

Filmmaker wins contest with Bigfoot

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"Finally, a crystal clear photo," posted filmmaker Stacy Brown Jr. on one of his social media accounts. Attached was an image of a hairy, silhouetted being that he neither confirmed nor denied as the Apalachicola Skunkape. As the 2016 Bigfoot of the Year, Brown's photo set online bigfoot culture abuzz as they believed he had finally captured the elusive creature.

Brown later explained his only intention was to create hype for his newest project, a Bigfoot-themed commercial for the Kia Drives Creativity Video Contest. The figure in question was none other than a friend in costume, and the video received over 4,000 plays on Facebook alone.

Brown was overjoyed when he got the notification that his commercial was selected by Kia of Tallahassee as the first place winner, reaffirming his path in film and undeniable draw towards the world's most mysterious figures and vast unknowns.

"It's stuff that I loved as a kid," admits Brown, who recently created a documentary, "Roswell: 70 Years Later," after feeling dissatisfied with other films on the subject. "The problem with these films is that they're always trying to lead you to believe that it is aliens or the government. It is never here are the facts, believe what you want. We just wanted to get the truth out there, whatever the truth may be, and whatever you may want to believe."

Growing up in Crawfordville, Brown remembers making films with his father's VHS Panasonic camcorder. He most enjoyed making stop animation films with his action figures and other toys. In high school, Brown acted in theater and was part of a TV production class.

"Filmmaking was something I always wanted to do," says Brown. "I fell into an acting career a few years back and I learned a lot about how they were doing it. I thought, 'I can make movies myself,' and that's how I got my start."

Brown is one of the Panhandles' most notable Bigfoot hunters. Propelled into the national spotlight in 2012 when a video he and his father filmed together in Torreya State Park snowballed, Brown was asked to be a part of Animal Planet's "Finding Bigfoot." He was also the winner on Spike TV's "Million Dollar Bigfoot Bounty."

With these career experiences on television shows and the advent of user-generated sites like YouTube, Brown was able to teach himself a lot about cameras and filming. He says vision is what sets artists apart nowadays, and having a strong point of view when it comes to the filming and editing of a project.

"That's not something that's taught in a school, that's something you either have or you don't," states Brown. "My vi-



Stacy Brown and his crew created a Bigfoot-themed commercial for the Kia Drives Creativity Video Contest. PHOTOS BY STACY BROWN

sion will change based on the project. We just did a documentary that was very guerrilla style, and a horror flick that doesn't fit into a genre. For me, it's about experimentation, no rules, and just making a good film."

Not having as much training on the technical side of filmmaking presents its challenges, which Brown combats by bringing in people with expertise to assist and teach. Once he learns a specific skill, Brown says he figures out how to move past that hurdle next time.

Among his favorite filmmakers and directors are Christopher Nolan and Tim Burton. Brown is attracted to the plot twists at the end of Nolan's films and the aesthetic that Burton achieves in his movies. In terms of his own process, Brown says he never sits down and storyboards his ideas. Instead, he maintains a roadmap of his film inside his head, and allows for spontaneity and flexibility dictate the rest.

"I think if you overthink things you don't get as good a product," says Brown. "If you overwork something, you're trying too hard, and if it's good it'll come to you and it'll flow."

He says that Les Stroud, the "Survivor Man" on Discovery Channel, became a mentor while they were acting on set for the upcoming movie, "Interview a Monster." Brown says Stroud's can-do attitude rubbed off on him, especially since the TV personality owns his own production company and self-produces many of his own shows.

"If he wants to do something, he just



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goes and does it," says Brown, who started his own production company, Best Dudes Films, in June 2017.

The name is derived from his son, who would call Brown his "best dude" when he was younger. Alongside Assistant Director, Steven Stafford, the production company's second completed project was for the Kia Drives Creativity Video Contest. Their 30-second video took first place, and will air publicly as a commercial.

"The behind-the-scenes stuff is insane," laughs Brown. "No matter the project, there are always a hundred sto-

ries, so the most rewarding thing is getting the product finished."

Though the filming had its bumps along the way — the creepiness of the creature spooking one actress, and a brief audio mishap that was quickly corrected — Brown was pleased with the outcome. Partnering with the Wakulla County Police Department and featuring a Kia Soul, the video highlights Brown's Bigfoot background in a unique way that he hopes audiences will enjoy.

"If it makes you forget about what's going on in your life just for a second, then money or awards don't really matter," says Brown. "That, as an artist, is what I try to get across."

The new year holds numerous opportunities and projects for Brown and his budding company. Best Dudes Films will be shooting another documentary this January, "The Wild Man of Ocheese Pond," and Brown hopes to keep the ball rolling with four more films in 2018. He says his children provide his biggest source of motivation, with his daughters catching the filmmaking bug themselves, and begging Brown to set up their own YouTube Channel.

"I want them to be able to look back and be proud," says Brown. "That's what drives me and inspires me to do it all in the first place."

Amanda Sieradzki is the feature writer for the Council on Culture & Arts. COCA is the capital area's umbrella agency for arts and culture (www.tallahasseearts.org).