

# THE WATERHOLE

## Production Notes

How two friends with no clue what they were doing took ten years to get a good movie made.

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### **The Screenplay “Write what you know, and then make it interesting.”**

Nathan Cole started writing THE WATERHOLE in the mid-nineties. Just out of college and wondering what to do with his life, he was working a low-paying but entertaining job at a local record store in Reno, Nevada. When he wasn't hiding in dive bars, he was patronizing the one movie theater in town that screened independent film. It was there that he was introduced to the films of Jim Jarmusch, Whit Stillman and Hal Hartley. It was also at this time that films like CLERKS by Kevin Smith and THE BROTHER'S MCMULLEN were getting bought up at Sundance, giving Nathan his first “I can do that” moment.

Nathan would tell you that the first incarnation of the screenplay was a joke. A flat collection of stories about a local bar he frequented and his diverse collection of friends. Not one to give up, he re-wrote and re-wrote until the tone started to solidify, the dialogue became polished and the characters became real. The final version still retains many of the auto-biographic elements, but with a fictionalized focus on the damage “drinking to forget” can do and the potential consequences to your friendships and your future.

### **Stops and Starts – “I loved the script, but...”**

Once the screenplay THE WATERHOLE started making the rounds in Los Angeles, it attracted several producers, but the project never seemed to make it off the ground. This was due partly to Nathan's insistence that the script not be radically changed to be more commercial, as well as his desire to direct the film himself. It wasn't until the fall of 2006 that a call from an old friend came through. Daniel Menahem and Nathan met during college where Daniel had read an early version of the script. He always claimed that one day they would make it into a movie. Daniel was currently living in Paris but ready to close up shop and move back to the States. He was ready to fulfill his prophecy and make the movie, more importantly he had the money to make it happen. There was only one condition, to help insure that the movie was completed, Daniel wanted to hire a director with experience. After so many years of trying unsuccessfully to get the movie made, Nathan agreed that this was a more-than-fair concession.

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## **Pre-Production - “What’s a line producer do?”**

They had a script. They had the money. What next? At issue was that neither had any idea how to make a movie beyond reading a few books and listening to dozens of DVD commentaries. They drafted up a rough budget that came up well below what they knew in their gut would be needed. They had no clue who to hire first or where to even look for the people they needed to hire. They decided to first find a director, which would ultimately happen at a dinner party where Nathan was re-introduced to Ely Mennin. When asked if anyone knew a good up and coming director, Ely’s fiancé offered up Ely. Nathan and Daniel screened a copy of Ely’s debut film BREATHING ROOM and loved the style and the tone he was able to get with a very modest budget. They had their director.

Ely’s first question was who was going to be the line producer. Nathan and Daniel’s response was, “What’s a line producer do?” The short answer they were about to find out was: a lot. After interviewing a few candidates they decided they liked the enthusiasm of Mike Tarzian. He immediately had ideas on how to shoot the script on a limited budget but not sacrifice things like having a full art department complete with a costume designer, production designer and hair and make-up. Crew that Daniel and Nathan did not think they could afford nor did they think they were needed. As they would learn time and time again, Mike knew what he was doing. Nathan and Dan went to work with Ely hiring a Director of Photography, a position that went to Lincoln Lewis after looking at several hundred reels.

## **Location – “The movie is Reno.”**

The only issue that came up time and time again as they planned the production was location. Daniel and Nathan were adamant that the movie be filmed in Reno. Their logic was that: a) the movie takes place in Reno, and b) they had friends and family in Reno that could greatly assist with locations, lodging, and food. Mike and Ely were of the mind that shooting on a soundstage in Los Angeles allowed for more control and cheaper costs. In the end Nathan and Dan made their case and the production began to scout locations in the “Biggest Little City in the World.”

