The Way Back Home

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The Way Back Home

By

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the requirements for the
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School of Film and Animation

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Abstract

After traveling, Ming (38) and Qinyi (35) pack their stuff to catch the flight. A sudden email destroys Ming’s mood: he lost his new job. Then he sees his share price fall. He is upset with his wife and vents his anger to his son, Tommy (6). Qinyi thinks that Ming still has a grudge because she is unable to have another baby. They start to go to the airport in an awkward atmosphere.

On the road, Ming refuses to stop the car, which makes Tommy urinating on the seat. A STRANGER follows their car and keeps flashing him. Ming keeps speeding and blocks the man's way because he thinks he is being offended. However, the stranger surpasses him and shouts to him. Tommy tells him the stranger said something is wrong with his car, but Ming thinks he was just being targeted by the man. Qinyi says that Ming is overreacting. Ming fights back and his distraction makes the car fall into the ditch.

Their fights are still going on after they see nobody was hurt. Tired of their fight, Tommy sneaks out disappointedly. Ming walks out to avoid the quarrel but he suddenly finds that Tommy is missing. They see Tommy's hat on the cliff and are filled with nothing but worries. They decide to search for Tommy separately.

Without finding any clue, Ming goes back to the car helplessly. He sees Tommy sitting inside safely and realized that Tommy was hurt by their arguments. They also find out that the car accident was caused by a flat tire which the stranger mentioned before. Ming
realizes he was blinded by anger and asks for the forgiveness from Tommy. Then, they go to find Qinyi with apologies.

**Introduction**

This story was inspired by my father’s journey to Tibet in the last year. Part of the story did happen to him. On the road, someone followed his car very closely and annoyed him. He kept speeding and tried to leave that person behind. However, that person just wanted to remind him of his flat tire. The road was twisted and very dangerous; it’s very high on the mountain and there is a sharp cliff on the right side. I had such a panic after he told me that. This is a big issue and it’s worth for us to meditate: Don’t start to judge others with a negative attitude.

Besides, I would like to reflect a common problem that happened in a lot of families: Anger begets greater anger, especially when a couple is arguing. If they let their angry moods keep going, things will only get worse and worse.

My father is an impetuous person. Sometimes he might be angry at something small in daily life, but my mother’s calm nature acts as a counterbalance to his excitability. However, even if they are arguing or in a conflict, I can see they are still care about each other. When my father calms down, he always reconsiders his behaviors and he will apologize to my mom about his impulsion. He told me the importance of controlling anger and how to deal
with it. I realize that my family members are the most precious people, so I won’t vent my anger to hurt them. Therefore, I decided to write the story as an exhort to myself.

Except for emotional inspiration, I also want to evoke a common trauma that happened in a lot of Chinese families. Since the 1970s, one-child policy was defined as a basic national policy. Some of the parents had to have an abortion to keep their jobs. My mom is one of them. Nowadays, the policy which violates human rights has changed, but those parents can’t get their aborted child back.

So here I arrived with my protagonist Qinyi, who is a victim of the one-child policy. She took an abortion when they were in China. The surgery hurt her terribly which made it hard for her to get pregnant again. She admires the other families that have more than one child and she is afraid that her husband might think of this as a knot. I want people to see some of the trauma may never be erased by time. I used this as my story’s background and influenced the dialogue in the story.

In my original idea, Ming is called Donald and Qinyi is called Francies. I changed their name not only because I felt like it would be difficult for me to reproduce an American family’s life realistically, but also like to reveal a contradictory immigrant couple. Unlike the local families, most immigrant Chinese wives gave up their jobs to support their families, even though they might be very talented in their careers. Their efforts might not bring them as equal respect as the man. A few macho men regard themselves as the
economic sources in the family and ignore how much sacrifice the wives made. I set up the couple in such a relationship and gave them more tension before starting the fight.

As my thesis, I also want to try some new shooting techniques, such as shooting the car scene. This is a new field for me. I studied a lot of car scenes on the internet, but I found they are too difficult for me to realize. Most of the scenes are filmed with a green screen which can promise the best lighting and background. Also, it will be safer for the actors. However, I chose the on-location production for the sake of real effects and budget limits. I also researched some on-location car catching scenes like those in Initial D to reconstruct the real intense for the scene.

Based on all of those inspirations and studies, my script comes with a realistic style. I hope this can deliver a reasonable story which could arouse common emotions for every immigrant families.
The original style of my film comes from a Chinese film called *Dearest*.

It's a realistic film which doesn't show too many skills on the audio-visual language or emotional rendering, but spends all the frames to tell a solid story. The film reminds me that film is not just an entertainment tool but also a media that can arouse people’s attention to the problematic phenomenon. Therefore, I created all my story based on a real background. Like what this film showed us, the shots are always following the character's movements. It's more like an observation of the character. I gave up the tripod in my film.
and use the handheld camera all the time. This way helps my audience to get closer to my characters.

For the car catching scene, I did a lot of researches on an action film. Although my film is not an exciting racing film, I hope the car catching scene can show some tension and provide a visual impact. I refer the storyboard from the racing movie, *The King of the Drift*.

The variety of shots tells me the more angles I take, the more passion I will obtain. There is no need to show the dangerous surpass in one shot. I can bring the feeling of tension by using more inserts and reaction of the characters.
Pre-Production

Iterations

In my original idea, the story happened on a mountain road with a cliff on one side. I was planning to shoot the whole film in China. However, because of the crew recruiting issues and the background of the film is from an immigrant family, I changed my mind to shoot the whole film here in the US, where the story becomes no more a family story but a multi-culture thing.

In the first version of my film. I emphasized the part of the stranger. After surpassing Ming’s car, the stranger goes out with a tire iron. Ming sees this as a threat and wants to fight back. Tommy realizes this whole thing is not like what Ming thinks and stops him. I imagined the whole scene so many times in my mind, but I couldn’t buy the story because I couldn’t fully understand their motivations. The image that the stranger walks out with a tire iron seems a little bit exaggerating for me. He should remind them first before walking to them with such a threatening tool. I talked with my thesis chair Malcolm Spaull for many times about this scene. Finally, we figured out that it might be unnecessary for the stranger to get off the car. A simple reminder from the stranger can be powerful and reasonable.

