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Good Luck

"Good Luck", inspired by real events, is a story of Bernard Lemley (Gregory Hines), a dental technician in Seattle who is fed up with his job. He has been harboring a wild dream-to win a raft race across the ferocious rapids of Oregon's Rogue River. Even wilder, he decides he wants his partner to be Tony "Ole" Olezeniak (Vince D'Onofrio), an ex-football superstar who lost his sight in an accident. Bernard Lemley is paraplegic. Good Luck is a rollicking and spirited film about two men and a journey called life.

There was a sneak preview of the film at the Olympic Village in Atlanta, during the Paralympic Games. The film was sponsored by AT&T, Kodak and the Atlanta Governors' Council. They paid for an outdoor screen and a DTS audio system because there are no theaters which house more than two or three wheelchairs at a time. Over 1,000 athletes, judges and staff members saw the film. Later they said "it was one of the most important films Hollywood has produced about people with disabilities because it is the first time they are portrayed not as victims, but in a truly positive and uplifting light."

The NFL also sponsored the film. The Seattle Seahawks thought it had a great message and wanted to be a part of the project. Joe Theisman, the sports announcer opposite James Earl Jones wanted to be a part of the film because he too experienced a career ending knee injury during a Monday Night Football game. He knew all too well how the character of Ole felt. Good Luck was shot entirely on location in Seattle and Oregon over a ten week period. In order to film the white water rafting race, the production was scheduled to shoot on the Rogue River in Gold City, Oregon. An unexpected drought, however, forced them to move to Northern California. The race was ultimately shot on the American River outside of Sacramento. Controlled by an elaborate series of dams, the producers knew they could re-create a class 5 river, the most dangerous level, on the American River, and get the shot. The flood gates were opened and the water rushed in at even higher levels than expected.

Although stunt doubles were used for some of the more dangerous white water sequences, Hines and D'Onofrio did most of their own rafting and swimming.

CC: How did you become involved with the movie, Good Luck?

GH: They sent my manager the script, they said it was a low budget feature, buddy film. Vincent D'Onofrio was going to play Ole and I'm a big fan of Mr. D'Onofrio. When I saw that I said, I sure hope it's good, but I figured it would because I've seen Vince's work. All that he's done has been very powerful stuff and sure enough it was a really good script and I wanted in.

CC: Did you find it interesting that in most of your work you are a dancer, and here your character uses a wheelchair?

GH: A first I thought it was challenging, I felt it was going to be tough! It turned out to be exactly that, but more challenging emotionally. I looked at it in a more physical way, having to act in a chair and move around. But it really was more emotionally challenging.

CC: Emotionally? In what respect?

GH: My character had been in the chair for seven years. He had gone through his anger, depression, drug and alcohol abuse. He had gone through everything, now he was up, he was happy, he was filled with his dream. He was the perfect man to help Ole deal with what he knew he had to go through. Ole was the perfect person for him to achieve his dream. You know the first time I sat in the chair I felt anything but up, it was very emotional for me. I had a chair in my hotel room, a chair at rehearsal, and I was trying to spend as much time as I could in the chair. When I started moving around in my hotel I realized that my room and the hotel was not set up for people in wheelchairs, that actually angered me after a little while. I couldn't get in and out of my room. I had one of those doors with that thing on it so it wouldn't slam, it was heavy, it was very hard! The maids and everyone knew I was working to get into this part, but every now and then they'd say, "Oh, let me help you Mr. Hines". I can remember

feeling very angry, and saying no! I can do it myself! From that point of view it was very emotional for me to get myself to the point to sit in the chair and be "up". I spent some time with the wheelchair rugby team in Long Beach, California, they went easy on me I might add. That was a very enlightening experience.

CC: Was that the quadriplegics team?

