

InkTip

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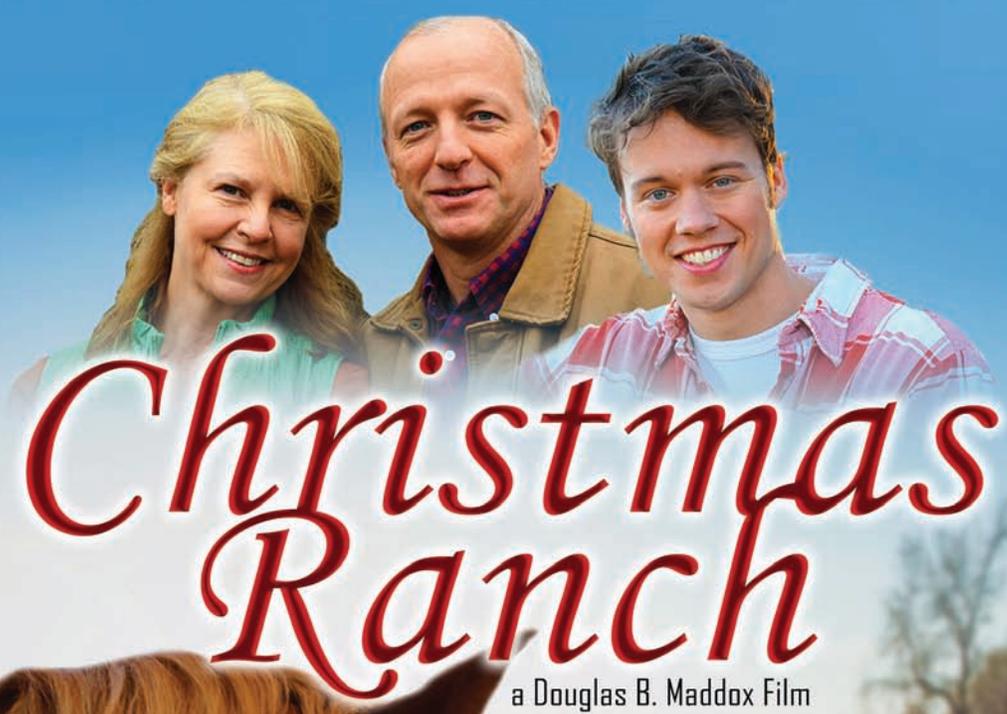
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FRANCINE
LOCKE

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ALLEN
WILLIAMSON

TAYLOR
LYONS



Christmas Ranch:

This Holiday
Season's Hit

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Screenwriter
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Christmas Ranch

This Holiday Season's Hit



Francine Locke as Mary Evans with Ken Arnold



Taylor Lyons as Lizzy Evans

"My family wanted me to do a family film, and I have always wanted to find a story that related to my personal journey in some way," Doug said. "I was amazed that this all came together when I found this great script from Simon K. Parker, called *Christmas Ranch* ... Working with Simon was amazing."

The story is about strong-willed Lizzy Evans, who is sent to her grandmother's ranch for the holidays. While there, she bonds with her grandmother's horse and is determined to save the ranch from foreclosure. It's a story about hope and second chances that rang true to Doug. He said, "It related to my story of living with my grandmother [on her farm] when I was a teenager. My grandmother had a profound, spiritual, life-changing impact on me in the same way Lizzy's life was changed by her grandmother ... She was an inspiration to my whole family ... It really gives me goosebumps when I think of the similarity of my life and the story of Lizzy."

Since the characters were so near to Doug's heart, selecting the right cast for the film was important. He worked with Sylvia Hutson from Virginia Casting Community, and Michelle Norton, who worked in Douglas's production company, DBM Films. The film stars Taylor Lyons as Lizzy Evans, and Francine Locke (*Nashville*) as the grandmother, Mary Evans. Doug made offers to Jessica Lange, Lynda Carter, and Francine for the role. The shooting schedule didn't work out for Jessica or Lynda, but Doug flew to Atlanta to meet Francine, who impressed him and did an amazing job.

"Another strategy I rely on is calling on some of the actors that I have worked with in the past who would be good for the role," Doug said. "I hired Allen Williamson [who is James Mifflin in the



Christmas Ranch was shot in Glyndon, MD

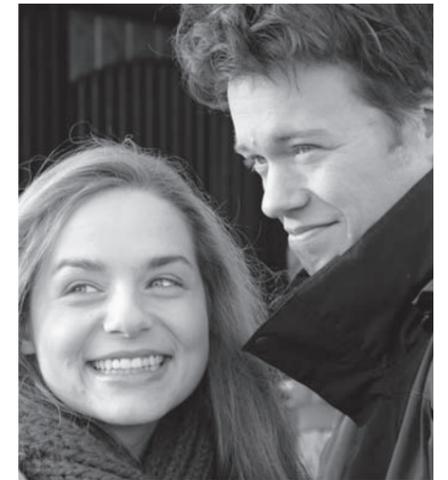
film] this way. He played across Taylor Lautner in *Abduction* and also played Josh McDowell in *Undaunted*."

The cast weren't the only stars of *Christmas Ranch*. The gorgeous horse country of Maryland is heavily featured. Doug earned his film degree from Towson University and founded DBM Films, a development, production, and distribution company based out of Maryland. It's in his blood, and he wanted to bring a project home to the state.