Besides, there was a huge change in my ending part. In my proposal, the stranger takes them to his car which has his young daughter sit in the passenger seat. He is jealous of Ming’s family because he lost his wife a long time ago. My thesis committee member Cat Ashworth and Karl Goldsmith told me that it's not realistic to get my stranger talks about his personal experience to touch the couple. It was too deliberate to give a happy ending. I
tried to change their dialogues in the car, but none of them satisfied me. When I did the proposal, Cat told me that she really like the style of my story since it told some small and common things that might happen in everyone's family. However, the defeat also came from this. I tried to make everything come normally but ignored the dramatization.

In the second semester, I talked with Malcolm about my new version of the story. He gave me a vital suggestion which changed the tone of story. Malcolm suggested that there should be a more intense plot like a car crash after the car chasing scene. I used to think this might not be feasible because of the limited budget. Fortunately, he told me the way to avoid a huge expense. The car doesn't need to be ruined or crashed. It can fall into the ditch, which also can limit the character's action. The story is not only about the trifling matters in daily life. It shows the terrible sequence after distracting driving. Anger begets greater anger and will cause irreversible consequences.

The kid character, Tommy, is a supporting role in the first place. However, Malcolm also reminds me that there is an interesting perspective I can work on. I could see the parents from Tommy's point of view. The family argument is unavoidable to Tommy. He has no way to escape but bear it. From Tommy's point of view, there is no right or wrong between the parents. They are all selfish when they vent their anger to each other without considering Tommy’s feelings. When the parents are still arguing after the car crashed, the negative emotion in Tommy’s mind burst out. He sneaks out of the car. Tommy’s missing causes a huge panic for the parents and let them realize what they were arguing are not important anymore. With the searching Tommy’s scene, the whole story is no longer flat
or simple. The emotional ups and downs of the two protagonists have become twists and turns.

**Cast**

It was not easy to find Chinese actors in America. I tried the usual ways to look for actors, like posting casting call on Facebook groups and searching the actors in the Backstage website. Unfortunately, none of the worked. There was no mid-aged Chinese answering my cast call on Facebook and only 2 actors met my requirements in the Backstage. I tried to shoot with unprofessional actors. That experience reminded me that if the actor lives a similar life as the character and they’re willing to express themselves. And they can also bring you great acting.

Therefore, I started looking for actors in the Chinese community in Rochester. No matter if they are local teachers, hospital nurses, restaurant waiters or housewives. As long as they meet the age and image requirements, I was open to interviewing them. I greeted more than 10 women interviewing Qinyi, but no one tried the role of Ming. Because most Chinese men in the United States have very full-time jobs, they need to go to work every day to cover the family's expenses. People in this age and identity have no time and interest to participate in my graduation work.

Then I came up with a way to both help my story and reduce the difficulty of recruiting actors. I persuaded actresses who came to the interview to bring their husband. This was
not mandatory, but there were still a lot of actresses who convinced their husbands to participate with them.

Someone said that in film acting, less is more. The strongest approach for outstanding screen performances is to choose seriously talented film actors who have a strong presence even when they are not doing anything. Therefore, to find the couple who are close to my character is my goal. Interviewing a real couple and interviewing two unidentified actors are really different. My film is full of quarrels from beginning to finale, and the story is gradually escalating in their constant quarrels. When a real couple comes to the line, there will be a tacit understanding and a chemical reaction between them. The rhythm of their quarrels is also smooth. My first interview was with an actress Wendy, who was found by my producer Zichen Liang at the Backstage. She was 48 years old, living in Buffalo. She has had a guest appearance in the American drama, but she is still relatively young in performance. She interviewed my character with her husband and told me that they resonated with my story. They are also a couple of immigrants. The husband said that he understood that my hero, Ming, lost his job and saw the stock falling, and the kind of collapse when the child was in trouble. I am actually very satisfied with the performance of Wendy's husband. But I still considered comparing all the interviews.

Later, I interviewed a lot of actresses, and most of them came alone. Some people looked much younger than their actual age. They were dressed and sexy, not like a housewife’s temperament. Some were too quiet and couldn’t let go off the sound to perform the effect of arguing red face. Among all of the actress, there was a very special actress called Yiqi
Zhao. After the interview of everyone, she called me again to say that she had a new understanding of the script and the characters, and hope to come back and audition Qinyi again.

Yiqi told me that she has many similarities with this character. Her husband is a professor at RIT Computer Science department. She graduated from the Communication University of China and worked at China Business Network. She has an excellent resume for a working woman and a bright prospect for future. However, for the sake of the child and her husband, she gave up her career, immigrated to the United States, and started to learn English from the beginning. In the United States, she can only start from the work of LV sales. Most of her time was spent on taking care of her husband and children. She can't say that there is no regret, but she has to do it. In addition, she had a miscarriage because of the abuse of medicine six months ago. Although she is not affected by the one-child policy, she has a deep understanding of the pain of losing her child.

I don't know if the resonance of the character enhanced the interest of Yiqi, or she had a strong passion for acting. She tried various emotions to play the quarrel, which presented my ideal Qinyi.

I very appreciate Yiqi Zhao’s performance and decide to let her become Qinyi. However, she is only 33 years old, much younger than my ideal Ming, Wendy’s husband, who is 15 years old older. Besides, they came from different areas, one is from south China and one is from north China, which means their accent was very different. I couldn't imagine the
way they work together because of the considerable disharmony. I had to give up one of them. Taking Tommy's age setting into account, parents in their early 30s are more suitable for my script and role. They are more immature and easily angered. So, I later abandoned the actor I first admired and chose Yiqi's husband Zilong Zhao to match with her. Both of them are from Sichuan province, China. I found that when they argued in Sichuan dialect, they could transfer lines more fluently and vent their emotions more naturally. Later, I converted the lines into a colloquial expression according to the background and habits of the actors. They had reached a secret agreement while acting to each other. Finally, they gave me a wonderful performance which is beyond my expectation.

