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# CATCH SANTA

by

**H. Kamau Buchanan**

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for  
The degree of Master of Fine Arts in Imaging Arts/Film  
School of Film and Animation  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
March 2010

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Malcolm Spaul, Chair  
Professor  
School of Film and Animation

---

Howard Lester  
Professor  
School of Film and Animation

---

Patti Durr  
Professor  
National Technical School for the Deaf

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## **Abstract**

Catch Santa is a short film and a comedy about a two hearing robbers who rob Christmas gifts in the homes of deaf families on Christmas Eve. These robbers are able to steal the Christmas gifts while the Deaf residents are asleep. The conflict occurs when they confront with a deaf young boy who was determined to secretly videotape Santa Claus in the act of delivering Christmas presents. The thesis report discusses the technical and artistic process of making the film.

## **I. THE FIRST STORY DEVELOPMENT**

I knew that for my thesis project, I wanted to do something that I have never done in the past and a venture that would present me with challenges and new experiences. Of all possible film genres, I felt that comedy would be a good selection since it tends to be a tough genre for filmmakers, many of whom struggle to accomplish comedy's ultimate goal –making the audience laugh. Additionally, I have never produced a comedy film, so I thought it would be a great challenge for me.

Naturally, to start my thesis project, I needed a comedic story idea, so I brainstormed ideas in my scrapbook. While contemplating my ideas for the film, I decided that I wanted to come up with storyline that is original, clever, entertaining and challenging. Because my films would include Deaf actors, it would immediately appear original to most people, especially hearing people, since they don't usually see a film involving Deaf actors. However, I did not want that kind of superficial originality; I wanted the story itself to be unique even if the film portrayed all hearing actors. Therefore, I decided to create an original story to make my film different than other comedy films that have been produced.

Based on the ideas that I had in my scrapbook, I decided to tell a story about a man who dies and later returns to Earth as a guardian angel in order to help a lonely man find the woman of his dreams. It was my goal to use the clash of two cultures – the hearing and the deaf – to create humor. I presented this story idea to the board in spring of 2008. The board was intrigued by my desire to attempt a comedy and by the story idea I had. However, the board did not approve my story idea because they thought it was too complex to become a short film. They wanted me to work on the story development in

order to simplify the storyline and strengthen the story concept. So, they asked me to come back with a revised thesis proposal at a later date in order to get their approval.

Some time after I presented my thesis proposal to the board, I rented and watched a film entitled “Over Her Dead Body,” and I realized that this film was much too similar to the story idea I had for my thesis. Because I wanted to tell a story that has never been told or seen before, I decided to abandon my original story idea and create a new one. My advisor encouraged me to stay with my initial idea, and said that it would still be unique because it has Deaf actors. I still insisted on changing it. As I mentioned earlier, I did not want the inclusion of Deaf actors to be the only reason why my film is original. Thus, I decided to develop a new story.

## **II. THE SECOND STORY DEVELOPMENT**

To find a new story, I looked in my scrapbook for other ideas. I did not see any that I liked enough for a short film. I was taught that it is best to write a script based on what I know well. I decided to think about my own personal stories that I did not write down in my scrapbook. I also thought about the ones that I have heard from my family and friends.

From my recollection of the personal stories that my family, friends or I have experienced, I recalled that a friend of mine was robbed. The reason why this story stood out in my memory is because it was not a typical robbery story. My friend lives in Washington, DC area and he attends Gallaudet University, the first and only liberal arts university for Deaf students in America. Many Deaf students who attend Gallaudet University live in the residences nearby the campus, and these residential areas have high

crime rates. Hearing people in these locales are very aware of the Deaf residents. Consequently, there have been hearing people who targeted Deaf people's homes for robbery. These hearing people know that the Deaf residents would not be able to hear them breaking in. My friend was a victim of being robbed while sleeping. I thought this would be an intriguing event to incorporate in my story idea.

Another personal story that stood out in my mind was when my brother got married around Christmas time in 2007. He married a woman who had two kids from a previous marriage. My sister's oldest daughter, who was eight at the time, met these kids for the first time a few days before my brother's wedding. During that time, those kids got to know each other a little bit. One night I was at my sister's home, and I asked my sister if her daughters believe in Santa Claus. My sister said that they know Santa Claus is fake because she told them the truth. The oldest daughter overheard our conversation, and then told her mother that my brother's kids think Santa Claus is real. My niece was shocked, especially with the oldest son, who is ten years old. She said kids at her school who are younger than ten know Santa Claus is fake. My sister and I both laughed at her daughter's strong reaction. I decided that I should somehow incorporate this in my story idea as well. I thought it would be interesting if we followed a story about a boy who is so convinced that Santa Claus is real that he wants to catch Santa Claus on film in order to prove his existence to his classmates, who know Santa Claus isn't real.

Drawing from these two personal experiences, I incorporated them both into a story idea for my thesis film. After figuring out a rough story idea, I felt that I still needed more elements to make the story funny. I decided to do some research on how to make a comedy film. I researched online and read two books to learn how write a comedy and



what elements can be used to make a humorous film. I also watched several comedy films to detect which elements made me laugh. After making use of online sources, books and films, I had a better understanding and more knowledge of what comedy elements I could use for my thesis script. I felt ready and prepared to write the treatment and the script.

