

# **AN ACTIVE IMAGINATION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

“An Active Imagination” is a live-action, short film. It is a magical realist drama, which interweaves the naïve fantasies of childhood, with the harsh realities of the adult world, into a cohesive narrative.

The narrative is centered on the lead protagonist, a young girl coming to terms with her nascent pre-cognitive abilities, while navigating an abusive and turbulent childhood. This film is primarily a coming of age story, which speaks to audiences of all ages, which explores the loss of innocence of childhood.

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Thank You!

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## INTRODUCTION

I've always been fascinated by the medium of film, and its unique ability to push boundaries of our imagination. It is only in the realm of moving pictures and sound, that we can change our known realities of life, and manipulate space and time.

Like any artistic endeavor, filmmaking offers us the unique opportunity to transcend reality, and challenge ourselves. This film was perhaps the most ambitious, creative project I have undertaken, which challenged all of my physical and mental faculties, leaving me thoroughly spent, yet fulfilled. I have never before felt that I had been achieving my full potential.

With this film, I feel that I've finally had a breakthrough, and I am optimistic of creative possibilities in the future.

A film is a study of life, a reflection of images and sound, and imitation of reality, and what I love about fiction art is that it has the capacity to be both expressionistic and realistic. It gives me the opportunity to peel back layers of time and consciousness, to peek into the hidden realm of the subconscious, and explore its infinite mysteries.

*“The professional tackles the project that will make him stretch. He takes on the assignment that will bear him into uncharted waters, compel him to explore unconscious parts of himself.”*

*(The War of Art, Pressfield, 2002)*

In the past, I have primarily made documentary films. Fiction was always the untouched thing beyond, a new territory yet to be ventured into. The mystery,

unfamiliarity, and novelty of it made it all the more challenging, and so I decided to take the leap with my thesis film.

At first, I was hesitant to venture into a fictional world, because writing is so personal. It cannot be anything but. Writing a new character or a world that feels authentic takes great vulnerability and courage to delve into one's internal reserves and resources to try and come up with something original, something close to what it means to be me.

At first it was terrifying, I have always been fascinated by dominant-submissive relationships, where one partner maintains the constant upper hand, with a need to win the power struggle, to maintain his own sense of self.

*“Woman is compensated by a masculine element and therefore her unconscious has, so to speak, a masculine imprint. This results in a considerable psychological difference between men and women, and accordingly I have called the projection-making factor in women the animus, which means mind or spirit.”*

(The Syzygy: Anima and Animus, Collected Works, Jung, 1966)

The stereotype of the tormented artist led me to believe that in order to write well, I must feel pain. A few failed attempts later, I realized that by not immersing into, and truly enjoying the creative process, I was doing myself, and my work a disservice. There had to be another way.

When I finally started the rewrite process, I realized that for the first time I actually liked what I writing simply because I was looking forward to doing it. This film then became a labour of love, persistence, and a newfound enjoyment and curiosity

towards this art form. In the next chapter, I will delve more into the creative process behind the development of my story.

## **DEVELOPMENT OF STORY**

I had mentioned in the previous chapter, that I had quite a few failed attempts before finding this story. I used the screenwriting classes at York to write more, and it was helpful to have feedback from professors and fellow students, to have an objective appraisal of my work. Through it all, I wanted to remain in touch with my true meaning. These classes gave me an opportunity to not only, improve my writing, but also to stand my ground in the understanding that there are diverse perspectives, and someone will always have a differing opinion.

So I began to write and test myself in different genres. Being a documentary filmmaker, I was an absolute novice at fictional writing, and taking screenwriting classes with students who had studied screenplays intensively, made me feel like I could never catch up. Persistence is another lesson I learnt. Never give up on yourself and your voice, because everyone has something important to say if they research it well, and write from the heart.

At this point, I tried to come up with a definition of a good story, and what makes a good writer. I soon realized that all good stories need to be authentic. On the first day of class, Howard Wiseman, our screenwriting professor walked in, and scribbled on the board, ‘Nobody knows anything.’

