

DreamPath Podcast
Transcript of Interview with Filmmaker A.J. Eaton
Host, Bryan G. Smith
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- A.J. : Cameron's like, "You know the more you show his dark side the more people will like him and more people will like the story." And he's right, and this is a collaboration of us working together and trying to understand this very very complex human. And Crosby is, yeah he can definitely be an asshole but he also has a lot of redeeming qualities too, and if we were to cut out all of the negative and just show all the redeeming then we weren't doing our jobs as filmmakers
- Bryan: Bryan Smith here, and welcome to the DreamPath Podcast, where I try to get inside the heads of talented creatives from all over the world. My goal is to demystify and humanize the creative process and make it accessible to everyone. Now let's jump in. .
- Bryan: A.J. Eaton is on the show today, I've been trying to connect with A.J. For a while. He's a film director and his latest project is David Crosby: Remember My Name, a documentary that does a deep dive into the life of folk and rock legend David Crosby. But this isn't your typical rock documentary. It's unique in the way that it portrays the subject of the film, Crosby, by showing all sides of him, warts and all. It's not a puff piece in any way. In fact, you come away from this movie knowing the full journey of a man who was loved by many, but who made some enemies along the way. If you listened to my interview with Greg Mariotti who produced this documentary, you heard how Greg was involved in the making of this movie after the project had already been underway. This film was the brainchild of A.J., who had started filming David Crosby years ago without the backing of a studio. It was a project that was fueled initially only by A.J.'s dream and vision. In this talk with A.J., you will hear how the concept of the film started. It all happened completely organically with no studio backing, and later blossomed into a film backed and produced by Cameron Crowe's production company, Vinyl Films, and that's how Greg Mariotti got involved, as he is Cameron's partner at Vinyl Films. .
- Bryan: I really connected with A.J., perhaps because he was brought up in rural Idaho, which is not too dissimilar from my upbringing and rural central Washington. Yet he didn't let his small-town roots prevent him from learning the craft of film making in his home state of Idaho, nor did he let this stop him from dreaming big and following those dreams all the way to Los Angeles, where he has been working in film and television for the last 20 years. We recorded this interview in the Los Angeles editing bay where he and his production team cut the Crosby documentary, and it really made for a great atmosphere for the interview. I'm so glad I made the trip down to see him, and I hope you enjoyed the interview as much as I did. So without further ado, please enjoy this wide ranging discussion with Los Angeles-based television and film director, A.J. Eaton.
- Bryan: A.J. Eaton, Thank you for being on the podcast, welcome.
- A.J. : Sure. Thanks.

Bryan: Yeah. So, let me give you my frame of reference here for how I came to know your work. I did not see the movie David Crosby: Remember My Name at Sundance, but I did see that it was there, but I did see it finally at the Seattle International Film Festival and became an immediate fan. So, well done on that film!

A.J. : Thanks, thank you.

Bryan: So how did you get involved with that project?

A.J. : Well, I met I met Crosby when he was 69 years old and he was in the midst of working on what was his first solo album in 20 years, an album that was called Croz. And I was introduced to him by my brother Marcus Eaton, who himself is a very talented guitarist/singer. And he and Crosby met and they, they hit it off really well, which turned into him going and working with Crosby on this album project.

A.J. : And so my brother was like, "You oughta come meet Cros." And I didn't really have much expectation from, you know, I didn't really didn't expect much when meeting with Crosby because I knew about his past struggles with addiction and I knew about his past, having a liver transplant because, you know, I grew up in the eighties and nineties. And so I knew about that, so I was like, well, this ought to be interesting. So I stopped by the studio and what I saw really defied my expectations, like surprised me. Like he was really energetic, and being funny and the music that they were making was really quite surprising and extraordinary. So I sat down and kind of visited with Crosby and I was like, "well, I really love the chord changes that you guys are doing there." And "he's like, you really like those, huh? Yeah." And I said, "you know it kind of reminds me of some jazz stuff that I've heard." And he's like, "Oh yeah, I'm a huge jazz fan." And, and so we hit it off. And from that point forward, I knew that I had kind of a dialogue with Crosby and we just became friends. And soon thereafter I realized that someone should shoot some footage of this, being a filmmaker. Uh, I just kind of presented that premise to, to Crosby. I said, you know, we should shoot some footage just for posterity. And he's like, "Okay, go ahead. I don't have any money, but go ahead." And, u, I, you know, brought my camera people and also operated a camera myself and just shot footage, which then we kind of started, we turned part of that footage into an EPK for that album. Which, you know what an EPK is?

Bryan: Electronic press kit?

A.J. : Yeah. I mean, that's what the nomenclature is for it, Like a short film about, you know, it's kind of a commercial for-

Bryan: Promotional stuff.

A.J. : Yeah. But really I was shooting more footage than needed. And I kind of had this sneaking suspicion that there could be a story there. And I kinda was right where it was like, you know, the minute you turn that camera on Crosby, he lights up. But he also is a really great storyteller.

Bryan: I like how modest you are. "I Kind of was right, what you created here."

A.J. : Thanks! So anyway, we shot footage and then finally I came to realize like he's ready to do this documentary or he's ready to take, I could probably ask him. So I did visit with him and said "we should do a documentary about you." And he was, he was agreeable to that, but also I knew that he was not he wasn't crazy about talking about the stuff that everyone wants to talk to him about, which is, "what was it like to be on drugs?" And Laurel Canyon and you know, "what was Woodstock like?" He was interested in talking about the new things, very excited talking about like his new album, writing new tunes, all the new musicians that he was talking about. He was kind of looking at a forward, forward looking type of premise.

A.J. : But I also had kind of a sneaking suspicion that once we started talking about that, There would be a connection to the past. And in fact, a couple of the interviews that I did with him early on for these album projects, you know, he was like, "well, you know, in the 70's when I was recording," tell me a little bit more about that. So and then, so, you know, I had kind of amassed this footage and there was times when he was doing something, he would be recording you know, he'd be recording in the studio or he'd be going out on tour. And it was like, I need to shoot that. And, but I couldn't, I have this joke, which is like, I couldn't afford not to shoot it, but I also couldn't afford to shoot it, you know. And so I was begging and borrowing money and getting on the edge where I like, I was late on my rent a couple of times and trying to put this all together.

Bryan: Yeah. So where does the expense come from when you say you're running out of money? What is the cost related to? Is it renting cameras? Is it paying crew? Is it actual film? I'm so ignorant about the process. UI don't really understand how it works, I guess.

