

## Filmmaker, Lighthouse Films

Aug 27, 2020 | Amy Lehfeltd

[Amy Lehfeltd]: We email all the time, but I realize I don't know much about you besides the fact that you are very talented and run a busy commercial film production company. How and where did Lighthouse begin?

[Brad Walker]: My dad took me to the movies a lot as a kid. That's part of the reason why I got into film. I went to film school and started shooting independent films in North Carolina after I graduated. Our first big clients were high-end summer camps in the northeast. The work was consistent and that helped my wife and I get out of our house and into an office. Soon we started adding people to the team. When the Arri Alexa (digital cinema camera) came out, we made a team decision to get a loan and buy it along with some lenses for \$250,000. Money we didn't have. It was a risky move. But I like craps and I love new toys. We had no clients that were renting it out, but I thought that tool would shift our mindset, changing from summer camp promotional videos back to independent films and shooting for Corbis/Getty Images. We started renting our gear out when we weren't using it and at about the same time, I became a commercial director. I landed my first job on a Chrysler commercial in Mexico City and that put us on the map. All the different parts of the business gave us flexibility and options to create and grow.

[AL]: Your wife, Andrea is your partner and co-owner of the business. What do you each bring to the table to make your business a success?

[BW]: I bring risk and she brings steadfastness. She and Michelle our business manager are problem solvers and I'm a problem creator. I need them! Having a great team around me is so important. We are a family. That's how we've survived. The team mentality. No ego. We are excited for each other. A long time ago, I got a big job and was editing a project twenty hours a day. I had a nervous breakdown. I flew my friend in from LA to help me out. I only had one computer, so I still edited twenty hours a day and while I slept, he edited the other four. He got me through the project, with a little editing and a lot of moral support. I learned that I cannot do everything myself, as much as I'd like to think I can.

[AL]: I actually noticed your "team spirit" at a Getty Images Artist Event. I remember you stayed the entire time and helped us clean up afterward – you even brought down all the garbage to the street. Is that how you work with your crew?

[BW]: That's funny that you remembered that. Yes, I'm very much a team player and collaborator. I've always said I want to be the last person at the location until the trucks are wrapped. It produces better morale with the crew. It was how I was brought up. If I leave early, it's only because I have pre-production I need to do for the next day of shooting. I believe in leading by example and I'll take out the trash anytime!

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[AL]: What is it like to work production in Wilmington, N.C.? I seem to remember quite a few of my college friends moving there for work after they graduated. Is it an active production hub?

[BW]: I grew up in North Carolina and my wife is from Virginia. We wanted to move back and the film industry in Wilmington was starting to take off. The industry is small but has been growing. North Carolina is primarily home to TV Shows and Features but offers a lot of commercial work too. So many places are film-friendly and everyone who works here says how much they love the vibe, the crew, and the down to earth energy. We could live anywhere but we've built a name for ourselves in the area. Wilmington is an interesting city and we are proud to serve, support and give back to the community. Hopefully, some of our pro bono work has made a difference.

[AL]: Your work has a lot of energy. Do you always look for stories and projects where that is central to the work? Are there certain themes that resonate with you most?

[BW]: YES! YES! I love what I do. Every day is a new experience. I like creating moments that feel real. If it's not authentic, it doesn't resonate. Finding those moments and then deciding how you want to shoot it, whether it is on a dolly or shot as a fly on the wall is an important creative choice. Generally, I'm open to any theme. I try to find the emotion within it. I love people. I love shooting humans. I'm an extrovert. Theme-wise, as long as it's fresh, I'm in. When we go into a shoot, we go into it with a story that we are trying to tell. If you don't know, you need to find it while you are shooting it.

[AL]: Which kinds of productions are your favorite?

[BW]: Ones that push me (us) to explore a different world, new technology, or even a business shoot that has a different approach. I look for projects that I might have a personal interest in like mountain climbing, for example. The biggest rush for me is finding the moment in the frame. That's my drug.

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[AL]: You had planned to do a big shoot in Wyoming for Getty in March but because of COVID-19 had to switch gears and it seemed like you pivoted so seamlessly. What have been some of the challenges shooting during a pandemic?

[BW]: Our recent series of ["Zoom" calls](#) were not necessarily in our creative heart but we knew there was a void with that content. With your help and guidance, we created a list of fifty topics to shoot. User-generated content. Milestone events. Mobile phone footage. Shooting through windows in a pandemic was safe and had the voyeuristic aesthetic that I love. I've always shot that way. I love to put different types of glass and prisms in the foreground. We were also shooting a pro bono job about anti-bullying during that time and we were clear on protocols on set. It's hard. When you are creative and in the moment and you realize you can't get too close, it's difficult to navigate the shot, you want to get closer but realize the limitations. Right now, we are shooting timely content but trying to figure out when to switch gears to more traditional productions. Trying to understand what aspects of life will stay the same and what other parts will look like in the future. One piece of advice you suggested was shooting scenarios with masks on and masks off. At some point, this will go away.

[AL]: You've submitted to Getty for a long time. How has the industry changed from your perspective? How has it affected the way you work?

[BW]: I started shooting in 1998. Man, was it staged and boring! Reflecting back on it, everything had to be perfect within a frame. It was so stale. Tripods. YUCK! At some point, I made a shift to shoot more authentically and I think the cool thing about Getty is you encourage us to play and explore and shoot stylistically. I got some great advice at the start of creating for an image library. My art director at the time said, "shoot what's in your heart and the money will come." One time I wanted to shoot ballroom dancers in the middle of the desert in Nelson, Nevada. Why? I don't know. It felt right. And it has been paying ever since.

[AL]: Why submit to Getty Images? What is the value of syndicating your work as a filmmaker?

[BW]: Getty is a part of our vocabulary now. It keeps us fresh with commercial work. We can jump into an advertising job and feel confident because we've been shooting for Getty. This is a long-term investment. So many people are only interested in the short-term but during the first months of COVID-19 our revenue stream was almost solely Getty Images and I want to say thanks. There is no way we could have survived without you beautiful humans!