**Location**

For scouting the location, I tried different ways. My thesis chair Malcolm recommended me to search the finger lakes area which only took half an hour ride. Cat introduced me to some of the private roads that in front of her friends' home. I used Google Map to search all the neighboring hill and checked the real places one by one. However, none of them got the cliff and narrow road without a guard bar. Finally, my classmate Yuan Yao sent me a picture which he took in a mountain top, the place gets a wide view and looks dangerous, which meets all my story settings. The only defect is that I need to drive 2.5 hours to reach the place. Without a better choice, I decided to take all my crew members to the location and planned to sleep there for one night. However, not all of my crew agreed this arrangement. Some of them had to go back because they have a class to take, others didn’t want to sleep that remote because of the cold weather. The biggest issue was that all the
Airbnb nearby was already booked. The nearest hotel was one-hour drive from my location and it costed at least $50 for one person. I gave up this plan again. I got 4 drivers including my cousin and dad who only responsible for the transportation. They had no work to do on the set but kept us safe on the road.

For the road scene, Karl Goldsmith told me how to contact the local traffic department and I could ask them to block the way. By contacting them before shooting, I could get a clear sound and make the shooting process safe. But when I arrived at my ideal location, I found that this place was too desolated which didn’t even have cars to surpass. The place was beyond my satisfaction, so I confirmed to shot there with my thesis chair.

**Equipment**

My DP Reddy Manojh gave me a list of his requirements for the equipment he is familiar with. It included the Fs 700, Cooke lens, shogun monitor, Arri Soft bank, Leds and so on. Except for the Cooke lens, I got everything I want. However, this is not like the film I shot before. Most of my story happened in the car, so I need to figure out where I can put the camera. Also, I have a car crash scene which consists of different angles. Malcolm suggested me to use his GoPro for shooting because it is portable and easy to assemble. However, Reddy asked for the best picture quality and refused to shoot with GoPro. Besides, he told me that there was no need to use the hostess tray because he could get all the angles inside the car. However, I found it does not work for him to shoot the car scene without any car mount equipment. Because he stands outside of the car and held the camera,
which limited the speed of the driving and made the film not realistic enough.

I gave up all the car scenes that I shot in the second day. Because Reddy went back to Atlanta and I need to catch the time. I got Bo Gao to reshoot the whole car scene for me. With his recommendation, I found the gearhead to rent accessory equipment including the hostess tray and wireless follow focus. He was trained to use the hostess tray before so that he assembled it very fast. We finished the whole scene very fast and efficient. They hostess tray gave me the wonderful pictures I want.

For the car chasing scene, I always imaged to shoot some of the full shots with the drone. I hoped there will be some wide-angle shots in the wild space which can create tension between two cars. I got my DJI Phantom 4 and DJI Mavic Pro 2 to shoot the aerial scene. Both can record in 4K quality, but they were not working well in a low-light condition. Therefore, I need to shoot all the drone scenes in daytime. All the drone shots were shot by Yuan. He is skilled to handle the drones, so we finished the whole shots between 10am to 3pm which gave us the best light.
Production

Production challenges

I was facing two biggest difficulties when I started the shooting: location environment changed and extreme weather condition. My first location was on a mountain top in Susquehannock State Forest, Pennsylvania. It took me 3 hours to reach the location because we faced with heavy snowfall on the road. I got four drivers who had no job to do but only drive the car. However, my sound mixer Creighton got too much equipment which cannot load on the car. He drove his own car and also helped me record the sound, which made him very tired. This was not a good beginning for my shooting day.

When I arrived at the mountaintop for the first time, the trees were full of vitality. But after one week when I started the shooting, the location turned to a dead brown color with bare trees.
This disappointed me a lot and I even thought about changing the location. It was November 10th, I realized that this was the beginning of the winter, more trees would be withered from now. The color of the exterior would become even duller. The setting of my story itself is relatively depressing. Therefore, I decided to accept the reality and reimagine the picture in my mind according to the current scene.

The weather on the mountaintop was extremely cold. Although we already informed the crew members to get as many clothes as they could, and we prepared the warm pastes for everyone, it was still hard for people to work outside for a long time. I felt sorry for my crews because they had to bare the extremely cold weather. I was unable to help them getting warm. Then my producer figured out a way to comfort them: She sent some of them back to the car to warm up by turns. However, the core crews like DP, AC and sound mixer couldn’t leave the set. This took us more time on communication because we need to get the new crews familiar with the shooting process again. Therefore, I was way behind my schedule. I had to wrap at 4:30 pm before the sun went down. However, I still finished scenes of parents’ arguments and car crash, which means I don’t need to back to the hill top again.

There was another issue that we couldn’t prepare hot food for my crews. My producer Zichen bought some bread, lunch meats, candies, Saqima and cookies as lunch. We let them eat separately when they took turns to rest. Because of the poor lunch and earlier wrap we got, I took all of them to the hotpot restaurant because this food could make us warm up. I felt very sorry about the rush lunch hour and the cold and arduous shooting.
But luckily, we overcame all the difficulties and made it down.

**Directing actors**

The only thing that I couldn’t get any help from my crew, was directing my actors. Because my actors were non-professional actors, I need to get them to know how seriously hard work about film making for the first time. So, they would spend more time to research my script and to know their characters.

I heard that the key to achieving amazing performance is to get them to show up on the set having learned their lines perfectly, so that they never have to spend a single second worrying about them. Therefore, I took the rehearsal very serious. In order to make the actor enter the character quickly, I rehearsed with my actors for more than 3 times from two weeks before the shooting. The graduate directing class and advanced directing class helped me a lot on directing. They taught me several ways to help the actors interact with the roles. Firstly, I helped them understand the script. They need to know the arc of the story, the beat change, what the character wants, and how should they reach their goals.

My actor Zilong Zhao told me that he thought Ming has a behavioral goal and a deep-rooted goal. He is anxious because of job losing and the stock falls, but he shows that he is only angry because the families are almost getting late. They gave me pretty correct recognition of the characters, which built the great first step.

