

# Highlights

**Writer/Director/Producer: Mary Novak**

**Co-Producer: Laurie Little**

**Running Time: 9 Minutes**

**Year of Completion: 2008**

## **Synopsis**

Jane loves to go to Marianne's Beauty Salon with her mother. It's a crisp November day in 1963, and the salon is buzzing with energy and music while Jane looks through her favorite magazine. Suddenly the television delivers tragic news into this safe, happy place. Jane tries to make sense of a moment that opens her eyes to peril in the world, a historic moment that has come to symbolize the loss of innocence in America.

## **Screenings and Awards:**

2008 Film Brothers Festival of Shorts, Wilmington, Delaware - **Finalist**

2008 Gold Lion Film Festival, Swaziland, Africa

2008 Salento International Film Fest, Tricase, Italy

2008 Chicago International REEL Shorts Film Festival

2008 Long Island International Film Expo - **Best Art Direction**

2008 Garden State Film Festival - **Best Family Short**

2008 Sacramento International Film Festival

## **Contact Information:**

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## **Director's Statement**

The terrible shock that struck America on September 11, 2001 reminded me of the shock that paralyzed the nation when President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was killed. A painful national awakening occurred after both events, and it was true that our world would never be the same. In "Highlights" I wanted to cinematically portray the loss of innocence that occurred during the President Kennedy assassination and how that altered American consciousness.

Jane is in her happy world when it is pierced by the grief and shock that the women around her are experiencing. Jane is the innocence of childhood; and while there will be many more events in her life that will take her from innocence, this moment is her first initiation into the adult world and the potential pain and violence in it. And Jane is the innocence of America, and the day that President Kennedy was killed was like a national initiation into the dark heart of humanity.

Making “Highlights” was a tremendous adventure that I thoroughly enjoyed with all of the crew and the amazing efforts of Laurie Little and Caroline Brandes. Recreating 1963 opened my eyes to the uniqueness of the time period; it was not the pure, somewhat kitschy 50s and it wasn’t the mod 60s. That time period is sophisticated in style and unique in its transitory culture. I was fortunate to find a spectacular, talented cast who looked great in chunky jewelry and the outstanding hairdos that Randy Ramos created. Allison Sparrow was a real find and I think one day when she’s a high powered actress someone will pull out this little film that portrayed her as the innocent Jane and see the beginning of her greatness.

### **Filmography:**

- “Highlights”--S-16mm, 9-minute short drama. 2008.
- “Out of the Blue”--S-16mm, 22-minute romantic comedy. 2007.
- “Three of Every Seven”--10-minute experimental documentary. 2005.
- “Daddy’s Waltz”--16mm, 15-minute experimental narrative. 2003.
- “Long Distance”--16mm, 10-minute drama. 2000.

### **Actor Bios**

**Allison Sparrow** (Jane) has been in several prominent Chicago theater productions, including Goodman Theatre’s “Dollhouse” (Robert Falls, dir.) and Light Opera Works’ “The Sound of Music”. She has been a model for American Girl Place and can be seen in commercials for “Build-a Bear-Workshops.”

**Erin Ordway** (Penny, the receptionist) is an actor well versed in both stage and screen, having worked on many theatrical productions and film shoots since graduating from college in 2004. She most recently starred in Bohemian Theatre Ensemble's production of 'Electra', and her first feature film, 'Perilous Ties', just had its world premiere, which was attended by 500 people! Working on 'Highlights' was such a joy and pleasure, and it is a film in which she is very proud. Thank you to Mary and everyone else who did such excellent work. Up next, Erin will star as one of six ensemble members in the world premiere original stage comedy 'Dates From Hell' at the Metropolis Performing Arts Center. Erin eventually hopes to move to New York, star on Broadway, make an astounding crossover to film, and be like Meryl Streep. Please, wish her luck - she'll need it!

