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Q&A: Writer Clarissa Jacobson and director JM Logan on short film 'Lunch Ladies'

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By Josh Morris

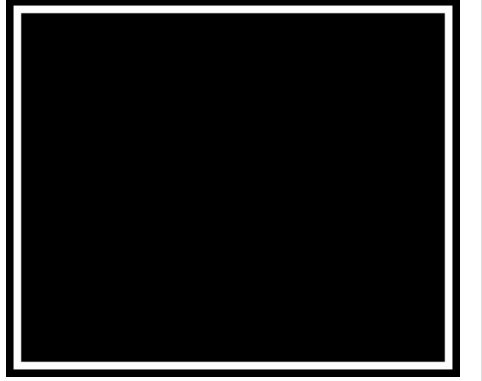
Lunch Ladies is a horror-comedy short film about two lunch ladies who will do just about anything to become Johnny Depp's personal chefs. The film's write, Clarissa Jacobson, and the director, J.M. Logan, were kind enough to answer some questions about the short.

Informer Media Group: The film really took me for a ride! Clarissa, where did this story come from? What inspired you to write this?

Clarissa Jacobson: I came up with the concept a few years ago when I was having dinner with Donna Pieroni who plays the lead in the film. Donna and I had been in a play many years ago together when I used to be an actress (before I realized my passion was writing). Donna told me that when she would audition, she was always up against one particular woman. They both liked one another a lot, but it sucked because there was always only one role available, so it was always competitive. Further, there aren't a lot of roles for middle-aged women, which makes it more competitive. Donna said she wished someone would write a movie about middle-aged

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Informer Media Group: What was it like going from memorizing lines to writing them?

Clarissa Jacobson: As an actress, I had always made up sketch characters – it was one of my favorite things to do – to create characters – I had all kinds of them – Nadia Fulloshtzky the Russian Balance Beam Artist; Shari Copenhagen, Southern Dating Coach; Maggie O'Ghoul, Irish Female Soccer Player; Betty Gruber, 80-year-old Bingo Lady I THOUGHT what I loved so much was the acting of these characters. But what I really loved was the creation of them. So when I found Twin Bridges Writing Salon – which I've been in for 13 years now and is run by Joe Bratcher and Judy Farrell – I discovered my true passion was writing. For me, there was no difference in memorizing or creating the characters, but there was a huge learning curve in writing a script. 13 years later I think I finally know how to write one.

Informer Media Group: I'd say you're correct! JM, what drew you to the project as a director?

JM: At the time, I had just been wrapping up some projects that were very emotionally sensitive, and I was really looking for a project that I could just have fun with and spray some blood around. When Clarissa sent me the script, it resonated with the horror nerd in me immediately, and I knew it would be a movie that genre fans would appreciate – we shaped it especially for them. We always wanted to direct something that would let me get both unapologetically stylized and away from the set with blood on my shoes – so LUNCH LADIES fit me like a glove!

Informer Media Group: What made you both want to write/direct a horror-comedy specifically?

Clarissa Jacobson: I have always loved horror comedy. It's the ying and the yang, the dark part of you and the light. When I came up with the idea, I wrote the feature screenplay first, then the short. There is a very thin line between horror and comedy – like hate and love – they are heightened parts of the emotional spectrum and go wonderfully together.

JM: Horror and Comedy are very close to each other, dramatically. They both depend on tension and timing in order to work – so for me, the combination of both genres is a perfect match. It's also an exercise in contrast and absurdism – and I love an opportunity to create a contradiction that still somehow works. If we can find a way to laugh at gallons of cheerleader blood spraying out a meat grinder, we can find a way to laugh at anything.

Informer Media Group: Fascinating. Do you have a favorite horror-comedy?

Clarissa Jacobson: It's hard to say I have some ties in there for sure – Sean Of The Dead, Evil Dead, An American Werewolf in London. By the way on the circuit now there are two very funny indie horror comedies – Bong Of The Living Dead and Dementia 2 – I recommend both.

JM: Evil Dead 2. I remember renting that on VHS sometime in the mid-'80s after the original Evil Dead scared the living crap out of me when I was 12 – and my life was never the same again. I was ready to be terrified like I had been with the first one, but instead, I found myself laughing so hard I couldn't breathe. There's nothing else like that movie. Except maybe DEAD ALIVE.

Informer Media Group: Great choices. So, Clarissa, why Johnny Depp of all people? (I found this particularity humorous; I have his *Sweeney Todd* poster hanging in my house.)

Clarissa Jacobson: When I came up with the idea to do [SPOILER ALERT: a spoof on *Sweeney Todd* about two burnt out Lunch Ladies at a high school] I decided to wink at it – that is, ADMIT I'm stealing the idea of *Sweeney Todd*. My rationale went like this – Johnny Depp stars in *Sweeney Todd* so why not have the Lunch Ladies get the idea to do what they do from Johnny Depp because they are huge fans of his? It also makes them more loveable because, hey, it's not their fault, they didn't come up with that horrible idea on their own. They're SUPER FANS! They got it from The Depper who starred in *Sweeney Todd*! It makes it all right!