GH: They were quadriplegics, paraplegics and guys with all types of disabilities. They were very generous with me. Everybody was willing to talk about their particular accident, what they had to deal with and how they got back in touch with their competitors' spirit. How they got started in wheelchair rugby, swimming, mixed tennis, and basketball. For some of these guys this is their life, competing on all different levels and enjoying themselves. Listen man, I was gone! They passed me the ball. I thought this is something I can crow about, I was going to score! From out of nowhere a little Hispanic guy comes over, he came at me at top speed and then he stopped on a dime and winked at me. He was letting me know what could have happened, because they bang into each other. They have done serious damage to each other that they can not feel. They play all night and this is just practice, had this been a game he would have up ended me. I could tell the guy had the spirit and the heart of a true athlete and it had always been there. Even with that, it was difficult for me because I was with them practicing, talking and hanging around. I felt all kinds of things.

CC: Did you look anywhere else to gain insight and feeling for your character?

GH: I looked at *Coming Home*, a John Voigt film and *The Men* with Marlon Brando. In both of those cases they weren't "up", although their performances were great. It helped me as I needed to get comfortable in the chair, that was the toughest, I don't think I ever got comfortable.

CC: You couldn't tell, you seemed very natural in your part. Bob Comfort spoke of how quickly one forgot that these two characters had disabilities.

GH: Well, you know I'd sit in the chair all day long and Vincent, once he would get that far off gaze going, even I would forget. I remember after shooting a couple of times I had something and I actually almost reached over for Vincent's hand so he could touch it so he could see what it was. It really was a great experience.

CC: We are working on a national program with Ability Awareness, facilitated through community centers, churches, and schools. The program will provide the experience of different types of disabilities, for a day or a week, people will choose from a hat a disability and put themselves in a chair or experience being deaf or blind, so that people may gain an understanding.

GH: I think that would be a great thing. It would be like the films I've seen where wardens would decide to be in a jail cell for a week, to get a sense of what it would be like to be a prisoner. I know every hotel owner and manager should sit in a wheelchair for a whole day and move around the hotel and see how difficult it is. It is very frustrating to come to an area that's just a staircase! I didn't want to wait until someone got me a ramp. I didn't want to call all kinds of attention to myself, I wanted to be able to move around myself. I have met a couple of men who were in wheelchairs in various hotels after that and I had very deep conversations with them. They told me that the hotels had maybe two rooms set up for people with disabilities, but if they got there too late, and didn't get one of these rooms, they couldn't take a shower. The room wasn't hooked up for them, or maybe the sink was too high. I could see where that would be a great idea.

CC : We need to establish a greater awareness in the society so that unnecessary obstacles are removed. Including obstacles that are both physical and attitudinal. Overcoming societies misconceptions can be one of your biggest hurdles. How is society going to view you with a disability. It is our message at ABILITY and the movie says it as well; let's focus on people's ability.

GH: Right, that's what these guys want to do, they just want to live. From the script it was obvious that people feel that once somebody is disabled then they lose the ability to do certain things. Then people start thinking that they have to live a certain kind of life as opposed to just participating in everything life has to offer. That was the thing about my favorite scene in the movie is when Vincent comes back into the room after talking to Max in the bathtub and he says thanks for getting me out there where people are living, where there's fun to be had. I loved that scene.

CC: How do you prepare yourself to play the role of a person that is blind?

VD: First you need to find out how the character you are playing became blind? Was he born blind or was it an accident of some kind? Because their physical behavior and their physiological behavior is different if they were born without sight than if they have lost their sight in an accident. I read a bit about blindness and I went to visit the Braille Institute. I spoke with some people there and I watched a few educational tapes. These tapes were designed to help family members learn how to understand the psychological impact of being blind. Those were helpful. Once I thought what the psychological behavior was going to be like I knew how I would play the role. My character was depressed for a long time. He had lost his career and his wife had left him. The character of the story is not a heavy drama, so there is only so much you can put into it without making the movie too heavy because you want to keep it in the comedic genre. So you can't go too heavy with it for this particular film. You need to figure out what you can use. Then the actual technique of it as an actor to perform it as if you were sight impaired or without sight. My character had no sight at all. To do this you need a concentration technique called the Stanislavsky system of acting which turned into the Straussberg Studio of method acting. I don't follow it all but it was a part of my schooling at the American Stanislavsky Theatre. You formulate your own technique through a blend of all the others you learn. The technique I would use to portray a sight impaired person, your eyes still have to move. The muscles around the eyes, unless you have been injured, still work. So there is eye movement, you blink. So the way to do that is you sit in a dark room with a straight backed chair and you create an object that is familiar to you. Something that is easy to create. Something that you can put right in front of your minds' eye, floating right in front of you. Less than two feet in front of you. Then you create this. In my case I used an eight ball. It was easy for me to create. So I pictured it and became comfortable viewing the eight ball with my eyes closed. Then you open your eyes and move your head around and move your eyes around but you are never seeing anything but what you are concentrating on, in my case the eight ball. This is how I play blind in plays and theatre.

