

The Worst Weeks' Filming of My Life

I've been a Location Manager for some 18 years now, having been in the business for 31 years. Last year I was working on "The Knock", the ITV drama about the Customs & Excise Authority, and as is always the story these days, or so it seems, it was chaos. I had had a head start on the director of two weeks, got well ahead, he joined and didn't like the scripts at all. So, of course, everything is rewritten and I now get well behind.

Anyway I was doing all right until 2 days 'after' the technical recce: a company that owned a recycling plant in Southwark wrote to me to say they had changed their minds and didn't want to go ahead with the filming. The dreaded domino effect sprang into place, the gym and the park scheduled on the same day got blown out of the water because they were certainly not near any other recycling plant, which was a crucial part of the script.

Oh, by the way, this was the week before Christmas and we were supposed to close down for two weeks and start filming on 5th January as soon as we came back. Now, if you, like me, have had the misfortune to have that two week period of Christmas and New Year as a set-up or finding time, you'll know what I was about to go through. You can't get a hold of anybody, nobody wants to talk to you, they are on leave or they are pissed.

The director buggered off on holiday, the whole place shut down and I was left on my own to find an alternative site for all three locations, to film on the Wednesday of that first week back. It is here I will mention one name in this piece, Pip Short, God bless him, the first assistant, who said "I'll stay with you and come looking". How many assistants do you know like that? So apart from Christmas Day, Boxing Day, and New Years Day, I worked those two weeks and good old Pip came with me most of the time. We found a friendly refuse recycling place just off the A40 and, cold calling, talked to the site manager. He talked to his bosses but couldn't give the OK till after Christmas when his bosses were back from leave, so I sweated for a few days I can tell you. The David Lloyd Centre came up as the replacement gym but I was still having trouble with a residents association about parking round a block of flats on that fated Monday we were back!

So here comes Monday and I'm still struggling to get sense into the stupid twit I have been faxing, telephoning for a fortnight re the flats. I get a phone call from the guy who owns the warehouse I want to film at on the Saturday, he is now back from America but he has gone into liquidation (he would, wouldn't he?), he may have the keys, he may not. If he has, we can film, if he hasn't we can't, call him about Wednesday and he should have some news. I get news from the set in that, the director wants a high shot of the said warehouse, can I get permission from the building on the corner overlooking the place. Between frantic phone calls to the flats, it is the third location that day, so I've still got time to sort it out, I go to Brick Lane and find that the building he wants to shoot from is a Mosque (it would be wouldn't it?). My Urdu is crap and their English ain't so hot and I'm told to return tomorrow at half past four to see their head guy, can't talk now it's Ramadan and they are gone and I leave the building. The recycling plant gives permission. I now have to find a park near it and a unit base. It will have to be a tomorrow job because I have failed with the residents and for the first time in my career I have lost a location on the day we were supposed to shoot there. I have to go and see the director and say sorry but you can't go there. The unit overruns at both the first two locations and we would never have made it to the flats anyway, even if we could have shot there. I feel a little bit better because of that but not a lot. In the end they build the damn thing, with two bits of flat and a telephone!



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Tuesday dawns. When do I confess about the warehouse or do I keep quiet and just hope it will be OK? Do I find another one? Yes but where and when, anyway no time today, off down the A40 to find a park location and also a base for tomorrow. God I hate working like this. I'll phone the movement order in. Council very helpful and find me park and unit base in one place. David Lloyd OK. Quick visit just to make sure, and tell them it's definitely on for tomorrow, sorry about the short notice! Oh God the mosque, I'll be late, back down the A40 into town. Just in time, see the place for the shot and thank them and tell them I will be back Saturday Allah permitting!

Wednesday. I leave the unit to it, I have to be at Gatwick just to tidy up loose ends for next weeks' filming. I telephone the warehouse guy: "Ring me on Friday morning I still don't know". Gulp.

Thursday. Travel round and find a jewellery shop for Saturday (how did I get into this mess?) to go with the warehouse and an Indian restaurant, which I have already got. Nice man says he will talk it over with his wife tonight and phone me, feels it won't be a problem as I only need it for about two hours Saturday a.m. I hear nothing.

Friday. I bite the bullet and telephone the jewellery shop first. "Oh sorry, I forgot all about you, I went out for a meal with my wife and I forgot all about it. I'll call you back." Sweat is slowly breaking out on my forehead. I telephone the warehouse. He has the keys and "thinks" it will be OK. Jeweller phones back, yes that's fine. Quickly I telephone the police, council, and rush off to do a route for tomorrow's movement order.

Saturday. I made it, I made it to the end of the week a bit ragged but intact. I begin to relax. We finish at the Indian about seven, there is no problem because they are closed all day on a Saturday, the man who owns it is cooking the food for the scene, he has said he should be there some time around one o'clock. The jeweller goes well. I relax a bit more. I telephone Michael the restaurant owner, he is a bit delayed at a wedding but will be there soon. Two o'clock and no sign of Michael. I begin not be relaxed any more. Three o'clock and no Michael. The prop master comes to see me, "When can I get into the restaurant?".

A weak smile, "Soon I hope". "Michael where the hell are you?" "Sorry I will be back soon, look, the keys are at the newsagents round the corner, help yourself. Oh, by the way, he shuts at three thirty." It is twenty past three. Luckily it is a Saturday, the traffic is light and myself and the prop master grab the keys in time.

We open the doors and gasp. The shooting crew is due there about four; the scene is a meal for two in an up-market Indian restaurant with a few other diners in the background. It is three forty and the place is still trashed from the night before. The tables haven't been cleared, there are glasses and stale food everywhere.

"Oh shit! I'll start washing up in the kitchen, you start clearing the tables", says the prop master, his eyes having widened to about four times their normal size.

We managed to get food from an Indian takeaway further up the road. Michael arrived about four thirty, full of apologies. No problem, the food was already prepared and just needed heating up. The unit overran at the warehouse, thank goodness. The director walked into the restaurant at about five thirty, just as myself and the prop master fell out of the building and breathed sighs of relief.



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"All right, boys?"

"Oh, yes, fine thanks."

"Oh this place looks bloody marvellous."

In a very quiet voice as the door closed I said, "Yes, good job you didn't see it two hours ago."

I lit a cigar round the corner and said to myself "Why? Why, oh, why do I do this bloody job?"

And do you know I still can't answer that question. Can you?

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