A.J. : Well, sure. One is that, you know, at certain point you can't just be a guy with a camera. You know, you have to have an audio person, you need to have maybe another camera. You need to have all of the things that, be prepared. You know, when someone shows up to do a job, be it a plumber or a carpenter or whatever, they show up in a truck and you know, in that truck they have all the tools that they might to do the job. And we kind of feel the same way when you're making a movie. Be it a documentary or even a narrative, you know, you see the trucks lined up on the street, you know, you've got your lighting truck, your props truck, because every minute that you're there, shooting is, every minute that you don't shoot because you're waiting for some proper or the right light to come in or whatever, that's costing you money or you're missing out on a valuable shot. And so when Crosby's doing stuff, you know, when he's recording and you've made the decision, the commitment and the decision that you're going to shoot it, you better have every battery that you need. You better have every lens you need and you'd better have a plan. And, sometimes through the course of making this movie, I would say probably about a third of the movie that is cut is just me with a camera, which is kind of a technique that I developed where Crosby, you know, with a huge crew, behaviors change. When you have two cameras and a lighting person and a sound person or whatever. But then there's just, you know, then sometimes it's just me and that's where we got these really heartbreaking, valuable, beautiful shots. But to answer

your question, yeah, you have to pay, you need to pay a crew, you need to pay your camera person and you need to have the right lenses that you need.

Bryan: Right. And it sounds like you're also developing a strategy for whether to be a fly on the wall person when you're shooting, or to have the full crew because that's going to affect the shot, right? And the material that you're able to get?

A.J. : Exactly. And, and so you also kind of can start to see like, "all right, we're going to go shoot this event and is that appropriate to bring two cameras there or, or not?" And so part of your strategy in getting to know who your subject is is to kind of know, like you kind of can expect how they're going to react, or expect kind of an idea. So when he's in the studio for instance, which a lot of that stuff didn't make the cut of the movie, but when he's in the studio, m could know what to expect. And so when there was a big day in the recording studio, then I would be, I would be like, let's bring two cameras in there. But other times when he was in a smaller, cause you know, when you're recording an album you do like, sometimes you're in a big recording studio and other times you're in the smaller rooms. And so sometimes I would just, you know, be there with me and the camera just to grab a couple of shots. And that's when you got these moments of him sitting there strumming his guitar and working on his laptop.

Bryan: Yeah, some of the scenes that really jump out at me as I look back on the film, and I saw it with an audience at Seattle international film festival, was him I think sitting on a couch and just kind of maybe looking over to his right a little bit and so intimate, so vulnerable. I would imagine that that was a one camera moment, but I don't know.

A.J. : Yeah. That interview with him on the couch is... Cameron Crowe was there, that is a two camera shoot. We knew that that was going to be a pretty big day for us. We had done a series of interviews, I think that was like fourth or fifth. For a couple of years, I was shooting this footage of Crosby. Then it got to a point where I needed to, "okay, this is a serious movie now." And the experiment of, you know, "will Crosby work on camera? Is he ready to talk?" All of that was, was solidified. So Jill Mazursky, who's one of our executive producers, and she produced a movie called Keep On Keeping On, which is a fine, fine movie. I would highly recommend it. I believe it's on Netflix.

Bryan: I'll check it out.

A.J. : It's about Clark Terry, who's this legendary flugelhorn player and jazz musician who mentored, had a legacy of mentoring musicians. One of his first students was Quincy Jones. So I saw that movie and I was, and I was just blown away because I connect to music. My dad's a songwriter and grew up in a house that had a recording studio in the basement. Which I can tell you about. But, o I saw that and Jill and I became friends. And so I told her I was kind of working on this Crosby idea. So she and I went through a number of meetings in town to try to get financing because even though I'd been financing up until that point, I'm not in the position to personally finance a documentary of this caliber or a documentary that needed to be. Because, you know, when you're doing a documentary like this, it's a Herculean task. You're running multiple edit bays, you've got archival research specialists, you've got a number of producers doing

research and such. And then of course, then there's the music rights, which is, you know,

Bryan: That's a quagmire.

A.J. : Yeah. Majorly. So anyway she and I had gone to a number of meetings with agencies and such in town. And uh, you know, some people just didn't get it, what we were trying to achieve, you know. "Crosby, He's a has-been right?" Or "he's still doing stuff? Whoa!" And then one agency said, you know, we'd be willing to finance it but you, you would have to include like a roster of artists and we represent a lot of hip hop artists.

A.J. : So, so I was like, well, Crosby's not going to respond to that. He's not going to do that at all. So at one point we had this bizarre meeting at an agency and I just kind of thought, you know, this movie, the time for this movie might not just be right. You know, like the industry just might not be ready for this movie yet. So, you know, maybe I should just take the footage, put it in storage, and just kind of keep moving on to my other projects. And I went back to Jill's office and Jill Mazursky, you know, she and J.J. Abrams, who is this unknown filmmaker you probably haven't heard of.

Bryan: I think maybe I've heard of J.J.

A.J. : Yeah. He's doing this little movie right now, I hope it makes it.

Bryan: Poor guy.

A.J. : So it went back to Bad Robot and and met and had kind of a meeting with Jill, and at Bad Robot down the hallway was Cameron. And I was like, that's it, that's it. And it just hit me. So I was like, "Jill, Cameron! That makes total sense." And she kind of sat back in her chair and goes, "yeah, that is, I'll go and talk to him, you know, let me go and talk to him." So later that evening she did speak with him and he was like totally, he's like, "wow, you've got Crosby? Like actually he's letting you shoot him and you've got permission to do that?" And yeah, yeah, yeah. So he agreed, and this is just a Testament to his graciousness and his overall like curiosity and open to new ideas coming his way, he said, "I'll meet, let's meet like tomorrow." So he and I sat down and Jill, we sat down and met at Bad Robot like literally like the next day.

A.J. : And I told him about what my idea was with the movie, which is like, I'm like, "look, he's doing all these new things right? And let's do like a forward moving thing about what he's doing right now, going on tour recording these two albums back to back and then we can use that as a lens to look backward." And he just was like, "yeah, I can see this." And I brought Crosby back in to meet with him again and he definitely could see what I was talking about, that Crosby was willing to talk. He was ready to talk and he could see that the window of his mental clarity, you know, after, a decade of having some problems with drugs and such, his mind was open. And, mo he was like, "I'll tell you what." He told me that he was in the middle of working on this TV series at Bad Robot, it was called Roadies, which is a Showtime series. So his level of commitment was not, he couldn't commit to taking on a documentary, but he's like, "well, why don't you let me do an interview for you, as a gift to you" And I was like, "Yeah, that makes sense.

Absolutely." And so I think his gears were turning in his head. And so within, Oh, a month later or something, Crosby was back in the studio and I set up a meeting or I set up an interview, multi-camera interview thing, came in on a Saturday morning and Cameron came in with a collection of questions. And, ht was like, let's go. And the minute that, that, that Crosby and Cameron Crowe started talking together, it was like, all right, now I can see this. Because my conversations with Crosby are pretty good, you know. We're friends, we can poke fun at each other. But the minute that Cameron became involved then the whole thing went into hyperdrive.