CC: Has anyone discussed the concept of having a blind person play the part of the blind character, instead of a sighted actor portraying a blind person?

VD: There have been people who have mentioned this but not actually discussed it with me. There have been blind people in the audience who have listened to it and have loved the film. But nobody has ever brought it up. I am conscious of it though, that these problems exist for actors with a disability. They don't get to play disabled roles very often. My opinion is that the producers are having to take into consideration that if they are going to hire someone to do the things Greg and I were doing, white water rafting, wheelchair antics, and things that could be dangerous, the financiers, the bond companies and the banks would not like the fact that their money would be at risk. The insurance companies would never go for it. I do think that in a story with less antics in it would be fine to use a person with a disability. I can't understand why they don't use them every time. If they can act. They should not use somebody just because they are disabled, the person with a disability has to be able to act as well. Like any actor, they should be used if they are right for the part.

CC: What movie are you producing?

VD: A movie called the *Velocity of Gary*. It is about the New York street. It is a three character piece and it's about their relationships as they live on the street. I produced a film about a year and a half ago with Director, Dan Ireland, called *The Whole Wide World*. He and I will do another one in September.

CC: You also played the villain in the movie *Men in Black*.

VD: Yes that was a great part. Barry gave me the control of my character and he let me do some things that weren't in the script. This is why I have stayed a character actor all these years. Unless you look like Brad Pitt, it's really hard to have full control of your character. When you are a character actor they trust you will go in and give them a full character and leave. I prefer that. They are much more fun.

CC: Hi Max.

MG: Hi Chet.

CC: Max, how did you find out about the movie?

MG: Well, I got a call that they were sending out a script and if I wanted to do it I'd have to let them know right away because they had already started shooting and I would have to fly the next day. I thought it was a great story and the next thing I knew I was doing it.

CC: What did you think about the two leading characters having disabilities?

MG: I thought it was very welcome, it was out of the normal groove. I knew Gregory's work, I didn't really know a lot of Vince's work, but I knew some people that said, "Oh, his work is terrific". So I had a feeling it was going to be just that—it's as much about how people are approaching what there is as what's there. I mean when you're thinking about whether you want to be involved with something it's as much about the kind of approach people are going to take to it as it is the kind of work they do. I'd say it's about what's actually on the page, because sometimes you can see something that's a terrific story and the people are just not trying to do anything with it. Other times you get people making the kind of effort to find something in the material that makes it much better. So with this one I just knew it was a neat story with people I was happy to be working with.

CC: What were your thoughts about a movie involving characters with disabilities and the two actors portraying these characters do not have disabilities?

MG: Well, they were not thoughts that gave me pause to do the movie or not. Now there's a certain thing from an acting standpoint that we think we can play anything. I suppose if it had been a story involving Indians and the same issue had been there, I would have given it a lot more thought. Because I'm a lot closer to that issue, but my own feeling about it is that it is still situational. It's like the story about the actor who shot himself when he heard Barbara Streisand got the lead in *Funny Girl*. (laughs) It didn't happen, as far as I know. It is just a joke how actors think they can play anything. Even though you and I have been good friends for years. I never gave it much thought. The first time it came out was when you asked. Again, using the Indian analogy, there's the other side of it. It would be great if more people could be cast not just in the Indian part or the disabled part. I would be more of a champion, of the idea of an actor in a wheelchair playing a part that said nothing about being in a wheelchair. It didn't have to be the key part of the story line, that the person is in the wheelchair. When you think of what acting is and what different people could bring to it, I don't think it's absolutely necessary, even in an artistic level. I think people should look around. There are times when non-Indian actors were cast in the lead role for a film when there were Indian people that could have played the part. At the very least they should have been brought in to read and at least explore it and see what they were capable of doing. The same is true for people with disabilities that are totally capable of carrying a movie under the right circumstances, and may never get into read for the movie. But there are other realities too. Where do you get the money for a movie? Does anybody feel there's a chance of a film ever reaching an audience if there isn't someone in it that is known. People putting the money up want to know the movie will reach an audience.

