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“Don’t look at the camera!”

*An investigation into Directorial methodologies and practise used
when working with child actors in film.*

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and Television*

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Abstract

This dissertation sets out to explore the complexities inherent in working with children in a filmic context. The focus is on creating a set of guidelines for other emergent filmmakers to use when and if they choose to work with children in film. It will analyze how the complex dynamics of children and film together create both the obstacles and inspirations in filmmaking. The film *Unwritten letters* forms the platform for the analysis and discussion around the nature of children and the filmic environment with specific attention to Directorial techniques and Professional practice. It forms the basis for posing a number of theoretical questions about Realism and the intricate dynamics at work when dealing with children in film.

Declaration

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: _____ Date: 18/02/05
Student Number: GN TALY001

Introduction

For the purposes of fulfilling the Research and Production component of the Masters Degree in Film and Television, I had to create a film. The prerequisites for the project were that the film had to be between twenty-six and thirty minutes in length. It could take any form or explore any style that I chose to investigate. It had to be written, directed and produced by myself, using a budget of five thousand Rand. *Unwritten letters* is the end result of my project. It is a period, fiction film about a young boy on a journey of discovery about life, love and loss.

The motivations behind the choices I made in the making of this film were driven by the passion I have for working with children and the Creative Arts. I have been a Drama Teacher for many years and have explored working with young children on stage during that time. I wanted to turn my hand to film and investigate the concept of achieving authentic, emotionally compelling performances from children for camera. In so doing I wanted to explore the complexities inherent in the concept of Realism and the unreal nature of film as an art form. From this project, I wanted to create a body of work that would serve as a practical information guide to other filmmakers who wish to work with children in film.

I set about creating a project that would allow me the opportunity to explore:

- a) what it entails to successfully work with children in a film
- b) how one elicits an emotionally compelling performance from a child actor
- c) the concept of truth and honesty in filmmaking
- d) the concept of the invisible camera and authenticity in filmmaking
- e) the tricks that one can use to create the illusions of reality in a world of magic realism
- f) The methodologies and techniques other directors of children in film have employed

The Journey to this project

My final thesis project was a long time in the deciding. At the outset of my year of study at the IFNM, I knew wanted to work with children and film and set about discovering the manner in which to do this. With ten years of experience working as a drama teacher of young children, I was interested to discover how the techniques and methods, I use when working with children and performance on stage, would translate, if at all, into work with children on screen. I began the process with the filming of children telling stories, either their own or ones that they had heard. I filmed interviews with children to find out what their understanding was of the world of film and story telling, the results of which I presented in a talk entitled 'Hollywood is a country'. What was most prominent about the stories I collected was the striking difference in the manner in which the children told the stories on camera. There was a clear difference in the way a story was told depending on the source of the story, i.e. whether it was a repeated story or an imitated story or a story that was created on the spot. What became extremely interesting was the effect the presence of the camera had on the children while they told their stories.

I began to investigate the possibility of a project that would involve working in a non-fiction/realistic/documentary film style with children and teenagers. The aim of the project was to create a film or series of short films, using the life stories of a select group of children, at the heart of the film. I wanted to explore and compare the life stories of children from different walks of life (Boy's Town, De Nova Youth Centre, a facility for convicted juveniles and 2 demographically apposed Cape Town schools.) I was interested in a style of filmmaking in which the children were the driving force behind the film's content. They were to be fully involved and integrated into the actual filming of their own stories. The project had to have the saying 'out of the mouth of babes' at the heart of it. I was in search of truth told by a child, honest and real, with little interference or affect inflicted by the director.

The project proved too large, costly and unviable for the amount of time allocated for completion in this Masters course. However, the fascination with film and children remained my central idea. I began to focus on: A) the notion of film style, particularly on styles in which the level of realism appeared to be distinctive and B) to delve into films that for me were captivating and compelling because of the children who performed in them. Together with this, a new focus began to emerge that would profoundly affect the content of the project that I eventually tackled, that being the concept of memory and personal stories around cinema as place and motif. I turned my attention therefore to three areas of research. Firstly, to the area of research about the theories concerning the perception of realism in film Secondly, to research about film directors who had placed children at the centre of their creative work and thirdly, to the collection of stories about the role cinema plays in the personal lives of people.

Realism in Film and the Myth of the invisible Camera

The research intended to broadly investigate the concept of realism, authenticity, and the myth of The Invisible Camera in the creation of films that use children as central components. I wanted to shed more light on the manner in which I approached the project with children and in so doing attempt to clarify the meaning of 'real', in a world where everything is a contrived falsity. I wanted to unpack the notion of the Invisible Camera and the degrees to which the perceived presence or absence of the film camera affects our perception of what is authentic or contrived. In a world where the word 'documentary' is so over used (docu-drama, docu-soap, reality TV), it is difficult to find clarity about what is the true 'slice of life' approach, versus the 'plotted, planned, rehearsed' approach to filmmaking. What has been manipulated and what has not? The fascination with what looks authentic but has been created. By looking at theories around realism, I wanted to explore subjective responses to film. How does one rate a performance? What makes a performance more or less real? What makes a performance underplayed or overplayed and who perceives it to be so?

Lastly I wanted to uncover what contribution old and new film theorists could make to my understanding of the way forward as a new and inexperienced filmmaker in South Africa.

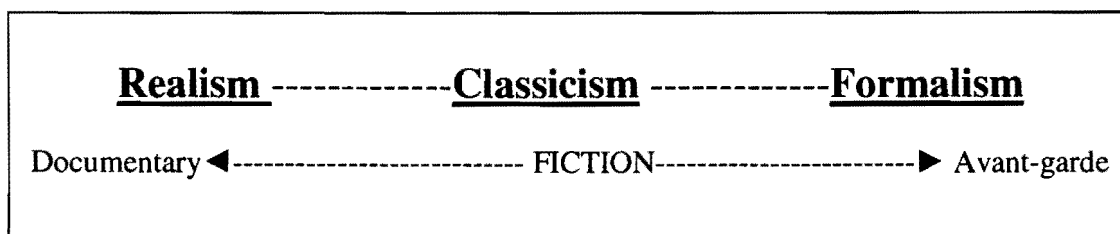
There is a vast collection of work devoted to the understanding of film as an art form and the concept of reality. For the purposes of this paper it will be assumed that film is an art form. What then is the point of art? According to the age-old understanding: art imitates life or nature. However, is what we see on screen real? Is a painting an exact replica of the subject? Is what we watch on stage truthful? Is film capable of capturing real life? The answer is of course, no. All filmmaking is contrived and only pretends to be a mirror to life. As in all art forms, a creator has manipulated the tools at their disposal to create a representation of life (the real) in a particular manner. It is a carefully planned and rehearsed construct, which only pretends to be real. The main tool of the filmmaker, the camera, empowers the creator with the ability to approximate the representation of reality extremely closely. The secondary creative tools of a filmmaker: editing, special effects, colour grading and sound engineering to name a few, are also exploited in the manipulation of reality. According to Kracauer in *Armes* (1971), film is an extension of photography and is able to capture the flow of life. Documentary film is supposed to record reality as opposed to fiction. 'Raw footage of real events as they happen, real people as they speak, real life as it occurs, spontaneous and unmediated' (Nelmes 2003: 188). However, even in the purest form of documentary filmmaking, the meaning inherent in the word 'making' implies some degree of manipulation and creation and therefore can only be an interpretation of life and reality. 'The material (for documentary) has to be ordered, reshaped and placed in sequential form...' (Nelmes 2003: 188). Therefore filmmaking is an art form that always manipulates the degree of reality to create a representation of life in order to entertain or to stimulate debate. Film is not real but attempts in some cases to approximate the real.

When we turn to fiction film, what is the work that is at play with regards to the appearance of the sense of reality that certain films possess? We know that what we are seeing is a construct however why are some films more like real life than others? Why

are we moved by some films more than by others? Would one say that when a film is closer to your own sense of reality, then you are moved more by it? Or, is the 'realness' of films directly related to the believability of the performances on screen? In other words it does not matter if the content of the film relates to anything you have experienced as real; what matters is the emotionally compelling nature of the performance that convinces us that it must be real.

We as spectators to film accept this in the same way that we agree to suspend disbelief when watching a piece of live theatre. We know that what we are seeing is a construct of reality but we 'play along' with the illusion and may or may not be truly moved by what we see. Some forms of theatre, for example by Chekov and Brecht, make a point of revealing the unreal nature of the event for audience members, others go to great lengths to create the absolute illusion of reality. There is a similar sense in filmmaking and in the subjective response achieved in the spectator. What is vitally important to consider is this subjective response a spectator has to a filmed story. Therefore, for the purposes of this paper, it is imperative that it is understood that all filmmaking is trick work and will always be an illusion of reality to a greater or lesser degree. It is this 'degree' that is of primary significance to the topics under discussion.

The following diagramme from *Understanding Movies* (2002) very simply explains the continuum of filmmaking styles. Represented, are three types of film classifications displayed with three types of film. What is important to remember is these categories are not autonomous entities but rather overlapping or blending phenomena. 'Reality is the source of all raw material of films' (Giannetti: 2002: 2). What is important is the style in which a director chooses to mold and shape that material that will determine the style of the film and amount of blending that will be created. The important point here is the question of how far from the source does a film director wish to take their audience and for what reason?



Films classified under the classicism style are roughly speaking your popular films about movie star heroes. We as audience members are asked to identify with the morals and goals of the hero and to immerse ourselves in their journeys (Maddin in Nilsson 2002). They are films that think for us and we are generally entertained by them. Formalist style is best described as being apart of the avant-garde or expressionistic creative movement. Film directors here would aim to deliberately distort material or footage and create an extremely stylized feel. Distortion for a heightened sense of effect is very common. There is no attempt made by the director, to conceal the creative manipulation of the images and they are deliberately beautiful and powerful.

Realism, according to Arnes (1971) is the means of expression with the desire to stick to the truth. According to André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, both advocates of the realist film theory, film is not an art in contrast to nature but art of nature. (Film Theory and Criticism 1999). Realist films attempt to reproduce the surface of reality with the minimum of distortion. They try and 'preserve the illusion that their films are unmanipulated, objective mirrors to the actual world' (Giannetti 2002: 2). Realistic films specialize in the business of concealing their trickery or art. Compared to the more avant-garde end of the scale where the opposite is said to be true. Rob Nilsson, a modern advocate of realism in his radical approach to capturing real life on camera, states that filmmaking must be about 'studies in human nature... a way of being rather than a way of seeing' (Nilsson 2002: 3). He works to achieve an interplay of documentary and constructed or affected elements in his fictional film work. His philosophy of 'Direct Action Cinema' requires that there are no 'impersonations, only the real thing'. He advocates that in order to make films real you need to embrace the 'wildness, contradictions and mysteries that are life' (Nilsson, 2002: 32). In other words, real life is messy, ugly, unpredictable and chaotic. Pretty films are false films. Nilsson refers to his directorial role as 'the puppeteer' who wants to set his puppets (the actors in his company) free but is not quite able to do so. In other words he as a director would like to

sever the control he holds over them as players in his film and allow them the complete freedom to be real without constraints. He reports that he is able to release some puppet strings but cannot set the puppets free completely. To do this would mean having to sacrifice the film/story he wanted to create. The concept of control and degree of manipulation in film is of paramount importance to the understanding of the 'realness' of film.

According to Arnes (1971: 18), a realistic approach to filmmaking will entail 'constant individualization and originality because you are dealing with the lives of ordinary people whose total reality (political, social, economic) is real and constantly changing'. Arnes describes realist films as those depicting what you see, not what you would prefer to see. Bazin describes realist films as being subtle, sharp and natural. He advocates that they resemble in style, a sketch rather than a full colour oil painting. The audience is not presented with the whole picture and all the answers, so to speak, but an unfinished feel, which requires the mind to work to fill in the gaps. 'In realistic films there is a close correspondence of images to everyday reality, i.e. textures of an unbeautiful world. The realistic cinema tends to deal with people of the lower echelons and often explores moral issues. The artist (director) rarely intrudes on the materials, however, preferring to let them speak for themselves' (Giannetti 2002: 6). Furthermore, realistic films have the feeling that the people in them are caught unawares. There is an unrehearsed, unsentimental and unaffected quality about the performances of basic everyday events and experiences. In this way the ordinary becomes the extraordinary.

It is important to mention the Neo-realistic film movement, as it has influenced my thinking about film style and the use of children in film. This movement arose out of the need to 'wipe out the legacies of fascism in post-war Italy' (World Cinema 2000). Fascism represented the opposite of truth and authenticity. The films that had been created during that time (1930s) were escapist, lighthearted, entertaining comedies with their focus on the glamorous lives of the stars. After the war there was a need for reconstruction and a radical break with film tradition ensued. This came in the form of films about reconstruction, poverty, unemployment, the problems of housing and the

social struggle of the Italian people. There was a radical shift in the way films were shot.

A) Directors filmed on location and not in an artificial studio environment. The people in the films and the landscape that was filmed in became extremely connected and significant. B) Available lighting was used; no attempt to add artificial lighting was made. C) For the first time the main characters were played by 'real' people and not professionally trained actors. There were no stars so to speak. The notion that real people should play the roles of real people became paramount. D) Stories were simple and centered around the lives of ordinary, poor, lower-class folk. The idea was unconventional but resulted in what has been described as 'pure poetry'. The following quote is very pertinent to my central theme: 'The aim of Neo-realistic films is to rediscover without embellishment or dramatization, the daily life of people's lives' (World Cinema 2000: 74).

Probably the most important film to emerge in the Neo-realist era was *Bicycle Thieves*, directed by Vittorio De Sica in 1948 and starring two non-professionals Enzo Staiola as the young boy Bruno, son of Antonio played by Lamberto Maggiorani. The story is captivating, beautiful and simple. A father finds work as a poster distributor. In order to do the job, he needs to have a bicycle. His wife pawns their matrimonial linen in order to do this. During his first day on the job his bicycle is stolen and the film is about how he and his son attempt to retrieve the bicycle. In reality Lamberto was an unemployed worker struggling in the same fashion as the character he played. He in fact played himself and this, together with the unaffected performance of the son, resulted in a masterpiece of realist cinema. It is this impression of truth which certain films give us that I am interested in pursuing further.

Let us turn to the main tool at the disposal of the director in film, the camera. If we talk about the concept of an invisible camera what do we mean? Can a camera ever record reality? A camera can be used in a number of ways. It can be set up to merely record what happens over a given time in a given place. This is similar to a surveillance camera that records life in front of it. What it records may be interesting but in most cases it will record 'boring old life'. It may capture a glimpse of something interesting but it is

unlikely to capture the whole story of that event due to its static position. A camera can be used to capture a spontaneous event like the use of a 'handy cam' to record a giant tsunami wave engulfing you on holiday. A chance occurrence captured by lucky timing. A camera can also be set up to capture a planned event in a specific way. As we move closer and closer to creative camera work where specific choices are being made about framing and technique, the further away from real life and pure, unmanipulated observance we get. A camera in the hands of a filmmaker is therefore a creative tool that can never be mistaken for a tool of 'truth'. How then are we as spectators of unreal film, so moved by what we see on screen? We know what we are watching is false but some films appear to be so real. How do directors work to make unreal situations appear as the real thing?

A director is like a magician. They use trickery to achieve compelling performances. This of course is aided by brilliant and convincing acting and technical support to get the best shots that help to make the emotional content of the film more readable. It is up to the director and the style of filmmaking they are attempting, as to how much trickery is involved. There are many 'veils' or layers of illusion at work in film in both the filming and post-production phases. One has to pull them back to see what is really going on. The ability to truly move an audience member is rare. When one looks at films that do move me and have children in them, one wonders to what extent the trickery of filmmaking predominates. In the case of a film like *City of God*, there is an extremely disturbing scene involving rival child gangs. One gang plans to teach the other a lesson by terrorizing its youngest members. The scene ends with both children getting shot in the foot followed by the older being murdered in front of the younger boy. The scene for me is so real and extremely shocking. I am fascinated with the captured performance of the younger boy. He appears to be really crying and really afraid. What have they told him or frightened him with to make him react in that manner? What technique did the director use to film this scene? What is truly being inter-cut with the shots of the little boy? Is the camera hidden and the child believes what is happening is real?

The questions raised about trickery or illusion in filmmaking with children are of central importance to the topics under discussion in this paper.

Children and Emotionally compelling Films

For the purpose of this project, I have critically analyzed the following films:

- A) Teen Film Genre and the search for authenticity: *Thirteen*, *Kids*, *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dangerous live of Altar Boys*, *Billy Elliot*, *Kes*, *The Diary of Adrian Mole Age 13 3/4*.
- B) Children in films: *Pay it forward* and *Sixth Sense*, *Kolya*, *Children of Heaven*, *Central Station*, *Paljas*, *Salaam Bombay*, *Bicycle Thieves*, *Cinema Paradiso*, *The Little Rascals*, *The Kid*, *City of God*, *Lucky*, *Life is Beautiful*, *A Touch of Spice*, *Akasha*, *Azuré*.

One cannot go into the full details of the comparative analysis for the purposes of this paper. There are however a few discoveries that have come to the fore in relation to truth, authenticity and the techniques directors have or have not employed in these films and the resultant effect on the spectator, that are worth raising. Because an emotionally compelling performance is so closely linked to the perceived authenticity of that performance, it is vital to understand the ability a child has to pretend. Children are terrible liars and don't have the sophistication of performance to create the illusion on camera of authenticity especially when they themselves know they are being filmed.

