

Interview with
TOBIJAH “TOBY” TYLER

March 21, 2016

**MOTION PICTURE PRODUCTION IN
WASHINGTON COUNTY, UTAH
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

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TOBIJAH “TOBY” TYLER

Tobijah “Toby” Tyler was interviewed by cell phone on March 21, 2016 in St. George, Washington County, Utah by Dr. Stephen B. Armstrong. He related his experiences with motion picture production in Washington County, Utah.

SA: I am a professor [at Dixie State [Utah Tech] University in St. George, Washington County, Utah] who does a lot [of work] with film history. About a year ago I approached the Utah Humanities [Council] in Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] about [funding] a grant to detail the oral history of motion picture production in Washington County, Utah. They gave me this grant to work with. When you gave me the flyer on *Slice to Life*, [I noticed] that you have been active in Utah as a filmmaker for a long time. I wanted to chat with you and see if, perhaps, you have any memories of working down here.

TT: We did a film called *Coyote Summer* with Adam Beach. I will have to look up the dates for you. That was fifteen or sixteen years ago, maybe a little bit more. He was a local director. It might have been the only feature that he directed. The director was Matias Alvarez who lives in Park City [Summit County, Utah] and was a long time director for me. I worked for him as a second [inaudible] director. That would definitely be one. Just recently I worked down here [in St. George], not as much as I would have liked to. A lot of the work I have done has been more toward Moab [Grand County, Utah] area. There is a lot of work to do here and I have found it [very] interesting. I just did a show with Go Films called *Extinct* that they are shooting for BYU-TV [Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah County, Utah]. That is the most recent project which is shooting mainly around St. George and above Snow Canyon.

SA: Can you tell about that a little bit?

TT: I don’t know how much I could talk about it. I should probably ask for clearance beforehand. What I can say it is a science fiction drama. Ryan Little has directed a lot of [projects] and is the director and cinematographer for the Go Films project. It is the production company that has been hired out by BYU-TV to shoot this original content. From what I understand, BYU-TV is [inaudible] and, you are obviously aware of this, is doing a content basis. I actually worked on a series called *Granite Flats* that is airing there, on Netflix and some other cable streaming. Anyway, back to Go Films, Ryan Little, is the director, and Adam Abel is the producer. There are some other producers involved. It is very unique. Maybe we can talk about it again when I have some more information. But I can ask them. I know them well enough that I could ask and see what they would allow.

SA: Okay. It has been about twenty years since you did *Coyote Summer*. Do you have any recollections of that [experience]? Any stories? Any reflections?

TT: What comes to mind is working down here in the desert. There were a lot of filmmakers I had worked with and there were some locals, too, that were hired. I would have to go through my crew list that I keep for nostalgia. But there was Adam Beach, whom you probably know, who was the lead within the project. It was fun to work with him. He was a Navajo Code-Talker, using the Navajo language —

SA: Yes.

TT: — to hide back and forth. Anyway, spending time with him and actually watching him work and seeing what he has done since then until now and just working here and being in a tight knit community. I have been very lucky. I am a Southern California transplant. I went to Utah State [University, Logan, Cache County, Utah] and was lucky to fall into film in Utah. I have been very fortunate to come back. I have only been in the St. George area for about two and one-half years. My wife lives here and I travel a lot for work. But I would like to do more productions. I actually have written a couple of things. The landscape here I hope to in the next couple of years actually film down here.

SA: Did you ever talk to Phil Tuckett over in the digital film program here?

TT: I have not. But I have heard of him through Joseph Girard who comes down a lot and he is somewhat connected. Do you know Joe?

SA: No.

TT: He has been coming down and doing some workshop [projects]. But he is somewhat connected and so I have heard his name, Joseph Girard, through the doorman in Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah]. I work in Salt Lake a lot. What were you going to say about him?

SA: He was with NFL [National Football League] films for years and years and [received] a lot of Emmys. He went into this sort of semi-retirement gig down here nine years ago. He has built this program from basically just two or three cameras on [student's] shoulders to something that is substantial. It goes hand in hand with the growth of the DocUtah Southern Utah International Film Documentary Festival. [From] the old airport they bought a hangar and they are going to turn that into a studio up there. So the emphasis is really on documentary. There is talent. There is a [man] named Ben Braten there. He is just a staffer who has a lot of talent. I have worked with him. I did a little documentary eight years ago about motion picture production in Kane County in the Kanab [Kane County, Utah] area.

TT: There is a lot of history, a lot of history. That goes back like fifty plus years.

SA: Yes. It is surprising what they are doing over there. If you ever want to come to campus I can introduce you. I can serve as a liaison if you are looking for people, interns and that sort of thing. I didn't realize you lived in Washington County. How long have you been down here?

TT: About two and a half years.

SA: Are you doing your show up in the Salt Lake [City] area or do you film down here too?

