you are driving in a new area of town. These are some basic tools to help you get ready to scout.

Let's do a walkthrough and plan a location scout. Where would you start if one of your scenes takes place in a small theater on a performance stage? Let's assume that you know all the smaller community theaters and it's easy to get a list from the Internet, from a local arts publication, or from a phone call to the Arts Council or theater group. Next, you could get a list of the community recreation centers with stages from your local Park and Recreation department. Next, get a list of VFW halls, Rotary Clubs, Lion's Clubs, Women's Clubs, fraternal organizations like the Elks, Moose Lodge, and so on. Anything that functions as a meeting hall that might have a stage could work as a small community theater location. Consider school auditoriums, private dance studios, and actors' workshops: let your mind roam free and cast a wide net for any and all possibilities and watch your list of possible locations grow. Then you spend a day on the phone—yes, the phone—and the Internet looking at images, contacting each facility to ask about availability, cost, whether are they open to filming, and when you can visit the site and take pictures. If you haven't been to the website, ask them to email or fax you any details they might have, such as a floor plan or a diagram with dimensions and ceiling heights. Then start to create an itinerary for your scouting trip based on the meeting times you've set up on the phone.

Research and planning can save you hours of disappointment in the car with nothing to show for a day of driving around.

Pack up your location scouting kit with all your lists, maps, compass, cell phone, car charger, and camera. Put some water, snacks, and energy bars in your six-pack cooler in the car. Charge your batteries for all your electronics, pack extra memory cards, get your laptop for downloading and emailing your photos, fill up the car with gas, wash the windshield, grab your sunglasses and hat and CDs, and head out location scouting! Well, wait: you're not quite ready to go yet.

BE PROFESSIONAL: YOU ARE SELLING DOOR TO DOOR

Write a letter of introduction that you can leave with people or put under the welcome mat or taped to a gate or door. The letter should introduce you, the project, the nature of the location you are scouting, and include an invitation to have them call you back and talk about what it all means. Include all the essential information without overwhelming them. Basically, you want them to find the information interesting and exciting and make them comfortable and curious enough to call you back. If you are working with the local Film Commission or permit office, be sure to include that information and the name and number of someone in that office they can call to confirm that you are legitimate.

Have business cards to use as an introduction when talking to people. Business cards help validate you as a professional or at least demonstrate that you are a serious businessperson. Have some references available in case the home owner wants to talk to someone you've worked with in the past or to talk to another person who has had their property used as a filming location. You will spend a lot of time trying to find someone to talk to; often, you will have to go up the chain of command. That can take time. Scout houses on the weekend if you can, as more people are likely to be home on the weekend. You might start by talking to a gardener, a neighbor, or an employee at a business. Ask them to pass your introduction letter on to the owner. Better yet, get the owner's name and contact information. Ask what time the manager will be in the restaurant later that day. Be ready to give a brief synopsis of the script and a brief but honest description of what you want to shoot at that location. Anticipate the person's questions and be ready with the accurate answers. For instance, the owner may ask about insurance, how many people will be in the house, why their house is of interest, what will you pay, and similar questions. If you don't have an answer, say so, and promise to get back to them soon with the information. Look professional and be serious about your work. Don't be too casual or flippant, as this first contact is bound to lead to some thoughtful conversation and negotiating. You want to be taken seriously when contracts

Next Time Films, LLC

Dear Neighbors, October 7, 2010

My name is Kathy McCurdy and I am a Location Scout for an independent movie filming here in the San Diego area. The movie *Better Luck Next Time* is a romantic comedy/drama that requires a variety of real locations and I am in the neighborhood today to contact property owners who might be interested in having their homes or businesses used as a location in a movie.

Your property has many of the attributes we are looking for and I would love the opportunity to talk to you in person about what is involved in our filming request and answer any questions you might have. The local company, Next Time Films, LLC is insured and will be permitted through the San Diego Film Commission. If you find the idea of welcoming a movie onto your property interesting, you would of course be paid a location fee and the company would provide insurance naming you, the owner, as additional insured. In addition, you would have the fun of experiencing the "behind the scenes" realities of the movie making business. We are local crew people working with a local company to grow this business and we count on residents, business owners and community groups to support and assist us in our work. Movies can only be shot on location when we have the interest and cooperation of people like you.

Please give me a call to discuss this film request and talk about what happens next. If you need references or verification you can call the San Diego Film Commission at 619-234-3456. Thank you in advance for your attention. And see you at the movies!

Best regards,

Kathy M. McCurdy
Location Scout
619-555-1212

555 Central Ave. Ste. 5 San Diego, CA. 92121
619-555-5555 www.betterluckmovie.com

FIGURE 4.4 A sample location scout letter of introduction. Leave this at properties when scouting. It gives the owners a quick overview of who you are and what you are asking in the film request. It presents the information in a professional way and encourages the owner to call you back to discuss the project.

come into the picture. Be clean and neat in appearance and be calm and articulate in your speech. You don't want to reduce your appeal in any way. First impressions can be very powerful. I know, it sounds like a sales job! And it is.

It is more often than not like looking for a needle in a haystack. You might walk miles some days through a neighborhood hoping to get three people to open their door and talk to you. You will have doors slammed in your face. You will be invited into the backyard and offered a cold beer. You will find yourself in the most outrageous and amazing places that the average person would never get to see. And that's just the beginning. Location scouting is so much like selling door to door that you'll wish you'd read all the motivational speakers' books on how to close the sale. It takes tremendous patience, commitment, and skill. Cinematographer Thomas Ackerman, ASC, said it best, "People skills are so important in this job. It's pretty hard to fake it on a movie set." Your communication skills are critical, so practice pitching in front of the mirror if you have to in order to become polished and smooth in your presentation. Be gracious, enthusiastic, and articulate in your effort to engage people—and don't forget to smile. You might be writing the next book on how to close the deal!

Before You Go Out Scouting, Remember to:

1. Honor your creative contribution to the film's look.
2. Know your location budget—there's no such thing as a free location.
3. Have answers to your insurance questions—you will be asked.
4. Analyze your locations by genre, public impact, control, cost, availability, and accessibility.
5. Identify critical considerations that make any location especially challenging: long-term filming, sensitive subject matter, sensitive neighborhood or community.
6. Create one vision with the creative team.
7. Start scouting close to home—ask family and friends.
8. Build your scouting kit—cell phone, camera, GPS/compass, maps, electronic support, lists, itinerary, and creature comforts.
9. Be professional—business cards, letter of introduction, leave-behind materials.
10. Smile.

Chapter | five

Your Kodak Moments

CHAPTER OUTLINE

A picture is worth a thousand words.

Frederick R. Barnard

When Paul Simon sang, "Mama, don't take my Kodachrome away," little did he know that before long they would take it away forever. The song was released in 1973 and was named after the Kodak 35 mm Kodachrome film that had become the standard for print photography and would continue to be so over the next several decades. I'm certain the singer never stopped to think that eventually film itself would be taken away from the world of still photos! That was never even a possibility back in 1973. Kodak kept their 1975 prototype for the digital camera under wraps for almost 20 years. During that time, the standard for location photography was true to 35 mm film—right up until the advent of digital photography in the late 1990s. How technology has continued to alter the way we capture images!

Shoot on Location.

LOCATION PHOTOS: POLAROID, FILM, DIGITAL—WHAT NEXT?

Here's what it used to be like to go out and shoot location photos before the digital revolution. Pack up your Polaroid camera and make sure you have plenty of film. Yes, Polaroid was the only way to get fast delivery on location pictures. If you could shoot that day and FedEx overnight, the client would see pictures the next day. But Polaroid was pricey and brought some limitations—for instance, you couldn't cut the pictures to tape together in panoramas. The chemicals would ooze out and make a mess. And Polaroid didn't do well in certain weather conditions—the chemicals wouldn't combine in cold temperatures and there were many times you would have to breathe on the print or put it inside your jacket to warm it up and bring out the image. But it was immediate. And of course you rarely got the Polaroid pictures back from the client, so if you didn't shoot doubles, you were at a loss. That was only one of the limitations.

I'm Going Where to Do What?

In 1978, my first job scouting involved a Polaroid camera and a long drive up into the mountains east of San Diego to Lake Cuyamaca. It was pouring rain during a winter storm, the roads were washed out, and the sky was so dark that the Polaroid pictures ended up looking like underexposed shots taken underwater. I didn't have enough boxes of film and it was so dark by the time I got to the lake that I barely got a couple of series of three or four shots off before I had to get in the car, turn around and drive down the hill to get to FedEx. I cut and taped the pictures together in a panorama on the FedEx counter as the agent almost patiently waited for me to label and package the photos to be rushed out the door. But they worked and the Canadian client came here to shoot commercials for Molson beer with beautiful people drinking beer on the shores of what looked like a Canadian lake. Polaroid worked its magic once again.

Here's a little historical look back to help us appreciate the new technology. During the Polaroid era, you could still shoot 35 mm photos, process, print, and paste up the photos to go out overnight. But you would need a week. If you had that much lead time, it was great to take a week to scout, shoot, and present to the client. In that case, you would grab your 35 mm SLR camera and head out the door, after packing the camera case with film—at least three or four packs of 36 exposures each. You'd generally shoot 200 ASA, but had to make sure you had different ASA film—400 ASA for bright light, slower films for low-light situations and longer exposures (Historically the former American Standards Association (ASA) created a mathematical formula for film speed and film's sensitivity to light). Your camera case would also have lens paper, a UV (ultraviolet) filter, batteries for the camera and the flash, a dust brush, a compass, and pencil and paper. You'd follow your scouting itinerary and shoot efficiently, thoroughly, and quickly, and you'd always shoot the location in overlapping shots to create a panorama: three or

four shots starting at the far left, then move the camera about an inch to the right each time you take a new photo, until you reached the far right side of the location. This provided overlap to create one long panorama of the site when the photos are trimmed and taped together. Shooting panoramas was the standard for location photos, and how you presented them was an established industry standard, too.

Once you shot all your locations, the next step was to drop your film off for processing. If we were still in the film era of the time, your reminders might look like the following. When you pick up your prints, be ready to review them immediately or it will all become a big blur. Organize the shots by location and start to look them over, because you could be dealing with hundreds of prints. Make sure you have plenty of legal-size manila file folders, tape, scissors, a paper cutter, and Sharpies. Lay out your overlapping shots matched as closely as possible and tape them together across the back. Trim with scissors or a paper cutter to make a clean-edge top and bottom that is easy on the eye. Tape your panoramas into the 14-inch manila file folders in a logical sequence to best represent moving through the location property in a natural manner. If you have pans of more than four pictures, you'll need to fold them in from the side to make them fit on the page—then fold out for viewing. Make your file folder bundle as big as needed to hold all the photos. In other words, tape as many file folders inside of each other until you have as many sides as you need. If you have 50 pans of a farm house, you will need 50 pages, so you would tape 13 legal size four-sided file folders together to give you 50 pages. On the front page, write the owner's name, address of the property, phone number, and map page number. Tape one good representative photo on the front and include the location name—and what "part" it will play in the script. If you have a business card, map page, brochure, or any other extraneous material about the location, attach it to the file folder.

This process was a lot of work, and it could easily take half a day to paste up the photos from the previous day's shooting. But panoramas have been the standard for location photos for decades. We find ourselves in the midst of a digital and electronic revolution, so change has become the new constant. But how did we get here?

Can you imagine having to wait two or three days for film processing? By the mid-1980s, though, things had improved. It took years until the advance of same-day photofinishing and then one-hour processing became the standard. Of course, if I ran into Ritz Camera at 5:00 p.m. with 15 rolls of film, I wasn't guaranteed to get it back by 6:00 p.m. that same day. The system couldn't handle it. But the advent of one-hour photo finishing really put the pressure on the scout to deliver something to the creative team every day. And even though most days I could take the pictures and get photos in my hand at the end of the day, there were

many nights when I would be pasting up location photos into the wee hours to be ready for an 8:00 a.m. show and tell.

Now fast track to the late 1990s, when digital cameras were becoming affordable enough to fall into the hands of the average consumer and the location scout. The Sony Cyber-Shot Digital Still Camera came on the market in 1996, but it took a while for the entire supportive infrastructure to come together to make digital both the shooting method and the delivery system. In the early stages, just being able to take digital pictures reduced the time factor for shooting location pictures to minutes or hours instead of hours or days. We still lagged on how to see the digital print quickly, and the time factor in delivering the digital print in a fast and acceptable way was still under development. It would be a long time before we could email a photo or post photos to a shared website. Digital photos saved on a CD still relied on an overnight FedEx delivery for next day viewing. We still had a long way to go.

Location manager Greg Alpert scouted in San Diego for Steven Spielberg's movie *A.I.—Artificial Intelligence*, and it was exciting to talk to him about the new digital cameras and how they were changing the face of location scouting. He shared with me that *A.I.* was the first major studio movie to shoot all-digital in the Location Department. But even at that time, when we were first shooting digital photographs, we were still printing color copies of the photos to pass around the table to show the director. And that was printing to a color copier, not a photo printer. It wasn't feasible to pass a computer around the van when out scouting with department heads, so color pictures on paper were that last old tradition to fade away. That was probably early 2000, and no one could have predicted how quickly we would move from digital pictures on CDs to digital delivery systems, electronic file folders, personal websites, and shared files.

SHOOTING PANORAMAS OR NOT?

The technology has changed, but the technique for shooting location pictures remains pretty much the same. Location scouting requires clear, precise, detailed pictures that bring a realistic reference and representation of a place. Now is not the time to be artistic. If the location generates interest from your team, you will go back to shoot more detail, but the first time out, shoot quickly, concisely, and economically. Bring your artistic eye but shoot more from the simple documentary viewpoint to show what is there in that real physical location. The panorama format with full reverse-angle photography is not necessarily the preferred way to shoot location photos. But pans can be valuable for the microbudget, no-money indie. It brings broad images to your crew—and in the beginning, you should take advantage of all the visuals you can bring to the table.

Here's how to shoot your panoramic location photos. Shoot everything in multiple pictures to overlap and create broad panoramas. For

instance, shooting single shots of a city street doesn't convey the real look of the storefronts or the total impression of a whole city block. And shooting it with a wide-angle lens would help a little but would also cause some distortion. So a panorama is the answer. Panoramas were the gold standard for location photos and can still work for you. Shoot at least three and often more pictures slightly overlapping as you move from left to right or right to left. You will be moving the camera very slightly, so establish some landmark like the first letter in a store sign or a light pole as your edge guide for matching the next shot. Make sure that you have some slight overlap and be sure not to leave anything out. Use a tripod to help keep a matching even frame line, which will prevent you from tilting the cameral up or down. And always shoot complete reverse angles, too. For instance, when approaching a location, take photos of the exterior of the building looking at the main entrance. Next, walk to the entrance you just shot, turn around 180 degrees and shoot the reverse back to where you were just standing. Now you have the reverse angle from both directions. Do the same on all exterior sides. Interiors need all four walls shot this way; usually, you should shoot in the vertical format interior of a building to give a better indication of ceiling height and to show any light fixtures. Always shoot the reverse. Whether you are shooting pans or single shots, the same rules apply. You need to represent the space in a practical way to help everyone see whether there is room for camera, actors, lighting, and normal movement in the location and within the frame they plan to shoot. I could take photos of an amazing old weathered exterior of a classic standalone diner. But if I don't shoot the reverse angle, it won't show that I was standing on the edge of a cliff in the desert with no room to expand the scene or get the long shot that the director might want. You are shooting to reveal a location's limitations as much as you are shooting to demonstrate its appeal. Taking the reverse angle-pan adds the opposite 180° to give almost the 360° view you want to present.

This type of photography is not necessarily art. These are practical photos that show the size, scope, and style of a physical property. Photograph the natural elements as they exist and don't add any fancy lighting or theatrical nuances—no unusual angles or sepia tone or in-camera effects. You are going to move fast and shoot as much as you can every day; save your artistic sensibility for your return scout. But at the same time, you need to shoot everything at each location. Don't overlook anything as a possible point of interest or a feature that the production designer might find intriguing. Photograph any interesting elements in a single shot like a spiral staircase or a carved mantlepiece or distinctive architectural elements to show the detail. This is when you can bring a more creative technique to your shots. Get coverage on all interior and exterior space, including rooftops, basements, driveways, approaching street access, and outbuildings. Never talk yourself out of

taking that picture. If you see it, shoot it. Do not make a judgment call as to whether the location is right. That's not your decision. There will be some value in everything you shoot and show, but at the same time be sensitive to not wasting anyone's time. And you will learn a lot from hearing, "No, that's not what I want." You may have a personal opinion, but this is a collaborative effort and you owe it to the rest of the design team to show them everything. Every presentation will bring new clarity to your vision. And your creative energy and eye can contribute much.

That's the best way to shoot your pans, even in the digital world. Shoot single overlapping shots that are merged together. Many newer automatic point-and-shoot cameras will actually have a "panorama" selection in the menu. All you have to do is set your camera for pan and shoot. That might work for many of you on a beginning level. When you're spending your own money and you are producer, director, and location scout, use what you have. But some of you have moved beyond that and are actually getting paid to scout and work in the location department, so that might mean you need to upgrade your camera. Automatic point-and-shoot cameras rarely have "good glass," meaning they don't have a quality lens—and the lens is everything on professional cameras. The automatic features on many cameras limit you to average photos with inconsistencies in focus and exposure. They're just fine in the right situation but barely adequate in others. Just be aware of who you're going to present the photos to and what their expectations are going to be. If you have an older digital camera without the pan option or a higher-end digital camera, you will probably be using some of the free software downloads to create your pans. Try free software like Canon PhotoStitch or purchase PTGui Pro, which can stitch multiple rows of images, create 360° pans, and fix photos in which you didn't keep the camera level. You can even stitch your photos together with Adobe Photoshop. So there is a way to shoot better-quality digital images and stitch them together into panoramas. It just gets easier and easier from a technological point of view, but it still takes time, so expect to invest hours and hours into preparing your photos, regardless of whether you're using digital format or tape and scissors.

TO PAN OR NOT TO PAN

There is an important new difference of opinion developing among location scouts and location managers. The discussion centers on whether or not to shoot panoramas. What had been the unwritten law for location photos is eroding under the pressure of time, technology, and new attitudes. Location managers working on short-form projects (commercials or corporate videos) tell me that they are shooting more single-shot photos and not shooting pans. That's because their creative above-the-line folks like the fact that they can shoot and deliver more locations if

they're not taking all that time to stitch together or—heaven forbid—tape and paste together hundreds of pictures into panoramas. There are some producers or directors who still want to see pans in file folders, but it sounds like they are becoming the minority. Location scouts and location managers working in the studio world of major motion pictures tell me that you do whatever the producer and director ask for. If the director wants panoramas in file folders, digital images on a website, and videotape coverage, that's what you will shoot. There is still room for all of these different preferences and lots of potential for changes in the future. But because everyone wants to see their location pictures now, if not yesterday, digital is the new standard for location photos. As location manager Caleb Duffy told me, production wants to see the pictures "now and now quicker"!

AESTHETICS VERSUS LOGISTICS

It's important that you look at the location in the full context of the story and in the details of the scenes you need to shoot there while keeping in mind the logistical requirements that must be met to actually shoot there. Location manager Welton Jones calls this the "location specs." Go back to your breakdown location list and read the brief description you wrote there. That description defines the specific attributes, or the "specs" for each location. Those are the most important details to capture in your location photos. And those "specs" will very likely change for some locations or evolve as the creative team starts to click and brainstorm new interpretations of that location. You might end up scouting several different times for completely different house styles as the production designer and director decide that it shouldn't be a 1950s cottage, but instead should be a 1960s ranch style. And so it goes. Change your specs as the creative team gives you new input and keep good notes so you can justify why you had to scout so long for that one house. When you can document that the location specs changed three times, it's easier to explain why scouting took you so long. Be ready to scout for dozens of looks for any one location. It is very rare for a location to be selected until multiple possibilities are seen in pictures or seen in person on a scout.

Your location doesn't exist by itself alone in the world. It may look like it does, especially if it is a remote, isolated location. You need to do something to bring a sense of size, distance, and proportion to those location photos. I spent many years working on car commercials; I would always shoot the location first when scouting locations, whether it was a switchback road or an open meadow. And then I would park my car in the shot somewhere so there was a better sense of proportion by seeing the car in the space. You need to be able to estimate large distances like how high a cliff is or how wide a corn field is in your

pictures. Get familiar and comfortable with estimating size and distance so that you're ready when the director asks you how long the driveway is or how high the ceilings in the family room are. Use a tape measure or pace off the size of the empty lot. Pay attention to mile markers on rural roads. They will act as signposts along the way and provide a reference point for you. Use your trip odometer to log distances and drive time from the production office or between locations. This is where art and practicality collide. Location scouting requires a good eye to capture the visual and a good analytical approach to uncover all the elements that affect the logistics of shooting at that location.

Remember when I mentioned having pen and paper in your camera case? That is still necessary, as there is essential information you'll want to attach to every set of location pictures. Whether you are printing hard-copy photos and taping them up in file folders or creating panoramas in a computer folder, you will attach and store this information with your location photos. So you need to take notes. At every location, you want to record the day, date, time of day, weather condition, and the compass setting when facing the location. Day and date are obvious. Time of day will give some sense of the sun's position; coupled with the compass setting, you'll be able to establish how the sun will move throughout the day and how much daylight you will have at the location. The compass setting will show how the location might be affected by bright sunrise light if it's facing east or the quality of light all day depending on what direction the building faces. It's important to document the geography and physical position of the location in your notes.

So the Sun Still Sets in the West!

A commercial was shooting in an avocado grove tucked amongst the rolling hills of North County, in San Diego. The scene involved a grandfather and his grandson sitting on a tractor talking about saving money. As the day flew by, the time came to get the shot, but by now the sun was sinking low behind a hill in back of the camera, and they began to lose the light. There was no way to chase the sun and certainly no way to stop the sun. They lost their key light and hadn't planned for any big additional lighting to match the sun in this location, so there was nothing to do but shoot tighter and settle for a less-than-perfect shot. Everyone started pointing their fingers, looking for someone to blame, but the fact was that several key people needed to pay attention and notice the hill behind them to the west. Back at the production office, all the above-the-line professionals sat in amazement when they realized that their combined experience of over 100 years shooting couldn't guarantee that something wouldn't be overlooked. The movement of the sun cut their shoot day short when the sun faded behind a hill an hour before they had planned for sunset.

Geography is an important natural attribute of any location. Note true north on the compass and take notes on what direction the location faces and what direction the camera will be facing based on the scene. Weather

condition notes during your location scout will clarify any weirdness or unknowns seen in the photograph. A dark photo makes sense when it's noted that it was shot in the rain in the late afternoon. All these factors affect the location, and the conditions there throughout the day will be of great interest to your Director and Director of Photography.

DIGITAL CAMERAS

Choose your camera to fit your budget—your personal budget and the film's budget. I don't know anyone who doesn't already own a decent digital camera. And I know many people who own thousands of dollars of camera equipment for producing the best-quality digital photographs. If you are committing in the long term to a career as a location scout, invest in the best digital camera and accessories available. But if you are honing your scouting skills on your friend's short film, use whatever camera you have available to you now. Serious scouts are using the state-of-the-art SLR digital cameras that can cost in the thousands of dollars, but any good Nikon CoolPix is going to give you what you need for around $100. And in the blink of an eye, the market has ramped up to offer affordable full HD 1080 cameras that take you beyond the still camera into High Definition movies. Some filmmakers are actually shooting their movies on these HD digital still cameras. You can buy the Sony Bloggie 1080 HD at Target stores for $129.99 or shoot, edit, and share HD video on the 8 GB iPod Touch. Canon offers the top-of-the line PowerShot complete with HD video, LCD touch panel, and 14.1 megapixels (MP) for around $350. It's staggering to see where the art and science of capturing images has brought us. And almost frightening to think of where it's going and how fast it's going to change. Mark Urman, ThinkFilm's head of distribution, told the *Hollywood Reporter*, "It feels like the cycle of new technology used to come in 20-year intervals in our industry. Now, they seem to be coming in 20-month or 20-week intervals. It's accelerating so fast now that you need to be a science fiction writer to imagine what the experience of the movies will be like in a few years."[1]

There are only a few accessories that might enhance your digital photography when you are location scouting. Quality lenses, resolution, storage capacity, and pixels are still important features of the camera, so look for the best out there. A good lens like Zeiss, Nikon, or Leica guarantees an excellent starting point for your photos. Then you want to be able to take a large number of pictures at high resolution: that's the bottom line. Some scouts carry a wide-angle lens, but you'll shoot the majority of your pictures with a basic 50 mm lens, which is standard on most cameras. The 50 mm lens interprets images much the way the human eye sees, so there is no adjustment or jarring difference and the image is comfortable to

[1] Kirsner, S. *Future of Entertainment*. THR.com. Accessed 9.13.05.

the eye. Sometimes a wide-angle lens helps capture a very small compressed space like a bedroom, attic, or crawl space. But the disadvantage of the wide-angle lens is that it distorts the image and can make a room look larger than it really is. If you do use another lens, wide-angle or zoom, be sure to indicate it on the photos so there's no confusion.

All smaller point-and-shoot cameras have a built-in flash. Generally speaking, you won't need a flash when shooting location photos except when shooting a more close-up feature, like a doorknob or fireplace grate. Flash is sometimes used as "fill" light in a close-up in conditions with a lot of natural light to try and balance the light across the frame. But in reality, the average camera flash usually only throws a distance of 11 feet, so it's not going to make a difference when you're shooting an interior pan across a 50-ft. ballroom. If you do use a flash attachment, use it as a bounce flash pointing up or off a reflector and not a direct forward-facing flash. Bounce light is softer "indirect" lighting and does not create such hard shadows. The automatic focus feature can be a disadvantage on some cameras. It's often not sensitive enough and will cause a variation in exposure and sometimes even a variation in focus across a panorama. You may want to use the manual options and practice to see how you can guarantee the best, most consistent picture quality. A tripod is a good accessory that can be really helpful when shooting pans. You can get lightweight telescoping tripods that allow you to keep your camera mounted and transport the combined unit around easily from place to place, into and out of your car. No matter what your instrument, you should learn the basics of good photography. Don't neglect the creativity you can bring to a shot by controlling the light and shutter speed. There is a point where art and practicality can come together to create the best Kodak moments in your location photos. Your camera is your most important tool, so learn everything that your technology makes possible to make your photos look great.

DIGITAL DELIVERY METHODS

Quality, speed, and efficiency are real benefits the new technology brings to digital location photography. The current revolution is occurring in the range of new delivery methods—how you deliver and share those digital images. Some scouts send location pictures from their smartphone already and it works just fine. That's more of a scouting on the fly approach, but it does work in an emergency. Digital location photos are sent via email, which is one of the preferred delivery methods—especially in short-form projects. It gets slow and cumbersome if you have hundreds of pictures to share. And not everyone can accept large images or multiple photos in a single email. That means the producer is dealing with multiple emails, which takes time. But it means you can attach text and data so that the producer gets important information

that affects the location. But the convenience of shooting, downloading your pictures to your laptop, and then emailing some essential shots within moments of shooting the location is priceless. With your laptop, Wi-Fi, and a USB cord, you are in business just by hitting "send." Most location scouts working on long-form projects like episodic TV shows and movies post pictures to their individual websites or build a separate website for each job or client they are scouting for. These days it's the rare producer who carries manila file folders everywhere and whip them out to ponder a concept or scene as it plays out in a moment of inspiration. Anyone can open up a PC or a Mac laptop or an iPad and look at the images in much the same way, anywhere and any time. As long as there is a way to share the images or computer files, location photos will be easier to send in the future—if that's possible when it's almost instantaneous now! There are easy ways to set up a group for sharing files. Google Groups, OpenOffice, and box.net are only some of the current websites for shared documents that allow access for multiple users. As these shared file sites grow in size and popularity, it's amazing to see how they eliminate all limitations to shared use and can handle any size file.

Your challenge is how to keep the data and images organized and easily accessible. There are many ways to deal with storing data and images, so you need to find the system that works the best for you. Keep complete contact information with the images as well as the date and time the photos were taken and any notes you may have taken about the site. Ideally, you want to be able to keep the images with the text data. The technology is certain to keep advancing and changing the way location scouting works. But the key elements remain the same. Capture the visual representation of the location in the best most objective and detailed way you can. Make the image and data easily available and accessible to you and your production team. Digital images still need to be seen as printed pictures by some people. It's a more tangible, hands-on product, much the way some people want a paper script and don't like to read a hundred pages off a computer screen.

You can share your images easily through all kinds of different systems. If you can invest in learning the technology, you can be the hero. Most location scouts post their location photos on their own website and then send the producer and creative team a link to their website. Everyone can see what they've scouted or see images from another place or historical period that they are trying to match. Computer-based presentations are the new standard for location photos. And the Apple Mac OS X operating system is the standard in the industry and always has been. The new standard is paperless. Shoot your pictures, organize them in categories and files for the project, download and email to the team as a group. It's all about efficiency and speed without sacrificing any of the creativity. Learn about all the tools that are available to make your job

easier and more effective and try to keep up. And be prepared for how it will morph in the future. Most important for you as the location scout is the connection between your eye, your brain, and your creative spirit. The expanding software applications and speed of electronic communications are your tools for storing, managing, and manipulating the images and data. In your job, you explore the physical world around you to interpret and then locate the perfect looks for the script. What your brain and your heart glean from the story is transformed as you put your eye to the camera and make the everyday into something magical.

LOCATION PHOTO PRESENTATIONS

You've been scouting for a week. What happens next? Who sees your location photos? How do you present your location photos? Location selection involves the several department heads on your creative team who drive the creative vision of the film, the pervasive "look" of the show. As discussed in Chapter 4, the director, producer, production designer, and often director of photography will come together to look at your location photo presentation. As you show your photos, there will be much open, candid discussion and brainstorming, along with lots of questions. In addition to the conversation and brainstorming that takes place, there is a psychological factor to this meeting of the minds that is important for you to understand. Each person in the room or on the conference call brings their own importance and their own unique vision for the film. So each person is going to respond to your presentation in a different way and interact with you in their own unique way. There will be different personalities and temperaments at the table, so be prepared for a wide range of creative outbursts and communication styles. This is the politics of movie making: you need to be confident in your ability without trying to lead or influence any other decision maker during the process. Don't step on anybody's toes, figuratively speaking. Be honest and direct at all times. If you don't have the answer to a question, the best response is "I'm not sure; I'll get right back to you on that," after which you get the answer as quickly as you can. Know any concerns you might have about a particular location, but don't make it the focus of the meeting—better to go directly to your producer with any negatives you encounter. Make this a friendly exchange of information and move on to the next step—which will no doubt be more location scouting.