Then, based on their understanding, I gave them more details I wanted. I told them how
much I wanted from the character. For example, when my heroine Yiqi starts to argue with Ming, she is not angry but more like questioning Ming. I told her the background of her character to let her know how she feels unsafe about her current situation. She gave up her job and became a housewife who only relies on Ming's wage. Right now, her husband seems to abandon her because she can't have another baby and give no economic contribution to the family. These things not only disappointed her but also hurt her a lot. The second time when she tried the character, her emotion gradually released, and her performance looked much more real.

Finally, I tried to bring them into the real scene. I told them to imagine what they will do if they were the character. Think like the characters themselves and do with your nature responds. When they asked me should they stand up or sit when they're showing impatient attitude to each other, I told them to do what you really feel you should do. When the angry reaches the peak point, Qinyi involuntary stands up because she feels that will help her express more resent. I didn’t want to direct them too much body movements or gestures because this would distract them. Besides, the key with directing actors is to tell them what is really happening in the scene over and above the dialogue itself. Most of actors focus too much on repeating the dialogue which leads to a missing of performance itself. As a result, I told them what I valued more was their emotional expression rather than dialogue correction. They didn’t need to repeat every word they read on the script but need to find a comfortable way to say it. To get them to express emotion better, my actors used their dialect. They gave me better performance and changed some of the dialogue with their acknowledgement and oral expression. I marked them on the script to keep them saying
the same words when filming.

Based on solid rehearsal I did with my protagonist. On the set, they’re pretty familiar with the beat change of the script and emotion expression of the character. It didn’t take me a long time for the dialogue scenes. But I was still worked on the action scenes because the change of the scenario makes my actors unaccustomed. When we shot the car crash scene, I asked Yiqi to perform as she just experienced the car crash. However, her body was too freezing which didn’t look like she really experienced that. I told her what I wanted her to act, but she still couldn’t reach that level. Then I tried to show her the body movements by myself, but it was still not working. The last thing I tried is to show her the car crash videos I downloaded before. Also, I told her to take a rest for 3 minutes, waited for her to release her pressure and relaxed her body. By this way, she finally got that feeling I wanted.

The kid actor was the most difficult one to direct with. I got a six years old boy Joseph to play Tommy. He is silent and obedient which conforms to my character. On the bench near the cliff, I asked Joseph to leave the bench without noticing the hat falls down from his leg. He tried this small scene for more than 5 times. Every time when he stood up, it looked like he deliberately dropped the hat off. He couldn’t help to look at the hat or swing his arm. I explained to him what this character are experiencing. But he couldn’t get the common sense with the character and he seemed overloaded by this situation. I tried to act for him, let him repeat what I did. However, he still cannot involve in the character. I deleted the medium shot and finally took the close up which didn’t need to show his body language to make the scene real.
There was one more directing thing which bothered me a lot: when Tommy had breakfast, I hoped he can accidentally hit the milk box, but he hit it deliberately every time. No matter how I guided him the detail of the gestures, he couldn't correct it and kept repeating the wrong thing. I realized that it might be too difficult for a young child to act something that he feels unreal. I gave up guiding him the gesture and detail but focused more on his reaction about parents' quarrels. I found that he is still a good actor for the character if I help him involved with the situation. To keep Joseph away from distraction, I asked my actor Ming yelling at him as a real father would do. Also, I asked my crew to be serious which would be helpful to get him into the real suppressed environment. It’s lucky that I got all the expressions I want from Joseph in the end.
Post-Production

Editing and color grading

I always spent most of my time on editing because it was the final re-write for the film. I would like to look over all my footage for at least two times before I start the editing. Then I would mark the best footage or moment I really want so that I can simply take them out when I was editing. The editor is a creative job which not only works with the story, but also changes the pacing and flow. It crafts the film into a cohesive whole. No matter if they can say the dialogue complete or correct. When I did the editing, my first purpose was to find the best acting moment which can express the emotion accurately.

The dialogue scenes were not difficult for me because I already knew how I wanted it to flow. I knew the character’s inner activities so that I knew where I should cut. For example, after the first arguments in the scene, I left Qinyi to stands on the lobby for a long time. By stopping at her moment, I hoped the audience can see her desperation because her husband just avoids the rift in their relationship. I’m familiar with the script so I always cut on the right place to express the best emotion. I don’t need to worry about any dialogue scenes. However, the car chasing scene and car crash scene did made me feel headache. The first reason was that I used different cameras. My drone doesn't have good quality as FS700 has. The colors look more uniform and the saturation is lower. Yuan Yao helped me with the color-grading. Rather than giving him all my footage and requirements, I stayed on his side to see him do it all the time. By this way, he could get the specific color-grading advice from me for the first time. Also, with both of our attention, we could see more problems and keep revising it. I stayed in his place for three days to complete the tasks concentratedly.
When we did the post-grading, I found that the information drone captured was not as rich as FS700 can get. This means I didn’t have too much space to color grading it. But Yuan still changed the keynote of the color into a cold blue to make it feel depressed with a cinematic tone. We still did our best to make the whole scene look consistent.

We couldn’t drive too fast as we were shooting in the extreme weather condition. I speeded up all the full shots of a car-chasing scene to make it seem more passionate. As for the car crash scene, I speeded different angles with quickly cutting to increase the tension. I tried lot of ways to arrange the sequence of the shots. Finally, I got the best way to make it seem real: Gradually cutting from the wide-angle shots to the close-ups, and then suddenly cut to the wide angle with a long pause.

Besides, my story was shot at different times and different weathers, which bothered me a lot. When Ming and Qinyi were driving in the car, I shot their dialogue in snowstorm weather which was very cloudy. But Tommy’s scene was shot on a sunny day. The different environments gave the picture a different color temperature. To make them seem reel, we spent a lot of time to color-grading the details. For example, the color of the front seat and back seat looked different. The front seat was darker and more blueish, while the back seat was lighter and more yellowish. We took the single color out and adjusted it separately. Finally, we got all the interior shots look like they were shot in the same location and time.

