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30 Minutes With Gabrielle Berberich – Jersey Shore Producer of *Greetings From The Shore*

by Drew King

In this installment of our coverage of the 6th Garden State Film Festival we have an old-school Jersey style sit-down (via phone) with the preeminent Jersey Girl Filmmaker herself, Gabrielle Berberich. Berberich is the Co-Writer and Producer, in this her first feature film, *Greetings From The Shore*.



To open I would like to share a comment Berberich made about **ExperienceTheShore.com**.

“When I looked at your website I could tell you were a kindred spirit... I know that people who love the Shore totally get it, that you understand why it was so important to me to make this movie.”

With that touching endorsement we will begin with some background of Berberich.

DK: Where are you and your family originally from?

GB: Warren County. My dad (Leo) was from Jersey City and my mom (Anne) is from the Bronx and they moved out to Warren County... to build a house and raise their six kids.

Growing up in Warren County, the youngest of six children, Berberich attended Pope John in Sparta, NJ. While Berberich never attended film school she did attend Marymount Manhattan College on a merit scholarship. A psychology major with substance abuse counseling as a minor she never intended to be in the Arts track. Berberich considers Marymount “an incredible school for the Arts.”

DK: Tell me about your time at Marymount.

GB: My friends were all actors, writers and directors and there is a chartered off-Broadway theater in Marymount so it was kind of hard to stay away from the Arts. In fact, I own an acting studio (Michael Howard Studios). Many of my teachers teach at Marymount.

Berberich launched her career in media as a college freshman, when her interviews of a “Who’s Who” of the golden age of television were published in *Serling: The Rise And Twilight of Television’s Last Angry Man*, a Penguin/Dutton biography of Twilight Zone creator Rod Serling. It was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Berberich became a freelance writer/photographer and publicist.

She spent seven years in Los Angeles where she immediately joined on at Universal Studios, casting Penny Marshall’s Parkway Productions film *With Friends Like These...* (Bill Murray, Martin Scorsese, Laura San Giacomo, David Strathairn, Alan Arkin, Amy Madigan, Elle Macpherson). Berberich was then tapped by Rysher Entertainment (*Oz*, *Nash Bridges*, *Family*

Brood, Martial Law) to join their creative affairs department. Later, she founded an independent casting company, casting such projects as *Universal Soldier: The Return* (Jean-Claude Van Damme, Bill Goldberg, Michael Jai White) and *If You Only Knew* (Gabrielle Anwar, Jonathan Schaech, Allison Eastwood). She would later expand into producing theater, music videos and film, including the award-winning shorts, *The Quarry* and *The Hook-Armed Man*, which screened at film festivals worldwide.

Sand Between Your Toes

DK: Did your family ever vacation on the shore?

GB: My Dad's Mom started going down to Lavallette about fifty years ago... rent(ed) a house... They were bennies. My parents fell in love with Lavallette... It was the only affordable vacation for six kids. We mostly stayed on Jersey City Avenue... (it was) absolutely wonderful. The experience had the most impact on growing up in our family. It was the time we all got to spend together." And as I got older I started spending my summers working down there. I worked at Tito's Pizzeria in Ortley Beach for many years and then at B&B... Lavallette was my second home."

Creating The Memory

"The beach is very much about family for me, and my Mom and Dad... When there's six kids in the house it's tough for everybody to get their share of attention. They took the time to spend individual time with each one of the kids. If it was just taking one of us out for a walk, or looking for sea-glass or going crabbing. It was absolutely the highlight of my year to spend that time with them."

DK: Do you still visit the Shore?

GB: I own a home in Ocean County now and I spend plenty of time there. I'm just there constantly. The really great thing about having a house there which was just a childhood dream come true and a generational dream because for years and years my grandmother and my parents talked about getting a house. I was fortunate enough to find a beautiful place. I've been so lucky because it's become the new family home and after my father died it was very hard for everyone to feel comfortable going to the beach. Now when we go to the shore we build new memories in this place. We spend a lot of time there during the season, off-season, it's fabulous really fabulous.

DK: Being part memoir, I'll assume *Greetings From The Shore* is circa 1990-92?