TT: *The Slice to Life* was a creation. I was back east working on a project and I needed to make something. So to start the process I [started] building my library so I can show people that I can direct. I have been working as a PA [production assistant]. I worked my way up. I got into the directors guild rather early, started working in film about late 1991, early 1992, [and] in the directors guild as a director about 1996. I always wanted to make film, projects, just little things. An independent filmmaker that I knew in the Salt Lake [City] area. Finally, with the new SAG [Screen Actors Guild] agreement I was able to [get] SAG members that I really wanted to work with, Kathleen Dombo and Sean Nottingham, and expand it to a bunch of performers, singers and musicians that I knew in Salt Lake. I came up with a concept, *Slice to Life*, a dark comedy about music, love and loss. We shot twenty-six episodes. It is twenty-five now, but I am going to re-release one of them as an alternative take toward the ending. Actually, we completed those about almost four years ago and [got] YouTube [to] distribute and have them on other websites as well.

SA: That is fantastic. What kind of budget were you working with?

TT: A low budget! [Laughter] It was a no budget. Fortunately I had a couple of friends come in here and [they] would buy food and allow me to shoot in their places. A lot of the locations they just allowed me to film for free. I shot it [with] no budget. It was all about time. There is a saying: there is good, fast and cheap. So we made it, hopefully, good and cheap. [Laughter] It definitely wasn't fast. So we were about three and a half, four months. Most of it I only shot six hours a day. I didn't want to waste people's time. We posted the ending. It is weird to watch, but you go in and look and there are people from Iraq, Cambodia and Israel watching these [inaudible]. It really puts it in perspective. Hopefully, it will catch on fire and it will draw some attention. My goal is to shoot the second one *Life Flight 2* with the two being the number two in the middle. It is a winner. It is two sisters dealing with struggles. The confidante, the love interest, in the first *Life Flight* will be the lead in this next one.

SA: Would you be selling that in Salt Lake [City] or possibly down here?

- TT: I will shoot some pieces definitely here now that I know the feature well enough that I know the area, what I can use. I will shoot, most likely, about sixty to seventy percent of it just to keep the landscape consistent.
- SA: Where do you get your actors and your crew from for these productions?
- TT: I have been very lucky to be working in the industry for like twenty-something years, coming up with twenty-five years, and you just build relationships. There are [fellows who] just are technicians [who] are actually filmmakers. They don't necessarily want to pursue their own ambitions of making their own projects. There are a lot of people who, with their skill and trade, want you to support the independent film movement. It is amazing to me. It is not that hard. It gives some people chances that are ambitious. There is a [fellow] by the name of Josh Dussierre. [Inaudible] They became producers on the project. Casey [Halaufia] came in as a sound person and Josh came in as a production person. If it wasn't for them, there is no way I would have [made] it through those four months. Of course, my wife — we used our home. We used the back yard. [Laughter] My friend, [inaudible] Perkins, property. We shot there a lot. Sixty percent was at the apartment house at the time. You do what you have to do. You make sure people understand that you really appreciate them. You try not to take advantage of them. You can create some [projects] as an independent filmmaker, especially now in the digital age. Think about it. I was fortunate to start when it was film. The transition between trying to print light onto emulsion and to actually be able to see it immediately, that is huge!
- SA: Are you using tape at all or is it straight to the disc? Is there a hard drive on camera?
- TT: I will shoot on disc. It just depends on whatever medium the camera is using which is usually basically USB. You know what I mean? Sony has memory type cards. Windows RED has their own. Some people go straight to hard drive. You can, if you wanted to. You probably want to because you are probably shooting high resolution, high speed. So it just depends. I knew that I didn't have to worry. I tried to keep the look somewhat consistent, but I also tried to manipulate the look to my advantage using the different cameras from cards and discs to film. Some [inaudible], not too much, because it was low budget. I didn't have the budget to have a bunch of hard drives. So somewhat using high definition is a good look for what we were doing.
- SA: Do you have an editing suite at home? Are you using final cut? How do you put your [projects] together?
- TT: I don't edit, although that is my "new" on my way to my doctorate, so to speak. That is my next thing. I would rather write. I tend to work with editors. There are three editors: Paul Baird, this talented [fellow] I met through Josh Dussierre Baird. I told you about earlier. He cut the first path of it and helped me with the

piecing. There is a woman that helped me on the rough cut which is [a] much more technical cut and helped me clean up some of the audio. Patricia Kirk, who I work with as a production person also. She is super talented. She really helped create the paint for the film and the final edit before we posted. It was variegated, very dirty and rough. The script is extremely gritty so I am hoping it translates. A lot of people like it, though. I have been so intrigued. I feel good about it now in the fifth year. It has been a struggle. I don't think as far as my own system — as a production person, it is better for me to create the concept and execute. That is my skill set. The production work, the people work and all that [inaudible] some of the [projects that] I have produced I have been able to use that to help me get the project up and going. As far as shooting, I don't know a camera I might want to use. So I might find a DP that has a certain system. So I would rather collaborate with those things as well as editing with somebody else that helps. I think you can get too close to a project. I can't see the forest for the trees. In those [cases], especially, I think that you need an outside look. You have the final say anyway. But I don't intend to buy the equipment. I have a concept of film that suits me when I first started. That is what it is. You show up with a suitcase.