Of key importance was securing Corrigan’s bit ‘o Ireland, the bar where most of the story takes place. The bar’s owner liked the script and agreed to close the bar early and open late for the days needed. For another key location, a record store, the producers were able to secure one of the record stores Nathan worked

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at. Only a few months later the store would leave that location, taking a piece of Reno history with it.

## **Casting – “People get paid to do this?”**

The production was able to a great casting director, Mark Tillman. As had happened with other key positions, Mark took the job at a fraction of his normal rate because he liked the script. His only concern was that at the small budget level he would have trouble attracting “name” talent. He was assured that the production needed good actors that fit the roles. Mark approached the job with true professionalism, bringing in hundreds of actors and arranging dozens of casting sessions.

During this time Nathan found himself sneaking away from his day job working for anti-piracy operations at the Motion Picture Association to attending the early auditions, a process he thoroughly enjoyed. He was particularly concerned about the two leads. Early on he saw a young woman, Rebecca Mozo, who read for the two other female parts, but as much as they liked her she didn’t seem to fit. It took a while for them to realize that she was exactly what they were looking for in a lead. In the meantime, Patrick J. Adams, an actor Nathan had seen on an episode of LOST, came in and blew them away.

As they narrowed down their choices, the production faced a problem. Patrick was at the top of their list but had left the country for several weeks. Nobody felt comfortable with offering him the part until he read with Rebecca, who had officially been brought on board. A last minute session was arranged two days before the production moved to Reno for the two actors to run through a few scenes together. It worked. Patrick was hired and the cast was set.

## **Principle Photography – “I will never write anything that takes place at night again.”**

“THE WATERHOLE” began principle photography on September 10, 2007, using a Sony F900, shooting on HD cam. They had only twelve days to shoot a hundred and ten-paged script, so there was no room for error. For the most part everything went on without a hitch. The cast and crew all made it to Reno on time, as did all of the equipment. Daniel and Nathan were running around like crazy, as they were filling the positions of craft services, prop managers and location managers in addition to all their other duties.

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Only a few times was the project put in jeopardy. Midway through the shoot a tiny screw popped out of the camera base, effectively rendering the camera useless. The production drove to every camera, eyeglass, and electronics store in the area to no avail. A screw would need to be shipped from Los Angeles, costing the production at least two days. Minutes before shutting down a friend of Daniel's hauled in an old computer and the crew scavenged it, eventually finding a perfect replacement.

Shooting mostly at night took its toll as well. By the end, the whole cast and crew were effectively zombies. There was one final scene that needed to be filmed in an alley in the downtown area. This was to be a simple yet crucial scene, and time was running out as dawn was breaking. As the crew set up, the first assistant director made a discovery: they had left without the lead actor, the only actor in the scene. The first AD rushed to base camp, grabbed the actor and rushed back. Two blocks away from the location red and blue lights flooded the rear-view mirror. The first AD pulled the car over within sight of the location, but the officer would not let the actor out of the car. The production manager ran down to plead, but the officer had protocol to follow. As the sky grew lighter, the officer ran his check and issued a warning. The scene was completed just before the sun came up.

Twelve days went by in a flash, and the crew packed up the trucks and everybody headed back to Los Angeles.

## **Post-Production “Always save money for a music supervisor.”**

Rich Fox edited the film using Final Cut Pro. For eight weeks Rich sat alone in Nathan's garage, where a makeshift studio had been built. Although there are very few differences between Rich's first pass and the final cut, many discussions took place on the finer points of pacing, opening credits and music.

Finding music was very tricky because they needed lots of it. Nathan called upon an old friend, Willy Vlautin, who was a Reno native and front man for the Portland-based RICHMOND FONTAINE. Willy generously agreed to donate several songs. In the meantime, ex-FAITH NO MORE member Roddy Bottum was hired to compose several pieces for the score.

The film was then sent to Hyper Image, a post-production facility in Glendale, CA for final sound mixing, color correction, digital fixes and the final output.

“THE WATERHOLE” was finally ready to screen for audiences in September 2008.