North Star

Peter Cayer

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North Star
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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
MFA Imaging Arts/Live Action Production
School of Film and Animation
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology
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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to outline the process of making the film North Star. This paper follows the director from the very concept until beyond the final screening of the film. Included in the paper are supplemental materials, including stills, original proposal, shooting script, and budget.

North Star follows a man, Will, on the run from something in his past. Will meets a boy, Caleb, and the film follows their adventures in an unnamed town. North Star was conceived as a “take” on the classic Western genre. It was shot, edited, and scored digitally.
Reasons for Pursuing This Film as My Thesis.

When thinking about my thesis film I wanted to do something that I would challenge me and build on the tools that I had learned after two years at RIT. My background is in Theatre and Acting. I have been drawn to dramatic realist pieces for a long time. (The works of Elia Kazan and Nicholas Ray from the 1950’s and Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola from the 1970’s come to mind.) I was interested in making a fiction piece; my previous films at RIT were experimental and documentary, respectively. I also wanted to work in color. My previous fiction films had been shot on black and white 16mm film and highly influenced by the French Nouvelle Vague. I wanted to expand my artistic range and focus on directing actors and getting the best performances I could capture. The story for North Star intrigued me. I felt it was a rather simple story to tell but could lead to some exciting possibilities both visually and dramatically. There was always a conscious battle in my head to make a film that was not influenced by my earlier films and the films that influenced those films. I am not sure if I was a success at that. I feel like working in the Western genre was a break from my previous work. But looking back on North Star, now two years removed, I see the ever present influence of Goddard and Truffaut. Specifically the main characters, Will and Caleb would be quite at home in 1960’s France. What I mean by that is that these two characters are so obviously self-aware in their unawareness. They are both acting in ways that only make sense if you have seen movies. No one rides trains, it is glorified by movies and Jack Kerouac. Cowboys never said reach for the skies, but I am pretty sure John Wayne did or the Lone Ranger. This referential behavior is perfectly in synch with anything from A Bout de Souffle or Jules et Jim.
Script Development.

I had developed the script in Screenwriting II based on my own encounters with a little boy who dressed up in different costumes. I tend to write my scripts with a specific image in mind to start from. In this case the image of a little boy holding a gun to the camera saying “Reach for the skies!” was that image. Caleb was the first character I was drawn to. I felt that having a kid acting like a sheriff was an interesting way to tell this story. Taking a cue from the Sheriff theme, I decided to structure the film like a Western. That decision informs the development of the lead character. He is a loner running from his past in an unfamiliar town, unwillingly caught up in some trouble.

Thinking about the film as a Western set in modern times, had its advantages. I was able to borrow from earlier films and inform the structure, pacing, and visual style of North Star. Again a post Post-Modern sensibility, highly referential to material, that in of itself was already highly referential. Specifically, The Man With No Name trilogy comes to mind. Sergio Leone’s “Spaghetti” Westerns have a unique outsider point of view that certainly pops up in North Star. Clint Eastwood’s character is an outsider in all of those films, searching for a purpose and a place, much like Will.

The character of Will is definitely a version of me. This gave me an opportunity to explore the consequences of actions that I would never take, but occasionally entertain. Will is a character that is scared to death of responsibility, as I think we all are at times, the difference is that he runs away, instead of facing his fears.

There is also another aspect of Will, which again falls in with the Nouvelle Vague influence, and that is the fact that for the most part this is an act. Will does not have to be here in this current situation. He’s acting the role of lost soul. His misery is his own
creation, almost as much out of sheer boredom as fear of the growing up and taking responsibility for his actions.

The rest of the characters are rather stock characters from a Western, I would argue. Ted is the gruff citizen who calls the “hero” out on his issues. These characters abound in Westerns. It seems like the Western hero is blind to his own failings. There is always a person needed to help them “see the light”. Harper is the woman the hero loves but can't be with for whatever reason. In a lot of ways Harper is a continuation of the characters Grace Kelly and Angie Dickinson play in *High Noon* and *Rio Bravo*, respectively. They are in love with flawed men and continue to do so, despite their own misgivings. The bullies at the end are the “bad guys” in every Western. They also act as the “maguffin” and a comic one at that. For the audience they do not add anything but comic relief, they really are there as a vehicle to push the Will and Caleb story to it’s end.

I continued to develop the script with my Thesis Advisor, Malcolm Spaull, in the Spring of 2012. From that phase, the idea of having a Parent collect Caleb at the end was introduced as a way to further provide adequate and creative character development. As well as biographical information about the characters that never made it into a script, but were very helpful to answer larger questions of motivation and characterization from Actor's and were integral to directing the scenes with clarity. One of the nice things about directing a script you wrote yourself is that you have most of the answers already and if you have trouble making a scene or a sequence make sense for the actors, you can always rewrite the script if need be.
Pre-Production.

Pre-production began before I proposed this film to the committee. As I wrote the script, places that I walked past on a daily basis became locations in the story. Cobb's Hill Park, the Upper Monroe Neighborhood, Blessed Sacrament Church, were all part of an expansive vision brought to life by the story and film. Locations close to me have always played a large part in my scripts. I knew that I wanted this film to take place in an unspecified town with a backdrop based on my own musings. Having grown up in Rochester, I have an intimate knowledge of locations within the City of Rochester that are overlooked and I wanted to paint them in a new light. Specifically I was looking for locations that would seem mundane in real life, but have a certain urban grace on film. The locations I chose were ones that I felt would hold a memory if someone was new to the area. I was also curious to find places that a child would find to be full of adventure. I know that from my own adventures growing up they usually were contained in either parks or playgrounds.

My Director of Photography, Tom Atwell, also came aboard around this time. That was one of the most fortuitous events that happened around this film. I met with Tom in the Spring of 2012 and we immediately were on the same page about the visual style of the film. Tom also grew up in the Rochester area, and his work truly reflects the same connection I feel with spaces we chose to shoot. Tom’s choice of both camera movement and shot composition were important to the story telling, as well as the visual feel of the film. At that time I wanted to shoot on Film, I felt that as a capture medium, film was the obvious choice for a Western. We were both excited about the visual possibilities that the Western genre afforded us.
My proposal was accepted unanimously. The suggestions I received from the committee were to fix the playground climax, lock down more crew roles, and work on making Will a more likeable character. While I never had much of a problem viewing Will as likeable, he is after all based in no small part on myself, this was one of the major criticisms that I received throughout the entire scripting process. My thought was that in America we tend to like characters that go their own way and do their own thing, Walter White of Breaking Bad is a good example of that, and that what the characters do in the end can make or break them. I planned on working on these things over the Summer of 2012. Along with figuring out locations for the opening train sequence, and casting as much as possible.

Tightening up the dialogue, making Will more likeable, and working on the ending, specifically answering the question of how Caleb leaves the story took up most of my time that summer. After much indecision and discussion, I decided to have Caleb's father come pick him up. In previous drafts I had Caleb's mother showing up, but I ran into believability problems. (What mother would accept her son hanging around a homeless 25 year old man?) Having another man, of a similar age to Will, being a father to Caleb, to me, really cemented Will's choice to return home. All of this was in an effort to ensure the integrity of the father-son themes in the film was maintained.

This decision made the script stronger, but I was still stuck on the playground climax. Ultimately, that was not fixed until after casting, and I will explain that further on.
Casting.

I am fairly used to writing and casting roles for people I know. That comes from my Theatre days. I have found through trial and error that it makes the director's job so much easier if they can count on the people they have cast. While I did have some actors in mind for specific roles, namely Ted and Harper, I did not have anyone in mind for any of the rest. Going into the casting process, I thought for sure that finding four kids who can act and take direction was going to be tough. Ironically, that was the easiest part. Finding someone to play Will was very difficult.

