Feature Story

PROJECT DU F.I.L.M. AND THE MAKING OF HAPPY F-ING VALENTINE’S DAY: A STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

By Marteene Diaz, First Year MFJS Graduate Student

This spring saw the release of Sheila Schroeder and Project DU F.I.L.M.’s inaugural screenplay, Happy F-ing Valentine’s Day, a collaborative project between DU alumni and students that has been in the works since 2015. The film premiered at the Longmont Front Range Film Festival in April and received the Best Film of the Fest Award as well as the Audience Favorite Award, and has since been accepted into film festivals internationally as a finalist. MFJS graduate student Marteene Diaz served as a production assistant and the on-set photographer and shares her experiences during the production process.

It was a typical day in the grad lounge at the MFJS building when Sheila Schroeder walked in and asked us if we had a few minutes to chat. She began to fill us in on this new program she was starting called Project DU F.I.L.M. (Film Initiative Linking to Mentors). The idea here was to create a program that brought DU alumni, professionals in the industry, and current DU film and video students to one place where projects could be created, thus Happy F-ing Valentine’s Day was born. Needless to say we were all in for this kind of opportunity. It was the first quarter of starting the graduate program and we were already going to be making a short film?! Dreams do come true.

It was a learning environment from the get-go. There were late nights working as casting assistant for auditions and many other aspects of pre-production we were able to experience. The table read was a very exciting day for everyone. It was the first time everyone involved was in the same place at the same time. By this point, it was clear that Happy F-ing Valentine’s Day was going to be a success one way or another. The room was filled with dedicated like-minded individuals that were ready to make this a reality.

Before we knew it was December and we were packing cars with equipment and people and heading out to Nederland, Colorado for this long awaited 4-day shoot. From day one, it was all hands on deck to get the Black Forest Restaurant from Christmas to Valentine’s Day in a matter of hours. From staging to cleaning to ND-ing windows everyone worked together like a well-oiled machine. As the days went on, we as a team became that much more efficient.

Throughout shooting, we learned things like “don’t touch the f-ing camera!” and “what that color chart thing does.” We watched Jeremy Dehn, Director, handle the actors with grace and learned not react to performances so as not to interfere with direction. Frazer Lockhart, Director of Photography, was there to answer every question pertaining to the camera: “why that lens? Why this angle?” Aidan Sean McCarthy, Head Gaffer, was the lighting man with the plan. From faking daylight to getting a three-point lighting set-up just right, he was there to teach/guide us about the importance of lighting and achieving the right look. Sheila Schroeder, Producer/Professor, taught us the importance of logistics, organization, and how to be a kick-ass Production Assistant.

Being on the set of Happy F-ing Valentine’s Day was the most powerful and educational experience of my time at DU thus far. I gained experience and knowledge that simply could not be replicated in a classroom. Together we build relationships and memories that I guarantee will last a lifetime!

Thanks for reading,
Marteene G. Diaz