If one looks at what I perceive to be the antithesis of the type of films I am aiming for, one gets a clearer picture of what is meant by unaffected or authentic filmmaking. *The Little Rascals*, directed by Penelope Spheeris, introduces us to Spanky and his gang of "He man women haters". In this neat, Hollywood perfect 'rosy realism' film, affect is what it is all about. 'Rosy realism', a term coined by Arnes (1971), refers to films that toy with reality but gloss over its problems. A group of child actors perform well rehearsed but extremely fake interpretations of children. There is no attempt made to show these children in their 'natural' form, rather they are portrayed as miniature stand-up comics

who clearly are delivering an extremely well rehearsed performance. The performance is overplayed and artificial in most instances. As a drama teacher I stand in awe of the performance achieved by such young actors and the effect on me is one of extreme enjoyment and entertainment. However, I am not moved by the film and it has no lasting or life changing effect on me.

The same cannot be said for the likes of *Kolya*, *Salaam Bombay* and *Children of Heaven*. These films for me represent the very heart of 'authentic' filmmaking. All three films are non-Hollywood genre. All three films have very young children acting in them. It is significant that these children are non-professionals and in the case of *Salaam Bombay*, are actual street children who workshopped the film with the director, Mira Nair. All three films are foreign language films (Czech and Russian, Indian and Iranian, respectively). The concept of language and delivery of lines is a significant feature and the concept of the foreign and familiar when it comes to language, authenticity and subjective response, is an interesting conundrum. It is easy to tell when a child performs lines that are not their own. It is often the manner in which they are said that gives away the fact that what you are hearing is not real but contrived. I really love many foreign language films especially those with children in them. I am usually very moved by the performances of children in foreign language films. Does this have to do with the fact that I as an English language speaker am unable to tell if the performance by a child in a foreign language is authentic or not? I am not familiar with the inflections and rhythms of that language. In conjunction with this many have raised the issue that some Nationalities produce children who are naturally histrionic (dramatic, full of gesture, temperamental) and expressive. It is suggested that Italian and Russian children are naturally theatrical people, (Bazin: 1971). Does this phenomenon, if it exists, effect our perceptions of reality and believability in film?

All three films tell simple, everyday stories that have the most incredible capacity to move and evoke profound emotions in me. In *Kolya* a small Czech boy finds a temporary home with a Russian man. The story is about the love that they learn to have for each other. In *Salaam Bombay*, a street child attempts to earn money to enable his return

home. In *Children of Heaven*, a brother and sister struggle to share one pair of shoes in order to avoid their parents' anger over the loss of the sister's shoes.

The realism of the performance from Kolya (Andrei Chalimon) is breathtaking. It is here that one wonders about the methodology employed by director Jan Sverak. How did he approach working with this small being? Were the cameras hidden as they were in the filming of *Children of Heaven*? Was there a lengthy rehearsal process to orientate and familiarize the young actor with the film world or was the mode one of improvisation and on the spot/in-the-moment capturing of real moments?

According to Armes, 'the impact when you tell the story through the eyes of a child, using the child as a touchstone of truth, is enormous' (1971: 48). Children are the worst liars. As a teacher you learn to discern between fibbers and truth tellers. It is not a difficult thing to do. Children of a certain age have not yet learned the subtleties of the polite question or lie. 'Why are you so fat?' is a question children are not afraid to ask. Armes goes on to say that: 'in children's films, we are dealing with a special genre in which a professional actor would be unthinkable' (1971: 23).

One has to remember that there is a subjective audience response to any film. Truth is a subjective reality for each of us. Your real is not necessarily mine. The formal expression each film director chooses to use on the unadulterated chunks of life will vary. So too will the responses. But according to Armes (1971), the point of being connected to life (and therefore to reality) is to have variety and in my opinion serious, humorous but never cynical attempts at the truth.

Cinema, Cinema

I wanted to investigate the concept of cinema as place and motif for the purpose of my project. I set about firstly looking at films with cinema at the heart of them and secondly at personal story and memory surrounding cinema.

The anticipation and splendor of the cinema of a bygone era is portrayed in full sentimental Hollywood glamour style in the opening sequence of *The Majestic* (Directed and Produced by Frank Darabont and Tim Ben). The story revolves around Peter Appleton (played by Jim Carrey) a writer for a Hollywood studio who after a car accident loses his memory, is washed down river and ends up in a small town. Here he is mistaken for the son of Harry (played by Martin Landau). The son was presumed dead in the war. Peter is welcomed back by the somewhat perfect community and he and his 'father' Harry set about fixing up the old cinema 'The Majestic'. The building, all forlorn and dilapidated becomes the symbol of hope, renewal, new beginnings for the newly reunited father and son and a community reeling from the loss of so many young men from their town. The film is not very earth shattering and is nauseatingly perfectly wound up in the end in true Hollywood fairytale fashion. However it does for me capture the magic and majesty of the cinema of old.

Today our experience of cinema going is very different. We can choose from a number of mini-complexes in any shopping mall. Commercialism at its best. What matters here are bums on seat and a quick turn-over to ensure box office ratings and takings. The commercialism of this art form has reduced film to a commodity that can be taken in as a small distraction from shopping. Gone are the days of The Alhambra, The Odeon, The Three Arts now a nursery, The Monte Carlo on Adderley Street, The Protea in Claremont now a Home Choice Center, The Bijou in Observatory now a night club and gallery space, The Liberty Cinema in Goodwood, my Grandfather's cinema built with his own hands and later torn down to make way for a furniture store. This lament for the old and for what is gone is beautifully and authentically portrayed for me, in Franca Croustade's *Cinema Paradiso*. Directed by Giuseppe Tornatore in 1990, the story is about a young

boy, Salvatore or Toto (played by Salvatore Casio) and his relationship to Alfredo (played by Philippe Noiret) the projectionist of the Paradiso, the local cinema in the town of Ganado, Sicily. The film was set just prior to the advent of television. This is an important choice for the director to have made and it has relevance to my notion of the world faced with ever advancing and changing technology.

Tito falls in love with the cinema and all it holds for him. Roger Ebert in an article in the Chicago Sunday Times, refers to the cinema as Toto's substitute mother and Alfredo as his substitute father. There are three aspects of this film that I find absolutely mesmerizing and real. First is the unique relationship between Toto and Alfredo. Tito learns about life from the wiser Alfredo who is afraid that Tito will make the same mistakes that he has made. He guides the boy into manhood as an apprentice projectionist and then later as the projectionist after Alfredo is burnt in the fire. Alfredo sensing the young man's ambition, restlessness and potential, prophetically explains to Toto (played now by Marco Leonardo): 'Living here day by day you think it's the center of the world. You believe nothing will ever change and then you leave. A year, two years. When you come back, everything's changed. The thread's broken. What you come to find isn't there. What was yours is gone. You have to go away for a long time, many years...before you can come back and find your people, the land where you were born'. Later he says: 'Don't give in to nostalgia – forget about us'.

These words resonate with me and my approach to my own sense of history. It is very easy to deify the past. The idolization of a person or era once they have died can be dangerously sentimental and purely nostalgic for the sake of rosy, neat stories. However is this not one of the blessings experienced once someone has died? Do we not have the capacity to remember all that is good and forget the bad? Story becomes embellished and cleaned up and memory begins to take on a creative process of its own as it mutates to form the picture we want it to. Memory often plays us false even when we are convinced otherwise. How does this affect stories told from memory and the screenplay that results from these stories? Are they less truthful because they lack documentary accuracy? Or are they more real because they come from an individual's own reference point and

perspective? The warning is there! Don't give in to nostalgia purely for the sake of nostalgia but rather for the sake of richness of reality. For the purposes of this project I wanted to draw on the stories I had been told about my father and his two sisters growing up in The Liberty Cinema. I have recorded many hours of stories from my aunts and other individuals about cinema from the 1930s to the 1980s and the stories have been used as the backdrop to my film. However I have used selected truths and re-worked them according to the fictional needs of my screenplay. In this way truth is also manipulated and I am concerned about the mismatch of the story's truth as opposed to the actual truth especially when the original storytellers come and see the film.

The second feature inherent in *Cinema Paradiso* that I find of interest is the characterization of the actual cinema as a place of extreme and striking importance. The cinema is depicted as the central place to which a community could come and be transported into magic and passion. All ages are depicted together. Noisy, opinionated and real. The old and toothless, a mother feeding her baby, young lovers kissing in the back row, the rabble rousers spitting over the balcony on those below. The local characters are believable and real. The sense of awe about what appears on the screen is palpable. Chairs are brought in when there were not enough and the entire film and audience is transported outside in the memorable scene when Alfredo projects the film out of the booth and on to a building in the square. The crowd follows, taking their chairs with them. The destruction of the building again also offers us a metaphor for the changing world. An era coming to an end. Thirdly, I am captivated by the performance of little Toto played by Salvatore Cascio, but more discussion about this when we look at children and film.

The film *The Last Picture Show*, directed by Peter Bogdanovich in 1971, looks at life in the small Texan town of Anarene in the 1950s. The apt tag line for the poster of the film states: 'Nothing much has changed'. We see two generations of small town inhabitants struggling with the restless isolation and monotonous desolation of their everyday lives. The film was shot in gritty black and white. (Robert Surtees was the DP). According to Tim Dirks, this was very unusual for the time as the mode for film production in the 70's

was to use full colour. This return to a mode used for films of the past, gives the film 'an authentic look'. The idea of black and white photographs and film representing a more authentic record of something is an important concept in the perception of authenticity. There is the notion that black and white photographs are more factual, documentary in nature, resembling press type images and are therefore a more reliable and trustworthy record of the truth than colour photographs. Taking this into account I began to think about the grading I would choose to use in my film and the style I would choose to emulate to create the sense of age and authenticity

The opening and final scenes of the film feature the same panning shot of the main street buildings of Anarene. The opening shot pans in to the action. The wind is blowing the dust, a truck will not start and a Texas cowboy croons out the words 'Why don't you love me as you used to do?' The first building we see is run down cinema 'The Royal', at which the last film will be screened before it is shut down, hence the origin of the film's title. The final shot is an exact reverse of the opening shot. A technique that serves to reaffirm on the surface, the notion 'nothing much has changed', despite the journeys the characters, in particular Sonny Crawford (played by Timothy Bottoms), may have attempted. A night at the 'movies' represents for the characters, an exciting escape from the boredom and banality of life in Anarene. The closing down of the cinema figuratively signifies the end of flight and the inevitable acceptance of fate. Although cinema is not at the very heart of the film, the cinema motifs bookend the narrative, and deepen our understanding of the plight of the characters. I was interested in the manner in which the director chose to use cinema as place of escape as well as symbol of inevitability. Films within films are often used to represent dreams or desires and I wanted to use this representation in my film.

The Spirit of the Beehive is the fourth film under consideration. This film does not have cinema at the centre of its narrative, but does use the motif of the traveling cinema to introduce a key plot structure in the film itself. Directed by Victor Erice in 1973, this Spanish gem, set in the Castilian country side in the 1940s, tells the fascinating story of two sisters Ana and Isabel (played by Ana Torrent aged 8 and Isobel Telleria aged 10).

What captivated my attention at the start, was the arrival of the film, which will be played in the town hall. A group of children excitedly jump and shout: 'The movie's coming, the movie's coming!' The children demand to know from the mayor what the film is about. All he keeps saying is that it is 'wonderful, magnificent, beautiful'. The town crier announces that the film that will be screened will be *Frankenstein*. The town's people gather, bringing their own chairs and portable heaters, to watch the film. Children sit in the front, seated among them we see Ana and Isobel for the first time. The informal gathering for the mere watching of a film is significant for my subject matter and is reminiscent of the scenes in *Cinema Paradiso*. In *The Spirit of the Beehive*, the gathered crowd watch James Whale's 1931 version of *Frankenstein* starring Boris Karloff as 'the monster'. The scene that we see being played out, (Frankenstein befriends a small girl and they throw flowers into a lake), becomes an extremely important element in the world of the sisters in the remainder of *The Spirit of the Beehive*. The screen character so believable to Ana, becomes a real 'character' in her childhood world. I was interested in the manner in which the director of this film used other films as key plot points in the story. I liked the layering of cinema within cinema so to speak. We could see *Frankenstein* through the eyes of Ana and this peaked my curiosity about perspective within a film. I wanted to create a story told by a child and from his perspective, his point of view.

The Spirit of the Beehive, is to me a most authentic and convincing portrayal of the dreamlike world of childhood. A world where adults are almost absent altogether. Dialogue is at a minimum and long, silent periods go by as the director focuses on long shot, after long shot. The effect of this is the sense of real time passing. No hurried or frequent editing. One gets the feeling that the camera is not actually present and we are voyeurs observing the slice of life before us. Ana's performance, is in my opinion, unaffected and truly an authentic portrayal of the manner in which a child her age would instinctually react to the world. When I watched this film I was interested in discovering the manner in which the director had worked with these children. It felt to me as though he knew children well and his observance of children or of the memory of his own childhood appeared to come through very strongly and clearly in the film.

Realism and the way forward

If one had to put into action all the ideals of pure Realism and Neo-realism in a film, you would have little to no control over the process in which the story would develop. Hidden cameras, no rehearsal, no professional actors, no lighting, improvisation, no trickery, merely a recording of a chance occurrence. Filmmakers want to tell stories. They plan and plot the look and feel for every nuance of the story that they have carefully 'nursed from birth'. A director will definitely want to have control to a greater or lesser degree over the development of the story in the filming process. They will have to call upon many devices to create the story they want to tell.

The Making of *Unwritten letters*

With the research behind me I wanted to practically investigate the points raised thus far. I needed a vehicle with which to do this and thus the screenplay was born. Having started out wanting to work in a documentary fashion, I decided to create an extremely simple fiction story about the lives of three people in the late 1940s and work in a classic fashion.

For the purposes of my film I needed to do much research into the life and times of the late 1940s in South Africa, specifically related to cinema of that time. I began to collect people's stories on camera about cinema and their memories of the ritual of going to 'bioscope'. I collected stories from many people, the youngest being 36 and the oldest being 75. In the future I hope to use these stories in a documentary about the cinemas of old in South Africa. These stories provided the daubs of colour on the canvas that is my film. They allowed me to add the detail, unusual elements and richness of texture to my film. I needed to familiarize myself with the films that were popular at the time my story

is set. I spent many hours watching films like: *Casablanca*, *Mildred Pierce*, *Ninotchka*, *Gone with the wind*, *Anchors Away*, *National Velvet*, *Gold Rush* and *Modern Times*, *Stagecoach* and *Little Foxes*. I wanted to soak myself in the genre of film that would have been the escape for people of the era. This was post the war and a time of rekindling of spirit, hope and magic again. I wanted to explore the kinds of films that children would have watched at the Saturday matinee. The musical cinema especially: Gene Kelly, Mickey Rooney, Fred Astir and Judy Garland. I wanted my film to be seeped in the images from the screen and the music of the era. The same for costume hair and make-up. See the picture gallery.

The screenplay was an extremely difficult and time-consuming process. I felt I created a story that was possibly too dense for the purposes of a twenty six to thirty minute film. But in other ways the story is simple, repetitive, innocent and I felt appropriate for working with children for the first time. The themes which ran through the film emphasized the tag-line for the film: 'When your life falls apart, who brings the pieces back together for you?' Loss, love and the literal ways children interpret things were all important. I wanted a universal feeling to the story but set it in South Africa. The sun, moon and stars became an important universal connection through time and place in this story.

I needed approximately 16 children to be in this film. The children had to be of the age when children first go to school. The lead boy needed to look Greek in some way. I approached Drama clubs and schools and invited children to come for an audition. Eight-eight children arrived and through a slow process I cast seven adults and sixteen children. I focused on casting children with acting potential or a beautiful face on camera! If I got both then it was a bonus! I chose to work in local locations rather than travel vast distances with many children to authentic villages like Paarl. We shot in and around Chelsea village in Wynberg, at the Education Museum in Wynberg, in fields in Constantia, at the Labia on Orange Street and at Oostewal a National monument in Langebaan. We shot over nine days.

Working with the children

'Never work with children or animals in film!' Is the mantra I have heard more often than any other since I began my journey into the world of film. Working with children in film is messy, complicated, time consuming, dangerous and unpredictable. If this advice is true, why then is it that some of the most profoundly moving, entertaining and thought provoking films to date have children at the heart of them? Why then do individuals continue to travel down this rocky road and continue to create the work that they do with children? I have no doubt that working with children in film is an extremely complicated and difficult path to choose. I feel sure that there are many added considerations a filmmaker would have to contemplate when working with children that would not be an issue with an all adult cast and crew. I am interested in the work of those who dare to venture into the quagmire of children and film. I am fascinated by the ability of filmmakers who achieve emotionally compelling performances from children on screen. I am interested in uncovering the nature of the methodologies and practices of these filmmakers. I want to know more about what is behind the 'magic' of capturing child performances on screen.

There is precious little documented about work with children in film, specifically with relation to acting coaching, rehearsal techniques, on-set interaction and achieving the desired performance from children. My research had to come from interviews with local people who have worked with children in film as well as from observing and critically analyzing films with children at the heart of them.