How you present your pictures may be completely up to you or you may have been given a step-by-step protocol by the producer. The creative team will be at the table. If you have taped up pictures in file folders, present the folders with your narration about the location and then pass the folders around the table. If you are all meeting via a conference call while you all scroll through the website photos in the

comfort of your individual offices, the process remains very much the same. You show the photos to everyone at the table or through the website and communicate as much clear detail as possible. Write down the questions you get so you can follow up; these question may include such questions as what the ceiling height of the living room is, how hot it gets during the day out in that part of the desert, whether there is an attic room, how long the driveway is, whether we can paint the kitchen, whether we need to put sconces on either side of the fireplace, and on and on. Many locations will fall along the wayside as rejects; a few will end up in the pile of possible locations. If there is some strong initial interest in some of the locations, you will probably be asked to set up another scout as soon as possible, perhaps bringing the production designer along. Do the next scout with the designer, get all the questions answered, shoot more photos based on what you learned at the first meeting, and get together with your producer and director. If they like what they see and hear from you and the designer, then chances are you will all be in the van the next day doing a first look at possible locations. This is the challenge and the beauty of the collaboration that goes on here. So much of production depends on the partnership of several people across many different departments. The goal is to work together to communicate, collaborate, and create something in a unique way that didn't quite exist before. You will keep scouting and presenting your photos until everyone is happy with the locations and you can move on to being the location manager.

ETHICS AND SAFETY IN THE WILD

One of the perks of location scouting is that you will find yourself in the most amazing places that the average person would never have access to see. People will welcome you into extraordinary venues and natural environments. You need to be sensitive to the broad range of locations you may scout, and you need to be smart and practical when you find yourself entering dangerous, remote, or potentially threatening locations.

Help! I've Fallen and I Can't Get Up!

A location scout was looking for remote single-lane mountain roads for the perfect spot. He kept driving higher and higher up the hill in what constituted "off-road" conditions. He drove as far as he could, got out of the car, and started hiking up the face of the hill. Nearing the top, he turned to take some pictures and got the first sense of how high and how far he had climbed. Anxiety set in and he turned away from the vista and started to go down the rock face. He immediately realized that going up is a lot easier than going down. He started to creep along on his belly until he reached a small clear patch where he could call down to the assistant at the car, who helped guide his blind steps down the mountain to the car. Physical environments can be seductive and misleading.

Always make sure that the production department or an assistant has a copy of your scouting itinerary. When scouting wilderness areas, always have a ranger escort you. Wild animals are going to be wild wherever you encounter them, so don't be naïve. Don't go into compromising environments alone. Insist on having an assistant with you. One other big temptation will be to venture into areas unknown (also known as trespassing). It's another one of the ethical decisions you will have to make over and over again. Do not do anything illegal, unethical, or dangerous to compromise your safety and your reputation. You are always representing your name, the project, and the industry at large. No one will benefit by seeing you on the news after an angry homeowner attacks you for illegal entry. Be safe; be professional.

LOCATION SCOUTING KIT

Although the elements in your camera case have changed quite a bit over the years, there's a survival mode that comes into play when you are doing extensive location scouting. And survival mode dictates you have some new material in your location scouting kit. We've already established the main components: camera, memory cards, chargers for all electronics, laptop/iPad, USB cord, GPS, maps, itinerary, cell phone, hat, cooler with water and snacks, and CDs. Even though we've gone full-tilt electronic, you still need paper and pen to make notes at each location. A small reporter-style spiral notebook or any small journal that can go from pocket to backpack or camera case easily is a good tool. I know scouts who carry industrial-size tape measures, surveyor's stakes with different colored flags to mark off areas, rulers to lay in frame to give a sense of size and proportion, and lots of water and packets of Emergen-C. They have built a mobile office in their cars with the trunk full of computer supplies like a printer and paper, foam core for quick signage, a change of clothes, hiking boots, rain gear, cones, caution tape, first aid kit, pepper spray, and a small toolbox. Include over-the-counter products like aspirin, ibuprofen, antacids, sunscreen, eyedrops, lip balm, wipes, hand sanitizer, bug spray, and more practical aids and tools. You'll add to your kit based on your firsthand experience as you scout. I've known location scouts who wore a pedometer to record the distances they would walk some days. You will be almost living in your car, so it becomes logical to have all the tools at hand to manage whatever might come up. Keep your car clean and clear of old water bottles, food wrappers, and trash. It can get to be a disaster fast and you don't want the wild animals or ants finding your banana peels and candy wrappers when you are out and about hiking up the mountain. And there may be days you'll be driving the production designer around to view locations with you and you'll need to be able to find the passenger seatbelt under the pile of stuff in your front seat. Have everything at hand that you

might need and you will travel many miles in some simple comfort. Location scouting is an invigorating job. I never felt better than leaving the house early with a cooler, photo supplies, and an itinerary that would lead me to places unknown. It's the job of the travel photographer who gets paid to explore exotic unknown locales, take pictures, and share the adventure: hard work with a great payoff!

When Taking Location Photos, Remember:

1. Respect how far the technology has come.
2. Shoot standalone single pictures with the reverse angle or panoramas if needed.
3. Note the day, date, time, weather, and compass setting at each location.
4. Master your camera, use a tripod, and shoot efficiently.
5. Manage and organize your photos and data in shared files or on a website.
6. Be knowledgeable and organized when presenting your photos to production.
7. Be safe and aware of your surroundings when scouting by yourself.
8. Stock your location scouting kit to support you in the wild.
9. Clean your car regularly.
10. Enjoy the adventure!

Chapter | six

I'm Not Lost: I'm Location Scouting

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Wherever you go, there you are.

Confucius

As a location scout and location manager, I felt I was always driving erratically, half on the road, half off the road, zigzagging onto the shoulder with irritated drivers honking at me or gesturing rudely. I'd be driving way too slow, looking out the window and muttering out loud to myself, wondering how I could get over there, pointing at some distant structure. This is often how location scouts drive, because we're always looking for the next best location: the one that is *it*!

Shoot on Location.

The first movie I worked on as a location manager was a TV movie for USA Cable Network titled *Tainted Blood*. In the story, an investigative reporter begins to look into the causes behind a bizarre murder/suicide. Along the way, she discovers that the murderer had a twin sister who was adopted as an infant. Worried that the adopted child has also grown into a killer, the reporter has to choose between the daughters of two neighboring families, trying to determine who the troubled sibling really is before it's too late. The two girls live in an idyllic neighborhood where terrible things begin to happen. Almost the entire story took place in the neighborhood where the two teenage girls lived across the street from each other. The two houses where the girls lived were critical in the story. That meant we were going to be shooting much of our 18-day schedule on one street in and around those two houses. That was a challenge: not only to find the right look but also how to deal with the neighborhood in the long term.

Are You Lost?

At my first meeting with the family of the soon-to-be-chosen house, I joked with them that I was going to have a bumper sticker made that proclaimed "I'M NOT LOST—I'M LOCATION SCOUTING" to let people know that my driving was an occupational hazard and not disrespect or poor driving skills on my part. The family and I became great friends over the next few weeks as I moved them out of their home and into nearby corporate housing. They tolerated it well when the Mayflower moving van pulled up and we moved almost every piece of furniture out of their house and into storage. I remember the quizzical look on the homeowner's face when she asked, "But I thought you said we had the perfect house?" I appreciated their good nature when I had to completely resod the side yard after major winter storms brought torrential rains and constant crew traffic turned the yard into muck. They appreciated it when I steam-cleaned their garage floor after housing crafts service in the garage for much of the two weeks of shooting. They were forgiving when all the Girl Scout cookies disappeared from the freezer in the garage. It was an amazing baptism of fire for me as a first-time location manager. But I must have done a good job, because at the wrap party, as I gave the family a gift basket of wine, crackers, and cheese, they presented me with the perfect brass license plate holder that said, "I'M NOT LOST—I'M LOCATION SCOUTING." I've treasured that gift and my Toyota wore it well until 1994 when I retired it to my office wall at the San Diego Film Commission.

Tainted Blood taught me so much about what it really means to scout and manage and how important and significant the differences are. It brought so many logistical and technical challenges for locations that I still talk about it today—it is a timeless example. Almost everything facing a location scout or location manager was actually experienced in this one case study. We spent 12 shooting days in a neighborhood—almost a month with the prep and the strike days. I had to move the homeowners out, house them, and store their furniture. The master bedroom became the psychotic teenager's room and a guest room became the baby's nursery. We opened the movie with an Iowa farm location (in San Diego

County!) requiring well-behaved cattle out in the field—cattle that could tolerate a disturbed teenager walking out amongst them and shooting himself in the head. We did a second-story house fire on stage in a warehouse and recreated the aftermath of the house fire at the real house location. That one night the street was engulfed with emergency response vehicles, including fire engines with hoses drawn, ambulance and paramedics, lots of smoke effect, a burned-out car in the garage, and torched front yard landscaping while 300 neighborhood folks watched with excitement from a viewing area. We had an electrocution in a hot tub, babies on the set, hatchets chopping through kitchen doors, and a psych ward scene and hospital room scene. All this was done with three or four weeks of prep, 18 shooting days, and a week to wrap. What an intensive immersion course for any location manager! But every job is like that, and you never stop learning how to do it better, faster, cheaper, and easier. So how do you get out there and start scouting?

COLD SCOUTING

What is the most bizarre location you have ever seen in a movie? It could be a nuclear power plant, underwater cloning labs, a flimsy footbridge across a gaping canyon, mountaintop retreats, or a rat-infested prison. These extremes certainly grab one's attention. But even the average, everyday location can be as challenging. After doing your research, coming up with a plan, and arming yourself with camera, memory cards, maps, GPS, and lists, you will still have to go out scouting—cold scouting. Cold scouting means you drive around, find some interesting places, and then begin knocking on doors and talking to people with no previous introductions. You talk to strangers about doing extraordinary things in their home or business. This is where you become a door-to-door salesman. You have to make a good first impression to begin developing the trust and respect you need to get to the next step. The next step would ideally be allowing you to come inside right there and then to take location pictures. If that doesn't happen, the next best step in the deal is making an appointment to come back and meet with whomever has the authority to let you on site to photograph it. If that doesn't happen, at least get the name and number of the person you need to talk to next. That could be the owner or perhaps someone up the corporate ladder if you're approaching a business or office setting. If you can get a phone number on that first door knock, call right there at that moment just in case you can make the next move and photograph the location. Act immediately on any new information or the opportunity to contact someone who will give you the OK. As a salesman, you are selling yourself, the project, and the industry. The majority of your scouting will be cold scouting on some level, and how you approach it is going to affect

the results. See it as an adventure. Welcome that opportunity and wear some good shoes for the journey. You'll be doing a lot of walking.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

When you're knocking on doors and meeting people for the first time, you want to be professional and confident. As a student filmmaker, as a startup company making your first short, or as a seasoned location person, the same people skills are critical to your results. If you are going to get people to respond to you and call you back, you need some strong people skills. Communicate confidence. Know your stuff. Have your facts at your fingertips, whether it's the script synopsis, the production company's track record, or the shoot dates at that location. Property owners will have a ton of questions from the very beginning, so prepare a strong introduction. Communicate professionalism. Be courteous, polite and patient. As a production person, you know something about how the process works. You know the language and subtleties of production. The average person won't know these things. No matter how much behind-the-scenes Hollywood and the making-of TV shows they watch, they won't be prepared for what you are about to ask. This will most likely be a new situation to them and often a scary experience. Explain your terms in everyday language so that you don't lose them in the business jargon of production terms. We take for granted that this industry has its own language, but people don't really know what a wrap day is or what a tech scout is or what a base camp is. They won't understand what you mean when you casually reference pre-rig day, condor, or Musco. If your owner doesn't work in the world of production, he or she needs to be educated, and you need to introduce these foreign elements and terms slowly and gently. Explain everything along the way, but don't overwhelm them. Be friendly and professional and bring your honesty and integrity to every conversation. Take your time to present the overview in a slow but deliberate conversational manner.

At the same time, share your passion and excitement about making this movie. Excitement is contagious. If you love what you're doing, other people will notice. The first serious conversation should include the basics—the idea of multiple days of filming with gunfire, if that is the case. But you can present it in a relaxed way as if it happens every day in your world, because it does. And be excited about it. This job seems to require almost contradictory skills—patience and persistence. Confidence, yes, but you still need to be approachable and personable. Be passionate but business-like, and not cocky. Balancing all these attributes can be a test. Location scouting relies on good old fashioned common sense, a friendly attitude, and communication skills. Your attitude communicates your interest in this other person and their property as a potential business partner. In doing business with them, you bring your

knowledge, experience, professionalism, and business ethic to every conversation. You are articulate and detailed when sharing information. You are calm, even-tempered, and personable. Let them get to know who you really are. These are all important people skills in any business arena, but they are especially important when you are asking strangers to let you into their home or business to do perhaps unimaginable things. Your friendly conversation will hopefully lead to the next call and the next conversation. And in future meetings, you will lock down one more important location on your breakdown list.

MAKE CONTACT, STAY CURRENT, AND DON'T ASSUME

I sat with a producer going over his script for the first time, listening to the prep he had done. He was excited that because he was native to the area, he knew San Diego well. He had scouted, meaning that he drove around town about six months earlier and found most of his locations. But when I asked him if he'd had conversations with the owners or begun preliminary agreements with them, he hadn't. I call this "drive-by scouting." It happens all the time when a producer or filmmaker brings a casual approach to location scouting. There is an inherent risk in this type of approach when you see a sidewalk, a building, a deli, or an area of a park that you like. If you haven't made contact with anyone and haven't physically seen that location recently, you have no idea if you are going to end up shooting there. Remember the Bubble effect: you don't make your movie in a bubble and your intended location is not protected by an invisible force field. Scouting is a job that hinges on communication and coordination. A casual look at an area of town that doesn't involve contacting owners is usually pretty fruitless. If you are actively scouting, you should be closer to a shooting schedule now and thus able to target more specific dates when talking to each property owner. That begins the coordination process of finding out if the dates you want to be there are even doable. There may be conflicts with other events going on at that location. And there may have been physical changes to that location. The building exterior you liked could have been hit by a wrecking ball and the storefront deli could have become a neighborhood police substation. Never count on locations remaining the same over time, even short periods of time. As a location scout, I had beautiful pictures of a horse ranch and stables that I mailed off to a client. The client loved the pictures, so I went to scout in more detail, and of course the stables were gone. A new condo complex was rising up out of the ground. Always put your eyes on a location in the present time and never assume that it's maintained with the same look, coat of paint, owner, or configuration. Keep current with your locations. And

even then, understand that locations can be affected by last-minute changes that are out of your control.

Poof

A Chicago producer decided on the perfect location for a hair spray commercial. It was a classic country estate house in upstate New York, spread across sprawling acreage alive in white, fluffy dandelion blooms. She and all the advertising agency folks traveled for the shoot day, scouted the location, met with the homeowners, and went back to the hotel. They all arrived at the location early next morning only to be shocked to see the yard empty of dandelions. The home owners had mowed down the dandelions and groomed the yard entirely so it would look its best in the commercial! Lesson learned: locations can change overnight. Even a hard rain or wind storm could have wiped out the acres of dandelion fluff. The entire crew went door to door, canvassing the neighborhood, looking for dandelions. They picked dandelions that were then carefully glued into little boxes and then buried in the ground so the actress could pick a dandelion and poof, the dandelion floats away on a breath. And the commercial was shot with no one knowing what went on behind the scenes.

Communication is what this business is all about. It's the first and foremost function of this business, as in storytelling. Scouting starts with you telling your story many times and introducing the project and those particular scenes to hundreds of people over and over again. Seeing a location you like from the driver's seat or knowing what area of town would look good in a shot is a good start. But until you see it as it is now, talk to all the people and permitting agencies, and start to coordinate the details, it's no better than showing your director a picture in a book. Advance scouting starting with research on the Internet, and even drive-by scouting can start the creative juices flowing. But as you get farther along in your preproduction, other factors begin to affect your locations; you need to be talking directly with the owner and everyone else involved. Realistic coordination depends on talking to the owners, presenting specific details, getting feedback, addressing concerns, and getting a location agreement signed. Nothing is for real until the deal is signed. Don't assume anything. Just because you saw a building that looks like it would work for you does not guarantee that all the obstacles will be overcome to get it in writing. Until you go through all the steps of inquiry—contact, keeping in touch with the owner, and signing the contract—don't assume you have that location. Contact multiple property owners to start building resources in case you have to go to Plan B (more about that later in this chapter). Remember: patience and persistence.

THE PITCH

Selling door to door can be a tiresome, frustrating job. First impressions can make or break the deal. You are always selling yourself first, as this is an industry that turns on the ultimate power of the pitch. But what is

the pitch? The dictionary definition is spot on—to set up, to cast, to plunge headlong. But Merriam-Webster probably didn't know that in the movie business, it can be the make-it-or-break-it part of the setup. The pitch requires skill and enthusiasm to sell your idea in the shortest time available to the most important person who will listen. In location scouting, you need to convince a perfect stranger to trust you enough and believe what you say to do business with you. So many people say that they can't do that kind of selling. Sure, some of us find it more natural to walk into a crowded room of strangers and feel right at home and strike up a conversation. Regardless of whether you are comfortable in pitching, it's a skill you need to cultivate. Location scouting is all about how you handle a conversation to make any stranger feel at ease with you and your request. Most importantly you want people to "buy in" on an emotional level—you want them to want to say "yes." Get comfortable with it and practice. Strike up a conversation in the coffee shop or in line at the post office. Get familiar with the feeling of initiating conversations and talking about your work. You must be comfortable and skillful in selling your project and your abilities. When heading out to scout, always have your carefully written letter of introduction to use as a calling card. (See Chapter 4.) Your intro letter is an important setup for your pitch. It can take many phone calls or multiple days before you actually talk to the owner. Your letter of introduction may get passed around up through management, or passed down to the caretaker before the phone call or the decision is made.

When location scouting, much of your time is spent meeting new people for the first time. You'll soon see that the mystique of Hollywood and the movies carries weight and influence. We are a culture that thrives on the cult of personality. Celebrity always gets a double-take response. The average person will have their interest piqued and will react to the intriguing idea of having a movie shot in their home or business. The chance to meet the stars and get a firsthand experience behind the scenes and behind the camera will be exciting to many of the people you approach. Some others may immediately say "no," go off on a rant and slam the door in your face. You will hear any number of arguments attacking the industry, its practices, and the deep pockets that allow you to exploit the public and take advantage of people. But generally speaking, people will be curious, interested, and most often excited about being asked to use their place as a movie location. It's your job to keep that excitement alive.

WHO'S THE OWNER?

That first knock on the door can introduce you to any number of people: the cleaning lady, the distracted teenager, or the gardener. A custodian, property manager, or building owner might be on site at an office

complex. Regardless of whomever you talk to first, make sure that you eventually work your way up to dealing with the owner directly. The guy renting the house does not have the authority to say yes to filming on the property. The property management company of a building often has the power to contract with you on behalf of the owner, but they still have to go through levels of corporate approval. There will sometimes be many overlapping levels of control and ownership, so be prepared to filter through all of them. For instance, your homeowner is ecstatic about filming at her house but the local HOA (Home Owners Association) has rules prohibiting anyone from parking their cars in the driveway or leaving their garage doors open during the day. They also might have a clause prohibiting anyone from doing business out of their home. That can cause you and the homeowner some grief. Be certain that the Art Department will want to park in the driveway and keep the garage door open as they haul furniture out of the house and load in new items for set dressing. How are you going to rectify that with the HOA? Most HOAs have a serious amount of control over determining what you can and can't do in that neighborhood. You'll be negotiating with the HOA, the neighbors, and the homeowner on this location. They all participate in the decision making. In commercial or retail areas, you could be affected by a merchant's association or BID (Business Improvement District) that includes all of the area businesses in that association. Often a BID has rules and regulations for their members and a board of directors that might insert themselves into your negotiations. Begin your conversation with the first person you encounter at a property and cultivate the interest and excitement to get you to the owner and all parties involved in giving you permission to film there.

Who has the final authority to give you permission to film on private property? Ultimately, the owner is the final and legal authority and not the renter or the lessee alone. You must get permission in writing from the owner and then sometimes get the OK from the others by committee. So if the manager of the Hallmark Store says you can film there, you still need to get the approval from the owner of the strip mall. Your key grip says that you can shoot in his apartment, but you still need to get approval from the building owner and property manager. Your lawyer says that you can film in his office on the 25th floor of a grand high-rise tower, but you still must have permission from the owner of the building. It is always one of the first questions you must ask: are you the owner?

But I Thought I Was Dealing with the Owner!

A short film was scheduled to shoot in a modest home near the beach. As required in the permit, the producer distributed a neighborhood notification letter giving the neighbors all the information they needed about the upcoming filming in the house. I got a call at the Film Commission from an irate homeowner threatening all kinds of legal action if the movie shot at

that house. He was the owner, but he didn't live there. The house was a rental and the owner just happened to live on the same street. When he received the notification letter, he was blindsided, didn't know about any filming, didn't want any filming, and was going to shut it down—whatever it took. The words "trespassing" and "lawsuit" came up often in the loud conversation. I explained that the situation was an innocent misunderstanding and miscommunication; that the producer was legitimate, thought he was dealing with the owners, and acted in good faith. The producer went right to the owner to work his magic and get the situation under control. It worked out and they shot at the house. The crew was actually on their way to that location, as it happened, so it was really going to be major trouble if the location fell through. And I'm certain the location ended up costing more because the renters and owner wanted some compensation.

The genuine desire to make things right will most often solve the dilemma, and people will usually instinctively see the truth and calm down. But give them time to do that and go through the stages. Listen. While the clock is ticking and you're checking your watch, be patient to help the upset person work through it. Get everyone to sign off just to be safe. I've seen experienced location managers deal with damage control when an owner showed up while filming, only to find out that the renter had lied to him, claiming to be the owner. Don't take any chances and be certain you are talking to the owner.

I CAN'T FIND THE OWNER!

Another situation often comes up when dealing with a property. What do you do if you can't find the owner? Every thing, every structure, every inch of land is owned by someone. I've learned through years of scouting that much of the desolate desert scrub in south San Diego running along the Mexico–United States border is held in trusts by estate executors with addresses on the Avenue of the Stars in Hollywood! Get closer to the actual border and the land belongs to the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego, and the U.S. federal government—all overlapping and bumping into each other. So when a producer came to permit his show and wanted to include a day of shooting at an abandoned, falling-down shanty in the middle of desolate Otay Mesa, I had to ask him who was the owner. His answer was, "It's abandoned, it's in the middle of nowhere!" I had to point out that someone owns the land it's on, which means someone owns that falling-down shack, too. And it means that someone owns the land he trespassed on to walk from the dead-end city street to get to the shack in the middle of nowhere to take pictures of it. So how should we find the owner? If this happens, the first thing to do is talk to the neighbors. Inquire in the immediate area if anyone knows who the owner is or whether they have any information that will help. Sometimes local realtors know who owns all the land in a certain area, or local developers might know the owners. If the land or property really is in the middle of nowhere, you need to get your bearings.

Draw a simple map with street names, landmarks, and mile markers. Take pictures to show these same elements near the location. Use the Thomas Guide map or any good detailed map or GPS as a reference. Locate the spot on Google Earth. Know how to get back to the location and know how to direct someone else there if you need to. Learning how to interpret and give good directions is a critical skill for anyone in the locations department. You might get information if you track down service providers, like cable, phone, or other utilities in the area. If you don't have an exact house number or street address, you will eventually be dealing with a parcel number and county tax records. The tax records are public records, so you can go into the office or search online in most areas, as long as you can identify the location. This is why an "X" on a map needs real reference points, or you will be off target. Most tax records list a name and address but not always a phone number. So your work continues. Search the phone directories for a phone number or, if you have to, mail a letter of inquiry with the filming request to the address on the tax records. Ideally, you'll be talking to a real human being sometime soon. Searching for and getting a response from an owner can take a long time. Plan ahead—this is another good reason not to leave your scouting and location contracts to the last minute. The temptation to just steal the shot can be really strong, especially if it is a distant remote wilderness location. Don't do it; the risk is too great. If the owner shows up that day in his limo doing a quarterly check-in with his accountant, it can get nasty. Or the sheriff, Bureau of Land Management agent, or a ranger might just happen to be in the area, and if you are there with no permit, you will have to go. Deal directly with the property owner at all times and be confident that if you've identified and obtained permission from the owner, the location is yours to use. Honesty, integrity, and professionalism should guide all your location decisions.

KNOW YOUR LOCATION ENVIRONMENT

You are the expert when it comes to knowing everything about every location once it gets locked down in your schedule. Before you select or contract a location, you will have scouted it many times, meeting with the owner and walking through the details of the scene. Most of the first impressions will be visual: the physical location, style, architecture, colors, and aesthetics of the location. But at the same time, you need to bring the mental checklist of a good location scout to your observation method. Stand and turn slowly in a full circle, looking and listening to everything in the area. Look high and low. Look and listen for at least 10 minutes. Look, listen, and evaluate everything around that location and take copious notes. Is there airplane noise, and if so, how often? Are there barking dogs? The house next door runs a preschool day-care

LOCATION SCOUT CHECKLIST

PRODUCTION NAME:

LOCATION SET NAME:

LOCATION NAME AND ADDRESS:

OWNER'S NAME & ADDRESS:

OWNER'S PHONE HOME & WORK/CELL/EMAIL:

Renters/Lessees	Light	Night work
Property Management	Water	Police
HOA	Stairs/elevator	Fire
Permit	Access	Security
Power	Sound	Safety
Parking cast & crew	Traffic	Cell signal
Parking trucks	Mowing/sprinklers	Special?
Parking permits	Construction	Restrictions
Meals	Air traffic	Neighbors
Tents/toilets/trash	Bus route	Fees
Holding/staging	Street sweeping	Animals
Wardrobe area	Garbage pick-up	Misc.

NOTES: DIRECTIONS/DIAGRAM ON BACK

DAY DATE TIME WEATHER COMPASS DUE NORTH MAP PAGE

FIGURE 6.1 The Location Scout Checklist.

facility, so you hear active noisy children throughout the day when they are outdoors. Is there construction, heavy traffic, or noisy businesses in the area? All these things can adversely affect your plan to film in that location. Focus your attention on all the elements native to the location and watch for foreign aspects that come and go. Use the Location Scout Checklist (Figure 6.1) to ensure that you consider everything most commonly found on location or affecting a location from the outside.

THE LOCATION SCOUT CHECKLIST

The Location Scout Checklist should provide you with the basic overview of what does and does not exist at each location. A short note or question after each of the 36 points will give you a solid foundation for each location. For instance, after the item "Animals," you would note that there are "3 German Shepherds next door," and at "Parking Trucks," you would write "lots of street parking." Almost every element on this checklist is discussed somewhere throughout the book; this is a summary of what any good scouting checklist should cover.

Scouting Checklist Elements Defined

- Location set name: The location as written in the script, i.e., Pacific Beach Bar.
- Location name and address: The actual place where you are taking photos, such as CJ's Beach Break, 1234 S. Mission Blvd., San Diego, California, 92108, 619-555-5555.
- Owner's name and address: Gives you necessary contact information, especially about a business or high rise building
- Owner's phone/home/work/cell/email: Gives you every means of contact; if he or she has a vacation home or downtown loft, get every phone number possible.
- Renters/lessees: Tells you if someone else is living there as a renter or leased user other than the owner.
- Property management: Whether there is an outside management company for an office building or apartment—on site or off site.
- HOA: Is there a Home Owners Association in charge of the site? HOAs can dramatically affect what you do in a residential neighborhood, condo complex, co-op, or apartment building.
- Permit: Identify the jurisdiction or government responsible for the required permit in that area.
- Power: Do you have access to power on site or do you need to bring in a generator?
- Parking cast and crew: What parking is available at the location, or is it necessary to locate a close-by parking lot?
- Parking trucks: Is there parking close to location for essential working trucks?
- Parking permits: Are any special permits required, such as for long-term parking, bagging meters, oversized vehicles, and so on?
- Meals: Is there room for catering with tables and chairs? Are there restaurants nearby where you can buy "second meal" (by law a production company must provide a crew meal every six hours, usually brought in from a near-by restaurant)?
- Tents/toilets/trash: Is there room for these creature comforts at the location? Can you rent a dumpster? Do you need a permit for that? Do you need a permit for the tents? Where can the port-a-potties go to be out of the way and out of the public view?

- Holding/staging: Are there rooms to use as changing rooms, equipment storage, and extras holding?
- Wardrobe area: Is there an area or room for wardrobe racks, steamer, and irons?
- Light: What type of lighting is in the area, both interior and exterior—i.e., fluorescent tubes indoors and sodium vapor street lights? Are there lots of windows and much natural light flooding in? Where is the sun and how does it move through the course of the day?
- Water: Is there access to water for catering steam tables, Art Department cleanup, wet down, or other practical needs?
- Stairs/elevator: What is the access to other floors, rooftop, and basement? Is there a freight elevator or loading dock for loading equipment?
- Access: This could be any number of things, such as, steep driveway, difficult stairs, long private road, and overgrown trees and shrubs blocking an entrance.
- Sound: What kind of sound is interior the location: hollow with lots of echo or muted? What does the neighborhood in general sound like?
- Traffic: Is there heavy street traffic noise? Are you near a freeway? Is the street noisy with commercial truck traffic?
- Mowing/sprinklers: Is this the kind of neighborhood that will have a lot of gardeners and landscapers coming in on different days to cut grass and clean yards? What kind of sprinkler/watering system does the location have and how is it controlled?
- Construction: Listen for construction noise that you might hear without ever seeing the construction site—nail guns, jackhammers, heavy equipment trucks beeping as they back up, and so on. Any road work in the area?
- Air traffic: Listen for planes and helicopters, commercial and private as well as military.
- Bus route: Is the location on a bus route? Will you be able to reroute the buses or hold them for ITC (intermittent traffic control)?
- Street sweeping: Check the street signs for notice of weekly street sweeping. Can you cancel and reschedule if it's a sound problem that day?
- Garbage pickup: Ask the owner when garbage trucks come through the neighborhood. How will you deal with that noise and disruption and still guarantee pickup?
- Night work: Do you need to shoot after 10:00 p.m.? Is there an exemption from the normal noise abatement ordinance prohibiting excessive noise after that time? How much will you disrupt the neighbors?
- Police: Are police officers required onsite as part of the permit? Do you need officers to hold traffic for sound or to assist getting the big trucks in position? Are officers needed to manage traffic and crowds during stunts?
- Fire: Do you need the fire marshall to be on set for squib hits (explosive devices simulating bullet hits), pyrotechnics, or open flame on the set? Does your permit require an FSO (Fire Safety Officer) to be on the set at all times?
- Security: Do you need to hire security to stay with the trucks at base camp or with crew cars? Do you need security at the location when you are away from the set or overnight?
- Safety: This is the first and foremost concern each and every shoot day. Is your location environment safe? Is the neighborhood violent or volatile?
- Cell signal: Is there a strong signal or are you dropping calls? Do you need to arrange for a land line at the location? Are there pay phones nearby? If so, you'll need coins or credit cards.
- Special questions: Are there special requirements at the location, such a ramp for one of the disabled residents that can't be blocked, or do the owners have valuable antiques they want moved offsite?
- Restrictions: Are there areas of the location that must be maintained as *off limits* to the crew? Are you restricted in the neighborhood to finish by 10:00 p.m.? Can you start before 7:00 a.m.?

