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# BARGAIN BASEMENT MEMORIES

ONCE UPON A TIME IN COLUMBIA, we had a few old beautiful cinemas that occasionally showed independent films and the odd documentary. I remember watching *Hoop Dreams* and eating so much candy that I felt sick (it was three hours long, so I bought a huge bag of candy). But then a giant multiplex descended on our humble town and closed our precious downtown screens. The dark years that followed were a sad time for everyone in mid-Missouri.

Finally, David and Paul appeared on the scene with a wild sparkle in their eyes that suggested they were crazy enough to take on Hollywood. In an effort to save our town, they launched the Ragtag Film Series—a seasonal program of bi-weekly film screenings at The Blue Note night club. For two nights a week, a few weeks a year, we were spared from the homogeneity of the multiplex and got to enjoy great films like *Crumb*, *Sick*, and *Divine Trash*.

There was hope in the town and excitement in the air and my friend Aaron Davis and I were inspired to start a film festival. We wanted to showcase the cheap and cheerful of independent film—the wonderful little gems people were making on the fringes. We didn't care if it was shot on 35mm or VHS. If it was good, it was on. At the very moment that Bargain Basement Film Festival was coming into being, Paul and David were working with some co-conspirators to open the doors

at the new Ragtag Cinema—a small, quirky one-screen cinemacafé filled with antique sofas and delicious beverages. The first film I saw at Ragtag was a bootleg of *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. It was clear that Ragtag would be the home of Bargain Basement.

For two years we crammed a motley collection of unknown short films and features into a summer weekend of films, ice cream, ramen noodles, music, and randomness. Bargain Basement was not in a basement, but it was a bargain and it sold out pretty much every show. David even won the audience award with *Hepcat's Holiday*—a beautiful black and white 16mm short accompanied by an incredible snare drum solo performed live in the cinema.

Aaron and I weren't living in Columbia anymore and we were too busy shooting documentaries to keep up the festival, so the basement got damp. I have no idea if there was a connection, but a couple years later David and Paul announced the True/False Film Fest. This was the real deal, a proper film festival, with the best audience and the best parties at any festival in the world. I've been lucky enough to have been invited twice and to show my films to the best audience on earth—my hometown audience.

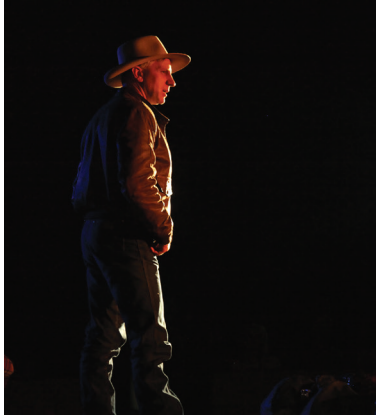
— PETER GERARD, CEO/Founder of Distrify

THE ORIGINAL RAGTAG CINEMA. 23 North Tenth Street was formerly the home of the impossibly cool Whizz Records, Whitney Shroyer's garage rock mecca. In May 2000, Ragtag opened and operated there until February 2008 when it moved to its present location at 10 Hitt St.





A T/F ATTENDEE SITS with an installation created by the Chicago Film Archive. Buck Branneman, Pearl S. Quick and David Wilson at *Campfire Stories* (T/F's live storytelling event complete with balsam fir incense and locally sourced artisanal s'mores). Julia Reichert (T/F SWAMI) and Chase Whiteside (*Lifelike*, 2011), members of the "Ohio Contingent," meander from one late night party to the next.



TAYLOR GLASCOCK

PHOTOS BY MO SCARPELLI & TAYLOR GLASCOCK



## HYPE

OVER THE YEARS, T/F has been touted as a gem of a festival that offers the most rewarding and intimate screenings. In fact, I have heard this so often, I began to wonder if my friends and colleagues were drinking a particular brand of documentary Kool-Aid. So when I finally booked my trip in 2011, I was skeptical. First, I was drafted as a "Swami," a designation that I enjoyed as much as the fabulous Swami hoodie that I received upon arrival. I found the projects and filmmakers particularly impressive and the discussions engaging and productive.

Then I moved on to the films at the festival. I saw the hybrid documentary *The Arbor*, which is such a unique film, it haunted me for days. We screened a new film that would officially premiere at another festival later in the month, and the response and extended Q&A's were ideal for the launch of the film.

Next, we screened *Buck* at the Missouri Theatre. The film's director, Cindy Meehl, Buck, and I headed over early and marveled at the grand and glorious venue. We then looked around and noticed that there were a dozen people in the audience and wondered if we would be

screening to an empty house. This was Cindy's first film and we were all a bit nervous that the first festival after Sundance would be a letdown. Fortunately, we were happily distracted by a great band that appeared on stage and started to perform. This was something I absolutely loved at T/F—the marriage of live music and film screenings. We heard great music throughout the festival and in fact Cindy's niece was one of the musicians—small world.

We moved up to the balcony and listened to the music as the theater began to fill up. And it did fill up. Completely. Every seat taken and people turned away. We were both relieved and thrilled. The audience was fully engaged throughout and when we went up for the Q&A there was a sustained standing ovation that left Buck so moved that he was in tears. We still talk about that screening.

After the festival, a friend asked if T/F was "really as great as everyone says?" "Of course," I said. "Even better."

— JULIE GOLDMAN, producer, *Buck*





## ON COMO

**IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 2007 WHEN WE FELL IN LOVE.** Not with each other (we were already in love), but with a small town in the Midwest that had dared the impossible.

We were living in Brooklyn, NY. But we felt separation anxiety when we left the True/False Film Fest, and had a yearning to deeply throw ourselves into the arms of Columbia, Mo.

So we decided to leave New York and dive head-first into Columbia's magic. In Columbia we experienced the best of times—cool bike rides late at night, swimming on hot days inside a tucked away rock quarry, playing tennis, initiating and editing parts of *Girl Model*, long walks through downtown Columbia,

rentals from 9th Street Video, baked goods from Uprise, cooking for new neighbors, watching movies at Ragtag, and, most importantly, the creation of new friendships.

We sincerely love Columbia, Mo., and can understand why and how people stop there to eat, yet never leave. We yearn to return to its backbone of simplicity, its hidden treasures, its people with swelling hearts, and of course its once-a-year festival whose name is known around the world as “True/False, that festival in Columbia, Mo.”

— **DAVID REDMON & ASHLEY SABIN, co-dir. *Kamp Katrina and Downeast***

## THE GUESTS WHO WEREN'T

1. Adam Yauch (Awesome, I Fucking Shot That!)
2. Banksy (Exit Through the Gift Shop)
3. Leon Gast (Smash His Camera)
4. Rodriguez (Searching for Sugarman)
5. Errol Morris (Fog of War and Tabloid)
6. Rokhsareh Ghaemmaghami (Going Up The Stairs)
7. Steven Soderbergh (And Everything is Going Fine)

🏠 **THE MARCH MARCH** started in 2007 when we realized that Friday night of the festival would be the first day of March. Like many inspirations at T/F, this silly, inconsequential fact was all we needed to recruit hundreds of people to help us plan an outrageous, New Orleans-style parade with a documentary bent. (PS)