

SHOWCASE



THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

The young girl with a dream now has her sights set on making a feature-length film *by Sherren Lee, Toronto*

At six years old, when my family emigrated from Taiwan to Montreal, I was the kid in kindergarten who didn't speak French. When I was 12, my family moved from Montreal to Toronto, and I was once again the new girl who didn't really speak the language. I think being an outsider at a young age forced me to learn to adapt quickly. I've always been fairly shy and often spend considerable time observing before engaging, but somehow I manage to assert myself and forge my own path.

I feel very fortunate to have always had this sense that if someone else could do something, I could do it, too. Why not? People often told me I was naive, but I was proud of being an idealist. Maybe it's because I am a middle child, or because my immigrant parents couldn't really help me

navigate the world around me, but if I wanted something, I took it upon myself to figure out the steps to make it happen.

Ever since I was a child, I wanted to be an actor and whenever an adult asked me why, my 12-year-old answer was that I couldn't imagine a better way to put yourself in someone else's shoes. I figured acting would help me better understand the world and the people around me. I even mailed my summer-camp headshot to all the agents I could find—and got rejected by all of them. At 17, I paid for my own singing lessons, which were a joy for me to pursue. I went to university because that was expected of me, but I kept doing community musical theatre throughout my time at McGill University—until I directed a play for the first time. I was seduced by the craft of storytelling and realized that,

PHOTO: KRISTINA RUDDICK

Left: Sherren is all smiles on set. Right (from top to bottom): Sherren (right) pictured here with her sister Jane and their grandfather shortly before the big move to Canada in 1990; giving notes to actor Jean-Michel Le Gal during the filming of her short film, *Benjamin* (2015); setting up a cool, one-shot scene on the TV show *Dino Dana* with camera operator Brett Hurd and 1st Assistant Director Mary Reynolds.



as a director, I could explore perspectives and experiences in a fuller and more complex way. I never acted again, but I kept telling stories from a director's perspective. I'm constantly fascinated and uplifted by how different and unique we all are—and, at the same time, by how much we're really all the same when you get right down to it.

When I graduated with a bachelor's degree in commerce in 2007, I thought the best way of entering the film industry was through production. So, I worked as a production manager and associate producer for more than seven years, primarily with Mushkeg Media and Frantic Films.

While working in production, I was also writing, directing and producing my own independent work. I didn't really know what I was doing initially, but I focused on the things that made me excited and put everything I had into the next thing I was capable of doing, no matter how small a step it was towards becoming a full-time filmmaker.

I made a web series and a dozen short films before applying to the prestigious Directors' Lab at the Norman Jewison Canadian Film Centre. I was a resident there for six months in 2014 and spent another six months making my short film *Benjamin* (2015) through their Short Dramatic Film program, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. It was also screened at the Palm Springs International Film Festival, and earned us a Golden Sheaf Award in 2016 at the Yorkton Film Festival in Saskatchewan.

Since then, I began my television career by directing on Sinking Ship Entertainment's acclaimed series, *Dino Dana* (Amazon, TVO, Yoopa) and the Emmy-winning series *Odd Squad* (PBS, TVO). I also got my start directing one-hour dramas a few months later, on Shaftesbury's period crime drama, *Murdoch Mysteries* (CBC). I've returned to *Murdoch Mysteries* for another two episodes during their 12th season this year, and I am excited to be directing an episode on the first season of Muse Entertainment and Back Alley's new show, *Coroner* (CBC).

This past year, I've been lucky to travel to various festivals with my latest short, *The Things You Think I'm Thinking* (2017), which has won several awards including the Oscar-qualifying Grand Jury



Award for Best International Narrative Short Film at Outfest. It has been in competition at more than 20 festivals, including Slamdance, South by Southwest (SXSW) and LA Film Festival, and it's continuing its festival run.

Despite it being ten years since I made my first film, I feel as though I'm just getting started and look forward to the many milestones ahead of me. As I work towards my first feature film and continue to grow as a filmmaker, I often remind myself to dream big, but to take it one step at a time. I also make an effort to take care of myself in order to cultivate my love for this craft and retain the passion and stamina for this exciting and unpredictable path I've wholeheartedly committed to. Here's to the next ten years! ■

Find out more at <http://www.sherrenlee.com>.