(*Continued*)

Scouting Checklist Elements Defined (Continued)

- Neighbors: Are the neighbors on good terms with each other? Is there a troublemaker on the street who will cause problems?
- Fees: Get a basic idea of what the property owner expects to be paid and any other hidden costs. Are there additional fees paid to the HOA, the property management company, custodian, or other party?
- Animals: Yours and theirs; in other words, do you need animals at this location for the scene or do the owners or neighbors have animals that need to be boarded or taken to the groomer the day you shoot?
- Miscellaneous: Any number of things that the location will force you to deal with in prep and shooting, such as nasty neighbors, tree trimming, school buses, and so on.
- NOTES: Everything and anything you need to ask, research, follow up on, contract for, remove, bring in, and so on.
- DIRECTIONS/DIAGRAM ON BACK: Jot down the basic directions and sketch the general lay of the land at the location. A simple hand-drawn outline will help you later when you lay out your photographs and identify areas and structures.
- DAY/DATE/TIME/WEATHER/COMPASS DUE NORTH/MAP PAGE: Make notes to give yourself a reference for the day you took the location photos. Is the weather clear or cloudy? Show true north on your diagram and place the location on a Google Earth map site or record the Thomas Guide map page reference.

Become the eyes and ears of your director, DP, and sound mixer. Absorb every detail of the total environment so that there are no surprises. Hopefully, there won't be any when you come back for the tech scout or when you are filming there. But be prepared to shift or change locations if you have to. Flexibility is an all-important survival skill for a locations person.

PLAN B OR PLAN C OR PLAN D . . .

The house is perfect. The very first house you scouted is exactly as written in the script. The owner is charming and welcoming; she's excited about filming at her house and happy with the money you offered. Done deal, right? Or does it sound too good to be true? Perhaps. Remember, location selection is not in your hands alone: it is collaboration with your design team. You always need to present multiple possibilities for every location. The best plan is to keep scouting and looking for other possible houses that bring a different combination of things to the table. So feel good that you have what you consider to be the perfect location but continue to scout. I remember how on one of my jobs as a location manager, the estate home we needed was critical in the love triangle part of the story. I showed five then another five and then another five different mansions in Rancho Santa Fe, an affluent area of San Diego, much like Beverly Hills. Mansions are never easy locations to scout or lock down. None of the fifteen estate homes worked for everyone. I must have scouted another ten mansions, wondering all the time how many more times could I sit in my car at the end of a long gated

entrance, talking to a disembodied voice coming out of a little black box while I tried to convince them to trust me and open the gate to let me come in. We finally decided on a house seen early in my scouting, mainly because it was in the Southern Colonial style. That made it distinctive; it stood out from so many other red tiled roofs and southern California haciendas. That particular perspective was not discussed early in the scouting. It evolved over time as we looked at over 15 estate locations; in the end, the whole creative team agreed that the style added new value to the character's personality. The vision for your locations will change and shift and self-correct in many different ways throughout the scouting period. You need to be prepared to show many different properties for each location at every step along the way.

You need many options for artistic reasons and for practical reasons. You always need to have a backup plan—a plan B. Any number of circumstances or situations can affect a location's availability at any point in the preproduction process. Or it can happen at the very last minute. It could be illness, a plumbing problem, or worse yet, a Southern California wildfire. In October 2007, San Diego County experienced the worst firestorm event in the history of the region. Although human lives and property were always the top priority, the devastation and aftermath affected many, many businesses. San Diego lost some film work when estate homes already locked down and contracted to shoot were lost to that fire. Production did not have the ability to lose a week of preproduction due to the fires. They felt that the right thing to do was take the show back to LA. An extreme example, it's true, but important in the context of "anything can happen." It's a reality that circumstances can arise totally out of your control, so it is important to be able to guarantee that you have a second (or even third) choice location standing by.

Location Manager versus Mother Nature

I was prepping a movie in Salt Lake City and had been scouting for a month. I was scouting streets for driving shots that would marry with the days at our primary locations when thunderheads appeared that led to fierce wind, rain, and lightening. I turned on the car radio only to hear that a tornado had leapfrogged across the city. The twister had jumped through the area west of downtown, destroying four buildings in four different locations. When I arrived, I couldn't believe my eyes. Two of our primary locations had been obliterated. One was a two-story early 1900s building that we had dressed as a police station, and the other was a nightclub next door. The radio news sent me to check on the addresses of two other nightclubs destroyed and yes, one of them was another of our main locations. In a matter of minutes, we had lost three of our primary locations—with a tech scout planned for the next day. We weren't able to push the start date due to actor availability, so I had four days to replace the lost locations. I put on a couple additional scouts and, with my prior knowledge of the city, was able to replace the lost sets—and we started filming on schedule.

Location manager Dennis Williams

Obviously, Dennis put his earlier scouting expertise to work for him. His knowledge of the city and earlier location scouting contacts came through for him in the midst of a major disaster. I often say that there are 26 letters in the alphabet in case you have to go from Plan A to Plan Z!

In addition to knowing that you have backups for every location, there is another practical reason to keep in touch with all the locations you scouted. An important benefit of the scouting process is expanding your network and creating new relationships that you can return to in the future on other projects. Keep cultivating more locations to grow your own location library so that you always have some ready-to-go location at your fingertips. And if you become a return customer and are welcomed back at a home or a business, you can be proud of the work you've done to bond with that owner. The decisions are made; your locations are locked down. Even though you will be extremely busy finalizing and prepping the actual locations to shoot, try to find the time to contact each of the other sites you scouted. A quick phone call, email, or hand-written note is an important step. Those people deserve the courtesy of a thank-you. It takes a special person to say "yes" to filming. Let them know that. And you don't want to leave them hanging, wondering whether you plan to shoot there. This is another important step in the public relations side of your job. Let them know you appreciate their interest and enthusiasm for filming. Ask if you can please keep them in your database/files for future filming possibilities. A sincere thank-you with an offer to stay in touch is the best way to follow through and finish up. This kind of courtesy is worth the time and effort and helps maintain relationships and build your library.

Another type of backup plan is to always have a "cover set" in case a scheduled location falls through or an exterior set becomes unusable because of weather. The day you plan to shoot on the Big Dipper Roller Coaster at Belmont Park starts out with the worst winter rain storm that San Diego has experienced in decades. What do you do? You have to shoot. You never just take the day off when it rains; you still have to pay actors and crew people, so they are on the clock. If the weather causes a change in your schedule, you must have a "go-to" location that would be available at the last minute with very little notice and hopefully no prep. Stage days are perfect cover sets, which is why stage days are often at the end of the shooting schedule—so that you always have a place to shoot if something goes wrong earlier in the schedule. Cover sets can be tricky because of actor availability. The location you want to switch to last minute might not work if you don't have the actors you need on hold. So it can be a tricky coordination challenge to find the cover set that works for the talent you have available and a cover set where the owner is flexible enough to say yes to you when you call him at 6:00 p.m. the night before. Selling a last-minute scheduling change to a property

owner is in your future. And a last-minute change to the schedule is a condition you should be discussing with your location owners all the way along in the negotiations. Nothing is written in cement in this business. It's important to be able to go with the ebb and flow of many variables, hoping they come together on a day-by-day basis. Flexibility is the key.

HOW TO MARRY YOUR LOCATIONS

When you keep your locations as close together as possible within a single day, you are "marrying" your locations. You always want your locations close together to prevent a company move whenever possible. A *company move* means everything that came out of the trucks in the morning needs to be wrapped, stacked, and loaded back on the trucks so that you can drive to the next location. When you can marry your locations, ideally the trucks, trailers, and parking all stay in one place for the day. It's often said that the best location is one where you can simply turn the camera and you have another look—another totally different location that works within the schedule for that day. If you are shooting an office building interior, parking garage, and convenience store all in the same day, you want those locations to "marry" by existing within a few yards or a few blocks of each other. How you marry your locations will depend primarily on the shooting schedule—what you have to shoot that day. The page count for a scene can influence how you marry locations, too. If the convenience store scene is only $\frac{2}{8}$ of a page, you certainly don't want to have a company move taking hours out of the day. So you would scout all around your primary location on that day to find something close that would work or "cheat" as a convenience store. Locations can marry with a "mini-move" or "splinter unit" going off from the main shoot to "pick up" some shots. That means essential gear (camera, sound, and shiny boards) gets loaded into an open stake-bed truck or van and driven the few blocks to the next location. A company move on a big show can take two or three hours or more just to load the trucks, move them, and get them parked at the new location. You don't want to lose that much shooting time unless you absolutely have to in order to get the location. Keep it nearby and practical whenever you can. I'll borrow from Dennis William's earlier story when prepping in Salt Lake City, when he said, "I was scouting streets for driving shots that would marry with the days at our primary locations." If you are doing driving shots, you don't want to drive miles across town. You want to keep those street locations close to the primary location and base camp where you are settled in for the day. Marry your locations within a short distance for efficiency, convenience, and ease. You'll have more hours in the day for production when you keep locations close and reduce company moves.

CREATE YOUR ZONE

You begin scouting by looking at what you know—by keeping it close to home. But early on, you can tell that your scouting is getting fragmented and the locations you've been looking at are spread out all over the place. When there is too much driving time between locations, you'll lose precious production time every day. Long distances between locations and too many "company moves" through the day mean that you won't make your day and won't get your coverage. That is a disaster of cosmic proportions. Travel time can waste so much time in your production day. So get out an area map and set some parameters for your scouting. You and your producer need to decide the longest drive time allowed to any location. Then determine the most ideal distance or drive time. In my experience, that would mean no more than 30 minutes to location. Then decide the farthest distance allowed. This approach is based on the longstanding enforcement of the LA "studio zone." The zone was created by the guilds and labor unions and is an area radiating out for a 30-mile radius from the intersection of West Beverly Boulevard and North La Cienega Boulevard. Ideally, films should keep all their locations within that zone to keep the pay scale for all crew members affordable, consistent, and predictable. Once production leaves the zone, workers' rates go up and additional costs are incurred for travel and even per diem and hotel rooms if the distance is great enough. Of course, 50 years ago it was a lot easier to travel those 30 miles than it is today. It's not easy to move across the zone in LA traffic, so company moves are kept to a rare event. But the zone concept helps focus your scouting efforts in a defined area.

Start by establishing a voluntary zone for your project. In San Diego, there is a well-known area of Mission Valley called Hotel Circle that offers a good sampling of hotel franchises with a wide range of rates. Most often, out-of-town productions stay in that area, so that seems to constitute the center of the zone, because the production offices are at the hotel. Determine your center: it can be your production office, hotel, or sound stage. Now distance out from that center to create your zone based on miles and/or travel time. This becomes your self-imposed zone on the basis of making every location work within a reasonable drive to get the maximum production day possible. Your location list will determine much of the size of your zone, but usually the exotic, distant locations will be an exception and kept to a minimum. Keep your locations as close together in the zone as possible, simply to reduce the drive time. You don't want to spend 45 minutes driving to a cookie-cutter subdivision when there are several similar neighborhoods 15 minutes away from the production office. Keep your scouting close to the center of your zone and radiate out from there only as you need to. This approach is simply good planning. It will keep your travel time reasonable and predictable.

HOW TO HANDLE "NO"

One of the hardest parts in location scouting is finding the perfect location and being told *no*. No matter how well you do your job, expect a certain amount of rejection. And learn early on to not take it personally—develop some tough skin. You're going to meet people who don't want to have anything to do with the movies. You're going to meet people who are very private individuals and don't want any attention drawn to them or their property. You're going to meet people who are in it only for the money, who will ask exorbitant location fees or try to coerce or blackmail you to pay them off. You'll meet corporate executives with a closed door policy who worry more about their tenants' reactions to filming or the company image as see on the screen. Don't take it personally. It's just part of the job. This is where you can acquire some fine skills in psychology and sociology if you pay attention. Get comfortable when people say "no" all the while putting your skills to work to see whether you can change their mind. Your director or production designer might not be as able to accept it, but you will have to get used to "no." This is true for almost any job or position in film production. It brings out the best and the worst in people—just don't internalize the negativity. Discuss the objections openly, do everything you can to address the obstacles, but don't force the issue. Never try to talk someone into doing something they don't want to do. It never works out in the end and can cost you much more than accepting that "no" and moving on would have cost you. When interviewing location managers, I had three different people say that their advice was, "Don't talk a location into being involved if there is resistance. Just move on." I've see property owners and company CEOs do more than bristle and get downright obnoxious when a location person just kept coming back with desperation and attitude. There comes a time to graciously accept "no" knowing that you've done everything humanly possible to get that location. When I worked for producer Ed Milkovich, he really "got it" when it came to locations. If the house we all liked brought so much difficulty, angst, and obstacles with it, he'd be the first one to say, "It's not worth it. Let's just get another house." Accept the "no" and don't see it as defeat but just another opportunity to learn more about how you do your job. You never want to shoot where you're not welcomed. It creates more trouble than it's worth. Be resilient and move on.

SCOUTING SAFETY AND POST-9/11 PARANOIA

The world changed in so many ways on September 11, 2001, and we are still adjusting. Although so many lives were lost and countless others devastated by the tragic losses, as a culture we tumbled down into a dark netherworld of pain, suffering, loss, and fear. A new sense of mistrust became commonplace and fear became the new emotion in charge. Fear

has grown into rampant paranoia and has become the basis of a new pervasive culture in the United States. As a location person, you are going to be exploring unknown territory much of the time. People have learned to be suspicious of people and situations that are different from their everyday experience. You will be seen as the stranger—perhaps the threat. Expect that sometimes you will be considered a suspicious person. Be sensitive and aware that these are different times and the culture is different. Again, think of the Bubble effect: you don't make your movie in a bubble. People are going to react to you and your work and all the unusual activity to bring to a place, even when scouting. Pay attention and anticipate the possible reaction within the different environments that you will find yourself scouting. Be responsive to external conditions and different locales and plan ahead.

Press Police Stop Filmmakers

More than 5,000 security guards in London's financial district have been instructed by police to report people taking photographs, recording footage, or even making sketches near buildings, the *Guardian* has learned. City of London police's previously unseen advice singles out people who may appear to be "legitimate tourists" to prevent reconnaissance by al-Qaida. The document helps explain a number of recent cases in which photographers have been stopped and searched by police using section 44 of the Terrorism Act, after first being approached by security guards. Section 44 has been repeatedly used to question tourists, photographers, and filmmakers. Cases have also been documented where artists have been stopped from painting in the street. Under "examples of suspicious behaviour," the document lists people spotted in stationary vehicles watching buildings or who ask "detailed or unusual questions" about a location. One line in the document, marked in bold, states: "The person you think is a legitimate tourist may be somebody else!"

UK News, London, *The Guardian, Press police stop filmmakers. guardian.co.uk. Thursday May 13, 2010.*

Several people loitering, asking questions, pointing, taking pictures—well, that sounds like filmmakers out on a location scout to me! Know your environment where you are scouting. Contact any person or agency in advance who can help facilitate your scout and protect you. Make your presence known in advance and get permission to scout and photograph. Docks, downtown lofts, and the barrio will all bring very different people and different reactions to you and your scouting. You will be scouting in neighborhoods that may be known for gang violence, drive-by shootings, and worse. You may have to scout for a nighttime location that takes you into dangerous or unknown areas. If you need a nighttime location, scout it during the day and then return at night with someone as a sidekick. Don't scout at government buildings, airports, water treatment plants, power plants, international borders, or any type of high-profile site without getting clearance first. There are cameras in

many public areas and you will be seen as a suspicious person. Don't enter any violent, threatening, or foreign location alone. I know location scouts who carry pepper spray and one who carried a taser during an especially rough location scout. Make sure someone knows where you are scouting each day; share your itinerary with production. You never know who you might encounter. People may be quick to step back and demand to know who are you and ask what you are doing there. Be aware of the location, the current mood, and the culture you operate in. Be safe and be sensitive to your surroundings.

LOCATION PROFESSIONALS

Location scouting can be the thankless, tiresome, physical labor of slugging from door to door feeling like a missionary and sounding like a used-car salesman. But let's look at the bright side. Location scouting is a very creative job requiring a certain level of knowledge and sophistication, if you want to do it well. Do yourself a favor and hire a location scout whenever you can. In this business, you always want to surround yourself with the best people you can have on the job. It makes you look good and makes your job easier. This frees you up to focus on your primary job and brings another professional, experienced expert onto your crew. Location scouts and location managers bring experience to your project. Experience brings confidence and a tested methodology. Experienced professionals have all the tools and they know the ins and outs of negotiating. They've done it before and make it appear easy. They won't be asking the question you've probably asked yourself, "Where do I start?" Hiring an experienced scout will save you time and money. And if this is a micro- or low-budget project, there comes a time that you will realize you really can't do it all and do it well. Even if you find the locations, you will need someone else on the crew to manage them from day to day so that you can direct or produce or act in the film at the level you need to perform. Scouts and managers bring their expertise to bear, which makes all the difference. The Location Department is a critically important one and deserves the same attention you give to any other department. You certainly wouldn't ask your PA to light or direct your films. Why is it so often the case that I hear indie producers say they'll have a PA do locations?

A scout or manager brings a wealth of resources to fortify your film. They've probably shot all over town at least once. They already have photos in their files and on their website or in their computer. They have cultivated friendships and relationships that open doors. These resources and relationships bring quality and reliability that elevates your film and makes your job so much easier. You'll see it in the actual production value. You'll see the benefits in cost savings in your budget.

There won't be as many repairs to locations when someone is spending all their time monitoring the set and making sure everything is going smoothly. There will be smiling faces and tolerant strangers on the sidewalk around your set because someone is doing the PR and community outreach to keep the delicate balance. And you or the next filmmaker will be able to return to the location because the shoot was managed well, people had a good experience, and everyone is happy. Surround yourself with the best professional experienced crew. Anyone reading this book is probably going to have to cut corners somewhere, and most often that starts in the Location Department out of necessity. But think about the far-reaching repercussions. Even as a student, you are always building the foundation for your future and your career. Learn the standard in the industry, learn what the professional expectation is in the Location Department, and hire the best when you can. If not, train yourself to follow the practical guidelines here and bring that planning and knowledge to managing your locations.

When Scouting Locations, Remember:

1. First impressions are important when "cold scouting": be friendly, personable, and professional when getting strangers to trust and respect you.
2. Cultivate communication skills—bring confidence, passion, persistence, and patience to your request. Speak in everyday terms, not film jargon.
3. Contact the owner and stay in touch. Don't assume that you have the location until you have it in writing. Things can change.
4. Know your pitch and what you're selling.
5. Always do business with the property owner, not a renter or lessee alone. Be prepared for overlapping ownership such as HOAs.
6. Everything is owned by someone. Find property owners through tax records.
7. Know your location environment thoroughly—sight, sound, activity, and so on.
8. Use the Location Scout Checklist to cover 36 points of interest at every location.
9. Have Plan B, Plan C, and so on in mind. Prepare a backup plan in case something goes wrong and you lose a location. Build relationships with all the property owners you meet.
10. Marry your locations. Keep your locations close together whenever possible to reduce drive time and company moves.
11. Create a zone with your producer to keep your scouting within an agreed-upon area of distance and drive time.
12. Expect rejection and learn to take "no" graciously. You can learn much from hearing "no" that will prepare you for next time.

13. Be sensitive to the culture and the times. People are more paranoid and quick to react when you appear suspicious in your scouting. Have permission to scout and photograph before you enter high-profile public places.
14. Location professionals bring expertise and experience to your crew. Hire them whenever you can—it will make your job so much easier.

Chapter | seven

Before You Shoot

CHAPTER OUTLINE

In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

The location scouting is over. The locations have been selected. Now your job becomes that of the location manager, whether you like it or not. Switching hats from location scout to location manager can be a welcome relief on some levels. But with it comes new responsibilities that require excellent project management skills and attention to detail. And eventually, it comes with the gratification of knowing you did an important job well. Now you begin to lock down all your location selections, finalizing all the details, "dotting the i's and crossing the t's," being meticulous and thorough, and getting everything in writing. So let's look at the big picture of what has to happen to secure and lock down each and every location. Now that you have the specific details of the shooting schedule and what has to happen at each location,

Shoot on Location.

you need to organize that firm data to fit within the world of logistical planning—the logistics of on-location filming.

LOCATION LOGISTICS

What does "logistics" really mean? It is a term originating in the world of military science and having to do with moving and supplying troops, orchestrating maneuvers, and planning. Putting the aggressive aspects of warfare aside, the term has become commonplace in the context of our busy, multitasking lives. These days, logistics can apply to everything we do in our busy lives from planning vacations to managing our family's meals. In that context, I prefer to interpret logistics as knowledge-based planning grounded in detail, detail, and more detail. Good logistical planning guarantees a certain level of success—at the very least, basic survival. Although going on location isn't a life-and-death situation, the reality of moving people and materials around from place to place while providing for the basic needs of your cast and crew is a daunting challenge. Someone must manage all the detail on a daily basis specific to each move and every location. The details of this job don't change if it's a crew of 150 people or a crew of 10. All the necessary elements remain the same. The need for impeccable coordination remains the same. The all important logistics remain a constant. The planning must be precise and the movement must be controlled. It's all about information and mobilization, which requires tremendous organization.

Detail is everything at this point. Create as much control as possible in terms of the key elements: who, what, when, where, and how of every location. In this chapter, we will revisit many elements discussed in earlier chapters, elements that take on new importance and an added dimension now that you know for sure where exactly you are filming. The speculation must be cleared away and a new clarity brought to each location—no loose ends. The logistics of on-location filming involve multiple reviews of the same questions—so much so that it can be overwhelming. Planning and constant review is the best safeguard against anything being overlooked or neglected. You want to be the best informed, most knowledgeable person about each and every shooting location. Be sure to know how to get there, where to park, how late you can film, whether you have permission to get on the roof, and so on. All the elements to create a sound and secure shooting environment must be in place; hopefully, all will go well. But where do you start?

WHAT DO LOCATIONS COST?

If you've signed a contract, you've done the money deal. Learning how to negotiate through the mine field of location fees is an important part of your job. Your budget will likely dictate what you can afford to spend on location fees. But regardless of how much location budget you have

available, negotiating the cost of a location is an art form. But how much do people expect to be paid, and can you anticipate that? Money is one of the early subjects discussed with the owner of a potential location. Often it is one of the very first questions asked: "What will you pay me?" can make a scout's blood run cold when it comes out too early in the process. As unfair as it may seem, people still think of this industry as having deep pockets and money to burn. Even your small, micro-budget independent short film will be seen through the veil of the Hollywood fog, and the first thing you have to do is bring your prospective location owner down to earth. The challenge of balancing budget with fair compensation while maintaining a friendly atmosphere of trust and cooperation can be terrifying.

So where do you start? How much do locations cost? There is no simple answer. Everyone's time and property has a special personal value to them. The best starting point is to be honest in your discussion of what real impact the shoot will have on the owner. Will she lose business because you have to take over the entire boutique for the day? Will the homeowner not be able to sleep because you'll be shooting in every room of the house all night? Always approach a location fee from the perspective of fair compensation, then add a little extra. A business owner will equate a different value than a homeowner in terms of compensation. When filming in a working business, be prepared to pay a location fee equal to the business lost. If you need to take over the bakery for the day, it is only fair to pay the baker what he or she lost in business while his or her door was closed to the usual customers. Determining that dollar amount can be tricky. Ask what the shop took in that day in the previous week or ask to see the accounting books for that date last year. Retailers may slip into inflating their numbers if they see your offer as a chance to exploit the situation for more money. Business lost plus something extra for the inconvenience is a good starting place in determining a location fee at a place of work.

One Film Commission advises homeowners to use the following formula when trying to figure out a location fee. A good place to start for a homeowners is to compare the days of work to a percentage of their monthly mortgage payment or rent and use that as a starting point. For instance, if someone pays $2,000 per month for their house payment and you want to film a total of seven days, that's nearly a quarter of the month and thus a quarter of the mortgage payment. It's reasonable to offer the owner $500 plus a little extra for the inconvenience and good will. That can help micro-budget independents when approaching a private home. But I've seen that the formula doesn't always work, except in first-time locations and small towns that don't experience a lot of filming. The public has become pretty sophisticated about filming, so be prepared for some big money differences in your initial conversations. A large corporation will probably shock you with the amount they expect

to be paid. But usually a homeowner will appreciate anything from a few hundred dollars for exterior-only shots to a thousand dollars or more per day to take over the entire house. Shooting a car commercial in the circular driveway is much easier to tolerate than shooting inside every room of the house. Going inside someone's home is very intrusive and you should expect to have to pay more to compensate for the disruption. By the time you're ready to sign a contract, you'll know what to expect from the owner and you'll have a better estimation of their tolerance level. You will have gone beyond the first knock on the door introductory phase and moved into respectful cooperation.

Some people will always want to take advantage of the opportunity when Hollywood calls. They see dollar signs as soon as you mention you're making a movie. And you'll hear some ridiculous amounts of money thrown out on the table in the early stages of negotiation. Remember how much information is out there to taint the discussion. These days the average person is bombarded with details about movie budgets, celebrity salaries, and contracts. *Entertainment Tonight*, *Access Hollywood*, and the most recent incarnations of the movie star magazine scream headlines about the big money deals made to guarantee box office. So now everyone's an expert and these self-proclaimed experts will bring unrealistic expectations to the bargaining table when negotiating a location fee.

Although it doesn't always play out this way, I believe that whoever offers the first dollar amount is at a disadvantage. If you tell a homeowner that you only have $100 for that day, you risk losing them right off the bat. Of course you will already have informed them that your project is a really, really low-budget movie with hardly any money to set the groundwork. But when they ask what you can pay, try turning the tables and ask them what they think a reasonable fee is for what you're asking to do. Often they will turn to you as the expert and ask what is standard for a location, but sometimes they come up with a dollar figure that is worthwhile to them, and that's what's important. Once a dollar figure is on the table, you can begin to negotiate up or down, hopefully to everyone's satisfaction. Realistically, I think it's smart to have $1,000 a day in your budget to cover locations and even better to have $2,000—yes, per day. That is a good, safe starting point. Of course, there will be many private locations that won't cost nearly that amount. And there could be those that cost much more. For example, your nephew is happy to let you film in his classy clinic or your makeup artist has a "day job" in an upscale salon where you can film for free after hours. But don't forget that you might have to pay to park the crew in a commercial parking lot or hire a security guard to watch the trucks at the location one of those nights. Again, I am a huge believer that there is no such thing as a free location. Start from that point; establish a minimum amount for each day's location. Estimate $1,000 per day (or

whatever amount you can afford) for locations in your budget and be amazed at all the places you will start to save money. You'll be happy when the savings on free parkland means you have saved that $1,000 that you hoped you wouldn't have to spend in the first place! By budgeting some consistent daily location fee, you are better prepared to rob from Peter to pay Paul and still stay on budget.

PREP AND STRIKE DAYS

In addition to the location fees and extraneous expenses for the shoot day, you need to expect to pay for prep days and strike days. Prep days are needed before you shoot to prepare the location and present it in the way it's needed in the script. Strike days are needed at the end, after you wrap, to get everything you brought in moved out and return the location to normal. It is most unusual for a production to walk into a location and have it perfect in every way. The script usually brings specific props, set dressing, or a character's style to each location. There will usually be some prep time needed to paint, change the furniture, or create cobwebs and decay—time to dress the set to contain the elements found in the script. You may need a prep day just to do what must be done to protect the location from damage. Your art department may likely need an entire day just to put down layout board so the carpet and wood floors are less likely to be damaged. Layout board comes in different forms, in sheets or rolls, but basically consists of heavy corrugated cardboard that is taped down with easy-to-remove paper tape to protect the surface below. Ram Board is a newer version that is much easier to handle than the big bulky panels. Ram Board is available at most big box home improvement stores and is used by contractors for the same purpose. It comes in big rolls and often can be reused. If you don't use some kind of layout board, make sure to have an abundance of moving pads—or "furnie pads," short for furniture pads—to cover the floor and furniture.

Some additional time is almost always needed in a location in advance of the day's shoot for different department needs. For example, your electrics need to get in the day before to lay lighting cable throughout the house, so that you are ready to go immediately when you arrive that first day. Painting, propping, and prelighting require extra days. And that is an additional expense if you have to displace the property owner or business is lost. For example, your opening scene with credits rolling is the slow pan across framed family pictures on the mantle and table tops throughout the house. You will need to plan a day in the house with your actors and a photographer taking those pictures: the family portrait on the front porch, the big Thanksgiving dinner photo with all the family seated smiling at the dining room table, and the

birthday barbeque shot around the backyard pool. Expect to pay something for those prep days at a location.

Strike days are planned for after you finish filming at a location. Once you call a "wrap," all the departments start to "strike" the set. All the equipment, props, and set dressing get packed up and the location is restored to its original condition or often left in better shape. The strike can take a couple of hours or a couple of days, depending on how much the location has been altered or enhanced. And also, depending on what you shot there. Dramatic dialog as opposed to multiple throat slashing murders will each affect how much time it takes to get things back to normal. If you have to go back with the Art Department to replace furniture or repaint the walls the original color, then you need to expect to pay for displacing that family for another day or whatever it takes during restoration. The standard rule is to pay half the day's location fee for prep and strike days. If you are paying the owner $500 per day to shoot, it's common practice to offer $250 for each day of prep and strike. So one day of shooting with one day of prep and strike can cost you the $1,000 you budgeted originally, hoping every location wouldn't cost that much! But expect to pay for any additional days that displace or impact an owner while you prepare the location for filming or restore a location after you've wrapped.

