

Sole spirits

Woman returns to old Waverly home to film movie

By MELINA HUDDY
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An abandoned 1884 Victorian farmhouse in Waverly echoes with the memories of the family whose lives it once embraced. For a few short days in June, the house once again will be filled with life as a granddaughter returns to film "Sole Spirits," a tale of traditions, trends and transition.

Joanna Jefferson, 26, remembers visiting her maternal grandfather, James P. Sharp, in the house where she will shoot the thesis work that will complete her master of fine arts degree in film production from Boston University.

"My mother grew up in this house. My grandfather lived here until his death. My uncle still lives next door. The house has been vacant since my grandfather died and is sadly deteriorating. It's important to me to do the film here, to capture the spirit of the house while it still exists," Jefferson says.

Jefferson became interested in visual arts during high school and found video a particularly fascinating medium for narrative storytelling.

"Using technology to be creative, using a scientific method as a means of self-expression, fits my split personality," she says with a grin.

She took her interests with her to Miami University, where she graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in mass communication. Jefferson began her career in video production working as an award-winning producer and videographer for MMG Corporate Communications in Cincinnati for three years.

"As much as I enjoyed the work, I soon realized that serious, independent filmmaking is not a part-time endeavor. It's definitely an all-or-nothing proposition and so I decided to give it my all," Jefferson says.

"Sole Spirits" is one of three thesis films to be shot this summer by Jefferson and her classmates. The crew of seven will leave Boston in late May, traveling first to a remote rest area outside Kansas City before going out to the Berry College campus in Rome, Ga. They will then go to Waverly for filming of Jefferson's project.

"Yes, these are school projects, but they are also much more than that. For each of us, they are our first. Yes, these are school projects, but they are also much more than that. For each of us, they are our first serious short films, and we hope to show them as a package and enter them into festivals," Jefferson says.

While the three films are as different as their settings, they are linked by their makers in a unique way. Jefferson explains, "Each of us are going back to the place where we got our original inspiration to pursue the art. Each of us are seeking authenticity in our films, not just in the location, but in the casting of local talent. We understand the goals of one another's projects so well that



Joanna Jefferson prepares to cut a piece of wall papers as she redecorates her grandfather's home to film a movie called "Sole Spirits."

everyone brings something to the others' films."

"Sole Spirits" is the story of a woman who has lived her life in the family home and comes to realize age has brought her to the point where she is no longer able to live alone. Her son, who has left to pursue a career in a more urban setting, returns with his daughter to help his mother make the transition as she prepares to leave the house.

During the course of a single morning, "Sole Spirits" deals with three generations of a family coming to terms with their history, putting the house and all it stands for behind them and moving on.

"I struggled with the title and even now, I'd be just as happy if no title were necessary. Sole, as in alone, spirits, plural, was chosen because we have three people coming together at the end of three separate journeys," Jefferson says.

Jefferson has worked with Artsbridge to make arrangements for casting calls and other details necessary to her schedule.

"I have been taking advantage of the local arts community and have been pleasantly surprised at the availability of resources and the outpouring of support I've received in the area," Jefferson says.

Auditions were conducted at the Actors Guild April 13 and 14, giving Jefferson the chance to meet some of the 20-plus area residents she has talked to either on the telephone or by e-mail.

"I've watched my classmates work through the casting process and am confident that I will find the three characters I'm looking for in the Parkersburg area. Not that I

know exactly what I'm looking for. I'm very open to seeing what people bring to these characters. It's not so much a matter of whether they look or sound like anything specific as it is that they connect," says Jefferson.

Within Jefferson's family, the connection is complete.

"My parents' involvement with this project has come as a pleasant surprise. They came with me, a 13-hour drive from Boston, and while I was conducting auditions, they assumed the role of set designers. Together with my aunt and uncle, they have been working to get the house ready, which is quite a job.

It's been empty for a few years now and is in a sad state of disrepair. But, they are cleaning, decorating. We're completely re-wallpapering one room. It's very personal for my mother, and I'm glad she can be a part of it," Jefferson says.

As excited as she is about filming "Sole Spirits," Jefferson admits there are some difficulties. "One of the things I've learned about filmmaking is that a large part of the process is planning for disaster. There are outside scenes dependent on the weather, for instance, or a cast or crew member has an emergency or ... well, disaster!

"The other difficulty that I'm a little worried about is simply the distance and lack of personal contact between the cast and crew before filming. We need to be comfortable with each other, so I'm hoping everybody clicks. I'll be back here in early May for rehearsal, but we won't be shooting until late June. So, I'm very excited, but I'm also very nervous."