In fact, over the course of writing many stories, I came to the conclusion that the one absolute truth of a well-researched and executed story is authenticity. So, I tried writing something that felt original. Self-confidence was another lesson learnt here, because if you don’t believe in yourself, you cannot respect what you have to offer.



I initially had a proposal for a film to be shot in India, my home country. However, that fell through due to logistical difficulties. Once I came to Canada, I felt that I should explore outside my comfort zone, and also take advantage of the facilities provided by the university. I decided to pursue a fiction piece to be shot in Toronto. I tried to collaborate with a screenwriting student, but it did not work. This was because we were two writers, each trying to put in our own voice into one story. At a loss of how to proceed ahead, I decided to start from scratch with what I really enjoyed doing, creative writing. It felt familiar, and in my comfort zone, and from there I hoped to launch into unknown terrain.

I started writing short fictional stories, and when I read them all together later, I was surprised to find so many common story elements. I wondered how I had missed it.

I have always been interested in fantastical notions of storytelling, but it seemed too vague a genre to tap into. The creative pieces I had been writing shared undertones of magical instances in real life, making the dominant theme, Magical Realism. Another key element was children's stories. Every single story I wrote happened to be a coming of age one, told from a child's perspective, with philosophical overtones of what it means to come of age.

I am very idealistic and this part of me resonated with children in their sense of wonderment and naiveté. Another interesting idea that I returned to was that of the subconscious. I have been significantly influenced by Freud, I was very curious to explore the workings of inner mind and spirit.

So I decided to combine all these ideas, and finally wrote my screenplay, *An Active Imagination*, in an intensive short overnight burst. It is funny how weeks of toiling into nothingness can change overnight with a quick push. I had always imagined myself with a chisel hitting at a sculpture, always knowing where I was going, until the piece was finally done, but in my process, it was quite contrary.

The film opens with Skylar, an eight year old girl reading a fairytale book in her room. The fairytale Wolf comes to life as a metaphorical allusion to her abusive and dominant stepfather. She hears her mother and step-father arguing at the very moment she is looking at the terrifying image of the wolf. The terror of her fantasy world merges with her feelings towards her stepfather. She also has a precognitive vision. When she tries to express how she feels, her mother brushes it aside. However Skylar's imaginary fears are so strong, they begin to affect her daily life, and she begins to see visions of the future. It is at this point, that we see her stepfather, Rob's potentially violent tendencies, which make us question whether Skylar really is an unreliable narrator. It is slowly revealed to the audience that she has psychic abilities, where she is able to know the future. She randomly predicts the weather, her father's death, and perhaps even her mother's murder. Rob also has a charming, apologetic, sad puppy dog persona. This is the lovable man that her mother has married, and she is willfully blind to his abusive side.

Skylar gets more severe visions at the school playground. Once again she attempts to warn her mother through her teacher that something bad is going to happen with Rob, in vain. Rob's true nature is revealed when he attempts to abandon her in a forest, on

the pretext of taking her to the petting zoo. Skylar's psychic abilities give her lead on the situation, and she follows Rob back, by hiding in the trunk. Once home, Rob tries to coerce Lydia into leaving the country with him, claiming he is going to be arrested if he stays. When Lydia resists and threatens to call the police, in desperation, Rob attempts to stop her with a clear physical threat. Skylar steps in, and saves her mother. She also learns to trust her visions, and realizes that she can change the outcome of her future. The policemen step in, and Skylar and her mother share an intimate conversation, which reveals that Skylar's naïve idealism may not be so naïve after all.

## PHILOSOPHY

This is a story about a young child caught between the two worlds of childhood fantasy, and harsh reality. I am fascinated by the age at which children still believe in Santa Claus, ghosts, and fairytale characters.

I am also really interested in the power of stories within the stories of our life, in a sort of meta-construct. What is it that makes a story powerful, and resonates with people?

