

# MOHILL-WOOD



Alan Earley

DURING THE past Easter Holidays, I shot a short film. Well to say that I shot a short film all by myself is both totally inaccurate and arrogant. I had a lot of help—from the crew to the cast to the family and friends who were more than happy to lend a hand. So let's, in the tradition of many great classic films, start at the beginning. And the very first thing you need for any film is an idea. A plot—preferably consisting of one or more characters and preferably packed full of conflict and hurdles over which they will attempt to leap. I'd written a short story years ago – a black-as-night comedy about a family of undertakers in the wild west of Ireland whose business isn't going quite as well as it should be. And so they decide to... well... 'help it along' in the only way they can – by killing the local parishioners in a series of untraceable 'perfect murders'. It ended with the family home being burnt to the ground in a gas explosion. Needless to say, much as I liked the story, I knew that in its present form it was impossible to shoot as a budget-less college student. Therefore I stripped the story to its bare bones. The family of five became just father and son; the many deaths were reduced to one and the effects-driven climax was replaced with a much more budget-friendly ending. Now I had my script.

The next step was to find my cast. The part of the hero—Sean Junior—was written for my cousin—Niall Quinn from Cloone, so I was delighted when he accepted. But next I had to find the villain—Sean's Father—and the victim—an elderly widow. We held auditions at our college in Dun Laoghaire and, although many of the actors were very talented—they either couldn't work during Easter or couldn't travel to Leitrim for the shoot. It was getting close to the deadline and I still hadn't found my two adult leads.

But on advice from a tutor, I got in contact with the various theatre groups in Leitrim and Longford, and the Backstage Theatre Group in Longford came up trumps. I found my lead in an English actor living locally called Frank Farrell who can not only act but do a faultless Irish accent. And I was so impressed with Longford actor Brendan Williams that I re-wrote the elderly widow into a simple country bachelor.

And so, on the 7th of April, 2006, we descended on Mohill. When I say 'we', I mean the fantastic crew that helped me in getting my film shot, and helped keep me sane (for the most part). Cillian Daly was my producer—my right-hand man, who made sure I was doing everything right every step along the way. Piers McGrail, my cinematographer, looked after the 'look' of the film, while Sean Branigan operated the camera and Dave Tynan set up the lights. Podge Whitmore was my over-zealous sound operator. (Note: good Sound Ops should be over-zealous since they tend not be listened to on set.) And finally Ted Moran made sure we didn't make any continuity mistakes—like cigarette lengths hopping all over the place.

We spent the first day getting our locations ready, making and buying props, and generally just running around organising things. To make sure the film didn't infringe any copyright laws—we designed and made a fake box of rat poison—a crucial prop for the film. The script called for the setting to be a remote, desolate village in the west of Ireland. To achieve this, we had to find the more isolated areas of Mohill and shoot there. We even dressed an empty shop front as if it were a funeral home to avoid the village looking too large.

On Sunday morning, April 9th, we started shooting. Anyone going for a relaxing drive after Sunday lunch was

surprised to find us all huddled around a hearse, clamping a camera onto the bonnet. On Monday, commuters—(and a couple of Guards)—were curious about the new Funeral Directors that had seemingly opened in the town.

And on the following Tuesday evening, we wrapped, relatively hitch-free. The only real hitch we did encounter was a slight scheduling hiccup that meant that we had to shoot a night scene without any of our main actors. Assistant lighting Dave, and another cousin of mine, Brian Moran, stood in. We had to light, and compose the shot so that their faces were obscured enough so as to hide the fact that they were stand-ins. Shooting a scene in the middle of Mohill on a Monday night with a bright light illuminating the side of Carroll's Public House will undoubtedly draw a few spectators. Actually the sight of these spectators did raise our spirits and reminded us that we were doing something different. Something undeniably difficult and tiring but something we adored all the same.

The film, 'Make a Killing', was entirely finished a month later—complete with an original score by Piers McGrail. If it wasn't for the help of the crew, cast, family and the people of Mohill who allowed me to use their premises, it would never have gotten made, so thank you to all involved. At the minute I'm working on my next film—this time an adaptation of a short story I wrote a few years ago for *the Leitrim Guardian*, in fact! It's not hard to start making films—the main attributes you need are enthusiasm, basic problem-solving skills, an idea and a camera. And if you have those and a sprinkling of talent, you can create whole worlds to enlighten and entertain.

For more information on 'Make a Killing' contact Alan at [alearly@gmail.com](mailto:alearly@gmail.com)