You will often still need access to a location even if it is limited to a one day or a portion of a day's shoot. There will always be a need to get into the location for some reason before and after a shoot day. Hopefully, you can negotiate this at no cost or keep it to a minimum. You will need to see the location for a short time in advance with all your department heads on a technical scout (more about this later in the chapter). Although the tech scout may only take 15–20 minutes, it will still mean traipsing through the location with multiple department heads or representatives creating some sort of disruption. Or your director may want an hour in the location for rehearsing a significant bit of action with a key actor in the house. Or your DP will need to see the back porch at sunset. So much of this planning develops on a day-by-day basis that you will find yourself talking to the owner of each location many times to work out these logistics. Establishing a relationship with the property owner based on flexibility and cooperation is critical to keeping your crew and your property owner happy.

LOCATION CONTRACTS

Before you bring a crew person or a single piece of equipment onto a location, you must have the owner's permission in writing. A signed location agreement is a legal and binding contract between you, representing the production company, and the owner of the property. It protects both parties. A location agreement gives you permission to be on

the property and gives you permission to use the images of the property you will film.

In fact, it usually gives you ownership of the visual image and the sound recorded, in writing. It also promises the owner that you will take care of the property and "restore it to its original condition." Every property owner is going to be concerned about two very important things: liability and what's in it for them. The contract clarifies these details out in the open and should put the owner at ease. You both agree to the terms including days, dates, and often start and wrap times. Also included are any arrangements for prep days and strike days. If financial compensation is part of the agreement, it needs to be stated here. Contracts can also include other types of compensation, such as credit in the film, product placement, and the like. Verbiage specific to weather or other contingency days, cancellation terms, or acts of God should be spelled out. Keep it simple but also solid and specific to your interests and needs at that location. If it's too complex and long, a location agreement can intimidate people and scare them away from working with you. And if you don't have a big studio legal department behind you, it pays to keep it simple and understandable, yet legal all the way. There's a wide range of location agreements out there, many of which are accessible on the Internet. Just be sure that whatever form you choose includes maximum protection for you and the property owner. Figure 7.1 shows a sample property release form as published in the San Diego Film & Video Resource Guide.

Familiarize yourself with the content of the agreement. It affects you, too, so both parties need to be informed and comfortable with the terms. Two important aspects usually found in a location agreement are the "hold harmless" and "restoration" terms. A standard "hold harmless" clause in the property owner's agreement states that they will not be held responsible if you or any of your crew suffers injury or loss of life while on their property. They give you permission to be there, but they are not responsible for any accident or injury that might befall your cast or crew members. That comes back on you and not the property owner. This releases the owner, in writing, from any liability. The contract also usually contains a clause that guarantees that you, the production company representative, will "replace, repair, and restore" the property to its original condition. However it is written, there should be some statement in the contract stating that you "will leave the property in as good condition as when received." Even the smallest crew creates unusual traffic through a location and the movement of camera equipment, lights, C-stands, and cables always leaves some kind of trail, no matter how careful the crew is during the shoot. Some location contracts include the phrase "normal wear and tear," which can generate some interesting discussions. "Normal wear and tear" is a pretty nebulous term that no two people on opposite sides of the contract will ever agree

LOCATION AGREEMENT

Picture:_____ Scripted Location:_____
Production Co:_____ _____
Address:_____ Set#(s):_____
_____
Phone#:_____ Date:_____

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. I, the undersigned owner or agent, whichever is applicable, hereby irrevocably grants to [NAME OF PRODUCTION ENTITY] ("Producer"), and its agents, employees, contractors and suppliers, the right to enter and remain upon and use the property, both real and personal, located at: [ADDRESS AND/OR DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY LOCATION] (the "Property"), including without limitation, all interior and exterior areas, buildings and other structures of the Property and owner's name, logo, trademark, service mark and/or slogan, and any other identifying features associated therewith or which appear in, on or about the Property, for the purpose of photographing (including without limitation by means of motion picture, still or videotape photography) said premises, sets and structures and/or recording sound in connection with the production, exhibition, advertising and exploitation of the [TYPE OF PRODUCTION, SUCH AS THEATRICAL FEATURE, TV SHOW, ETC.] tentatively entitled [TITLE OF PROJECT] (the "Picture").

2. Producer may take possession of said premises commencing on or about [ENTER DATE] subject to change because of weather conditions or changes in production schedule, and continuing until the completion of all scenes and work required.

3. Charges: As complete and full payment for all of the rights granted to Producer hereunder, Producer shall pay to Owner the total amount of $[ENTER AMOUNT], broken-down as follows:

	No. of Days				
Prep	_____	X	$_____	= $	_____
Shoot	_____	X	$_____	= $	_____
Strike	_____	X	$_____	= $	_____
Hold	_____	X	$_____	= $	_____
Other	_____			$	_____
	_____			$	_____

All charges are payable on completion of all work completed, unless specifically agreed to the contrary. Producer is not obligated to actually use the property or produce a [TYPE OF PRODUCTION] or include material photographed or recorded hereunder in the Picture. Producer may at any time elect not to use the Property by giving Owner or agent 24 hours written notice of such election, in which case neither party shall have any obligation hereunder.

4. Producer may place all necessary facilities and equipment, including temporary sets, on the Property, and agrees to remove same after completion of work and leave the Property in as good condition as when received, reasonable wear and tear from uses permitted herein excepted. Signs on the Property may, but need not, be removed or changed, but, if removed or changed, must be replaced. In connection with the Picture, Producer may refer to the Property or any part thereof by any fictitious name and may attribute any fictitious events as occurring on the Property. Owner irrevocably grants to Producer and Producer's successors and assigns the right, in perpetuity, throughout the universe, to duplicate and recreate all or a portion of the Property and to use such duplicates and recreations in any media and/or manner now known or hereafter devised in connection with the Picture, including without limitation sequels and remakes, merchandising, theme parks and studio tours, and in connection with publicity, promotion and/or advertising for any or all of the foregoing.

5. Producer agrees to use reasonable care to prevent damage to the Property and will indemnify and hold Owner harmless from and against any claims or demands arising out of or based upon personal injuries, death or property damage (ordinary wear and tear excepted), suffered by such person(s) resulting directly from any act of negligence on Producer's part in connection with the work hereunder.

(Continued)

6. All rights of every nature whatsoever in and to all still pictures, motion pictures, videotapes, photographs and sound recordings made hereunder, shall be owned by Producer and its successors, assigns and licensees, and neither Owner nor any tenant, or other party now or hereafter having an interest in said property, shall have any right of action against Producer or any other party arising out of any use of said still pictures, motion pictures, videotapes, photographs and or sound recordings, whether or not such use is or may claimed to be, defamatory, untrue or censurable in nature. In addition, neither Owner nor any tenant, nor any other party now or hereafter having an interest in the Property, shall have any right of action, including, but not limited to, those based upon invasion of privacy, publicity, defamation, or other civil rights, in connection with the exercise of the permission and/or rights granted by Owner to Producer. If there is a breach by Producer hereunder, Owner shall be limited to an action at law for monetary damages. In no event shall Owner have the right to enjoin the development, production, distribution or exploitation of the Picture.

7. Force Majeure: If because of illness of actors, director or other essential artists and crew, weather conditions, defective film or equipment or any other occurrence beyond Producer's control, Producer is unable to start work on the date designated above and/or work in progress is interrupted during use of the Property by Producer, then Producer shall have the right to use the Property at a later date to be mutually agreed upon and/or to extend the period set forth in Paragraph 2, and any such use shall be included in the compensation paid pursuant to Paragraph 3 above.

8. At any time within six (6) months from the date Producer completes its use of the Property hereunder, Producer may, upon not less than five (5) days prior written notice to Owner, reenter and use the Property for such period as may be reasonable necessary to photograph retakes, added scenes, etc. desired by Producer upon the same terms and conditions as contained in this agreement.

9. Owner warrants neither he or anyone acting for him, gave or agreed to give anything of value, except for use of the Property, to Producer or anyone associated with the production for using said Property as a shooting location.

10. Owner represents and warrants that he/she is the owner and/or authorized representative of the Property, and that Owner has the authority to grant Producer the permission and rights granted in this agreement, and that no one else's permission is required. If any question arises regarding Owner's authority to grant the permission and rights granted in this agreement, Owner agrees to indemnify Producer and assume responsibility for any loss and liability incurred as a result of its breach of the representation of authority contained in this paragraph, including reasonable attorneys' fees.

11. If there is a dispute between the parties, Owner's remedies will be limited to an action at law for money damages, and in no event will Owner have the right to seek injunctive or equitable relief or to otherwise enjoin the production distribution, marketing or exploitation of the Picture.

This agreement constitutes the entire understanding between the parties, supersedes any prior understanding relating thereto and shall not be modified except by a writing signed by the parties.

AGREED & ACCEPTED TO:

_____
Property Owner or Designated Signatory

AGREED & ACCEPTED *for Producer*:

_____
Signature

_____
Print Name

_____
Title

_____

_____
Address

_____
Phone No.

_____
Social Security # or Federal ID #

FIGURE 7.1 This sample Location Agreement—Property Release form gives you the basic written agreement and terms for shooting on private property. *Reprinted with permission from* The Complete Film Production Handbook *by Eve Honthaner (Copyright Elsevier),* 2010, 330–331.

upon. When that phrase is used, it is usually tied to "normal wear and tear from uses permitted herein excepted." But just take note of what works best for you and have some type of solid legal agreement signed before anything takes place on the property.

Once you know you are shooting at a location, it's a good idea to go back and photograph the location in detail. By the time you sign an agreement, you may have returned to the location multiple times in meetings with the owners or to gather more information for other departments. But before you shoot, get good photos to have a point of reference when evaluating any damage or restoration that needs to be done. Doing a walkthrough with the owner after filming can be precarious if it becomes a he-said, she-said argument over whether those scratches were on the new hardwood floors before you started shooting in the house. Broken windows, trampled marigolds, or an unsavory new color on the wall can be obvious changes requiring repair or replacement. But the subtle or often not-so-subtle impact of people and equipment can be the cause of disagreement and arguments if not planned for before you go into the location.

Photograph the entire location to the best of your ability before you start your prep. Walk throughout the property with the owner so you can point to scratches on the wall or dings in the woodwork as you create a photographic record of the condition of the property at the start. Photo document the location well in advance of any work done there by other departments needing prep days. Often the Art Department will photograph the location for the same reason and to help them put everything back the way it was. Make every effort to avoid property damage whenever possible. This means educating and controlling your crew and their actions throughout each and every location shooting day. This "courtesy" message to the crew must go out on the call sheet and in safety meetings over and over again on a daily basis. Remember the faulty concept of "cinematic immunity." It's easy for the crew to adopt a backlot sense of security that can lead to carelessness and a casual attitude. This is someone's home or workplace, not a set piece built for the sole purpose of filming. Keep everyone on their best behavior and ask for respect for the location and for you. Protection and prevention is always cheaper than restoration.

Often improvements are made to a location. A new coat of paint in the bedroom or a gazebo built in the backyard may be changes the homeowner wants to keep in place. This can be one of the perks of having a property used in a movie. And it can become a bargaining point. The movie *Bring It On* shot in seven different schools throughout San Diego, and almost every school benefited from some improvements made by the production company. One new high school just finishing construction got new sod for their football field. Another school's gym floor was sanded, refinished, and made better than new. A private home

had a facelift of a new coat of paint for the entire exterior of the house. If you know that you are making significant changes or improvements to the property, you might want to include that information in the contract. Repair and restoration are very important to a property owner and must be as important to you in your cleanup after the wrap. This is about ethical treatment and fulfilling your contractual obligations. Your business, professional, and personal responsibility hinges on how well you take care of your property owner and the location. This caring and follow-through helps solidify your relationships and will allow you or any other project to come back and film there again. You want to create a return customer—an owner who respects and trusts you and the industry you represent. Protect yourself and the property owner through your written agreements.

The challenge of balancing budget with fair compensation while maintaining a friendly atmosphere of trust and cooperation can be terrifying.

WHERE DO I PARK THE CIRCUS?

Going on location is like bringing the circus to town. A caravan of trucks, cars, tents, and equipment lines up at every location needing space to park, unload, spread out, and live for the time you are shooting there. It's like Pandora's box—once you open it, the stuff inside keeps spilling out, getting bigger and bigger, and taking over. The circus needs a big footprint at every location. Whatever the size of your project or the number of vehicles, you need to plan to have your key working trucks as close to the location as possible. You can't afford to lose precious time throughout the day traveling long distances between your equipment trucks and the set. The key working trucks usually include, but are not limited to, the lighting and grip truck, camera truck, Art Department/Props truck, motorhome for the vanities (hair, makeup, and often wardrobe), and the sound mixer's vehicle. Even if you don't have large 5-ton or 10-ton trucks, or the all-consuming 40-foot semi trailer, you will still probably have some type of vehicle dedicated to each of these essential departments. These departments have to get their equipment off the truck and into the location quickly first thing in the day and return to their vehicles frequently throughout the course of the day's shoot. These basic trucks have to be as close as possible to the shooting location. Get used to looking at your location in terms of parking requirements.

You can see the impact made on a business or residential street just to get the equipment trucks close to the location. This kind of big show travels with a fairly predictable entourage of specific trucks. Most TV shows and movies will bring between 400 feet to over 1,000 feet of working trucks. Some are essential trucks that need to be right at location; others can live a few blocks away in a parking lot. The most

FIGURE 7.2 Essential working trucks parked around the corner from a shooting location for the episodic TV show *Veronica Mars*. Several 40-foot semi trucks were permitted to park along the curb. *Reprinted with permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

FIGURE 7.3 Equipment stacked along the curb with "taco" carts holding equipment standing ready near the working trucks. *Reprinted with permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

common list includes the following basic working trucks (on big shows they will have multiple trucks in some of these categories):

- Grip truck (40 feet)
- Lighting/electric truck (65 feet)
- Honey wagon (65-foot tractor/trailer truck with mobile dressing rooms, production offices, and rest rooms
- Star trailers/motor homes (35 feet)
- Wardrobe trailer (35 feet)
- Hair/makeup trailer (35 feet)
- Prop truck (14 feet)
- Art Department/Set Dressing truck (25 feet)
- Camera truck (25 feet)
- Sound equipment van
- Crafts service truck/van
- Fifteen-passenger vans/shuttle cast and crew
- Two or three pickup trucks or stake-bed trucks

I know this is beyond what most of you reading this book will bring on location, but think about it. Familiarize yourself with the nature of each truck because even the smallest shoot will usually have a van, pickup truck, or box truck dedicated to each of the departments represented in that list of trucks. You may not have the star wagons or honey wagon, but you'll probably have a motorhome to provide those same basic services and comforts. Even the smallest movie crew needs to get technicians and equipment to the location fast and efficiently throughout the day.

Regardless of the size of your project, you need to be able to guarantee that the equipment trucks can get up close to the location at least to offload and then move off to a parking area. If you can arrange long-term parking for your key trucks, take advantage of that with special parking permits (discussed later in this chapter). In some locations, you might be able to park as the public would park by arriving early and parking on the street. This is risky, but possible. You don't want your camera van circling the block for an hour because the empty curb you saw yesterday is filled with parked cars the morning you show up to shoot. Not having a definite parking plan is the best way to put the day into a desperate downward spiral. Everyone needs to know where they are supposed to park. Parking normal size cars, vans, or cube trucks on the street legally is one way to park the circus if it's small enough. Don't try to put oversized trucks on the street. Don't park the motorhome on the street if it's going to open up with expandable sides and metal stairs down across the sidewalk. These are dangers to begin with. With any oversize vehicle, you will spill over into the driving lanes, sidewalks, and driveways, creating a hazard for your crew and anyone driving or walking in the area. If you have larger trucks or a greater number of extra support vehicles, you need to expect to create some kind of "base

FIGURE 7.4 Trucks stacked in a base camp parking configuration away from the shooting location. *Reprinted with permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

camp." Base camp is that parking lot, empty field, or any large area away from but close to the location where you can park the rest of the entourage. You would have been looking for this possibility during your scouting, so now you need to go back, find the closest spot, contact the owner, strike a deal, and arrange to park there to be safely off the street. Base camp is used for equipment trucks, trailers for talent, catering, crew parking, and so on. So how do you guarantee that all this parking will be there for you and your crew? Usually you need to arrange special parking permits and have a contract with a private property owner for your base camp.

HOW DO I FIND A BASE CAMP?

Moving into a congested commercial, retail, or residential area is challenging in so many ways. Parking is already at a premium and will always be a sensitive issue to those who work and live there every day. Now you want to take that parking away, and even though it may be only four or five spaces, it can create a real tug-of-war. So the rule remains pretty consistent—park only key working trucks at the location. That means everything else has to park someplace else. "Someplace else" means a piece of land reasonably close by, easy to access, and affordable or free. Someplace else is transformed into base camp when the trucks roll in and jockey for position, trailers settle in, pop-ups appear like

mushrooms, and the smells from the catering truck waft through the neighborhood. Base camp should ideally be within walking distance of the set (a block or two) or within a quick shuttle van ride (definitely less than a mile away). So now you are looking for that all-important base camp. Where to start? Hopefully you kept your eyes open when you were initially scouting this location and can now return to that city park with a parking lot, the church or school lot, or even the strip mall with lots of empty parking spaces and arrange to use the space. Finding an area that will work as base camp can be a challenge. You have to drive the area around the location with a different set of eyes. When you start driving, fan out from the location to canvas the closest area first and then fan out to more distanced possibilities. Industrial areas, mall parking lots, park and ride lots near the freeway, empty lots—any number of unexpected sites can work if you use your common sense and add some imagination.

Size, proximity to the set, easy access for trucks, safety, and security all factor into your selection for base camp. And of course so does budget. City lots open to the public might come free with the permit, but expect a business or private entity like a church or school to expect some type of payment. The offer of a donation can go a long way in creating a friendly working relationship. If shooting in a residential neighborhood, look for other houses in the area that have big lots and undeveloped backyards where you might be able to park. Often production will buy out a privately owned commercial parking lot. This can become very expensive if it is a large, nationwide corporation. The corporate owners of big city commercial lots won't usually agree to the single-day rate per space. If they normally charge $10 for up to three hours parking, they usually want to charge you more because they see a potential turnover in a single space throughout the course of the day. That one space may bring three or four cars to park over an eight-hour period, and that means the lot owner could make $30–$40 dollars for that one space. And the owner may start at that point in your negotiations. Of course, your crew cars can come in early and park as the public and pay the normal fees. But you are taking a chance, even for crew cars or normal-sized vehicles. There's always a chance that the day your crew shows up at dawn the lot is filled and there's no place to park. Negotiating for reserved spaces always applies to trucks requiring guaranteed parking in a base camp situation. The search for base camp can be especially difficult in compressed urban areas or dense neighborhoods like beach communities. Make sure you have a large enough space for big trucks to get in and out easily. You need room to maneuver and park with room to spare.

Cast and crew parking is most often part of the base camp plan whenever possible. Crew parking is always easier if the crew is bussed in or shuttled into a difficult location. Production will meet at the

production office or sound stage and shuttle everyone to the remote set to avoid having to park so many cars. If you ask your cast and crew to come to the set and find their own parking as the public, you run the risk of some variable affecting the available spaces you were counting on that day. Again, that is very risky. Sometimes crew parking is separate from base camp and still requires shuttling people to base camp and to the set. If that's the case, you might need security at crew parking as well as base camp. I've parked crew cars along remote hiking trails, and none of the crew would have been comfortable leaving their vehicles in the wilderness without some kind of protection. You should always hire security at your base camp whenever possible. Even though there will be drivers and crew people bustling around base camp, they won't be watching for suspicious or loitering strangers who might try to rip off some gear or wardrobe. Hired security means someone is dedicated to protecting your stuff from harm. You want to do all you can to guarantee people are on time after an easy drive to location. You want to do all you can to reassure cast and crew that their vehicles and personal safety are important. You want your cast and crew to feel confident that they will have a place to park with a nearby cup of coffee at crafts service when they arrive on the set. Base camp becomes one's home away from home while on location. Do your best to make it welcoming and easily accessible.

TENTS, TOILETS, AND TRASH

So much of the logistics of on location shooting revolves around transporting people and goods across difficult terrain. You have to plan for everything. This is a mobile business; you have to arrange to have everything at hand for any 24-hour period. In addition, you need to provide for creature comforts, which often translates into the bare necessities. Thus the topic of tents, toilets, and trash needs to be discussed before you shoot.

The location manger will always establish comfort stations at the location. You also want to have designated areas where people can sit and relax or seek shelter and cover from the elements without having to put your entire crew in a spare room in the house or office location where you're shooting. Working crew will be on the set; other cast and crew should be off the set and someplace else to reduce the noise and activity around the camera. You need tents for other obvious reasons, too. Cover from sun, heat, rain, and weather needs to be available outside of the shooting set. Crafts service will often have a pop-up, but you need to rent another tent or two for feeding the crew and to act as a holding area. In extreme weather, these tents should be heated or air-conditioned and have sides and door flaps; often, the tents need to be permitted through the local fire marshal. This kind of big tent is easily

available through party rental companies, who deliver and set it up. If you have a budget for catering, check with your catering company to see whether they provide tables and chairs. If not, you need to add those items to your party rental list. Cover from the elements and a place to sit and eat is essential over a long workday and is important to crew morale. And as we're talking about catering, I encourage you to feed your crew well. Whatever your budget, make sure that your crew has plenty of healthy, wholesome, hot food. Meals can make or break a crew's morale and affect their after-lunch performance, so don't scrimp or cut corners here. I know indie filmmakers often have family members cook and cater or bring deli sandwiches to the set, and that's all good. But make it a real meal, no matter how frugal. Always make the meal something your crew can look forward to and not a reason to complain.

Toilets seem an obvious necessity for any group of people working offsite. But this topic gets ignored, overlooked, or disregarded all the time. One location house bathroom cannot accommodate a film project comfortably. Someone will always be waiting in line. Multiple bathrooms in a location house might help ease the strain, but there are cleanliness and personal hygiene concerns that always build up over the shoot day. And toilets are not an area where you want anything to go wrong. Trust me.

What's that Bubbling in the Side Yard?

An independent movie was shooting multiple days in a quaint house in a rural community east of San Diego. Pine Valley is a charming community of older ranches and country homes that blend nicely into a small town with rustic neighborhoods. On the second day of shooting, one of the grips noticed bubbling liquid in the side yard at exactly the same moment someone came running from the house bathroom yelling that the toilet was overflowing. There were two bathrooms, but obviously only one septic tank, and that septic tank had surpassed its capacity. Thirty additional people using a limited holding tank (septic tank) over those two days was too much for the system. The AD was quick to the phone to get a septic tank specialist to the set to fix it, and at the same time asked, "By the way, can you recommend a port-a-potty company?" For the next two days, the crew was limited to the rented toilets, but they had to change only one exterior location to get away from the percolating crud in the side yard.

Not all toilet disasters are that extreme, thank goodness. Sometimes it just involves messy people and bad habits. But those things can affect the entire crew. Someone needs to keep the bathrooms clean, at the very least. And as you see from the Pine Valley disaster, there are times when it isn't practical to not have many more facilities available to cast and crew. The honey wagon provides portable restrooms on the big projects with big budgets to match. But your smaller, low-budget movie will have to resort to renting a port-a-potty. Now it's not as bad as all the disastrous rock concert situations from the past. Portable toilets have

been improved upon in big ways. Rent the executive model that is a free-standing unit, with actual commode, carpeted floors, sink, and running water. It's going to cost you something, sure, but there are certain areas where you *really* shouldn't cut corners. Expecting crew people to run across the street to the coffee shop or fast food restaurant to use a bathroom is inconsiderate and not very professional. You need your crew on the set and that means keeping creature comforts and every day physical needs at the set. On some movies, all you need is a motorhome; some experienced moho companies can actually pull a second bathroom facility (port-a-potty) on a trailer behind the unit. But a motorhome is cramped quarters that can become uncomfortable or unpleasant for all involved, especially if production is using the moho as a production office. Personal hygiene is a very personal matter and should be respected. Asking your cast and crew to make do with less than clean, convenient bathroom facilities is inhumane.

People always like to point out what a clean industry this is. No pollution, no big carbon footprint, no leave-behind waste product. I beg to differ. Trash is a big part of any film production. As a mobile business, we have to bring everything with us to support a small community on wheels. And when on location, we have to pack out everything we pack in. That means that every plastic cup, napkin, makeup sponge, cable tie, spray paint can, and water bottle needs to be removed from the set. If crafts services doesn't provide enough trash cans, bring your own. If it's a big scene with lots of extras, add trash cans to your party rental company list with the tables and chairs and extra tents. Have plenty of big garbage bags and a plan for hauling the trash and dumping it. Don't leave it in the homeowner's backyard next to the garbage cans. Haul it to a prearranged dumpster (at the stage or hotel, perhaps). Better yet, if you are at a location for multiple days or have lots of extras, rent a small dumpster from a waste management company and bring it to the set. Having a small roll-off dumpster at location can help the other departments too, especially if the Art Department is doing a big build or major remodeling at the location. Again, it comes down to budget, but investigate the cost of renting a dumpster with pickup, delivery, and dumping charges so that you can start putting it in your next film's budget. Now is the time to think about separating trash and making recycling a requirement on the set. Mark cans for plastic water bottles, aluminum cans, and clean paper trash. You will have the extra work of taking this to the recycling facility, but it's the right thing to do. If your producer allows smoking on the set (food, drink, or smoking are *never* allowed in the location), you need to establish separate smoking areas with plenty of "butt" cans. Butt cans are cans filled with sand for smokers to use as ashtrays. You sift out the old butts and provide new clean sand as needed. The "no food, drink, or smoking in the location" rule as well as the butt can requirement needs to be announced every day at every

location. I remember wrapping at midnight one night, but there I was at 2:00 a.m., walking the front yard of the house with a flashlight picking up cigarette butts so the family would come home to a perfect house and yard the next morning. People get comfortable and casual and cross the line, so they need to be reminded. You need to police your location on a regular basis and make sure that people aren't getting sloppy or ignoring the rules.

PARKING PERMITS

If you are parking on a public street, arrange the details with the permitting agency for a couple of reasons. You will probably need to park beyond the normal or legal hours as posted and you could have oversized vehicles that extend beyond the normal curbside parking lane. Every city or regional film office will be able to tell you how they want the parking request delivered and what the time frame is. Most often, the permit office wants a simple hand-drawn map (please, no Google Earth maps) that acts as a diagram showing the street names and an "X" in every parking spot being requested. The map should include the project name, production company information, day, dates, and times of the requested parking permit. It can look something like Figure 7.5.

Once approved by the permit office, and most often the local police department, the location manager hires an outside company to put the customized "NO PARKING" signs in the area, usually two or three days in advance of the parking ban going into effect. The legality of posting in advance and permitting is critical in case you have to tow. You never want to tow a car if you can avoid it. It creates disharmony, conflict, and bad feelings. It can even lead to court. If there are cars parked where you need to park the trucks or where you need to keep the frame clear for picture, try to find the owner first. Go door to door; ask the diners in the restaurant if anyone owns a "red Toyota pickup truck" parked out front. Let them know they are at risk of being towed and they will rush to move their vehicle. If you have a police officer with you on the set, ask him or her to run the license plate so that you can go to the owner's address and try to reach him or her that way. The owner will appreciate your efforts to save him or her the hassle and expense of getting the car out of impound even if the owner doesn't think you should be able to take the parking place. Tow only if it is absolutely necessary. I have seen the owners of towed cars sue for damages, work lost, and personal hardship and you don't want to run that risk, especially if you are a small, barely insured or uninsured company. Keep accurate records of all approvals and transactions so that you can document every stage of placing the no parking signs out on the street.

SAMPLE POSTING DIAGRAM

(This sample is designed to give a close-up view of what we need.)

1. Please be aware of the curb markings — do not plan to post colored curbs or permit parking.
2. Note traffic and parking restrictions (one-way streets, bus zone, loading zone, parking meters, lane reduction due to construction, etc.) on your diagram.
3. Include camera placement, picture car (include direction of rig if it's a rigged shot), grips trucks, etc.
4. Meter numbers alone are not sufficient, you must note where you plan to post.