I have many passions. Cinema and children are two of them. I have grown up with the legend of the cinema of old in my blood and I have been a teacher of children for 10 years. I wanted to combine these two ideas. I set about creating a film with children and cinema at the heart of it. The screenplay I created was to be used as a vehicle in which to explore the concept of working with children in film and the layers of affect and construct (magic) that are used to create the illusion of reality in film. I want the insights I have

gained about my experiences of working with children in this film, to serve as a practical guide to assist emergent filmmakers should they want to attempt work with children in film.

All filmmaking is trickery. What are the tricks one needs to have up your sleeve when working with children? Children are not able to pretend to be someone else very convincingly or to lose themselves in a character like adult actors can when asked to. This is possibly why the ideals of the Neo-Realist film movement and its constructs, work so well with children. One merely observes a child in their natural environment, doing what they know best. They do not have to think about what they are doing or go outside of their realm of experience. Generally speaking adults have more life experience to draw on for acting when compared to children. They have maturity and this brings insight about life and the way the world works. This does not make them better or more convincing actors though. Children have their own understanding of how the world operates. Their unique insights, refreshing and often spontaneous responses to the world make film work with them extremely exciting and unpredictable.

Why it is difficult to work with children?

After completing this project, it is my opinion that the attributes that make children appealing and inspiring to work with in film, are the very same attributes that make children complicated and difficult and sometimes near impossible to work with in a film. I would like to outline and discuss the attributes that I observed during the making of *Unwritten letters* that made directing children immensely exciting and daunting at the same time. I would like suggest ways in which a director might approach these attributes in order to elicit the desired performance from a child actor.

The Question of Experience

The children I chose to work with in *Unwritten letters* had no previous film experience. Some of them belonged to Drama clubs or had been involved in their school plays.

When working with adults, you assume that they are able to read, write, concentrate, be professional, handle multiple instructions and co-operate with a team. When you are working with children you cannot assume anything. You have to begin a fresh and be incredibly inventive in your directorial approach. I am a novice filmmaker and in the case of *Unwritten letters*, a first time director of children for camera. The concept of acting for camera or being part of a film set was foreign to all the child actors. This combination of inexperience at the start of the project was extremely daunting. I intended to experiment with techniques and methods I had read about, heard about and thought about but never attempted previously with a cast, who knew nothing about being in a film. Working with a team where there is little experience has advantages and disadvantages.

In my approach to the project, I was extremely honest with the children who were cast in my film. I explained that this was the first time I was working with children in a film and that we as a team would need to work things out together. In my experience as a teacher it does not help to try and pull the wool over children's eyes. If you are honest about your shortcomings, they are invited to relax about theirs. Sometimes a level playing field is a good place to start. In this way, the children were free to ask questions and to expose their feeling of inadequacies while acting. There existed from the start a sense of common purpose in the team. I feel this helped to put the children at ease and feel comfortable about making mistakes. A relaxed child on set is a happy child and one willing to explore and push the boundaries of comfort zones. If a child actor felt daunted or intimidated on set, I would say that that could work against the purposes of your film and make it difficult for the child to relax and make is harder for you to get a variety of responses out of them. There came a point in the filming process when I began to find my feet as a director and I felt more confident about experimenting more with the children. I had started on a level playing field with the children but found that once I had gained this confidence I needed to 'up the stakes' in a sense and raise the expectations I had set initially for the children. Children like to rise to a challenge. According to Rita Horst a Dutch filmmaker who works extensively with children in film and television, it is important to establish yourself as the authority figure so that children respect your credibility without being afraid of you (Horst in Rickards 2005).

People who have never been on a film set often have an over-rosy view of what a typical day entails. Children especially are often under the understanding that film work is glamorous work. It became very important to inform the children what the filming process would entail so that they would be prepared for the reality of the hard work involved. At the start of this project it was very important to explain what a typical day of shooting would be like. Children respond extremely well to being treated like adults or professionals. They enjoy the status associated with being called an experienced actor. I explained to them that they would need to agree to the code of professional conduct that all actors agree to abide by. This really helped later on in the process when stamina and enthusiasm wilted on set or when a child was misbehaving or complaining about the hard work or unwilling to try a scene. The children responded well when reminded of this code of professional conduct.

Inexperienced actors need to become familiar with the manner in which a film shoot operates. I spent a long time before the shoot familiarizing the children with the language of instruction on set. I made them aware of the commands I as the director would give and what they had to do in response. Film jargon is something to get used to and if your children are familiar this saves much time during a shoot. It also helps with discipline on set. I had up to sixteen children on set at any given time and the noise off camera is often a problem. It helps to have a rest area away from the action where children can go. However the command 'quiet on set' becomes an important one for children to grasp. It helped to make it a competition to see who could keep quiet for the longest. What really helped was working with a monitor on set. Children who were not acting on set were fascinated by the action they could see on the monitor. This helped to focus and calm them and helped them to observe others in action and learn from them. This also helped with the understanding of the differences between 'close-up', 'wide' and 'medium' camera set-up. The children could see on the monitor how much an actor can move in a close-up and when the action within a shot was delivered too quickly. On *Unwritten letters* I explained to the children that one does not stop acting until the director calls 'cut'. This is very important because when a child is finished doing what they think they

need to do in a scene or the dialogue has finished, they will stop loose their character and look away from camera usually to me to see if they have done a good job. This severely hampers extended response and reaction time to a scene that has a high emotional content.

Spontaneity and Attention Span

Inexperience is not always a negative attribute to have. There is a freshness and un-jaded approach to a project when it is something that hasn't been explored before. I think one is more open and flexible to new ideas and suggestions when one tackles a new experience. I feel children are at their most compelling when they are inadvertently 'performing'. A spontaneous reaction from a child will be the most convincing and truthful reaction you will be able to record. One should try and preserve on set the feeling of spontaneity at all times. In order to help achieve this, keep shooting times short and focused. Children do not have developed attention spans. Children of six years are able to concentrate for up to a half hour at a time. It is very important to keep things lively but not too stimulating on set. Children are easily distracted by activities that happen around them. A film set is a very exciting and busy place with many distractions. Some directors only bring the children onto set when all the preparation work is done.

Children who are tired or have not been eating properly will be 'spontaneously revolting' to work with. Insist that children rest in between shoots and eat healthy nutritious snacks in between shoots. I did not allow chips, sweets, fizzy drinks and junk food on set and provided items like Ceres juices, fruit, sandwiches, muffins, Safari Jungle Bites packs of dried fruit, peanuts and raisins and other slow energy release food. A child hopped up on sugar is very difficult to handle. Be strict with this, it will only help your film and your mood.

The concept of rehearsals with child actors for a film is a complex consideration. There is a fine line between under rehearsing and over rehearsing with children and the affect this has on their performance on screen. According to Meg Rickards, a South African

filmmaker and educator (2005), one should make children familiar with the story of the film up-front and in full detail. If the story is complex and very adult in nature then the story should be explained in full using language and phraseology that is suited to children. Rickards also suggest that in the explanation, that the story is told from the children's perspective and focuses on the parts that involve them directly. 'I think that they seeing the story from their point of view is crucial, even if their role is a small one. I am not saying that they shouldn't know where they fit in the whole story, or be under the illusion that they are the main character if they are not, but they can for the main part engage with what concerns them' (Rickards 2005).

In my experience it is more important to focus on explaining in more detail the intricacies of the story to the lead child actors rather than to the extras. I was able to spend a lot of time with my child lead Kyle who played Nicky in the film. During these times normally while driving in my car to and from shoots, we chatted about the film and the story and in particular about Nicky's journey in the story. It was extremely valuable for me to witness Kyle telling me the story in his own words, from Nicky's perspective. It helped me to understand when I needed to explain more to him about a particular event in the story that he was unsure about. This mastering of the story for himself helped him to make sense of the motivations for the actions his character Nicky would have to play on screen. I think he felt happier and more secure knowing when and where he fitted into the story as a whole.

I think that informal and very short rehearsals with children are the way to go in film. On the stage children need to understand the concept of cues, exits and entrances and the precise timing of event sequences and costume changes. On the stage real time is adhered to and there is only one chance to get the performance and lines correct. Lengthy and extremely precise rehearsals are required to achieve this. The same is not true for film. You have multiple occasions, within limits of course, to get the desired performance in a scene. Real time is not observed and one can repeat a scene many times using off camera techniques to achieve the desired response from a child. Therefore a child does not need extensive rehearsals prior to shooting and does not have to be word perfect before the

time. Most people I have spoken to rely on brief rehearsal just before shooting or the feeding of each line to the child just prior to a take. Horst uses this method and in this way she is able to run the lines over and over again with the child until the desired performance is achieved. She never plays a scene out in full until the child is in front of the camera. I can understand the advantages of this method of working. It saves time and energy on the part of the child and you are able to control the response a lot more than if the child was operating on their own.

Over rehearsing a scene can lead to flat or unspontaneous performances from a child. Too much familiarity with the lines and the delivery can become wooden and dull. The lines although they have not been created by the child in the moment must appear to be just that in the final product. Often a child will repeat something in a dull manner if they do not understand the line. In this instance I feel it would be a good idea, in order to achieve a spontaneous sounding performance from a child, to have the child deliver the line using their own words. During the filming of *Unwritten letters*, many line changed as a result of my preferring the way the children said them to the way in which they were written.

One of the key concepts of achieving emotionally compelling performances on screen is that of action and reaction. Characters in a story have to engage and interact with the other characters in order for the internal world of the characters and the subplots in the story to emerge. Children are not always able to achieve this interplay. A child is often only able to concentrate on their own lines and action at a given moment. They are focused on the delivery of their own performance which takes much effort on their part, that they often forget about reacting to or taking note of a fellow actor's lines. They often rush lines they know well, or will often anticipate lines of others and react too quickly and therefore in an unconvincing manner. This is another reason to under rehearse scenes where reaction shots are needed. It is also extremely important to separate instructions out and to feed children small bits of instructions and information at a time. They do not yet have great capacity to multi-task effectively on camera. Technical details and character details are very confusing together. I found it interesting to let the child run with the scene to see how they would cope with no interference from me first. Often this

worked and I was able on many occasions to use my first take. However often this did not work and the child would stop, flustered and say they could not manage all the physical action. Because of this the lines and emotional content of the scene was sacrificed. In these instances it was advisable to simplify the task technically or to talk children through the technical side of prop handling or physical acting while the child was on camera and I was off camera. This makes your sound in post extremely problematic. However one has to use all sorts of methods to help the child to get the performance. I have learnt that a great deal of illusion is used in post-production handling of sound when one films with children.

Horst in Rickard (2005) uses a very different technique to gain spontaneous reactions from children particularly in close-up shots. She has a box of trick items that she uses to elicit responses from children when they are unable to elicit the performance themselves. The items include funny glasses, fart cushions and other party shop items These help to relax children and elicit spontaneous responses. It also helps to liven things up when energy is flagging.

Child actors and the characters they play

Children are often extremely obsessed about the characters they are to play in a film or stage play. They become very aware of the size their role in comparison to others in the same play or film. The amount of words in comparison to others becomes of paramount importance and children will easily become openly jealous of other child actors. I suppose it is the same with adults but polite custom has taught us to hide our 'green monsters'. Children wear theirs right out on their sleeves. It is important to make sure that each child in your film understands who they will be playing and where in the story they will fit in. It is useful when you explain the story to the cast that you introduce all the players being clear to state who the lead characters and supporting characters are. Spend time introducing the children who will play those characters too. It is important to make each child feel their importance in the film even if their characters are not crucial to the

film's plot. In this way a child will feel a part of the process and will invest time and effort because they feel important and vital to the story.

In *Unwritten letters* I divided the cast into extras, non-speaking roles, supporting roles and leads. In this film the main child lead was Nicky a six-year-old orphan who lives with his Greek grandfather. His two best friends are Raymond and Abigail, the supporting child actors. The remaining child actors became the non-speaking roles and sisters/brothers and friends who happened to want to be in the film became the extras in fun group scenes in the cinema. I had to spend most of my time and effort with the supporting and child lead so the other children had to maintain their performances pretty much on their own. To facilitate this process, I created character names and basic identities for each non-speaking role in the film even though an audience would never hear those names in the final product. When I cast my children I did not have specific performance requirements in mind but rather I searched for the look I wanted to create on camera. My film was a period piece set in the 1940s and the children needed to have the look of children that may have been around during that era.

I worked with broad stereotypes for each character and chose specific activities or tasks that each character was to perform in the film. Children recognize stereotypes quickly and easily and know how to pretend to be that stereotype quite effectively. For example, I created Percy and Richard, the two good boys who always get picked on. Matthew and Luqmaan who played those boys were able to go away and create their own back-story for their characters. The same was said for Penelope and Priscilla the snobby girls. Ruth and Hayley played the girls in green, as they became known. They were able to create an entire world around this pair of twins and this made their performance and interaction rich and interesting to watch. It is a very good idea to create the back-story for each character with the children who are to play them. Rickards suggests that you spend some time with your leads inventing the back-story of the characters they will play. Andrea Pienaar a South African filmmaker who has worked with children in film (2005) explained that even simple things like deciding what was go into the picnic basket of the children in her short film *Akasha*, helped to involved and secure investment from the

child actors. In so doing children begin to make choices about what their characters would do. The relationship between actor and character is an important consideration.

Children are not always aware of the separation between the identity of their character and their own identity. Children of a certain age do find this difficult to do. Pretend play is often real play in the mind and imagination of particularly young children (under six). Children over six start to be more able to discern role separation. Sometimes there is advantage in a child believing that they are their character. If a child believes they are the character, you are more likely to get an authentic performance from them. There are cases though when discernment between the two becomes helpful. I found that it was helpful to be able to address children as their characters on set and during performance. We were able to have discussions about what their character may or may not do. It helped when fellow actors did the same during filming. I tried to praise and discipline the child and concentrated on asking character related questions to the child in character. Rickards (2005) says: 'I think it is really important to speak with the actors as their characters, so that they can start to feel, think and act in character from the start'. Horst in Rickards (2005), suggests that there is another benefit to the character/actor identity separation. When a child does not want to do something for camera for example hold someone's hand or kiss a girl, a director can negotiate by explaining that they know that the actor does not like to kiss girls but the character does.

For me it would also be important for actor and character identity to separate, particularly at the end of a hard day on set when a child needs the release from the character and is able to leave them behind. This is a technique used by drama coaches of children and is referred to as 'de-roling'. At the end of a shoot I like to bring the child back to him or herself and to praise the child for their hard work.

Child actors and the Period piece

I chose to create a film about a group of children's first day at school in a small town in the late 1940s. I am fascinated by this era as I am with old artifacts in general. I set the

piece at this time for various reasons. Children have a relative concept to time. They think that a person of thirty-five is extremely old in relation to themselves. Most of the children in my cast were born after 1995 and have no concept of a world without television, where headmasters were allowed to hit you with a cane at school. This would be an extremely foreign world for them to contemplate. It became very important, if I was to expect convincing behaviour from my young cast, to allow the children to enter into the world of a child living in 1948. In order to achieve this I gathered together as many artifacts from the era as I could. I borrowed some but most of them I had at home. These included a gramophone and original 78 records which we used in the film. Box photographic cameras and an old film camera, films in their original canisters, hats, walking sticks, gloves and other clothing items, comic books and children story books from the era including original school books, old postcards and writing implements such as paper knives and ink-wells, children's toys such as spinning tops and paper doll cut outs. Before we began filming and when the cast got together for the first time, I told the children the story of the film after which they were allowed to look at and play with the items I had collected for them. While they were examining the items, we spoke about the era and what a typical day was like for a young child. I showed the children many black and white photographs as well as my old family photo album to give them a sense of what people did and looked like in those days. They were fascinated to hear in particular about cinema etiquette in the late 1940s.

I do think that this exercise was a very valuable to spend time on. The children enjoyed it and they became quite expert at spotting the non-period items on set. In fact they, as a group began to maintain standards among themselves during a shoot. Children would correct the language or prop of a fellow actor: 'You can't say "movies", you have to say, "films"!' or 'You can't wear that watch it's too modern!' 'Guys' became 'chaps' and 'cool' became 'neat'. The children bought into this world completely and were very proud of their attention to detail. Children also started to bring items like cattles and old books and suitcases to the shoot. This kind of commitment and investment is extremely heart-warming and encouraging to a director. It showed just how much they were

enjoying themselves in this imaginary world. I feel it really aided the authenticity of performances from some of the children.

Most successful and very unexpectedly so, was the children's reactions to the films of the era. With kind permission from Freddy Ogterop of the Cape Film Library, I was able to borrow an old projector and canisters of real film to use in the cinema shoot. The children firstly did not know that this was going to happen and many of them have never been inside screen one at the Labia on Orange Street Cape Town. This theatre was opened in the early 1950s and is a wonderfully atmospheric location in which to work. With kind permission from Ludi Kraus, the owner, we were able to use it for our period piece. The children were thus immersed in a world of yester-year dressed in their costumes and eating popcorn from small brown paper packets. Who would not believe?