CC: Are you working on any other movies at this time? You just recently did a movie called "Not in My Town".

MG: Yes, which has aired already, so I guess you'd say this is one of those times where there's nothing, although I got a call the other day from some people here in Malibu and they have a kid oriented movie being shot here, supposedly with William Baldwin. I haven't read the script, but there are a number of people who live here that want to shoot it in Malibu.

CC: So, most of your time is spent working on "Laps"?

MG: Most of the time it is my main focus. I need to reorient some of that. I would probably work more as an actor if I devoted more time to it. By the way, Howard Reingold, a writer that was with the *Well* for a long time and wrote a book called "Virtual Community", started an electric mind community. He gave me a book called, "New Communities Network Wired for Change", published in 1996. This guy is doing this from the Seattle community network. It is really interesting because it's just like reading and its of history of the "Lap" idea, because early in the book he starts talking about the great good place, he goes through the different books, like "Info Zone" and the different things going on. It is really very thorough, probably too thorough to be a popular book. I mean by that the type of books that would be in the airport and people would pick it up and read it on an airplane. "Laps" has grabbed me in a way which is so much more meaningful to be working on.

CC: How would you describe "Laps"?

MG: "Laps" involves a multi media community communication centers and all that they can bring further into the community towards democracy, culture and with a high quality of life. It also involves how people will participate in the network and the Internet merge.

CC: At that point will you be producing Internet programs?

MG: I'd like to be exploring the program where you are producing something that is created by or at least participated by the audience. So that it is a less passive type of program. You know it really bugs me when you are on a plane and people say, "Oh, your somebody aren't you? You know people might recognize me, but not place me. Everyone is somebody. I think what we need is something people can participate in so that they experience themselves on a creative level and have better dialogue about the issues we need to deal with if we are going to pass on a better world to our kids. The Internet has that tremendous appeal, it matters, and it's totally on the learning curve. I am learning something everyday. Even the songs I write end up with a chorus in which people can sing along. There is a part of me that is drawn to that kind of participation.

I think what Vince and Gregory did was very special. All the people that supported the making of the movie from the writer, Bob Comfort, all attempted to tell a great story. I am honored to be part of this movie. They did not shy away from the characters disabilities and not make a pity movie, they really approached it to make a human story.

The other thing I'd like to say was regarding the organization "Soar". This was Gregory's inspiration and in a certain way a great unifying idea, it gave a great thrust to the movie, and seems a worthy effort to support and keep going. So, things are happening, including you doing this article, the company is releasing the movie. Everybody that's been involved has joined in to support recreating "Soar", in a way that utilizes the Web that connects people that care about that.

CC: How did you come up with the idea of the movie?

BC: What I wanted to do was show people and whatever baggage they bring with them. We are all disabled on one level or another, physiologically, emotionally, physically, some kind of a thing. But pass that you can still have fun, be challenged, you can still try and achieve. The other thing was several years ago, I think it made it into the final cut, was that I had seen a piece on 20/20, 60 minutes or 20/90, something like that. It was about women with cancer who had gone to this camp, a very physically tough camp, lots of crawling and a lot of it was like we had to do in the Marine Corp, we had to go over tough courses with obstacles. It was a confidence builder and it was a confidence that helped them get through their ordeal. It didn't keep them alive necessarily, but it kept them from giving up and it kept them from surrendering. Usually the adventure things are left for big hairy guys, and the people who take too many steroids and that sort of thing. I just wanted to see what would happen when a couple of guys took this on. I think what happens is that pretty soon you forget that A: one is black and one is white and B: one of them is this and one is that. You just think of them as two guys that want to have fun, trying to make some sense out of life. You soon forget about their disabilities. That was my main purpose. The human spirit is always the human spirit.