Bryan: Well, he's kind of a rock star whisperer.

A.J. : Yeah. he is.

Bryan: I mean, embedded with bands in the 70's and his whole musical consciousness is, I think, One of the most developed, complex, rich, of any reporter out there, certainly, filmmaker as well. And if you look at his work, you know, music is such an important part of every one of his films.

A.J. : Absolutely.

Bryan: And with Cameron, when you had those meetings, what was your frame of reference in terms of what you knew about his work? And, you know, some people I guess may not have seen all of his stuff and maybe they're not a huge fan and they're just getting to know him, but what was your frame of reference for that first meeting with Cameron?

A.J. : Well, I knew that he was a rock journalist. And I knew, I mean Jerry Maguire is one of my favorite movies.

Bryan: Me too, yeah

A.J. : And it just has everything that you want. I mean, every time I see it on TV it's like everything is just stopped and I just sit and watch.

Bryan: Yeah. Once a year at least.

A.J. : At least, yeah. And just the nuances of, and it just kind of as a sentimental romantic kind of feel to it. And it just, it's always struck. You know, everyone has those movies that just strike you, but it really worked well for me. And then of course I like Almost Famous too. I also thought Vanilla Sky was brilliant. But it was only after I saw it, then someone explained to me like, "well, you know, they're replicating the album cover from the Bob Dylan thing, right? You know, that?" And I was like, Oh. And then I went watched it again and I was like, wow. So, you know, it's like something that's so dense there and bold. And of course, like what guy can get Paul McCartney to write a song for his movie, you know? So that was my frame of reference. So I was, I was very, like, I was nervous. But I also, you know, I was like, "look, here's what my idea is and what do you think?" And so he was like, "I like this." So when they started talking, I could see that Crosby was impressed by the fact that I was able to, you know, to get Cameron, to court Cameron

and get him enthusiastic about the movie, but also they have a legacy of talking together for 40 years as you see in the movie.

A.J. : And so when, you know, some of the first questions that Cameron asked was like, "when did you lose your virginity Cross?" And of course he kind of looked back and he was like, "Hmm, well it was like..." You know, and, and went into give specifics of where he was, but I could see that he was, the strategy was that we wanted to just start, we wanted to generate kind of a Crosby Wikipedia from beginning til now. And with each interview we went deeper. And so we kind of would do a huddle after, you know, in between takes and then a huddle afterward and go, "you know, I really liked this and we could go there, we could go here." And Cameron was like, "yeah, I like that a lot." And so we just kept generating these interviews and Crosby did not, there was not one question that I think Cameron asked that Crosby's ego, "No, I don't want to talk about that." He was absolutely honest and forthright.

Bryan: Yeah. That's what I noticed about the movie, he's putting it all out there and it really does not. There's a lot of scenes where you're looking back on his life and you're going, yeah, the guy is kind of an asshole. Well, he's not kind of an asshole. I mean, you've got people on film saying "this dudes an asshole." You know, but to allow that to unfold that way on film says a lot about where he is right now. I think the audience, at least the audience that I watched it with really appreciated that willingness to go there.

A.J. : Yeah. Yeah. One, I think, and this is something that sitting on this very couch where we're sitting right now in the edit Bay that we edited the movie you know Cameron's like, "you know, the more you show his dark side, the more people will like him and more people will like the story." And he's right, you know. This is a combination of collaboration of us working together and trying to understand this very, very complex human. And Crosby is, yeah, he can definitely be an asshole, but he also has a lot of redeeming qualities too. And if we were to cut out all of the negative and just show the redeeming, then we weren't doing our jobs as filmmakers, we weren't telling an honest piece, and we weren't trying to do an EPK. We weren't trying to do a commercial for his next album. This is a story about a guy who has some, you know, it's a full spectrum of his life for the good and the bad, warts and all.

Bryan: Right. So the, so the music rights part of it, were you involved in the logistics and the fights and the struggles to get the rights?

A.J. : Uh no. I mean on a surface level I kind of was, once we got the movie kind of shaping together, then there were songs that, and parts of Crosby's, you know, I was very, a big fan of his later work, the work that he did on this band called CPR with his son James Raymond. I think that album is just so underappreciated. A lot of people just didn't get a chance to really discover it and it's just gorgeous, gorgeous work. And then, you know, these last two albums, Lighthouse and, and Sky Trails, or Lighthouse, Sky Trails. And Here If You Listen. And Here If You Listen has this song "Glory" on it that both Cameron and I discovered right away which is just, it opens the movie and closes the movie. And it just kind of like, just melts your heart. Like throughout it all, through all of this ups and downs in this life, the guy's, you know now he's 78 years old, so he's 77 or so when he wrote this song and he's singing, and it's still beautiful and it's heart wrenching. It's just,

it makes you sit back and kind of think. But anyway, so we had, touch points that we wanted to hit with music. You can't do a movie with David Crosby and not hit like, you know, "Almost Cut My Hair" and you can't do a movie... And of course the Byrds.

A.J. : But with that said, we also didn't want to go with the typical typical, you know. Everyone has used Turn! Turn! Turn!. And so it was kind of a back and forth by which I was kind of worried like, "God, you know, am I going to get crucified for not using Turn! Turn! Turn! Because he was the guy that was singing it?" Or we're going, "no, I think it's cool that we didn't use Turn! Turn! Turn! Because that's your typical thing. We want to go into the deep cuts in every aspect on the movie." Like the deep cuts is like not your typical music doc, but also like, instead of using Turn! Turn! Turn! We went into Do You Want To Be a Rock and Roll Star, which is totally symbolic of what the movie is. And it's so funny that they're singing about the thing that they were actually trying to do. Uh, and then Cameron's knowledge of just this, you know, of that world.

Bryan: Encyclopedic, yea

A.J. : Totally. So we found I think a lot of really great cues that just work, you know Especially in the Laurel Canyon sequence,

Bryan: Laurel Canyon stuff. You hear a lot about Laurel Canyon, but you really got a sense of what it was like back then from just from watching that movie. And so you were there on location, walking into the infamous grocery store and, what was that like?

A.J. : Well, that day of shooting was was tenuous and kind of trying for everyone. Cause that day we, we shot a lot that day. It was also very hot up there. It was like 95 degrees. And so by the time we got to the Laurel Canyon store, Crosby was, I mean he wasn't excited about going up there to begin with. Because again, he was not crazy about going back to, "what was it like at Woodstock? Tell us about Laurel Canyon." But once Cameron came aboard and once he could see that I could be trusted and that I wasn't going to exploit, you know, I was going to handle the material or we were going to handle the material with reverence, he kind of played along. He's like, "Oh, okay, well we'll go up to Laurel Canyon" and you can see that in the movie. But when we walked in there, you know, it was like, I was hoping, ad the whole goal there that we talked about was that we had done a number of these sit down interviews with Crosby, you know, at his house, in a studio on the road, et cetera.

