



By Jesse Kreitzer

Make THE WAKE

To emerge from a state of rest. The aftermath of a traumatic event. The sacred ritual held beside someone who has died. The title alone carries many implications and each of them is equally relevant to the story that I need to tell.

Set in rural Vermont and told over the course of four seasons, *THE WAKE* is the tale of a social worker, consumed by such grief and sorrow after the death of his mother, that he begins caring for another dying woman in secrecy from his wife and two children. This act of seeming compassion is, in truth, concealed as one man's blind quest for redemption and closure. My debut feature-length fictional narrative, *THE WAKE*, was recently selected for a second round of consideration for the Sundance Institute's 2012 Screenwriter's Lab.

Perhaps I'm fighting an uphill battle to get this film made. It doesn't contain gratuitous sex or violence, doesn't spoon-feed or pander to its audience, nor is it the Classic tale of hero versus villain. Instead, it's an original, inspired and uncompromising vision of Man versus Self, where the ambiguous line between good and evil resides within each character, as they wrestle with their own response to grief and mortality.

This film was born after I recognized an issue that extended beyond my own personal experience and permeated throughout Western culture. Generally speaking, we don't "do death well". We grieve behind closed doors, avoid unsettling discussion and toil to say goodbye; without proper resolve and healthy outlets to cope, grief can manifest into unforeseen and destructive ways. This is a deeply personal work; one that I've concealed atop my chest and beneath crossed arms since my undergraduate days at Emerson College. It wasn't until January 2011, seven years later, that I knew it was time to publicly unveil this film and ask for public support to bring it to fruition.

I have been the sole driving force of *THE WAKE*, on all fronts, since the project's inception. Serving as the Writer, Director and Producer for *THE WAKE*, among countless other roles, the act of producing a debut feature film at times feels like a solitary uphill crawl. To better describe it, my role is comparable to the token coal stoker, entrusted to fuel each locomotive along multiple tracks and ensure each one departs the station and arrives at its respective destination. It has been a tiresome and arduous task, but my commitment to telling this story and trust in the journey has never wavered.

As a first-time filmmaker, one of the greatest challenges is how to raise a budget for a film that has yet to exist. A solid script and the conviction that I'll produce a great film is hardly sufficient bounty for potential investors. To build traction and help leverage the project, I attached two veterans of the indie film world as creative advisors, Michel Moysse and David Kleiler, to oversee production. Also, during the film's conceptual development, I spent two years using 35mm still photography to illustrate the overarching themes, visual style and tone of *THE WAKE*. I've employed these images across multiple



clockwise from top
Jesse Kreitzer, Writer/Director of *THE WAKE*, filming at home in Marlboro, Vermont.

A grief-ridden social worker seeks refuge in his garden. Kreitzer's conceptual photography taken while developing the script. Photo by Jesse Kreitzer.

A son confronts the death of his mother; Kreitzer's photo taken in Brookline, Massachusetts during the film's development. Photo by Jesse Kreitzer.

The home is an organ, sustained by those who reside in it. Kreitzer's conceptual photography taken during *THE WAKE*'s creative development. Photo by Jesse Kreitzer.

Using the resources available to him, Kreitzer's frame-by-frame restoration of a decayed 8mm film of his then-infant father makes its way into the script. Photo by Abraham Kreitzer.



accomplish. Try to partner with like-minded organizations that will advocate to their respective circles on your behalf. Seek fiscal sponsorship from a nonprofit organization to offer a tax-deductible incentive to donors. Exercise discretion when approaching people for money; there's a fine line between bombardment and real cause. Be realistic about your goals. It's okay to fantasize, but at the end of the day, it comes down to doing. Whatever happens, don't get discouraged.

I am the only native Vermonter in my family. My parents moved from Glen Cove, New York to Marlboro, Vermont nearly 30 years ago. Their decision was prompted by the reputation of the town's elementary school, widely known to celebrate and nurture the student's individuality. I've always had an inherent passion for filmmaking and attribute this to my grandfather, Abraham Kreitzer, who devoted his lifetime to 35mm slide photography. In the third grade, my teachers recognized my tenacity for the craft and encouraged me to create short films to accompany my research reports. I thank my parents and earliest educators for never dissuading me from pursuing a career in the arts for the sake of its competitive and challenging nature. Instead, they gave me the tools and support that I needed to thrive in it.

THE WAKE is fiscally sponsored by Central Productions, a Cambridge-based nonprofit dedicated to advancing New England's emerging independent filmmakers. Jesse Kreitzer is seeking tax-deductible Kickstarter pledges until October 19, 2011.

To learn more about *THE WAKE*, please visit www.thewakefilm.com and sign up for the e-newsletter or contact Jesse Kreitzer at jesse@thewakefilm.com.

platforms, from the film's website to investor packets, to help convey my vision without having shot a single frame of the actual film. I compiled the images into a 50-page, hard-cover book that's now a limited-print perk for my donors' coffee tables. Filming faux teasers, trailers and scene excerpts has also helped raise awareness and build a fan base for *THE WAKE*. Raising a budget, however, is only one small facet of this sole endeavor.

From writing innumerable drafts of outlines, treatments, scripts and budgets to LLC operating agreements (my gratitude to the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and Attorney Christopher King for providing pro-bono legal assistance), production packets, teasers, trailers and newsletters — all while maintaining a forty-hour, bread and butter gig — has been at times, a bit daunting. But what keeps me above water is a levelheaded sensibility that, in due time, this will all be accomplished.

The greatest misstep among novice filmmakers is blind ambition. Not that I'd ever dissuade anyone from realizing his or her vision, but to pull off a high-concept film on a shoestring budget without risking parody is no easy feat. My filmmaking mantra has been, and likely will always be, "use your resources

and embrace your limitations." *THE WAKE* is no exception. From country ponds to backwoods, gardens and barn houses, my access to locations, characters and props was enough to ensure that they made way into the script. Having the film take place over four seasons in rural, picturesque Vermont not only serves the story, but boosts production values given the meager budget. Instead of trying to raise the projected \$130,000 budget before commencing production, the goal is to raise \$30,000 to shoot Act I, the winter segment, in early 2012 and use the footage to leverage more funds and resume production in the Spring. After nearly six years of development work on *THE WAKE*, my ducks were in seeming good order, and so I leapt into fundraising.

I'm certainly no self-professed scholar or guru on raising money. There are countless articles about compelling methods to run your crowdfunding campaign, so I'll refrain from repeating most of it. Instead, the following are several techniques that I've personally employed throughout my campaigns: Curate a solid mailing list and Facebook following prior to launching your campaign. Don't launch until you've created a pitch video that clearly communicates what you're trying to

Jesse Kreitzer is a film graduate of Emerson College, Magna Cum Laude, and was the recipient of the Senior Award for Outstanding Achievement in Photography. He has independently produced over 40 short narrative, documentary and experimental works that have screened in Boston, New York and Los Angeles. He was recently awarded a 2011 Artist Fellowship Finalist Grant for his film work from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.