We set up the projector and I was amazed to see the reaction on the children's faces when the like of Charles Chaplin in *Gold Rush* and John Wayne in *Stagecoach* appeared in true jumpy, flickering fashion on screen. The children were mesmerized and the spontaneous reactions that we were able to film, I believe are among the more successful of *Unwritten letters*. I think that equipping the children with knowledge about the period piece before we began shooting helped to make them feel comfortable and secure about what was going to be expected on them on set. It allowed them understanding into why they had to say/do/wear strange and unfamiliar things. The knowledge also helped the children to plumb greater depths with their own characters and this made for richer more motivated performances from the children.

Costumes and Props

Children are quite particular when it comes to the costumes they have to wear for performance. They don't want to be made fools of but they also want to please you and wear what you suggest. This is not always the case and you will come across instances when children will refuse to don an outfit. There is no point in forcing them because this will result in a child being unhappy in front of the camera. This may be your intention

and in that case I would certainly use uncomfortable, itchy or ridiculous costume to evoke a sense of outrage, discomfort or irritability in a child actor on set. However, generally you want a happy, comfortable child on set. If one was not working on a period piece, I would suggest relying on the costumes that the children normally wear or what they suggested. However in *Unwritten letters* I had to stick to what was authentic in 1948.

Costume hiring is extremely expensive, especially for children as the risk of damage to the clothing is fairly high. I was extremely lucky to have the help of Celeste Pretorius at the Little Theatre. Together we found most of the items I needed from stock and at various second hand clothing stores. I stored the costumes in the wardrobe at the Little for ease of fitting the leads. I took the lead boy Kyle and supporting children who played Raymond and Abigail (Carig and Fiona) first. I tried out various options until I had at least 3 combinations that worked for each child. Because you do not have the budget to create costumes you have to be clever with what you have. So shirts and jumpers get switched on various days of shooting. Outfits get shared between children who are not on screen together. You also rely heavily on accessories like hats, braces, hair ribbons, flowers and bags to add to or alter the looks of an outfit.

I spent most of my time getting the lead children and adults outfitted. This time was well spent firstly because I wanted my leads particularly to feel comfortable and for them to have functional and workable clothing on set. Secondly, the children while waiting for costume altering and adjusting had a chance to play in the wardrobe together and this helped to break the ice between the lead and his screen best friends. I was able to observe the dynamics that were emerging between them and this helped to define the on-screen dynamics as well. A lot of what I observed in the children while they played in the costume wardrobe, I chose to put in the film and slightly alter my original ideas about their screen friendship. On a student project such as this one, you are director, producer, costume designer, location scout and caterer all at once. Because of this you have the rare opportunity to observe your actors in a variety of ways that you would not normally be privy to, if your role was only that of director. I enjoyed this angle and would try in the

future to be involved in as many ways as possible in order to get to know the children I am working with well.

When it came time to costume the non-speaking roles in the film, I took the costumes home and did the fittings there. The children were very excited and wanted to see what each character was going to wear. The long process of altering the costumes to fit was time consuming but essential. Your children need to feel happy and comfortable if you expect them to deliver great performances. A case in point was the boy who wore the sailor suite, Carl. He was very keen to wear the suite at first and enjoyed the positive reactions he received from the other cast members. However and unbeknown to me the suite was itchy and the pants kept falling down. Carl did not say anything and suffered in silence. When it came time to get the children back to complete the shoot after Christmas, Carl did not want to come back. Devastated I spoke to his mother who told me what the problem was. I promised him a new outfit and back he came and was more focused and energized than he had ever been. I feel that even on the limited budget the costumes for me gave a period feel to the piece and were on the whole quite effective and I was very pleased with them.

Children need props when they are acting for camera. Bobby Heaney, well known South African director of film, television and theatre has worked extensively with children on stage and screen (*Soul Buddies* and SABC/Ciak winning film *Lucky* to name a few). During a television workshop with him in 2004, he began to discuss work with children on screen. He said that often children would freeze up in front of the camera even though they were fine in the rehearsal. As soon as the focus is on the child and there is pressure to deliver the performance, they clam up. Bobby suggested that you give a child in this instance a prop to play with and the problem is often solved. What the prop does is give something for the child to focus their energy on, almost distracting them from the pressure of the task at hand. If the prop is carefully chosen, i.e. something that a child would normally be interested in playing with, then the handling of that prop will be natural and unaffected. In this manner I think that props can help to define a character depending on the manner in which that character handles that prop.

The irony of what is being suggested here is that you will get a better performance if you give the child, who already has enough to cope with on set, something else to think about. However this truly works. In *Unwritten letters* the children were all given props to deal with most of the time. They were given cattles, sticks, bags, paper to fold into boats, bubblegum, books, caps, popcorn, coins. In most cases the children when they were dealing with props were less aware of the camera and less aware of the fact that they were pretending to be in a film. They relaxed into the process more easily and the natural behaviour became more prominent. It is difficult for children to just be when they know there is a camera watching. If you say 'be happy, sad, angry, jealous' they will give you the broad stereotype of those emotions. If you put them in a 'happy' environment with something real to play with, they will simply 'be' happy. The paper boat/stream scene is a case in point. I gave the children paper and reeds and I placed them on the wooden bridge over the stream. I asked the cameraman to keep filming and I waited for something to happen. The children were unsure at first and kept looking to me for suggestions and guidance. I told them that I was not a child so I didn't know what they should do but that they were and so they should do what feels right to them. They soon got into it and forgot about the camera and crew completely.

Children and their relationship to Adult cast members

Although the focus of this paper is on the child actors in *Unwritten letters*, it is important to reflect on the combination of child and adult actors in this film. All adult actors in this film had no previous film experience and all of them were amateur performers. I think this is clear to see when one looks at the overall success with which they handled the material on camera, that this inexperience shows through clearly. The grandfather and teacher are played by people who come from a background in theatre performance rather than screen performance. I am also an amateur film director who comes from a stage background. I became very aware of the differences inherent in the techniques each craft employs and of the shortcomings of my inexperience in writing for and eliciting performances on screen.

As a student director you do not have the budget to remunerate professional actors for their time. On this project I had to budget according to the fact that this was a period piece first. With this taken into account, one has to ask many favours from many people. This becomes a tricky situation because without formal contracts and remuneration, people feel they are not beholden to the project and may or may not let you down if other paying jobs come their way. As understandable as this is, it is an extremely frustrating and precarious position to be in as a director who is trying to co-ordinate a shoot involving twenty-five plus cast and crew not to mention parents. To avoid this I cast adults who had the time and willingness to work on an amateur production and muddle along with the rest of us without expecting remuneration. I wanted people who were happy to experience a film shoot without too many expectations. Although I ran my shoot with every attention to professional detail, I wanted a relaxed atmosphere in which to work. Without money it is impossible to pay actors you would dearly like to have play the roles in your film. One has to make do with what you can get.

I found it extremely difficult to cast the role of Jack, the grandfather. Older men actors are difficult as it is to find in Cape Town. The good ones are extremely busy with their own work and many agencies can only offer a few options. The 'Greekness' of the character was very specific and not easy to recreate. The accent for one is very difficult to handle because it is not heard very often in the world and therefore not easy for an amateur actor to emulate. Because the character is based on my Greek grandfather, I also had very specific ideas in mind for what the character needed to look and sound like. I did not want an extreme, pure 'Greekness' but an authentic flavouring to the character.

What I wanted to do with this role was go the Neo-Realist route and find a real Greek grandfather within the Hellenic Community in Cape Town. Unfortunately this did not come about. I think having a real Greek person for Nicky to act with would have made a significant difference to his performance and the authenticity of the character of the grandfather. The character as it stands in the film now is a rather young, lightweight, and

generic grandfather who is less 'Greek' than I had hoped. He comes across as caring and quirky but is a 'Guipetto' from Pinocchio rather than something original and gritty.

Shaun who tackled this role was very aware of the difficulties inherent in playing this role. I think he coped admirably but I don't think he was ever comfortable with his performance. He needed a lot more of my time than I was able to give and I regret not being able to manage this. The hurly-burly of the set was extremely problematic for Shaun and sustaining his character over time was difficult for him. At times when things were not going well particularly to do with accent, I was often at a loss as to how to help him. In the end we settled on a generic 'Mediterranean' accent, what ever that is, and this seemed to settle him. There came a point when although I knew we were not achieving the objectives for the scene, we had to work with what we had. I decided to let go of the ideal and allow the grandfather character to be less Greek and ultimately played down as much as possible without losing the story, the role of the grandfather. I needed to accept that together we were unable to make this happen and focused on making the actor feel good about what they were able to do rather than terrible because of the inexperience of all of us. If I did this again and I had the budget, I would provide a voice coach to work with the actor on set. I would also spend more time on back-story and insist that the actor immerse himself in the world of the character more.

In the future I would handle the adult actors in my film very differently. I cast the adult actors according to the look I had in mind for each character and according to ability or potential ability I perceived from the screen test and audition. I also took into consideration how I perceived the actor would cope with working with children on this project. I needed to have their support and understanding and be secure in the knowledge that they could cope with the unpredictable nature of working with children and the demands that would place on their patience and time.

Laura, who played the teacher Stella, is a mother of two girls and a teacher of high school students. On set and particularly on the away-shoot in Langebaan, she became my second pair of hands and slotted in as a mother and helper when the going got tough. I felt she

really understood the children and worked extremely well with them during and between shoots. She became extremely popular and the children always asked if she 'was really going to be their teacher today'. She was not on set frequently and this helped to maintain the illusion of her status as the angel, saviour, Mary Poppins, Cinderella in the children's eyes. Whenever she arrived on set she always looked beautiful and happy and really livened up the atmosphere which helps so much with tired children. I needed the children to idolize her so that when she, Stella, left the school, the emotions around that would feel real to the children. For these reasons I felt that Laura was the perfect Stella.

However, the role of Stella was quite an emotionally demanding one that required quite a high level of experience to handle well. I think Laura coped admirably with very little direction from me. This is one of the disadvantages of working with children and adults simultaneously on set. The focus of this project for me was on eliciting the desired performance from the children and I had to spend the majority of time with them on set and I feel my adult actor's performances suffered as a result of this. At times I simply had to run through things with the adults prior to shooting and if things went wrong then I would need to first deal with the child actor and assume that the adult actor would self-maintain and put into action the brief feedback I was able to give. When the scene was centered around an adult actor rather than a child, I worked with that adult extensively. For example for Stella's break-down scene towards the end of the film, I put into practice a suggestion made by Jacqui Singer who coached us briefly in directing for camera. She suggested that you walk around an area with your actor just prior to shooting an emotionally demanding scene and gear them up for the intensity you need them to feel in front of camera. You achieve this by talking to them very quietly but intently while walking. Laura had worked on an extensive back-story to the world of Stella and her husband David. We discussed this back-story during rehearsals and when I geared her up for her emotional scene I used that back-story to help evoke feelings. I also worked with association and this was very successful in accessing personal, emotional experiences from which the actor could draw.

I would suggest then that much more work with adult actors needs to happen in the pre-production phase of a film, when your child actors need less input and few rehearsals. I think that one would need to insist on a research and back-story with your adult actors. I think that if you choose to work with children in film, then you need to choose your adult co-actors very carefully. They need to be patient and experienced actors, able to manage the type of shooting techniques at work. Adult actors can be a great support and help to you as a director by helping their child co-actors to focus and concentrate. Children will learn discipline and professional attitude by example. Adult actors can be extremely effective in keeping lines and action spontaneous and fresh so that one can continue to elicit a spontaneous response from the child even when a scene needs to be repeated many times over.

A good example of this was the case with Chris Weare who graciously agreed to play Mr. Fistule the headmaster. I decided that I would not let the children meet this actor prior to shooting the actual scene. In preparation for the scene I told the children about this very experienced performer who was coming to act in our film. They were to be on their best, most professional behaviour. This upped the stakes for the children quite a bit and they rose to the occasion. There was a great sense of anticipation about his arrival and how 'scary' he was going to be. I made sure cast and crew were in place in the schoolroom beforehand so that we were ready to shoot the moment the headmaster walked in the door. I had run through the scene with Chris before the children arrived for shooting that day and he stayed hidden until we were ready for him. I instructed the children and Chris to keep going no matter what and to never look at the camera until I said cut.

This is the stuff of magic when you film with children. I could cut the tension in the room with a knife, which was the desired response for this scene. The children's reactions were spontaneous and unaffected. Nobody over-acted or lost focus. Chris, because of his experience managed, technically and emotionally to carry the scene with great ease. The children did not anticipate any lines or movements but responded to them naturally and truthfully as they occurred. The tension was still palpable even after the dramatic exit of the headmaster. After I called 'cut' the children burst out laughing and could not believe

what had just happened to them. I used ninety percent of this first take in the final cut and to me it is one of the most successful scenes in the film. We had to repeat parts of the scenes for the close-up shots and for this Chris was again invaluable. We agreed up front that he would repeat the sequence in the same manner for continuity sake but that he would add to and mix up the action that was not required for continuity purposes. I told the children that the headmaster was going to be picking on different children each time we shot the scene. In this way we managed to keep reactions fresh and the sense of anticipation and spontaneity going.

Technical Details and Children on a film set

Instructions are very important while filming. Be sure that your child actors know what each one mean because you may sometimes loose spontaneous performance opportunities if you have to stop and explain what you mean while shooting. Very important is to practice what the instructions mean. For instance a child will stop acting as soon as their lines are delivered and often the reaction shots to other actor's lines that come after are lost. Practice with the children the concept of continued 'acting' until 'cut' is called. I set up a system to help the children. When I called 'standby', the children had to begin acting and when I called 'cut' they had to count to three before they could stop acting. This worked in most cases except where little mouths were silently counting to three.

The other two that come to mind particularly are: over-acting and looking at the camera. Children will tend to over act when given broad instructions. Make sure your child actors know the difference. Over-acted work is very unnatural. Show the children examples of when one over acts. Children and adults tend to make things exaggerated in front of the camera so gestures and movement are often too large or too quick for the medium of film. You will need to get the children especially to slow down movement particularly for close-up shots. It helps to tell them to think about what they are doing carefully and this slows it down.

The camera is an object that has great significance and interest for children. It is very difficult to keep the camera invisible when working with children. They are fascinated by it and the attention it receives from the adults (director, DP and Sound engineer) who are working to set up the shot. Children learn very quickly that when the red light on the camera is on they are being filmed, even when you do not want them to know that they are being filmed. The director will more often than not stand just to the left and right of the camera to give direction and when a child looks at you in this position, they will invariably look at the camera too. A director of children has to feed children their lines and talk them through action on many occasions. You do this normally from the position of the camera. Often during filming something unexpected will happen that may throw the children but which is spontaneously beautiful on camera. Invariably two or three children out of a group will look to the director to see if they must carry on or ignore what has just happened. This happens often during shooting and the illusions you are trying so hard to create are dashed in a split second and you are unable to use the footage.

I would suggest that a director should vary their position on set while shooting is happening. This does hamper your ability to see exactly what is being framed on camera and what the exact focus is. However, the use of a monitor greatly helps this problem. If you and the monitor are positioned off to the far left or right of camera, and a child looks to you then the chances are that you will still be able to use the footage. You are still able to see what is being framed and communicate with your DP from a distance. In some instance I gave the camera a name and personality. 'Gertie the camera is watching you all the time but she is very shy and does not like you to look at her or make any sudden movements'. This helped with the younger children on set who really became fixated with the camera.

Your technical crew on set and your child actors need to function well together as a team. Rickards (2005) suggests that all technical setting up on location has to be complete before any child is allowed on set. Equipment is expensive and often dangerous. Children may sustain injury during set-up and children will get under-foot while the crew is trying to set up and equipment may get damaged. The crew need to focus on their tasks and

cannot be distracted by the children. Adults like to engage children in their work especially when it is exciting for the child to watch. The child actors when they arrive on set need to proceed with their scenes quickly and efficiently to avoid fatigue and lack of concentration due to long waits. Make sure that children rest until they are needed in an area away from where the set-up is taking place.

The Legal and Ethical Issues

The care of children in a film environment is vitally important and is a more complex consideration than it is with adult actors. Adult actors are capable of understanding their own rights and needs and possess the necessary skills to articulate these with authority. Children are still under the care of their parents or guardians. They are not of a legal age therefore cannot negotiate contracts on their own behalves. For the purposes of this paper, when the title 'parent' is used, please read 'parent or legal guardian'.

1) What the Law states

When one intends to cast children in a film, advert or cultural event, whether as leads or as extras, it is your responsibility to adhere to the laws laid down by the Cape Film Commission, The Cape Film Office and the Department of Labour. Up until fairly recently, it was illegal to employ a child under the age of 15 or who has reached 15 and is still attending school. A new decree (Sectorial Determination 10: See appendix one) was passed making an exception to this rule in the fields of advertising, performing art and cultural activities; film being included in this exception. The laws as they stand are on a par with the minimum standards in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. All employers in South Africa have to abide by this employment act. The laws are straightforward and reasonable, the only draw back being that time and organization are required to fulfill the obligations inherent in these laws. I feel strongly that, with the current rise and emergence of so many independent, young film companies, an awareness about these laws within these companies should occur. It is in the best interests of

professional and ethical film practice for film companies to ensure that these obligations are carried out. This will ensure the protection of child actors and film companies alike.