Yuan also helped me with some exposure problems. Inside the car, when Qinyi leaned back to talk with Tommy, her face was too dark to see her expression. Yuan drew the circle around her face and followed her movements, rose the exposure in that area to fix my
As for the keynote, I hope my film seemed to be more realistic. The color doesn't need to be too stylized. It aims to make the audience feel we did the color-grading and focus on the story itself. When I showed my first draft to Malcolm, I asked him about the comments of my color, he said he didn’t even notice that I already finished color-grading. I was disappointed at the first time because I know it was not stylistic enough. Then I think this might also be a good thing. I hoped that the color can contribute on expressing the story rather than distracting audience’s attention.
Pick-ups

In this short film, I had lots of scenes remade. Mainly because most of my scenes are exterior scenes. The weather forecast only shows the probability of snowfall every day and is not accurate. The second day when I was filming at Letchworth State Park, only half a day of was snow, and the snow was completely inadequate. Only the woods on both sides looked like snowy. The road in the middle was very clean. Besides, the road is very wide with double yellow lines very obviously. After we finished filming searching Tommy's scene in the woods, we took the car chase scene on the main road. The sun suddenly came out and lit the whole road like summer.
I really like some shots we took in that day, but it can’t connect with the next scene: the car crash scene. There was no way we can go back to the mountaintop with the same weather and view, so I can’t give up my car crash stuff but give up these car chasing shots.

Besides, I abandoned all the arguments stuff we shot in the third day. The first reason was that there was no snow at all, there was only dead trees outside with no residual snow on the top. The other reason was the whole scene looked too fake.

I suggested that I wanted to rent a hostess tray, but Reddy thought that he could get what I wanted without using that equipment. When we filmed the driver's side, Reddy sat on the passenger seat shooting the close up of Ming. However, when we were to shoot Qinyi's side, Reddy could only sit in the driver's seat - he can't drive while holding the camera. Reddy suggested that he could stand outside of the car and follow the car slowly. He held the camera and leant on the front door. As a result, my two protagonists can be shot into the same picture and while the view outside is changing. However, my actor can only drive at a very slow speed to ensure the safety of the photographer. The final shots was very unsatisfactory because the car was obviously
slowing down. So, I didn’t use any shots we shot in that way. And I planned to do the pick-ups after I rent the hostess tray.

Because of the crew recruiting issues, I shot my first pick-ups three weeks later. Bo Gao becomes my DP because he is familiar with car scene shooting and Reddy can’t go back at that time. That day got very heavy snow. I picked them up one by one because I was afraid that they might feel uncomfortable to drive. Due to the terrible weather, I knew I won’t shot too much stuff, so I only planned to shoot the dialogue scene with setting the hostess tray outside of the car. With the experience of shooting in extremely cold weather, I knew the battery would die fast so I must race against the time. I store all the equipment in the back seat with air condition keeping heating. Until we set up the hostess tray and tested it, we took the assembled camera out to fix it on the hostess tray. We covered the camera with black garbage bags to avoid it from the snow. With preparing all the stuff well, our shooting moved on very fast. We took only two footages on each side of the car. The actors are already pretty familiar with the whole scene and didn't make any mistakes. The whole shooting process took less than one hour and everything went on well. The only bad thing was that we took 1 hour to go back home because of traffic congestions caused by snow weather.

My second pick-ups were the drone shots. I filmed the whole stuff later with Yuan to become the DP as I didn’t need the real actors to stay in the car. He is very experienced about the drone shots. Since his second film, he kept putting the drone shots as a transition to introduce the environment. I asked two people to drive the car with a
walkie talkie in each car. I stayed in the back seat of the second car so that I could give more specific advices for the driver. Yuan stood outside to control the drone. I kept contacting with Yuan so that I knew where the drone was and what time I need to surpass the front car. It’s unlucky that Yuan’s drone hit the branch in the last shot. The road is a pretty twist so that the drone quickly disappears from his sight. He flew too low because I wanted it to be closer to the car. The branch broke his drone wings, so we had to stop there. Fortunately, we shot about 10 shots with different angles and speeds, which already beyond my plan. That was another day we completed filming quicker than expecting. I asked to compensate Yuan with a set of new drone wings, however, he refused it. As apology and celebrates, I took all of them to the Sushi buffet. And we finally ended all the pick-ups with satisfactory.
Screenshots

The Way Back Home

Listen...Listen...You are my headhunter

Pack Tommy's stuff, is this so difficult for you?
I'm already said it's unsafe
Stop blaming at me... It's that man keeps blocking...
Don't you know how your mom and I worried about you?
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the MFA degree in the
School of Film and Animation,
Rochester Institute of Technology

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Audience Reaction

I was not confident with my film and nervous when I stood on the stage. I explained how the idea came up and illustrated the biggest challenges I met in the process of shooting in the artistic statement. My conclusion was inspired by my direct and sincere feeling of this film, which aroused audiences’ empathy. The audience’s reaction to my speech relaxed me and made me more confident, I appreciate their encouragement.

In the comments section, I got praises and different advices. Frank Deese said it’s a good story which is very touching. He admired the shooting angle. He stated that the shooting angle put our characters into a dangerous situation, which is helpful in telling the story. The car chasing part of my film was emphasized by its unique shooting method, which added a sense of thrilling on my movie. Someone said I have done a great job in shooting in the snow weather, it looks very cinematic. He said he could imagine the difficulty in shooting those wide scenes. The low set up shots were easy to catch audience attention. Another one indicated that the film is interesting due to the great performance of our lead actors, but the background music is kind of overwhelming. One of my audience criticized that my subtitle is not complete because I simplified a lot of them to make it easy to read. There’re still some grammar mistakes in subtitle that need to be corrected. But another person indicated that he liked the way I put the subtitle since it’s a non-English argument, the mistakes made him feel that’s the way how immigrants fight. It seems more nature.

