

Holland Land: Back Out in the Sheds

Written by Tom Holland
Tuesday, 17 January 2012 16:12



When I started to work in Hollywood, there was little interest in movie props. You made them and forgot about them; the eyes were always on the next job. However, with each project, I acquired file cabinets of papers, mementos, stills, posters, storyboards, director's chairs, crew jackets, caps and anything else you can imagine.

I didn't know what to do with the stuff, but it felt right to hang onto it. So I built three metal sheds in the back of my house. They are hidden by trees, so you can't see them. All the materials went in there, and were promptly forgotten. For years at a time. Maybe even decades.

Then some of the movies I made garnered fans and grew in reputation, and people started asking me about the stuff. They wanted signed photos, or copies of the scripts for silent charity auctions, reviews or one-sheets. All kinds of requests.

So I went back out to the sheds to try to dig the stuff up. I succeeded in some cases, but failed in most. You see, all the material had become jumbled over the years and was strewn throughout the three sheds. In some cases, they were packed so full that I had to crawl over boxes and squeeze down narrow aisles. File cabinets were locked and rusted. I started sneezing because of all the dust. That kind of stuff.

Overwhelmed by it all, I started to look for someone to help me make some order out of it. It would take somebody special, who had great knowledge of genre films and preservation, and would value what I had. Then I met Earl Roesel. He had catalogued Forry Ackerman's

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collection. Forry was one of the first collectors—maybe the first—and his memorabilia was extensive.

I knew I'd found my man in Earl when I brought out a silver handmade amulet on a chain. It had very distinctive markings, but hard to decipher. Earl recognized it immediately: It was a copy of the ring that Bela Legosi wore in, believe it or not, ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET FRANKENSTEIN. It was the Dracula family crest. I had it struck for FRIGHT NIGHT, for Chris Sarandon to wear in the seduction scene with Amanda Bearse. He didn't use it because it swung outward when he bent forward to kiss her. The original had been in Forry Ackerman's collection; the set decorator on FRIGHT NIGHT had rented things from Ackerman and used them in Peter Vincent's apartment. The propmaker, in a stroke of genius, suggested the ring.

I hired Earl on the spot. He's currently going through the sheds and cataloguing the contents. It has been a fascinating experience for me, sort of a combination of STORAGE WARS and digging for buried treasure.

There was damage in one shed. The rats had gotten in years ago and been driven away, never to come back again, but rain had followed. A lot of warm-weather clothing was ruined. It didn't bother me. But I wasn't so happy about the three velvet crew jackets from PSYCHO II, or my high-school letter jacket. I salvaged one of the crew jackets. It has my name written in red silk on the left breast. Also ruined were a lot of great stills from FATAL BEAUTY. That's one of the movies I did that I thought was great fun, but nobody ever mentions. Whoopi Goldberg did some of her best work ever, but the critics didn't want to see her shooting people. Go figure. Anyway, I'm sorry I lost the pictures. A lot of good stuff was saved from the rain, like all my original hand-drawn storyboards for FRIGHT NIGHT (thank you, Lord). I had done them before I really knew what storyboards were.

The other two sheds were just fine. Earl kept working. Every now and then, when he found something he thought was particularly good, he'd call me. That's how I found a fax from Stephen King about THINNER (if you don't know what a fax is, look it up). Of course, a fax is a copy of the original note, and I'm sure the original is long gone, but it's a fun piece to have.

I have some publicity stills from A WALK IN THE SPRING RAIN, in which I acted. It was one of my first big-studio jobs. I get to kiss Ingrid Bergman and then I'm killed by Tony Quinn. The stunt coordinator was Bruce Lee. We got to hang out together for two weeks in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. Bruce doubled me in my fight scene. How many people do you know who can say

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that?

This is how I spent my Christmas. I hope your holidays were great, but you're not going to top this: I found Paul Newman's personal script for THE TOWERING INFERNO, with his notes in it, on New Year's Eve. He didn't sign it. It never occurred to me to ask.

He gave it to me because I was interested in the work of Stirling Silliphant, who wrote it. Sterling also wrote SPRING RAIN, and was an amazing man. He was one of my heroes, because he did the screenplay for the original VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED.

I can't wait to see what else is out there in those sheds. I'll let you know as items turn up. I hope you can see why I'm having a good time. I finally realized why I kept everything. I always hoped there would be a moment like this. (*smile*)