A film company intending to employ child actors will have to seek, in writing, a permit (Appendix Two) from The Department of Labour. The application form requires the employer to provide the following details:

- Details of the Company including UIF and SARS information. Students may leave this out, however a letter proving student status and stating that the production is supervised, will be required.
- A detailed Shooting Schedule for the intended child actors.
- Proof of Consent from the parent/guardian of each child involved.
- Proof of the age of each child involved.
- Details of the qualified 'on set' tutor, the film company will have to provide, in the event that the children involved, are absent from school for the purposes of the shoot.
- A motivation as to why the permit should be granted.

To obtain the permit, your shooting schedule and the execution of the actual shoot must align itself with the following criteria:

- Children who are ten years of age and younger, may only work a maximum of 3 hours per day. A rest break of 30 minutes after 1.5 hours of work is required.
- Children who are ten years of age and older (to 15), may only work for 4 hours per day. A rest break of 30 minutes after 2 hours of work is required.

Child actors may not be physically acting for an entire day but may have to be present at the work place for extended times. The call times for child actors are detailed as such:

- Children 0 years – 5 years, 6 hours
- Children 6 years – 10 years old, 8 hours.
- Children 10 and older, 10 hours

In my experience these time frames allow for adequate shooting hours with children. The ability of children to concentrate and remain focused for lengths of time exceeding this is very rare. I would recommend that one works in short intensive bursts rather than over extended periods. Children tire quickly and frequent breaks help to re-focus and re-energize the children.

A film company is advised to apply well in advance to ensure that the permit is processed before the commencement of shooting. I was advised to apply a month before the date but received the permit within 10 days. I was also advised to inform the Cape Film Commission of the time it took to receive the permit. As the Determination (Sectorial Determination 10) only came into effect in August 2004, the Film Commission intend monitoring this new process. According to Martin Cuff, CEO of The Cape Film Commission, there are two concerns at present. Firstly, a month is a relatively long time in the film and advertising industry and situations where actors are employed and/or replaced at the last minute frequently occur. The requirements for the permit are time-consuming to fulfill and permits may be required with greater speed. The Film Commission would like to see the Department of Labour provide permits within the realities of film industry demands. The Department of Labour appears to be aware of the cumbersome nature of the permit acquisition and is taking steps to rectify the problem. Secondly, the Commission is concerned about The Department of Labour 'policing' rather than 'monitoring', the employment of child actors in the industry. The Department can at any time send an official to conduct an inspection of your shoot once the permit has been issued. In my opinion, and in the case of working with children, I do not think this is a negative concept. Children need to have their rights protected by those who are able to. Unfortunately, as it is with many organizations, not every film company is as honourable as the next.

2) What the Law does not state: The Unofficial Criteria

The Determination does not lay down the law with regards to the personal contracts one needs to have in place when you work with child actors in film. If you employ actors from an agency, that agency will more than likely arrange the contract of employment with your actors. If you approach actors outside an agency environment and those actors are children, there are a number of suggested contracts that you need to have in order to protect your self and the people involved in your film. I would suggest that you consider very carefully the contract that you set up between the director and parents or legal guardian of the child actors, they represent. There are a number of facets to this contract and a number of stages to the negotiation process.

Working with Parents

1) Information and Permission

During the making of *Unwritten letters*, communication was the key cornerstone to the smooth running of the project in general. This became paramount when dealing with the parents or guardians of the children who were cast in the film. I feel that without the support from the parents, organization will have been hampered severely. With out formal contractual agreements with all parents, I would have been extremely exposed as a filmmaker. It is extremely important to get the parents 'on your side' so to speak. By this I mean, invested in the project and feeling part of the team. Being invested means that they trust you as a professional and are confident that their best interests, which include their children, will be cared for and protected. If the parents are fully invested, the outcome of the project they are all invested in, will be richer and a more positive experience all round. How does one get parents invested?

In my opinion, parents like their children to have exciting and positive experiences. The opportunity to be in a film could provide such an opportunity. Therefore at the outset the parents who have agreed to allow their children to be in the film will already be invested in the experience they are providing for their children. However, parents need to feel confident in you as a director and secure in the project itself, for them to continue to

remain invested. It is the film director's job to provide information, negotiate terms of working and facilitate the smooth running of the process to parents on an ongoing basis to ensure the continued support of the parents.

2) First Approach: The Meetings

There are a number of sources for child actors in Cape Town. If children are approached through agencies, the agencies generally tend to handle the interaction between the film company, the child actor and the parents. Be aware of the protocols under which the agency operates and make sure that the correct legal procedures with reference to employment, remuneration, hours of work etc are up to scratch. I would not enjoy an agency liaising with parents on my behalf in a negligent manner. An adult actor operates as an individual, but a child actor operates with their parents. The parents will become members of your team. I would suggest that you form a personal relationship with the parents as soon as possible. Parents can become great assets to the smooth running of the film process or a great pest if not treated with respect.

In the case of *Unwritten letters*, children were approached through schools and private Drama clubs rather than through agencies. There is an unofficial system of approach in this instance that I recommend should be followed. If you approach parents through their child's school, it is considered good protocol to approach the school Head first, then the teachers and pupils and then the parents. Parents who receive opportunities approved or endorsed by their school will feel a certain security in that opportunity because of the faith they have in their school system and that their children's best interest are at the heart of that school system. Approaching the Head first is considered good form, the 'chain of command has been upheld' so to speak. A school head may be prepared to assist your cause if he/she has been approached timeously. In this way, the head may be able to liaise with the respective teachers of the school, who will then assist you even further in the search for your child actors. In the case of *Unwritten letters*, I was able to have twenty minutes of contact time with each class of Grade 2 and 3 pupils, in order to explain the project and hand out letters inviting parents to consider their child's involvement. The

HOD of the Junior Primary Phase was invaluable to this facilitation and helped to ensure that 200 letters of information were in the hands of the parents within 24 hours. The contact time of 20 minutes allowed me enough time to tell the story of the film to each class and take questions from the pupils. In this manner, not only was I able to begin my casting procedure, but the children could also get to know me and could return home with some detail about the film project and the director to report and inspire their parents with.

My experience with this school was a very favorable and positive one. 88 children came for a screen test that Friday. If I had to approach other school in the future, I may not be as lucky. Not every school has such a good reputation or such fine up-standing staff. However, I would recommend in even the best cases to separate your connection with the school once your relationship with your cast and team is finalized. It would not bode well if parents' complaints or dissatisfaction with the film project became the problem of the school. Make it very clear to parents that your project is independent and that all problems should remain within the project's domain.

If you approach children through their Drama club, a similar protocol should be observed. The Drama clubs I approached were all willing and very pleased to have their pupils approached and have the prospect of an acting opportunity on screen, presented. In both cases with *Unwritten letters*, the Drama coaches allowed me access to parents so that I could establish independent contact swiftly. It was reassuring for parents to know that I had met the Drama coaches and had observed their children in action. Again the endorsed understanding and approval from the drama coach was reassuring and helped parents to trust and then invest their time and energy into my project

At the school, I approached the children first. A letter was sent home with each child inviting interested children to attend a screen test/audition. I wanted parents to understand in full detail the purpose and nature of the project before they sent their children for an audition. The letter (Appendix Three and Four) was very detailed and direct. The nature of the project was made extremely clear so that prospective parents would be left in no doubt as to the commitments inherent in the project. The letter was upfront and honest,

detailing the amount of time that would be required, the style and nature of the film, the fact that it was a nominal student production, the fact that the project was supervised, and endorsed by the school. Special requirements were also detailed, i.e. like the fact that the boys would need to be prepared to have their hair cut and possibly restyled and the fact that filming would take place in the holidays. I feel it is extremely important, not only to the children but to the parents, to be absolutely clear and definite about what you are offering. In this manner people will enter into a project with a full knowledge and understanding of what they are committing to.

In the case of the private Drama Schools, I contacted the parents of the children I was interested in having in my film and spoke with them first about the possibility of using their child in my film. I wanted to give parents the opportunity to approach and discuss the option with their children. This is an important negotiation between parent and child that needs to take place without the presence of an outsider. Once this discussion had taken place I set up a meeting with the parents and child with the aim of going through the details of the film and doing a screen test. In this way I got to meet these parents far quicker than the parents at the school. I went to each home individually and spoke with the families about the project. This was not possible with all the children who came from the school as they were too many. I also had in mind who I wanted to play the leads and who I wanted as the extras. I spent more time with the prospective leads rather than the extras.

3) Second Approach: The Contractual Obligations

Once I had chosen the children I wanted to have in my film, a new series of negotiations began with parents. They needed to know the finer details about the project. In order to help with time, I invited the cast and parents to an informal gathering at my home. The outcome of this meeting was very favourable. Parents got to meet me and got a sense of who I was as a person. I was also able to get to know the parent body I was going to be dealing with. The parents got to meet each other and through this they were able to

arrange lifting to and from rehearsals and shoots with greater ease. This does help ease the guilt one feels as a student filmmaker asking people to do many things as favours.

The transportation of children who do not belong to you is a very tricky and contentious problem. According to the law, you are responsible for the safe transportation of child actors to and from your shoot. In a well-established company, insurance is a very important consideration. However, on a student production, those sorts of legal costs are not a viable option yet, due to the extreme costs. For this reason, before taking the children anywhere in your car, obtain an indemnity form from the parents. This form will cover you in the event of accident or injury sustained while transporting the children. Also the more you can get your parents on board, the less you will have to be responsible for the safety of children while transporting to and from your project shoots. Parents are willing to help with the safe transportation of their children.

At this initial meeting I wanted to make clear the finer details of the project so that child and parent were all in the same boat together. Details about casting were given and the roles the children were to play were made clear. A second letter was given out (Appendix Five) and the shooting schedule was explained (Appendix Six). I felt it was necessary, as it was to the children, to make clear the nature of a film shoot to the parents. I needed them to understand the flexible nature one has to possess in the film world and that things don't always run to schedule and some extra time may be needed. I erred on the side of scheduling more time than was necessary to complete the shoot. In this way I did not have to arrange extra shoots near Christmas and inconvenience families at late notice. I also invited parents to come forward with any concerns re the screenplay. Parents of the children in *Unwritten letters* had to sign a consent letter stating that they gave permission for their child to be in this film. In order to do this, parents had to have read the screenplay. I also got parents to fill out a form that detailed any special dietary requirement or medical conditions that their children may have. This is extremely important.

4) The Screenplay and the Parents

Parents of children who are going to be in a film, must be fully informed about the nature and content of the screen play of the film you intend to shoot, before the signing up process is complete. They must be aware of what you as a director, intend their children to do in your film and what role each child has been given. I do not think that parents should have a say in the manner in which the story has been written, but I do think it is their prerogative to refuse to allow their child to perform in a film, the content of which they would choose not to allow their children to be exposed to. Therefore all parents should have access to the intended screenplay, before they agree to allow their child to be involved.

It was very interesting in the case of *Unwritten letters* that only one parent asked about the content of the screen play prior to my making it available to all for perusal. A simple e-mail to all parents was all that was necessary to make this happen. I was not concerned about the content of my screenplay as I purposefully, created an innocent and relatively 'safe' screen play with which to tackle my first attempt at working with children on screen. In my film, the dramatic context in which the children would be required to perform did not have the potential for damage, emotionally or physically. If one wanted to create a film in which children would be placed in situations of an advanced, adult, sexually risky, or emotionally damaging nature, their parents would need to be aware of this and they will need to give their consent. I feel that directors may be at fault if they fail to be upfront, with parents or the children for that matter, in the fear that parents would call a halt to the process. Do not couch issues but be upfront about them so that everyone is clear about what they are letting themselves in for. An informed parent is a happy parent.

Pushy parents will want their child to have the main or lead role. 'Speaking' parts are highly sought after parts by both parent and child. Be careful of the parent who wants to know how many lines or scenes their child will be doing. Be up-front about the nature of the role their child has been given before they sign up completely, so that there are no

disappointments when that child only appears in one scene as an extra. Children and adults like to know where they fit in the hierarchy.

5) Parents on Set

This is a very tricky predicament to consider. Do I or don't I allow parents to be on set during shooting, when and for how long? According to the laws outlined by the Department of Labour, the employer must allow the parent 'reasonable access' to the child during a call. You can't refuse a parent access to your shoot but I feel you should negotiate the times and manner of access with the parent before hand.

This becomes important for a number of reasons. In my experience as a theatre maker in schools, parents being present during rehearsals for a theatrical production, can be problematic. The rehearsal space is a 'sacred' space in which a group, who are working toward a common goal, bond and develop in an fairly insular fashion. The focus of the children is inward. They are creating a product that belongs to them. During the rehearsal phase, the children are discovering their own talents, gaining confidence and security in their own performance ability. They are learning about ways in which to work with others in the group and ways in which to work with a director. This confidence is built over time and under the careful guidance of the director who's job it is to elicit the best out of the child actor. The presence of an outsider may put pressure on the group or compromise their performance. Many children feel inhibited when they are watched by people who know them. Horst comments that children are simply different when their parents are on set (Horst in Rickards 2005). On many occasions I have heard directors say: "The family is coming to watch tonight so I'm a little nervous". Family often comes with the fear of criticism. We as human being also want to impress our nearest and dearest with the best we can be.

The director during rehearsal is aware that there is a process being developed in close ties with the children. Directors develop a very close bond with their actors and relate to their child actors in a very different manner to which a parent does. To allow too much access

to parents during rehearsal may compromise this freedom as well as lead to a decrease in the magic of surprise in the finished product. Once the confidence of the group has grown and the work relationship is functioning well, then it is more possible to allow outsiders into the process.

On a film set it is extremely difficult as it is to keep this focused relationship with your child actors going. There is so much happening on set that has the potential to distract and pull the focus of your actors. It is a semi-‘sacred’ space as it is. Your crew is part of the team but not of the inner circle so to speak. Onlookers can cause more of a distraction than already exists and you may at times ask your crew to leave you and the actors alone to work for a while. I feel the same should be said for parents. On this project I was a first-time director of children in a film and I needed space and time to settle in myself and to begin to find my feet without too many onlookers. I appreciate very much the trust and respect parents on this project had for my work needs and I thank them for giving me time and space with their children.

There are great advantages to parents being on set. In my experience, parents have been an asset to the smooth running of my creative projects. They often help with the discipline of their own children when this is needed and you or the chaperones are tied up. They are often happy to help with hair and make-up and will often get involved with the making or construction of costumes, scenery and props. If you do require your child actor to be on an ‘away’ shoot, you as a director, will not have the time to look after that child’s every need all of the time. A parent is invaluable in this instance because a child will more often than not, benefit from the comfort and security a parent usually brings. In my opinion it would be vital to have the parents available on set, when filming sensitive or potentially emotionally risky material with a child. A child may be put in a situation that makes them feel extremely vulnerable. I feel it would be a good idea to have that child’s parent on set to help normalize the situation for the child post shooting. Horst disagrees with me on this point and says that she never allows parents on set when the child is working on an emotionally demanding scene.

I would suggest that you negotiate with your parents beforehand how and why you will or won't allow access at given times. Explain what your needs are and the nature of the triangular relationship between parent/director/child on a film set. Allow them to understand that needs change within a shoot. In other words it may seem fine at the outset to have parents visiting on a particular day, however when the actual shoot unfolds it may no longer be viable. I think that a parent will be sensitive to the aims, objectives and needs of both the director and the child. The reverse also needs to be true: directors need to be sensitive to when a child needs to have their parent present and the need a parent has to have access to their child. Agree with your parents up front that although they are welcome to be present on set, some circumstances may require them to be invisible to the process.

If you choose to work with children in film, you will need to learn to work with their parents. Horst suggests that you 'cast' your parents as well as your children for your film. She warns that overbearing parents will be a hindrance to your sanity (Horst in Rickards 2005). Gain their trust by treating them in a professional manner. Make them feel secure enough to allow you the freedom and space you need to do your creative job. Do it well but remember that this is your creative space. And finally, make sure you are legally covered for any eventuality. This is time consuming but vital.

Chaperones

One of the most under estimated members of a film team is the chaperone. They are invaluable to a director in many ways. They are there to make sure that all the needs of the children are taken care of off-set so that the director can focus on the performance objectives on-set. I enjoy being a hands-on director who gets stuck in to doing hair and cleaning up scraped knees. In this way I have a chance to get to know my child actors well. However there comes a time, when your chaperones have to take over those reigns completely so that you can have peace of mind about the well being of your cast and focus on your job, directing. According to Horst (2004), the director should remain the authority figure/person in charge and the chaperone or caregiver becomes the familiar

friend. I feel I did not get this quite right and the familiarity the children had with me became a problem towards the end of the project. Children had by then also gained quite a lot of confidence. I am extremely grateful to the three chaperones I had working on my film.

In my opinion, a good chaperone is someone who has the ability to communicate with children and is able to relate to children on their level. They also need to be able to discipline the children when required and be equipped to deal with rivalry and disputes among the children. They will need to be trained in basic first aid and have the ability to deal with emergencies safely on set. They will need to be trustworthy drivers and be able to negotiate and deal with parents diplomatically. A chaperone with an even temper and patient nature is recommended when dealing with unglamorous tasks like babysitting the children when they are not needed on set. This is tiring work but the activities that a chaperone can offer children while they wait to go on set can greatly influence the focus and energy of a child in performance. Kerrin, one of my chaperones played carefully chosen games and activities that helped to quiet the children down so that they did not disturb the action. The children were so excited by the games that they were eager to stay off set which meant that I and the crew could get on with the scene at hand without the distractions of children being under foot or asking one hundred questions.