### **III. THE FINAL SCRIPT**

Before I started creating the final script, I decided to do some research. I wanted to learn the essential tools in making a successful comedy film. So, I bought and read two books entitled: “Writing the Comedy Film” by Stuart Voytilla and Scott Petri, and “The Comic Toolbox: How to Be Funny Even Though You’re Not” by John Vorhaus. Both books emphasize that the key elements to comedy are surprise and absurdity. I also learned about several types of surprises I could use. One example of surprise that I used in my film is called magic three, or rule of three. When two of the same instances happen, the viewer expects the third instance to be the same, but it turns out to be something different like an accident, a punch line, or other kinds of humorous surprises. After gaining knowledge about comedic elements I could use to make the final script funny, I felt more confident in creating it. However, it was still a challenge to write a funny script because a lot of jokes or humorous instances have been done before in older films.

### **IV. CREW ORGANIZATION**

My search for the Director of Photography (DP) began in the late winter quarter, when most DPs had already committed to a project. Because the DPs I wanted were not

available, I had to ask around for other DPs including the inexperienced ones.

Fortunately, I came across a DP named Aurora Gordon who was a junior. She sent me her website link so that I could review her demo reel to see if I liked her work. Even though she was the only choice I had, I was impressed with her demo reel, and she appeared to be an experienced DP. I was relieved that I found a satisfactory DP who would be able to do the job well for my film. After she read my script, she expressed great interest in shooting my thesis film. We decided to meet for lunch to discuss further details regarding the plan for my thesis project.

During my lunch meeting with Aurora, we discussed details regarding the production. Aurora wanted to shoot my thesis film using film format, but she and I did not have the money to spend for film development. So, we decided to go with high definition format using a HVX200 camcorder. We also discussed the lighting because a lot of my scenes happen at night and in the dark. That posed a challenge for Aurora in making sure that we would have the necessary lighting equipment for the night scenes. We also discussed who would make the shot list and the storyboard. She wanted to do those tasks. I was flexible and allowed her to have control over the shot list, but I told her that I wanted to review it with her beforehand. Finally, we talked about finding crew members. I was honest with her and informed her that I did not know most film students in SOFA, and that I would need her help with finding crew members. She was kind enough to give me some names to contact.

Among the names I received from Aurora, Adam Snyder was the only person who was available to be on the crew. He was committed to being the sound person and the editor for my film. Fortunately, he was available to attend all of my film shoots. Adam

had experience with being the sound person on previous shoots so he was comfortable in that role. His focus is editing so he was excited to have that opportunity as well, especially with respect to editing a film involving American Sign Language (ASL). He does not know ASL, but I told him that I would help out with the editing.

I also needed a deaf crew member because that person would be the liaison between me and the deaf actors or deaf people on the set (like Theo's parents who are also deaf). I assigned Brian Milburn to be the Assistant Director even though he had no prior experience with filmmaking. He was interested in learning the role. I taught him what his responsibilities were. I told my advisor, Malcolm Spaul, about this and he insisted that I find another Assistant Director – a SOFA person who would run the set. I had no luck in finding one for the first film shoot.

For the first day of production, I only had four people on the crew: Aurora, Adam, Brian and Romeal. Romeal said he wanted to be on the crew when I needed him. So, he was the light person. After the first film shoot, Romeal realized that I needed more crew members for the remaining film shoots. So, he offered me assistance by contacting his SOFA friends to help out. He also eventually decided to be the Assistant Director to run my film shoots. I was very grateful for Romeal: he provided me with tremendous help when he took on the Assistant Director role, and actually found a few crew members to commit for most of the film shoots.

## **V. THE CAST**

The characters in my thesis script are supposed to be funny since it's a comedy film. Having said that, it was imperative that I find actors who would execute their comedic roles very well. Of all characters in my story, the robbers, the little boy, and the

boyfriend who also plays the fake Santa were the most important roles to find the right actors for. None of the prior actors that I had worked with fit exactly what I was looking for. I had to search for new actors by asking around and checking the actors' book.

I began the search by finding actors to play the robbers. I asked my peers and my advisor for suggestions. I did not have to look far because I got a good amount of names to start with. I contacted all of them, and most already had prior commitments, leaving me with two actors who were available and interested. They were Dan Kulp and Jonathan Ntheketha. Both men had prior acting experiences. Jonathan had a lot of acting experience in drama and theater. He had never done comedy film before but he wanted the opportunity to try it. Dan acted in Neal Dhand's film entitled "Used," and I received a DVD copy of it to view his work. It was a serious dramatic role and Dan did very well. However, I wanted to see if he could do comedy as well. So, I asked Dan and Jonathan to do an audition.

At the audition, I learned that Dan does stand up comedy for children. I was pleased to learn that. After auditioning him, I thought he had potential so I decided to cast him. I also cast him because I wanted an actor who is very good with kids. The fact that Dan does stand up comedy for children tells me that my child actor would feel comfortable working with him. I felt this was important because it would help with the production time if the actors work together well.

