

Three-time Action on Film Winner Gives Insight on his winnings.

Stan Harrington, a Grand Prize winner, credits his acting career for his success as a screenwriter.

by Carolyn Firestone

Making his debut as a film producer, director, and screenwriter, **Stan Harrington** was the Grand Prize winner of the 2005 Action on Film (AOF) Awards. Taking home three awards (for Best in Show, Best Screenplay, and Best Actress respectively), Harrington's film, **Bred in the Bone**, was the small budget success story at AOF. Moving from Australia in the 1990's, Harrington's first success in America came when he was able to begin a career at the Stella Adler Theater in Hollywood, California, where he has since served as a writer, director, actor, and producer for countless productions. Still his accomplishments at the Adler included his creation of Adler After Dark, a platform which offers writers an opportunity to present their shows rent free.

After establishing a strong background in theater, Harrington established Xristos Productions and was determined to try his luck at filmmaking. So, with a \$5,000 budget and a borrowed camera from the Adler Theater, Harrington set out to prove that an inexpensive film with a solid script, big universal themes, and a strong sub-text could compete on a production value level. Still, it took years in theater production before Harrington decided to take on the film genre.

In between performing and directing an endless series of plays, Harrington found the time to write his own screenplay. The result was **Bred in the Bone**, a script that tells the story of John Palmentario, a paid thug who won't kill or carry a gun. The action of the film begins when John decides to deviate from his father's way of life by quit-

ting his job and settling down with his girlfriend. Soon after John's plan is disrupted by the appearance of a mysterious Mexican,



Stan Harrington

Cruz, the story ultimately asks if this unlikely protagonist can truly change his life or if he is destined to follow in his father's footsteps.

The unique storyline behind **Bred in the Bone** is not limited to the film's content. In fact, the making of the movie provides a story all its own. If one were to ask what is the secret behind Harrington's achievement, they'd soon learn that the journey to the Action on Film Awards was the result of a screenwriter's creative

conceptualization combined with a director's determination. Yet when it came to wearing the hat of scriptwriter and director Harrington's main experience had initially come from the stage. When deciding to produce **Bred in the Bone**, his first feature film, Harrington also took on the role of director, lead actor, and editor. Taking on the complex artistic challenge of bringing his own screenplay to life, Harrington saw a benefit in understanding diverse elements of his craft.

After moving to Los Angeles, California, Harrington had put writing on hold to focus on acting. His first step was enrolling in classes at Stella Adler Academy, where he ran out of money after his first semester. Fortunately, Gail Ross, his speech teacher, recognized his talent and offered him a scholarship and consequently an opportunity to view his trade from the other side of a script. He soon found that, "Understanding the craft of acting and studying the great playwrights like Miller and Albee and Wilson only improved my writing and consequently directing beyond anything I could ever imagine," he says.

His experience as an actor may have helped shape his unrestricted style as a screenwriter. Says Harrington, "I always work with what I refer to as a liquid script. There is constant adjustments even as we shoot so the script is never really complete. I don't believe that it can ever be perfect if it is supposed to be art. It's like a poem. If you have ever written a poem I am sure you always go back and tweak it. Didn't Spielberg

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just make adjustments to ET? An artist is always seeing things that can be done better...**Bred** had a lot of things that I could improve on but you have to know where to stop and when to move ahead."

Knowing when to move ahead is a key element of Harrington's style. He freely admits that his ambition in creating **Bred in the Bone** was "to create work for myself and my friends rather than wait for an agent to get us the opportunity that could turn things around. I am at a very impatient part of my life which is typical of a lot of actors. I don't like to sit and wait," he notes.

This desire to get things done didn't just inspire Harrington to complete his screenplay, but it also gave him the will power to stay focused all through the production process, and even to enter the complicated technological world of editing. In the end, all the hard work paid off when Harrington took home the Best in Show Award at AOF. "I have never entered a screenplay contest.

AOF had an award for produced and up-produced screenplays so naturally mine fell under produced," says Harrington.

Since winning at AOF, **Bred in the Bone** has gone on to win the audience award for Best Feature Film and become runner up for Best in Show at the Foundation of Independent Films International Film Fest. In addition, the story of the making of **Bred in the Bone** has generated a stir in the industry. "[It] has captured the imagination of many influential companies such as Sony Media Software and The Sundance Media Group. Sony has since done a featured article which is due out in their current catalogue and SMG have featured the story on countless websites for filmmakers and editors," he comments.

With the attention generated by his first film, Harrington offers this piece of advice to other aspiring screenwriters, "Finish it. Finish the script as soon as you can. Don't keep going over the same stuff. Finish it and

you will improve. Evolution is a promise," he states.

Finishing it never seems to be a problem for Harrington, who is already hard at work on **The Craving Heart**, a feature film about knowing when you've met your soul mate. Harrington describes it as no ordinary love story. He says, "It has a very dark edge and there will be plenty of discussion after this film. I believe it will challenge the audiences thinking and push a few buttons."

It seems that pushing buttons, while sticking to a strong universal theme, is Harrington's formula for creating a good screenplay. In the end, he hopes that all the hard work will produce something that the audience can, "Understand, appreciate, and learn from," concludes Harrington. And if there is one thing we can understand, appreciate, and learn from Stan Harrington's story is that great talent can indeed win over a great budget.