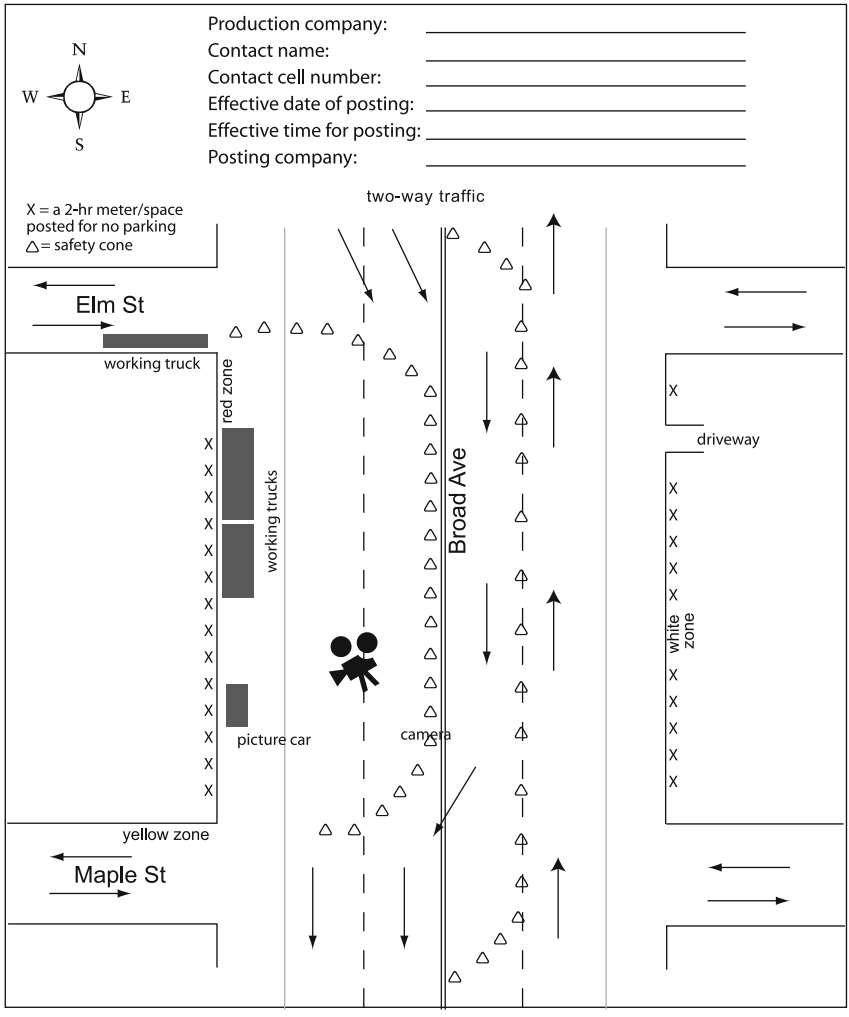


FIGURE 7.5 This detailed map shows street names and traffic flow and clearly marks the spots requested for parking trucks. Include day, dates, and times for the posting for parking. *Reprinted by permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

Another benefit of posting for parking is keeping the area you are shooting clear of traffic. For instance, if you are shooting interior a restaurant looking through the window and seeing the street in the background, you won't want the public parking along the curb, coming and going, moving in and out of your frame all day. This is a nightmare for continuity and also could require releases from those people if they stop and look right at the camera. When filming a car pulling up to a business or actors getting in the car at the curb and pulling away, you need to keep the curb open for your shot. That means you can't risk anyone from the public parking where you need to shoot. And often lighting and sound and other key crew people need to be close to the set but just out of sight, so taking a curb lane normally used for parking gives the technicians the space they need to do their jobs. Often, keeping the key trucks close to location and guaranteeing that the street will be clear for picture are the main reasons for posting for parking. And of course, you would post no parking to keep the street clear if you are doing any complex driving work or driving stunts. You don't want to put the public at risk, so you need to make sure that no one is parking in the area of your shot where they could get hurt or their car could get damaged. It's all about control: the control you need to shoot safely and efficiently and how you manage and control the public safety of the people and property around you.

If you are requesting a street closure and detour, the permit office will often require that an outside company provide a written traffic plan.

FIGURE 7.6 A wide shot of a street with no parking signs placed to guarantee permitted parking for working truck. *Reprinted with permission Cathy Anderson/ San Diego Film Commission.*

FIGURE 7.7 Police officer, equipment, lighting gear, and crew in the street in front of the Sun Café location filming *Veronica Mars*. In this situation, no parking signs were approved and posted to give production the curb parking lane and street access to keep the frame clear for picture and to use that street space for equipment and crew. *Reprinted with permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

Traffic Control Systems is one such company that is well known in LA and Southern California. Barricade companies often provide the same service and rent the no parking signs for a small daily fee, delivery, and setup charge. These companies have offices nationwide to provide law enforcement with the analysis and recommendations for detours, signage, and staffing to prepare the public for any disruption in normal traffic. Make sure that your no parking signs and advance notification meet your permit requirements. Because you are technically going to be parking in a "no parking" area, you should identify each vehicle to prevent parking enforcement from ticketing you. Create a simple printed sign that identifies your production vehicles by the project and/or production name, such as "My Big Movie Production Vehicle."

One more tip: sometimes when parking legally at the curb, there just isn't enough curb length to accommodate longer trucks with lift gates. Especially if you are in a residential neighborhood, you are going to be blocking someone's driveway. Not a good idea. Go door to door and try to "buy" the driveways you need. For a few bucks, people will agree to be out of the driveway by a certain time next morning and you can use the street in front of their driveway.

Parking can be one of the most difficult and sensitive aspects of shooting on location; you need to plan and manage it well in advance.

I mentioned earlier how possessive people are of the street parking in front of their house or business. Some folks will not be happy when you claim the right to park there where they usually expect to park. If people have special needs or physical disabilities, you need to find a way to accommodate them, get them parked, and driven back to their house. Find a way to make it work and keep the atmosphere one of tolerance and curiosity. Work with your permit office, police department, and the residents in the area to make certain that you have the parking you need the day of the shoot.

THE ALL-IMPORTANT NEIGHBORHOOD NOTIFICATION LETTER

Communication is our business. Whether it's through the storytelling or the terms of a written contract, getting information out to the people is the most important task of all. Every time you go out on location, you are obligated to distribute all of the detailed information regarding your shoot to the people in the area. Film commissions and permit offices require this broad communication as part of the permit process. Normally you will inform everyone within a one-block radius of your filming location. LA requires that a 500-foot distance from the location be informed. The neighborhood notification letter tells the residents the name of the production company; the address of the filming location; the day, dates, and times of the filming; and any pertinent details. This is where you let the people know about any extreme activity like weapons fire, stunts, pyrotechnics, or all-night shooting. Include your name and contact number as well as the permitting agency contact information.

Besides being a requirement of the permit, this flier serves a dual purpose. First, it is a courtesy to the people who reside there. You are coming into their front yard to do business, so you are a guest in their neighborhood. Extend the courtesy of acknowledging that and thank them in advance for their patience and cooperation. Second, the letter serves to inform people about anything you as a filmmaker might need to know about what will be going on in that neighborhood that could conflict with what you want to do there. Distribute the flier several days in advance before you shoot (check with your permit office for time frame). You need this lead time for the residents to respond, give you a call, and give you time to address any problems or concerns so that all of you can coexist. You might get a call from a neighbor who plans to trim trees all day the day you want to shoot, causing sound problems. Or another resident is hosting his daughter's wedding reception and there will be 100 cars valet-parked on the street where you need to park the trucks. The location flier is part of the planning, communication, and coordination necessary to make sure everything runs smoothly the day of the shoot.

Speak Louder! I Can't Hear You Over the Bulldozer!

A small commercial production company had arranged to film in the backyard of a suburban neighborhood house. The scene was a family barbecue, and as they were completely contained on private property, they didn't think they needed a permit. They arrived at the location house the morning of the shoot day to discover that the neighbor next door had started work on a new swimming pool and a large bulldozer was working hard to clear the yard and start digging a big hole. The producer called me at the film commission in a panic. When I asked if he had distributed the neighborhood flier and talked to the neighbors, he said no, he didn't think it was necessary as they were just in the backyard of a private home (the same reason he gave for not getting a permit!). I explained the purpose of the letter and the advantage of permitting even when on private property, and he saw then how much the public can affect him even when he's on private property. He made a deal with the neighbor to delay the dig, and the shoot went on, but money was spent solving a problem that could very likely have been avoided with communication and coordination.

The neighborhood flier can be posted up and down the street through a business district to help prepare shoppers or pedestrians who normally frequent the area. You can tape it to shop windows, bulletin boards, and light poles if allowed. The more you can saturate a street or neighborhood with advance information, the better off you will be on the shoot day. I sometimes mailed the letter well in advance of a big complex shoot simply by addressing it to "Occupant" at the individual street addresses. You want to be able to say that you made every effort to notify the people in the area of the upcoming work. Even if a home owner thinks it's junk mail and throws it away, you are able to say, "I sent everyone on the street a notification letter all about the filming" if questioned later.

The basics have been covered. You have your location list in hand. You know where you plan to shoot every day and the detailed logistics of each location are being finalized. Written agreements are signed, checks are written to pay the locations, your base camp is ready and waiting, parking permits for the street are in process, and the neighborhood fliers are being written. There are no problems reported and the weather forecast looks good. You're almost there—you're ready to shoot. Or maybe not.

THE ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TECHNICAL SCOUT

The last few days of preproduction before you start principal photography will be hectic. They will also be invigorating, frustrating, confusing, and terrifying. There comes a moment when you have reached the point of no return and there is no place to go but forward into the unknown—the shoot days. Generally speaking, the last three or four days before you shoot will be spent doing a technical or "tech" scout and holding your last production meeting. A very critical meeting of the minds takes place

LOCATION NOTIFICATION LETTER GUIDELINES

When filming in a community, neighborhood, or retail business district, proper advance notification is required as part of the permission process. This notification must be provided to each merchant or resident who is directly affected by the company's presence or activity. This includes parking, base camps, staging, and meal areas.

The filming notice must include:

- ✧ Production company name
- ✧ Production title
- ✧ Day, date, and times, including prep and strike
- ✧ Type of production: commercial, TV show, feature film, etc
- ✧ Production company contact: Location Manager, AD, etc
- ✧ Film Commission contact — office number and cell
- ✧ Description of the activity: car chase, talking heads, etc

In the body of the letter please include all of the details from this list that might apply to your project:

- ✧ ***No Parking*** signs are posted on public property with the approval of the San Diego Police Department.
- ✧ Police will be on site for traffic control and/or public safety. The City of San Diego will be reimbursed by the production company for this service.
- ✧ Street will NOT be closed — traffic will be held for short periods of intermittent traffic control while filming.
- ✧ Describe any unusual activity: gunfire, pyrotechnics, car chase, stunts, helicopter, rain, special effects, etc.

Please respect the sensitive nature of on-location filming. A neighborhood that is well informed will be more likely to tolerate the intrusion and disruption that filming can bring. Remember, film crews are guests in a neighborhood and all personnel should be respectful and caring. Keep the noise to a minimum and pick up after yourself. Keep every location happy and ready to welcome the next film project.

FIGURE 7.8 Template for writing a Neighborhood Notification Letter, which should be distributed in your location area several days in advance of filming. *Reprinted by permission Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

Next Time Films, LLC

Dear Neighbors, October 21, 2010

Next Time Films, LLC, is filming an independent movie titled “Better Luck Next Time” in your neighborhood. The production company will be filming scenes in your area this Monday, October 25, 2010. We realize this is unusual activity for all of you who live and work in the neighborhood and we will do our best to reduce the impact as much as possible as well as work quickly to be in and out in the expected time.

We are filming interior CJ’s Beach Break at 1234 S. Mission Blvd. We will be interior the bar all day and do not plan any filming exterior the bar. But you will notice more people and activity around the bar and sidewalk area while we are there. The cast and crew of 45 people will arrive at 7:00 AM and will work until 1:00 PM. We plan to be out of the neighborhood at that time while still parking our vehicles in the City’s Park & Recreation lot across the street. There is no loud activity or special effects so the noticeable intrusion will be kept to a minimum. You will notice several equipment trucks parked on the street in front of the bar as necessary to unload heavy equipment and keep it close to the filming location. The parking is arranged with the permission of the San Diego Police Department. Next Time Films, LLC is permitted through the San Diego Film Commission.

We thank you in advance for your interest and cooperation. Thank you for your patience and for welcoming us into your neighborhood. If you have any questions or special needs, the on-site contact is Kathy M. McCurdy and she can be reached at 619-555-1212. Or you can contact the San Diego Film Commission at 619-234-3456 and speak with the Assistant Director Feature Films. Thank you and see you at the movies!

Sincerely,

Kathy M. McCurdy
Location Manager

555 Central Ave. Ste. 5 San Diego, CA. 92121
619-555-5555 www.betterluckmovie.com

FIGURE 7.9 A sample neighborhood flier for Sc. 22 *Better Luck Next Time* that gives an idea of the tone and detail in a Neighborhood Notification Letter.

during the course of the technical scout. It's a good idea to have your Location Scout Checklist with you for each location you are going to visit on the tech scout. This will provide you with answers to everyone's questions and gives you a format for notes and the all important follow-up. The tech scout involves a location visit with the director, the producer, and every department head (and anyone else they want to include). Everyone gets in the van together and drives to each location for a quick on-site review. This is often the first time many of these people have even seen the location, so the questions and demands will come fast and furious. Everyone will be looking at each location from his or her own point of view, seeing what they need so that their departments can do their jobs. Someone has to pay attention to all of these new requests. Someone needs to write them down and incorporate them into the final arrangements at each location so everyone on the tech scout gets their answers—hopefully before they show up to shoot at that location. The intense exchange of information on the tech scout reiterates the importance of establishing one person as the locations point person. Even if you don't give your PA the location manager title or even if you are wearing the locations hat along with your producer hat or writer hat, someone needs to be in control of the flow of information. And someone needs to act on it.

Here's how it goes during a tech scout. Usually 10–15 people get in the van and travel to each location based on an established itinerary that you have created. Your AD may have asked to visit each location based on the shooting schedule, but usually you create the itinerary to be geographically efficient (avoiding driving back and forth across town) and to accommodate the property owners' availability. The owners need to let you in, open doors, get you on the roof, and so on. You don't want to be backtracking, driving in circles, getting lost, or wasting time in any way. The tech scout needs to be a fast, efficient tour that allows the main players on the crew to run through a little rehearsal in their head.

So you have listed the locations in a sensible pattern, called all the owners to be on site or have someone available to escort you, or you have all the keys—whatever it takes. You have your maps and all contact numbers and you are familiar with the areas. The van arrives at each location; people spill out of the doors and tend to wander off in all directions. It is critical to keep everyone in a close group so that you can hear all the comments and questions. Don't let the grips and electrics wander off measuring the length of the cable run without the group in tow. You are in control. You and often your AD are tour guides who introduce the location, its place in the schedule (days and dates), and the scenes being shot there. Try to get the department heads to then tell you separately and quickly what their questions are and what additional access or support they might need at that location. It's best if only one person speaks at a time, but this never happens. Be prepared to filter

through several simultaneous conversations, because things are going to change.

For instance, seeing the park location for the sunset kiss may have inspired the director of photography to shoot that scene from a high camera angle from a crane—now you have to get approval to drive a 2-ton crane onto the grass. Electricians want to come into the elementary school classroom the day before they shoot to prelight—now you must make arrangements with the principal or custodian and hope it doesn't cost you more. The transportation captain doesn't like where you plan to park the working trucks, so he wants you to clear the red curb for parking—now you have to contact the fire marshal to see if that is possible. Lighting needs to access both houses next door to your location house to put practical lights in the upstairs windows and lights on the roof—now you need to notify those owners and make it happen. The producer doesn't like the base camp location; it's too far away from the set and will cost the director valuable time—now you have to try to find a closer parking lot even though you have already exhausted every possible option. The Art Department wants to know if they can get into the restaurant early to hang white twinkle Christmas lights in all the ficus trees and if they can use the restaurant's linens and china—now you need to ask the owner and hope you can make those arrangements. A hundred new ideas can come out in conversation during the tech scout. Be prepared and don't miss a word. You will have lots of phone work to do after the tech scout.

An important part of the tech scout is lunch. Seriously, it is a critical point in the day. Make sure you have a couple different restaurants lined up for lunch. Know your neighborhoods, because you could run late if you stay at a location longer than scheduled. Or you can be ahead of schedule if things stay simple or if someone doesn't show up as planned. Let the group know what restaurants are available in the area and get a consensus from the group about food preferences. When you know where and when you'll have lunch, notify the restaurant in advance that you will be bringing a large group or, better yet, have menus in the van so that you can pass one around and call in the order in advance. You can get burned trying to get 15 or more people in and out of a restaurant in an hour if you don't plan ahead and communicate. Call ahead and stay in touch by phone. Let them know that this is a business meeting on a timeline and you have to make it quick. Even the seating arrangements in the van and the restaurant selection can be sensitive points in the tech scout.

Whatever the size of your project or your budget, do not overlook the importance of the tech scout. On a short film, you may accomplish all you need to do in a couple hours—sorry, no lunch. Even commercials require a full-day tech scout if there are multiple locations. And movies usually need at least two full days for the tech scout. Plan and

execute the tech scout with good humor and efficiency. It's where you usually start to get to know each other and start bonding with the crew. This is often the beginning of some wonderful experiences and great camaraderie. Preproduction is all about the work you do before you ever shoot a single scene. Every department has its focus and area of specialization. And whoever takes on the detail of setting up the locations deserves the title and glory of Location Manager. That person will endure sleepless nights, never-ending changes, and countless details until the final "wrap" is called. Doing a thorough job before you shoot guarantees a certain amount of calm preparedness during the actual shoot days.

Before You Shoot, Remember to:

1. Pay attention to the logistics—planning and constant review of the details at every location.
2. Negotiate location fees, including prep and strike days.
3. Finalize signed location agreements, permits, and all paperwork.
4. Photo-document the location well in advance to help with restoration.
5. Plan your parking needs for working trucks—how many and how long.
6. Arrange for a nearby base camp for crew and overflow vehicles.
7. Rent creature comforts, tents, and toilets and arrange for trash. Encourage recycling.
8. Get special parking permits if necessary.
9. Distribute the neighborhood notification letter a few days in advance.
10. Plan your technical scout to be efficient with a great lunch. Take notes.
11. Make your lists and check them twice.
12. Repeat for every location!

Chapter | eight

Shoot and Wrap

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Expect the best, plan for the worst, and prepare to be surprised.

Denis Waitley

You usually don't get much sleep the night before your first day of shooting as you revisit the whirl of details swimming in your head. It can be truly overwhelming. Everything up to now has been bringing you to this point—principal photography. Get ready to jump in with both feet. You're ready to start shooting. Your best guide now is the Location Shoot Checklist that will help you stay organized and in control at every location. You are going to ask the same questions over and over for each location: do I have the signed agreement, where's the location check, do I have the insurance cert, are the crew maps ready, did I reschedule the street sweeping, why haven't I heard back from the owner of the base

Shoot on Location.

camp property? It seems neverending. The scouting checklist helped you anticipate all the questions that would arise about the physical, geographical, and shooting-related aspects of the location; this checklist will help you focus on the specific production needs at that location. You need to keep the information for every location at your fingertips. The checklist covers everything from contracts and creature comforts to public safety and public relations. The attention to detail is paramount now more than ever. Nothing on that list can wait until the last minute. Everything is planned well in advance of anyone showing up to shoot that day. Many details would have been arranged days if not weeks prior to the shoot day. So although much of the work related to this checklist is advance work, the checklist is your safety net to keep the details organized and accessible. Each location will bring its own subtle differences and special needs to the shoot day and you need a good roadmap to handle all the nuances.

The Location Shoot Checklist includes all the detail covering the owner's contact information, days, dates, location fee, payment terms, additional costs, and a checklist covering 45 specific elements, many of which will come into play at almost every location. Though you rarely need to check the box for Pyrotechnics, you will consistently check off the essentials such as Location Contract, Neighborhood Notification Letter, and Tables/Chairs. This checklist functions as a daily inventory as you prep your next location, and you will probably sleep better because you will definitely have gone over this list the day before the shoot and probably multiple times leading up to it.

By this point, there shouldn't be anything on the Location Shoot Checklist that takes you by surprise. Many elements were part of your scouting checklist, but all those things gain new importance once the location is locked down and you know for certain that you are going to be shooting there. All the questions are answered and the particulars are on this checklist now. Let's walk through the checklist for the shoot day for Scene 22, the Pacific Beach Bar scene, from the breakdown exercise in Chapter 3. Using the Location Shoot Checklist as the template, here's the narration covering all the points.

SHOOT CHECKLIST INVENTORY

The movie *Better Luck Next Time* is shooting in the Pacific Beach Bar set located at 1234 S. Mission Blvd., San Diego, 92108. The owner's name, home phone, cell phone, work phone, and email address are filled in at the top of the page. The location manager's name, phone numbers, and email address is next on the checklist. The movie shoots Monday, October 25, all interior for one day (pickup driving shots last part of the day in the area). No prep day or strike day needed—we will pretty much

show up, shoot, and hopefully be out in four hours for just one script page, which does involve a brief bar fight. Drive time from the hotel production office in Mission Valley is 15 minutes (7 miles). We're paying the owner a total location fee with a check for $500 for the day starting at 7:00 a.m. planning to be out by noon. He's OK with us staying as late as 5:00 p.m. but wants us out by then because he'll have a crowd for Monday night football. No OT—no overtime costs or any additional costs anticipated. No construction or set dressing needed, no special strike, just wrap and go.

Location Shoot Checklist: Scene 22

The 45 items in the Location Shoot Checklist can read like a laundry list requiring a simple "YES it's handled" or "NO we don't need it/haven't done that yet" or "NA that does not apply here". Let's see how quickly we can go through the list for Scene 22. The *Location Contract* is signed and on file along with the *insurance certificate* naming the owner as additional insured. I have the *permit* from the San Diego Film Commission and *check* for the bar owner. No door *keys*, as the owner will be there to open up and let us in, so no worries about the *alarm*. No exterior scenes so NA on the *sprinklers*—there is no yard. No *garbage pickup* that day, no *street sweeping* that day. No *police* required in the permit for the bar interior, but we have to keep the gear off the sidewalk. Two police officers report at 2:00 p.m. to work with us and escort the picture car for the driving shots. No *fire marshal* required, no *safety officer*, but ask the AD to do a safety meeting first thing in the morning regarding the fistfight and announce that nobody should be behind the bar if they don't have work to do there. The owner will be onsite all day to act as *custodian*. The SDPD approved the permit for curb *parking* for our 3 key vans and the *signs were posted* Friday morning to comply with the 72 hours advance requirement. I checked each day and the signs are in place and all the vehicles have placards for the dashboard that identify them as **Better Luck Next Time, Production Vehicle, San Diego Film Commission**. No *security* needed. *Neighborhood letter* went out on Friday when the "No Parking" signs were posted and there haven't been any calls from any of the adjacent businesses (I talked to the two owners on either side or the main one across the street). Our *base camp* is in the City Park & Recreation beach parking lot across the street with no need to tape or cone it off; no special functions going on with the City so plenty of open parking this time of year and no shuttles needed. *Crew map* went out with the call sheet yesterday. No *layout board*—even the owner said forget it, it's a bar floor, nothing can hurt it! *Catering, tables, and chairs* across the street in the city parking lot with *popups* for cast and crew. One motorhome with restroom plus *public restrooms* in the beach parking lot and the park ranger said we can toss our *trash* in the big dumpsters there. No *heaters*, *fans*, *or AC*. Vanities (*hair/makeup and wardrobe*) are set up in the motor home across the street; no *green room*, no *school room* (no minors on the set). *Production office* is in the motor home, no *generator*—using house power in the bar. *Weather* clear and sunny, all interior so no need for a *cover set* unless something goes wrong with the driving shots later in the day. *Butt cans* at the back door of the bar near crafts service and at catering across the street. No *SFX*, no *weapons, gunfire, pyro*, or *helicopter*. Bar fight with one *stunt* and a stunt double (Dylan) and fight coordinator. We will have a *medic* on the set because we are doing stunts. No *traffic control*, no *barricades*, no *detours*, no *signage*. The nearest *hospital* is Mission Bay Hospital and the address is on the call sheet. Use the NOTES section to list other specific elements unique to this location.

LOCATION SHOOT CHECK LIST

PRODUCTION:

SET NAME:

LOCATION INFO/OWNER/CONTACTS:

LOCATION MANAGER: PHONE/EMAIL:

DATES: INT EXT DAY NIGHT

PREP DAYS & DATES:

SHOOT DAYS & DATES:

STRIKE DAYS & DATES:

DISTANCE/DRIVE TIME FROM PROD. OFFICE:

LOCATION FEE TOTAL:

PREP: SHOOT: STRIKE:

PAYMENT TERMS:

OT:

ADDITIONAL COSTS (specific to the site): i.e. electricity, water, board pets, fix the fence, hotel for owner, etc.

_____
_____

CONSTRUCTION/SET DRESSING SCHEDULE:

STRIKE SCHEDULE:

FIGURE 8.1 Location Shoot Checklist covering all the details that you need to manage at every location. This first page gives the basic information, including dates, fees, and scheduling arrangements.

CHECKLIST:

Location Contract, Certificate of Insurance, Permit, Location Check, Keys, Alarm Code, Sprinklers, Garbage Pick-up, Street Sweeping, Police, Fire Marshall, Safety Officer, Custodian/Maintenance Person, Parking Permit, Posting for "No Parking", Security, Neighborhood Notification Letter, Neighborhood Signatures (if required), Base Camp, Crew Map to Location, Crew Parking/Shuttles, Lay-out Board, Catering, Tables/Chairs, Tents/Toilets/Trash, Heaters/Fans/AC, Hair/Make-up Area, Wardrobe, Green Room, School Room, Production Office, Generator, Weather Forecast, Cover Set, "Butt" Cans, SFX, Weapons/Gunfire, Pyrotechnics, Stunts, Medic, Helicopter, Traffic Control, Barricades/Detours/Street Signage, Nearest Hospital, Other

NOTES:

FIGURE 8.2 Second page of the Location Shoot Checklist, covering 45 points of interest for you to review at each location.

Whew! It looks like a lot in writing, but you can click through these components really quickly when you're ready to go because the work should be done. You've used this checklist all the way through preproduction to help you narrow down just what exactly had to happen to prep each location. None of these items can wait until the last minute or the day before except for the latest, up-to-the-minute weather forecast, which might lead to a cover set! Now the next important job is to get the crew to the location, one of the most important jobs of the location manager.

CREW MAPS AND DIRECTIONAL SIGNS

You need to drive the route to the location well in advance and take accurate notes so that you can design a map and compose clearly written directions. Usually the map will originate from the production office (your house) or some central location. Other times, if people are traveling from various far-flung areas, you would draw a map showing directions from the north, south, east, and west. Most important is that the map and directions be clear, easy to read, and accurate beyond a doubt. You cannot make a mistake and be responsible for the crew not getting to the location on time. In order to shoot, you need to get everyone to

the location. Good directions and clear, easy-to-read maps are one of the most important jobs of the location manager. Even making it a "boulevard" when it's an "avenue" can change everything. Even though everyone will probably still Map Quest or GPS the location, you need to do your job and provide a good map. The electronic methods can be as subject to human error or operator error, as any other method, but you've driven the route and only you can provide the landmarks or icons that might make a difference.

A simple hand-drawn map can work just fine for many small projects. But the new trend of course is the nicely designed map drawn on the computer. Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, and Smart Draw give you all the tools you need. I also know a location manager who uses Microsoft PowerPoint—you will see his map in this chapter. However it is drawn, the map needs to show the key elements, including location name and address, the location manager's cell phone number, and North on the compass, and must indicate whether the map is to scale or not, give some landmarks, distances and drive times, written directions, and hospital location. Also include the information specific to moving between multiple locations, indicating Location #1, Location #2, and so on. Often a second page of written directions can be added if they're too long to include on the map. Very important: do not include the location phone numbers on the map; you want lost crew members to call you and not bother the owners of the location with their frantic phone calls.

In addition to maps, the location manager is responsible for placing directional signs en route to the location. There bright yellow signs are wired to street sign poles, light poles, or any stationary object along the road to provide a distinct visual cue to cast and crew driving to a new unknown location every day. They used to be just poster board or foam core signs that didn't hold up very well in weather or during the wear and tear of traveling on a long production. Now the standard is the classic 18" × 24" plastic yellow PVC sign with black letters identifying the name of the show or more often some acronym for the project that is less recognizable to the public. There is one large black arrow in the middle, often with the movie name or production company name on two or three sides of the arrow. These directional signs are usually made very inexpensively by a sign company, with holes drilled in the center that allow the sign to hang in any of three directions. It can point to a right turn ahead, left turn, or continue straight ahead. This lets you turn and position the sign for whatever direction drivers need. Once you have your signs in hand, post them, wiring them in place, either the night before or early in the morning a few hours before the first trucks or people will roll into the location or parking. Make sure you know what the transportation department call time is so that you can leave enough time to get the directional signs in place. Be sure to retrieve the

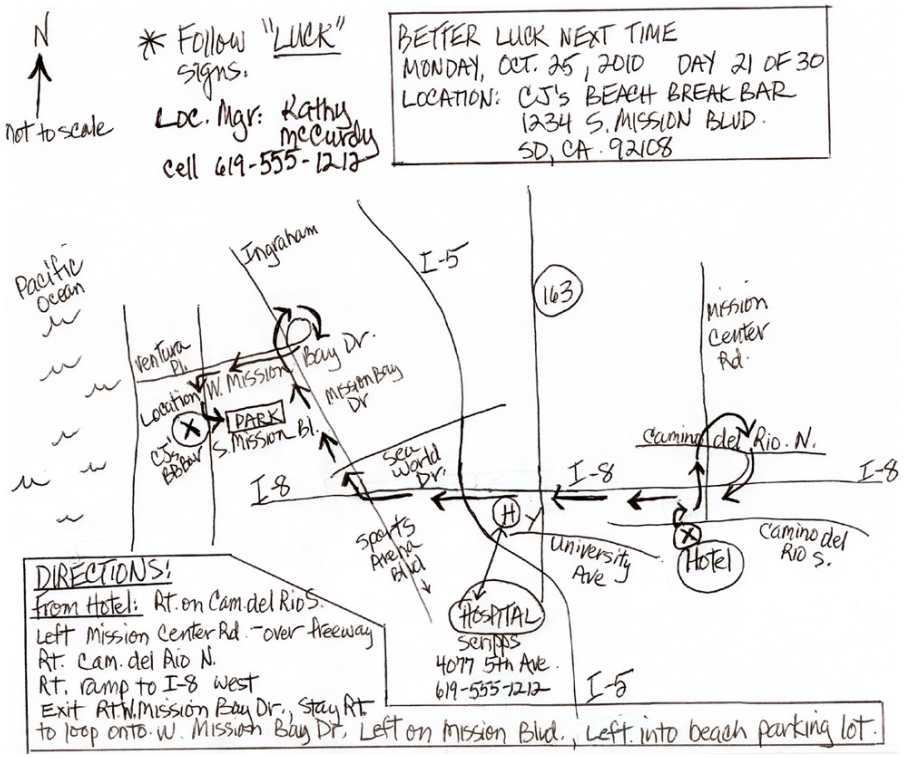


FIGURE 8.3 Hand-drawn location map to the beach bar location for Sc. 22 in *Better Luck Next Time*.