When I met Jonathan, I recognized his face from the student films I've seen at the SOFA screenings. I knew he was a talented actor but I had to find out if he was capable of playing a comical role. After auditioning him, I realized that his strength lies in dramatic roles, but I cast him anyway. I decided to cast Jonathan because he had

experience in acting and I knew he would be committed to the project. His enthusiasm also impressed me, as he wanted to challenge himself by doing a comedy film.

After finding Dan and Jonathan, I looked for the child actor. I asked the people I know in the Deaf community for suggestions. I also contacted Rochester School for the Deaf. To my surprise, I did not get enough suggestions. I struggled with finding a child actor who fit my description of an eight to twelve year old boy. After contacting many people, I finally found someone: Theo Conley, a seven year old boy. His age concerned me because I was well aware that young kids can be hard to direct, hence my desire to look for someone in the age range of eight to twelve years old. I wanted a child who was closer to twelve but looked a lot younger. I thought that the younger the child looked, the better the odds would be that his character would be funny and adorable.

I only had one name, Theo Conley, and I hoped that he would be the perfect fit for the role. I got in touch with his mother via video phone and talked to her about what Theo's role would be and how much commitment I needed from him. Even though Theo had no prior acting experience, Theo's mom said that she wanted him to audition and that he was very interested. I then spoke to Theo and asked him if he wanted to act for my film. After talking to him for a while, I had a good feeling about him. I took a gamble and gave him the part.

In finding an actor to play Theo's mom, I wanted one that Theo would be comfortable with. To begin my search, I started off by asking Theo's mom if she had anyone in mind that could play the part. She suggested Ruthie Jordan. I was excited with that suggestion because Ruthie is a very experienced and talented actor. I was even more excited when Theo's mom explained that Theo and Ruthie know each other and that they

get along very well. The fact they already had great rapport with each other would make it easier for them to be able to act together. I contacted Ruthie immediately and asked if she was interested. She expressed interest and got the part.

The last actor I had to find was the character of Theo's mom's boyfriend. I did not audition anyone for this role because I had had someone in mind all along. That person was Steve Whittington, who had already acted in my two quarter films. I knew he would be committed to the role and had a very flexible schedule that would allow him to attend the film shoots and rehearsals. Steve also fit the description I wanted for the boyfriend character. He and Dan were both big enough to look like Santa Claus when wearing the costume.

## **VI. THE PRODUCTIONS**

I had a total of ten days of film shoots. The first day of production started on April 4th. It was pushed back by a few weeks because my DP forgot that she had to do pick up shoots for another student project. I was stunned that I had to wait a few weeks. Fortunately, this setback had little adverse effect on the scheduling and I managed to have a film shoot schedule to fit all the actors' availabilities. It was certainly a busy month for everyone involved in the project, especially for the actors and I, as we had film shoots and rehearsals every week. In the end, we completed all film shoots on time and I felt very satisfied with the footage I had for post production.

## **VII. PRODUCTION DAY 1: APRIL 4<sup>TH</sup>**

The first day of shoot, we shot at the actor Theo Conley's home. The house was located in the suburban area of Rush, New York. I chose this house because it required

less work for decorations. Theo already lived in the house, so there were already pictures hung on the walls of the house, and his bedroom fit his character, Chase. The spacious rooms in the house allowed the DP to have the freedom to move her camcorder around and set up lights.

The first day of the film shoot, we filmed all the scenes in Chase's bedroom and bathroom, which all happen at nighttime. We started in Chase's bedroom which was already decorated with Theo's things. The room looked like it appropriately belonged to a young boy with a lot of stuffed animals, toys, kid posters, and so forth. Chase's room was the one of the few rooms in the house that was not as spacious as we would have liked. It posed a bit of a challenge when the crew set up the lighting equipment. It also limited the blocking for the actors, and they had to move around the room in a way that allowed the camcorder to capture their faces and Chase's dialogue in ASL. Since it was Theo's the first acting for a film production, he had the tendency to look at the camcorder while acting. For this reason, we had to do several more takes than expected.

After the bedroom, we moved to film all of the scenes in the bathroom. The bathroom was another room that was limited in terms of space. For this reason, only the DP and the actors were in the bathroom when recording those scenes. To set up the lighting in this room, the DP used the bathroom lights but replaced them with 40 watt light bulbs. The DP also added a dimmer light behind the camera to fill the room with light. The bathroom also posed a challenge for blocking, but I identified the appropriate blocking during the rehearsals prior to this day of shooting. The film shoot in the bathroom moved along with ease and allowed us time to do more scenes.

We moved on to the van parked in front of the garage of Chase's house. The scenes take place in the front seats of the van with the two robbers talking. Setting up the lighting equipment to illuminate the van was a challenge for the DP. Fortunately, she found a way to create good lighting in the van. She set up 2000K light bulbs to beam toward the front of the house with white painting, which created a bright reflection into the van. The other limitation I had was I could not listen to the actors saying their lines because the van windows had to be closed in order to avoid recording the sound of the winds. So, when recording the van scenes, the DP was in the back with the microphone aimed toward the actors. I stood outside and depended on the actors' facial expressions and body language get the best acting I wanted from them.