A.J. : And then we needed to get him out of that interview chair and go into places where he would be reacting to things spontaneously. And that was where you got some, some of our iconic lines in the movie, you know, where he walks into the Laurel Canyon story and goes, "look at the Doors," you know, "Morrison, what a dork!"

Bryan: Not a big fan of Morrison.

A.J. : No, not at all. And, and, you know, just driving down sunset Boulevard and he's talking to us and talking about going into the various clubs and, you know, seeing Morrison there. And so it was, my hunch worked out there, where it was like we got some reactive lines. And then we pull up to the, which is now just kind of a parking lot of the

house where he was fired from The Byrds, didn't want to get out of the car. "Now There's nothing there, there's nothing to see!" And but you know, then he proceeds to say, "Oh well you know, yeah they rolled up in two Porsches you know, got out of their cars come in and go like 'we don't want you in the band anymore'." And that was like perfect because you're taking him into the place and he could talk about the specifics of that place, where in a sit down interview situation he would've answered things a little bit different. But what I think is you should also like talk about it twice, you know. You don't just talk about things once. In the interview chair, you can say, tell us about being fired from the Byrds. And he would go in and he'd give you details about, you know, "it was a time, and I was an asshole." Or whatever he says. Then you take them to that location and he'll give you different details. And then that's so valuable when you go into to cut and go into an edit Bay because you've got a way to tie it all together.

Bryan: Yeah. You know, I never thought about that strategy for pulling the story out of your subjects, but that's brilliant to bring them into the setting. Maybe that's why I like to do these interviews in the creative space of my guests because I think you just, you're going to look at a poster on a wall and it's going to trigger conversations that wouldn't otherwise occur. But you know, you put someone like David Crosby for instance, on his bed, he's laying down on his bed, I'm not sure if his guitar was on there, and his wife is there and then he's packing up to go on the road again. And you cannot, I don't think you can really capture the essence of someone's journey unless you have them there in their space.

A.J. : That's right. And you know, it's hard because like for a movie, you know, it's all a set, but with a documentary, this is their real home. And it was hard for Jan to, you know, I mean, Jan and I are friends and, and you know, we're like family. But, you know, I said, we want to do this movie and she could see. But Cameron and I said, you know, for weeks and months we were saying we wanted her to be involved. And the day that we shot that interview with Cros on the couch, the one where he says he's afraid to die, spoiler alert. And you know, where he does the Coltrane impression and all of that. I think that she heard him say that "I'm afraid to die" and it really upset her, but she went into their bedroom and locked the door with their dogs.

A.J. : I mean, they have like five dogs. And stayed out there for the entire day. Now keep in mind, I had asked her, I said, "you know, we really want you to be involved in this. We'd like to interview you." And she never said yes or no or whatever. And finally, after that day of some pretty, I mean, just like some emissions by Crosby on camera as you know, I've already told you about and many others, e kind of took a break and Crosby went and got something to eat in his kitchen or whatever. And Jan comes out, she's wearing this really nice outfit. Her hair's all straightened and looks beautiful. And she goes, "I'm ready." And I'm like, "ready?" She's says "yeah, I'll do my interview now" And I looked at Cameron with like my eyes open and I was like, "okay, u,w about sit right here in your kitchen table, and the camera guys will just sit right here." And within, like we were just in clockwork and she sat down and that's where she said, "I might just disappear" and "I'm afraid" and I'm all those things. So it's real life. It's not just, you know, I didn't, you know, you know what I mean? You're in their life and she is really experiencing the reality of the things that he just said.

Bryan: And that's when the interview is taking place, right as she is ready to reveal it. As opposed to some non-organic way where she shows up at a studio and she may or may not be ready.

A.J. : Right. Right. And so, I mean, it was, when she says that, then I'm going like, "Oh my God. Like this is, this is deep and this is, and it's..." I had to go out after she did her interview and Crosby and Cameron had to drive away. And so after she did her interview it was kind of hard. I had to go outside and just kind of take a minute.

Bryan: To compress a little bit.

A.J. : Yeah. You know, she's saying like, you know, you see it and it lasts in the movie there. She's like, "I might just disappear." She's put, her whole life has been spent loving David. And when someone says that that that light might burn out and it's going to burn out faster than you, then you think, boy, that's hard.

Bryan: Yeah. And he does seem to have health issues that could make, I mean, every day is a gift for him is my impression. With his, is it diabetes that he has?

A.J. : He's gotten nine stints in his heart now, he's eight in the movie, but they have another one in there now. So nine stents, liver transplant, liver transplants usually last six years is what I've told. I met the surgeon that did performed his liver transplant, came to a screening in Sun Valley, Idaho. And so he was like, "I wanted to introduce myself." So I was like, "I have to thank you man. Thank you for..."

Bryan: Put him in the credits.

A.J. : Yeah. Yeah. But their, their expectations on the liver transplant are like six years and he's 20. Oh 20 in 20 out. Well, so there's that. And he, you know, he got Hep C, hepatitis, which, which caused him to need to have a liver transplant. But yeah, I mean he's, and he's also had two or three heart attacks too. He's living on borrowed time and he calls it time is the final currency. So he's, that's why I think he's trying to get this music out as much as he can while he can.

Bryan: Yeah. The sense of urgency was there in the film. You could see it. He's leaving his wife behind, clearly wants to spend time with them, but he has to do this thing; the music.

A.J. : If he retired, if he just were to say like, "okay, I've said my peace, I'm done." I don't think he could. I don't think he would last long. It's the music that's keeping him going. So it's heart wrenching.

Bryan: So how did you get your start in film, and how did you know that that was your direction as a young person?

A.J. : Well, my dad is a songwriter and he is extremely talented guy. We're from Idaho. And he'd had a couple of record deals and he's kind of a folk musician, but he moved after

living in LA for some time, he decided that he wanted to live in Idaho full time. He just doesn't like LA and he's not really into big cities.

Bryan: It's an acquired taste.

A.J. : Yeah. So he moved back to Idaho and we, and you know, still was working as a musician, but just thought like home base was going to be Idaho. We had a recording studio at our house, which he was using to demo his songs and he'd had a couple of songs cut throughout his career, Art Garfunkel, Carpenters.

Bryan: Really?

A.J. : Yeah.

Bryan: What's his name?

A.J. : His name is Steve Eaton. But, you know, he also was like his solo artist himself, but at one point some filmmakers approached him and asked him to, you know, commissioned him to write a song for a documentary. This documentary is like long forgotten, but the documentary is about, it was like a Northwest PBS special on vanishing small towns in Idaho or in the Northwest. And so they said, you know, "we've kind of got to get a song together for this movie, or this special." And so he sat down and he wrote this song called The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore, which is a very kind of Mark Twain type of statement.