I set up a casting call for the first weekend of the Fall Quarter, 2012. I had placed an ad on Craigslist, and had asked some local theatre directors to pass the word along to any kids they might know. I had four people show up to audition, three of whom were kids. I had one man audition for Will, he did not have the leading man look that I was thinking of for Will. He also did not read all that well.

Richard Simon, was the first kid I auditioned. He only acted in one play before, but he looked age appropriate, and brought a nice sense of awareness to the role. I immediately had him in mind for Caleb. I also auditioned Emma Morrison that day. I had been open to casting the role of Caleb as a girl. Emma read well, but she had a certain “staginess” that I felt would be hard to break. I read another boy later on that day. He read well, and could have played Caleb, but he was from Buffalo, which would have made rehearsals and shooting a nightmare.

The next day I auditioned Brady Griffin. He had just turned eight and was, as they say, “a ball of energy.” I liked what he brought to the read, but I felt like his attention span would make filming with him over the course of several days a burden.
I decided to go with the easy route with the kids. I cast Richard as Caleb, and Emma and Brady as the bullies. Casting a girl as one of the bullies actually lead to the solution for the playground scene. I made the bullies brother and sister, further reinforcing my existing themes of family and parenthood. I also thought about how the fights I got into when I was a kid ended. Most of the time they ended in one or both parties running away. It seemed like a nice way to end the fight – and to keep the correlation between the children’s behavior with the main character’s own behavior. childish and without direct end. If you think about it Will is the child and Caleb is the adult. One runs away from what he fears, while the other stands his ground and faces what terrifies him most.

This still left me without a Will, which pushed back my timeline for filming considerably. I had intended to start filming by the 3rd weekend in September and be finished by the 2nd weekend in October. But I could do nothing until I had cast Will.

Another Craigslist ad led to nothing. I contacted theatre people from the area that I knew. No one was available. I thought I had gotten really, really lucky. I got the name of an actor from a friend of mine and met with him. He seemed perfect! We talked for a while and I liked some of the ideas he had for the character. I offered him the role and he seemed interested. He then proceeded to ignore my emails and calls for three days, until I fired him over email. By now, it was early October and I was running out of time. My options were getting limited. I was down to playing the part myself or finding an actor that week. Realistically I had no desire to play the role of Will. While he most certainly contains some of the darker elements of myself, the thought of writing, directing, acting, and editing my own film was daunting to say the least.
For once in this process, some actual real luck was on my side. I got the name of Matt Nersinger, from Mary Tiballi, the actress who played Harper. She is involved with several local theatre companies so I knew she had some access to talent that I was unable to garner. She spoke highly of Matt and gave me his contact information. I met with Matt and offered him the part after we read and talked. We started filming that weekend.

While Matt ended up being a great choice for the role of Will, his availability left a lot to be desired. In retrospect, knowing the issues I would have in completing the production of the film, I may not have cast him.

**Visual Style.**

While working through my casting issues, I continued to meet with Tom to discuss and form a plan for the visual style of the film. One of the first choices that was made was to shoot digitally. There were several reasons for that. My first love is film. Given the option I would shoot exclusively on film. But when thinking about distribution and exposition of a short film, it becomes rather clear that 16mm is not going to be what people watch your film on. They will watch a digital file for the most part, unless a blow-up 35mm print is struck. Even then, who or what is going to project a 35mm short film?

Shooting on film also raises the size of your crew, dramatically. Suddenly, the option of running and gunning is no longer there. Shooting on the shoulder is not an option with what equipment was available to us. All of these reasons pushed me more towards shooting digitally. Certainly saving money by not having to pay for film, processing, and transferring, made the decision attractive.

Tom was a fan of the Panasonic GH-2, a micro four thirds DSLR. It shoots HD 1080p and has a nice “film look” to the video it records. Shooting on the GH-2 allowed
us to shoot scenes on the shoulder and with Canon Prime lenses two things that added to the “look” of the film. Another benefit to shooting on the GH2 was my post-production workflow was very simple. The same year that we shot North Star there were several other films at RIT shot on either the Arri Alexa or on a Red Camera. While working with these cameras may have some real world experience value, when it comes to your post-production they become a headache. Especially at RIT where that type of work was not planned for. I saw a lot of headache and wasted time with the people that chose to work with those cameras given the huge amount of data that they use. Never mind the fact that they were shooting in 4K or RAW resolution and the film would be screened at 720p.

As I said previously, Tom and I share a love of the landscape in the film, so once the choice was made on how we were going to shoot it – the actual shooting tended to become self-fulfilling. I will also add, that while there were a plethora of Directors of Photography at RIT at the time, Tom hands down was the best. He was absolutely professional and his “style” never interfered with the story we were trying to tell. Not only was this true of my film, but also of the four or five other films he ended up shooting that year.

The last choice that we made was to frame the scenes with the notion that we would crop the aspect ratio to 2.85. As a western influenced film composing for scope just made total sense. I love the look of wide screen films and believe that 2.85 aspect ratio pushes the quality of the film.

Visually I was drawn to John Ford’s The Searchers, as everyone who has directed a Western I think is. While Rochester may not be located in Monument Valley, I think
we were able to bring some subtle beauty to long forgotten pieces of architecture. Ford’s use of wide-angle camera lenses certainly played a role in my mantra throughout filming, which was “Can we make it wider?” The answer was invariably “Yes, we can”

**Production.**

Principal photography began on the night of October 14. Which felt auspicious as it was my 30th birthday even though my hangover lasted well into filming. I decided to shoot, what I felt was going to be the most time intensive and troublesome scenes first. So with a gas-powered generator and two 1K’s we lit up Cobb’s Hill Park and shot the scenes of Will at night in the park. I had also intended on moving locations and shooting the scenes of Will leaving the train yard, and wandering the streets at night. The night got the best of us however.

We had a barebones crew and did not get our first shot off until after 10pm. But once we got going we moved at a good clip. We got every shot we needed at the park just after midnight. At that time I called the shoot, as my actor was exhausted (he was shooting another film that weekend), and I felt like we would have time to get the remaining night scenes later in the schedule.

My plan, all along was to shoot all the scenes that involved children in one weekend. One day and a half just shooting the scenes with Caleb and a half day to shoot the playground sequence.

The following weekend we were set to do just that, until my lead actor had to work, so I was forced to schedule filming around him. (This happened most times that I set up shoots. Working around his schedule was one of the banes of my existence during the production of *North Star*, as I noted earlier.)
With the limited time that we had the following weekend we were able to shoot the scenes between Caleb and Will that take place in the park. And in something of a coup, we shot all of Will’s shots for the playground scene, something numbering close to 10 different shots, in an hour and 15 minutes the next day. We then spent the rest of the day working on the parts of the playground scene between Caleb, Amy, and Frank. This lead to problems later on in Post Production. I still had shots to shoot between Will and Caleb before and after the “playground scene”. I was not able to get the rest of those shots until almost a month later, by that time it was rainy, cloudy, and much grayer out. Consequently during post-production we had a challenge to make the shots look similar. Looking back I should have reshot the entire sequence.

After what boiled down to about a day and a half of filming, we had shot roughly a quarter of the film. Not terrible. But the weather was turning, and there still was a long way to go before morning. The following weekend I planned to pick up the rest of the scenes with Caleb and shoot the two telephone calls that Will makes. I only had Matt for one day, and it poured rain the entire day, so I cancelled the shoot and lost a weekend.