"Yes, I love the Maryland location," he confessed. "I wrote about this in one of my film classes in school many years ago. Within a three-hour drive, you can have mountains, farms, horses, ocean, and bustling cities. We were thankful to work on a great farm in historic Glyndon, MD called GreenMount Farms, a family Thoroughbred farm down the street from the highly recognized Sagamore Farm owned by Under Armour's Kevin Plank. To say the least, the sunrise and sunsets were magnificent, and the barn was amazing!"

Doug used the help of the Maryland Film Commission, run by Jack Gerbes, who introduced him to Ross Peddicord, Director of The Maryland Horse Industry Board. "What an amazing guy and board. They have embraced the film and what it stands for in the horse industry," said Doug. More producers and directors can take advantage of all that film commissions have to offer, with InkTip's new Film Commission Database on the site.

Christmas Ranch was released on November 15th, just in time for the holidays! For international distribution,



Taylor Lyons with Allen Williamson

allowed him to shoot a feature in his beloved, equestrian state – Maryland. "Life has a way of connecting us to our roots," he said. "I definitely believe in serendipity on this project."

"Every production you work on is a learning experience. I have gotten a lot of positive feedback through the years on my work and work ethic. I apply what I've learned each time to a new project. As my grandmother used to say, 'You are never too old to learn.' This was a slogan she put into practice into her 80s," Doug said. "This production had a great team approach in independent filmmaking. It was all hands in ... especially in December in Maryland. There were some cold days on the farm! All that said, it was an amazing production with amazing talent!"

By Chris Cookson



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Q&A with *Christmas Ranch* Screenwriter Simon K. Parker

Christmas Ranch is the first produced feature script for British screenwriter Simon K. Parker. Although he still considers himself a novice to the industry, he has a few scripts under his belt and is actively looking for representation. He also believes his status as a produced writer has changed his approach to writing dramatically. He spoke with InkTip about it, the serendipity in finding DBM Films' lead in the InkTip newsletter, and more.

InkTip: How did you find out about InkTip?

Simon: I found InkTip all those years ago through a simple search on Google. I was looking for a way to get my scripts seen. I didn't really know how to approach production companies and seeing how InkTip worked and the success stories made me think it was worth a go.

InkTip: How did you come up with the story for *Christmas Ranch*?

Simon: I was massively inspired by the film *Spirited Away*, which I just think is a masterful film. I wanted to write a coming-of-age story about a lost girl who connects with herself through something wild.

InkTip: Did you set out to write a Christmas-themed script or did it happen to evolve into it?

Simon: At first [the script] didn't have a time of year in which it was happening. But as I was writing it I found that the characters were getting ready to celebrate Christmas. So, it transformed into it, really. It wasn't my idea; it was the characters who made me.

InkTip: What went through your mind when you saw that Douglas Maddox had a lead in the InkTip newsletter for the exact story you had written?

Simon: I've always written all kinds of different things. And I love writing sweet stories, but I couldn't seem to find a home for *Christmas Ranch*, so I was overjoyed when I saw what Douglas was looking for and that I could be a perfect match.

InkTip: You're based out of the U.K. Many U.K. writers feel like U.S. produces

won't bother with their scripts due to location. Can you talk about your experience working across the pond with an American producer?

Simon: I have to disagree with many U.K. writers on this I'm afraid. I find it almost impossible to get my work into the hands of U.K. producers, production companies, or agents. I feel U.S. producers are more willing to take a chance. A lot more willing to look at the work of an unknown writer, whereas in the U.K. it feels to me like you need to be already established. I had no credits to my name, but Douglas liked my pitch and was willing to read what I had written.

InkTip: Were you able to visit the set at all?

Simon: Unfortunately, the Atlantic Ocean stopped me from visiting. But I loved the videos that Douglas shared, which made me feel a part of the process. Douglas was kind to send me a very early screener of the film, so I have watched it with family and friends. And on a personal note seeing my name credited as the writer was hugely uplifting. Made all the hard work worth it.

InkTip: Michelle Norton was brought on for rewrites. How did the rewrite process go with you in the U.K.?

Simon: I wasn't there for any of that, but was happy and trusted Douglas when he told me about what changes he wanted to make and the faith that he had in Michelle.

InkTip: Now that you have a produced feature, do you approach the writing process any differently than when you were just starting out?

Simon: My writing process has changed dramatically. I'm so different now from when I started out. It's much more of a science now. I plan, plan, plan, plan. Whereas before I would just write whatever came into my head and then spend months and month re-writing over and over until it made sense. I'm much more clear in what I want to write before I start ... All I think about is my writing. I go to sleep thinking about it. I wake up thinking about it.

InkTip: Is there a part of the writing process you love the most?

Simon: I always love Act Two of any of my screenplays. Just so much fun to write. Joining Act One onto Act Two is always a fight. But it's so satisfying when you get it right.

InkTip: How do you get through writers block?

Simon: I walk away. I don't write anything. I just let the writer's block take care of itself. I watch films, I go for walks. This could take 30 seconds or a couple of weeks. I used to try and force it, just try and write anything, but it never worked. If you have writers block, don't fight it.

InkTip: What advice can you give other writers who are trying to get their foot in the door?

Simon: I wouldn't have a career without InkTip ... [And] don't give up. I heard this myself over and over. And normally I rolled my eyes pretty hard whenever someone gave me this advice, but it's true.

You can find Simon K. Parker's logline for his latest script, *Seeking Similar*, on page 7.

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