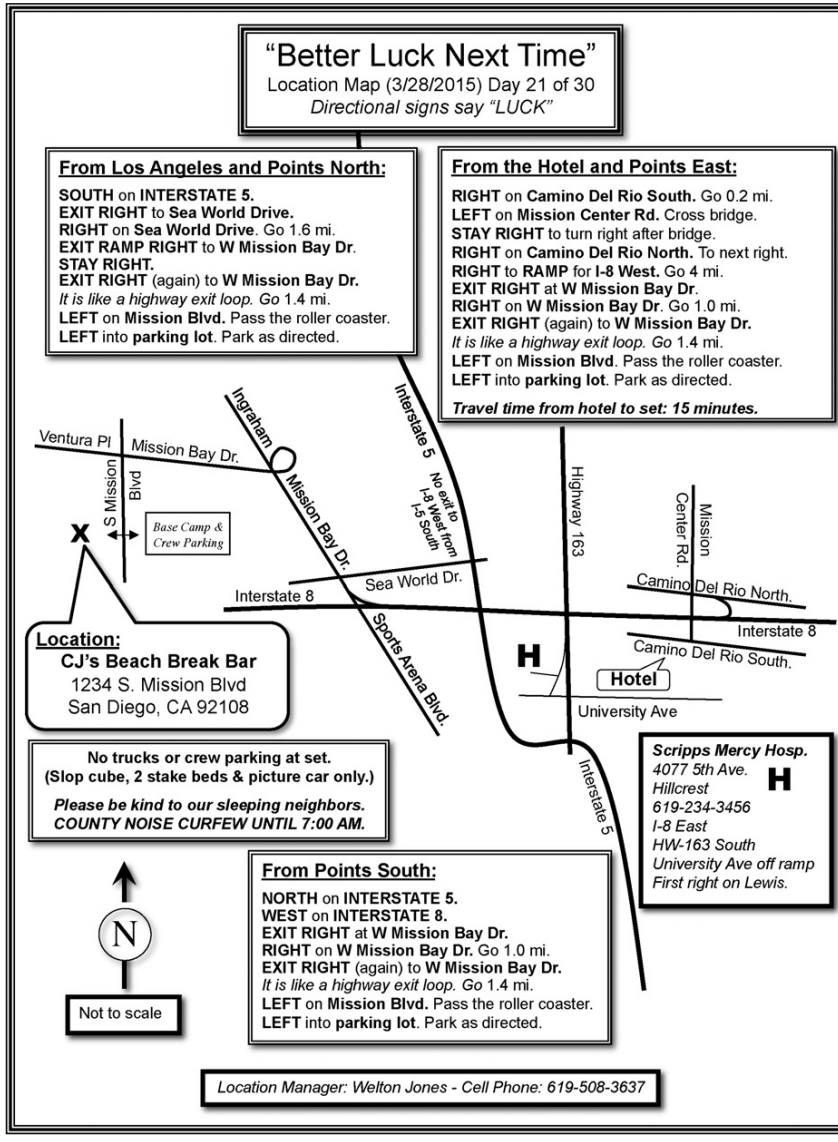


FIGURE 8.4 Computer-generated location map as a PDF created in Microsoft PowerPoint. *Reprinted with permission Welton Jones, Location Manager.*

signs at the wrap and don't leave them to become trash or someone else's problem. Besides, you want to reuse them continuously throughout the show.

Directional signs get the cast and crew to the location and to base camp; special crew parking signs direct crew to their parking area. These signs are vital to communicate to drivers that they are on the right path and to reinforce some sense of security that they are following the

FIGURE 8.5 A directional sign for base camp and parking for the movie *Almost Famous*. At the time this movie was shooting in Ocean Beach, the project did not have a "working" title and was known as the Untitled Cameron Crowe project, Untitled C.C.

FIGURE 8.6 A base camp directional sign for crew working in Michigan on *This Must Be the Place*, a Sean Penn movie filming in September 2010.

FIGURE 8.7 A specific Crew Parking directional sign used when crew vehicles park in an area separate from base camp.

directions correctly and will get to the set on time. Also, be aware that many city streets have weight limits, so big trucks will sometimes have to take an alternate route. Talk to your drivers, and if it's a big show with a Transportation Department, you will be talking to the transportation captain about the truck routes specific to weight, access, and maneuverability.

Now that you've gotten the cast and crew to the set, your job begins for real. One other aspect of your preproduction becomes critical now that you have people to tend to and take care of while at that location. You need to know what kind of local location support you have. In all your trips to scout, photograph, negotiate, and get paperwork, be sure to take the time to get familiar with the surrounding area. Retail stores and suppliers that are close to a location can help everyone when some department needs a quick run to a hardware store or when craft services needs more ice. Chances are the first thing your AD will ask of you in the morning is where the closest Starbucks is! In this business, neighborhood coffee shops are a basic necessity. Map out the closest convenience store, hardware store, big box store, home improvement store, ATMs, Dairy Queen, and all the cell phone and electronic stores. Know where all the local support services and businesses are for the last-minute requests and supplies anyone in the cast or crew might need. Maybe your director needs an hour at Dave & Buster's playing video games during lunch to relax and decompress. Your producer might be an antique hound, so be able to give him directions to the closest antique alley. Know your surroundings at every location in intimate detail. You are the expert and everyone will come to you with their questions seeking information and answers.

FIRST ONE ON THE SET

The location manager is the first person on the set. You need to be there well in advance of the rest of the crew's call time. You are the ambassador on the set. You have the keys to open all the gates and doors, or at the very least, you meet the owner or custodian a few minutes early to guarantee access. You know everyone's name at the location, you've met the neighbors, and you know what vendors are showing up early. You are the link to everything that happens in that space for the duration of the time you are there. You are the first one on the set and the last to leave. Once you've parked and made the rounds shaking hands, you need to get all the production vehicles in place and parked at the location. Most important is to get the walkie-talkies off the truck and passed out as fast as possible so that you are in communication with your key people, AD, and department heads. There is no time to waste first thing on the set; everything has to happen quickly and efficiently. It's a critical time that can set the tone for the day. You will help direct traffic to get the trucks parked and get crafts service setting up because the first thing people need is coffee and food. If you're catering a walking breakfast, you will have met the catering truck an hour before. Be the concierge: say good morning to all the crew as they arrive, get them to the caterer, or wherever they need to be. Make sure your crew is happy and in compliance with the arranged parking and all the planned details at that location. The first hour at the location can be a fast-paced, hectic time as equipment, camera, and lighting gets unloaded from the trucks and time is flying. The AD will be watching the clock and trying to get the first setup done and get the first shot of the day. You and your AD will be joined at the hip through the first hour or two at every new location.

TLC: TENDER LOVING CARE

At this point, your property owner needs a little hand holding. Usually you will start to see the panic in their eyes as the real impact of the film crew's arrival hits them. No matter how well prepared they are, they are never ready for what really happens as people, trucks, gear, and organized chaos descends on them and takes over. You need to be with them to help talk them through it. Conduct a little orientation-type private tour. Walk the owner around the set as it comes to life, showing what all the different trucks carry, how specialized the technical side of the business is requiring experts in every field, and explaining the dichotomy of organized chaos. A film set can at times look like a disorganized mess, with people running every which way—a bit like watching an ant farm! But underneath all the frantic activity lies great knowledge and understanding of what each person's job is and how important it is. It helps to bring some insights into the conversation when helping the

home or bar owner adjust to the onslaught during the load-in and setup. Once things get going, it can operate like a well oiled machine—always the hope. But it can be very chaotic and disruptive getting to that point. Almost immediately, you will be going to the owner with new questions and requests to do things that had not been discussed before. Be prepared—it just happens that way.

Get everybody into the groove and then go talk to the neighbors. Introduce yourself to the residents and businesses you are affecting, be friendly, and answer any questions people might have or invite them to come see the filming up close if they show an interest. You have to coexist with these folks, so make them feel acknowledged and keep them involved in a casual, friendly way. Of course, in no time you can have a grumpy neighbor complaining about something or anything. Listen and try to identify and address their concern. Often I found that people would come to the production company with complaints about things that had nothing to do with the shoot. I listened to many people complain about the late mail delivery or potholes in the street or bad city water when all they wanted was a friendly ear to listen to their tales of woe. Of course there will be times when production is in the wrong and you'll have to move a truck that is blocking a driveway or ask the grips to move equipment off a neighbor's lawn. You are a guest in that community, and even though you are permitted to work there, you need to play nice, keep the peace, and help people tolerate the disturbance. Once you are on a shooting set, you are fully engaged in your public relations mode. If you have police officers, fire marshals, or any other law enforcement or public safety representative on the set, meet them right away, welcome them, introduce them to the AD, discuss the day's work briefly, and get them comfortable.

Everyone you meet should know how to contact you. Crew people will be able to get you on the walkie-talkie, but offer the neighbors and other officials your cell phone number if they need you right away. A film set can be spread out over a wide area, and if you are at base camp or on the other side of the property, you want people to be able to contact you immediately if necessary. A word about how important walkie-talkies are here. Communication is essential on a film set. If you don't have the budget to rent walkie-talkies for the long term, at least spend the money to buy some simple walkie-talkies at Radio Shack or your favorite discount electronics store. Your cell phone battery will be used up fast because you will always be on the phone with the next day's location or yesterday's disaster. Extra cell phone batteries and a way to charge your phone are necessities along with adequate walkie-talkie coverage for the crew. It seems like everyone is doing their job and the shoot is off to a good start. Now you need to step away, step into your office or your car, and start prepping the rest of the shoot while looking back at what happened yesterday.

LEAP-FROGGING

Day one is the reality check for the location manager. You feel like you jumped off a cliff and actually survived. Then get ready for the ride. You've locked everything for today's location: contracts, key, parking, base camp, neighborhood letter, permit, police, catering, popups, tables and chairs, maps, and directional signs, and your phone is fully charged. But that's just one day's events. How do you manage all this chaos for the whole shoot?

Even before the first day of shooting, you will have started to leap-frog your locations. What is "leap-frogging"? How do you work forward and backward, all at the same time, all the while knowing your work is never done? The details of on-location filming can be all-consuming and neverending until the day you pack up your office, turn in your petty cash envelope, and say goodbye to the POC (production office coordinator). Once your current day's location is settled in and the cameras are rolling, do two things: look back at the previous location to make sure all is well and people are happy. And second, jump ahead to the next day. Often you will jump ahead two or three days on the schedule to guarantee everything is settled and ready for the circus to show up. You become a master juggler, keeping many balls in the air. While you are on today's set making sure all is gong well, you will be on the phone with yesterday's homeowner making sure all the furniture is back in place and the gardener is coming to replant the trampled impatiens. Then you will be checking in with the Art Department to confirm the swing gang is at day 5's location painting so props and set dressing can move in on day 4. Then you'll call to confirm the hotel accommodations for the family you will have to move out for days 10 through 15 while you film nights in the house. And on and on it goes. Scout, prep, plan, shoot, restore, shake hands, send a thank-you gift, and start all over again for the next day's location. You will do this over and over simultaneously at multiple locations until your job is finished and you move onto the next show. But the detail never ends.

Finalizing the plans and the work to be done amongst all your locations can't always take place over the phone. There are times you will need to leave the set. There will be contracts to sign, and you might have to drive around looking for a better base camp or need to do a walk-through at a location from last week to have the owner sign off.

Many times you will get everything under control for the day and then get in your car and take off to finalize the rest of the shoot. That means you are going to break the first rule of the location manager; never leave the set. Yes, that is the ideal situation. More than anything, you want to be able to be on the set keeping it running smoothly. You are the point person and you should know every detail and every person involved with making that day's work flow. But it can't always be that

way. So how do you accomplish this when you can't be in two places at once?

WHY PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS ARE IMPORTANT

Who can you turn to for help? The Location Department is often the most overlooked, unrecognized, and understaffed. Often the misperception is that once you find the location, the job is over. Not at all—actually, far from it. The heart of the location manager's work is the day of the shoot, every day on the set, taking care of all the little anomalies that pop up to test you. Your PAs (production assistants) are your biggest resource. Make sure you have adequate PAs with some onset experience and capability. Your PAs are often the first line of defense—the first representatives of the production company that most strangers will meet. They are an all-important public relations element in your immediate area. Teach them the all-important basics of interacting with the public, who are everyday people who don't know the business and don't understand the unique demands that come with movie making. Make sure they have a smile on their face and they greet people in a friendly informative way. You want them to present themselves with confidence and kindness and make sure they know enough about the complexities of shooting on location to be able to answer questions.

Anyone dealing with the public should be able to exhibit graciousness and sensitivity. It's your PAs who will be standing on the corner stopping pedestrians from walking through the scene. You don't want someone who throws their arms up, caustically shouts, "Stop! You can't go through here!" and acts the bully. While everyone on the set has to be strong and confident, you can do that more readily with information and conversation than with threatening behavior. A confrontational attitude breeds more antagonism and creates more resistance. Leading with an authoritarian attitude in this situation more often than not leads to confrontation.

Of course, there may come a point where you must stop a person because they would be violating your permitted work or putting themselves in danger. But most of the time, you and your PAs are actively involved in face-to-face, friendly dialog with people. You must teach your PAs how to engage people. Of course you have to ask people to stop and hold during the roll, but go beyond that by telling them some of the details, engage them with trivia about the movie, why you picked that location, how lovely their neighborhood is, and so on. Something like this sample script can work wonders: "Sir, can you stop and stand here by me for a minute? We're filming a scene for a movie and it will only be two or three minutes for us to film this scene. It's just a conversation between this couple about whether they should buy a new car or not. And we can't have anyone but the actors seen in the background.

I know it's an imposition, but it will only be a couple of minutes. Have you ever had anything film in this neighborhood before?" This kind of active, animated conversation usually uses up the time you've been asking them to hold, or at least entertains and engages the passerby.

Be genuine and be excited about what you're doing and tell them about what the scene involves. Teach your PAs by example and request those who are outgoing, talkative, and unafraid to approach a total stranger. It's your PAs who will be answering questions about what you are shooting and why you are shooting there. A friendly invitation to talk about the project you are shooting will do so much more than creating verbal roadblocks or coming from a harsh place and shouting orders at people. People are honestly curious and interested, so take the time to give them a glimpse of behind the scenes. An interesting story about why that exact location was selected or how hard it was to find a place to park the trucks can work wonders and win people over. Your PAs are your most valuable resource out on the street. Teach them the important parts of the location job: what it means in the big picture and how important they are in managing a set.

Now that your PAs are up to speed, you will be leaving the set to finish your job as location manager. Never leave the set without notifying production; that usually means you go directly to your AD and let him or her know that you're leaving the set and when you expect to return. If there are complex scenes coming up while you are gone, review them with your AD and reassure him or her that you've briefed your location PA, who's on top of things. Don't leave the set before or during any sensitive or complex shooting. Plan your offset work to happen during the scenes that are relatively simple, uncomplicated, and safe. The odds are better in that situation that things will go smoothly while you are away. If you can send your PAs out to pick up paperwork or deliver a check, take advantage of that so you can be on the set. It is the most efficient and desirable mode for a location manager.

TROUBLESHOOTING ON THE SET

You will always be troubleshooting some situation or new development during the shoot day and that will keep you on your toes. Situations will arise quickly, plans will change, and unexpected elements will come into play to disrupt your peaceful smooth-running shooting set. Here are the top ten rules for managing the set:

- Be on the set at all times.
- Communicate clearly and in a nonthreatening way.
- Use your diplomatic skills.
- Kill them with kindness—smile.
- Remain calm, never panic.
- Maintain clear thinking, think it through.

- Always look at the big picture.
- Ask for help.
- Be a friend but be the boss when you need to be.
- Control the variables—anticipate Plan B, play out the "what ifs."

Rule number 1 is the first rule to be broken! Rarely can a location manager be on the set at all times, but it is still the goal. That means that ideally, you have an assistant or key location's person who can cover the set while you are gone or go do the running around on your behalf. Remember: you are the point person for the location; you know everything there is to know about the site, the people involved, the neighborhood, and the work you plan to do there. The whole production is at a loss if you are not there to handle things as they occur or bring the needed information to bear. Plan how you are going to cover the set and still get out and about to leap-frog and finalize the rest of the shoot's locations. I've heard location managers tell tales of leaving the set to deliver a contract and check only to be called on the phone in ten minutes and get pulled back to the set to do some damage control. The location manager keeps the set running smoothly, and that is a critical job.

You will talk to hundreds of different people throughout the course of a shoot day. Communicating clearly usually requires patience and the ability to listen. When someone comes to you with a complaint, always let the person talk about their problem before you jump in with a quick fix. I found that more times than not, if you listen to a person, let them know you hear them, and then lighten up the conversation in a good-natured way, most problems will be resolved with very little else. And sometimes that means you need to listen to them rant and sometimes even yell at you: if they are unhappy over something and it's your fault for being there, you are going to hear about it.

You Make Me Sick!

When *Tainted Blood* was filming for multiple days in one neighborhood, it was only a couple days before a resident came to me asking to move the generator. The genny was parked on the street right in front of her home, which was the house next door to where we were shooting. The generator was out of sight for the picture and was far enough away so there weren't any sound problems. But the diesel exhaust was constantly blowing into the neighbor's house, making her and her young children sick to their stomach. I couldn't argue with that. Driving behind a diesel truck on the freeway gives me the same feeling. We couldn't move the generator at that moment; we were in the middle of our morning's work and it's never easy to move a generator. It involves disconnecting the entire show's equipment from its power source and then laying new cable runs, and that does not make for happy electricians or grips. So the best I could do was offer to send her family to SeaWorld for the day so they could escape the smell of the exhaust. It worked. And the next day we did a company move to a new location, and on our return, we parked the generator in a different spot.

Complaints come in all types, shapes and sizes. It was important that I explained to the neighbor why we couldn't move the generator easily or quickly and what a great amount of work was involved in doing that. There will be times when a solution seems impossible, but you have to keep trying. Before we sent her off to SeaWorld, we hung some furnie pads off C-stands to make a buffer wall, but fumes don't travel in straight lines and it didn't help. Even with her doors and windows closed, it got pretty toxic, so we knew we had to do something about the problem. Luckily it was an easy solution and a fun one for the family next door.

All communication should be clear, friendly, and nonthreatening. You are an ambassador for the business, you are the face of this industry, and your diplomatic skills will be put to the test over and over again. Keep a smile on your face and engage whomever you are talking with in a calm, nonthreatening discourse. Invite unhappy people to come over to crafts service and get a cup of coffee. Take them behind the scenes to look around. Invite them to have lunch with you. Engage them in the work you all are doing so that they acquire a new appreciation for the real effort that comes together for that few seconds on the screen. Become a people person and be the first one to extend your hand, say hello, and offer to work together. Of course, no matter how much you smile, someone is not going to budge. After all your efforts to chat, charm, and distract the complainer, there will be times you just have to say you're sorry but there's nothing that you can do to change what has to happen for you to shoot there. Remind them that you are permitted to work there and you've made every effort to reduce the impact and keep people informed, but this is how movies are made. They may call the mayor or the newspaper or police to complain, but you are legal, so you go on with the day's shoot. This is another reason to make sure that you have permits. No one can help you if you are out there as a renegade filmmaker. If you have your permit, the police, government and permit office are going to guarantee that no one can stop you from filming. But regardless, you need to keep the peace and maintain a balance at the location.

There can still come a point at which good people skills and winning smiles don't get you anywhere. Remain calm at all costs. Don't panic. Take the time to think through the problem. Act as quickly as you can.

They're Shutting Us Down!

A movie was planning a major stunt on the docks of the San Diego Port's 10th Avenue Marine Terminal. It involved a high-speed car chase, a struggle in the car in which at midpoint the hostage jumps from the car and into the bay as the limo crashes and explodes into a 60-foot fireball. The location manager was ready, and all the jurisdictions and agencies were notified along

(*Continued*)

They're Shutting Us Down! (Continued)

with nearby city police departments, media, and the harbor police. The day of the shoot, as the crew was arriving for a 3:00 p.m. call time, the location manager noticed two armed, uniformed men walking the length of the warehouse coming right to her. It was the Coast Guard, and they were there to shut them down. Though the Location Manager had notified the Coast Guard as requested by the Chief Wharfinger, the information about the shoot didn't get to the right people for several days. And when the right people found out about the pyrotechnics, there was a problem. The 10th Avenue Terminal is a port of entry, with docks *and* a live fuel depot. That meant there was fuel running in overflow catch basins all along the length of the docks. Not a good situation for blowing up black powder and naphthalene!

The location manager said she felt herself leave her body and look down on the group from above as she realized the significance of this miscommunication. Once she started to breathe again, she got the producer and PM into the conversation where the question became what would it take to allow them to shoot the scene. A meeting was planned for 8:00 a.m. the next morning at Coast Guard Headquarters, including production, the Port District officials, and the local Film Commission. Within an hour the problem was solved, as the production company agreed to hire a hazardous materials company to come on site and fill any open or exposed areas adjacent to the fueling sites with removable foam. Any spilled fuel would be covered and blocked from access and the dock would be safe for the pyrotechnics. They didn't lose a day when shut down as they juggled the schedule and shot a day's worth of work in the warehouse all that night. Then the hazmat team plugged the access holes the next day and they shot the next night. The location manager told me she felt utter panic and wanted to run screaming from the warehouse, but she went into "zen" mode and knew instinctively that she had to remain calm and focused to fix the problem. And it worked. No time wasted pointing fingers: just figure out what do we do now to fix this.

The importance of taking the time to think things through brought results for that situation, as it usually will. What was the big picture here? Not that they were shut down, but rather what was necessary to fix it and find a way to shoot.

A great resource when up against situations on the set is knowing when to ask for help. Go to your AD if you see a situation escalating or growing beyond your control. If you need additional resources or help from another department, talk to your AD or PM on the set. There may be the rare time you do move into that frozen state of being completely overwhelmed; when this happens, get help. Ask for more PAs, a second or full-time assistant, or more time if possible. Ask for whatever you need to help you right a complex development and prevent disaster. You are a powerful department head who cares very deeply about the quality of your work and the success and integrity of the project. Let that be your mantra through the difficult times. "I am good at my job and I care about this project." The answers and solutions will come.

When *Tainted Blood* filmed the aftermath of a house fire, I distributed over 300 fliers to all houses in the neighborhood so people wouldn't be terrified seeing "smoke" and fire engines arrive that night. The neighbors turned out in record numbers to watch the filming, and it wasn't long

before I realized that I had a crowd control problem on my hands. Although I had taped off an area for the viewing public, the numbers exceeded the space and started to spill out into the shot and onto other people's property. I called the police department film liaison and asked him to send more officers to help keep people in check. He couldn't assign more officers at the last minute, but he sent his on-duty patrol officers in the area to the location to help establish a stronger presence and wrangle the friendly natives to a safe and controlled area. There were some trampled flowerbeds, but everyone had a blast and went home with a smile on their face. We replanted the flowers and everyone was happy. Asking for help is a strength and shows that you understand the scope of your job and how to do it well.

The location manager is a department head, and as much as you want to be friends with everyone, there are times when you need to be the boss. Within the context of troubleshooting, keeping the peace can apply to cast and crew as well as the public and the neighbors. How do you keep the peace and keep everyone happy? You probably don't. But you try your hardest, and when it doesn't work out, let it go, and don't take it personally. There will be times as a department head that the grips or the caterer or the transportation captain will be mad at you. You've done your best to get the trucks as close as you can to the location, but you still didn't meet their expectations. So you do your best to keep the peace even when the day is filled with complaints and there's nothing you can do about it. Sometimes you have to fight for your decisions while remaining cool, calm, and professional. No name calling or temper tantrums on the set. No yelling or screaming, no threats, and no ego-driven plans for revenge. As a leader, the boss must demonstrate maturity, control, and expert skills. Never let anyone violate your agreements with property owners or the terms of the permit. You are the one to ask for anything new or extra from a location owner; that is the job of the location manager, not the job of any other crewperson. You protect your business partners and their interests. Everyone comes to you for adjustments or changes at a location. You are the boss.

To the best of your ability, control the variables but be prepared to shift gears if you have to change. You are there with the cast and crew ready to shoot because you've done a thorough job of taking care of the details. But something can change or go wrong at any moment through the day, affecting that day's work or a future day's work. This isn't unique to troubleshooting, but when things blow up in your face, you need information fast. The depth to which you plan and anticipate for each location will determine how prepared you are to deal with a new development. Every variable from garbage pickup to the neighbor's family reunion party to gardening schedules has been researched and handled before the shoot day. But according to Murphy's Law, if it can go wrong, it will! Weather changes force you to secure a location indoors as a cover

set at the last minute. Sick actors change the day's schedule, which means that you have to change locations abruptly. School buses pull up on the street with kids on a field trip right in the middle of your shot. Public works crews arrive to start repairing potholes. The house you're shooting in gets burglarized the night before—even with security onsite. All these things happened to me as a location manager. In an industry relying on absolute and total control, you will find out that lots of things can and will go wrong. Control the variables you are aware of so that normal changes don't become critical to you and your performance.

Expect changes and cultivate your ability to be flexible. Plan and anticipate, play out all the "What if?" scenarios and have remedies in mind. Your knowledge and clear thinking will serve you well. Have all your notes and files accessible to you at all times. You don't want to be stuck without a phone number to catch a property owner on the fly to try and change the date for a scheduled location shooting day. Electronic and hard-copy paper files should be in your car, office, and laptop, and in your assistant's possession, too. Keep a clear perspective on the big picture. Hundreds of small issues will arise and need your attention over the course of principal photography and after the wrap. Don't let any one small disaster undermine your good prep and detailed planning. Again, you can't take any of this personally. The barking dog that appears from out of nowhere the morning of the shoot day, the broken water main, the sudden outburst of the angry shopper—you have done all you could to prepare to shoot. No matter how hard you try to make it OK, there will still be someone who yells at you threatening to shut you down, wringing his or her hands, not content until you leave. Human beings can be fragile and you are the caretaker on the location.

At a certain point, there is nothing more for you to do. This is the reality. The crew is on the set, the camera is in position, and everyone is smiling and standing by for "last looks" from the AD. The train has left the station and you try to breathe, hoping it all goes smoothly.

THE WRAP

Just as you are the first one on the set, you are the last one to leave. Everyone waits anxiously to hear those words "That's a wrap" bellowing from the AD at the end of the day. "That's a wrap" marks the end of a shooting sequence, or more importantly, the end of the shooting day, and the mood changes in an instant. Where the morning load-in and setup seemed to take forever, the wrap appears to be able to move at breakneck speed. This can be especially taxing on the location manager because people in a hurry can become more careless. And carelessness usually results in damage to the location. I've been on sets where household items get broken, equipment gets dropped or dragged down steps,

chandeliers are damaged, walls are scraped, and landscaping takes a big hit—all during the highly energized wrap. During the course of the day, all departments should be moving things out to the trucks whenever they can; when lighting knows they don't need those instruments the rest of the day, they are wrapping and stacking. The Art Department can be taking props out to the trucks when that room is finished. So some heavy lifting can be going on during the final hours of the shoot to help shorten the wrap. But there is significant work to be done at the end of the day. Every setup takes at least an hour and a half; plan on it. And the wrap can take as long as it takes. There's no predicting. You need to be on patrol as the wrap takes place. You are there to guarantee that the property ends up looking as good as or better than it did when you arrived. You will be working with very critical eyes.

REPAIR, REPLACE, AND RESTORE

If the wrap goes quickly, you can go through the house that day with the owner and look for damage, discuss how to fix things, and get the owner to sign off right then and there. Some wraps will take longer and it will be a day or two before you get back to finalize with the owner. But always get it in writing. A simple statement that you and the owner have reviewed the location and the owner agrees that the property is in good condition can suffice. If there is expensive work to be done, that gets more complicated. Production usually wants to be finished with a property as soon as possible to eliminate any possibility of a time-consuming disagreement. If a property needs repair, a good place to start is to get an estimate from a reputable plumber, dry-wall guy, or painter for the work to be done. Then offer that amount of money to the home owner; then they sign off and the sometimes long, drawn-out process of painting and repair is in their hands and off your "to do" list. It is usually preferable to settle on an amount of money to cover the cost of repair and restoration, offer that to the owner, and get the owner to sign off. Get it in writing.

It's often a good idea to hire an outside cleaning company to come in after the wrap. If it's a commercial office building, the building management will want to bring in their cleaning crew for extra hours to put things right. Be prepared to pay for that. After days of filming in a house, it's going to look like a war zone in some ways, and hiring a company like ServPro or Maid to Serve will solve the problem. Cleaning services that specialize in cleaning and restoration, moveouts, or next-day one-time cleaning can be life savers. Again, this is where you want to make sure that you have some location budget money for making things look pretty after you wrap at a location. It's important. I've had to repair cracked floor tiles, repair torn wallpaper, and drain and clean the pool at locations. You don't want to be taken by surprise when things get damaged.

Of course there is always that particular type of restoration that falls into the location manager's hands. Remember my earlier story about picking cigarette butts off the front lawn at 2:00 a.m. using a flashlight and rubber gloves? Things like that become the job of the location manager, whether you like it or not. One of the grips on a shoot had a terrible oil leak from his pickup truck and of course left a puddle of motor oil on the street. Locations had to buy cat litter and degreaser to clean the oil off the street. Restoration can involve the most innocuous and mind-numbing elements. But you need to walk through the whole area with a keen eye looking for anything that wasn't there before production invaded that space. Sometimes crafts service leaves trash bags, which is a problem for locations when the rest of the crew is gone. Broken sprinkler heads, tire tracks across the grass, and divots in the lawn all need to be repaired. The broken gate, the broken door hinge, the missing power strip from the home theater setup—all this has to be accounted for and fixed. Do not look upon this job lightly and do not ignore the responsibility of making good on your promise. You have a contractual agreement that must be honored in good faith. Budgeting for repair and restoration will give you the financial support and confidence to know that you can be responsible and true to your word.

NEVER BURN A LOCATION

Any time a project leaves a location without fixing the hole in the ceiling or putting the screen door back on the hinges, it hurts the next person who wants to film there and mars the reputation of this business—of your business. Regardless of the size or scope of the work or the experience of the crew, if a location and the owner are not treated well and are not happy when it's over, there is a black mark against filmmakers that mars our industry. A bad experience for a property owner will live on by word of mouth for a long time and cause criticism and negative comments about this industry and the people in it. Any bad attitude, exploitation, negligence, or irresponsibility toward a location tarnishes our work and makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the next project to go into that property, all because of one bad experience. That is known as "burning a location." Someone went in and trashed and "burned" the place, did not keep their word, took advantage, left damage and mayhem in their wake, and disappeared. There's a very good chance that no one will ever be able to film at that location again. It could affect an entire street, neighborhood, or city, depending on how badly the evil filmmakers behaved. The term "burned" relates of course to any bad relationship; I got burned by an old boyfriend, my sister burned me on my Halloween costume, or I got burned where I used to work when I was overlooked for a promotion. It's a strong colloquial expression of hurt and abuse in our culture. It can have far-reaching effects when an

owner feels that way about a filming experience. This relates directly to the casual approach some new filmmakers take when going out on location. This is not a casual relationship; it is a serious business that brings with it great opportunity and great responsibility.