As humans we are all storytellers. We spin tales of our remembered pasts, imagined futures, and view each other through the filtered vision of subjectivity. We tell stories from our personal reality. How much of our real lives are fantastical constructs of our attempt to explain our reality. As like fantasy is a coping mechanism, it is also a tool for liberation and exciting possibilities of exploring the potential of a situation.

“It is a curious fact that two writers, MacDonald and C.S. Lewis, go out of their ways to claim that they did not write their stories for children... In fact they both argue, that is the childlike attitude, not age, that marks his readers....Instead his (MacDonald) targets are those who are eager to ‘exercise a willing suspension of disbelief.’”

*(The Childlike in George MacDonald, and C.S. Lewis, King, 1994)*

As per MacDonald and C.S. Lewis’s ‘suspension of disbelief’ this film hopes to transport us back in time, to what it means to be a child, scared, unsure in an uncertain world, and remind us that though our lives are not so different from that, we have lost the power of imagination and dreams that made our childhood joyous.

I am very interested in how high-stress, traumatic, and dangerous situations change people. In these make or break situations, unusual abilities are discovered, as people are forced to stretch outside their comfort zones. In dealing with the immediacy of a situation, people learn to adapt, and discover aspects of their characters that they never knew existed. These adaptations mark true character, the resilience of humanity, and push the edge of our limitations.

“The biologist and intellectual E. O. Wilson was once asked what represented the most hindrance to the development of children; his answer was the soccer mom. He did not use the notion of the Procrustean bed, but he outlined it perfectly. His argument is that they repress children's natural *bio-philía*, their love of living things. But the problem is more general; soccer moms try to eliminate the trial and error, the anti-fragility, from children's lives, move them away from the ecological and transform them into nerds working on preexisting maps of reality... Further, they are now totally untrained to handle ambiguity. As a child of civil war, I disbelieve in structured learning... Provided we have the right type of rigor, we need randomness, mess, adventures, uncertainty, self-discovery, near-traumatic episodes, all those things that make life worth living, compared to the structured, fake, and ineffective life of an empty-suit CEO with a preset schedule and an alarm clock.” (*Antifragile*, Taleb, 2012)

In many ways, my characters are in desperate situations of emotional upheaval, relocation, and stress, and they react in different ways to these calamities. I am

fascinated by the transformation of human nature under turmoil and angst, to reveal the potential one's true self.

## **CHARACTERIZATION AND THE PSYCHE**

The three main characters in my film, Rob, Lydia and Skylar represent the following. Skylar explores the fine line between fantasy and reality; she experiences traumatic visions, triggered by her stepfather's abusive ways. An unlikely hero, she comes of age in a cathartic ending. Growing out of naive, childish wistfulness, she uses her special abilities to save her mother. She learns that she has agency, and is not a mere prisoner of her nightmares.

Lydia is a single, desperate mother who falls into an abusive marriage with the charming Rob. Only when the life of her daughter is put at risk, does she reveal a surprisingly strong, maternal backbone.

Ingeniously manipulative, sometimes charming, sometimes terrible, Rob plays the dominant father, who consistently convinces Lydia to doubt Skylar's credibility, and also his real intentions.

Rob has narcissistic, psychopathic tendencies, and makes a perfect partner for Lydia, who seems willing to put his needs before her own. She is the desperate equivocation of a single mother, who has resigned herself to society's rules of conditioning, and is unable to come into realization of her true self, seeking comfort in a male dominant figure.

With reference to Rob's character, he alternates between abusive and violent, to charming and manipulative. A great analogy is the Carl Jung's theory of

psychoanalysis, about the splitting of personality, and the creation of a true and false self.

