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Why Sundance Rejected You

By Roberta Marie Munroe

Here we are once again in January on our way to Park City, UT in the hope that we'll be among the first to see the latest and greatest of independent filmmaking at Sundance. Some 120 feature filmmakers and 85 short filmmakers are having business cards printed, picking out their favorite parkas and creating a "vision board" of all the things they're going to buy with the three-picture deal money Harvey Weinstein is going to beg them to take. Buena suerte con este.

During the five years I programmed short film at Sundance, the unhappy recipients of rejection letters sought me out at other festivals and often asked me, "Why didn't I get in?" Seems like an impossible question to answer. But in my book "How Not To Make A Short Film: Secrets From A Sundance Programmer," I do share some ideas -- over a few hundred pages -- about what may have befallen the rejected filmmakers. Here is the short list.

- It's not good.
- It's good but too long.
- It's good but too short.
- You forgot to hire an editor, and it shows.
- You did hire one who just got Final Cut Pro last week -- and that shows.
- You didn't think you needed a producer and now you're taking Xanax.
- Several of your "friends" play lead characters.
- You shot the first draft of your script without reaching out for feedback.
- Instead of finding out what Secret Service Agents do -- you made it up.
- Hi, it's called a tripod.
- You forced a family member to recount an old family secret.
- Cocaine, guns, condoms and a ninja are all in the same scene.
- All the black male characters are drug dealers.
- You thought your wealthy parents' financial investment would be enough.

While no one would (out loud anyway) question the relevance of Sundance for the filmmakers who were selected to screen this year, I want to be one of the few who would question it for the filmmakers who did not. A quick Internet search will show you a number of talented and successful independent filmmakers who have never been selected to screen at Sundance. So what I'm always suggesting to up and coming filmmakers is this: Get out there and watch some

stuff! You can watch some really fantastic short films on Netflix, iTunes, Funny or Die -- and yes, there is some great work on YouTube as well. Get educated.

Don't worry about getting into Sundance. Worry about making a great film. The truth is, if there are 10,000 independent films trolling the festival circuit, and Sundance only has room to show just over 200 of them, then does that make the other 9,800 not worth watching? Of course not. Some of these 9,800 directors go on to amazing celebrity-level victory. I know this because I meet them at cocktail parties and they can't wait to tell me that while I didn't select their short film for the festival, they are now working on their second feature after the first one got a huge distribution deal.

Do your homework and be one of those 9,800 who corners me at the cocktail party with tales of grand success. I can't wait to meet you.

How Not To Make A Short Film: Secrets From A Sundance Programmer is due in bookstores January 20, 2009 - yes, the same day President Elect Obama hangs his hat in the White House. I'm planning to send him a few of signed copies for Michelle and the girls so they can start making home movies they'll actually want to re-watch for years to come. For more info: www.HowNotToMakeAShortFilm.com

<http://www.thewrap.com/blog-entry/390>

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