### **VIII. PRODUCTION DAY 2: APRIL 5<sup>TH</sup>**

The second film shoot took place at a medium sized house in Pittsford, New York. This was the stranger's house in which the robbers first appear in the film. I chose this house because the owner had a Christmas tree that I was looking for, and s/he allowed me to set it up in the living room. Also, the house had a stairway from the first floor to the second floor located next to the living room, which is what I wanted. The scenes at this house were during nighttime. First, I wanted to film the dialogue between the robbers outside of the van at this house. I scheduled the production to start close to sundown so that we would have some natural light as the sun set while we recorded the robbers' dialogue outside of the back of the van. Because the DP and one of the actors arrived late, we could not get the appropriate lighting outside of the back of the van. Thus, we moved inside to film all of the scenes in the house. We were behind schedule when we started filming the interior scenes, and there was even more delay because the



crew had to set up the lighting. After a long interruption, we started filming inside. Because we lost a lot of time, I could not get all of the shots and takes needed for these scenes. However, the shots that were taken looked really good and I had enough for post-production. As a result of not able to do outside scenes, I rescheduled to shoot those at a later date.

### **IX. PRODUCTION DAY 3: APRIL 10<sup>TH</sup>**

The third day of the film shoot took place at Chase's house again. This time we filmed the night scenes in the living room. The living room is wide and spacious, which really gave the DP a lot of flexibility to set up her camcorder and lighting equipment. For this reason, her crew was able to set up the lights where she wanted. However because the scenes happen at late night when everyone is sleeping, there was very little practical light she could work with. A few days prior, the art director, a few helpers and I transformed the living room with Christmas decorations that Theo's family had stored in their basement. We tried to find decorations that had light which would provide the living room with more light. The practical lights that were available to the DP to work with were the tree decorations, a few Christmas decorations that had light, and a lamp by the Christmas tree sitting on top of a small shelf. The DP was able to create adequate lighting to be able to see the actors' face on the camcorder. She suggested if the footage looked darker than it should be, then the editor could use color correction to fix the lighting.

### **X. PRODUCTION DAY 4: APRIL 11<sup>TH</sup>**

The third film production was at Chase's house and the scenes we filmed were in the foyer area. In these scenes, Chase meets Gabe, and Mardy confronts Gabe which then

leads to a fight. I had never directed a fight before so it was a new experience for me. The actors, Theo, Steve, Dan and I met several times prior to this day to rehearse these scenes. While I had to come up with a natural way of how these characters meet, and how Chase attacks Gabe, I also had to find a way to make their interactions humorous. I asked Theo for ideas of what to use to attack Gabe that would be funny to him. He suggested a few ideas and we agreed that using a toy baseball bat was the best idea. With the help of Theo, we started to experiment different way of how Chase would attack Gabe. I already found the way Chase attacked Gabe hilarious on his first try. We agreed that Chase would first hit Gabe by his groin then attack Gabe on his back as he falls down. The sight of a little boy beating up a big and tall man like Steve was perfect. The reaction of roaring laughter that this scene got at the film screening proved that it was indeed the right choice.

For this scene, I also had to find a humorous costume for Gabe, who needed to be dressed as what I called a “Ghetto” Santa Claus. I wanted the sight of him wearing a homemade costume to replace his lost costume to be hilarious. I worked with Steve and the Art Director to find the best costume for Gabe. We thought about what items in Gabe’s house would help create a costume that looks like Santa Claus. We thought of using paper plates, cotton balls and old small-sized clothes stored in his storage. It was the best outfit we could come up with. I thought Gabe looked more adorably stupid than funny in the outfit, but I was content with that.

On this day of production, it was a joy filming these scenes because they were hilarious. I knew it would probably be the funniest scene at the screening because my

crew and I could not stop laughing at the actors. Fortunately for me, the actors did a great job in these scenes and that made my job a lot easier.

## **XI. PRODUCTION DAY 5: APRIL 18<sup>TH</sup>**

The fifth film shoot took place in the living room in Chase's house and all scenes occurred during the daytime. This production day was the most challenging day of all because Theo did not want to act anymore. The amount of acting he had to do overwhelmed him and he was frustrated by it. Ironically, I needed him to be frustrated and upset for the scenes and it worked in my favor when he attempted to act. However, it made it harder when he just wanted to do one take for every time that he acted and thought what he did was good enough. After I got through one scene, I spoke to Theo's father to see what I could do to appease Theo. His father told me that every time the crew and I showed up, Theo wanted to play. In the past, when the crew and I showed up, we would come to film Theo, and then I would stay a little bit to play with Theo. Theo actually wanted to play with the crew members, too. I realized that he is the only child in his family and that explained the reason why he needed play time with people. After realizing those things, I decided to delay the production time for the remaining film shoots and let Theo play with the crew members for approximately thirty minutes. In the end, I was thrilled to see that it worked. I learned that Theo needed his "play fix" in order to be willing to act. After Theo had his time to play, he was committed to acting again and was all happy again. Even though Theo was back to his normal self, I still did not get as many takes as I wanted to. Seeing Theo feel frustrated and unwilling to do more than two takes concerned me that he would get frustrated again. As a result, I felt that I lost

focus on my ability to direct the scenes as I wanted to. It was a good learning experience for me as I learned how I would better prepare for situations like this again.