In between days of shooting I was working with the Genesee Valley Railroad Museum to use their existing track line to film the opening sequence of the film. They were amazing partners. I was given *carte blanche*. They ran the train up and down the short track and were very gracious with their time. I also was working with Asbury First Methodist Church to use the interior and exterior of their church. I had originally been communicating with Blessed Sacrament Church on Oxford Street to use their space as the church Will goes to. But after scouting the location with Tom, we both agreed that the space would be hard to work around. While the interior of the Church is beautiful,
most of our filming would be outside and Asbury First Methodist had much greater room to film around. Both places were gracious enough to allow us to shoot, no strings attached. Without their cooperation, *North Star* would be a lesser film.

With those two locations locked down, we wrapped filming for the Fall Quarter in a marathon three days. On Friday, we shot all of the church sequence except for all of the interior. I did not have an actor to play the priest, and I was never thrilled with the scene as I had written it. My intention was to go back and reshoot those few shots as soon as I had rewritten the scene and found an actor. Saturday we filmed the opening train sequence. Sunday we wrapped Caleb, while dodging snowflakes. I mentioned earlier how this caused frustration in Post Production, marrying an outdoor scene shot over two days a month apart is not worth the headache. Reshooting the scene would have been a better call in the long run.

At the end of the Fall Quarter, we had left to shoot, the two telephone calls, Will wandering the streets, and all of the flashback scenes with Harper. During the Fall break, we wrapped the exterior shots. Tom, Matt, and Myself went out with just a camera and our car headlights and shot those scenes. The first weekend of the Winter Quarter we shot all of the flashback scenes at my house. This ended up being a rather great shoot. It was the largest crew that we had the entire time that we shot and it went the smoothest out of any. By the time we had shot this we were such a well oiled machine that we flew through the scenes that we needed to get. All and all it was a great way to wrap production on *North Star*.

A few things to note about production: While filming, I decided to cut a few scenes, namely when Caleb gets into an argument with a man in a car. Will “rescues” him
from this, and I felt like it did not work for the character. He needed to change at the end.

I also scrapped the Priest. I filmed interiors in the church, but had no actor to play the Priest. I also was never happy with that scene and could not figure out how to make it work. If there is one thing I could do over on the film, it would be to include the Priest in the final film. It was a mistake to scrap the scene. I think going back to the drawing board on that entire sequence or using the shots that we had and adding the disembodied voice of a priest would have been the right thing to do. That part of the film is in my opinion the weakest.

One last thing on production over the course of the shoot, we had maybe 2 full days of shooting. The rest of the days were half days at best, usually I had about 3 hours to get as much as I could those days. I rehearsed with my cast before shooting and usually did 2-3 takes maximum. I think this comes through with the performances. They feel fresh and spontaneous. I think there is a tendency to overshoot your actors. As a former actor myself, I was very aware of how my cast was doing and tried to be as efficient as possible. Actors want to have fun and want to play, as soon as it becomes work their performance begins to suffer. Having worked on many other films while at RIT, over-shooting actors is a problem that gets short shrift in classes designed to teach directing.

Post-Production.

During the Production period I cut some scenes together, just to make sure they worked, namely the playground scene and a few of the “Will wandering” scenes. For the most part, however, I waited until after we had wrapped production to start the editing phase. Editing my own work has always been a love/hate relationship for me. There are times when I enjoy it immensely, and there are times when I get bored. I have found that
I enjoy the discovery process of editing. I enjoy creating a story through edits. I do not like storyboarding my shots, filming my storyboards, and then editing. It leaves me feeling cold. We had storyboarded every scene of *North Star*. However, we shot so much on locations that we did not see until the day of shooting that often times I could not edit to the storyboard. Which gave me the freedom to experiment with the way the scenes were cut together.

My goals for Post Production were pretty simple. I wanted to have a fine cut of the film, with a scratch soundtrack, ready in time for Winter Screenings. As a Graduate student, I was not required to screen a rough cut of my film, but I felt showing it to a large audience would be beneficial. I’ve always found screenings to help shape the previous films I have made. One thing that I wish happened more often at RIT was regular screenings of rough cuts of films beyond the class that they were being filmed for. While you do not want too many cooks, it would be nice to get some fresh eyes on things. I also hoped to have picture lock on the film by the second week of the Spring Quarter. Leaving eight weeks for the Sound and Color to get done.

Editing went rather smoothly for me. Tom and I had storyboarded the scenes rather thoroughly as I previously stated, so we did not have any shots that needed to be redone. Everything was there. It was just a matter of sorting through it all.

I started by watching, rating, and labeling all the clips that we had. I did this over several days, so as not to fatigue myself and lose track of what was good and what was bad. Even so, there were certainly takes that I thought were rubbish, but ended up being used in the final film. Once all the clips were labeled, I dove right in. I assembled the film in order. I felt that to achieve the right pacing that was important.
I noticed a couple things right off the bat. The scenes that we shot early were rather slow. By slow, I mean, the pacing of the action in the scenes were slow, the camera angles felt rather static, the takes were long with no way to cut them unobtrusively. As we went on in the filming, this changed, the action of the scenes were faster, more camera angles, easier ways to cut things together. I take responsibility for that pacing issue. I think that there is a fear of stillness in me. As I was watching the dailies after we shot, that fear of stillness subconsciously came out in my later direction. In the final film, I think these apparent differences are still noticeable; I did try my hardest to make the differences as negligible as possible.

Beyond the difference in pacing, I did fool around with the structure of the flashbacks within the film. In the script the flashbacks happen in short succession of each other. While editing the sequence together I played around with moving them to different parts. There are two and they happen pretty close together. I tried to move them around, but could find no good place to move them to. So they stayed where I originally put them. I cut several scenes of Will wandering around the city at night, they really just dragged the film down and were not needed for his character. If anything they made him less likeable, and I was struggling to make him as likeable as possible.

**Winter Screening.**

As previously stated I was not required to screen a rough cut in the winter. I felt like it was an opportunity to get a wide variety of input. One of the shortcomings of the Thesis year for me was the lack of input from my fellow classmates. After spending two previous years creating films with the other students in my Graduate class and giving and receiving feedback freely, I felt a loss not having the same experience on my
capstone film.

I felt that the experience of screening in the Winter was well worth it. I screened on the first day of screenings in the afternoon. It was well attended and I got some good feedback.

I had a cut of the film that was roughly 20 minutes, not including credits. I had a scratch soundtrack (Neil Young’s soundtrack to *Dead Man*) and had roughly mixed the dialogue. The overall reception was mixed to positive. There was no one disparaging the film, but no one was hailing it as the next *Citizen Kane*. Most of the comments were in regards to pacing. They felt the film was too slow. Others hated my scratch soundtrack, which had no chance of making it into the final film. I had several suggestions to cut the scene with Ted outside of the church, saying that it gave the entire plot of the film away.

After the screening I felt like the film was in a pretty good place. I was well aware of the pacing issues. I knew that the film moved too slowly and that I needed the film to get to Caleb quicker. The Neil Young soundtrack was more for me, than anything else. I felt that it worked with the mood that I was going towards with the film. But, again, as a copy written piece of music I had no intention of it making its way into the final film.

The scene with Ted, has always been a sore subject with audiences that have a knowledge of film. They see it as giving too much away. Ted mentions his son, and anyone who has watched anything ever, rightly jumps to the conclusion that Will is running away from a child that he does not want. Writing the script I paid special attention to this scene. I knew that in many ways it was a make or break scene. Will needs to confess, or at least let the audience in on his fears. Without doing that, there is no reason to continue to watch.
That scene also harkens back to the Westerns of old. Within the genre there is always a scene between the reluctant hero and a wiser/smarter/older sage like character. These sage characters serve as the proverbial kick in the ass the hero often needs. Viewing *North Star* as a modern Western, this sort of scene needs to be in the film. I strongly defend the Ted scene as important to the film; I believe the film would fall apart without it. I also think that some of the strongest performances are in that scene. Matt and Mark had a good chemistry together. It also happens to be the only sequence of any length where Matt could stretch his acting “chops”.