It's easy to burn a location if you adhere to the mystique of guerilla filmmaking. If you don't go through the permit process and don't prepare a community, street, or location prior to filming, there's bound to be hard feelings. Someone is going to feel as if they've been taken advantage of, which leads to bad feelings toward the group representing the business of filmmaking. As a location scout, I spent a lot of time doing damage control when I would approach a home or retailer, only to have them snap my head off that they'd never let anything film there because the last group was a bunch of hooligans! "Shoot and skip" was the term I came up with to describe those projects that jumped in to shoot and then skipped town (or the location) without doing anything they promised. Some locations never received the fee they were promised and then ended up with broken windows, trash, and angry neighbors. I agree it wasn't worth it for them; that was my challenge to rearrange the thinking and make them feel comfortable enough to try again with a group of professionals who will come through in the end. Bad behavior out on location is damaging and unprofessional. Unfortunately, it happens more than I like to acknowledge. Do your best to change that. You can make a difference by treating people as you would like to be treated. And treat other's property with respect and care. When you are shooting on location, you leave your mark on that place and those people. And you leave your face and name attached to the experience. Perform as a sincere and professional filmmaker who knows how important every aspect of this process is to the success of the whole.

THANK-YOU NOTES AND GIFT BASKETS

There are all kinds of ways to let your location owners know how much you appreciate them and their welcoming attitude toward filmmaking. No one is going to get rich having their property used as a location. So there are many more reasons for a homeowner to say yes to filming, and it's nice to acknowledge that. It takes a special person to say "yes" to filming. Many people find it interesting and exciting to be part of something so different. Most people want to take advantage of the opportunity to see the real behind-the-scenes work on a film. And many people want to support local people, local jobs, and help the local economy develop new markets and new industry. Whatever the reason they said "yes" to your film request, your property owners deserve a thank-you. A note to the neighbors can go a long way to keeping that community film-friendly. A gift of some kind, a wine and cheese basket, or tickets to the symphony are all nice ways to say thanks for doing business with

you. As you get to know some of these people on a deeper basis, you will learn about their personal likes, hobbies, and interests. That opens the door for customizing a thank-you gift special to each one.

A nice way to follow up is to stay in touch and let your location owners know the air date of the show if a TV project and the opening date for movies with theatrical releases. If possible, get them some free passes to an early screening. When *Traffic* wrapped in La Jolla, I was able to send a thank-you letter to the entire neighborhood with a movie pass for a current release. I actually heard back from several people that they really appreciated that gesture. When *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* opened in local theaters, the Film Commission was able to get 300 passes, which we hand-delivered to the neighbors closest to the location. The set was a military bunker that hosted some serious firepower for a night of "shooting" while filming, and many of the residents were military families with young children who were excited to see the movie that shot in their backyard.

There are many ways to give back to a neighborhood and say "thank you." Some production companies have made donations to community Little League fields or Girls and Boys Clubs. When you have some room in the budget, you can make a nice impression by putting something permanent in place in a neighborhood that has your name on it and speaks well of the production world. Be gracious and say thanks. It can help you get a lot of mileage from a good experience and help this business maintain a good reputation.

WHY YOU NEED A LOCATION MANAGER

I'm certain by now you are convinced the location manager job is a rigorous, detail-oriented, public relations extravaganza. Ironic as it may sound, I have worked with many low-budget films on which the producer felt—no, actually believed wholeheartedly—that the first place to cut corners is in the location department. This takes us back to one of the earlier chapters and perhaps my driving passion for putting this all on paper. There must be one consistent point person who is in possession of all the details specific to your each and every location. Location shooting requires cohesiveness. You must have that one person who provides all the continuity of a location department. The reliability and security of your shoot depends on this. Otherwise, you are throwing darts at the wall and hoping they land someplace with helpful information. It is the unknown world of the location manager that makes other production people think that their project can do without that department head. Would a producer ever consider shooting without another department head's leadership and ability? Not likely. Your locations are important to your story development and to the visual success of your film. Locations are people's things that require someone's personal

attention and care. Locations deserve the information, outreach, and preparation to be able to tolerate the disruption filming brings to a place. Your days of principal photography demand that the best person is taking care of your locations, and for good reasons.

Location Managers Make You Look Good

Location Managers are a cost-effective way of controlling your budget. We allow you the most options in setting your schedule. And when that schedule changes (and we know that never happens), we keep you shooting with the least amount of headaches. We handle all the little details that keep the production on time and on budget. Can you imagine shooting a car chase without a location manager? No street, no police, no permit, and ultimately *no filming*. By acting as a liaison between all the entities required to be legal, we take care of the business side of things so that you can capture the most on film. We are the public face of the production. We make you look good.

Reprinted with permission Dennis Williams, Location Manager.

The most important thing to remember is that someone on your project is going to do the work regardless of whether they have the title. Put one person in charge to guarantee that you have the continuity of information and the strength of personal relationships to make things happen. If you can't hire a location manager, plan to hire one on your next show. And use these guidelines to mange and monitor this shoot, regardless of whomever wears the hats of location scout and location manager.

Responsibilities of the Location Manager

In addition to providing creative input, the location manager is responsible for the day-to-day management of locations and generally will be called upon to do any of the following on behalf of production:

- Meet with neighbors and merchants directly affected by prep, shoot, or wrap activities.
- Negotiate the location fees, contracts, and associated paperwork.
- Coordinate legal issues with company attorneys.
- Request filming permits with all pertinent authorities, listing filming activities in detail.
- Call in notification of special effects and extended hours. Notify neighbors and gather signatures as required.
- Schedule police, fire safety officers, and security personnel.
- Coordinate with company safety department and supervise environmental clearance and studies in an expedited manner.
- Design and implement traffic plans and street closures.
- Work closely with Transportation Department to ensure that parking arrangements meet both production and neighborhood needs.
- Prepare directional signage and maps.
- Act as liaison between the public and the shooting crew.

Courtesy Location Managers Guild of America (LMGA), http://locationmanagers.org.

During the Shoot and Wrap, Remember to:

1. Use the Location Shoot Checklist to inventory everything you need at each location (see the sample for Sc. 22, Pacific Beach Bar).
2. Provide clear and accurate maps to the location.
3. Provide easy-to-see directional arrow signs at intersections and along the driving route to the location.
4. Know what location support you have nearby, such as Starbucks, hardware store, and so on.
5. Be the first on the set to direct people and parking and get everyone settled in.
6. Take care of your property owner. It can be shocking to watch, so be ready with a little tender loving care and hand holding.
7. Meet the neighbors and field problems and complaints. Make everyone happy.
8. "Leap-frogging" allows you to prep and finalize locations in the future while reconciling locations from the past.
9. PAs are your important ambassadors on the set. Train them as warm representatives of the production company and the industry.
10. Learn the ten rules of troubleshooting—how to manage the set.
11. The wrap requires your supervision.
12. Repair, replace, and restore the property to its original condition. Every little thing matters.
13. Never "burn" a location. Never abuse, abandon, or neglect a location. Attention and care are required to guarantee filming is a good experience for the owner.
14. Location owners deserve thank-you notes and gift baskets.
15. Hire a location manager.

Chapter | nine

Film Commissions and Location Incentives

CHAPTER OUTLINE

There's never enough time, light, or money.

An old film cliché

Movie making is no easy task. On the outside it appears glitzy, glamorous, and intriguing. In reality, it feels like a circle of hell with painfully long days spent agonizing over the grueling logistics of on-location shooting! It may be formulaic and predictable in some ways, but it's hard, hard work. Knowing from the very beginning that "there's never enough time, light, or money," every filmmaker wants to make the best movie possible and get the most bang for their buck. Even the most experienced big-budget movie crew can use all the help they can get. The AFCI is here to help. The Association of Film Commissioners International is a well-known worldwide association whose members will be there to assist, inform, and walk you through the maze of government bureaucracy and permit requirements, while promoting all the local resources available to you, wherever you shoot. The AFCI "offers global resources for global production." There are more than 300 AFCI Member Film Commissions

Shoot on Location.

worldwide, covering almost every continent. With those numbers, they can rightfully claim that wherever you go with your next production, you can usually find a Film Commission to help you. I'm all for that! And you should take full advantage of the assistance and services offered by your local Film Commission wherever you are.

The AFCI Mission

The Association of Film Commissioners International (AFCI) is the official professional organization for film commissioners who assist film, television and video production throughout the world. It is a non-profit educational association whose members serve as city, county, state, regional, provincial or national film commissioners for their respective governmental jurisdictions.

www.afci.org

AFCI Film Commission member offices function under the authority, endorsement, or sanction of their local government. That means they are government-funded, which prevents any kind of conflict of interest from outside companies or from within their operations as nonprofit organizations. All members must meet AFCI qualifications and training requirements as specified by the AFCI. This guarantees a level of industry knowledge and professional performance. When you call the Film Commission, they will know what you need and how to make it happen. The primary role of every Film Commission is to attract film projects to their area. It's about promoting the region as a filming destination and benefiting from the economic development that accompanies any TV show, movie, or music video crew when they come to town. It's about attracting business to the area—business that employs local people, puts people in hotel rooms, and uses local goods and services while working as a temporary mobile business over a few days or a few months. Film Commissions know their area and their geography and prize themselves on how well informed they are about their particular region. Some Film Commissions provide a one-stop-shop approach and actually function as the permit office, too. But not all Film Commissions are permit offices. If not, they will still be able to put you in touch with the correct governmental entity or permit office in any local jurisdiction to start the permit process. They can provide a wealth of information and they are only a phone call or email away.

From San Diego to Sudan, Brazil, and South Korea, 340 Film Commission offices offer a level of consistency in what they deliver because of the membership by-laws that guide and govern the structure and services within each office. These things will always be the same among Film Commissions—wherever you call. An AFCI Film Commission must provide these basic core services at no cost to the producer—these are free services.

AFCI FILM COMMISSION FREE SERVICES

AFCI members provide location scouting assistance to producers. Most often this means that Film Commissions host a location library that you can access and look through to help you target specific locations in your script. Most location libraries are digital and live on the website, but some offices still have physical libraries with photographs mounted in file folders or binders. This is a rich resource, especially for a producer new to the area trying to get acclimated and learn her way around town. Some Film Commissions will actually have a staff person who will drive you around and scout your locations with you to save time and hopefully convince you to shoot there. There's nothing better than spending the day in a car with a captive audience (a producer) spinning the tale of all the great things the Film Commission can do for your project!

Second on the list of no fee services is that all Film Commissions must offer liaison services with industry facilities and services in the area. The Film Commission will be your concierge to the local industry, introducing you to its sound stages, crews, equipment rental companies, vendors, and service providers who depend on the Film Commission to attract business. They understand that the more local people and services an incoming producer can find locally, the more money he or she saves to put back on the screen. Most Film Commissions provide a directory with complete listings of experienced experts in every department and every phase of production. These resource directories will list a wealth of local companies covering everything from hotels to dry cleaners to dry ice. Some Film Commissions will post crew calls or casting calls on their websites to help develop local interest. This liaison service can be expanded in any number of unique ways, depending on what your project needs and what the Film Commission has to offer.

Third, Film Commissions must offer "augmented research." The staff must be prepared to go above and beyond the simple "yes" or "no" in response to a film inquiry. Increased, extensive research into possible locations or unheard of geographical elements is what the Film Commission has to deliver. When working at the San Diego Film Commission, I regularly got calls that required me to do some serious outreach in the county to find spelunking caves, old quonset huts, or "futuristic" structures in the middle of nowhere. If I didn't have those locations in the Reel Scout™ location library or if I'd never heard of local spelunkers exploring San Diego County, then I had to make the calls, track down the locations, and go out to photograph them for the producer. If someone called with a new film request for something we'd never been asked for before, the Film Commission would do the research to find out what exactly was needed to make that film request happen.

You Want to Do What!?

San Diego hosted two seasons of *The Invisible Man* for the SyFy (formerly Sci-Fi) Channel, which just by the name alone lets you know there were going to be location and production challenges unique to this show. But we weren't quite ready for production's call to ask if they could have an actor/stunt man jump off the Coronado Bay Bridge. This stunt seemed impossible at first for obvious reasons like safety, impact on normal bridge traffic, and the fact that the bridge is the major artery onto a military base! But because of the Film Commission's commitment to creative problem solving through greater, expansive research, the director of the Television Division went full speed ahead to figure out how to make it happen. Luckily, there was enough lead time to bring the more than 15 different authorities, including governments, government agencies, environmental organizations, and watchdog groups to the table. The shoot went forward only after multiple meetings and tremendous community outreach to prepare the public for the disruption and the actual sight of an actor going off the bridge (with halter and bungee cord to break his fall just before he hit the water). The permit required a sign-off from the City of San Diego, San Diego Police Department, City of Coronado, State of California, California Highway Patrol, CalTrans, San Diego Unified Port District, Harbor Police, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Navy, FAA, EPA, U.S. Fish and Game, National Wildlife Federation, Water Quality Control, and others that I don't even recall. This is the type of film request for which one phone call becomes a hundred phone calls. That's what I call "augmented research."

The fourth free service a Film Commission offers is to act as liaison to and among the community, production companies, and government. This extends the work of the Film Commission into the very important role of public relations, government relations, and community outreach. No filmmaker wants to try to do it on their own without a partner and spokesperson representing them and their business interests to the local community and government. This business collaboration is essential. The Film Commission gets the positive message out to town councils, business improvement districts, and area governments. Filming on any scale creates disruption and intrusion, and it is often very difficult for local residents and retailers to see any value in what appears to be a hostile take-over by a film crew. The Film Commission brings the positive spin and the appropriate sound bytes to the local scene to help educate people to see the economic benefits of this short-term invasion. Once the Film Commission partners with the production company to create good press and good media relations, the public becomes better informed. Seeing the big picture reality that this is good for business can help people warm up and tolerate what the crews need to do in their neighborhoods. Film Commissions are important partners in connecting with local government and cutting through the red tape. Helping government understand that film requests need to be exempt from most laws and ordinances is a big role of the Film Commission. This outreach and engagement by the Film Commission helps maintain a film-friendly attitude throughout the community and creates long-term good relations with the different government agencies.

MOVIE-INDUCED TOURISM IS THE BONUS

As stated on the AFCI website, "The primary responsibility is to attract films and video production to their area in order to accrue locally-realized benefits from hiring local crews and talent, renting local equipment, using hotel rooms, rental cars, catering services, or any number of goods and services supplied on location" (http://www.afci.org/about/history.htm). But it also goes on to say that although Film Commissions attract movie-making business, they also attract visitors. Tourism generated on the heels of popular movies and TV shows is a real contributor to the expansion of an area's desirability as a tourist destination. "Film scenes at a particular location are in themselves 'soft-sell' vehicles that also promote that location as a desirable site for future tourism and industry." Movie-induced tourism has been credited as an economic boon in some of the most unexpected areas due to successful movies shot there ranging from *The Sound of Music* to *Field of Dreams* and *Clerks*. Specialized Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) have sprung up to cater to this new form of cultural tourism and bring travelers to visit their favorite movie locations. The megahit movie *Top Gun* was shot in 1985, but its San Diego–based film locations are still popular sites for tourists today. And the Kansas City Bar-B-Q still celebrates its fame as the site of the "sleazy bar scene" filmed in *Top Gun*, complete with that credit blazoned across the side of the building. Film Commissions are quick to see the expanded marketing opportunity when high-profile films or fan club–based TV shows shoot in their area.

WHAT IF YOU'RE ON A SMALL, LOW-BUDGET PROJECT?

With all that being said, how will Film Commissions respond to student filmmakers or budget-challenged TV pilots and micro-budget indie filmmakers? You won't necessarily be bringing tons of money into the local economy. Needless to say, each Film Commission has its own policy toward student, noncommercial, or micro-budget film projects that will affect all of you reading this book and making a movie for the first time. Every Film Commission will have its own criteria to qualify a film project, but there is bound to be some level of assistance with location scouting, research, and recommendations for local resources whatever the size of your project. Although Film Commissions don't charge for anything they do, the government or permit office they refer you to might charge something for permits, administrative fees, or staff time required to process the permit. Generally speaking, this is the difference between Film Commissions and permit offices.

Kentucky Film Office There for Every Project

Film Commissions are not allowed to charge for their services, and as M. Todd Cassidy from the Kentucky Film Commission commented, "The Kentucky film office works hard to make the filming experience in Kentucky very pleasant for the production companies. This is true for large budget studio and small budget independent films. Not only do we not charge a lot of money for our services, they are absolutely free of charge. We work with students as we would with any other production. There are no special requirements."

Reprinted with permission of M. Todd Cassidy, Kentucky Film Commission.

So expect free Film Commission services while the permit office creates its own fee schedule and sometimes, in some places, offers free permits and often free public locations. Do your research and find the right location to fit the budget, logistical demands, and scope of your project.

Film Commissions take on a different configuration in every city, state, province, or country. Some Film Commissions are housed in a mayor's office or within the governmental EDC (Economic Development Corporation). Others are found in Chambers of Commerce, with a focus on supporting and building local business. Some cities think the best fit is CVBs (Convention and Visitors' Bureaus) because of the tourism tie to films and TV shows. For some offices, being the Film Commission is only one of many multitasking jobs that need to be handled each and every day. And some Film Commission positions are government-appointed positions, which brings an extra layer of politics into the mix. So you might bump up against a wide range of involvement from person to person and office to office. In any business, there will always be some leaders who rise to the top and others who are content with the status quo. The same may be true among Film Commissions, but the good news is that there are 340 dedicated Film Commissioners willing and waiting to take your call. Ray Arthur, who worked with the Ridgecrest Film Commission for 15 years and is currently with Fresno Film Commission, says, "I look at every, *every* project with one initial question: How do I make this work?" That's the kind of attitude and response Film Commissions are famous for delivering.

It's important to return to the one significant distinction among Film Commissions. Though all Film Commissions' primary purpose is to promote their region as a filming destination and market to attract incoming productions, not all Film Commissions are permit offices. All Film Commissions will be a liaison to the region's governments and all Film Commissions will refer you to and liaison with the appropriate permit offices. The one additional function for a few Film Commissions is to actually issue the permits, too. The San Diego Film Commission is one such office. Many state Film Commissions issue permits for state properties. So be sure to do your research and ask all the right questions.

The permit process when housed in any Film Commission exists outside of the AFCI by-laws and is not a required function in order to be a member of AFCI. Those four core services already discussed are the required activities of any AFCI Film Commission. Be sure you know what your Film Commission can do for you when you make that first call.

Film Commission Standard Services

The film commission must provide full film liaison and location services and location scouting upon request to the qualified imported and indigenous production community. The film commission must provide service and support from the initial contact to the close of production, including on-call problem solving. In providing its services, the film commission should work with and be supportive of the local production community, particularly in the areas of information and referral services.

AFCI (http://www.afci.org).

Along with the valuable film commission services that come with shooting on location, many AFCI members offer financial and tax incentives. These summaries are available on the website specifically as incentives worldwide and in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America, and Oceania.

LOCATIONS AROUND THE WORLD

Now that you know all the services a Film Commission can provide, you might be thinking of all the exotic places in the world where you would like to shoot. The AFCI website provides a location inquiry service via which you can send your location request to any or all of the membership. The links to all the 340 members will take you to websites and photo tours that will inspire you to write your next script—if you have travel in your budget! The best way to introduce the most popular locales for filming is to share the *P3 Update Magazine* article, "The World's Top 10 Locations in 2009."

The World's Top 10 Locations

The world is the filmmaker's oyster and where to crack the shell is one of the most important decisions in production. Tax incentives, infrastructure, crew base and popularity are all contributing factors in the location decision-making process. Dama Claire, production executive at the Incentives Office, lends her expertise to P3 for the countdown, in no particular order, of the top 10 locations in the world.

Louisiana

Known as the filming hot spot and for its flavorful Cajun food, Louisiana has spiced things up with an increased transferable tax credit of 30 percent with an additional 5 percent for

(*Continued*)

The World's Top 10 Locations (Continued)

local hires. And if that's not fulfilling enough, more incentives can be found in Jefferson Parish and in the Shreveport/Bossier area. Jennifer Day, Director of the New Orleans Office of Film and Video, is excited to report that New Orleans is experiencing their busiest fall schedule (2009) to date. "It means that we will hit our record number of major projects to shoot in one year," she celebrates. "In 2008, we hosted 21 major projects—projects with budgets of $300,000 or more—and for 2009, we've seen 21 again in the midst of a recession."

New Mexico

New Mexico offers a 25 percent rebate on all expenditures plus an interest-free film investment loan of up to $15 million. Combined with the state's skilled crew base and favorable shooting weather, it's obvious why this southwestern contender is still holding on strong to the top 10. New Mexico has hosted some massive blockbusters, such as the *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, but productions of all sizes are encouraged to shoot in New Mexico.

Michigan

Michigan's enormous refundable tax credit of up to 42 percent is keeping the state in the spotlight. The Detroit area offers cultural attractions, urban, downtown and upscale locations, as well as sports arenas and riverfront properties. "New studios are planned for Pontiac and the Detroit area to make year-round filming more convenient," says Claire. Claire adds that Michigan's tax program requires production companies to file state tax returns after a third-party CPA audit. "Barb Evers, a partner in the audit firm Schellenberg & Ever, reports that all her clients' Michigan films filed in 2008 were paid on time," she says. "[That's] good news for this new Midwestern Hollywood hub."

Georgia

Peaches aren't the only thing Georgia is known for, now that they offer a transferable tax credit of up to 30 percent along with the great crew and developing states. "Atlanta can double for many cities, and its good weather and digital media credit are also attracting new business," says Claire. The Incentives Office is opening their latest brand there. "Georgia is in the film business for the long run, and we can help monetize the Georgia tax credits easily. Business for 2009 is expected to exceed $500 million."

New York

In addition to an enormous crew base, New York offers a 30 percent, below-the-line refundable tax credit. The incentive requires that 75 percent of filming take place on New York's qualified stages, which isn't difficult with the many state-of-the-art facilities.

Claire does note that the New York City program, which provided an additional 5 percent, is on hiatus due to a lack of funding.

Canada

Canada has been very successful at winning over production business for a long time, which is why crew depth and infrastructure are so plentiful. The Federal Film or Video Production Services Tax Credit of 16 percent is increased when combined with the generous provincial credits that add up to over 60 percent in some cases. Alberta's film development program contributes up to 29 percent of all eligible expenses, which calculates to a 53 percent labor-based tax credit. British Columbia has a base tax credit of 25 percent of accredited qualified labor expenditures, a regional tax credit of six percent and a Digital Animation or Visual Effects credit of 15 percent. Saskatchewan offers up to 55 percent for eligible labor and Manitoba offers up to 65 percent in tax credits on local qualified labor.

Australia

Australia offers a 15 percent rebate for qualifying spend and a 20 percent rebate for television production. Additionally, films with Australian content have a tax offset of 40 percent. Local incentives are also available in various regions and Tasmania. The country offers a good crew base and major stages in Sydney, Melbourne, and Gold Coast, plus a favorable return rate.

New Zealand

The Kiwis are offering a 15 percent rebate of qualified spend for projects of at least NZ$15 million that descend on either of the two beautiful islands. Qualifying Post Digital and Visual-effects (PDV) incentives are included and they offer local Screen Production grants of 40 percent for certain products. "New Zealand also participates with co-productions with key countries like the UK," says Claire. "With its growing crew base and outstanding effects house, plus good exchange rate, New Zealand has been attracting more production."

United Kingdom

There's been a lot of talk about the UK's rebate program, which allows productions to earn a payable cash rebate of up to 25 percent of qualified UK film spend and a 20 percent rebate on films over L40 million. The UK also has an array of co-production treaties, which allow European countries to qualify for greater incentives. With its new 20 to 25 percent tax rebate program, the UK is once again competitive with other locations enjoying some major films. The UK has a depth of trained artisans and top stages which boast backlots and plenty of room.

France

France is quickly climbing up the popularity ladder with its 20 percent rebate. France currently features over 80 studios and postproduction facilities, some which feature full-CGI animations. The region also offers 30,000 crewmembers that speak English, Japanese, and Chinese, and can accommodate several feature films simultaneously. According to Olivier-Rene Veillon, director of Commission du Film d'Ile-de-France, the country welcomes 200 features per year and currently there is great interest generated from the Indian and Chinese markets. Much of the heavy filming traffic occurs in "the golden triangle," an area that encompasses the Champs-Élysées, the Eiffel Tower, and the Arc de Triomphe.

Locations on the Rise

California this year (2009) announced the California Film and Television Tax Credit Program, which offers a 20 percent tax credit to feature film production between $1 and $75 million and a 25 percent credit to independent films with budgets ranging from $1 to $10 million.

Utah just announced the passing of the Senate Bill 14, which increased the state's incentives to 20 percent in the form of a tax credit or cash rebate. To accommodate larger production, the bill eliminated the $500,000 cap on the incentives.

Kentucky is also jockeying for a lead in the race for industry attractions. A new 20 percent refundable income tax credit was announced while the state still offers a refund on its 6 percent sales tax on all production expenditures.

While the **United States Virgin Islands** await the completion of proposed financial incentives, the film office staff continues to bring in productions based on an array of alternative incentives.

While incentives, crew depth and infrastructure play a major role in this list of top worldwide locations, the logistics are only part of the big picture of filmmaking.

Jennifer Marino
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FILM INCENTIVES ABOUND AROUND THE WORLD

As demonstrated in that list of the top ten locations in the world, it's all about the money. Once incentives became the new standard for where a movie shot, I never took a phone call at the Film Commission office without the producer on the other end of the line asking, "What can you do for me? What's your incentive package?" The entertainment business is a global industry, and the worldwide competition for market share is ramping up every year with more sophisticated marketing and increasingly serious incentive programs. Many people point to Canada's business model as the starting point. Beginning in the late 1990s, the Canadian government saw the value of importing an industry with attractive tax incentives. And it certainly didn't hurt that at that time, the return on the dollar guaranteed that another chunk of change on every dollar spent was at the producer's disposal. Hollywood's business became "run-away" production as movies and TV shows went to Canada and then anywhere in the world where they could get the most value for their money. Eventually the light went on and everyone stopped blaming Canada for creating "run-away" production and followed their successful business model. Other countries and individual states across the United States began to offer incentive packages built on tax credits, cash rebates, and interest-free loans or matching funds!

How students and first-time filmmakers benefit from big money incentives is going to be your challenge: you must filter through all the terms, conditions, and criteria. There are businesses dedicated to providing a producer with everything he or she needs to know about every incentive offered. When you're looking for your location destination, don't forget to consider some of the "intangibles" or the "soft incentives," as they are called, found in a city or state. These can be the attributes of a region or the added-on value a Film Commission or government office can offer your project in subsidies or courtesy services. These intangibles don't necessarily have a dollar figure but can be very inviting and extremely beneficial. Consistently good weather, free public properties, free permits, the right to shoot nonunion, and many other elements all come into play when you are trying to decide where to shoot your project.

FLICS: FILM LIAISONS IN CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE

Because California, and specifically LA and Hollywood, have historically been and continue to be the hub of the entertainment industry for so many of us in the business, it's important to try to keep the work here. The state of California has been hard hit by the success of out-of-state incentive programs for over a decade now. And just as every state is working to attract the business, California is working to keep it at home. FLICS (Film Liaisons in California Statewide) is the professional

membership association representing 44 Film Commissions in the state of California. This group is a "network of regional film offices and commissions that work cooperatively with the California Film Commission to retain, attract and facilitate feature film, television commercial and print media production in California." FLICS acts to support the work of the California Film Commission and broaden the regional appeal of their representative areas throughout the state. This combined effort makes a difference to every producer who wants to stay close to home and hopefully sleep in his or her own bed. In 2009, Governor Schwarzenegger signed a new bill creating the California Film & Television Incentive Program as a new way of doing business for California entertainment projects.[1] The incentive program has been a huge success and promises to keep the local industry healthy in the future.

In California, Film/TV Incentives Generate $2 Billion

The first year of the California Film & Television Tax Credit Program has created and retained tens of thousands of jobs and generated $2 billion in direct spending to California communities, said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. In its first year, the California Film Commission, which administers the program, allocated $200 million in tax credits to 77 projects. This year, another 30 projects are set to receive an additional $100 million in tax credit allocations. Together, they are estimated to bring $2 billion in direct spending to California communities. The figure includes $736 million in wages paid to below-the-line crew members, according to data compiled by the Film Commission.

Studio Daily Blog, Debra Kaufman (August 9, 2010).

If you are in filming in California, be sure to visit the California Film Commission website, http://www.film.ca.gov, for full details about how to apply for the incentives. And don't forget the extended services FLICS can offer. FLICS is a helpful organization of 44 regional film offices throughout the state of California that are connected, communicating and interfacing from Alameda to Yosemite. Check out the services offered by FLICS at http://www.filmcalifornia.com.

The point of this book is to bring the student, first-time filmmaker, and emerging filmmaker all the tools they need to make their movies out in the real world. For those of us who have worked in the industry, it's easy to forget that what we take for granted, like the processes we know to be standard operating procedures or even the movie language and terminology we use, are not familiar to everyone. And they certainly aren't taught in any complete and comprehensive way. So if I appear to be writing about things that seem obvious to some of you, it's in the effort to level the playing field. The general public doesn't know what a

[1] http://www.film.ca.gov/incentives.htm.

Film Commission does. I spent 16 years at the San Diego Film Commission providing information and insight into my work over and over again on a daily basis. The communities we shot in, the business associations representing retailers, and even local and regional government needed to be educated to the work of the Film Commission as an economic engine. And the general public doesn't know about the highly competitive nature of the industry, which means that every state and many countries are vying for this business with lucrative and tempting offers to shoot there.

This chapter revealed the global scope and popularity of the entertainment industry. Everyone wants a piece of the Hollywood pie! And within the contest for the next TV show or next movie, professional organizations like AFCI with their Film Commission membership offices and FLICS in California are there to assist you. Use these sources to make your job easier as they provide data, local information, photos, and liaison connections to all the places you could ever consider shooting your movie. They want your business and they want you to be successful. They want you to become a return customer who comes back to shoot again and again.

When Deciding Where to Shoot, Remember to:

1. Contact the AFCI for access to any worldwide Film Commission.
2. Contact that Film Commission for free core services: location assistance, liaison services with industry facilities and services in the area, augmented research, and liaison to the community, production companies, and government.
3. Research the permit process for your area of interest.
4. Identify your student status or low-budget filmmaker status in the permit process.
5. Know what incentives are offered; identify the "intangibles" that can benefit your project.
6. In California, contact the California Film Commission and the FLICS office for the deepest information on what the state and regional offices can offer, including the new state incentive.