CC: After the final cut, how did you think it all turned out?

BC: I think it went quite well, I enjoyed the movie. Due to low budget and other things, one thing I miss in it is, that I had originally written a lot more on how they affected my life or the people that ran across their lives. It wasn't so insulated, just with the two of them so much. It's like everyone takes pride in their accomplishments and in return these guys make them proud of their own lives, more capable of dealing with their own lives. Other than that I don't miss much, I think its a nice picture.

CC: What other work have you done?

BC: Too much and not enough, all at the same time. I used to do a lot of television and I left that because I thought it was so stupid. Then I got into the movie business and I've written 15 or 16 movies. This is only the

second one that's been done, the other one is called *Dog Fight*, it was an autobiographical piece; about my own time in the Marine Corp. It was changed enough so a lot of stuff didn't happen. But I keep cranking them out. I'm doing something for Fox, there's about 4 or 5 pending.

CC: Other than the time you spent in the Marine Corp is your background basically writing?

BC: Yes, well I was going to be a very famous poet in my twenties, then I realized I had no talent at all. Other than that I've done radio, television but mostly writing.

CC: I'd like your thoughts on actors portraying people with disabilities, rather than actors that actually have disabilities?

BC: Well, there are two or three factors to be considered. There are emotional factors, commercial factors, creative factors and financial factors. So, I think a lot of those went into that. Is an actor good enough, physically and mentally, to act that role? Especially in a low budget film, there's only so much time, if you only have two hours to do a shot and your actors take more than that to prepare or more than that time to block it out, then your in trouble. I think for the talking scenes or the real emotional scenes it wouldn't make any difference, but for the physical scenes it would make it a lot harder. I think it is a challenge to us whether the people are actually involved in some problem or they are just portraying it. Like in *Citizen Kane* should a real magnate played that part? Should Ronald Reagan really have been President or should it have been an actor. What I'm saying is, actors are actors, they are there to act and do a certain job. It is a tough question. I wanted to stay away from the wonderful, wonderfulness of most movies that involve people with disabilities. It becomes so achingly beautiful that often times you lose the matter of factness. You have a missing leg and you do something about it and there's no violin music when you go over the top of the mountain and God doesn't personally intervene in your life. Part of it I think, and I'd written it a long time ago, it was only the second or third movie I'd written so it's fairly simple. I went through cancer, three or four years ago and one of the most amazing things I learned was that all the sayings are true, you know a stitch in time saves nine and all that your mother told you was really true. That was the only real insight that I got, other than the fact that life can be taken away from you at any second or given at any second, is that the real key to an emotionally productive life is the matter of factness of it all. Instead of getting locked into the wonder of life, instead of getting locked into that and the miracles, it is the everydayness of it, and it's the ability to except those challenges that make it possible to live life. I know that is rambling away from your original question, but it's a tough call. If we could have used someone who was actually in a wheelchair that might have helped it more. On the other hand you need some name power too. Who do we know in America, that's a really good actor, or two of them that are compatible physically and emotionally. One that's paraplegic and the other blind, that would have some marquee value. Those are all things that have to be considered.

CC: That's a Catch-22. If actors with disabilities aren't given good parts, how can they develop marquee value?

BC: I think it is slowly coming to be that people with disabilities are being considered for those parts. Some of it is political correctness, some of it is just BS, some of it is actually true and some of it is actual feelings. Again I think it depends on time structure—how long the actor can work, some of the days can get pretty long. I was always offended by the fact that Ironside was in a wheelchair. What offended me was the fact that I didn't like the guy. I wouldn't want him portraying my age, my sex, or whatever my disabilities were. You look at Vince in this picture and then look at him in *Men in Black*, he was wonderful. It was a physically hard job for him in both of those pictures. I talked to him a little bit, but to get that concentration going was hard. He played the blind man very well. That was an immensely tiring kind of a spot to get yourself into. The bottom line for me is I have very little choice in what happens. I am executive producer. Most of the decisions were someone else's choice. When I first saw the movie, and the casting after 45 seconds you forget about their disabilities, its just a couple of guys.