**Post-Production Part II.**

I took a break of two weeks after screening the rough cut of the film. I needed some time away from it, so that I could come back to it with fresh eyes. When I came back I focused my attention of tightening up every scene trying to increase the pace as much as possible. I also re-edited two scenes completely.

The first being the Will-Caleb scene in front of the reservoir. Caleb’s performance in that scene was very hit or miss. I was able to edit the scene to his performance, cutting out moments where he flubs a line, breaks character in the middle of a take, typical inexperienced actor stuff. The re-edited scene works much better, it is faster, flows better, and Caleb’s performance as a result is very nice.

I also re-edited the Will-Caleb scene on the park bench. There was no performance problems in that scene. In fact I had so much good tape to work with, that I was able to rework the scene to make Will’s emotional change a little more subtle and more natural. Of the scenes between Will and Caleb, this comes the closest to what I had imagined their relationship to be when I wrote the script. By the time we shot this
scene, Matt and Richard had worked together and developed a relationship that shines through in the final performance.

There were other small changes to the film at this time. A few frames here or there in shots. Nothing that changed the structure of the film away from what I had screened two weeks earlier.

Before I had screened the rough cut of the film I put out an ad on Craigslist for a composer. I knew that I wanted original music and was looking forward to working with someone on that. Unfortunately the only responses I got were from “composers” based in L.A. or New York. They all had slick websites and badly composed music samples. It was pretty clear that I was not going to find someone that way.

I was perusing the Eastman School of Music website and I noticed that they had a “gig service”, where the public can place an ad for music services from Eastman students. I posted an ad and immediately got a reply from Audrey Q. Snyder. She was a cello player and had written some original music and she was interested in doing some film work. I listened to the samples of music that she had sent me and liked the variety that I had heard. Most of the songs were just her playing cello solo, but the depth of the instrument really struck me as interesting. It also was not something I would even had thought about musically. I had guitar or piano in my head. We exchanged emails, I sent her a rough cut of the film with the scratch soundtrack in it, she liked the story and the possibilities that it had musically. We met face to face and I pretty much gave her carte blanche, and sent her emails from time to time just to make sure she was on the same timetable as me.
Besides finding a composer, the only things left to do for the film were color correction and sound mixing. I’ll start with sound first. Chris Viall, who was on 95% of my shoots agreed to mix the sound for the final film. Chris and I had a good working relationship and as he was a third year student he had much more time to spend to make the mix perfect. There were just a few moments in the film that were troublesome. The first being the scenes between Caleb and Will at the park. All of those scenes were shot with lavalier microphones. As a result, there were clothing scratching issues on the sound recording. Chris was able to “EQ” those problems out, or else cull from other takes to make those scenes work.

The real problem scene is the scene between Will and Caleb sitting on the park bench. We were shooting in the middle of a city neighborhood and had many noise problems because of that. The big one, being someone mowing their lawn through most of the takes. That was a problem we could not fix, without ADRing that scene. Unfortunately, Matt Nersinger was on tour, out of state at the time so we had to live with what we had.

Chris also added environmental sounds to the scenes creating a sense of place that was missing from the unmixed film. This new sound design which when put together with the music composed by Audrey, really helped to put the finishing touches on the world that I had created. Overall I could not be happier with Chris’s work on the film. Having a core group (myself, Chris, and Tom) work on the film from beginning to end was the highlight of this project for me. Coming from a theatre background, this has been the closest work to date that has felt and been 100% collaborative. I think the final film shows the tight knit-ness and is better because of it.
If I have one problem with the film it would be the coloring. Going into the color correction sessions, Tom and I discussed what we wanted to see. We were interested in seeing a muted color palate, to reflect the late autumn setting we ended up filming. We also were keen to see the flashback scenes colored differently. We wanted a visual cue to the audience that these events were happening previous to the events of the movie. We though either brighter more saturated colors, or black and white would work well.

Zack Wilpon, agreed to do the color for the film. He was another 3rd year Post-Production Craft-Tracker. (I gravitated towards 3rd year students because they were for the most part not screening anything and would have more time to work on my project.) Zack had taken the color-correction course, but had not colored a film. I think that is pretty obvious in the final film. We spent a lot of hours in front of the computer monitors in the editing lab getting scenes right, exporting the file, then viewing the film on a different screen, and seeing a completely different colored film. I do not want to throw Zack under the bus. I liked what I saw after our final color pass on the film, he did everything that Tom and I asked him to do. I will say, that if I could do it over it again, I would get to color sooner, do more passes, and make sure that the monitors that we color correct on were properly calibrated. We were correcting the film in the HD Lab, the problem that this caused was that every monitor, by that time in the year has a different calibration. Our first pass looked great until we looked at it on another monitor. The same with the second and the final pass. In some ways I was seeing the final pass of color when we screened. For something that is becoming increasingly important to filmmaking not having the right technology to do color correction on was a very trying experience.

One final note on Post-Production, I was picture-locked, by week 3 of the Spring
Quarter, and had a completed soundtrack by week 5. I did all this with the hope that I
would not be exporting a file at 3am the day before screening sign-ups. I still was in the
editing lab at 3am that day exporting. Best intentions.

**Final Screening.**

I screened the first night of Graduate Screenings Spring Quarter 2013. I was
excited to screen the film again for a wide audience. I was interested to see what
feedback I would get, for what turned out to be a very similar film to the winter version.

The film was better received the 2\textsuperscript{nd} time around. I’m not sure how much of it was
due to the fact that there was not much that anyone could say to change the film from it’s
current form or if the audience liked it better on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} viewing.

On the negative side of things, I again got complaints about the scene between
Ted and Will. I already addressed my thoughts on that scene earlier in this paper. Again I
will say that I felt that the scene was important to keep in, especially when the film is
screened to a wider audience. Not all audiences will be “Film School People”. The other
negative comment I got was on the coloring of the film. Again, this is something that I
agree with. I stated that I would love to have another pass at the color.

I received mixed views on the music. I personally love what Audrey did, it is
something that I would never have thought or asked for, but to me it fit the film perfectly.
I had comments in favor of the music and other against it.

An older lady asked if Harper was pregnant by Will, and that is why he was
running away. I told her that was the case and she said that was very subtle. That was a
nice comment to get from someone who was neither a student nor faculty member. It
gave me an idea of how the film would play to a general audience.
There were two comments that I found to be the most interesting. The first was from a student, who said that he had seen the rough cut of the film in the winter, and liked the film better on the 2nd viewing. He said he really enjoyed the film. The other comment came from the Emcee, who suggested that more graduate students screen a rough cut as I did. He said my final version was shorter, more interesting, and a better film because of that. I kindly told him I changed very little in the film and that the final version was actually longer than the rough cut.

Most of these comments lead me to believe that the film works as I cut it. I strongly believe that each scene that is in the film is important to the story that I tell. I think it is very easy to make a film that plays well at RIT screenings, but nowhere else. Within the film industry, and film schools for that matter, there is a push to be the “shiniest, newest, cleverest” thing. This seems to come at the expense of story. Do I think that my film is perfect? Absolutely not. But I think that the story works well. And at the end of the day what are we, if not storytellers? We just happen to use film as the medium to tell a story. Telling a good story is a hard thing, it takes work to craft something that someone else wants to hear or watch. But it is the foundation of what I am as a filmmaker. I cannot tell the future, so I have no idea where I will be in six months or six years from now. Hopefully I will be working in the industry. But if not, I know that I will be telling stories.
Addendum

It has been nearly two years since I last was at RIT. As I reread this paper with fresh eyes, there are things that I feel like should be added to. Also I was informed that while this paper contained everything it needed, it did not meet the page count. Short succinct prose apparently is only good for screenwriting not thesis writing. So consider this the “anniversary edition” of my thesis paper, now with expanded text.