Chapter | ten

Student Filmmakers' "411"

CHAPTER OUTLINE

It's a much more relaxing state of mind when you're not worried about being kicked out of a location in the middle of a shot! "Legitimate" filmmaking—who would've thought!

San Diego State University Student Mike Roddy

More than once I've had a college student sit across the desk and ask, "Do I really need to go to film school? Do I really need to go to college to do this?" I always instinctively felt that, yes, if you have to ask that question, you probably will benefit from the structure of spending time in the classroom. If there were no question about it, that person wouldn't be talking to me—they would be on a set somewhere learning through the school of hard knocks.

I believe that any time and energy you can dedicate to learning the process of production as well as the mechanics of the camera, three-point lighting, and how to block a scene is time well spent. It all comes down to how much the individual puts into the work—in school and on the set. This generation of student filmmakers has had the privilege of experiencing amazing breakthroughs and advances in the technology of the camera, digital HD, animation, CGI, and special effects. They are already so well schooled just by being an avid and enthusiastic consumer of entertainment product. A lifetime of intense visual input and the constant exposure to behind-the-scenes television shows and "making-of" DVDs alone constitutes an education in itself. So these students are perhaps better prepared than ever before to strike out and make their movies—technically.

But the movie-making process involves so much more than just learning the mechanics. There is much left to experience outside the classroom the first time you step off the campus and out into the real world. Student filmmakers benefit the most when the school values that transition from student to producer/production company and provides the orientation and training to allow the students to act professionally and be successful out on the street. Learning about the permit process, public perception, and what it takes to shoot out in the public is the best service the school can provide if they are genuinely interested in helping young people on a career path. Although not everyone will end up being a big-name director, we should hope every student will be well trained enough in a practical way to get a job and make a living working in some capacity in this business. I would like to see film academies and film schools become more career path–focused, like technical trade schools preparing students to get jobs in the ever-expanding arena of entertainment product and the explosive future of new media. Take the creative expression all students crave and provide the right vehicle to help them acquire the necessary skills, experience, and a paying job.

You don't have to wait for college to go to film school. Most school districts recognize the need and demand for film and multimedia academies. Many high schools and ROP divisions (Regional Occupation Program) now offer a full curriculum, including hands-on production classes available to students and to the public. *MovieMaker* magazine's article "Teen Film Revolution: Today's Teen Moviemakers Are Going Pro," by Troy Lanier and Clay Nichols, proved that the handwriting was on the wall. "Moviemaking is finding its way into high schools, too.

While it hasn't replaced the school play just yet, some programs put up a good fight. More than 2,500 high schools have posted films on Varsity Television's website."[1] I've worked with a ten-year-old movie maker who had been making movies on her computer since she was in kindergarten. The youth of the filmmaker and the accessibility of the technology are on a collision course. Luckily that also means that more infrastructure is emerging and more support for teen filmmakers is developing.

Festivals for Teen Movie Makers

According to *MovieMaker*, in 2005, "Festivals, summer camps, schools and non- and for-profit organizations promising to support the work of teen moviemakers have mushroomed. With 70-plus film festivals offering a student category, teens can enter festivals from Chicago (Chicago International Film Festival) to Austin (SXSW) to Fort Lauderdale (Ft. Lauderdale International Film Festival)."

Lanier, T. & Nichols, C. Teen Revolution: Today's Teen Moviemakers Are Going Pro. MovieMaker, *12(59), 85.*

So more students are making movies, which translates into more new, eager, inexperienced film crews out on the street in your neighborhood and around my town. Technical know-how and a lifetime of immersion in the product have brought the student filmmaker out of the laboratory environment and out onto the streets. According to the 2009 Horizon Report, the student filmmaker comes armed with a very different experience in "the way we communicate, access information and connect with peers and colleagues." True, but the foundation of the production process and the standard operating procedures of how to shoot on location still apply to everyone. What are the basic things a student filmmaker needs to know to shoot out in the public on location? How is a student filmmaker different from any other filmmaker? What makes it easier and what makes it harder for a student to film a movie on location? This chapter serves as a Student Filmmakers' 411—the place to go to first for quick, concise advice and answers. Although most of the questions apply to shooting on location, I've included others that always come up in class or workshops. This is the FAQ for student filmmakers. First let's look at the major differences between high school students filming on location and college or university students shooting out on location.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

If you are attending a high school media academy or series of film classes, you will no doubt be writing, producing, and filming short films. If you have to shoot outside in the real world, keep your shooting on campus. It's

[1] MovieMaker, 12(59), 85.

been my experience that high schools and their school districts are not up to speed on the risk and liability they assume when sending students off campus to film their media projects, which means the school district does not provide the insurance necessary to allow students to go through the permit process. It also means you as a student are not protected the way you need to be when filming out in public. If the school district can't provide the insurance necessary for the students to go off campus and get permits to shoot on public property, that means the school district should have a policy about what is approved in the script and where the students can go to shoot. Teachers should be able to realistically guide students in personal safety, public safety, and community sensitivities that might arise based on the script. At the same time, I am seeing more and more high schools with a studio that allows the teacher to teach, supervise, and monitor while the students have a safe place to shoot. If your school is fortunate enough to have a small studio, keep your project in the studio. If your teacher and school policy allows you to go out in public, ask your teacher if the school district can provide insurance to protect you and the school district when you are out in the public domain. If not, stay on campus or on the private property of a friend or family member who supports your work and accepts the liability and the responsibility for anything that might happen during production. This same situation often applies to small, independent media academies. If the school does not provide the insurance for you to go through the permit process, stay on campus in a studio or on private property just to be safe. If you can count on the support and enthusiasm of your high school teachers, the benefits of learning the production process can be far reaching.

High School Students Shoot Car Commercials

San Diego, CA—When the three car dealerships saw the concepts for their new television ad, they knew they had a winner. The Poway Honda, Toyota, and Chevrolet representatives also felt sure that the production company making the pitch would create a glossy, broadcast-quality product. Quite a vote of confidence, considering the entire crew consisted of students from Rancho Bernardo High School (RBHS) in San Diego, California. Using state-of-the-art production and postproduction tools—including Power Mac G4 systems and Final Cut Pro—the young videomakers crafted a 30-second spot that had all three dealers asking for more. The car commercials are just one of the major success stories that have come out of the award-winning Regional Occupation Program (ROP) in Digital Media at Rancho Bernardo. Founded and mentored by digital media instructor Ross Kallen and supported by Apple hardware and software technologies, the course has received national acclaim. Kallen's aim is simple: to prepare students for careers in digital media and familiarize them with industry-standard tools. "We want to take students who might lack a clear vocational path, put the best tools possible—such as Final Cut Pro—in front of them, and give them hands-on training. Then whether they want to go on to college or go to work in the industry, they'll already have a skill set that will take them there. And they'll be much more effective communicators."

Profile in Success, Rancho Bernardo High School.

UNIVERSITY FILM PROGRAMS

College film programs are very diverse both in the individual school's philosophy toward film as an artform and in the wide range of courses offered. College coursework can cover everything from the theory and anthropology of film to the study of a particular genre or historical period in film. School programs can offer a career path to film historian or film archivist and still provide hands-on production classes that require you to write, produce, direct, shoot, edit, and pay for your film. You know why you picked the school you are attending and you know you are there to take full advantage of all the resources available to you. As you begin your production classes, it's your responsibility to get to know your school's policy for student filmmakers. What are the rules and requirements for shooting on campus and off campus? Does the school provide the insurance necessary to shoot on public and private property? Does your school require permits and contractual paperwork as part of the class requirements for your grade? Some colleges actually provide a course specific to producing your on-location project. Other schools have a mandatory workshop or orientation class dedicated to teaching everything you need to know to permit and shoot your student film on location. Every school brings its own unique view and structure to how you shoot your projects. So ask questions and get to know what your school offers and what your professor and the school require before you shoot.

STUDENT FILMMAKERS' BOOT CAMP

Here's the drill. If I wrote nothing else directed at students, I would want you to read this list of taboos. These are all the things to avoid—all the things to *not* do as a student filmmaker. Without some previous on-location shooting experience, without trained experts on the set, and without the budget to manage these complex and challenging elements, it's difficult to pull these things off safely and effectively. Avoid the big *no-nos* as listed in the sidebar.

The Big No-Nos for Students

No prop weapons, no gunfire, no pyro, no cranes, no car mounts, no street work, no action or people in the street, no people in water, no fistfights, no foot chases, no police cars in the scene, no actors in police uniforms, no nudity, no minors/children, no questionable action (i.e., drug deals), no night shooting, no loud scenes in public, no blocking the sidewalk, no special parking permits, no generators.

Write for story, dialog, and character development when you don't have the resources or budget to shoot an action adventure. Don't write a period piece that will cost you thousands of dollars in wardrobe, props, and location fees. Once you embrace the creative challenge of writing a

shootable script—and a script that is able to be produced—you can focus on that and only that, leaving the gimmicky techniques and SFX (special effects) for later in your career.

CALL YOUR LOCAL FILM COMMISSION

Once you've determined what your school guidelines are, find out everything you can about the permit process in that city or region. Learn about and explore the permit process, wherever you are. Learn early before you write the script because you want to write a script that you can actually produce; that is, shoot within your budget and with the resources available to you. Discover what great locations are available and accessible to you as a student; explore the tremendous production value that becomes available to you when you can permit to shoot on public property. The support you have from your school, city, or community and the local permit office can enhance—if not sometimes drive—your script and story development. Get all the help you can get and keep thinking in a creative way: think outside the box.

Location . . . then Story

Lloyd Kaufman is famous for his unique approach to filmmaking. The founder of Troma Films and the creator of the cult classic *Toxic Avenger* movies, Lloyd appeared on a panel of independent filmmakers at Comic-Con, where each speaker shared tips and insider secrets on how to shoot when financially challenged. He spoke passionately about being creative when developing a project—for instance, you might find an interesting and available location first and then write the story around it! He experienced this approach firsthand with the movie *Class of Nuke 'Em High*. He stumbled onto a closed high school set for demolition that allowed him to shoot there almost free of charge with no worries about fixing things after they wrapped. So he wrote the entire story around the high school building location, where the unfortunate students suffer grisly mutations from the seeping waste of the nuclear power plant conveniently located next door. Perfect. And another legendary movie spawns two successful sequels. Stay tuned for the remakes!

Contact the local or regional Film Commission. They will be able to put you in touch with all the permit offices or government staff and hopefully will be able to advise you on the status of student films. Some cities and states do not require anything special from students; other governments require insurance and student permits but exempt students from any kind of fees. So do your homework and find out about all the local services, resources, and permit requirements.

DO STUDENTS NEED INSURANCE?

Insurance remains the number one requirement for anyone permitting to shoot on public property. Generally, students are required to provide the same insurance and most schools will be able to do that. If you

attend USC, UCLA, NYU, or another one of the big schools famous for their film programs, insurance requirements will be a well-known standard. The smaller, less-established film programs might not be as well informed or experienced with the permit process. You might have to introduce the idea to your professor or department head or the film school's business manager. Once the school understands the risk and liability issues, they will no doubt start issuing the necessary insurance for students. Most often the insurance will name the government (i.e., City of San Diego) as additional insured for $1 million general comprehensive and include the title of the student film so that it's specific to just that production. Once you have the insurance in place, you need to scout your locations.

WHERE DO I START LOCATION SCOUTING?

Your local Film Commission should have a location library available either in their office or as a digital library on the website. When talking to the Film Commission, describe the look of the location or the type of scene you need to shoot and ask if there is a favorite place or location for that kind of scene, including where a similar scene has been shot in the past. Do they have any suggestions for where you can shoot? Do some research and ask your friends and your crew for location suggestions. It's always a good idea to keep your locations close to home. Start with family and friends asking if you can shoot in their house or office and then extend your search to co-workers, your teacher, and friends of friends. Spend some time surfing the Internet for leads to the locations you need, but at some point you will need to grab your digital camera, get in your car, and go scouting. Be as confident and professional as you can be when approaching a business or private home. First impressions are important—you are selling yourself first and then you are selling your movie project as a potential business partnership with a perfect stranger.

EVERY INCH OF LAND IS OWNED BY SOMEONE

When you are out driving around, it's fairly obvious when you are dealing with private property: a house, storefront, or office building will always have an owner. But be sure you are paying attention to all the property jurisdictions when out in remote or rural areas. If it's not private, it is public property, as in government-owned, and you need to identify the government. If you can't find anyone, go to the local tax assessor's office to track down the owner on the tax records. Do not shoot anywhere, no matter how isolated or remote, without the owner's written permission. It is too risky and dangerous, and if something goes wrong, there's a good chance you, your parents, and the school could end up in court—and worse, end up bankrupt. It's not worth it. If you don't own it someone else does; everything is owned by somebody. Weigh the

benefits of shooting on private property, where you have control and usually fewer costs. But at some point, you can be on private property and still have a public impact, which then requires personnel, additional permits, or other additional costs and expertise. Choose wisely.

BIG CITY BLUES

Big cities bring more paperwork and bureaucracy to the student film permit process. Big cities also offer a deep and diverse urban and geographical landscape. But big cities that have experienced a lot of filming won't always be as inviting when you show up with your grip truck and invade the neighborhood. People get tired of having the disruption of a film crew in front of their house or business. Be prepared to smile and shake a lot of hands while you try to keep the peace. If you are going to school in Iowa or Maine or any place that is distanced from the Hollywood-style phenomena, you will very likely encounter an uncanny interest and desire to help among the local residents. People in small-town America will be very excited that you are making a movie right there in their backyard and you will be famous overnight. People will offer their homes, businesses, and Main Street for free just for the chance to be involved with the magic of movie making. Respect the mystique this business carries with it and take care of the local folks, who will shower you with free locations and probably cook you supper, too. But remember: there is no thing as a free location. It's wonderful to start off with a free location, but always be prepared to fix a hole in the wall, steam-clean the carpet, or replace a broken sprinkler head. Get a free location and a free permit and you have that much more money to put on the screen. Sometimes a free location can come with hidden costs if you have to pay for a police officer or a building custodian to be with you during the shoot. This "cost recovery" fee needs to be something you ask about at every location so that it doesn't come as a surprise after the fact.

FILM CREWS ALWAYS CREATE PUBLIC IMPACT

Shooting out in the public domain means that you will have some kind of public impact. No matter how small the crew or how short the scene, you and your filming activity will change the everyday events in that location. There will be disturbance, disruption, and intrusion into people's everyday lives and habits. Know this for a fact and be prepared that people will react in a variety of ways. Be prepared and do all you can do to reduce the public impact and be courteous to the public around you. In addition to public impact, you need to be sensitive to how your filming affects public safety, which includes the safety of your cast and crew. You've already read the list of *no-no*s, but I know some of you will still be shooting those car chases, shoot-outs, and film noir scenes anyway. Does your scene include stunts, pyrotechnics, or any effects requiring licensed experts

on the set? How do your stunts infringe on or threaten the safety of pedestrians or residents? Does your equipment piled up in the middle of the sidewalk create a safety concern? Are your cables run safely and tucked neatly up against the curb or building? If you are doing anything other than dialog, there could be additional liability if you have cars, helicopters, gunfire, and so on. And finally, you need to know about the personality of the community you are shooting in. Are there any neighborhood sensitivities to filming or any issues with the residents? Have they had a lot of filming lately, making the residents tired and burned out? Affluent neighborhoods have a completely different tone and tolerance than blue-collar, middle-class neighborhoods. Be aware of your location's total environment. You are going to be a guest there, a short-term resident, and you need to know what to expect from the neighbors.

KNOW THE POWER OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Thinking about all these variables at play in your location brings you to a better understanding of the public perception and how it affects your job as a filmmaker. Once you leave your classroom, dorm, or campus, you are now working in an "off the lot" state of mind. You've left the controlled security of your enclosed, contained location and now you are in the middle of the real world. You don't make your movie in a bubble; you make your movie in the middle of a whole lot of other people's everyday lives. And the public is going to react to you, your presence and your activity. How the public perceives you and your work will affect you and your work. How people feel about what you are doing is going to affect how you do your work. If people feel they've been ignored or exploited, you won't get the cooperation you need. Communicate with the residents in the area in advance so they are prepared for your invasion—no matter how small.

Film Shoot Mistaken for Hostage Situation

A movie set at the downtown post office turned all too real for a group of high school filmmakers. Members of the high school Spanish club were shooting a movie Thursday night when the police showed up, believing that a hostage crisis was going on inside the post office. Apparently, someone saw the teens carrying toy guns into the building on Centre Street, which is the heart of the town's historical district. When they couldn't get an answer to calls placed inside the building, they assumed the worst. Police cordoned off the block, cleared nearby buildings, and surrounded the post office, ready for a hostage crisis. When a group of students left the post office, they were ordered to get on the ground, face down. Postmaster Ron Steedley had given permission for the school group to use the post office afterhours to make a movie called *Rolling Thunder*. Steedley said he didn't think the student's movie would frighten anyone. Devon Menendez, the film's director, said his film career is over. "I'm not accepting any more offers to direct a movie," he said.

http://www.homelandstupidity.us/2006/03/26/swat-team-holds-movie-makers-hostage/

This is the classic example of someone acting on their perception of something being wrong or threatening. There is always the chance that passersby will see something out of the corner of their eye, not see the camera, and react to what they comprehend to be danger. You anticipate and control the public perception by sharing information about your shoot. Communicate with everyone around the location well in advance.

NEIGHBORHOOD NOTIFICATION AND SIGNAGE

Distribute a neighborhood letter in the area telling everyone the basic facts about who you are, where and when you are filming, and the nature of your shooting scene. Include the size of the cast and crew and anything unusual or disrupting. Sign off with your name and number so that people can call if they have questions or concerns. Your job is to address and alleviate concerns before you show up to shoot. Post that information around the area you are shooting in. I've seen great results from recommending students post signs at camera and at the edge of the frame announcing STUDENT FILM IN PROGRESS. The posted information immediately puts people at ease and prevents confrontation while encouraging interest and support. A courtesy call to neighborhood patrols, police, or business associations can prevent a potential disaster.

POST-9/11 PARANOIA

We live in a different world since the life-changing events of September 11, 2001. Our culture has become based more on suspicion and mistrust than ever before. It is not a trend to ignore when you are the one out there appearing unusual or suspect as you show up in someone's safe zone. People are much more likely to react first and ask questions later. That reaction can mean calling the police or pulling a gun and taking things into their own hands. This kind of instinctive reaction is most often negative and not something to be taken lightly. It's human nature to be protective of your space and to be suspicious of anything out of the ordinary. Talk to people and prepare the area for your friendly invasion when you bring the circus into someone else's quiet, predictable neighborhood.

The Ryder Truck Incident

A group of students were planning to film in a house in a quiet neighborhood. It was the director's uncle's home and they had permission to be there all weekend. Early Saturday morning, the crew pulled up in pickup trucks, SUVs, and one large rented Ryder truck. They began to off-load equipment cases from the back of the truck, carrying camera and lighting gear into the house. Next they started to bring sofas, chairs, and tables out of the house to be loaded into the truck and stored there over the shoot days. Of course, no one on the crew noticed the little old lady in the house across the street, peering out from behind her lace curtains and wondering what in

the world was going on at the neighbor's house. She hadn't seen any "For Sale" signs, and surely they would have told her if they were moving or starting a renovation. Not good. Within a few minutes, she had called the police about a possible home invasion robbery and police cars arrived on the scene with guns drawn. Although the situation was brought under control, there was still a serious threat to all involved. Anticipate how people will respond or react to your activity and communicate to anyone who might be impacted by your presence.

WHERE DO I PARK THE CIRCUS?

It's easy to see from the Ryder truck incident that even parking your crew cars and equipment vehicles can cause suspicion or reaction from people. So how do you get the gear close by the location? If you can't park long-term legally, you need to get a special parking permit from the local film permit office. This will require many days advance notification, usually involving approval from the police department. Then often you need to hire an outside barricade street sign company to put out some NO PARKING signs in the approved area several days in advance. If you can't post for NO PARKING, you need to park legally at the location, off-load your gear, and move the truck to other legal long-term parking, like a pay lot. Park your crew cars legally as members of the public or send them to a parking lot close by. Don't inundate the neighborhood by taking up all their street parking. That's not the best way to introduce your project to the locals. People really believe they own the curb in front of their house or business and no one else should be able to park there. The "this is a public street" argument has been lost by many a location manager. Parking is a hugely sensitive subject.

WHEN DO I NEED POLICE OR A FIRE MARSHAL?

Every jurisdiction is going to have its own criteria for when you need a police officer, fire marshal, or other law enforcement person on the set. Check in with your local government or permit office to find out what you need to do to be legal and safe. In general, a police officer is required on the set if there are prop weapons (that includes guns, knives, ninja stars, surface-to-air missiles, and so on). Police are required if there is gunfire or aggressive or violent action and if you have a police car or actor in a police uniform in picture. You will need police if you need traffic control or crowd control and if you are doing stunts or car-chase sequences. You usually need a police officer if you are doing car work with car mounts or process trailer. You will need a fire marshal if there is pyrotechnics, explosions of any kind, open flame such as a bonfire, and if there is a street closure or any activity at a red curb fire lane. Some jurisdictions require a fire marshal on all shooting sets. In addition to having personnel assigned, many of these stunts or special effects require specialized permits, too. Get to know the permit requirements in your

area, including what personnel will be assigned that will be a cost to you. These are standard and realistic expectations for this industry. Don't disregard these safety measures. And no, you can't bring your brother who just happens to be a cop onto the set for your car work. The officer must be assigned by the jurisdiction he or she is authorized to represent as per the film permit. This is not the place to cut corners. When you do have a decent budget, always plan to have a police officer on your set. Police are an amazing presence that will deter and prevent people from getting belligerent or problematic. Police can assist you in unknown ways and act as your public relations person in the community. Budgeting for an officer each day should be a priority for you as you move forward in your career.

CAN I USE CHILDREN IN MY MOVIE?

The great comedian W.C. Fields is credited with the line, "Never work with children or animals." The line is famous because of the sound advice inherent in the quote—even after all these years. Children and animals introduce a world of variables into your otherwise well-managed shooting location. And working with children means that you must adhere to the local child labor laws. In California, the child labor laws require that you have a permit to employ a minor and the child must have a current work permit to act in your film. The child must always have a parent or guardian on the set with them. You are required to hire a state-licensed studio teacher/welfare worker to be on the set at all times when there is a minor present. The studio teacher not only oversees school work, but—most importantly—looks after the well-being of the child and guarantees that you are in compliance with all the child labor laws. The studio teacher is there to make sure that the child is not put in harm's way or in dangerous, uncomfortable, or threatening circumstances. In addition, the age of the child determines how long the child can be on the set and how long the child can be in front of the camera. This can destroy even the best-planned shooting schedule. This is why twins are so often cast and why every TV show with teens in high school actually casts actors 18 or older to play younger parts. This is the state law, and to the best of my knowledge there is no exemption or exception to the rule. You can read the California State Child Labor Laws at http://www.dir.ca.gov/dlse/.

My Little Brother's Big Break

An independent short film was shooting in San Diego; after reading the script, I met with the producer to finalize permits for several parklands. One scene involved a family picnic with several children whom the producer said would be played by his own kids. I reviewed the Child Labor Laws with him, and to my surprise he said he had read the laws and was certain the

laws did not apply to him in this situation. He wasn't paying the kids—therefore, he was not employing them. I disagreed, but at the same time I realized he had thought this through and taken a stand on what I considered a "gray area" in the law. He tried to reassure me that this was not "work" but a voluntary creative collaboration and that the children's parents will sign a waiver stating as much and acknowledging that they were all volunteering for the fun of it and no one was being paid. I couldn't permit for that scene, and he shot it in another city's park.

Here's what happened. The day of the shoot, a bystander came up to the producer, asking questions about the filming, what were they shooting, and other such things the general public finds interesting. Then the woman asked if the kids had work permits! She worked for the California Division of Labor Standards Enforcement and knew the entertainment laws well. The producer kept his cool and calmly explained his interpretation of the law and his conclusion that his volunteer family members were exempt. Nothing happened this time, but it's another case of what can happen when you take your work out into the public domain. Strangers begin to interact with you and affect your filming. The woman told the producer that because the shoot was so small (more like a home movie) and because the producer demonstrated he knew the law and had not ignored it but had "reinterpreted it," the woman did not follow up with any legal action or a fine. He was very lucky this time. He told me he would never risk not following the child labor laws again.

WHAT PAPERWORK DO I NEED PEOPLE TO SIGN?

You need to own every image in your movie. That means you have to get it in writing. Get everything in writing. You want a signed release from every actor and background extra; you want a signed release/location contract from every location, and that includes your mom's house and your dad's office. Have your crew people sign off that they are contributing as a volunteer and understand there is no money being paid and there is no insurance or workers' compensation. It's the best thing you can do to show you brought your due diligence to the shoot and your crew agreed to the terms. I have no idea if this would hold up in a court of law; probably not. But I know many students will be shooting under these and even less desirable circumstances. Get it in writing. I think it matters that you can document your good intent in describing the work situation and have the cast and crew sign off. This discussion of owning every image automatically bleeds over into music clearance, copyright, trademark, logos, brand names, and so on. When you need to own every image, that means you don't let your actor wear a Hollister shirt while eating from a bucket of KFC. If you don't have permission, do not show a logo, trademark, or brand name anywhere in your movie. Use original music that you can own. Don't use any music you haven't researched for licensing costs or paid the licensing fee to the artists, writers, and recording artists; the record label; and other creatives involved. Just don't do it! It's a bad habit that you are going to have to break and unlearn as you work in this business. Own every image, physical likeness, sound and spoken word in your movie.

San Diego Film Commission
Filming Code of Conduct

Filming on location means utilizing property that is someone else's (house, store, warehouse, private road, etc.) or is a public street, sidewalk, park, etc. Production company personnel are guests in such places, and are obligated to conduct themselves as such and treat the public and the location with courtesy. While on location in San Diego please adhere to the following:

- When filming in a neighborhood or business district, proper notification is to be provided to each merchant or resident who is directly affected by production activities (including parking, base camps and meal areas).
- Production companies arriving on location in or near a residential neighborhood should enter the area no earlier than the time stipulated on the approved Film Registration and park one by one, turning engines off as soon as possible. Cast and crew should observe designated parking areas.
- Noise levels should be kept as low as possible. Generators should be placed as far as practical from residential buildings. Do not let engines run unnecessarily.
- Removing, trimming and/or cutting of vegetation or trees is prohibited unless approved by the property owner or city.
- All signs erected or removed for filming purposes will be removed or replaced upon completion of the use of the location, unless stipulated otherwise by the location agreement or the approved Film Registration.
- Meals shall be confined to the area designated in the location agreement or permit. Individuals shall eat within the designated meal area. All trash must be disposed of properly upon completion of the meal.
- All catering, craft services, construction, strike and personal trash must be removed from the location.
- When production passes, identifying employees, are issued, every crewmember shall need to wear it while on location.
- All members of the production company should wear clothing that conforms to good taste and common sense. Shoes and shirts must be worn at all times.
- Crewmembers shall not display signs, posters, or pictures that do not reflect common sense and good taste (i.e. pin-up posters).
- Cast and crew are to remain on or near the area that has been named on the approved Film Registration. Do not trespass on to another neighbor's or merchant's property.
- Observe the designated smoking area and always extinguish cigarettes in butt cans.
- Cast and crew shall refrain from using lewd or offensive language within earshot of the general public.
- Parking is prohibited on both sides of the city streets unless specifically authorized by the approved Film Registration.

FIGURE 10.1 Universal Code of Conduct that provides professional guidelines for anyone filming out in the public. *Reprinted with permission from Cathy Anderson/San Diego Film Commission.*

CODE OF CONDUCT

There is a professional code of conduct in the world of movie making that deserves attention and respect. This industry is often the first to be criticized and reprimanded for bad behavior and false values. Don't do anything to contribute to that misperception. Warner Brothers Studios published a Code of Conduct in the late 1990s in an effort to remind crew people that they represented the company and the business of movie making and there wasn't any room for attitude or offensive behavior. Do the same. Assume a responsible and professional demeanor when you are shooting on location. One bad experience by a homeowner will be multiplied many times by word of mouth and will hurt the next producer coming into that neighborhood hoping to shoot their film. Courtesy and common sense will go a long way in making your shoot successful and making your location's residents tolerant of all you do there. Figure 10.1 shows a version of the code.

There you have it: the big picture overview of everything you need to know about shooting on location as a student filmmaker. The production process will require all your attention when you're out on the set. It's easy to get caught up in the urgency and freneticism of shooting. To help keep you calm and clear-headed, the box "Moviemaker Mantras" lists my favorite reminders to keep you focused.

Moviemaker Mantras

Plan well. There's no such thing as too much preproduction. When you don't have money, you have time. Ask for help. Use your student status to your benefit. Smile. Pull in favors from your family and friends. Be safe. Don't put yourself or your crew at risk. Keep it manageable. Work on your craft. Perfect your basic skills then expand on them. Keep it simple. Be safe. Respect the student filmmaker *no-no*s. Have fun. Be courteous and professional. Communicate. Information prevents confrontation. Be safe. Have fun.

As a Student Filmmaker, Remember:

1. Whatever the age of the student, more and more people are making movies.
2. High school students need to know and understand the big picture of risk and liability when shooting off campus.
3. College students need to research your school's philosophy, course offerings, and student filmmaker policies.
4. Student filmmaker boot camp starts with the *no-no*s. Don't do it.
5. Call your Film Commission to get information on permits and your student status.
6. Students need to know the insurance requirements for permits and private property.

7. Check out your Film Commission location library and keep your locations close to home.
8. Always have permission from the property owner before you shoot.
9. Big cities can be jaded toward your filming on location—sometimes small towns are friendly and new to the experience.
10. Understand public impact, public safety concerns, and liability and community sensitivities as they apply to your project.
11. Understand and anticipate the challenge of controlling the public perception.
12. Communicate with the residents in your location area. Communication prevents confrontation.
13. People will react and often in a negative way. Be friendly and be careful.
14. Taking up parking spaces is the first thing that will irritate people. Park off site.
15. Law enforcement and public safety officers are needed for a wide range of activities—check the permit requirements.
16. Know the law for working with minors.
17. Get it in writing—own every image in your film.
18. Observe the Code of Conduct. Be professional, courteous, and respectful when on location.

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