## **XII. PRODUCTION DAY 6: APRIL 19<sup>TH</sup>**

The sixth day of film production took place at Theo's house and we shot the daytime scenes in the living room and the mother's bedroom. Prior to the film shoot, I decided to allow Theo to mingle and play with the crew members for about thirty minutes. When we started filming, Theo was ready to act and the "play fix" certainly helped a lot.

First we filmed in Mom's bedroom, where Mom wakes up in the morning and sees Gabe tied up. The room appeared to be spacious, but the large bed prevented the DP from being able to get the shots that I wanted. It also limited her ability to pan the camcorder. We had to figure out different shots to take while still being able to get the coverage we needed.

We moved on to film the scene in the living room when Chase opens his presents in the morning. The lighting there posed some challenges for the. I wanted Chase to open his gifts in front of the Christmas tree, which was located by a very large window. There was bright daylight coming through the window and it looked blown out on the camcorder. That window had only side curtains and they were not the type that you can close to cover the window. The DP tried to correct the lighting issue by making adjustments on her camcorder and positioning to avoid the window being in the frame. She could not find a solution. So, she suggested that we film from a different angle where the window would not be in the frame at all. This resulted in the Christmas tree not being in the frame as well. I did not like the new angle but it was the best position she could

find to film the scene. From this angle, we moved the Christmas tree closer so it would block the window, which then blocked the light that came through it.

### **XIII. PRODUCTION DAY 7: APRIL 25<sup>TH</sup>**

The seventh filming took place at Cobblestone School. I was fortunate to find this school via Neal Dhand. Before I contacted Neal for further help, I contacted several schools in Rochester and all of them declined to allow me to film at their school. I needed to find an elementary school because the interior would already have the design and decorations that would show it was a school for young students. I had no luck so I asked Neal if he had any suggestions. Initially, he did not, but then he tried asking one of his friends who worked at Cobblestone School. Fortunately, his friend was delighted to let me to use the school. So, I arranged a meeting with him to scout the location.

I needed a principal's office that is adjacent to a secretary's office and a hallway. The school did not have type of principal's and secretary's offices I was looking for so I decided to convert one of their office spaces to look like it was the secretary's office and the door entrance to the hallway would be the principal's door. The DP would film from inside and the principal and Chase would enter the door as if they were coming out of the principal's office when they were really coming from the hallway. I was relieved that this strategy worked. I gathered lots of school fliers from RIT to decorate the office to make the environment more school-like.

For the hallway scene, we use a doorway dolly to film Chase and his mom walking toward the camcorder. It took several practices to get the timing right for the actors to walk as the dolly followed them in a backwards direction. There were a lot of

windows in the classrooms and the hallway so we needed little lighting equipment for the hallway scene.

#### **XIV. PRODUCTION DAY 8: APRIL 27<sup>TH</sup>**

On the eighth day of the film shoot, we filmed the final scenes at Chase's house. We filmed the scene where Mom wakes up and confronts Mardy with Gabe screaming in the background. The blocking was important to determine because I had to find the right blocking for Mom and Mardy so that Gabe was still seen screaming in the background. It was important to see Gabe screaming in the background because it added humor to the scene as the audience would see Gabe struggling to get Mom's attention in the background. This was a night scene so we set up lights outside of the house to illuminate the house windows to add more lighting in the room that Gabe was in. In the foyer, we just used the room light along with some light coming through the door windows from the lighting equipment set up outside of the room. It was a productive film shoot in which everything worked as we hoped so it ended faster than expected.

#### **XV. PRODUCTION DAY 9: MAY 2<sup>ND</sup>**

The ninth film shoot was at a medium-size home located in downtown Rochester, New York. This was the house for Gabe. We filmed the night scenes in the living room, the bathroom, the kitchen and outside by the house. The filming and lighting set up inside the house went smoothly without any problems. When we moved outside, the lighting was a challenge because we could not get enough light to illuminate the interior front seats of the van where the robbers sit and talk. We tried to find a place or something to reflect the 2K lighting into the van but it did not look as well as it did in the previous

shoot when we filmed inside the van. It was a struggle because we could not find a way around it. Finally, the DP decided to move the van to park by one of the house windows. From inside we use lighting equipment to illuminate the inside of the van. It was the best lighting we could create but not entirely satisfactory. We decided that the editor could fix the lighting during post production.

## **XVI. PRODUCTION DAY 10: MAY 3<sup>rd</sup>**

The final day of the production was at an apartment room located in downtown Rochester, New York. The environment of the apartment was dull and simple, and I felt it was the type of apartment that the robbers would live in. It showed their economical status, which is lower class. Inside the apartment, my Art Director and I filled half of the room with trash bags to show that the robbers stole many bags full of Christmas presents. This was the location where the robbers got caught. Because I could not decide on the best lines for Mardy's reaction when he gets caught, we experimented with several different types of reactions and I was to decide the one I wanted during the post-production. The last day of the production went by swiftly as a lot of coverage was not required and the lighting set up was simple.