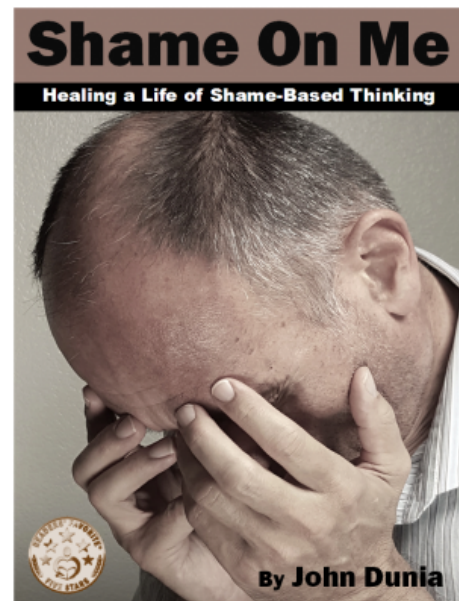
Informer Media Group: "WWJD," right? Has there ever been a plunger homicide on screen before? I sure can't think of any....

Clarissa Jacobson: I hope I am the first to come up with that – there are some other weird ones in the feature too – unique kills are tantamount to horror – particularly since it's comedy horror – the kills have to be weird and funny – so I'm hopeful I'm the first!

JM: Does that mean we're the first??

Informer Media Group: I believe you are! I took a visit lunchladiesmovies.com; did you expect the cults following you're receiving?

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everyday, sending the film out, writing blogs, trying to think outside the box on how to promote it with a Hairnet Club, jacked school store, submitting it to fests all over the world so it could get seen... I just tried to connect with people as much as possible and it's been exhausting but joyful!

JM: On our best day I hoped we might get a few nerdy fans that followed us around – but the response has been astonishing, and humbling! Most of it, though, is really Clarissa who has made it her full-time job for the last year promoting the film with every ounce of her being. I've never seen a filmmaker more dedicating to getting a project out there and doing everything she can to get it in front of people that might enjoy watching it. It's been an inspiration to watch!

Informer Media Group: What is it about lunch ladies that people connect with? What is it about *these* lunch ladies that have global appeal?

Clarissa Jacobson: I think it's because they are underdogs, and even though they are over the top and do crazy things, they are rooted in reality – they get sad, they get happy, they get excited, they have guilt. Also, they are fraternal twin sisters and true friends who go for their dreams – it's really a movie about friendship and going for one's dreams which I think most people can relate to. Everyone who gets killed ... you don't feel too sorry for them, they're all bullies.

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in our nature to root for the underdog, and even while performing the most horrible of acts, somehow it's always obvious that their hearts are in the right place. Plus – who hasn't been bullied? Who hasn't had to grind up a snotty cheerleader with a selfie habit? That's something we can all identify with.

Informer Media Group: Any plans to turn this into a feature? Or a sequel perhaps? Surely the story isn't over.

Clarissa Jacobson: Yes! This was my plan from the beginning! This is why I made the short. I wrote the feature first and this was my proof of concept to show people who are in a position to finance the feature what it would look like. So wherever you are out there producers and financiers, the feature is ready, the fan base is ready, the Lunch Ladies are ready!

Informer Media Group: What's next for both of you?

Clarissa Jacobson: Hopefully the feature of Lunch Ladies! I also have a coming of age feature film that was optioned by Norman Stephens and Bev Nero Productions called Stella By Starlight that we hope to film in Tulsa. I further have a gothic horror about Elizabeth Bathory which was optioned by Venezuelan Director Gisberg Bermudez who did the film The Whistler. Lastly, I have a thriller feature I just finished called Burnt Well Rest Stop and a comedy I'm currently working on with Shayna Weber who was a producer on Lunch Ladies and is in Twin Bridges Writing Salon with me.

JM: I've got a bunch of projects in development, including a 23-min anthology series I just finished a pilot called ON THE INTERNET, NOBODY KNOWS WHO YOU ARE, and I'm currently designing an immersive horror web-series that are intended to be watched on your phone, in portrait mode with headphones.

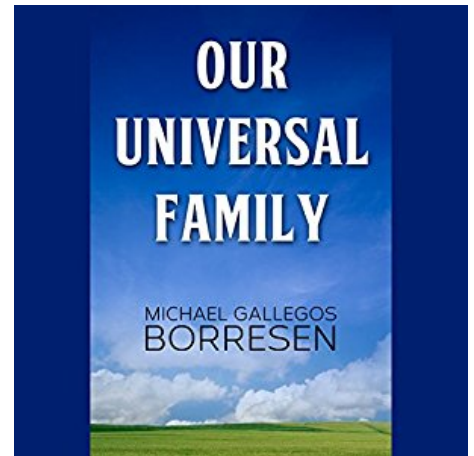
Informer Media Group: Where can people find out more about you / your projects?

Clarissa Jacobson: on all the Lunch Ladies pages – Website: lunchladiesmovie.com FB: @LunchLadiesMovie, Instagram: @LunchLadiesFilm Pinterest: @LunchLadiesMovie and Twitter @LunchLadiesFilm

JM: www.jmifilm.com – I try to keep it reasonably up to date!

Informer Media Group: Any chance the Lunch Ladies will be visiting Las Vegas?

Clarissa Jacobson: I hope! I haven't found a festival to enter there but it's on my radar. Meanwhile, the film will go into distribution in the new year so if it doesn't make it to Vegas it will hopefully make it to you electronically.



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