Overall, the comments for the film were positive. They enjoyed how I tell the story and could feel the strong emotion of my characters.
Conclusion

I learned a lot from the shooting process and the audience reaction. The existing of one film must be reasonable and there always are some people who can truly be into it. We all need to admit the imperfection of our work, at the same time trying our best to perfect it as much as we can. Giving an ending to the film you are working on; you will take this experience to make a better film in the future.
Dad, Calm Down

(working title)

By Bichen Yang

A Live-Action short Fiction

Thesis Proposal – March 21, 2018

Approved for Submission by

Malcolm Guy Spaul, Thesis Chair
**Logline**

Before traveling, Donald (40) and Frances (36) start to argue because of a small thing. Their son Tommy (9) gets involved into their arguments. On the road, Donald keeps being angry and Tommy pees in the car. Donald’s anger rises and makes their trip more awful. Until a stranger comes into the trip, Donald sees him as a threat. However, Tommy finds the thing is not as bad as his dad thought and stops the terrible thing from happening. His father realizes he was blinded by anger and reconsider his attitude to the family…

**Rationale**

My father drove to Tibet last year and part of the story did happen on him. Somebody followed his car very close and annoyed him, he keeps speeding and tries to leave that person away. However, that person just wants to remind him of his flat tire. That is a very dangerous twisting mountain road. I have such a panic fear after he told me that. That is not a small thing and it’s worth for us to rethink about it: Don’t always judge others with a negative attitude.

Besides, I want to reflect a common problem that happened in a lot of family: Anger begets greater anger. Especially when a couple arguing, if they let their angry moods keep going, you won’t know how bad sequence it is.

My father is an impetuous person. Sometimes he might be angry at something small in daily life. But my mother’s calm nature acts as a counterbalance to his excitability. However, even they’re argued with each other or in cold war condition, I can see they still worried about each other indeed. When my father calms down, he always reconsiders his behavior and he will apologizes
to my mom about his impulsion. He told me the importance of control the anger and how to deal with it. If I remind myself that my families are the most precious person, I won’t vent my anger to hurt them. I want to write the story as an exhort to myself.

Treatment

In the bedroom, FRANCES (36) is packing the clothes. Her husband DONALD (40) looks at the stock price on his computer. He sees the whole red on the screen and angrily closes the computer and shouts to his wife to hurry up. In the kitchen, their child TOMMY (9), is playing iPad game while eating his breakfast. Hearing the shouts, Tommy accidentally hits the milk box and makes the table a mess. Frances cleans the mess. Tommy finds that his dad is very upset because of his mom’s chatter. They start arguing and Donald doesn’t control his anger, heavily pads his computer on the table and stops Frances’ chatter. Tommy covers his ear with earphones to escape. The parents realize their overacting and stop arguing.

Donald is driving on the mountain road. His wife sits in the passenger seat and Tommy sits in the back. The road is narrow and the right side is cliff. Frances sneezed, Donald turns down the air-condition. Tommy tells his dad he wants to pee, but Donald tells him to hold it because there is no place to park. Tommy is afraid of his father and looks at his mom for help. Frances please with Donald, but her words raise more of Donald’s anger. Tommy tries to interrupt the argument but he fails. Finally, he pees in the car while they’re still arguing. Donald smells the urine and gets even more upset.
A car catches up behind them. The car is trying to pass them but the road is too narrow. Tommy sees this car following them very close and his dad keeps blocking the road. The car behind of them flashes and Donald considers this to be provocative. Donald suddenly breaks the car and Tommy accidentally hit his head on iPad heavily. Frances sees Tommy is bleeding and shouts to Donald to stop the car.

Tommy sees the car behind him also stops. The driver SMITH (40) gets out of his car, fetches a tire iron and walks to them. Tommy is frozen with fear. Then he sees there is a little girl sits in the passenger seat of Smith’s car. Donald gets out and picks up a large stone. He runs at Smith. Smith backs away yelling he is trying to help him. Smith tells Donald that his car tire is flat and it is dangerous if he keeps driving in such a road. Tommy sees Donald’s awkward face and after a while Donald apologizes. Donald calls the towing service because they don’t have a spare.

One the road side, Frances looks at Tommy’s head and complains that today is such an awful day. Tommy tells his mom that it’s not awful. He values the time of traveling with his parents. Smith tells them how fortune they are to have each other. Because Smith’s wife died long time ago. He and JESSICA(12) still miss his wife but they're grateful to have each other.

Smith and his daughter drive away. Donald touches Tommy’s forehead and ask him is that hurt. Tommy smiles, asks how long they need to wait and suggests them play Draw Something to kill the time. Donald and Frances look at each other with relieved smile.

FADE OUT
Location reference

Exterior:

Mountain Road

In the Car
Interior and Mood:
Schedule

08/24/2018 – First Draft
08/31/2018 – Second Draft and location scouting
09/07/2018 – Final Draft
09/14/2018 – Crew and Audition start
09/21/2018 – Shortlists and Storyboards
09/28/2018 – Finalize Crew and decide most actors
10/05/2018 – Props, Rehearsal
10/12/2018 – Principal Photography start
10/26/2018 – Principal Photography end
11/09/2018 – First Rough Cut
11/16/2018 – Pickups
11/17/2018 – Second Rough Cut
11/24/2018 – Third Rough Cut
12/15/2018 – Picture Lock
01/18/2019 – Color correction revise
01/25/2019 – Score revise
03/11/2019 – Final Sound Mixing Due
03/25/2019 – Final color correction and score
04/01/2019 – Final Thesis Due
05/01/2019 – Screening
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Total: 8855
The Way Back Home

BichenYang

11/09/2018

by3015@rit.edu
INT.BEDROOM - DAY

In an Airbnb house, Ming Zhou(40) walks around the table. On the table, there is a computer open with an received email. It says sorry that they can't have him to take their engineering position. Ming made a phone call.

MING
What do you mean that they decided to go in a different direction. I already quit my job for this position!

Ming walks towards the window.

MING
Why have they changed their mind? At least you need to give me a reason!

After hearing the door creak, Ming sees his wife Qinyi Hu(37) comes out from the bathroom. She holds her make up bag and put it into her suitcase. Ming turns back and lower his voice.

MING
Listen, you're my headhunter, you need to take the responsibility, ok? You can't let it end like this...