“Jung's conception of *persona*, a sort of mask we create and wear in society, is highly relevant here. The *persona* can be understood as the personality we choose over the personality with which we are born. The persona is an expression not necessarily of our true selves, but of our egos: how we wish to see ourselves and for others to see us, as opposed to who we truly and wholly are. As Jung pointed out, to have a persona is not the problem. We all need a persona, as we all need an ego. But the trouble begins when we become over-identified with the persona or ego, believing that these artificial creations totally define our identity.” (“Who Are We Really?” Diamond, 2010)



## GENRES AND THEMES

Magical realism is the key structure in this film, where magical events are interspersed with the grittiness of realistic life. The film aims to treat these two opposite worlds in a fluid manner by juxtaposing them so that it is hard to tell what is reality and what is fantasy. In this film, the magic of escapism turns into the stuff of nightmares. This is a metaphorical allusion to the inevitable advent of adulthood.

“It is, first of all, a branch of serious fiction, which is to say, it is not escapist...Any genre of fiction can get at truths, of course. Some science fiction and fantasy do so, and are serious fiction. Some SF and fantasy are escapist. But magical realism is *always* serious, never escapist, because it is trying to convey the reality of one or several worldviews that actually exist, or have existed. Magical realism is a kind of realism, but one different from the realism that most of our culture now experiences.”

*(What is Magical Realism Really, Rogers, 2002)*

The film explores the coming of age process, which is overall genre of the movie. In a coming of age story, the lead protagonist loses his or her naïve, childlike way of seeing things. This may mean taking on new responsibilities, or a change in the perspective of relationships with oneself and others. It is considered as the loss of innocence, when there is a new understanding of humanity and its potential for good and evil. The individual begins to create his or her own maps of ethics and values to create a sense of self and identity. It is the beginning of conscious self, and the maturing of the ego that defines personality. By combining the magical realist theme with a coming of age story, this film attempts to re-question the existence of a fantasy world through our powerful imaginations.

Psychological thrillers are another narrative inspiration. By doing this, I was attempting to draw parallels between how scary it feels to be losing control of not just your mind, but also your body and surroundings in the inevitable process of growing up. Psychological thrillers rely on character's fears and emotional instability to create tension. They expose the shadow side of the human psyche, which people repress or deny. They rely on the unknown and mysterious subconscious desires and fears, to create an ominous feeling, and strong sense of foreboding.

Dreams, magic and fairytales give us the impression of a semblance of control due to their infinite potential, and imaginary existence. The chaos, uncertainty, and terrifying possibilities signify the change that is coming as one makes his or her introduction into the so-called adult world.

## NARRATIVE INFLUENCES

The narrative influences of this film were largely influenced by the key genres explored above of fantasy, coming of age-children's stories, and psychological thrillers.

The major cinematic influences were *Pan's Labyrinth*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, *Being John Malkovich*, *Hugo*, *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*, *Amélie*, and *Black Swan*. Guillermo del Toro directed *Pan's Labyrinth*, and it is a story about a mythical princess of the underworld who is led through various trials through an old labyrinth garden by mythical creatures, before she can claim her right to the title. It is a historical periodic film set in Spain, during the Francoist period. She is terrorized by the rigors of war, and emotional turmoil, while her pregnant mother grows increasingly ill and eventually dies, leaving the fate of her brother to Ofelia.

What I really liked about this story was the way del Toro brought fairytales, commonly reserved for children, into the realm of adult horror. He brought together two diametrically opposite themes to create a masterpiece story. The paradoxical sweetness of the fairytales, contradicted by the harsh and traumatic surroundings of her real life created a very engaging story. I also really liked the bravery and courage of the child protagonist as one of the values propounded by the film. In addition I was drawn to its moralistic messages of sacrifice, selflessness, and the triumph of good over evil.

Despite the fantastical world being an obvious escape in *Pan's Labyrinth*, I really like how the escapist world is filled with grotesque monsters of Ofelia's imagination. The

tasks required of Ofelia are not pleasing, but dark and terrifying, implying the necessity of suffering and pain, rather than discarding it as something undesirable. The figures that support her through her identity quest do not spoon feed her, but rather encourage to come into her own.