I went to Kentucky [and] did a job this year. I knew exactly who I wanted to work with so I could execute a production. That is my advantage here in Utah. I know so many talented filmmakers here. It is crazy. With so many talented filmmakers you can do it. If somebody is busy they can still help you with this. Or somebody might rent you their equipment. Chris Burk, his company [inaudible], did a lot of commercial [work] here in Utah. I used seventy percent of the film with his [stuff]. That is actually my approach.

SA: I have some friends who are in Los Angeles and West Los Angeles [California]. One of them in particular may get a call the night before a job and then go out. How do you secure work being down here in kind of a remote place? Do they call you weeks in advance?

TT: You get lucky. I can probably name twenty films right now that I know that may go in the next year. You don't know when the project is going to go. I have been freelancing for twenty-five years. You don't really know. And even a project that does, it is not the project. Until they call you and you have it in a memo or you sign a contract, you don't know. So I think in the technical world a lot of [fellows] depend on how long they have been doing it. The earlier they are the later the call they probably get. I have been doing it for about twenty-five years now. [Inaudible] all over the United States only made it more practical since I am gone a lot. My in-laws are here. It is worth it to move here — four hours from Salt Lake [City]. I am shooting in Salt Lake. I am actually talking to you where we stay in Ivins [Washington County, Utah] right now. I will drive back up to work either tonight or tomorrow. But as far as needing the work, it is just contacts. I have done a couple of pilots that might go, so I might have an idea. I am expected to show in Memphis [Tennessee]. I was out there for three and a half months on

location. So it just works to my benefit. A place that is beautiful, I really like, and it is safe for your family. That is to say it works out for now.

SA: My assistant person who is working with me on this project just came in and I had found *Slice to Life* which just had the first episode on. With the park up there in Salt Lake City; it is nice looking. I am going to go home and start watching the episodes.

TT: I would love to know what you think.

SA: Let me bring back to your recollections of *Coyote Summer*. Can you tell me where it was shot in Washington County?

TT: We were in St. George. We were staying at the old Thunderbird at the time. That should date it, the Thunderbird Motel. We were just on people's property. [Inaudible] who was one of the producers. Schauna Schain, her husband just passed away. They bring in work in Utah, Don Schain, the producer on that project.

I would like to make some comments. I would actually like to elaborate on that and it would help if I had a cohort. It is so long ago. I just remember being in some of the most beautiful red dirt. It was a movie about a girl and a horse very along the lines of *Flicka*, [but] before *Flicka*. He helped work with this horse. I just remember watching the whole thing and the training and just watching the team I had worked with, done projects with, the assistant director, and how awesome it was and how much all the people knew more because it was like we were rooting for the [fellow] that was part of the team. The landscape, I remember the most. The landscape which made it easy for me to come down here and move here. How old was I? Like twenty-eight? That was twenty years ago. That was a long time ago.

SA: I just pulled up the credits for this. There is Don Schain and David C. Anderson.

TT: Yes. David is one of the producers of Leucadia Films.

SA: You said it was Don Schain's widow who might be the person to talk to?

TT: Yes, Schauna Schain. You should give her a call. We can do it through e-mail or what have you.

SA: Okay.

TT: She would have some great insights. Before I even was on board [inaudible] as assistant director, we were scouting. [Inaudible] he is another person, the director himself. I can get you a list of people. I am sure I can get you involved with ninety percent of the names.

SA: That would be very kind of you. Either do it by telephone as we are doing now. We do have a special collections [library that] has recording equipment. [They are] putting [items] into the archives immediately. If I can get you to do a release of this interview [it] will be put into the state archives and we can always do a follow up later.

TT: Absolutely. I will [send] you that e-mail when you get that squared away.

SA: Okay, thanks. Do you ever want to come to this campus when you are free and maybe meet with some students? I teach creative writing classes and it would be good to have you talk about story telling technique.

TT: I would love to!

SA: Okay. Since we are Facebook friends I can just communicate. I know you are busy. I know how it is with industry people. It is just another way for you to kind of plug into the St. George community. I have been here about nine years and it has taken a little while to get used to. I am from the east myself and yet, I think, this is where I am going to be the rest of my life. [Dixie State] University is a good place. Not a lot of people know about it outside of Utah, but it does have a lot of talent with the faculty and students. Do you have any questions for me?

TT: No, not yet. No, not at all. I would love to be involved. You let me know and when in due time that would be and I will come down and visit with you and we will take the next step.

SA: That would be brilliant. I know you said \$50.00 for this we would give to charity, but maybe I could take you out to lunch. We could just chat and thank you for your kindness.

TT: No, it is my pleasure. I love making films. I love talking about film. I love being a part of film. Maybe I will get lucky one day and [inaudible] be able to teach film. Thank you.

SA: Okay. Again, that is a reason to talk to Phil Tuckett. He is a very accessible person. I could always name drop if you want. Thank you so much, "Toby." It was a pleasure.

TT: You bet!

SA: Talk to you [later]. Bye.

TT: Bye.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]