As I look back on North Star, I realize that it was the film I needed to make at the time. There were things that I was struggling with that this film helped me rationalize or put into perspective. But I feel like it in no way moved me towards forming my own style. Is that not the goal of Film School? To have the time to discover your style and play with the medium? I think if anything my 2nd year film, Endless Winter has been the closest to what I would consider my own style. North Star is too polished. It lacks the character and rawness that I admire in film. Especially the films of mine that I am most proud of and feel like are the most creative.

Earlier in this paper I claim that as a young filmmaker I was influenced heavily by the Nouvelle Vague filmmakers. I still agree with that statement, but what I think in truth I am influenced by is the immediacy of it all. The Documentary style camera work of Raoul Coutard’s early work with both Truffaut and Goddard leaves everything on the screen, warts and all. While dolly shots and steadicam work creates an automatic rise in production value, does it add to the story? Is it necessary? Or in the long run is it just there for it’s own sake? Do we do these shots because they “look cool” or does it further the story? These are questions I have been asking myself for a long time.
While I have mixed feelings about my time at RIT, I think this past statement is the overwhelming problem that I have. As I have said I am a storyteller first and foremost and I do not believe this is as highly valued at RIT as it should be. This is a school that is putting out into the world some very high level technicians. The work that the Undergraduate Craft Track students are creating is astounding. The production level is unparalleled. But is it creating filmmakers and artists? I doubt it. I’m sure the argument is made that as a “Technical Institution” it does not need to educate artists. Which is a fine, if not underwhelming answer. Granted, my years at RIT, 2010-2013 was a strange time to be there. The old guard, many of whom I would consider the typical Film Professor, were close to retirement or maybe would have retired earlier had the economic collapse of 2008 not happened. SOFA was buffing up it’s faculty with younger blood, many of whom came from the professional sector, not from academia. I think that change was certainly apparent. Instead of classes that were challenging us with esoteric film theory we had classes in which for two hours we watched Kwik Fill commercials. Which is fine and good if you consider yourself an Editor or a Director of Photography. But where does that leave the storytelling filmmaker?

Since I finished my classes at RIT I have worked in a variety of jobs, some within the industry and most outside. I did spend over a year and a half as a Production Assistant at WXXI, the PBS affiliate in Rochester. Which truth be told was as good of an education in technical skills as I got at RIT. Working at WXXI also made me realize that I am far more of a documentarian than anything else. I like storytelling and I like discovery. Fiction filmmaking is an adventure in precision. I
am not precise. I am much more interested in the journey than the destination, which is what documentary work offers me.

I do not want this to come off as me disparaging RIT for my own shortcomings. Truth of the matter is RIT was not the school for me to go to. At least, not when I did. Perhaps if I was a class ahead or a class behind I may have had different feelings on the matter. I strive on collaboration and being in a class with only four live action majors does not allow for that. C’est la vie.

In conclusion, I made a film, which two years on, I am not happy with. Which is a shame. No one is to blame beyond myself. It is a frustrating experience, especially when you have to write about it. There is no way to escape the overwhelming feeling that you failed. I came back to school with hope and full of creative passion. I was excited to work in film. I felt like I was finally finding my foothold. Finally working in a creative space that I was meant to be in. I was also excited for the possibility of teaching in the future. I love academia. Hell, I have been acting like a professor for so long that I was starting to believe that I could actually be one. But it was not meant to be. When I left RIT, I was creatively bankrupt and so suspect of a system of education that I just came from, that the idea of being a part of it is beyond horrifying. In many ways I am and will always be Will, on the run, trying my best to get away. From what, I am unsure.
Stills:

Title screen.

Will riding on the train.
Will in the park at night.

Harper in Will’s dreams.
Caleb and Will’s first meeting.

Ted and Will.
Will leaving Ted’s hospitality.

Will calls home the first time.
Finding the North Star.

Rise and shine.
Sharing of a sandwich.

Bad guys in town.
Confrontation.

Nick of time.
Aftermath of a playground battle.

The parting of ways.
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the MFA degree in film and animation from the Rochester Institute of Technology.

Big reveal.
STUDENT PRODUCED AT R.I.T. SCHOOL OF FILM AND ANIMATION 2013

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Appendix A:

Thesis Proposal:

Synopsis:
Will Chambers is running from his past. He's been traveling from town to town, hitching a ride on trains. One night he gets off in an unknown town. Through a series of random events he forms a friendship with Caleb, a 10 year old boy, who is just as lost as Will. From these adventures Will is able to face his past and return to the woman he loves.

Rationale:
I have several reasons for pursuing this project as my thesis. First, I have used my previous two projects to explore different filmmaking styles, experimental and documentary, respectively. My background has strong roots in Narrative/Dramatic Theatre and Filmmaking. It is time I go back to those roots and take what I have learned from my previous two projects and make a better film. One that incorporates the process of creation that I explored in my One Quarter film; and has the length and scope of my Two Quarter film.

Second, I want to explore, in a small way the problems of my generation. Like those generations before, we are stuck in a state of ennui. We were raised in protective environments to believe that we could do whatever we wanted. That dream for many of us is false. We are an overeducated bunch, with little prospects. Where do we go from here? How do we deal with being 30 year old children? This film is in many ways, my personal response to that.

I also want to focus more on directing, performance, and creating a unique visual style. I have long admired the great “auteurs” of the past. I would like this film to emulate the style and feel of a John Ford Western, meeting a 1970's New Hollywood Urban Drama. My 1 Quarter and 2 Quarter films were essentially solo projects. I want to explore the collaborative nature of this art, and this film is my way of doing it.

Treatment:

WILL CHAMBERS sits in a boxcar. He is 28. He leans on a backpack. In his hand is a tattered leather bound journal. He flips through pages of writing and doodles. He stops and looks at a photograph of a woman. Through the door the countryside goes by.

Trains pull in and exit the train yard in the distance. Will walks towards a barbed wire fence. Suddenly, he is hit from behind. Will falls to the ground. Two masked HOODLUMS, kick him. Tear off his backpack. Steal his wallet.
We flashback and watch as Will sits at a table. Reading a copy of "Tropic of Cancer". He is clean shaven. He watches as HARPER, his girlfriend, putters around the kitchen. She pours her coffee. He stares at her ass. She catches him in the act and saunters over. They kiss with a passionate familiarity.

We return to the train yard. Will stirs. He gets to his feet gingerly. He touches his head and winces. He stumbles through the hole.

Will's backpack is on the sidewalk. It has been rifled through. He takes his littered possessions and stuffs them into his backpack.

There is a Classical looking building on top of a hill. Will gets to the building and sits down on a stone bench in front of it, staring off at the city below. He curls up on the bench, and closes his eyes.

Will dreams of Harper. She sleeps in bed. A white sheet is pulled up around her. She looks beautifully at ease. Will slips in to bed besides her and kisses her on her naked shoulder. Harper stirs and looks at him. The sunlight from the window gets in his eyes.

A silver cap gun is cocked by a small hand. Will wakes up and stares into the sunlight and down the barrel of a cap gun. CALEB, a boy of 10 years old, is dressed like a cowboy. Hat and all. Caleb says “Reach for the skies!”