## **XVII. THE FINE CUT POST-PRODUCTION**

For the post-production, I worked alongside Adam Snyder to help him edit my film since he did not know ASL. We started the post-production as soon as we got footage from the first few shoots. We worked on the post-production over a span of five weeks. We started off by doing the rough cut, editing the scenes that were done with filming. Once all the scenes were filmed, we started to do fine cut by putting the scenes

in order and trimming down unnecessary shots. Adam also started to do color corrections, added text for the title and the credits, and incorporated sound effects and music. When he did the music, he asked me if I knew what kind of music I wanted. I told him I had no experience in adding music to my film but I thought adding Christmas-themed songs would be suitable for my film. He agreed. He suggested that I find a music composer to do the music but in the meantime, he would use copyrighted music so the film would be ready for the screening. Because I wasn't able to provide my opinion on the music he chose for "Catch Santa," he asked Romeal for his feedback. Romeal agreed that Christmas-themed songs worked well with my film and he liked the songs that Adam chose. So, at the end of the fine cut, Adam and I had to add subtitles to the film. He subtitled the scenes with spoken dialogue while I subtitled the ones that were in ASL. Also, Adam used After Effects to superimpose a shot of Mardy being filmed by a camcorder in the living room onto the shot of the LCD screen of the camcorder. Adam also used After Effects to convert the quality of the shot of Mardy to make it look like it was recorded by a consumer-type camcorder. At the end of the post-production, the film turned out to be longer than expected. It was about thirty two minutes in duration. We wanted to leave it as is to see what the people at the screening thought before we cut it down even further or made more changes to the film.

## **XVIII. THE FINE CUT SCREENING AND CONCLUSION**

At the screening, I stood in the back of the auditorium to observe the audience's reaction to my film. Here is what I was able to observe while my film was shown. There were some laughs here and there up to the point when Gabe meets Chase. From that point on to the end of the film, there were a lot of laughs. I was surprised that there were few



laughs during the robbery scenes because I expected that the audience would laugh at how stupid the robbers were for mocking the sleeping deaf residents and thinking that their robbery plan was brilliant. I also had another hearing person, observing the audience's reaction, and that person was my editor. Beforehand I asked him to take notes on the feedback I got and to observe the audience's reactions as well. My editor said that the people who sat in his area laughed a lot all throughout the film but he agreed with my observation of the entire audience's reaction.

At the end of the screening, I only received three people's feedback and they were pretty much the same. The three individuals who commented on my film said that they felt that some of the scenes, especially the robbery scenes, ran on too long and some lines meant close to the same thing so it seemed like it was going in circles to them. One individual wanted an establishing shot of the robbers picking the lock of the first home while they were outside trying to break in. The individual felt that it was needed to establish them as robbers even though their clothes and behaviors identify them as robbers once they were in the house. I had hoped for more feedback, especially on the music but that was all the feedback I received at the screening. Because of that, I decided to get more feedback after the screening. I approached a few filmmakers who were present at the screening and I asked them for their opinions. They basically had the same feedback as the first three individuals: they thought some scenes dragged on a little too long, but they commended that my film was great as a whole. I came to the conclusion that maybe I received little feedback because everyone else had the same feedback and it would be redundant if they had shared theirs too.

After my film was screened, I was outside the auditorium talking to most of the deaf people who came to see my film, hoping to get their feedback as well. They all really enjoyed “Catch Santa” and they agreed with the feedback to trim down some of the robbers’ scenes. I asked them how they felt about the scenes in which the robbers mocked deaf people. This was a concern of mine because I did not want the deaf people to find it offensive. They said that they didn’t find it offensive and understood my intention. However, they wanted to see the robbers end up with a better consequence for mocking deaf people rather than being caught. I explained to them that I tried to come up with a clever way for deaf people to avenge the robbers but I had no luck. So, they tried to come up with suggestions and realized that it was difficult to come up with a clever revenge.

Overall, I felt very good about the responses I received at the screening. My worst fear was that there wouldn’t be any or very few laughs as the audience watched my film. That was not the case, and it was good to see that there were some scenes where the audience was amused greatly. Also, I agree with the prevalent feedback that some scenes in the film needed to be shortened. Before the screening, I would not have agreed with their feedback and thought the audience would enjoy the redundant lines in some scenes. I was wrong and I learned something. It will definitely benefit me as I know now not to make the same mistake in my future films.

## **XIX. THE FINAL POST-PRODUCTION**

Based on the feedback that I had received at the first screening, I was able to determine what areas I needed to improve for the final cut. The first area was to tighten some scenes that drag on. There were dialogues and jokes that were repetitive. So, I

shortened some dialogues and eliminated most of the mocking that the robbers did in the first two houses. In the end, the film length reduced from twenty-two minutes to twenty-eight minutes. After viewing the new cut, I felt that the pace of the film has improved tremendously and the story progresses more quickly. The second issue that I addressed was the transition of the last robber's scene to the second school scene that happens a few weeks later. The original transition appears to be abrupt and the people wanted to know what happened to the robbers in the end. So, I inserted a newspaper article that reports that the robbers have been caught. The last thing that the film needed was non-copyrighted music. So, I sent the film to my music composer, Jeffrey Arnold. I allowed him to make the decisions on where and what types of music the film needed. After Mr. Arnold completed the music composition, he sent the film with the new music to my chair advisor, Malcolm Spaul for feedback. Malcolm was very pleased with the music composition and he explained how much it benefited the film. I was pleased to know how much the music helps my film but I was curious to know the audience's opinion on it at the screening.