The games helped to maintain energy levels for performance. The children did not run around and exhaust themselves when they were not on set, but rather were intrigued by thinking and guessing games. The games also helped the children to get to know each other better. Bonds were formed and this greatly aided the existence of believable on-screen friendships. Playing games was a very effective way for the chaperone to ascertain if one was going to have behavioral or co-operative problems with a particular child. Conversations with my chaperones about these problems helped me to gain deeper understanding about the children I was working with and thus occasionally aided my ability to elicit effective responses from them on camera. It is a good idea to have chaperones who are also familiar with the nature of the filmmaking process. They can assist you greatly when it comes to tasks such as word learning with young children and

the understanding of film jargon by young children. It is very important to provide your chaperones and children with a peaceful area in which they can relax and unwind away from the action.

General Conclusion

My experience of working in an experimental and 'first-time' capacity with children in my film has certainly not been dissuaded me from working with children in the future. In fact it has done the opposite and has intrigued me further and inspired me to explore other filmmaking styles with children which I feel will be more conducive to the aims and ideals discussed in this paper. When one looks at the outcome of the film one can clearly see the chinks in the armour as a result of this inexperience. I hope to tackle other projects with children and put into practice what I have learned. I hope that by making known my learning, other filmmakers might be inspired to create with children too.

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Screenplay



Unwritten Letters

Character information:

Stella Waters = local teacher who has lost her husband.
Lives on the outskirts of town.

Mr. Jack = known by that name in the town. He runs the local cinema and is Nicky's grandfather and legal guardian.

Nicky = young boy of 6/7. Lives with his grandfather and is about to begin school.

Greek terms:

Ohí = no or oh no

Né = yes or of course

Parakálo = please or "I don't believe it" or "you're welcome"

Kalimera = good morning

Kala = good or fine

Muti = a blue glass bead worn around the neck to symbolize the Evil Eye. Worn to ward off evil.

Dolmades = traditional Greek food consisting of rice wrapped in vine leaves

Ílyos = sun

Kourabides = Greek shortbread covered in thick layer of icing sugar

Éla = hurry or come here

Moussaka = Greek dish made with aubergines. (Like lasagne)

Unwritten Letters

Original screenplay

By

Alyxia Geanotes

2004

FADE IN:

1. INT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

A telephone rings and STELLA brings the receiver up to her ear.

STELLA

Hello. Yes this is Mrs. Waters.

CUT TO:

2. EXT. IN WATER SOMEWHERE -- DAY

The image of a young boy NICKY is seen taking a breath and going under water.

CUT TO:

3. INT. BOOKKEEPER'S DESK -- DAY

A hand is writing in calligraphy the name of someone on a small paper label. The BOOKKEEPER is using an ink well and is copying the name from an old birth certificate. JACK is patiently watching the process.

JACK

I could never do it so beautiful. Thank you.

He takes the label and certificate and hands the bookkeeper two movie tickets.

CUT TO:

4. INT. CINEMA FOYER -- DAY

A large clock is TICKING in the background. Jack is pacing up and down in the foyer of the old cinema. His polished

SHOES ARE SEEN WALKING, turning and then walking again. He checks his fob watch. He checks the clock on the wall. He fixes his shirt garters. The TICKET LADY is SWEEPING in the background. Suddenly the DOOR BURSTS OPEN and in breezes a young man accompanied by a young boy. They are carrying film tins and a shoebox tied up with string.

JACK

Óhi parakaló! Where have you been! You know I can't put up the posters until they arrive.

JACK greets the young assistant with

YOUNG MAN

I'm sorry Mr. Jack. What is the movie tonight?

Jack looks at the title on the poster and says:

JACK

Come and see for yourself. I guarantee it will be marvelous, spectacular!

JACK pats the young boy on the head.

YOUNG MAN

What's with the shoebox, Mr. Jack?

JACK

Tomorrow is a very important day. My grandson's first day at school!

CUT TO:

5. EXT. OUTSIDE CINEMA -- DAY

Jack is putting up posters outside the cinema. Some people have gathered to look at the new poster.

JACK

Kalimera.

PASSERBY

What's showing tonight Mr. Jack?

JACK

Come and see for yourself, but I guarantee a spectacular,
wonderful time.

PASSERBY

You always say that and I believe you.

CUT TO:

6. EXT. LEI WATER CANAL -- DAY

Two boys and a girl, NICKY, RAYMOND and ABIGAIL are playing with paper boats in the lei water canal/gutter. They are friends. Mood is one of holiday time. They rest and dangle their feet in the water while eating bubble gum and blowing bubbles.

RAYMOND

Are you scared to go to school?

NICKY

No.

ABIGAIL

Me either.

RAYMOND

Me either.

NICKY

They hit you with a stick on your bum at school.

RAYMOND

Says who?

NICKY

My Grandfather

RAYMOND

What does he know?

ABIGAIL

Ya!

They look up and Nicky's grandfather is standing above them. Abigail and Raymond run leaving Nicky stranded. Jack opens

his hand and Nicky has to spit his gum out. Jack hauls Nicky up by his ear and marches him off.

CUT TO:

7. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

For punishment Nicky is sweeping up after the show. Jack watches for a moment, with folded arms and a stern face. Nicky is walking between the aisles picking up the things that people have left behind and putting them in a box. He finds a stick of chewing gum, checks to see that Jack is no longer about, and puts it into his pocket.

CUT TO:

8. INT. NICKY'S BEDROOM -- EVENING

Nicky is looking at the items that he has collected. These include a set of upper false teeth. He is fascinated by an earring, which he looks at for a while. From under his bed he takes out his treasure box and places the earring in it. He puts the stick of gum in the box too. He looks at his bits and pieces of treasure. He then finds an icon and stares longingly at the image of the saint. He puts it under his pillow and places his treasure box under the bed again.

CUT TO:

9. INT. JACK'S HOUSE: DINING ROOM -- EVENING

Jack enters their house. He is humming and he puts a record on the gramophone. Under his arm he has the shoebox. He collects a bundle from the shelf. It is a box that has the moon drawn on the front. He comes to see Nicky in bed.

NICKY

Mr. Jennings forgot his teeth again.

JACK

Óhi parakaló. We both have something he does not!

Jack takes from his pocket the lower set of false teeth. Jack presents the shoebox he has hidden behind his back and gives it to Nicky.

JACK

New shoes for a new beginning at school.

Nicky opens the box and takes out a new pair of shoes. He is delighted and hugs his grandfather.

NICKY

Did you like school Papóos?

JACK

It was wonderful, marvelous: stories and books and writing and reading. But Greek school is different. Tonight it is time for a magical story.

Jack takes a book from inside the moon-box. It is a beautifully covered, thick book.

NICKY

Are you sure there are no pictures in this book, papóos?

JACK

Ohi, ohi. No peaking

Jack opens the book and begins to read. His eyes watch Nicky and the horses that are woven onto the cloth around Nicky's headboard. He begins to tell a story.

JACK

A very long time ago, Celena, the Goddess of the Moon, was sad. She looked down at earth from the moon and saw that things were not all good with men. So Celena decided that she would come down on the winged horse Pegasus to see what she could do to help mankind.....

Nicky falls asleep.

CUT TO:

10. INT. JACK'S KITCHEN -- DAY

Nicky is polishing his new shoes with spit and a brush.

CUT TO:

11. INT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- SAME MORNING

Raymond is having his face smudges rigorously wiped off with mom's spit.

CUT TO:

12. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- SAME MORNING

A woman teacher is placing books on the row of desks in a classroom.

CUT TO:

13. INT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- SAME MORNING

Boy 2 is taking his spoon of cod-liver oil.

CUT TO:

14. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- SAME MORNING

The teacher sharpens pencils rigorously.

CUT TO:

15. INT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- SAME MORNING

Abigail is having a bow put in her locks. Her mom is using spit to get her curls to lie down.

CUT TO:

16. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- SAME MORNING

The teacher is writing her name on the board.

CUT TO:

17. INT. VARIOUS HOUSES -- SAME MORNING

Boy 2 is holding onto the gatepost not wanting to let go and face school. His mother is trying to pry his hands free.

CUT TO:

18. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- SAME MORNING

The teacher smacks the dust out of the blackboard dusters.

CUT TO:

19. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- SAME MORNING

Jack is fussing over Nicky and his school preparations. He wants to make sure that everything is perfect.

JACK

Now have you got your lunch? Don't squash the dolmades. You must wear this. It's to keep you safe.

Jack hangs a muti around Nicky's neck.

NICKY

Safe from what?

JACK

Things.

NICKY

What things?

JACK

Things!

Jack calms and takes the name label out of his handkerchief. He pins it to Nicky's blazer.

JACK

School is very, very important Nicky.

They leave to go.

CUT TO:

20. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- SAME MORNING

The headmaster polishes his cane and slams it down on the desk in front of him. The children take to their seats in unison and watch the cane nervously. The Headmaster walks up and down the aisle glaring at the children.

HEADMASTER

Manners and discipline, right and wrong. This is what school is all about!

The Headmaster stops at the desk of Abigail and puts his cane across her desk. Out of his pocket he takes a large pair of scissors.

HEADMASTER
Ribbons: wrong!

He cuts the ribbon out of her hair. The headmaster comes to a standstill at Nicky's desk. He notices all the trinkets and the large nametag pinned to Nicky's blazer. He pulls Nicky's nametag off and reads it.

HEADMASTER
Immigrant orphans and cinema: wrong!

The headmaster goes to cut the muti off Nicky's neck.

CUT TO:

Stella Waters, their teacher is standing in the classroom doorway.

STELLA
Thank you Mr. Fistule.

Nicky sees his teacher as a beautiful vision in the doorway in the form of the saint depicted on the icon under his pillow at home. It lasts a moment but it's enough to make him fall in love with his "saviour". The Headmaster leaves. Stella walks over to the nametag dropped onto the floor.

STELLA
Nikolaos, Gerasimos, Dimitri, Agyrios, Jason Ílyos.
Do you know that Jason is the name of a great hero who went
in search of precious treasure? No one thought he would
triumph, but he did.

She goes over to the blackboard and indicates her name written there.

STELLA
My name is Mrs. Stella Waters. I know you can't read this yet but you will. Stella means star, just like my pupils.
She draws a star in chalk on the board.

CUT TO:

21. INT. CINEMA FOYER -- NIGHT

A few children are standing in a queue buying their ticket to see a cowboy film. The TICKET LADY is kind but flustered by the excitement.

CUT TO:

22. INT. CINEMA -- NIGHT

The assembled crowd is watching "Stagecoach". The youngsters in the front row are making "cowboy and Indian noises". Jack comes into the auditorium to quieten them. Nicky and his two friends are OPENING TINS of condensed milk with a stone and a nail. The projector is TICKING away in the background. Jack is operating the projector.

CUT TO:

23. INT. JACK'S DINING ROOM -- DAY

Jack is sealing some letters. Nicky is trying to read from a book.

JACK

Three weeks only. You are clever just like your papóos.

Nicky looks very proud.

JACK

Take these for her.

Nicky takes the container of kourabides but is embarrassed by the prospect of taking it to school.

JACK

Be proud of who you are. Post these for me.

NICKY

Who is this?

JACK

Old friends in Greece. No one you know.

CUT TO:

24. INT. SCHOOLROOM -- DAY

The children are all standing with shocked faces staring at the Headmaster.

HEADMASTER

Mrs. Waters, your teacher has taken ill and will not be returning to teach here until she is well again. I do not know how long it will be. There will be no school until a suitable replacement is found. If not, I will be forced to teach you.

The children jump at the sound of the cane. Nicky drops the container of kourabides and the icing dust spills out. Nicky looks down at his shoes that are now dusty and covered in icing sugar. He looks up at the board and sees that the chalk star has been smudged.

CUT TO:

25. INT. CINEMA FOYER -- DAY

Nicky has hidden himself in the chicken coop. A white chicken is strutting about. Jack appears.

JACK

Ohi! Why are you not in school?

Nicky walks towards Jack and holds out the letter from school.

CUT TO:

26. INT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella is furiously cleaning. She keeps coming across items that remind her of her husband. She sees an open book left on the windowsill. She goes to the bathroom and picks up a shaving mug and brush. She smashes it on the floor.

CUT TO:

27. INT: CINEMA -- NIGHT

The audience is watching "Mildred Pierce". Someone is being killed on the screen. The faces of the children are important, especially Nicky's. The suicide scene is also featured.

CUT TO:

28. EXT. THE SHORE NEAR STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

The gentle sound of the SURF is heard. Stella is tearing up a letter and bits of the letter fall out and into the seawater. Her feet are submerged in the shallow water. She has been crying. Camera focuses in on the words on the bits of letter. Nicky is standing watching Stella at the shore. He sees her tearing the paper and watches the bits tumble down into the water. He turns to go.

CUT TO:

29. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Jack is contemplating the unopened letter from school. He puts it in a box in which other letters are stored and stashes in out of sight in the desk drawer. He prepares to leave the house on what appears to be important business.

CUT TO:

30. EXT. THE SCHOOL ENTRANCE -- DAY

NICKY, RAYMOND and ABIGAIL are sitting on the school step with their cases, ever hopeful that their teacher will come back. RAYMOND is doodling in the sand with a stick. Nicky is drawing with chalk on a small slate. Abigail is cutting a paper chain.

RAYMOND
She isn't coming.

NICKY
She'll come. I saw her.

They wait. Raymond and Abigail leave to go. Abigail turns to smile at Nicky. Her paper chain of 3 people blows away. Nicky looks down at the slate and smudges out the star he has drawn.

CUT TO:

31. EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

There is a KNOCK on the door. Stella reluctantly goes to open it. She looks extremely disheveled and unfit for company. Jack is on the doorstep, clutching his hat.

JACK

Mrs. Waters? I am Mr. Ílyos, Nicky's grandfather.

CUT TO:

32. INT. JACK'S HOUSE: DINING ROOM -- EVENING

Jack is eating pistachio nuts at the table and sighing. The sound of the SHELLS CRACKING OPEN is the only sound. Nicky is watching the pile of shells grow.

NICKY

But how long?

JACK

When someone is so sad, Nikolaos, they are broken into tiny pieces. Love is like salt; it adds all the flavour to life. Sadness is like water it washes the salt away. It will take a long time for her to get better.

CUT TO:

33. INT. STELLA'S HOUSE: BATHROOM -- EVENING

Stella is sitting in the bath. She is trying to piece together the broken shaving mug and is crying.

CUT TO:

34. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- EVENING

Jack is lighting a votive candle and has placed it at the icon corner of his late wife. The GRAMOPHONE is playing an old GREEK TUNE.

CUT TO:

35. INT. NICKY'S BEDROOM -- EVENING

Nicky is sitting on the edge of his bed. He has taken a photograph out of his treasure box and is looking at it. It is a photograph of his late parents. The GREEK TUNE is heard

in the background. He turns the blue muti, still hanging around his neck.

CUT TO:

36. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

The assembled crowd, mostly adults, is watching "Casablanca". Nicky is at the back of the cinema. The scene where Rick and Ilsa are planning, is being seen screened. Nicky resonates with Rick's words "I'll do the thinking for all three of us now" etc.

CUT TO:

37. EXT. THE ROAD TO STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky is carrying a heavy sack on his shoulder. It is hot and he is struggling with the sack and heat, but is determined.

CUT TO:

38. EXT. STELLA'S DOORSTEP -- DAY

Nicky has put the sack down on the doorstep. As he leaves to go, a small pile of salt starts to spill out onto the step.

CUT TO:

39. INT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella is pushing around some food on a plate. She hears a noise at the door and opens it. She sees the sack and notices the pile of salt. She tastes it. She looks around to see who may have left it.

CUT TO:

40. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

Nicky is at the TICKET LADY'S counter.

TICKET LADY

Nicky be a good boy and run this chicken soup over to Margaret. She has a cold.

NICKY

Why do people eat chicken soup when they have a cold?

TICKET LADY

It makes them feel better.

CUT TO:

41. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

The assembled crowd is watching "Anchors Away". The scene where the two marines persuade the little boy to attend school is being watched. Focus is on Nicky. Raymond is nudging Nicky and showing off his catty skills. Nicky is not too interested and his friend is disappointed.

CUT TO:

42. EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella opens her window and finds the blue muti hanging in the frame.

CUT TO:

43. EXT. A FIELD -- DAY

Nicky is walking and stops. He spots something in the sand. He bends to pick it up.

CUT TO:

44. INT. JACK'S HOUSE: DINING ROOM -- DAY

Jack is listening to a RADIO NEWS BROADCAST. Nicky arrives home and Jack quickly opens the newspaper.

NICKY

Why do you listen to the news and read it at the same time,
Papóos?

JACK

If you went to school, you would know this!

Nicky leaves saddened. Jack checks Nicky has gone and takes up the box of chocolates.

CUT TO:

45. INT. STELLA'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Stella is packing her husband's clothes into a suitcase. There is a knock at her door. Jack is at the door he holds out the pot of geraniums.

JACK

Mrs. Waters. You are looking much better.

She takes them.

STELLA

Mr. Ílyos, I appreciate your kind gesture but this is not a good time.

