

# Actor/producer sheds light on showbiz realities

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As Ridgewood's Jon Doscher begins pre-production on his second feature film, what advice does the producer and actor have for the millions who dream of chasing their Hollywood dreams in the movie business?

"Don't do it," the president of Starline Films said this week from his Saddle River office. "I don't recommend it to anyone. Either you have it or you don't."

Doscher stresses that the hardships of breaking into show-biz are not exaggerated in the least and that only a rare breed can find success in the field.

"I want you to put this in all caps because it truly is AWFUL in every sense of the word," Doscher said. "You have to have a passion to want to do it and you can't teach that passion. If you have it, you have to have some fire. But that can also work against you as much as it can work for you."

In the struggling-actors' community, peers see each other as a threat, Doscher explained, even though an individual's success in acting will likely have a positive impact on his or her fellow actors.

"You have to reprioritize your life in a way that might not make sense to others," he added. "I have never come across anyone like aspiring filmmakers and actors. They are willing to weather any storm for no money and keep doing it."

Doscher developed his passion as a boy growing up in Woodcliff Lake. He vividly remembers the advent of cable television in the late '70s and early '80s and the impact one particular movie had on him.

"I was probably around 10 when cable first became accessible and there was a Stanley Kubrick movie called *The Shining* that Home Box Office would show 24/7, and I really became fascinated with the film," Doscher said. "It was surreal, but I really identified with it."

As a teenager growing up in the

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Jon Doscher

'80s, Doscher studied drama at Pascack Hills High School and would spend hours every weekend filming home movies with two friends, Bruce Redman and Rick Hurvitz, and emulating their then-favorite "Saturday Night Live" cast members, Billy Crystal and Martin Short. In a unique coincidence, Doscher's childhood friends have gone on to work on such television programs as "Survivor," "Pimp My Ride" and "The Contender."

"It's crazy to still be doing the same thing 20 years later - only now to be getting paid for it!" Doscher said.

Despite his interest in the entertainment industry, Doscher would start Doscher's Power Clean Inc., after a brief stint at Bergen Community College. His next endeavor was creating a home-improvement magazine, *Home Contractor's Review*.

The former contractor began his segue into films in a most unusual way. In 1999, he sent three-time Oscar-winner Jack Nicholson a box of expensive cigars, along with a note asking for advice on whether to study acting in Los Angeles or New York City. When he received no reply, Doscher sent another note telling the screen legend how expensive the cigars were and again requested a reply.

Surprisingly, Nicholson did get back to him, and although the actor pointed out the inappropriateness of quoting a gift price, he did wish the young man well in his future.

It was only after the aspiring actor, while working as a contractor, befriended actor Danny Aiello, that Doscher's movie dreams came alive.

Having made the decision to pursue acting, Doscher attended the Lee Strasberg Theatre Institute in New York City until Aiello persuaded him to leave school and focus on auditions. After some bit parts in films like "Sweet Home Alabama" and "Analyze That," as well as the mob drama "This Thing of Ours," Doscher was cast as one of the leads in "Remedy" (co-starring Vincent Pastore, Frank Vincent and Arthur Nascarella of "Sopranos" fame), which was released on video and DVD this week. Local residents may recognize many of the Montville, Saddle River and Washington Township locations used in the filming of "Remedy." The film also features a cameo by former Woodcliff Lake mayor Josephine Higgins as an ambulance driver.

"I just loved the part I was playing," Doscher said of his role as drug-addicted dentist Evan Quinn. "It brought comedy to a dark and disturbing story line. It was like telling a horrible joke and getting a big laugh."

For his next project, "4Chosen," Doscher will be producing a film based on the 1998 shooting of four African-Americans by white State Troopers on the New Jersey Turnpike in Washington Township. The four were on their way to basketball tryout in North Carolina. The case shed light on the issue of racial profiling and police corruption.

"4Chosen" is an incredible human-interest story," said Doscher. "It changed laws. It changed the way police interact with minorities. These young men had all their dreams ripped away but they didn't give up. They became stronger and wiser men... but they still have that look in their eye - that they'll never be able to play pro

basketball."

Despite an extremely hectic schedule and long hours, Doscher is enjoying his work as producer.

"A producer is responsible for everything you see on that screen, and it's a three-year project," he said. "The producer picks the project, outlines a film, hires a screenwriter, brands a film (by creating a look or a tagline and a message). Then the producer tries to pitch the project to an independent financier. Everyone thinks that's the hardest part, but it isn't."

As proof, Doscher points out that despite his film's modest budget, A-list talent has been attracted to the story.

"Right now, Jack Nicholson's agent is calling me to be in the film (as attorney David Ironman, who represented the four young men in their lawsuit) even though I've really only made one film," Doscher said. "Money doesn't buy a film. You could have a billion dollars and it won't matter. These guys don't need the money."

Doscher admits that "4Chosen" is one of the few screenplays he has actually read since he's "usually bored after page three. They're difficult to be engaged by."

The five-year Village resident remains mum on his own personal life, explaining that the less audiences know about an actor's private life, the more convincing character they can portray onscreen. ("Why see Ben Affleck in a film for \$10 when you could just turn on a television?")

Doscher said his love of acting has not subsided as his focus has shifted to producing. He is enthralled with the work of fine actors and is mesmerized by the art.

"I prefer acting, but not because everyone just wants to be a movie star. Acting is like hitting a golf ball and putting it in the hole. An actor has to be passionate, but they have to have talent. It's very technical," he said. "Thousands of things have to happen for a great performance."

One such recent performance that awed Doscher was Daniel Day Lewis Golden Globe and Academy Award-nominated turn



PHOTO COURTESY OF STARLINE FILMS

Ridgewood move producer and actor Jon Doscher with friend Danny Aiello at the premiere of Doscher's film "Remedy," which was released on DVD and video last week.

as the sadistic Bill the Butcher in Martin Scorsese's "Gangs of New York." The mild-mannered actor is said to have remained in character even off-set while the film was shot.

"It was absolutely amazing," Doscher said. "How do you take this ruthless killer and make him someone that you'd like to hang out with? And he's nothing like that character in real life, either."

Unfortunately, Doscher said, the film industry changed again after the tremendous success of science-fiction work like "Star Wars" in the late '70s and the emergence of over-the-top action movies in the '80s. Money soon became the top priority of moviemakers, just as it has been in all other industries. Doscher longs for the days when audiences walked into classics like "Chinatown" and "Dog Day Afternoon" - movies, he says, that were made for art's sake, rather than profit - and he feels that a resurgence will happen in the next few years.

Doscher credits his business background with helping him achieve success and believes that having a strong business sense is almost essential to make it in the business.

"If you look at Tom Cruise, don't think he made it to where he is on looks and talent alone. He's extremely savvy and very creative," Doscher said. "The same thing with Beatty and Robert Redford and all of these other guys; sure, they're good looking and talented, but they have to have business skills to make it where they are."

There are, however, exceptions to the rule.

"Johnny Depp is a freak of nature," Doscher said. "He can rely solely on his talent. He can probably [bleep] up a bake sale."

When asked what kinds of films he hopes to spend his career making, Doscher definitely leans towards the darker, more serious material, since that is what will have the most impact on viewers.

"Dramatic films are moving," he said. "I like ones that audiences can identify with and feel empowered by when they leave the theater. Bad things happen, but there can always be good that comes from the bad."

"I like people to smile and raise their eyebrows and say, 'That was interesting.'"

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