## **XX. THE FINAL SCREENING AND CONCLUSION**

At the final screening, I stood in the back of the room to watch the audience's reaction as they watch my film. The audience's reaction was a lot different than the previous screening. To my surprise, there was a lot less amount of visible laughs. I don't know if there was any laugh at all because I did not ask a hearing person to listen to the audience's reaction during my film. However, when I received questions and comments from the audience, I got positive reaction toward my film. They said that they enjoyed and liked the film. One of the people who commented on my film had seen the film

before and the person thought the changes I made really improved the film. The audience also commented on how they like how I used the interactions and conflicts between the hearing and deaf cultures in the film. One person said that she was glad that I did not use the film to lecture the hearing people how deaf people are treated in reality. Instead she learns about it through the form of entertainment. No one commented on the music. So I went ahead and asked them if they liked the music and thought it helped the film. Immediately, after my question was relayed through the interpreter, I saw many heads nodded in the audience then a few people raised hands to make comments. The comments some people made on the music were very positive. They thought the music composer did an incredible job creating music for “Catch Santa”.

After completing my thesis film and receiving feedback at the final screening, I felt content with the work I have put into my thesis film to make it a successful film. I have learned a great deal from the pre-production to the post-production of my thesis film. I have also learned a lot about making a comedy film and how challenging it is to do so. Even though, it is hard to make a good comedy film, I do not intend to shy away from the genre. I know I will apply what I have learned from this experience and make a better comedy film the next time.

## **Appendix A**

### Thesis Proposal

## STORY SYNOPSIS

*Catch Santa* is a short film and a comedy about a two hearing robbers who rob Christmas gifts in the homes of deaf families on Christmas Eve. These robbers are able to steal the Christmas gifts while the Deaf residents are asleep. The conflict occurs when they confront with a deaf young boy who was determined to secretly videotape Santa Claus in the act of delivering Christmas presents.

## TREATMENT

A young boy named Chase meets the principal because hit his friends. Chase tells his principal that his reason for hitting his friends was because they were teasing him about believing in Santa Claus. Chase's mom picks up Chase from the principal's office. Mom tells Chase that Santa Claus is real yet it doesn't excuse him for hitting his friends.

Chase decides to set up a camcorder in the living room so that he can secretly records Santa Claus in the act of delivering Christmas gifts. Chase's mom insists Chase to take her word and that he'd upset Santa Claus if he secretly uses the camcorder. Chase tells his Mom that he's going to use the camcorder regardless.

Mom meets with her boyfriend, Gabe and tells him about Chase's plan to catch Santa Claus. So, Mom asks Gabe to rent a Santa Claus suit so that he can pretend being Santa Claus and deliver the gifts at Chase's home. Mom asks Gabe to do it because he lives close by and Chase has not met him yet. Gabe agrees to it. Mom gives the house key and the money for the Santa suit to Gabe.

On the Christmas Eve, Mom and Chase go to sleep in their house. Gabe goes to sleep in his house. There are two robbers, Mardy and Stu who secretly devised a plan to rob Christmas gifts from deaf strangers' homes of deaf families. While they break in and steal Christmas gifts from homes, they mock the deaf residents who are asleep by making noises.

Mardy and Stu break in Gabe's home and they stole his Santa Claus suit. While they were mocking Gabe in his sleep by throwing beer bottles onto the floor, Mardy's clothes got spilled with beer. So, he changes into the Santa Claus suit. Mardy and Stu have one more home to rob but Stu wanted to end the mission and go home. Mardy decides to break in the last home without Stu.

Mardy confronts Chase in his home. Chase thinks Mardy is actually Santa Claus. Mardy tells Chase to return to bed but Chase wants him to deliver his presents. Chase eventually listens to Mardy and goes to bed.

Gabe wakes up and cannot find the Santa Claus suit after searching the house. Gabe decides to come up with a back up plan.

Mardy sees Stu again and tells him that he saw Chase who they had met before at a restaurant when Chase found and returned Mardy's wallet. Mardy decides to give some gifts that he stole to Chase. Mardy returns to Chase's home to deliver the gifts.

Gabe's back up plan is to create his own Santa Claus suit using the stuff that he has in his house. After dressing up, Gabe goes to Chase's home with the presents.

As Mardy puts the gift underneath the Christmas tree, Chase comes down to get cookies and milk for Mardy. As Chase goes to give the food and drink to Mardy, he sees Gabe enters the house. Chase thinks Gabe is an intruder and knocks him out with a broom. Mardy tells Chase to return to his bedroom and stay there. As Chase returns to his bedroom, Mardy ties up Gabe.

After typing up Gabe, Mardy confronts Chase's Mom who thinks he is Gabe dressed as Santa Claus. Mom thanks Mardy and kisses him for doing the favor. Mardy leaves the house. Gabe wakes up and tries to get Mom's attention but she has been sleepwalking that she does not notice that Gabe is tied up. Mom returns to bed.