**Rebecca Friese** (Virginia/Mommy) has been performing for anyone who will watch since the day she was born. She grew up in Chicago but spent 10 years in San Francisco, where her professional acting career began. She moved back to Chicago in 2004 and felt quickly welcomed into the Chicago arts community. Her resume reflects her love of both theater and film -- continuing to work her craft at every opportunity. Her most recent credits include a run in Floss! at the Conservatory, a supporting role in the feature film Realization created by Split Pillow and a lead in the feature Seven Fallen Objects, directed by A.D. Liano to be released this year. She also had the lead in “Beaver Run Café”, which has been accepted to 6 film festivals (and counting). Finally, another short she worked on last year, “Vacant”, directed by Chicago Filmmaker, Brian McQuery, was accepted

into the Mircocinema Fest set for August, 2006. Life has moved her hometown again to New York this year, where she will continue to pursue every avenue of performing.

**Steph DeWaegeneer** (Marianne) is a 15-year veteran of the professional improv ensemble, ComedySportz. She originally began performing ComedySportz in Houston, TX ('91-'97), and then Chicago, IL ('98- present) She is an original cast member of the improvised long-form musical comedy *Whose Chorus Line Is It Anyway?* She has directed Chicago productions of: *Velvet Tom's Red Shoe Diaries*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Wild Pecos Bill*, *Beneath the Music*, and *How to Eat Fried Worms*. She is a graduate of The Second City Conservatory and has performed at Improv Olympic. Steph is an award-winning performer and director with the Bristol and Texas renaissance festivals. Yes, that is Steph in the Chuck Norris film *Sidekicks*. Find out more at [www.refsteph.com](http://www.refsteph.com).

**Kayce Alltop** (Joyce) is a local improviser performing with pH Productions and on Quincy at the i.O. Theatre. She has also traveled around the country and Europe with CarniKid Productions performing and teaching improv. Other recent stage roles include Titania in *Midsummer Night's Dream* with Arts Lanes and Molly in *Line* at The Oracle Theatre.

#### **FILMMAKERS AND CREW BIOS:**

**Mary Novak** (Writer, Director, Producer, Production Designer) has a B.A. in English & Creative Writing from Northeastern Illinois University and an MFA in Film & Video from Columbia College Chicago. She worked several years freelancing in Chicago, which included writing and producing video segments for educational media. Her filmography includes "Long Distance", "Daddy's Waltz", and her MFA thesis film "Out of the Blue". She is adjunct faculty at Columbia College teaching production and advanced screenwriting courses. She is seeking finances to produce her feature length script, *Fingers*.

**Laurie Little** (Producer and Art Director) founder of the production company Luminist Films Inc., she is a producer and directs documentaries, short narratives and music videos. Her filmography includes such award-winning films as the feature documentary, *A Day On The Force: Women's Professional Tackle Football* and the short film, *God's Eye*. Little works as a digital artist and film colorist and is adjunct faculty of film and media studies at Columbia College Chicago. She holds a BFA in Visual Arts from York University and an MFA in Film and Video from Columbia College Chicago.

**Caroline Brandes** (Director of Photography) has shot many award-winning films including "Plum Flower" (2005, Director Serena Moy), which was featured in the *American Cinematographer Magazine*, and "Stones from the Soil" (2005, Director Michael Caplan) a documentary that aired on PBS. Caroline grew up in Northern Germany and moved to the USA to study cinematography at Columbia College in Chicago. She currently lives in Toronto, where she has been involved in various independent narrative as well as documentary productions.

**Melissa Lawrenz** (Editor) was born in Stockholm, Sweden and grew up mostly in the Midwest, USA. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a BA in Theatre Arts in 1994. Melissa worked in Green Bay, WI at CBS-owned WFRV-TV for five years in all production aspects including Directing, Technical Directing, Audio, and Editing. She Produced and Directed her own weekly sports program, Eye On Sports. Melissa received her MFA in Film & Video Production at Columbia College Chicago in 2005. With the release of her thesis film "Heather" in 2006, she will continue to pursue her desire to write and direct independent feature films.

**Jonathan Levi Shanes** (Composer) received his B.A. in Music Composition from Columbia College of the Arts, Chicago, and has spent the past decade producing and performing music throughout the U.S. and Europe, particularly France and Sweden where he lived for some time. Some of his achievements include working alongside some of Hollywood's most accomplished professionals at CBS Studio City, Disney Studios, and Capital Records, and multiple radio and television appearances, including ABC, FOX SPORTS NET, and WXRT. Upcoming projects include an original score for Olive Entertainment's release Copasetic, and pop album American Bohemian.