Bryan: Sounds perfect for the film.

A.J. : Yeah. And he poetically encapsulated the entire theme of this, of the theme in multiple cases, in every aspect of the word into one statement. "The Train Doesn't Stop Here Anymore." It just says it all, doesn't it?

Bryan: It's kinda somber, sad, a little melancholy. Yeah.

A.J. : And the song itself is, I'll send it to you. So I was young, probably four or something, but they had sent a machine for him to kind of shuttle back and forth. It was probably a three quarter inch deck or something in a studio. And so he wrote that song and then he wrote like kind of the underscore with his guitar. And so I just became infatuated with this kind of watching them put music to moving image. And it's so amazing to watch like, okay, you can just see a shot then, then you put music on it and all of a sudden it like means something. So from a young age, four or five, I was like really interested in that.

Bryan: You're seeing the process. You're seeing the process unfold.

A.J. : Yeah. . And of course, and then, you know, also, there's musicians around us all the time because of my dad, because of his studio there. And I just saw a lot of musicians, like some musicians that were making it, that just didn't have any talent and then some that weren't making it, that should definitely be making it. And it was, it's kind of heartbreaking to see that world where you're going, you know, I can name like four or

five people that like my dad knew or passed through our life where I was like, "that guy should have been a star" because he was really talented, or "she should have been a star" because she was very talented and wrote great songs.

A.J. : So anyway, it just kind of got me interested in filmmaking. And being, you know, in rural Idaho, you know, you've got Boise, you've got Pocatello, you know, salt Lake city. Movies were not, you know, are not common in that area. But so I started seeking out every opportunity or any person that might be in Idaho that knew anything about filmmaking. And you know, the small town where I went to high school, Pocatello, Idaho they had a community access television station where you could go in and take a class on how to use a camera, and they had an edit Bay there and you could go and make your own show and put it on the air. And so I kind of got into that. And then through that process I met some people. I mean, look, there's resources. I would just find resources where I'd find like, Oh, so-and-so owns an Airflex camera. I wonder if I could go and just see how it works. You know? And so again, I was like 14 years old, but I met a guy, a gentleman who had moved from LA, bought a nice place in Idaho and had a very successful career, mostly in film advertising, but at his company that he had edited film trailers and specialized in movie marketing. But he was a director. He was a member of the directors Guild, also a member of the Academy. And so in his basement, in his house, he was offline editing, which is a thing back in the day when they would send, well I can explain that later. But anyway, offline editing movie trailers. And so I met him in passing and said, "you know, I'm really interested in filmmaking. I want to do, I'm really interested" he said, "well come on up and I'll show you what, I'll show you my edit Bay."

Bryan: This is Pocatello?

A.J. : Pocatello.

Bryan: Really?

A.J. : Yeah. And so, you know, he would offline edit, and he would take an EDL, and he would fly back here to LA and then they would do an online, which they would conform the edit. He had all sorts of stories about working with all the, you know, studio bosses and working on the ad campaign for 1941 and Robocop. And he had edited all of these trailers and had made a very successful business but had decided that he wanted to get out of town, not out of the business but just out of town, and focus on like writing a screenplay or something. But you know, as it was, he was getting calls to like do a trailer here because he was very good at what he did.

A.J. : And I also had a job working at it at an ad agency too. And it was kind of funny because it's like a very Ferris Bueller type of thing where the ad agency had this big building right next to my high school. And so I would roll into high school and there was a, I had a parking spot with my name on it and like my friends in high school were like "what the hell?" And after school I would go in and I would like dub tapes and you know, was friends with all the ad execs. And every now and then like I would just sit in the back and listen to their creative meetings and politely like, and sometimes I would get in trouble too. I would like suggest, make suggestions. You know, "you oughta try this" or "have

you ever tried that" and every now and then they're like, "you know what kid, that's a pretty good idea." So I, I had experience working in advertising and I also worked in this for this production company that was doing a lot of regional commercials owned by this trailer editor. But I just gained as much Intel as I could and absorbed, you know, about how the editing process works, shooting and you know, did a lot of commercials. And then went off, you know, moved here to LA when I was like 20 or 21.

Bryan: And how old are you now?

A.J. : 40.

Bryan: Oh wow, been here a while.

A.J. : Yeah. And I Started working kind of as an assistant for a couple of other people who were doing the same type of thing, you know, editor, director people. I've worked for Chuck, this guy named Chuck Workman, who himself is an Oscar winner. But every year he, for awhile, you would see "and now from Academy award winning Chuck Workman, we have a montage" at the Oscars. And so I worked on a number of those montages where, you know, he would do the best picture, every section would have, or there would be an opening montage to open up the entire Academy awards themselves.

Bryan: So you were working on those?

A.J. : Yeah.

Bryan: Oh cool.

A.J. : I mean I wasn't cutting them directly but was definitely involved in the process, and oftentimes it was just Chuck and I and it was a very, very challenging job. Chuck is, he's a very talented guy but he also has a temper. So which is, which was good for working on this movie.

Bryan: Oh, with Dave?

A.J. : With a person, certain person yeah. But I worked on a couple of Oscars and again, it was like research. Oh, and then we did a thing for the directors Guild, for the 75th anniversary of the directors Guild. It was like, it was going to be a probably 15 minute film that incorporates the entire history of film directors. And that's a Herculean task. So with thousands of clips of thousands of movies, and it was an education in cinema history working there because our task was, and we had a bunch of researchers, you know, other DGA members and things, but a bunch of researchers who were like, all right, you need to go and find, take let's just say a movie, Batman Begins. What's the one shot in Batman begins that is oh, three seconds long that I can cut into this montage? And people go, "Oh, that's Batman begins!" You know? And also don't get seduced by the typical, like I was talking about like Turn, Turn, Turn. Everyone's seen the rolling ball from Raiders of the Lost Ark. But what about the shot, you know, the like silhouette shot of all the diggers, where he's close to the tomb, where they find the, you know. That's like your iconic shot or you know, whatever, you know. And so I was tasked

with watching a lot, many movies.. He's like, "Oh, here. Go watch The Apartment," you know, Billy Waller. And what's the shot that you want in The Apartment. And so I would come back and go, "well, it's probably this one or this one." And he's like, "good choice." So and then we ended up, I ended up getting called, and I was also working on like, you know, trying to set up a short films on my own, which I did do. I did, I directed a short narrative film. So I was just kind of like going through this process of like need to job, was working with Chuck. I worked for, as an assistant for a couple of other production companies in town. And then I also ended up working for the opening/closing ceremonies for the Olympics in 2002.

Bryan: Oh wow. That's an eclectic work history.