The political undertones against fascism are very symbolic, and depict a universal struggle against authority and controlling influences. Coming of age is a great example of the first stage of rebellion against perceived authority, when children begin an internal inquiry into their sets of beliefs, against parental figures, religion, and educational systems. The most common stage of teenage growth is angst and rebellion, characterized by internal turmoil, and non-conformity, essential to becoming an individual. It is a first step towards re-evaluating the influence of conditioning, and becoming a separate individual with a mind of one's own. Ofelia must complete three tasks before the full moon if she is to be able to reclaim her status as Princess Moanna, and enter the world of fairytales, escaping the trauma of real life. The ticking time bomb is a highly useful device to create suspense in a successful storytelling technique that I have utilized in my own film, through the urgency of the impending visions of Skylar's mother's death.

*Amélie* was another magical realist cinematic inspiration. Jean-Pierre Jeunet is one of my favourite directors. Using the idiosyncrasies of various characters, Jeunet highlights the unusual elements in our daily lives. With her child-like notions of romanticism, Amélie paints a very idealistic character, similar to 'Skylar' in my story. The moralistic do-good is an important theme in the triumph of kindness and compassion.

## AESTHETIC APPROACH

There are various devices used in my film that are not commonly used in linear, narrative filmmaking such as the use of a narrative voiceover, flashbacks, flash forwards, special visual effects and hypothetical scenarios, translating into a dreamscape.

With regards to the narrative voiceover, *Beasts of the Southern Wild* was an important filmic inspiration with reference to its brave, mystically philosophical, child-like narrator to add to the surrealism of the piece. There is something discomfiting about hearing an omnipresent all-knowing narrative, wise voice in that of a child's. It removes the audience from a sense of familiarity and simultaneously creates a mysterious air because it is not common for children to be wise or all-knowing, least of all, objective.

The unreliable narrator in the psychological thriller, *Gone Girl*, is another reference. Amy and Nick Dunne are both unreliable, creating a more suspenseful drama in which the audience doesn't really know whom to trust, keeping them on the edge, waiting to find out who is right, and what happens next. It plays into the need of an answer, an absolute resolution as a commonly used device in conventional film plots.

“David Fincher is taking advantage of an element of film language that most filmmakers overlook, not everything that you show in the film has to have taken place just as it's depicted, or even have taken place at all. However, an unreliable narrator is a far more powerful device when employed in cinema. Why? Because audiences have a very strong reaction to images that they see - if we see an image in a film, we

automatically assume the events depicted to have actually taken place. Unlike text, which may or may not refer to the truth, an image is the truth, and so to depict images, in the course of a film, that later turn out to have been false can be extremely jarring and powerful.” (*Under the Hood*, Wigon)

Special effects have been used in my film to symbolize certain elements in the form of the monster of the child’s imagination, similar to *Pan’s Labyrinth’s* weird creatures, and subjective interpretations in *Amélie*, such as her beating heart.

The flashbacks and flash-forwards are another common filmic device to disorient the audience’s sense of time and reality. *Memento* is the first film I watched that is a good example of this. The structure of the film makes it hard for viewers to figure out the character. Since the flashbacks are indistinguishable from reality, it increases speculation, engaging the audience to be pro-active in the solving of the mystery. As they are a reflection of the character’s own memory, so also, in my film the intrepid, and unpredictable emotional state of a child’s mind signifies the usage of this device. Creating hypothetical scenarios through her childlike imagination is another device, because the audience is not sure if it is even actually happening or happened or will ever happen.

## VISUAL STYLE

Important cinematic references were *Pan's Labyrinth*, Tim Burton's films, *Hugo*, and *E.T.* In *Pan's Labyrinth*, Guillermo Navarro, the cinematographer and Guillermo del Toro, the director, together create a rich, vibrant, dreamlike world, with its surreal devices. Ofelia's surroundings alternate between cold cyan-blue, to warm orange-yellow, with low-key lighting. The terrorizing character Vidal, is cast in a dark, gloomy light, as his role as the villain. The colours of the two worlds symbolize the stereotypical images of good and evil, warm and cold. The fairytale world is shown with gold and reds, and the human world is dark and sinister with blue-greys. What is interesting is that even the mythical creatures of her escapist imagination are lit darkly, making us wonder who we can really trust.

