

Interview with Andy Royer, director of Trout Grass

Contributed by Bruce Frigeri
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Indiefilmchat.com: Trout Grass has developed a very passionate following over the past couple of years. Why do you think these films have been so well received?

Andy Royer: Well, I'd like to think that that Trout Grass has been so well received because it is the Best Film Ever. Other than that I imagine the film is well received because it doing the job of a film; it is presenting an evocative story, one which many people, anglers in particular, can relate to. I think people also like a film with a slow pace and wonderful cinematography. (

Indiefilmchat.com: What was your background and career prior to producing Trout Grass?

A.R.: I was just a lowly bamboo guy, supplying bamboo poles to fly-rod makers around the world. Film projects have been very small and none so meaningful as Trout Grass.

Indiefilmchat.com: Can you think of any ways that your background prepared you for producing a film like this? How about ways where it might have made the process more difficult?

A.R.: It made it easier because since I worked with bamboo and makers of fly-rods I knew what I was talking about and I was able to get great talent to help make the film. It made it more difficult because I didn't know what in the hell I was doing when it came to producing a film.

Indiefilmchat.com: What was your motivation for creating Trout Grass?

A.R.: I always heard that producers of fly-fishing documentaries were very popular with the ladies.

It actually started off as a smaller film. I sell bamboo to people that build bamboo fly-rods to people around the world and over and over again I get questions about why a piece of bamboo has this kind of a mark or that kind of a bend or scratch in it. I couldn't take hundreds of people to China with me all at once to show them first-hand answers to their questions. I wanted some way to show these people exactly what the bamboo went through before it made its way to their shops. After taking famed rod maker Glenn Brackett to China in 2000 we decided that the story of the process of bamboo in China could actually work as a small film and it grew from there.(

Indiefilmchat.com: How did you finance the production of Trout Grass?

A.R.: I've got two more years until the statute of limitations runs out and then I can tell you all about it.

As what seems to be normal for most small, independent films, I started with my own money then branched out to close friends, less close friends and eventually started asking people who had never met me for money. We had some luck because a few wonderful people believed in our ability to make a special film. There is an "interest group" for just about

every activity known to man. With fly-fishing we happened to find people across the country who loved the sport and wanted to see something like this get done.

Indiefilmchat.com: Can you share what you find so fascinating about trout?

A.R.: I don't think it has so much to do with the actual fish. As our narrator and fly-fisherman David Duncan states, "We're trying to get lost out there. We're trying to catch a ride our souls can ride forever." It isn't the fish that fascinates and invigorates folks so much as it is the pursuit of a wild animal. Here we have one that is exceedingly particular (in some cases) about where it hangs out and what it eats and for an angler to succeed in hooking in to one of these natural beauties they must learn what the fish is eating and present a hand-made replica in a way that the fish in question will attempt to eat it. In short, to be good, an angler must imitate nature and to do that, he or she must immerse themselves in the natural world; it's damn hard to catch a trout in a Hummer. Real fishing brings us, by default, into the real world. It is, as most genuine spiritual pursuits are, a tech-free, low cost way to elevate our spirits.

Indiefilmchat.com: Independent filmmakers often have a hard time identifying who their audience might be. Trout Grass appeals to a much wider audience than the traditional fishing dvd. Did you think that would be the case when you began the project?

A.R.: I think most people recognize that the building of a fly-rod (as well fly-fishing itself) is little more than a ways to a means. This is not a film about building a rod or catching fish. It is a film about involving ourselves with something we love and using that pursuit as a way to enrich our lives. I think that that idea plays out across the spectrum. But no, we had no idea that we'd end up with an evocative film at the beginning. When we started I didn't envision a film that would be viewed by any more than a few hundred "bamboo nuts" in their shops in the dead of winter.(

Indiefilmchat.com: Western film festivals seem to have a much more open minded criteria for accepting films than East or West Coast festivals. Can you talk about your experience with some of these festivals and how you think they helped Trout Grass?

A.R.: I guess first I've got to say that I'm not sure of the difference between "Western film festivals" and "West Coast festivals" unless we're referring to film festivals for "Westerns".

The small festival circuit we did with Trout Grass was great fun. We started in Jackson Hole which was a good meeting point for our crew which migrated from WA, AZ, CO and WY. We entered the film into dozens of festivals and it ran in probably 20. We were just tickled with the idea that anyone would actually choose to go sit in a dark room for an hour to watch our production. And while it did not result in fame, fortune or great debaucherous parties until 6 AM it did afford us an opportunity to travel a bit and to meet some awesome folks. We also got to learn a bit about how the process works and even won a few awards. I think all of this and any exposure in general helped get our film out to the public and brought a little more attention to it bit by bit.

Indiefilmchat.com: What was the best complement you remember getting about Trout Grass?

A.R.: I was blown away the first time someone called me to tell me that they had watched the film on DVD. I expressed surprise. Then they told me they watched it something like three times. I couldn't imagine someone getting so much from a film that they would watch it more than once or twice. I still think that is a pretty cool generic complement for any filmmaker. Specifically? Just last January I was back in China and there was a man from Germany making the trip with me to visit the bamboo forests. He stopped at one point while we were walking through a small village and said, "Yes, it is exactly like this in the film!"(

Indiefilmchat.com: What was the most fun you had while producing the film?

A.R.: A tie between watching our cameraman, Ed George and how he worked while filming. Once that guy gets behind his viewfinder the rest of the world is lost to him. I watched him fall into rivers and walk straight into posts as he tried to catch his shots. He really put himself into harms way to get what he wanted. It was also great fun trading barbs with our main writer David Duncan who is a humorous and fine writer and human being. We spent several sessions going over our script and recordings. That was a real pleasure.

Indiefilmchat.com: What was the most challenging thing that happened while producing Trout Grass?

A.R.: Challenging grown professionals in their work and not accepting efforts that I didn't think worked for the film. I had two professional musicians spend five days creating music for the film that I didn't want to use a lick of. I had to tell our writer and cameraman and editor when something that they had worked VERY hard on and spent many hours or days creating that I didn't want that particular piece of work in the final film. It is very humbling to reject these hard-working and skilled artists.(

Indiefilmchat.com: Can you describe what you're working on now?

A.R.: I've started two other projects that have dissolved and I'm still balancing the ability to create a great film, which takes hundreds of hours while not making money. That's hard. Our current project is focused on the passing of human lives and how that event is celebrated or marked by our loved ones. We all seem so dang scared of dying in this country, so much so that we hardly speak of it and we often don't know how to act when we are losing a loved one. I'd like to show some options.(

Indiefilmchat.com: What advice would you offer for aspiring non fiction filmmakers?

A.R.: Just freaking GO FOR IT! No one will believe in your dream becoming a reality unless YOU make it happen. As long as you keep pushing, it will keep happening.(

To find out more about TROUT GRASS and order your a DVD of it, [CLICK HERE](#).