A.J. : Yeah. Oh, I've got much, many more. I worked for a magician for awhile. And I just would, you know, you collect all these like neat, like metaphors, or just neat lessons if you're open to it, you know.

Bryan: Well it sounds like with Chuck, I mean, you're getting this, cinema history, which is great, but you're also being forced to make decisions. And I think that's one thing that I'm paralyzed by when I'm looking at hours and hours of footage or hundreds of pages of documents. Whenever I'm working on a project, it's that paralysis of, "I don't even know where to start." So here you're, you're being forced to make decisions and I would imagine that that is great for being a documentary filmmaker, cause you're shooting, I mean, as a documentary filmmaker, you're probably shooting hundreds and hundreds of hours of film.

A.J. : Yeah. And it's also about making decisions too. Once you've done it for a while, then you realize, okay, I can kind of, I think that sending a crew to go and shoot this probably is not going to be as valuable as sending my crew to go and shoot that. So you're kind of in your brain editing before you edit, but you only can do that if you've been editor before. So, yeah, then I ended up working as an editor for a number of years. I cut two TV series and I would come in and they would just, you know, would have a bunch of footage to look at it and my job was to go through that footage and go, "alright, well these are your shots." I kind of, I really started getting in tune with like kind of rescuing problematic narrative, or going you know, "we can cut out of that easier." And I just loved the process of editing.

Bryan: [inaudible], I think, talks about editors as being the real filmmakers. I mean, that's really where the story is shaped and molded and, and developed.

A.J. : Yeah. Well, and that's the same, I mean, it's the truth with the Crosby movie. You know, we had hundreds, thousands of hours and there's archival footage coming in and photographs coming in and music. And I just became like on this quest from from a moment of like 10, 12, 14, 15 on where I was in love with music and movies. And I was very interested in, it was just this curious quest learning about making films. And then after I met this guy, Michael Hoffman, who is like kind of a mentor and very close friend of mine, he's a road scholar and everyone thinks he's British, but he's actually from Idaho. He was born in Payette, or grew up in Payette, Idaho. And you know, he directed Soapdish, One Fine Day, Restoration, a movie called Gambit recently with Colin Firth,

Cameron Diaz, it was actually very amusing. And you know, Michael's a brilliant guy. He's a Sundance director. He directed a movie called *The Promised Land* that was premiered there, Meg Ryan and Kiefer Sutherland. So as I have been writing screenplays, living back and forth between LA and Idaho, I'd go out to his house and visit with him and he just gave me priceless pieces of advice, you know, "work begets work. Go and edit that show, just do it." And he was always curious about how my screenplays were going and he gave me some great advice. But when I was working with him, there was a movie called *Game 6*, which is starring Michael Keaton. And it's funny. The parallels between *Game 6* and *Birdman* are uncanny. That's a whole other story. Michael Keaton plays a playwright trying to mount up a play and he's haunted by the pending review of this theater critic, and the theater critic is played by Robert Downey jr. And but he's dealing with all of these, these other personal dynamics of like his daughter and his girlfriend and all of that. The only difference between *Game 6* and *Birdman* is that he, instead of going to the opening night of his play, he decides to go watch game six of the world series, the infamous Buckner, you know, ball between the legs error.

A.J. : And that whole thing kind of like parallels his life you know. It was a very independent movie and Keaton was in it. They shot it. And so he was going to edit that movie at his house in Idaho, and he had this Italian editor named Camilla Toniolo. And he was like said, "well, we're looking for someone who just knows how to operate in avid." And of course I'd worked with Chuck, and so I was like, "yeah, I could do that" So they had set up an edit Bay at this office in Boise, Idaho. And so for a couple of months I was sitting there working with this lady Camilla Toniolo. And you know, it was so funny because she would describe things like, "Ah, this cut is delicious, it's great, ah wonderful." And then we would, we would quit editing like, you know, seven o'clock and then she'd go and make dinner and that night we would sit around and talk about the scene that we had just cut. And Michael would be like, "yeah, but do you feel his emotion in that scene?" And so I was like, again, gathering all of this Intel like yes, that's the process of editing and the process of shaping a performance in editing.

Bryan: And processing it after the day is done. It's not just an eight to five thing. You're in this thing until it is completely in the can. You're thinking about it and you have a dialogue about it.

A.J. : And I could see Mike's process where he was just, he was constantly biting his nails, worried about if things were going to come off as they were intended, and I sure you know, had that myself. So anyway, cut to, pardon the pun, but cut to when I met Elisa Bonora, where I was seeking an editor to come join the Crosby movie. Wasn't going to cut it myself because that's a Herculean task. And in order to secure the financing I wanted to put in place, one thing I learned early on from working for a number of directors, Hoffman, Chuck Workman, Frank Marshall, is that you build a team of people that are not going to let you fail. So I had lunch or coffee with Elisa and I said, "I really loved what you did with the Glen Campbell movie. I could see how you handled music really well." And she's like, "well, thank you very much. I enjoyed you." And she said "come up and we'll have dinner and we'll look at the footage that you've shot." And I was like, well, this sounds exactly like what I was doing with Camilla. And my mother is Italian, so I, you know, I thought that was a cool omen. And of course, like we sat and

had pasta and she looked at the footage, she's like, "look, you've got some great stuff going on here. It's going to be great. We can make a wonderful film from what you have just here." And I told her that we were still looking at shooting probably more, you know, another 50%. This is only 50% of what we were hoping to shoot. So, you know, and with her, I met Michelle Farinola, who is sitting in the office right next door.

Bryan: We just met her!

A.J. : Yeah. And Michelle truly is one of the great women working in documentary film, but she's also just one of the great producers in documentary film. I mean she works with James Keach, PCH films. And James directed the Linda Ronstadt movie, or he produced the Linda Ronstadt movie. He also directed the Glen Campbell movie. So I could see that these folk know how to handle documentaries and music documentaries really well. And I needed to put together a team that would protect the independence of the movie. So it was kind of a Hollywood chess match, but I knew that these folks were all going to be, with Michelle and Elisa and James and all of that, they were all about "let's make the best movie possible."

Bryan: You got your A-Team together.

A.J. : Yeah. So, and then with that, then Cameron and Vinyl Films and BMG were very comfortable coming in and seeing that I wasn't, it's not a high school production.

A.J. : Right. Yeah. Well, I'm curious about the complexities of the business part of this where you're working with Vinyl Films, and Cameron, and Greg over there, you've got Michelle and you've got Elissa and you know, these very talented people who are not doing this for the money. I mean, this is not like big time. This is not J.J. Abrams, you know, Star Wars type of production. So how do you get lawyers involved to put contracts together in terms of how it's going to be distributed and who's going to get a cut of what? How does that work? Or do you just kind of turn it over to your agent or manager and let them work out the details?