Will sits up and pushes the gun away. He tells Caleb to beat it and grabs his backpack and starts walking down the hill towards the city.

Will sees a line of homeless people waiting to get into the church. He gets in line. After a few moments hesitation he taps the OLD MAN in front of him on the shoulder. “Do they feed you in here?” Will asks. The Old Man says “yes”. The line begins to move inside of the church.

Will, the Old Man, and the rest of the homeless people enter the church. Will sits in the back. Slowly takes his hat off and is visibly uncomfortable. Will pulls a book out of his bag and begins to read.

Will sits outside on a bench. A paper plate full of food on his lap. In the background we hear people talking within the church.

TED WINTERS comes out of the Church and pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights one. Will continues to read. Ted sits down next to Will on the bench. Ted begins a conversation with Will. He asks where he's coming from, and why he's traveling around. Ted confesses that he too, once traveled around. Will asks why he stopped. Ted tells him that having a child did.

That cuts Will to the bone. He puts his book in his bag and an apple in his pocket. He gets up to leave. Ted offers Will help. Will walks away without looking back.
Will flashes back again. He throws things into his backpack hastily. Harper is behind him in the doorway. Her eyes are red. She has been crying. She asks “Where are you going?” Will ignores her. He continues to pack. She asks again. Will finishes packing. Grabs his things and tries to walk out of the door. Harper stands in his way. She touches his face and kisses him. Will walks out the door.

Will walks through a Gas Station. He spies a pay phone next to a stack of Coca-Cola. He picks up the phone and dials "0". We hear the Operator say “If you would like to place a collect call please press '1'”. He hangs up the phone.

Will is back at the park. He plops down in the grass and stares at the stars. He follows the constellations with his fingers.

The next morning, Will is still in the grass. Caleb walks up to him. Caleb kicks him in the side. Will does not move. Caleb cocks his gun and kicks harder. Will is dead to the world. Caleb looks at his gun. Points it to the sky. Fires 6 caps. Will wakes with a start. He yells at Caleb and grabs his backpack and walks away.

There is a giant reservoir with people jogging around. Will stops in front of a drinking fountain. Caleb is not far behind. Will splashes water on his face, sits down and wipes his face with his shirt. Caleb sits down next to him and plays with his shoes.

Will tries to get Caleb to leave him alone. Caleb is nonplussed. He tells Will how he has been run out of town by “bad guys” and needs Will’s help.

Will tells Caleb that he is not helping and gets up and starts walking away. Caleb waits a few seconds and then follows. Will turns and finds Caleb. Will says “I told you not to follow me.” Caleb marches up to Will and tells him that the bad guys are that way and he’s going that way too.

Will and Caleb walk down the street near the park. Caleb is far in front, Will walks behind. Caleb takes aim at things with his gun. A car drives by and stops at the light. Caleb walks down the sidewalk until he is next to the car. He pulls out his gun and points it at the DRIVER.

The Driver ignores Caleb. Caleb gets his face right in the passenger window of the car and aims the gun at the Driver. Caleb threatens to write the Driver a ticket. The Driver puts his car in park and gets out to confront Will and Caleb. Will picks up Caleb and starts running away. Caleb struggles and continues to yell at the Driver.

Will puts Caleb on the sidewalk. He is out of breath. Caleb adjusts his cowboy hat. He tells Will that he is the Sheriff in these parts and they won’t be running away from any Bad Guys. Caleb turns and walks away. Will shakes his head, smiles, and follows the boy.
Caleb is moving slowly. Lagging behind. Will sits on a bench and waits for Caleb to catch up. He pulls two apples from his backpack. Bites into one and hands the other to Caleb. They eat silently for a moment. A Yellow School bus passes them on the street. Caleb says that they are getting close to town.

Will leads Caleb into the Schoolyard. It is empty except for 3 KIDS playing on the playground. When the Kids see Caleb they stop playing and walk over to him. There is a BIG KID flanked by two SKINNIER KIDS.

The Big Kid starts bullying Caleb. He tells Caleb that he can’t play there anymore. Will walks slowly up to the Kids and asks them to give Caleb a break. The Big Kid tells Will to “Shut up”.

Will squints his eyes in the sun, and spits. He turns to leave. Caleb stands his ground. The three Kids start pushing and taunting Caleb. Will gets to the end of the playground, turns and sees Caleb getting pushed to the ground. The Kids start kicking him.

Will runs back towards Caleb. He pulls the Big Kid off of Caleb. He kneels down and helps Caleb to his feet. He stares at the Big Kids. A fire burns in his eyes. The Big Kids run off.

Caleb yells after the Big Kids and tells him that the playground is his again. That anyone can play on it. And if they cause any more trouble he’ll get his Deputy to shoot them. He giggles, like he just got away with saying a bad word. He looks up at Will and tips his hat back.

Will and Caleb walk down a street. They turn up a walkway leading to a quaint house. CALEB’S MOTHER, runs out of the house. She looks frantic as she runs down the steps. She is relieved to see Caleb, but is not so excited to see Will. She threatens to call the police on Will. Caleb, stands up for his new friend. Will escapes unscathed.

A payphone is in the center of the screen. Cars pass on the street behind. Will walks over to the phone, puts some change in and dials.

A phone is ringing in a cluttered house. Random items litter the dining room table. Flowers past their prime wilt in vases. The phone continues to ring. We hear urgent footsteps and Harper comes into the frame and answers the phone. She is very pregnant. We don't hear what Will says. She smiles, tears filing her eyes. She says “I'll come get you.”
### Budgets:

#### PETER CAYER THESIS PROPOSAL - FILM BUDGET - 15 min. [10:1 Shooting Ratio]

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#### POST PRODUCTION

| Non-Linear Editing Suite | 15 Weeks | $495.00 /week | RIT IN-KIND | $7,425.00 |
| Film Processing and HD Transfer | 5200 feet | $0.28 /foot | $1,456.00 | $1,456.00 |
| 2 TB External Hard Drive | 1 drive | $150.00 each | $150.00 | $150.00 |
| Composer | 1 | $500.00 | $500.00 | $500.00 |
| Post Production Sound Suite | 15 Weeks | $495.00 /week | RIT IN-KIND | $7,425.00 |

#### OTHER

| MILEAGE | 500 miles | $0.75 /mile | $375.00 | $375.00 |
| MEALS | 15 meals | $50.00 /meal | $750.00 | $750.00 |
| PROPS | misc. | | $100.00 | $100.00 |
| COPIES | 300 copies | $0.10 /copy | $30.00 | $30.00 |
| POSTAGE | misc. | | $100.00 | $100.00 |

**SUB-TOTALS:** $5,291.29 $35,946.29

MISC. 10% $329.12 $3,594.62

Grand Total $5,820.41 $39,540.91

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#### PETER CAYER THESIS PROPOSAL - DIGITAL BUDGET - 15 min.

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#### POST PRODUCTION

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| 2 TB External Hard Drive | 1 drive | $150.00 each | $150.00 | $150.00 |
| Composer | 1 | $500.00 | $500.00 | $500.00 |
| Post Production Sound Suite | 15 weeks | $495.00 /week | RIT IN-KIND | $7,425.00 |

#### OTHER

| MILEAGE | 500 miles | $0.75 /mile | $375.00 | $375.00 |
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**SUBTOTALES:** $2,505.00 $36,350.00

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</table>
INT. TRAIN CAR - DUSK

WILL CHAMBERS sits in a boxcar. He is 28. He has a beard, wool cap, and layers of warm dirty clothes. He leans on a backpack. In his hand is a tattered leatherbound journal. He flips through pages of writing and doodles. He stops and looks at a photograph of a woman. Through the door the countryside goes by.