JACK

I just wanted to say that my grandson Nicky, you remember him? He will be so pleased when you come back to be his teacher.

STELLA

Please Mr. Ílyos, I have to bid you farewell.

She closes the door and he is left on the step with hat in hand.

CUT TO:

46. EXT. A ROAD AND A GATE -- DAY

Raymond and Abigail are playing shop. They have set up a stall to sell useless items to people. Nicky walks up to them.

RAYMOND

This is our game. You didn't help.

ABIGAIL

You promised us we could sell Mr. Jennings's teeth.

NICKY

I got this.

Nicky opens his hand and in it is a piece of broken blue and white pottery.

RAYMOND
Where did you get it?

NICKY
In the field. There's lots of it.

RAYMOND
Broken stuff is useless.

Abigail hides a doll, whose leg has just come off, behind her back.

CUT TO:

47. INT. BOOKKEEPERS -- DAY

Nicky is waiting for the Bookkeeper to finish writing something on a packaging label for him. The Bookkeeper hands it to him and Nicky smiles back at him.

CUT TO:

48. EXT. THE ROAD TO STELLA'S HOUSE -- MORNING

Nicky is walking on the road to Stella's house. This time he has a big, white chicken in a basket. He arrives on the doorstep and leaves the chicken. Around its leg, is a packaging label.

CUT TO:

49. EXT. A FIELD -- DAY

Nicky is collecting pieces of pottery and putting them in the basket.

CUT TO:

50. EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella finds the chicken, catches it and reads the label. It says "for chicken soup".

CUT TO:

51. INT. CINEMA FOYER -- DAY

Jack is talking to the ticket lady.

TICKET LADY

Such a shame about Mrs. Waters. Poor dear, losing a husband
like that and so young too.

JACK

If Nicky can't go to school, I don't know what I am going to
do.

CUT TO:

52. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Jack walks in and finds Nicky at the table with his school
things laid out.

NICKY

You can be my teacher.

CUT TO:

53. EXT. STELLA'S DOOR -- DAY

Jack is hammering on Stella's door. He is anxious. There is
no answer.

CUT TO:

54. INT. STELLA'S KITCHEN -- DAY

Stella is inside listening to the knocking at the door. She
does not go to the door.

CUT TO:

55. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

The Charles Chaplin's film, "Gold Rush" is playing. The
children in the cinema are seated near the front and are
laughing at the action. Chaplin is eating his boots.

CUT TO:

56. INT. FOYER OF CINEMA -- DAY

The group is exiting after the film. Jack finds Nicky in the foyer.

JACK

Nicky, go and get Mr. Jennings teeth, they are in the drawer in my desk.

CUT TO:

57. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky is rifling through some drawers and comes across bundles of letters that resemble the same type that Nicky took to the post office for Jack. Printed across the front are stamps that say: address unknown, return to sender. Nicky does not notice this or the fact that the letter from school is also in the drawer, unopened. He finds the teeth and leaves.

CUT TO:

58. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky is sitting at the table chopping aubergines. Jack has an apron on and he is busy stirring something.

NICKY

Why can't we get a new stove Papóos, like Raymond's mom?

JACK

There is nothing wrong with old things! Éla, éla I must get this done before I start tonight's film.

NICKY

Papóos? Why does Charlie Chaplin eat his boots?

JACK

Because he is a funny man and to laugh is the best medicine!

Jack wipes his hands and leaves to go.

NICKY

I thought chicken soup was?

CUT TO:

59. INT. JACK'S DINING ROOM -- DAY

Nicky is sitting in front of a mirror. He is using a piece of coal to draw a moustache and pair of eyebrows on himself. He dons the hat and his Chaplin impersonation is complete.

CUT TO:

60. EXT. ROAD TO STELLA -- DAY

Nicky is walking on the road to Stella. He is carrying a small but heavy suitcase and a stick with him.

CUT TO:

61. EXT. STELLA'S YARD -- DAY

Stella is at the washing line bringing in the sheets. She takes down the last one and Nicky is standing there. He opens the suitcase. It is his grandfather's gramophone. He puts on a record, winds it up. He does a little Chaplin routine to the MUSIC. She is not amused and walks away.

CUT TO:

62. EXT. ROAD TO STELLA -- DAY

Nicky is walking back. He has been crying. Abigail has followed him and confronts him.

Abigail
Where were you?

Nicky
Nowhere

Abigail
What were you doing?

Nicky
Nothing

Abigail
Where are you going?

Nicky
Nowhere

Abigail
Can I come too?

Nicky walks off and leaves her on the road.

CUT TO:

63. INT. CINEMA -- DAY

The assembled crowd is watching a scene from "Gone with the wind". Rhett is leaving Scarlet. The mood is frantic, one of suspense and tension.

CUT TO:

64. EXT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella is sitting at the water's edge. She is soaking up the sun.

CUT TO:

65. EXT. STELLA'S DOOR -- DAY

Jack is knocking on Stella's door again. He turns to leave and we see the dish of moussaka and a bottle of olives on the doorstep. Stella arrives and storms through her door upsetting the olives.

CUT TO:

66. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky is alone at home waiting for his grandfather to come home. He opens the drawer with the letters in it. He takes out a bundle and looks at it. Nicky takes a knife from the kitchen and opens one of the letters. Nicky takes out a blank piece of paper.

CUT TO:

67. EXT. ON THE ROAD FROM STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella is walking fast she is laden down with many parcels.

CUT TO:

68. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky goes over to the bookshelf and takes down the moon-box that contains their reading book.

CUT TO:

69. EXT. OUTSIDE JACK HOUSE -- DAY

Jack is buying his newspaper and leaves the shop.

CUT TO:

70. EXT. OUTSIDE CINEMA -- DAY

Stella is asking the ticket seller, who is locking up the cinema, for directions. Stella hoists her parcels up and moves off. She gets a strange look from the ticket lady.

CUT TO:

71. INT. JACK'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky opens the book and sees that the pages are filled with numbers and accounts. He raises his head and turns to see Jack walking in the doorway. Jack sees that Nicky has the book in his hands. He goes to speak but there is a BANGING at their door. They turn their heads in unison.

CUT TO:

72. INT. TO EXT. OUTSIDE JACK HOUSE -- DAY

The door opens and an exhausted and disheveled Stella is standing among her dropped parcels. She is clutching the geraniums and the salt bag.

STELLA

Mr. Ilyos Senior and Mr. Ilyos Junior! This has gone far enough.

Nicky and Jack looks at each other and then at the gifts that they recognize to be the items that they have given to Stella.

STELLA

All your gifts are wonderful and very kind and I know what you are trying to do, but I am sorry I can't help you.

Stella begins to break down.

STELLA

I can't be what I was. I am tired. Don't you understand? I am broken.

CUT TO:

73. EXT. SEASHORE NEAR STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Nicky is standing at the seashore with his bare feet in the water. Stella is watching him from a distance. She moves toward the shore and finds that he has gone. In the sand she finds the pieces of pottery that Nicky has collected arranged in the shape of a star, pressed into the sand.

CUT TO:

74. INT. STELLA'S HOUSE -- DAY

Stella is sitting at her table and she is helping someone to learn to read and write.

STELLA

...Y-o-s. Ílyos that is your surname. What does it mean?

JACK

The sun.

CUT TO:

75. EXT. IN WATER SOMEWHERE -- DAY

Nicky comes up for air and smiles.

CUT TO:

76. EXT. ROAD NEAR SCHOOL -- DAY

NICKY, RAYMOND and ABIGAIL are walking to school with their suitcases, laughing.

FADE OUT:

Appendices



SECTORAL DETERMINATION No. 10 – CHILDREN IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ADVERTISING, ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

1) Introduction

- a) In terms of our law, no person may employ a child who is under 15 years of age or who has reached the age of 15 but is still attending school.
- b) The Minister of Labour who issued Sectoral Determination No. 10 last week has now introduced an exception to this prohibition. The Determination, which is due to take effect from 16 August 2004, allows for the employment of children under the age of 15 only in the fields of performing arts, advertising, and culture and subject to strict requirements which are discussed in further detail below.
- c) By way of back ground, a Sectoral Determination is a law issued by the Department of Labour which stipulates certain minimum conditions of employment in a particular sector. The Determinations are issued in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (“BCEA”) and usually contain certain deviations from the minimum standards set out in the BCEA. Prior to the issuing of a sectoral determination, the Department of Labour is required to first investigate general working conditions in a particular sector and notify the public of the existence of such an investigation. Members of the public are afforded an opportunity to submit comments to the Department of Labour during the investigation process. On completion of the investigation, a Report is compiled and submitted to the Employment Conditions Commission. The Commission then makes recommendations on the content of the Sectoral Determination. The public is generally also afforded an opportunity to make submissions to the Commission during this phase.

2) Permit

- a) Any person seeking to employ a child under the age of 15 is required to apply in advance to the Department of Labour for a Permit. The application must be in the prescribed form (see pro forma application form attached) and amongst other details, should include a motivation as to why the permit should be granted.
- b) The prospective employer is required to attach documentary proof that the child's parent has consented to the application. Proof of the child's age should also be attached to the application.

3) Contract of Employment

- a) Employers are required to conclude written contracts of employment with the child's parent, legal guardian or authorized agent, prior to the commencement of the employment.
- b) Whilst the Determination does not prescribe a minimum wage, the contract must contain various particulars including the agreed remuneration (and calculation of such remuneration), place of work, date of commencement, hours of work and leave entitlement.

4) Expenses & Fines

- a) Employers may not either receive or claim payment from a child in respect of benefits granted to the child such as training, equipment, work clothing, food or accommodation.
- b) An employer is also not entitled to levy any fine against the child.

5) Hours of Work/Rest Periods

- a) The Determination draws a distinction between children over 10 years old and children who are 10 or younger. In respect of the latter, the Determination limits the maximum hours of work per day to 3 hours. In relation to the former, employers may not require the child to work more than 4 hours per day.
- b) The employer is required to afford the child with a rest break of at least 30 minutes –
 - i) after 2 hours of continuous work – where the child is over 10 years old;
 - ii) after 1.5 hours of continuous work – where the child is 10 years old or younger.

6) On-Call

- a) The Determination restricts on call time (i.e. where the child is present at the work place) as follows:
 - i) 10 hours – if the child is over 10 years old;
 - ii) 8 hours – if the child is older than 5 years but not older than 10 years old;
 - iii) 6 hours – if the child is younger than 5 years old.

7) Night Work

- a) An employer may not require a child to work at night without the written consent of the parent.
- b) For purposes of the Determination, night work is regarded as work that is performed after 22h00 and before 05h00 the next day.

- c) A child may not be allowed to perform night work on more than 3 occasions per week. The employer is also required to compensate the child with an agreed “night work” allowance.

8) Accommodation Away from Home

- a) A child is not allowed to work away from home unless the full particulars regarding the accommodation has been provided to and approved by that child’s parent. The accommodation must be of a suitable standard and the child may not be charged for such accommodation.
- b) If the child is required to stay overnight on location, the employer must ensure that the child is accompanied by his or her parent or child minder.

9) Food and Transport

- a) An employer is required to afford the child with nutritious food and drink at all reasonable times. The employer is also required to ensure that the child has a meal area separate from adults other than his or her parents.
- b) Unless otherwise agreed with the parent, the employer is responsible for the safe transport of the child between home and the workplace in the following situations;
 - i) whenever the child is required to travel;
 - ii) at the end of any work day; and
 - iii) at the beginning and end of a child’s performance (if the child is performing at night or is working away from home)

10) Reasonable Access

The employer is required to ensure that the child's parent or legal guardian or agent has reasonable access to the child during a call.

11) Offence

It is an offence to employ a child in contravention of the Determination for which the penalty may be either a fine or period of imprisonment of up to 3 years.

12) Conclusion

- a) The prohibition against the employment of children under the age of 15, has up and until now, been largely ignored by many employers.
- b) The purpose of the Determination is to provide a basis for employers in the Advertising and Performing Arts industries to legally employ children. The standards set out in the Determination mirror, to some extent, the minimum standards in the Basic Conditions of Employment Act that binds all employers in South Africa.
- c) Practically, it would seem that a prospective employer is required to apply for a permit in respect of each particular project. There is no provision for a general permit to employ children from time to time. Whilst the permit requirements may be cumbersome, it was not the Department of Labour's intention to stifle the respective industries, but rather to set minimum employment standards for the protection of children. The Department has advised that it will in cases of urgency accept permit applications via telefax.
- d) Finally, it is important to note that employers who currently employ children have a period of 3 months grace within which to apply for the necessary permits.



**DEPARTMENT: LABOUR
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
HEAD OFFICE**

Alyxia Geanotes - Student at UCT
43 Belper Road
WYNBERG
CAPE TOWN
7800

Enquiries M Bergmann
Tel. Direct 309 4140
Reference SD 10.1 A

SD 10.2

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR

**SECTORAL DETERMINATION 10: CHILDREN IN THE PERFORMANCE OF
ADVERTISING, ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, SOUTH AFRICA**

PERMIT IN TERMS OF CLAUSE 2

The Minister of Labour, grant the following permit in terms of Clause 2 of the Sectoral Determination.

1. Employer:

Alyxia Geanotes - Student at UCT

2. Extent of the variation:

That the children listed below may perform in the chicken Boy film.

3. Names of children in respect of whom the determination applies:

Fiona May	940125 0128 080
Carig Evens	931230 5126 088
Carl Nicholas Rohleder	960212 5115 083
Garrick Courtney Sutton	951016 5078 089
Hayley Benedikte Davidson	951026 0205 082
James Christopher Donald	960427 5249 084
Kieran Brown	950213 5168 082
Matthew Dylon Gildenhuys	950613 5205 083
Ruth Emily Amore	701 846854
Tara Wair van Ryneveld	19950831
Uzair Adam	950808 5140 088

4. Conditions on which determination is granted:

- (a) That the time that the children are on the set does not exceed the prescribed hours per day;
- (b) That the time that the children perform does not exceed the prescribed hours per day; and
- (c) That all prescribed conditions be complied with.

5. Period for which the permit is granted:

From 17 to 21 January 2005

SIGNED under delegated authority in terms of section 85 of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act, 1997 at Pretoria on this the 7th day of January 2005.

DIRECTOR GENERAL: LABOUR



"Jack and the Glory" Productions

19 November 2004

Dear Pupils and Parents

Call for Children to Perform in a Film

Hello. My name is Mrs. Alyxia Geanotes. I am currently studying my Masters in Film and Television at The Institute of Film and New Media at The University of Cape Town. I am a teacher with 10 years experience including being the Drama teacher at The Grove Primary for 6 years.

My thesis study involves an investigation into non-professional performances, given by children on the stage and on the screen. Part of this study involves the creation of a 26-minute film with children at the heart of it. Mr. Greg Brown and Mrs. Ursula Rounche have been kind enough to allow me access to the children of Grade 2 and 3 at Grove Primary. I will need to cast three children for the purposes of this project. Two boys and one girl are needed. I would like to invite all willing participants to an audition.

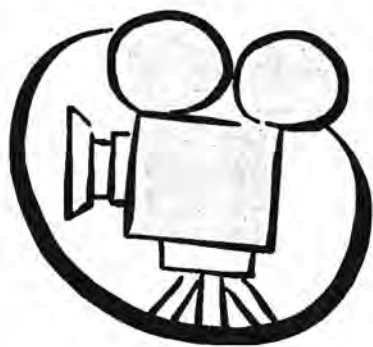
- Applicants will be to be available during mid-December and early January for shooting.
- Applicants do not have to have previous experience in film or drama.
- The film is a period piece set in the 1940's. Therefore successful applicants may need to be willing to have their hair cut in the style of the era. (This applies to boys only).
- The parents or Guardian of successful applicants are invited to be a part of the process.
- All procedures in this film have to comply with the Cape Film Commission's Standards. These are laid down by the Department of Labour and The Film Commission. In this regard, parents or guardians will have to give consent and provide a copy of the successful applicant's birth certificate.
- Although every procedure taken in this film is of a highly professional standing, please note that this is a nominal student production with an extremely small budget.
- The screening will be in mid-February. Friends and family of the actors will be invited to attend and DVD/VHS copies of the film will be given to all cast members. This production is not available for public distribution. It remains the property of The Institute of Film and New Media, UCT.

The audition will take place on Friday the 26 November 2004 at 1pm. Each child will be asked to do a screen test. Please meet outside the tuck shop and you will be taken to the audition room from there.

Please don't hesitate to call me if you have any queries on 0723696174 or 7624983.

Hope to see you at the audition.
Best wishes

Alyxia Geanotes BA (HONS) UCT



Hi!
 “Jack and the glory Productions”
 welcomes you to this audition.

Just relax and fill out this form. Keep it and
 your audition number ready at all times.

Name:		Surname:	
Audition number:			
Age:			
Boy:		Girl:	Please tick
Teacher's name:	Ms / Mrs.		
Class:			
Hair colour:			
Eye colour:			
Parent/Legal Guardian's name:		Surname:	
Contact Details:			
Home phone:			
Cell phone:			

6 December 2004

Dear Parents

Information Letter for "Jack and the Glory" Productions

Thank you for agreeing to allow your child to participate in my thesis film project. I am looking forward to working with these enthusiastic and vibrant individuals. What follows is a brief explanation of what to expect over the duration of the project.