A.J. : Well I yet do not have an agent, but I know part of the goal of like working on all these various projects that I've mentioned is that you know, you gather Intel about the behavior and psychology of how the business is going to work. So what's, what's cool about this is that once I met Cameron, I had just like that week met with BMG. BMG is the world's oldest music publisher. Bertelsmann Music Group. And a lady named Kathy Daum is now spearheading their film documentary investment wing. And their documentaries are centered around music clientele or music. And it so happens that Crosby had signed a publishing deal with BMG where they were going to be servicing the publishing. So I know about music publishing cause my dad. And so I met with her and I said, "you know, we're looking at doing this Crosby movie and Cameron's been doing the interviews and it's possible that he can step aboard as a full producer too."

A.J. : And she said, "Oh, I know camera cause I worked with him as a production associate on Almost Famous." So there was some serendipity there. So I put together budgets and I put together the dream team, you know? But to answer your question about "how does it work?" Well yeah, you have to have a good lawyer, and you have to kind of put

together what you think is a fair outlay because I had self-financed this whole movie myself, and figure out how that's going to work, you know. Do they buy me out? Do I stay in as a first in first out investor? You kind of have to figure out how the psychology of the whole team is going to work. You know, I think that the budget that I made early on was pretty spot on as far as what we ended up making the movie for. And that was just based on my own experience, and also then bringing it to Michelle, and Michelle and I went through and, and confirmed and affirmed how much we should expect to pay on something. And also, I kind of believe in paying people what they're worth. And having been the person who worked for free for a lot of people for a long time or worked for the next to nothing, I also believe that you get better work out of people when you pay them fair rate and they're willing to do better work for you or if you have to call them, "Hey, can you grab me... I need to just grab that one shot of this one thing" and "Oh A.J., absolutely for you, you got it."

Bryan: Yeah, I wholeheartedly agree with that. So what is the approach to awards season and you, you have this documentary that premiered at Sundance and made its way to a lot of festivals and got great reviews. What's next and how does that work, the campaign to, for instance, the Oscars and that type of thing?

A.J. : Well, I mean, just me sitting here and talking about the movie that I had expectations of like, alright, I know that Crosby is an interesting character, and perhaps if we do a fair job of this, what we might be able to sell it to a network, perhaps on HBO or Showtime or something like that, and then go off. Go on and make another movie. And I had basically kind of tempered the expectations of everyone like, "look, if we get into Sundance, great. And if not, we're going to be okay. There's plenty of outlets for us to go.' So when you get that call from Sundance and and they said that they see it as not just a movie that they would just premier in their premier section, but an actual documentary in competition, that's the ultimate compliment, because you've done your job, I shouldn't say you've done your job, but you made a film that's not just a, you know, it's about a guy who happens to be a musician. He's been a witness to some remarkable moments in our modern American history.

A.J. : So you know, the movie goes to Sundance and the idea was that we were going to go there and sell it. And Sony Pictures Classics was very enthusiastic about it and that deal was negotiated by the folks at BMG and Vinyl. But Sony, their plan is that they saw the movie as a theatrically, that it would succeed theatrically, and I could see that. Definitely. And I of course, you know, you love that idea. You know, like your movies going to be playing in theaters. And they're right, I mean this is his fan base, Crosby's fan base is one that would go to theaters. So the reviews at Sundance were all very favorable. You know, you go to that premiere and you still don't know, you still don't know what the people, like you show the movie and you're cutting a movie over a year's time or, or even more. I mean I've been working in this thing for eight, nine years. But when you're cutting, then you get a cut together and you show it to your team, then you come back with notes and it can be overwhelming at many times. Then you get a finer cut and you show it to your team again and you bounce off the ideas, like "is this making sense? Is that making sense?" Again, cut back to like, you know, my time with Michael Hoffman. Like, "I don't know if this is making sense!" And also just be willing to completely, be willing to kill your darlings. Just like, "Nope, sorry, not going to work.

Nothing sacred in this room." And we did that many, many times and it was painful, you know, but you know, you're, you're sculpting, you keep sculpting this narrative.

A.J. : So then we've got the cut that we felt, and we sent that to the folks at Sundance you know. But still after you get accepted to Sundance, you're still going to be tweaking the movie. You still need to mix it. You still need to fix various shots. You still need to replace that piece of archival footage with the master or with the full resolution. And that kind of changes the impact in the psychology of the cut. So we really didn't know until the movie was shown at Sundance how an audience, a full audience, is going to perceive the movie. And it was remarkable. I still look back and I'm like, "God, did we do that?" you know. So I had Cameron there and Greg was there and everyone's, and Crosby was there, and people just stood up and just applauded us. You know, it was pretty amazing. I mean, I looked at Cameron, Cameron and I talked about this, we looked at each other and we're going like, "Whoa," like this was the first time that we've seen Crosby in front of an audience and not have anything to say, you know, at a loss for words, because this is a guy who's used to talking to audiences a lot, and speaking his mind and not being nervous, but he was like, wow, wow. You know, it was pretty amazing.

Bryan: So the buildup to the Academy awards, is there, I mean,] do you even think about that in terms of a nomination? Is that something that's in your consciousness or do you try to not concern yourself with it because you don't have any control over it?

A.J. : It's a hard one. You know, like we were in competition at Sundance, which was again, like that was an honor, you know, to just be there. And so I've tried to treat each one of these things as kind of like just the icing on the cake. And if it all ended right now, I think that I should be very satisfied with how it's happened. Like, you know, we played the Boulder Film Festival and we won best music doc there. So all these surprising things that have come around like the Critics Choice nom, and the Grammy.

Bryan: Oh, the Grammy. Yeah, I just saw that on Instagram. Congratulations!

A.J. : Thanks, thanks. And that's cool because we're there with a movie that's directed by Paul Thomas Anderson and Beyonce, and Tom York, and Morgan Neville, and so it's like, we're in great company and I'm just honored to just be involved in that company. So whether or not we win, it's just really an honor. So as far as the Oscar campaign goes, like you know, people see that it's possible and we'll see what happens.

Bryan: Yeah. Couple of questions to wrap up the interview, if you're standing in front of some young people, say at a high school class, and they're asking you what do you recommend that they do if they want to get into film in terms of education, experience, and also where to be physically, what is your advice to them?

A.J. : Good question. Well, first off I mean, you know, kid from Pocatello, Idaho, there isn't a, you know, Idaho state university doesn't have a film program, but I just was so curious and I just was on a quest to find as much resources as I could. And if I would have grown up in LA, who knows what, I would've been like, you know, "Oh, come down to USC. We've got every piece of gear and go make a film." Who knows what would have

happened. But I did graduate from college. I graduated from Boise state, but I didn't graduate through degree in film. I graduated with a degree in political science and I worked on a lot of Senate and campaigns, and I worked for mayoral campaigns and kind of got interested in stories of democracy and people. And just that was a side note.