EXT. TRAIN YARD - NIGHT

Trains pull in and exit the train yard in the distance. Will jumps down an embankment and walks away from the trains. He crosses an empty parking lot. Gets to the exit. Looks to the right. Looks to the left. He walks forward, out of frame.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Will sits at a table. Reading a copy of "Tropic of Cancer". He is clean shaven. He watches as HARPER, his girlfriend, putters around the kitchen. She pours her coffee. He stares at her ass. She catches him in the act and saunters over.

HARPER

Like what you see?

She bends down towards him. They kiss with a passionate familiarity.

EXT. OUTSIDE OF A BODEGA - NIGHT

Will stares into the window of the bodega. He pulls some change from his pockets. Counts it. Opens the door and goes inside.

EXT. CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A large can of beer sticks out of a paper bag that is in Will’s hand. He stops. Drains the rest of the can of beer and throws it in a trash can. He continues to walk. Avoiding the people he passes.
EXT. PARK - NIGHT

There is a Classical looking building on top of a hill. Will gets to the building and sits down on a stone bench in front of it, staring off at the city below. He curls up on the bench, and closes his eyes.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Harper sleeps in bed. A white sheet is pulled up around her. She looks beautifully at ease. Sunlight falls on her face. Will slips in to bed besides her and kisses her on her naked shoulder. Harper stirs and looks at him. He stares deeply into her eyes. She smiles and stares back. She gets on top of him. The sunlight from the window gets in his eyes.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A silver cap gun is cocked by a small hand. Will wakes up and stares into the sunlight and down the barrel of a cap gun. CALEB, a boy of 8 years, is dressed like a cowboy. Hat and all.

CALEB
Reach for the skies!

Will sits up. Clears his throat and spits. Caleb still has his gun trained on Will. Will pushes the gun away.

WILL
Beat it.

CALEB
I’m the Sheriff around here and I don’t take kindly to drunks messing up my town.

Will stares at Caleb grabs his backpack and starts walking down the hill towards the city.

EXT. - OUTSIDE OF A CHURCH - DAY

Will sees a line of homeless people waiting to get into the church. He gets in line. After a few moments hesitation he taps the OLD MAN in front of him on the shoulder.

WILL
Do they feed you in here?

(CONTINUED)
The Old Man pulls a small bottle of brandy out of his dingy coat and hands it to Will.

Will unscrews the cap. Looks around cautiously. Takes a swig. He hands the bottle back to the Old Man.

The line begins to move inside of the church.

INT. CHURCH - DAY

Will, the Old Man, and the rest of the homeless people enter the church. Light filters through the stained glass. Providing a heavenly glow to the lowest members of society.

Will sits in the back. Slowly takes his hat off and is visibly uncomfortable.

FATHER O'BRIEN walks up to the pulpit. He is a large man with a seriously pious look about him. He begins to preach to the people.

FATHER O'BRIEN

There was a man. He lived a long time ago. And he was faced with a choice. He had two paths set out in front of him. One was easy. One was tough. . .

Will pulls a book out of his bag and begins to read.

EXT. CHURCH COURTYARD - DAY

Will sits outside on a bench. A paper plate full of food on his lap. In the background we hear people talking within the church. Will silently reads his book and eats.

TED WINTERS comes out of the Church and stands off to the side. He pulls out a pack of cigarettes and lights one.

He takes a drag. Turns and is startled to see Will.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED:  Revision 5

TED
Jesus! Didn’t see you there.
Sorry.
* Ted gestures with his cigarette.

TED (CONT’D)
Don’t tell my kid about this, okay?
He thinks I quit months ago... First time here?
* Will continues to read.

TED (CONT’D)
Looks like you’ve seen better days.

WILL
Yeah. Fell off my horse.

TED
(chuckles)
Oh yeah. Where was that?
* Will gestures off screen.

TED (CONT’D)
Where you coming from?

WILL
Back East.

TED
What were you doing there?

WILL
You know, this and that. Worked on
a farm before coming here.

Ted laughs out loud. Will stares at him.

WILL (CONT’D)
What’s funny about that?

TED
Sorry kid. Just I’m pretty sure
I’ve had this conversation before.
Cept, I was sitting where you’re
sitting.

WILL
Yeah. How long were you out for?

(CONTINUED)
Couple years, give or take. I had it in my head that I was gonna be this Wandering Mad Man. Like one part Neal Cassady, one part Gandalf. You should’ve seen my beard.

Will for the first time, laughs.

WILL
I would have liked to have seen that. Why’d you quit?

TED
Lot’s a reasons.

Ted stares off into space. Finishes his cigarette.

TED (CONT’D)
Just one, really. My son. . . you know, I was wandering around looking for stuff. For meaning. I couldn’t find it. It wasn’t till I could put meaning in something besides myself, that I found it.

WILL
I’m not looking for meaning, Man. Just trying to clear my head.

TED
Don’t take this the wrong way, Kid. But that’s exactly what you’re looking for. And you ain’t gonna find out there.

Ted gestures back to the church.

TED (CONT’D)
You ain’t gonna find it in there, either. That’s a crock of shit. You find it in you.

That cuts Will right to the bone.

WILL
Yeah. . . well. Thanks for the food.

Will puts his book in his bag and an apple in his pocket. He gets up to leave.

(CONTINUED)
TED
You can stay here. I can help you.

Will walks away without looking back.

WILL
You just said you couldn’t.

INT. - BEDROOM - DAY

Will throws things into his backpack hastily. Harper is behind him in the doorway. Her eyes are red. She has been crying.

HARPER
Where are you going?

Will ignores her. He continues to pack.

HARPER (CONT’D)
I know that we said we weren’t gonna do this. But it’s been five years. We can talk this out.

Will finishes packing. Grabs his things and tries to walk out of the door. Harper stands in his way. She touches his face and kisses him.

HARPER (CONT’D)
I love you. Please don’t leave.

Will walks out the door.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

Will walks through a Gas Station. He spies a pay phone next to a stack of Coca-Cola. He picks up the phone and puts a quarter in.

He begins to dial. He stops and stares at the dialpad. Will hangs up the phone and grabs his quarter.

EXT. PARK - NIGHT

Will is back at the park. He plops down in the grass and stares at the stars. He follows the constellations with his fingers. He points at the North Star.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: Revision 5

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WILL
I thought you were supposed to get
me home.

EXT. PARK - DAY
Will is still in the grass. He looks a mess. Caleb walks up
to him. Pulls his cap gun from its holster and trains it on
Will’s face. Caleb kicks him in the side.

CALEB
Get up!
Will does not move. Caleb cocks his gun and kicks harder.

CALEB
Get up! They’re almost on us.
Will is dead to the world. Caleb looks at his gun. Points it
to the sky. Fires 6 caps. Will wakes with a start.

WILL
What the Fuck! Seriously kid? Is it
Halloween or something?
Will rubs the sleep from his eyes and gathers his things.

CALEB
You were supposed to be on watch!
If I wasn’t running out of Deputies
I’d have you cleaning latrines.

WILL
What the hell are you talking
about?
Will grabs his backpack and walks away from Caleb.

EXT. PARK - DAY
Will walks to another part of the park. There is a giant
reservoir with people jogging around.

Will stops in front of a drinking fountain. Caleb is not far
behind. Will splashes water on his face.

CALEB
I did that at school once and the
teacher yelled at me. I told her my
face was hot. She didn’t care. She
said only animals do that. I said
(MORE)

(Continued)
CALEB (cont'd)

that humans are animals. She didn’t
like that. She called my mom.

