

Soul searching and dragon hunting



Written by Janet Yip

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Sustainability, sacredness and serendipity. These are just some of the keywords local filmmaker Dan Gainsford has in mind for his first feature-film project, *Searching for Dragons*.

Inspired by a dragon-shaped rock formation found by the director in a 2001 trip to Central America, the idea for the film slowly developed during five years of persistence and hard work.

At the departure party held in the Byward Market's posh Mercury Lounge March 10, friends, families and members of the Ottawa art community gathered to offer their blessings. It was a fantastic kick off fitting of the grand adventure they are about to pursue.



Dan Gainsford and Forbes Campbell are about to embark on a filmmaking journey that will take them from Canada's extreme north to the Panama Canal. (James Park) Beginning in remote northern Canada and ending at the Panama Canal, passing through deserted corners of the U.S. and Mexico, this one-year journey is as much about filmmaking, travelling and having fun as it is a sacred pilgrimage, searching for meaning in our technologically enlightened but spiritless world.

Gainsford, leader and director of this project, elaborates.

"[In modern society] we have a lot of information and knowledge, and not a whole lot of wisdom. This film is about closing the circle and bringing the wisdom back into it."

At the same time, it is about raising awareness on issues that are important to all of us as part of a contemporary reality, users of this planet's unfortunately unrenewable resources.

Setting a good first example, the van that will take the team across the continent will mostly be fuelled by biologically-friendly diesel fuel.

Gainsford never aimed to become a voice for sustainability or the environment. A Carleton film studies graduate, he is less of a social activist than he is an active participant of the Ottawa arts scene, which he has been since 1997, most significantly as president of the Independent Filmmakers' Cooperative of Ottawa (IFCO) for two years.

Despite his personal work as an artist releasing a series of short films on similar subjects, and finding time to

help other aspiring filmmakers at IFCO, "I'm not a perfect human being," Gainsford says. "I've grown frustrated with my habits so I'm going about to change them. And the more you become aware and more educated with the issues the more you become frustrated again. But I never thought I'd end up here."

Accompanying Gainsford for parts of the journey will be childhood friend Forbes Campbell and experienced filmmaker and friend Melissa Robertson.

As ambitious and clear as the goals are, a lot of questions are left unanswered.

Is there a central issue being discussed here? Is there a specific format as to how this film will be made? How will technology play a part? How will the film be distributed? What if their equipment gets stolen?

What if?

But as Forbes concludes using everybody's favourite word of the night, "[It's important] to give over to serendipity, and to let ourselves be governed by the path we have chosen and see where it takes us. If part of that is hardship then so be it.

"It's not just about the film but the project itself. There is no real end."

Updates will be sparse during the filming as part of the director's wishes to extricate himself from the urban environment and society, and to view the world anew through that perspective.

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