A.J. : But I guess one piece of advice is that I think you can learn the techniques of filmmaking perhaps outside of college. You know, as I kind of did, because I was just so interested in the process of editing, shooting, everything. But I also say, you know, go and study something where you can make movies about. Because if you just learn how to make movies and you can learn about the history of cinema, which I had through my job, you know, "I need the shot of Lawrence of Arabia. What shot of Lawrence of Arabia are you going to use?" You know, that meant that I had to watch the movie. And I also, I'm really interested in the technology, you know, film, IMAX. I was just talking to the director that directed Apollo 11, Todd Douglas Miller, he's brilliant. But they had to invent a new scanner to scan the 70 millimeter film that they used on that. So he and I were geeking out for an hour, and the publicists are going like, "how do you guys know each other and what? Wow." And I was like, just, we got it. And so, "so anyway, so you invented that scanner, dah, dah, dah, dah." So it was kind of fun.

A.J. : You know, when I was in poly PSI school, I started thinking about like, I love these stories of people fighting for what they believe in, and I became a better writer through that. And so I think there's a little bit of that in the Crosby movie where it's like, at the end of the day, he's a person who was an activist and he saw his role as the town crier to call out, you know, politicians, hence the inception of Ohio. And you know, how a song can be a message that will unite people politically or call out an injustice politically. I think all the movies that I'm working on right now, be it another documentary or I've got two TV series and you know, a feature that I'm pitching, you know, I'm going to direct next year, knock on wood, they have to do with a political thing, imaginative scenario. And so, you know, I say to students is that, you know, find something that you want to make movies about. And so mine come from the place where I know. You know what Mark Twain said, you know, "write about what you know." And I made a movie about a guy who's a musician, and it so happens that my dad is a musician and I could see things in Crosby that I could see with my dad cause I understand the struggles of musicians. My brother's a musician, and I worked as a composer for a little bit, not a very good one, but I just loved that. And then of course with Crosby, you know, there was also the political thing as I mentioned, so I respond to that.

A.J. : So one of the things that I'm working on right now, we've spent a couple of years doing historic research on a historical period of time. And the person that I'm working with on that is this historical research junkie, you know, Oxford graduate. So we just have been geeking out on, and there's things that resonate with that with me as a person. I'm just so interested in this like period of time and the stories about these characters and how they're relevant to today. And so this is not a film school graduate, this is a person who has a master's from Oxford in this period of time. And so, but that's what makes great films.

Bryan: Just having a passion for learning about things that are other than film. You use film as a craft to tell a story, but you need to perhaps look outside of film to really fully develop as an individual. To go someplace and be successful.

A.J. : Yeah, I agree with that.

Bryan: Okay. And then what about living in LA versus Pocatello and you know, that choice?

A.J. : Well, first off, I mean like, yeah, I think living in LA is, LA or New York is probably definitely a good move for anyone who's going to be in the industry. I mean, we couldn't have made this movie anywhere else, you know, the Crosby movie for instance. But it depends on what you want to do, you know what I mean? Atlanta is going crazy with production right now because of their tax incentives. And when you're in a regional place, like say Seattle or, you know, say, Chicago, or maybe Chicago is too big, but you know, a regional place. You can actually as a young, eager young filmmaker, you can get access to things that would be prevented in LA. Cause there's too many, LA is huge, you know what I mean? So it's like you can go and work on a film set in Seattle or Portland and get access to things that would take you a lot longer to get access to it in LA. So I don't know, I think there's value in taking full advantage of the possibilities that are presented in regional areas like I did, and finding the people that were the Michael Hoffman's of that time, because here it's like everyone's inundating, knocking down the door like, "Hey, can I talk to you?" And there it's like, oh yeah, it's a local person to a local person. But eventually you do need to be here.

Bryan: Yeah. So it sounds like you can cut your teeth. For instance, Magic Valley, that was in Idaho. Was that shot in Idaho?

A.J. : Yeah.

Bryan: Yeah. You can't shoot that movie in Los Angeles. You can't shoot it in Portland or Seattle or Atlanta, Atlanta. But yeah, just the setting. So it looks like there's, in terms of independent films, opportunities to learn the craft outside of the bigger cities.

A.J. : Sure. That's for sure. Here's another crazy little thing. I was appointed by the governor in Idaho to serve on this film incentive task force. And the idea was that, that we were going to create some incentives, some tax incentives to bring production, bring films to Idaho. And I was all about it and some of the local people said, "you know, that's not fair because there's just going to be, these big film productions that are going to come into town and absorb, take all the tax credits and leave." And I was like, no, no, no, no, no, no. They're going to be great for the local people that are trying, because you're going to then get a chance to work. Like, oh hey, Robert Richardson is going to come shoot you know, the legendary DDP is going to come shoot a movie here and he's going to need an assistant or a second assistant and you're going to get a chance to go work for Robert Richardson as a local. That's pretty cool. And when I was working for that magician, great metaphor that I use so many times when I talk to people, it's like there's a brotherhood of magicians where by you don't share your tricks and how you're going to achieve them. It's magic. And so we had a number of big levitations and various other

things that he was doing and he was opening kind of like his version of a magic castle in the Northwest.

A.J. : And so I was working for him designing soundtracks and editing all these special effects soundtracks and stuff. It was kind of a fun gig. But we had all these people who were working as servers in the theater that were taking a shortcut through the stage. And he was like, "there's no way that those people can walk through through the stage. They can't see what we're doing." And he was like, "give me 10 minutes backstage at David Copperfield or you know, one of the legendary, you know, Penn and Teller, and I will answer years worth of my curiosity within 10 minutes because it's like, Oh, that's how it does." So it's like a short amount of time, and so that's what I'm saying. Like you show up on a set where you're working with one of the legends, you know, and you can, you know, don't be an idiot and you can go there and you can see like, "Oh, that's how he set his light" or "that's how he frames that camera" or "that's where he positions his camera." And so I did that a lot with the directors where I would just learn how to watch each setup and I did it with four or five different major directors, where it was like I was there for a short amount of time, but it didn't matter. I was there to, "Oh wow. That's how they did that." Or.

Bryan: That's how the magic's made.

A.J. : Exactly. Yeah, exactly.

Bryan: Very cool. Well, A.J. Eaton, thanks so much for being on the podcast.

A.J. : Pleasure. I'm glad we finally got to do this.

Bryan: Yeah, It's been a lot of fun.

A.J. : Hey, thank you for listening and I hope you enjoyed today's episode of the Dreampath Podcast. If so, I have a favor to ask. Can you go to your favorite podcast service and give me a rating and review? Your feedback is what keeps this podcast going. I appreciate your time and as always, go find your dream path.