

# Christmas Ranch

**This Holiday Season's Hit**



Francine Locke as Mary Evans with Ken Arnold



Taylor Lyons as Lizzy Evans

**W**hen deciding where to start, sometimes it is best to determine the end goal. In the film industry, the goal isn't a produced film. It's distribution – because if there is no market for the amazing film you locked picture on, no one will watch it or care. That was producer/director Douglas Maddox's approach when searching for his next script. Instead of wasting time, he went to distributors to find out exactly what was selling the best. No surprise, they said family-friendly material. Especially, girl and horse films. This mandate was perfect for Douglas, who had wanted for years to make a movie that represented his love of horses while growing up in the equestrian state of Maryland.

Excited to hear that his personal goals matched the market's needs, Douglas knew where to turn for the right script: InkTip. He put a call out in our newsletter for "girl and her horse" scripts, and Simon Parker's script *Christmas Ranch* caught his eye.

"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

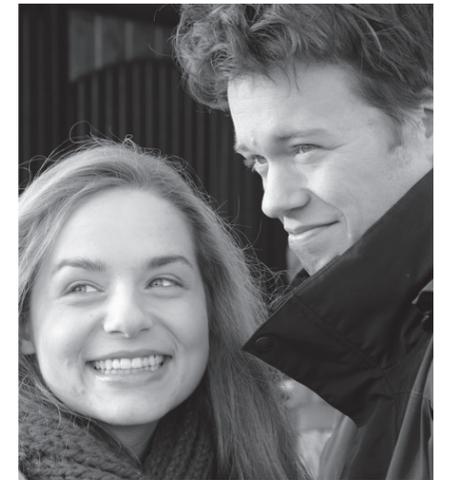
film] this way. He played across Taylor Lautner in *Abduction* and also played Josh McDowell in *Undaunted*."

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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