Ming hangs up the phone. Qinyi kneels down, wraps the clothes and asks him without turns around.

QINYI
Is there something wrong with your new job?

Ming ties his tie.

MING
Nothing. You need to hurry up, otherwise we'll miss our flight. The next one isn't until tomorrow.

Qinyi glances at him and stops her work.

QINYI
Tommy is eating his lunch. I almost finish it.

A reminder jumps from Ming's computer. He clicks it and it's his portfolio management software. His stock is declined and he is upset by the whole red on the screen. Ming sits heavily
CONTINUED:

on the bed.

Qinyi searches the map on her phone.

QINYI

The directions say it’s an hour and a half drive to reach the airport. Do you also want to get some breakfast?

MING

(impatiently)

I told you we’re in a hurry! Can’t you just pack your fucking food for the car?

Qinyi stands up and stares at Ming.

QINYI

What’s with the attitude? Why are you yelling at me? Do you really want to ruin the end of our vacation? I need to get Tommy ready and pack everything.

Ming is packing with putting his computer into his bag.

MING

I’ve already wrapped my suitcase.

QINYI

(angrily)

What about Tommy’s stuff?

MING

Just pack Tommy’s stuff then? why is this so difficult for you? Other couples have three kids and the wife can still have everything organized. How do you manage to make everything such a mess and annoy me?

QINQI

Are you finished?

MING

You don’t need to worry about money, job, you just need to take care of ‘one’ child, and you are so bogged down on this...
CONTINUED: 3

QINYI
(peacefully interrupt)
One child? Is this the reason you blame me? I knew it, you’d never let it go.

Qinyi is trying to suppress her pain. Ming seems a little panic and lower his voice.

MING
I didn't mean...

QINYI
You didn't mean what? That I didn’t want another child? You chose to work for a national company. So for you to keep the job, I had have to have an abortion...And Now, it is my fault?

MING
(depressed)
Can we just stop talking about this?

Qinyi goes into hysterics.

QINYI
Stop talking about this? So what do you want to talk about? Why I came here? You should know! I came here and gave up my job because you want me to! What am I doing here? I have no friends, don’t see my family and don’t have a job. You think I'm happy with that? You think you’re only one whose unhappy?

Ming walks out without replying.

2 INT.KITCHEN – DAY

Heard the arguments,TOMMY(9) looks at the bedroom with restless expression. He covers his ear with hands, but it won't work. He fetches the iPad on the table and puts on the earphones, he starts a game and humming with the melody.

Ming walks out and sees Tommy is playing iPad games while eating his breakfast. Seeing his father, Tommy shuts off his game in a hurry-scurry. However, he accidentally hits the milk box and makes the table a mess. Qinyi follows Ming out. She sees the mess on the table, fetches a towel to clean it up.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 2

QINYI
(to Tommy)
What happened? Did you upset your father again? I told you don't play games while eating. I just cleaned up.

Ming shows more and more impatient while Qinyi is speaking. Finally he interrupts with patting his computer heavily on the desk. Ming takes his stuff and walks out. Qinyi organizes the table and avoid his eyesight.

MING
I will wait for you two in the car.
When time's up, we have to go.

3 EXT.MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

A white car is driving on the twisting mountain road. It's a reverse dual carriageway. The road is narrow and there is cliff on the right side.

4 INT.CAR - DAY

Ming is focusing on the wheels. Qinyi sits on the passenger seat and sneezes. Ming turns down the air-condition while Qinyi looks the outside view.

Tommy sits on the back seat unlocks his safety belt. He leans his head into the front seat.

TOMMY
Dad, I want to pee...

Qinyi looks back and shouts to him.

QINYI
Tommy, do you need to go right now?

Ming looks at the navigation on the screen.

MING
Can you hold it? We’re a half hour away.

Tommy sits back. He tries to distract himself by playing iPad games. But it won’t work.

Tommy taps to Qinyi shoulder and he looks anxious.

TOMMY
Mom, I can't hold it.
CONTINUED: 2

Qinyi asks Ming with reluctant attitude.

QINYI
Can we pull over around here?

MING
No, don't you realize how dangerous it is around here? If any car catches up, they won't even have time to brake!

Tommy looks at them and wants to interrupt. But he fails because Qinyi suddenly raises her voice.

QINYI
But there’s only your car. Just put your flashers on, it’ll be fine!

MING
I already said it's not safe!

QINYI
Not letting him go for a long time isn’t good for him! Just pull over.

MING
(shouts loudly)
I don't want to say it again.

Qinyi looks at Ming and Ming ignores her. Tommy sits in the back seat and bites his lip. He takes a deep breath and suddenly shakes.

MING
What's that smell?

Ming frowns. Qinyi looks back and she is shocked.

QINYI
Did you pee your pants?

She sees that Tommy is upset.

QINYI
(to Ming)
I told you to pull over. And now look what happened.

Qinyi finds a towel on her carry-on bag and throws it to Tommy.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 3

QINQI
Take this and wipe them down. I will help you change your pants when we arrive.

Tommy unlocks the safety belt and wipes it.

5 EXT.MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Ming drives slow on the road and a blue car catches up behind him. This car is trying to pass Ming but the road is too narrow. Besides, Ming drives almost in the middle of the road and keeps blocking their way. The blue car pushes horn on him.

6 INT.CAR - DAY

Qinyi looks at the rear-view mirror. She sees the man in the blue car seems shout to them but she can hear nothing. Qinyi lowers the window but Ming rolls it up.

7 EXT.MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

The car flashes on Ming and he considers this to be provocative. He speeds up to make sure he is in the front and he suddenly breaks the car. When they make a large turn, the road is wider and the blue car passes them with higher speed. The blue car's window is lower.

THE MAN
You got a flat tire!

8 INT.CAR - DAY

Ming hears his voice but it's not clear.

MING
(angrily)
Am I hearing something wrong? Did he curse at me?

QINQI
You have an overactive imagination.

TOMMY
Dad, I think he said something wrong with our car.

QINQI
Would you like to pull over and check it?