Filming will take place between the 10th and 22nd December 2004 and again in January 2005. The specific dates and who is required on which days are detailed below. See the shooting schedule.

Although this is a student production, every attempt is being made to run this as a professional production. Each parent will need to fill in a consent form and provide a copy of your child's Birth Certificate. These will be handed to the Cape Film Commission. They will at any time, visit the shoot to monitor the children on set. Their job is to see that children working in Film are treated with respect in the correct manner. Your children will be under constant supervision while on set.

Drinks (water and fruit juice) and snacks will be available for all children on set during their breaks. Please feel free to send extra refreshments with your child if you would like to. We are trying to steer clear of too many sugary items. Please indicate to me if your child has any particular eating requirements and medical conditions that I will need to know about. Please fill in the separate form provided.

Your child will be needed for a costume fitting and a rehearsal. Please have look at the pictures of the era the film is being shot in: 1947. If you have any items at home that your child could use in the film, I would be most appreciative of this. At the costume fitting you will be briefed as to how hair will need to be worn by both girls and boys. We will see to it that boy's hair is cut into the correct style. A professional hairdresser will be on hand to do the job.

I want to thank parents in advance for all the lifting you will be required to do. Where there is a problem I will do my best to help with lifting. If you require reimbursement for your petrol, please keep a record of your mileage and I will sort you out.

Please don't hesitate to call me on 072-369 6174 or 7624983

Best wishes

Alyxia Geanotes

Shooting Schedule

1. Wednesday 8 Dec
10am – 1pm Rehearsal: Nicky, Abigail and Raymond
2pm – 4pm costume fitting and rehearsal for children, not Nicky, Abigail and Raymond.
43 Belper Rd Wynberg
Please bring any items you may want to bring from home
2. Friday 10
2pm – 6pm Rehearsal with Nicky, Stella and Jack.
43 Belper Rd Wynberg
3. Sat 11 Dec

9am – 4pm

Bookkeeper and home scenes

Nicky, Jack, bookkeeper, Abigail, Raymond, Matthew, Maria, Di, Shelly, Trace

43 Belper Rd Wynberg

4. Sunday 12 Dec

1pm – 5pm Ext of Cinema scenes, street scenes, ext. school scene.

Meet outside the Odd Fellows Hall in Maynard Street Wynberg

Luqmaan, Uzair, Nicky, Abigail, Raymond, Jack, Stella, Anne, Anthony, Carl, Kieran, Tara and Hayley.

5. Mon 13 Dec

Keep free for a rain day.

2pm – 5pm Rehearsal Stella and Nicky.

43 Belper Rd Wynberg

6. Tues 14 Dec

7.30am – 1pm Int. of Cinema scenes

Meet at Bertram House IFNM UCT, Michealis Campus, Orange Street. Directly opposite the Labia Cinema.

All children and extras.

7. Wed 15 Dec

7.30am – 1pm Int. of Cinema scenes and foyer scenes

Meet at Bertram House IFNM UCT, Michealis Campus, Orange Street. Directly opposite the Labia Cinema.

All children, extras, Anne, Margs and Jack.

8. Thurs 16 – Sunday 19

7am to leave.

Langebaan scenes

Only Nick and Stella. Jack to leave Friday afternoon.

9. Mon 20 Dec/Tues 21

Keep free for a rain day.

10. Wed 22

7am – 4pm Boats and Bubblegum scene, shop scene, road side scenes

Meet at 43 Belper RD Wynberg

Nicky, Raymond, Abigail and Jack to be there at 1pm.

11. 18 Jan 2005

10am – 1pm Rehearsal at 43 Belper Rd Wynberg

12. 19 Jan and 20 Jan 2005

1pm – 5pm Schoolroom scenes (times unconfirmed)

All children. Stella and headmaster.

Please meet at the Centre for Conservation Education, Aliwal Rd Wynberg. Opposite Wynberg Girl's School.



Art Direction: Picture Gallery

Photographs courtesy of Century



The teacher and the ladies of the 1940s





Photographs courtesy of Century

Costumes and Hair for ladies





Photographs courtesy of Hulton Getty Picture Collection



The Adult actors on set



Still Has "The Voice With A Smile"

War traffic keeps her busier than ever but she manages to keep calm and pleasant.

She still has "The Voice With A Smile" even when the nights are thick on the Long Distance switchboard and the circuits are crowded. Even when she has to ask you to —

"Please limit your call to 5 minutes. Others are waiting."

That's to help everybody get better service and you couldn't ask for a better reason than that.

BELL TELEPHONE SYSTEM



A Message of Confidence

THE WAR has brought many changes to the Bell System. The nation needed telephone facilities in new places. It needed more facilities in the usual places. It needed all those facilities in a hurry.

Shortages of essential materials brought new problems and new achievements in research and in manufacturing. Telephone calls increased nearly ten million a day.

Yet all this has been done without great change in your telephone ser-

vice. Millions of subscribers have felt no difference. The record as a whole has been good. That is the way it should be and the Bell System aims to keep it that way.

But when war needs delay your call, when you can't get just the service or equipment you need, let's put the blame right where it belongs — on the war.

Bell Telephone System



Service to the Nation in Peace and War

**WE'RE HANDLING
142,000,000
LOCAL CALLS A DAY**

That's 23,000,000 more than a year ago — and an all-time high.

It didn't seem possible that available equipment, with such additions as we could make, could be stretched to handle an increase like that. But it's done.



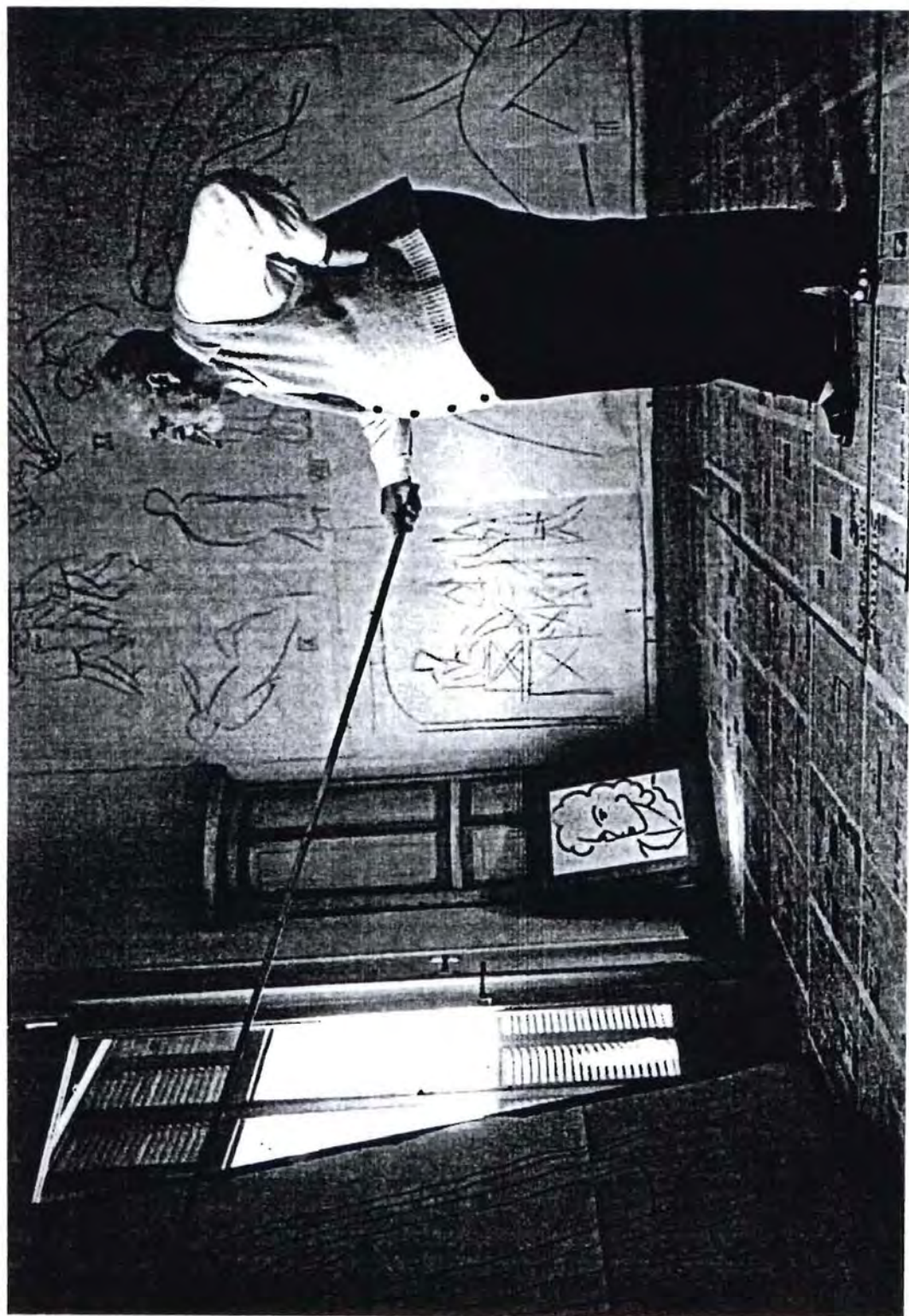
Telephone Adverts of the 1940s
courtesy of www.myinsulators.com



The Greek Grandfather



Photographs courtesy of Century





The Children explore props







The cast get ready to shoot at the Labia









Photographs courtesy of Century



Children and the 1940s





Photographs courtesy of Hulton Getty Picture Collection



Photographs courtesy of Hulton Getty Picture Collection





Photographs courtesy of Hulton Getty Picture Collection



Photographs courtesy of Century

Babes in Hollywood

The juvenile giants who took Hollywood by storm

From the moment in 1895 when, in front of Monsieur Lumiere's cine camera, a grinning boy put his foot on the gardener's hose-pipe, and then when the mystified old man peered into the nozzle took his foot off again, children became an irresistible force in the movies. Early films abound in mischievous boys and angelic little girls – or occasionally vice versa. Even babies were popular screen heroes.

It was only in 1911 that film actors began to be credited by name, but many professional children – such as Mary Pickford's kid brother Jack, Adele de Garde, Yale Boss, Gladys Egan, John Tansey and Paul Kelly – were already familiar faces to cinemagoers. One of the child stars, a particularly effete curly-head called Kenneth Casey, actually composed and published a song in his own honour:

Just because I am the Moving Picture Boy,
That is why I'm everybody's love and joy.
Every time my face is flashed upon the screen

They say: Oh, he's the sweetest thing we've ever seen . . .

Within the next few years the cult of personality mushroomed, and kids like Bobby Connelly, Helen Badgley, Andy Clark and Marie Osborne starred in their own one- or two-reeler series, dishing out the comedy and, when needed, the pathos. But the first child stars of feature-length films emerged at the beginning of the Twenties: 13-year-old Wesley Barry in *Dinty* (1920) and Jackie Coogan (seven years his junior) in Chaplin's *The Kid* (1921). Supremacy in short kid films – almost totally reserved for broad comedy from now on – was wrapped up for good the following year when Hal Roach launched the *Our Gang* series, an institution that was to last till 1944, with endless imitators but no equals.

Wesley Barry and his successor Ben Alexander only enjoyed two or three years of child

stardom. Jackie Coogan, having got to the top that much younger, stayed there for a whole decade, right into the early years of talkies. It is forgotten now what a superstar Coogan was. He was 'merchandized' in the same way the Beatles and Snoopy have been in our time: there were Coogan caps, Coogan dolls, Coogan match-holders, the lot. In 1924, not yet ten, he toured America and Europe in aid of an orphans' fund, in the course of which he was received by the League of Nations in Geneva, and in Rome by the Pope, who bestowed on him the Gold Cross of the Order of Jerusalem. Making only two or three films a year, he had earned a small fortune by 1925. As later transpired, he might just as well have saved his time – and in fact did so for the last three years of the Twenties as far as films were concerned; he was mainly occupied in an interminable vaudeville tour of the world with his father.

Coogan bluffed

The talkies tempted Jackie Coogan back to the studios. Now 15, he starred in *Tom Sawyer* (1930), and as Tom again in *Huckleberry Finn* (1931). Here his childhood ended, in every sense. He was too old to continue in boy parts, and in 1935 his much-loved father died in a car crash (taking with him in the tangle of metal Jackie's ex-Huck, Junior Durkin).

Mrs Coogan then married the family's financial adviser and they proceeded to spend most of the money her son had earned over the previous decade or so. Jackie asked for it to be paid over to him, but they said there had never been any question of the money being his. When a year or two later he married Betty Grable (still relatively unknown) he was obliged to go to law in an attempt to get his mother and stepfather to pay up; but what he finally secured barely covered the legal fees of the lengthy case. The scandal did, however,



Above: Jackie Coogan rose to stardom as the waif adopted by Charles Chaplin in *The Kid*. He did not, however, get to see the film for several years: 'Chaplin previewed it the first time about 9 o'clock at night – and that was past my bedtime.' Right: Hal Roach's version of *Our Gang* in the comedy short *The Kid From Borneo* (1933). From left, Spanky McFarland, Stymie Beard, Dickie Moore, Dorothy DeBorja, Tommy Bond, Pete the Pup





lead to the passing of a law – now updated, but still generally known as the Coogan Law – which obliges parents or guardians to keep half of child actors' earnings in trust for their adulthood.

Jackie Coogan at any rate, if nearly over the hill, was automatically Prince of the Child Stars when the Thirties opened; but there were others who successfully negotiated the switch to sound. Leon Janney (b.1917) for instance – a cheerful, curly blond who had acted earlier under the name of Leon Ramon – was a veteran of some 50 film appearances, including some with *Our Gang* in 1927. He scored a big hit in 1930 as the loyal child in *Courage*, and had several leading boy parts over the next two years, after which he followed Coogan into the mists of adolescence.

Jackie Cooper, superstar

A bigger star than Leon Janney – also a former member of *Our Gang*, and a leading one from 1929 – was to hit the jackpot in 1931. Jackie Cooper (b.1922) had been in films from the age of three. In 1931 his uncle, who happened to be the director Norman Taurog and had got him before the cameras in the first place, gave him the lead in a kid film called *Skippy*, based on a popular comic strip. The film was a corker, Cooper, already well known from *Our Gang*, became a major star and won an Oscar nomination for his performance – as he was to do again later in the year when teamed with Wallace Beery in *The Champ* (1931). Another three Jackie Cooper films – including a sequel to *Skippy* – were squeezed into 1931, and over the next four years he starred in ten more, three of them, like *Treasure Island* (1934), reuniting him with Beery.

Cooper was not a handsome boy: a somewhat baleful and peevish little face, thatched with stringy blond hair, centred on a strangely pursy mouth with a lower lip which at times of defiance or misery stuck out like a rainspout. He was a lachrymose tough, a formidable weeper. This doesn't take into account, however, his immense spontaneity (at least to begin with), his humour and temperament. He was able to exist, or seem to, quite unselfconsciously in front of the camera, with a relaxed insouciance which was charming; but when



Above: Leon Janney in *Courage*. His movie career faded when he grew too old for child parts, but he has since become a well-known actor on TV, stage and radio. Centre: Baby Peggy Montgomery, winsome star of the early Twenties. Top left and top: the familiar faces of Jackie Cooper – weeping his way to an Oscar nomination in *Skippy*, and sticking out his lower lip in *The Devil Is a Sissy* (1936), with Mickey Rooney and Freddie Bartholomew

he had an emotional scene to play, he went at it with impressive, uningratiating passion. By 1934 there began to be murmurs of disenchantment from the public, and some critics mentioned an increase in mannerism. Soon the terrible teens were upon him and in the late Thirties his career gently dimmed. After the war he returned – a far better-looking fellow – and played leads in one or two unremarkable movies and some Broadway plays before ending up in TV as actor and producer. Since 1948 he has made only two or three film appearances.

The mean kid

Cast as Cooper's pet hate in *Skippy*, back in 1931, was a highly interesting and amusing child actor called Jackie Searl (b.1920). Now almost forgotten, he made twice as many films as Cooper did in his childhood, and while he was never a star, his parts were meaty and rewarding. Searl specialized in playing mean, sneaky little runts – arrogant, smirking, prissy, insufferable. He perfected the role of a sort of Machiavellian milksop, and if the good little toughs like Cooper were allowed to rout him in the end, it wasn't before he had inflicted considerable torment on them along the way. At a time when most Hollywood kids were busting their guts to be tough and likeable, it was a shrewd move to be *The Kid You Love to Hate*, and Jackie Searl did very nicely out of it. He proved an admirable foil, later on, to the tomboy Jane Withers.

Another of the tough-and-likeables, of course, was Mickey Rooney (b.1922), whose real name was Joe Yule Jr. and who was born more or less in the proverbial trunk, of Irish-American vaudeville parents. Impossible to keep off the stage, he joined the family act at the age of two, and by four was a celebrated dancer. Aged six, he made his first screen appearance – as a midget – and soon afterwards won the coveted leading role in a comic strip series: the Mickey McGuire comedies which ran from 1927 to 1932.

These were the most successful of the many two-reeler kid series that attempted to challenge Hal Roach's *Our Gang*. From now on Joe Yule Jr. was Mickey McGuire: in the next five years, which took him from silent films into