During Ofelia's first encounter with the faun, the natural world is cast in low-key lighting. Ofelia sees these abnormal creatures as beautiful, and we are taught to ignore the stereotypes that we subconsciously associate with good and evil. This rebels against the classic film making habits that we see generally and emphasizes the beauty that resides in the dark earthy places in the world.

The use of strong back-lighting in *Hugo* and *E.T.* was an important lighting technique to create an element of supernatural allure, and magical mystery. The pre-dominant unrealistic blues complemented the mystical themes of both films. The use of shadows to create an element of suspense in *E.T.* is also strongly used in Tim Burton's cinema to indicate the darkness of the theme. Robert Richardson, the cinematographer of *Hugo*, and Martin Scorsese, used a lot of low-angle shots looking up from the perspective of small children. The use of haze, and fog in both movies

was very inspiring to create the atmosphere of intrigue, giving it an element of magical fairy dust.

As quoted directly by Richardson, “With the aid of a look up table, I lit the Méliès with only tungsten light apartment with only tungsten lights. In other scenes, I would have cool overheads, as if the daylight were coming in. And then I would add various colors on the ground, depending whether it was going to be white or warmer than white.” We attempted to imitate Robert’s use of ‘luminous golden colour’ for the interiors scenes in the film, contrasting with the exterior blue.

My cinematographer, Guillaume Cottin, was a great choice, as he has trained in France and has the artistic, rich style of European cinema, with an exaggeration of stylized cinematography. The moment he recommended *E.T.* to me as a reference, I knew we were on the same page. We discussed the lighting style, and colour tone based on the references above, and while the final result is not exactly what we planned, the film has developed a unique voice of its own through an amalgamation of our ideas.



## SOUND DESIGN

For sound design, my key reference, *Pan's Labyrinth* was important for its eerie, magical soundtrack, punctuated by classical notes, which gave its rich, fairytale like vibe transporting us to the past.

Besides *Pan's Labyrinth*, other soundtrack influences, were Benh Zeitlen and Dan Romer's *Beasts of the Southern Wild* soundtrack, which combines New Orleans Jazz with classical music to create a bold fusion. This fusion of the ancient, mystical fairytale land with reality, gives opportunities for compelling mixes. Akira Kosemura's moody, and minimalistic piano tunes was another inspiration for the tone of the film. David Fincher's, *Gone Girl*, had great ambience with its atmospheric yet suspenseful music, suitable for a thriller. I was most inspired by Benh Zeitlin's comment that he imagines music while writing the script, leaving space in the story especially for sound, which is something I consciously tried to do.

My composer is Charles Tilden, principle songwriter of the indie band, Delta Will. I felt like his music was a great fit, as he knows how to play the glockenspiel, which we used to create magical, child-like tones, and fuse it with suspenseful ambient sound. His versatility, along with the distinctive energy of his music, gave me the reassurance that he would create a unique stamp on this film's soundtrack, characterizing the specialness of the lead character, Skylar.

## **THE FILMMAKING PROCESS**

The initial scriptwriting process was very frustrating with different options for themes, but after I churned forth a draft of *An Active Imagination*, and was given the mark of approval by my supervisor, Ali Kazimi, and reader, Marie Rickard, I stuck with it, and I'm glad the persistence paid off. I began by recruiting key crew, taking on the challenging task of producing it myself. I set up an Indiegogo campaign, and we managed to raise 40 percent of the funds for which I am thankful for.

I found my crew from all possible sources such as Facebook groups, word of mouth, York, Sheridan and Humber university students. After that, the tedious interview selection process began and I finalized my key crew. The production designer dropped out two weeks before shoot time, and I was lucky to find another one from [filmandtvpro.com](http://filmandtvpro.com).