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 2

MING
You're actually taking this seriously? There's nothing wrong, according the dash board. You're worrying for nothing!

9 INT.CAR - DAY

When Ming is complaining about this. His hand leaves the wheel and the car suddenly turns to the left. It hits the rock on the roadside and falls on the ditch. Qinyi and Ming are packed under the seat belts and they were scared. Tommy accidentally hits his forehead on the iPad heavily. Qinyi unlocks her seat belt, turns back and sees Tommy is bleeding.

QINYI
Tommy!

MING
(worried)
Are you okay?

QINYI
(to Ming)
What the hell have you done?

Qinyi searches the bandage on her bag. She is concerned about Tommy wound.

MING
Stop blaming at me...It's that man, he keeps blocking...

This raises Qinyi's anger.

QINYI
Why are you still blame it on others? Can't you just take some responsibility for what you've done?

MING
That's funny. Without you complaining about everything, I wouldn't have been so distracted...

QINYI
(interrupt)
So this is my fault again?

In the back seat, Tommy opens the door and sneaks away.
10 EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD – DAY

Tommy sits on the side of the cliff, the gale blew off his hat and he doesn't realize it. Tommy looks back at the car, his parents are still arguing. He is very disappointed by that.

11 INT. CAR – DAY

Qinyi points at Ming.

QINYI
I should have never counted on you. I had a good job in China. If you hadn’t brought me here, I would’ve been fine, as would have Tommy.

MING
(loudly)
I didn't make you become a housewife. It's you who wouldn’t even try to work with foreigners...

In the back seat, Tommy wipes his head with sleeve, then opens the door and walks out. His parents are still arguing.

MING
I didn't mean to uproot your life. You made the decision to give it up.I didn’t force you.

QINYI
I listened to you and gave up all everything. Do you remember that years ago, it was you who asked me to get an abortion.

Qinyi becomes extremely excited.

QINYI (CONT'D)
Do you know how much that hurt me?

Ming is impatient.

MING
I know...

QINYI
(shouts)
You don’t know! If I didn’t get the abortion, I wouldn’t have

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 2

QINYI (CONT'D)
problem trying to get pregnant until now!

This chocked Ming and he is silent for a while.

MING
I know I did something wrong to you.

Qinyi covers her face with both hands.

QINQI
Now, we can't even talk or communicate. You don't know what I want so stop telling me about what to think. I know you quit your job, I knew you are under pressure... But I'm always on your side. If you don't share everything with me, how can we face it together?

Ming keeps silent.

QINQI
There will be always some ups and down between us. It's important for us to pick each other up when things aren't going well for one us so we can do the best for us, for tommy.

12 EXT. CAR - DAY

Ming opens the door and walks out. He anxiously lights a cigarette then he sees the back seat is empty. He drops the cigarette and opens the back door.

MING
Where is Tommy?

Qinyi looks back.

QINYI
I don't know.

Ming drags Qinyi out from the driver's seat. He realizes there is a bruising on her arm. Ming touches it with worried expression.

QINYI
I told you not to argue in front of him.
CONTINUED: 2

MING
It's not only me. Does it matter who
cause this?

Ming walks to the side of the road. He finds Tommy's hat
which was leaving on the bench. Ming Looks down from the
cliff. Qinyi sees the hat and follows him to look down. Qinyi
shivers.

MING
Don’t think that way. He is a smart
boy, he couldn’t have gone too far.
Trust me. We’ll find him. You go this
way, I’ll go that way.

Ming takes a deep breath.

MING
(mutters to himself)
We will find him.

13 EXT.MOUNTAIN ROAD - DAY

Ming walks on the roadside and shouts Tommy's name. He sees
the sun slowly goes down. But he still can't find Tommy. Ming
is almost break down. He stands toward the sun and looks down
from the cliff. Then he pads his head heavily and his eyes
brim with tears. Ming doesn't find where Tommy is, he
disappointed walks back.

Ming stands by the car trunk, lights another cigarette, but
his lighter drops on the floor. He squats down to pick it up.
Then he sees Tommy is sitting in the back seat with wearing
his earphones. Ming opens the door.

MING
Where have you been?

Tommy shrinks back after hearing Ming's voice.

MING
Get out!

Tommy shows the resistance expression. Tommy gingerly crawls
out. Ming kneels down and looks at Tommy.

MING
Don't you know how worried sick your
mom and I have been?

Tommy heard Ming's roar, he shivered for a while and finally

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 2

shouts back.

TOMMY
I don’t want to hear you argue with mom anymore!

Ming is shocked by Tommy’s reaction. He tries to explain but then he sees a nail on the flat back tire. He gets close and touches it. Tommy also looks at the nail.

TOMMY
The guy was right. He already told you we got a flat tire.

Ming is kind of regret. He takes a deep breath and turns to Tommy.

MING
Tommy, Tommy, listen to me. There were so many time I ignored your thoughts...I was wrong. I promise you, I will do my best to avoid the arguing...Can you give me one more chance?

Ming tries to hugs him, but Tommy avoids Ming. Ming pats Tommy’s head to comfort.

TOMMY
Are you angry with mom because she only had me?

Ming is surprised about Tommy saying that.

MING
No, I’m happy with you.

Ming hugs Tommy.

MING
Let’s go to find your mom.

EXT. MOUNTAIN ROAD - DUSK

Qinyi is searching for Tommy with worries. Ming and Tommy finds her and shout to her.

TOMMY
Mommy!

Qinyi looks back with rejoice.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: 2

They walks back hand in hand to the car.

MING
We got a flat tire because there is a nail on it. I should have listen to you to park and check...I will call the towing company, but I'm sure that would cause 2 or 3 hours...we can't catch the flight...

QINQI
That's okay. As long as we're safe and healthy, we'll be okay.

Qingyi pats Tommy's head.

QINQI (CONT'D)
Ming, maybe people aren't as bad as you imagined, and maybe things aren't as terrible as you thought...

MING
I'm sorry about...everything.

QINQI
(to Tommy)
Me, too.

Tommy holds his mother's hand and puts it into his dad's hand. The sunset lights on their faces and they smile.

FADE OUT