

## Scenarios USA provides teen filmmaker with opportunity to address issues

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The Scenarios USA program has focused on getting teenagers to contemplate on life-shaping issues since its inception in 1998. Winners of its story-writing contest get to work with professional filmmakers who help to turn their stories into short films used in school discussions on such topics as HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancy and violence.

"Our goal is to provide youth the ability to control their own media messages on issues that are impacting their lives," explains Maura Minsky, co-founder and co-executive director along with Kristen Joiner. "Our contest lets them personalize the issues, with the winner making their story into a film in their hometown."

Verena Faden was a senior at Hialeah-Miami Lakes High School when she won the competition in south Florida during the fall of 2001. The topic was "Coming of Age in the Era of AIDS." Her script, *Just Like You Imagined?* was selected from over 200 submissions from schools and community groups in the Miami-Dade area.



Wrap shot from the cast and crews of the Scenarios USA project "Just Like You Imagined?"

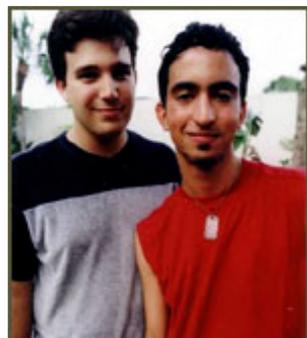


DP Steve Fraasa working on a Scenarios USA project.

says Minsky on choosing Frankel. "He lives and works in Miami and, as a new father, he is very interested in having an impact on changing what's going on in this community."

"At first I was really nervous because I didn't know what to expect, but he was very friendly," says Faden. "If he had to make a choice, David asked for my input, which was really important to me."

Along with Faden, 20 of her classmates were also being mentored on the set. Frankel stopped production meetings and production to explain what was going on so they could understand use of the medium to tell stories as well as the technical process.



Frankel's involvement brought Steve Fraasa aboard as director of photography. The filmmakers had previously worked together on *Grapevine*. Attracted by the project's aesthetic challenges, Fraasa cancelled a California trip to sign up.

"I enjoy the short film format because I can express myself visually in ways that are not always appropriate for commercials or corporate films," he says. "It's the process of communicating a story rather than selling a product."

Faden says Fraasa de-mystified the filmmaking process.

"I walked around asking everybody questions and I'm sure I got on people's nerves," she says with a laugh. "But Steve explained things and helped me understand what

She credits her drama teacher with encouraging her to enter the competition. Bothered by the outdated videos shown in school, Faden saw an opportunity to create a realistic film on the subject for her age group. The 15-minute film consists of three stories of teens dealing with everyday sexual situations. They include a girl with low self-esteem who becomes promiscuous to reinforce her self-image, a monogamous couple who engage in oral sex mistakenly believing AIDS can't be transmitted through such behavior, and a gay teen couple experimenting with sexual roles.

Faden teamed up with writer-director David Frankel, whose credits include the Academy-Award winning short *Dear Diary* as well as such television projects as HBO's *Band of Brothers* and *Sex and the City* and the Miami-based episodic series *Grapevine* which airs on CBS Television. Frankel helped develop the script and served as a mentor and collaborator to the budding filmmaker.

"David knows how to tell a good story,"



(L-R) Director David Frankel, Scenarios USA winner Verena Faden, and cinematographer Steve Fraasa discuss the making of "Just Like You Imagined?"



Actors play a gay couple in the Scenarios USA project "Just Like You Imagined?"

zoom movies to punctuate the action on screen," adds Fraasa. "I think it worked effectively."

happens on a film set."

The project was shot over two 18-hour days. Fraasa estimates that about 40 set-ups were shot a day. The schedule dictated rapid movement, so except for on-camera interviews, Fraasa handheld the ARRI 16 SR3 camera to record the action. There was either a Zeiss 12:120 mm or a Canon 8:64 mm lens on the camera.

"We shot exclusively on zoom lenses because David wanted to incorporate rapid zoom movies to punctuate the action on screen," adds Fraasa. "I think it worked effectively."

Fraasa says the need for flexibility led to choosing the Super 16 format.

"Since we were shooting handheld," he explains, "we needed a compact camera. The Super 16 is portable and compact, which allowed us to shoot inside cars and move quickly." Most of the program was recorded on Kodak Vision 250D film.



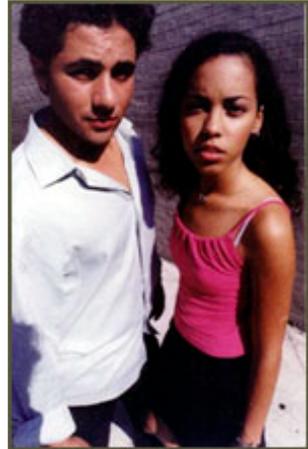
Verena Faden

"Even though many of our locations were interiors, I chose to shoot most of this film on (Kodak) Vision 250D stock," says Fraasa. "The speed, fine grain and contrast range of this film stock ideally suited the locations we were shooting. The scenes in the school hallways and gymnasium were lit with mercury vapor and fluorescents, which I complemented with HMIs and Kino Flos corrected with plus green gel. We liked the look of the green and left some of it in the final film to tape transfer. Some scenes, such as the party, were shot with (Kodak) Vision 500T and the interviews on (Kodak) Vision 200T."

Fraasa considers the project an opportunity to give back to the industry by helping people who are starting out in the business.

"There is something about seeing enthusiastic young people get excited about a project," he explains. "It's interesting to see students who might be naive about the process of filmmaking taking it all in. I remember what it was like when I first started out, so I like seeing that happen."

Like other Scenarios USA productions, Faden's film will be distributed nationally to classrooms and community organizations as well as aired on television and shown on Internet sites. Minsky estimates that seven million young people will see the film.



Actors play a pregnant couple in the Scenarios USA project "Just Like You Imagined?"

states. "Our films use current language and clothes, so they listen to them. We see that we are having an impact on the way that kids are thinking."

"We get feedback that teens are tired of seeing films made in the 1970s," she

The 2003-04 Scenarios USA contest will be held in Miami, New York City, and the Rio Grande valley border region of Texas. It's open to students between the ages of 12 to 22. Minsky says that those interested in participating can get more information at the organization's website, [www.scenariosusa.org](http://www.scenariosusa.org) or by e-mailing [info@scenariosusa.org](mailto:info@scenariosusa.org).

Now a student at Miami-Dade Community College North, Faden plans to study film and education with the goal of being a teacher and writer-director. She hopes to transfer to Florida State University and enter its film program. Faden views the experience as more than learning about filmmaking.

"I want *Just Like You Imagined?* to have an impact," she says. "It's an entertaining film that is not very preachy, with a point of view that they don't show you in school. Film gives you this great chance to touch peoples lives."



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