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[North Shore Outlook](#)

Dramatic choices



Career choices - After deciding to pursue a career as an independent filmmaker instead of attending law school, filmmaker Garfield Miller has been voted one of this country's top 10 talents in the industry.

Kerry Hayes photo

By [Justin Beddall - North Shore Outlook](#)

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Independent filmmaker or lawyer?

That was the dramatic decision facing the main character, Garfield Lindsay Miller.

First, the backstory. Miller, a West Van grad, had attended Santa Barbara City College to play baseball in 1995. He was good pitcher who dreamed of hurling in the bigs. But tendonitis in his pitching shoulder and elbow later forced him to re-calibrate his career ambitions. His focus shifted away from sports.

He ended up transferring to Wesleyan, a private liberal arts college in Connecticut. He planned to study English and play for the university's ball club. Like any transfer student, he got wait-listed for most classes. He signed up for the History of World Cinema because there was "plenty of space." The class changed his viewpoint.

"I realized film had the potential to be an art form – I'd never realized that before, I always just thought of it as entertainment."

"It was there that I (really) discovered film. I took more film (classes) than English (classes)," said Miller, who also worked as a TA in Wesleyan's film department.

He also worked on some independent student films, shooting in places like Sweden and Morocco. After graduation, he returned to B.C. and got a job on a local tech TV show and wrote a screenplay.

Later, while he was living in a yoga community outside Santa Cruz, Calif., he worked as a videographer following a group of students to Washington, DC, to meet senators, civil servants and policy-makers.

Admittedly jaded about politics before his trip to DC, left feeling inspired by dedication of some of the people they interviewed, like Congressman John Lewis, a civil rights leader in the 1960s. He wanted to do something with meaning, he decided. Filmmaking or law school?

“I had to make decision. I really wanted to do the film thing – I wanted to tell stories,” he explains, adding that if he went to law school he always would have wondered about the trajectory of his life had he become a filmmaker.

He moved back to Canada because there are more resources for filmmakers. Shortly after, a mentorship program through the Canadian Film and Television Producers Association led to his first producing and writing credits.

Now his filmmaking resume includes co-writing and producing the award-winning and Gemini-nominated doc *The Fires that Burn* about Sister Elaine MacInnes and co-writing *Stone’s Throw*, an award-winning dramatic feature film set in Nova Scotia – among many other film credits. Most recently, Miller, who is back living on the North Shore, was voted one of the top 20 Top Canadian Film Makers by a jury of his peers.

Miller’s new feature film, *The Last New Year*, which recently debuted at the Victoria Film Fest as the Canadian Gala Film, has already garnered rave reviews.

The film explores the relationships between a group of friends who made a pact in high school to get together each New Year’s Eve – only this year, “one is missing,” explains Miller.

The idea for the film was sparked by a similar tradition Miller and a group of friends from Sentinel secondary in West Van have based on the Danish tradition of “julefrokost.”

He says his annual tradition was the “inspiration” for the film but the “tone is different.”

The '07 actors strike gave Miller the opportunity to make his latest film.

Miller was working on a documentary in Toronto, living with a group of suddenly out-of-work actors. Sensing the opportunity, he, along with his co-writer Casey Austin, wrote a draft script of *The Last New Year* and later shot the film, which is available on Super Channel On Demand until Aug. 3.

“It was a really great experience,” Miller says about sitting in the director’s chair for the first time. “Each project has its fulfilling elements - that’s what sustains me doing this kind of work. It’s just kind of a journey, one project will lead to the next.”


For Miller, the next project is co-writing *Blowing in the Wind*, the story about Percy Schmeiser, the Saskatchewan farmer who took on a multinational agricultural company.

“I heard about the case when it was before the courts. It’s an amazing story.”

For more info, go to lastnewyear.com.

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