GB: It's really funny because we were talking about that... a lot of people will ask 'Oh, is it a period piece?' Or it's kind of timeless or whatever. If you've gone to a summer location where you spend a chunk of time outside of your other life or if you live in a place where others come for a season and then go off, it leaves a big impact, it's a big deal. This film is very much about having each person at each different point in their life for the character of Jenny it's different than for the character Catch, there's a wide age span between them ... something impactful will happen.

Berberich also addressed the numerous people who have come up to her at festivals and said "That was my coming of age summer!"

“When Diane Raver, the co-founder of the Garden State Film Festival contacted us, it was like kind of a homecoming for us. (It was) pretty cool.”

Sure? Shore? Jersey Shore?

We had discussed the term “Shore” and if it was intrinsically Jersey or would people identify with the term say in Florida or Texas.

GB: We played in a festival in Florida, Fort Lauderdale. There was this guy, who after the festival, after the screening he said ‘I haven’t been to Jersey in thirty years, I saw Shore, and I knew that it meant New Jersey.’ He had lived for like forty years in Lavallette.

“The movie truly feels like a postcard. The Shore is really when Greg and I wrote it, the first character of the movie, if we weren’t able to shoot there, we would not have shot this film. It’s not like we would have shot this movie in Malibu. I hope for everyone it shows how much I love New Jersey and I love the Shore, and how important it was and continues to be in my life.”

You Tawkin To Me? Ohh...

Face it, if you live in Jersey you have heard the jokes and know the stereotype of how the world perceives where we live. We discussed this stereotype and case in point, a story Berberich tells about worldwide screenings of *Greeting From The Shore*.

GB: When we play this movie in other places...people would stand up...this was not just Los Angeles, but Canada, Ireland and people would say ‘Oh My God I loved that movie. It’s so amazing. Even though I’ve never been there, this is my story, thank you so much, and where did you really shoot it?’ I would say, This is what New Jersey really looks like, this is the Jersey Shore, and they would say ‘Oh no I get that’s where it’s set, but where did you actually film it.’ This is what a bad rap New Jersey has.

Berberich also feels that the State of New Jersey does little to help correct the problem. She also feels that when the movie reaches DVD and gets around the world, people vacationing in New York will make at least a day trip to the Shore to see what it’s all about.

We touched on her writing and how that is still a big part of her life in the Arts and how she is also a huge fan of children’s literature, hinting that it could be another project coming up.

On the recent writers strike Berberich said, “It begins with a good story... I’m very supportive of writers and participated in fund raisers for them and striking with them. I hope that the perspectives from both sides are a little more even at this point.”

The North Star

Like the Jenny in the movie, Berberich lost her father Leo, quickly due to cancer, passing away before Christmas. Anyone who has lost a relative close to a holiday knows how it can mar that holiday. Berberich considered her father “the North star of our family.” So it put more of a perspective on the family’s summer vacation. *Greetings From The Shore* will stand as a tribute to her Father’s life and love. As a small Easter Egg, there is a scene in the film where Jenny has a photo of her and her dad, that photo is actually Berberich and her father Leo.

Saturated Sunflower

DK: The shot of Jenny, with the backpack, the lighting, the scene, this captures the Shore in one frame.

GB: That image is probably my favorite image in the whole movie. That's the light coming over the island, hitting her in the face while she's watching them play soccer, she's got her bags, I'm telling you, that was me... that's what it felt like, that totally saturated sunflower warmth beauty that comes from the lighting that's not just east coast, it's not Nantucket, not Cape Cod, it's Jersey. It's the air quality, the water.

DK: How long was the whole production?

GB: Almost 2 years.

DK: Did you find a co-operative environment working in Lavallette?

GB: They were amazing, we could not have done it without them, if the town had not been as generous as they were we would not have shot this film. Everyone was supportive.

DK: Would you shoot on the Shore again?

GB: Absolutely, in a heartbeat.

What's Next?

DK: Your newest project *Lucky Mucker* will be shooting in New Jersey, can you tell us more?

GB: It's a romantic comedy...

DK: Last piece of advice for the budding film maker?

GB: Just start working with people who are doing stuff...get involved...meet people who are making films. Make sure you're working with people who are committed and professional. Truly in this day in age it's accessible to everyone. Like anything else that's good and cool, it does not come without sacrifices, like sleeping, eating and paying your rent, but you get to a point where the payoff is really tremendous... you don't have to go to a fancy film school or go out to Hollywood. The Garden State Film Festival is a great example of a festival with a lot of talent from around the country.