In the morning, Chase wakes up his Mom and tells her what happened last night. Mom and Chase go downstairs and Mom tells Chase that Gabe is her friend. After

untying Gabe, Mom and Gabe look at the camcorder to identify who stole the Santa Claus suit from Gabe. Mom recognizes Mardy on the camcorder. A friend calls Mom and tells her to watch the news. Mom learns that several homes in her town have been robbed. Mom calls the police. The police go to Stu's home and arrest him and Stu.

After a few weeks, Chase is back in the principal's office again for hitting. The principal asks Chase why he hit again when he was told not to. Chase complains that people tease him for believing in imaginary people like the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and the likes.



## **RATIONALE**

This short film will give me an opportunity to show interactions between hearing and deaf people in a comedic way. Naturally, there will be stumbling blocks, such as the situation in which Mardy struggles to communicate with Chase. This is an opportunity for the audience to learn how these barriers can be broken down.

Being a Deaf filmmaker, I want to create films that provide job opportunities for Deaf people. Thus, my short film will encourage Deaf people to be involved in filmmaking by becoming actors or members of my crew. I also believe more films should be created for Deaf people's entertainment, and I am trying to accomplish that through my work. My short film will also appeal to the larger Hearing audience, since it involves Hearing actors and provides the audience with full access through subtitles.

I chose to do a comedy film because I believe that my strength lies in creating drama films, and subsequently most of the short films I have made are dramatic. However, I am a big fan of comedy films and I've always wanted to make one myself. Making a comedy film that is considered to be funny is hard to do and this is a challenge that I want to present myself with.

Finally, I plan to use a Panasonic HVX200 camera for this short film. Since this is a comedy film, the lighting used in the film will be high key. I plan to direct the actors to be dynamic and engaging in their acting, and to execute comedic behaviors. The acting and the dialogue will be critical elements of the film that allow the audience to connect to the story, so the success of my work will hinge on these things.

## TIME LINE

MONTH	DESCRIPTION	NOTE
SEPT 2008 – NOV 2008	1. Read books on making a comedy film 2. Brainstorm script ideas 3. Write a script	
DEC 2008	1. Find Cinematographer and Assistant Director 2. Find Actors, Crews and Locations 3. Plan Rehearsal schedules 4. Plan film shoot schedules	
JAN 2008 to MARCH 2009	1. Rehearsals 2. Film shoots 3. Review footages with Faculty advisor 4. First Rough Cut	
APRIL 2009	1. Second Rough Cut 2. Start writing Thesis 3. First Fine Cut 4. Continue writing Thesis	
MAY 2009	1. Final Cut 2. Screening with chair and committee members 3. Make DVDs 4. Film screening	

# BUDGET

## 1. Pre-Production

Items	Amount	Cost	Sub-Total	Note
Xerox (Sheets)	500	.15	75	
Gas (Gallon)	30	2	60	
Total (USD)			135	

## 2. Production

Items	Amount	Cost	Sub-Total	Note
Production Staff	10	0	0	
Talents	5	0	0	
Extra Talent	3	0	0	
Production Design		In Kind	In Kind	
Set Dressing		150	150	
Makeup		50	50	
DOP Expenses		100	100	
Props		200	200	
Costumes		300	300	
Camera		In Kind	In Kind	
Lighting		In Kind	In Kind	
Sound		In Kind	In Kind	
16GB P2 cards	2	In Kind	In Kind	
Food		1000	1000	
Total (USD)			1, 800	

## 3. Post-Production

Items	Amount	Cost	Sub-Total	Note
Music (if needed)		200	200	
Post Production Sound		In Kind	In Kind	
Graphic Art Work		100	100	
DVDs	100	.40	40	
DVD jewel cases	100	50	50	
DVD covers	100	100	100	
Postages		50	50	
Festival fees		300	300	
Total (USD)			840	
Sub Totals (USD)			2, 775.00	
Contingency (15%)			416.25	
Grand Total (USD)			3, 191.25	

## **Appendix B**

Script

## **Appendix C**

### Shotlist

**SCENE 26:**

2-SHOT – MARDY PUTTING CHASE TO BED

CLEAN SINGLE – MARDY

CLEAN SINGLE – CHASE

**SCENE 35:**

2 SHOT, CHASE AND MARDY ENTERING BEDROOM

MCU – MARDY

MCU – CHASE

INSERT – PAPER

MCU – chase sleeping, waking up, walking out of bedroom

**SCENE 22:**

WS – MARDY WASHING HIS HANDS

CU – MARDY IN MIRROR

MCU – CHASE OPENING DOOR

MCU – MARDY HIDING BEHIND DOOR

2 SHOT – MARDY AND CHASE

INSERT – AIR FRESHNER

**SCENE 17:**

WS – MARDY WALKING DOWN HALLWAY

MCU – MARDY ENTERING BATHROOM

INSERT – MARDY'S HAND ON DOORKNOB

**SCENE 3:**

WS – CHASE'S HOUSE , NIGHT

**SCENE 15:**

WS – VAN ARRIVING AT CHASE'S HOUSE , NIGHT

## **Appendix D**

### Production Stills



1



2



3



4



5



6