My cinematographer and I spent countless hours discussing the film and planning out a detailed shot-list and storyboarding it to make sure we were on the same page. We did a location scout with the gaffer and production designer. The location I sourced from [Setscouter](http://Setscouter.com).

On [Setscouter](http://Setscouter.com), I sent out many messages trying to negotiate a student deal, until a few agreed. I visited two houses from which I chose the one we shot in. For craft services, my production manager knew a food truck, and since they were a new company, I negotiated prices with them. Since some of our key crew could not make it out all days, my production managers and I worked to find subsidiary crew, coordinating the budgeting, and scheduling process. We also rented additional equipment, in addition

to the package from the university. Since our scene had a climatic scene with the knife, I hired a stunt coordinator who was kind enough to do it for free, though I did pay him an honorarium afterwards.

Admittedly, I was overwhelmed and overworked on this set, and felt like I was doing much more than I was able, but it taught me a bit about all the filmmaking roles I otherwise would have not known, and gave me hands-on experiential knowledge. I definitely underestimated the budget on this set, so the next time, I will be aware of all possible costs involved, to keep actors and crew happy on set, food preferences, location overtime, and transportation/gas costs. With the location, we had a problem where the house owner petitioned for us to pay for the entire floorboard repairing of her house, for a small square inch of scratches. Luckily, we did not shoot there at all, so were able to prove that it wasn't caused by us.

The call for auditions was incredibly successful, with a huge turnout. The casting director and I applied on all possible websites including casting workbook, ACTRA, mandy.com, and were able to choose the most suitable actors from a wide selection. The rehearsals process was aggravating as I had prepared by reading 'The Director's Intuition' by Judith Weston, and also 'Directing Actor's', but we could only have one rehearsal due the actors' limited ability, particularly the child actor. In the rehearsal, we discussed the backstory of each of the characters, the spines of the scenes, character motivations, and then proceeded to re-enact them while I gave directions. The two adults, Emily and Abraham, were ACTRA actors, and it was easy to work with them. I was able to have a second small rehearsal with only the child-actor, where I tried some work-shopping techniques to have her be present in the moment,

as opposed to simply parroting the lines, or carrying out the actions I told her to do. She was intelligent and grasped things fast, but since she didn't have prior acting experience, we struggled with this aspect. Still, she was a good overall choice, considering we did have union child-actors attend the auditions, and Sarah was an unanimous choice.

On the day of the production, things went a lot smoother due to the detailed planning, and pre-production. We managed to get all possible shots and coverage, including variety in the takes we wanted, thanks to good scheduling, and the discretion of the assistant director. Of course we would've would have preferred more time for better delivery of takes, but we didn't miss anything important to the story, due to a bad performance, technical, management difficulties or lack of time.

Since I have professional experience as a documentary editor, I edited the film myself with the help of Ali Kazimi. All in all it was an interesting and illuminating experience tackling the challenging arena of fiction.

In closing, I would like to include a quotation from Elizabeth Gilbert: 'A different way is to co-operate fully, humbly and joyfully with inspiration. You can receive your ideas with respect, curiosity, not with drama or dread. You can measure your worth by your dedication to your path, not by your successes or failure. You can battle your demons, instead of your gifts, by realizing that your demons were never doing the work anyhow. You can believe that you are neither a slave to inspiration, nor its master, but something far more interesting—its partner, and that the two of you are

working together towards something inspiring, and worthwhile.' (*Big Magic*, Gilbert, Jan 2016)

## **CONCLUSION**

This film was by far the most ambitious, and challenging project I have undertaken to date. It left me completely physically, emotionally, and mentally exhausted, but at the same time fulfilled, as I had really given it my best.

I am thankful to every single person who helped make this happen, in full awareness that a film is really a sum of team effort, culminating in a creative endeavor that is guided by the director's vision, but really belongs to everyone.

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