Will sits down and wipes his face with his shirt. Caleb sits
down next to him and plays with his shoes.

WILL
Kid, leave me alone. Alright.

CALEB
Caleb. My name is Caleb. Not "Kid".

WILL
I don’t care. You’re lucky I don’t
throw you in the reservoir.

CALEB
I can swim.

WILL
You’re missing the point, kid. I’m
not your friend. Just go on back
home.

CALEB
That’s what I’ve been trying to
tell you! Some Bad Guys ran me out
of town.

WILL
Bad Guys? Like in a Clint Eastwood
movie?

CALEB
I don’t know. My mom won’t let me
watch those til I’m older.

WILL
Jesus. . . listen. I’m leaving. And
I’m going that way. (He points to
his left) I better not find you
following me again.

Will gets up and starts walking. Caleb waits a few seconds
and then follows. Will turns and finds Caleb.

WILL
I told you not to follow me.

Caleb marches up to Will.

(CONTINUED)
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CALEB
The Bad Guys are that way. And I’m going that way too.

18 EXT. CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Will and Caleb walk down the street near the park. Caleb is far in front, Will walks behind. The street is more commercial than residential.

Caleb takes aim at things with his gun. A car drives by and stops at the light. Caleb walks down the sidewalk until he is next to the car. He pulls out his gun and points it at the DRIVER.

CALEB
(to the Driver)
Slow down! You are going too fast.
Don’t make me shoot you.

The Driver ignores Caleb. Caleb gets his face right in the passenger window of the car and aims the gun at the Driver.

CALEB (CONT’D)
(to the Driver)
I’m gonna write you a ticket.

DRIVER
(yells out his window to Will)
Tell your kid to get that gun out of my face before I come out there and beat the shit out of him.

WILL
(to the Driver)
Go fuck yourself asshole! He’s not my kid.

The Driver puts his car in park and gets out to confront Will and Caleb. He is massive and looks "Roided" out.

WILL
(grabbing Caleb)
C’mon kid. Let’s get out of here.

Will picks up and Caleb and starts running away. Caleb struggles and continues to yell at the Driver.
EXT. CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Will puts Caleb on the sidewalk. He is out of breath. They are in a nicer residential part of the city. It is quiet on the street.

Will is bent over catching his breath. Caleb adjusts his cowboy hat.

CALEB
Now you listen. I’m the Sheriff in these parts, not you. We’re going after the Bad Guys. And that guy was a Bad Guy. So shut up and follow me.

Caleb turns and walks away. Will shakes his head, smiles, and follows the boy.

EXT. CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

Caleb moves slow. Lagging behind. Will sits on a bench and waits. Caleb sits on the bench. Opens his bookbag and pulls a sandwich out. He bites into one half and hands the other to Will. They eat silently for a moment.

CALEB
What’s your name?

WILL
It’s Will.

CALEB
Do you have a house?

WILL
What? No.

CALEB
How come?

WILL
I just don’t.

CALEB
So you just sleep in the park?
That’s cool.

WILL
Thanks, kid.

(CONTINUED)
CALEB

Maybe you should get a girlfriend.
Then you could have sleepovers.

WILL

And what do you know about
sleepovers?

CALEB

A lot. I have sleepovers at my
cousin’s house. We stay up late and
watch movies my mom won’t let me
watch. I just saw Die Hard. It was
pretty good. Yipee-Ki-aye.

Will cuts him off.

WILL

So who are these Outlaws that we’re
after?

CALEB

Bad guys.

WILL

What’s the difference?

CALEB

Outlaws break the law and bad guys
are stupid.

Caleb returns to his sandwich.

WILL

I’ve never fought bad guys before.
I guess I always just ran away.

Caleb looks at Will. His eyes are glossy.

CALEB

That’s not what heroes do. They
don’t run away. They save the day.

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EXT. SCHOOLYARD - DAY

Caleb leads Will across an abandoned ball field and into a
playground. It is empty except for 2 KIDS, a girl, AMY, lanky and blonde, and her younger brother, FRANK.

Amy sits on the jungle-gym, coolly reigning over it. Frank,
paces back and forth, a bundle of energy.

(CONTINUED)
Caleb, enters the playground. Will hangs back and walks back across the ball field, happy to be rid of the kid.

When the Kids see Caleb they stand up and walk over to him. Amy is out in front. Frank follows like a guard dog.

AMY
Caleb! What did I tell you? You can’t come here no more. This is my place.

FRANK
Yeah! This is our place. (he shoves Caleb back) Get out!

Caleb stands his ground. Amy gets angry.

AMY
Hey Caleb! Who was the ugly guy behind you? Your new dad?

CALEB
He’s my Deputy. And I’m taking back my town.

AMY
You’re not a Sheriff. This isn’t a town. And you don’t have a deputy.

Amy points off screen at Will walking away. Caleb looks and sees Will walking away. He turns back to Amy and Frank. He knows he is alone.

Amy motions to Frank. Frank takes Caleb’s cowboy hat and flings it. Caleb runs toward the fence that surrounds the playground.

CALEB
Hey! Will! Help me. You said you would help!

Will looks back at the playground, in time to see Amy and Frank drag Caleb away from the fence.

WILL
This goddamn kid’s never gonna leave me alone.

Will runs back towards the playground. As he enters Caleb is pinned to the ground. Frank is on top of him.

Will grabs Frank and lifts him off the ground, one armed. Frank struggles while Will speaks.

(CONTINUED)
CONTINUED: Revision 5

WILL
Hey! Stop it. How bout you cut Caleb a break.

AMY
How bout you shut up and leave my brother alone!

Amy charges over to Will, who still holds Frank in his arm. She kicks Will right in the shin and stomps on his foot.

Will drops Frank and hops up and down on one foot.

Amy grabs Frank’s hand. She turns and looks at Caleb and Will.

AMY
Why are you guys so mean?

Amy storms out of the playground, Frank follows close behind her.

CALEB
You alright?

WILL
I’m fine. ... What just happened?

Caleb shrugs his shoulders.

CALEB
I don’t know. Girls are weird.

Will laughs hard. Walks over and grabs Caleb’s hat from the ground. He puts it on Caleb’s head. Once more he is the Sheriff.

CALEB (CONT’D)
Thanks Deputy.

WILL
No problem kid.

EXT. - CITY STREET - DAY

It is getting dark. The streetlights are a-glow.

Will sits on a bench and reads. Caleb plays on the playground with some kids.

CALEB’S FATHER, comes into the playground and stops by the bench. He is a couple of years older than Will.

(CONTINUED)
Caleb! Time to go. The Streetlights are almost on.

Caleb runs over to his Father and Will.

CALEB
Sorry Dad. We were fighting Bad Guys.

FATHER
Who’s we?

CALEB
(He points at Will.)
Me and my Deputy.

Caleb’s Father looks at Will and sizes him up. Will sits there awkwardly, trying his best to hide his unkempt state.

Caleb’s Father, extends his hand to Will.

FATHER
Thanks for looking out for him.

Will shakes his hand.

WILL
Um...yeah. No problem.

Caleb runs over and hugs Will.

WILL (CONT’D)
See ya, Kid.

EXT. - PAYPHONE - NIGHT

A payphone is in the center of the screen. Cars pass on the street behind. Will walks over to the phone, puts some change in and dials.

INT. - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A phone is ringing in a cluttered house. Random items litter the dining room table. Flowers past their prime wilt in vases.

The phone continues to ring. We hear urgent footsteps. Harper comes into the frame and answers the phone. She is very pregnant. We don’t hear what Will says to her. She smiles, tears filing her eyes.

(CONTINUED)
HARPER
I’ll come get you.