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Local filmmaker Brandon Freeman breaks the quiet

Freeman examines abuse, alcoholism, teen pregnancy and faith in 'The Broken Quiet,' his first feature film, at the Idaho International Film Festival

By Erin Ryan - eryan@idahostatesman.com
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At a pivotal moment, Brandon Freeman was inspired by two things: God and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. He was only 5, but he knew he wanted to tell stories that would touch people lives.

On Friday and Saturday, the 23-year-old Boisean will watch his first feature film go large during the Idaho International Film Festival. Whatever imperfections it has, it is an impressive debut and an enthralling story.

Freeman's own story makes for an interesting grocery list. He's a young husband, a Burger King alumnus, a home-school graduate, a deeply committed Christian, a confessed "Star Trek" nerd, an artist.

He started drawing in kindergarten, taught himself 2D and 3D animation and got into his dad's collection of classical movie soundtracks when other kids were pretending to like Green Day. He was writing mini novels by the age of 13, calling his first "Captain Brandon Freeman of the USS Might" (don't be surprised if you see it in lights someday). A few years later, he bought himself a computer and a \$20 Web camera, and it wasn't long before he made the leap to film.

"It was a 30-minute mini feature called 'Battle of the Mind.' It was terrible," Freeman said, laughing. "The movie is a dream, and you wake up at the end feeling cheated. Someone told me it's posted on YouTube as 'a movie some idiot made.'"

But ask yourself how many great filmmakers cut their teeth on such "idiocy," like M. Night Shyamalan's ridiculous spoof of "Raiders of the Lost Ark," or Quentin Tarantino's first screenplay, "The Amazing Adventures of Mr. Lee," which is so obscure you'd be lucky to find the text on Google.

"Nowadays, it's such a hot-house environment. There's so much money tied up in the film industry that nobody's allowed to practice. Nobody is allowed to make five films before they hit their stride," said Bruce Fletcher, founder and director of the Idaho International Film Festival. "But the real movie makers, they're unstoppable. They can't stop telling stories through film ... The great ones are born, and I think Brandon Freeman is one of those people."

Fletcher should know. For many years he has been watching movies for work and play, directing film festivals in San Francisco and Hawaii. He spearheaded the film festival in 2003 hoping some inspired outsiders would come forward.

Freeman may not have hit his stride just yet, but he has definitely come forward. After submitting his short film, "Letting Go," to Idaho International Film Festival last year, he offered up the feature that inspired it, a now 80-minute film called "The Broken Quiet." Within the first few minutes of watching the screener, Fletcher was sold.

"As far as a feature debut, it's really strong. He's got a tremendous amount of talent," Fletcher said. "Some people are storytellers. They understand how the whole is more than the sum of its parts, the way that music and lighting and camera work and the performances all add to the emotional impact of the story. (Brandon's film) is more than the sum of its parts because it's a concise whole that comes from a vision. It's fiercely non-commercial. He made this film to tell a story; he didn't make it as a calling card to get a job as a director."

If you ask Freeman, he made it because he was compelled to. Faith is central in his life as he both works and worships at the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Boise. As director of multimedia production, he films Sunday services for Web and DVD use and makes "Advent-ure" films about congregation members living their truths outside the church.

"Everything I do, in the end, my motivation is to glorify God," Freeman said. "Not to preach or evangelize, but to do the best I can for Him."

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"The Broken Quiet," a new feature film by local filmmaker Brandon Freeman.

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where

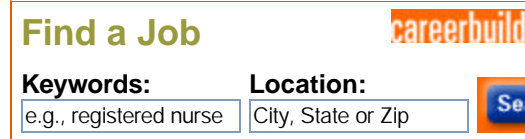
Egyptian Theatre, 700 W. Main St., Boise;
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Considering this, it would have been easy for Freeman to make "The Broken Quiet" an "issue" film, but he was more interested in the effect powerful issues have on people. "If you just make a film about an issue, it becomes forced and points a finger. In this film, issues become nonissues because they're about the people involved."

One of those people is an emotionally scarred teen named Ashlee (played ever-so-coolly by newcomer Kaytlin Schrader) whose mother has just died and whose father is a recovering, abusive alcoholic with potentially fatal depression (brought to life by veteran Boise actor TJ Johnson). Everything hangs on their struggle to accept and forgive each other, which begins when Ashlee's mother dies six months before her 18th birthday. She is angry, distant and bitter, threatening her father, Edgar's fragile sobriety and very hold on his life. When she gets pregnant, things spin out of control, and the words of Edgar's pastor, Reggie (Ray Gallegos), ring more and more true.

"Life as we know it now is pain. Life as we know it now is injustice, a struggle to survive. Life is a breaking," he says. "Until we're broken, we can never be real and never heal."

You have to wonder how a guy like Freeman could have insight into so much darkness, but like a good film, he has subtext.

He was candid about an addiction to pornography in his past, explaining that he went through a treatment program called Celebrate Recovery with the Vineyard a few years ago. He was moved by the people he met, the duality in each of them, the strength and the weakness.

"All these different addictions stem from the same thing," he said, "and I couldn't help but have my characters struggle with that."

Freeman got the idea for their particular struggle from a well-known ad campaign that proclaims, "Sex lasts a moment. Being a parent lasts your whole life." One ad caught his eye, a blaring music video of a girl pushing an over-sized baby carriage through a crowd of happy, childless peers.

Freeman worried that the message would be lost in the scare tactic, that young people would be even more likely to choose abortion faced with the supposed misery of parenthood.

So he started going to Web sites on both sides of the debate, reading about and conversing directly with women who regretted giving up their babies and others who fiercely protected their choices and continued right to choose. Then he wrote a story.

"It's about how Edgar handles the situation, not just about the issue," he said. "I don't pull any punches. I'm not trying to change anybody's mind. I can set the rules for my film, but I was really careful not to have any major debates."

The resulting story is dark and often uncomfortable, but not without demonstrating that most people have it in them to change, that there is always hope.

"Film is a Rorschach mirror. Everyone who looks at a film sees what they bring to it. A great film bounces you back at you. ... That doesn't mean I have to agree with what's on the screen, it just has to have an emotional center," Fletcher said.

Freeman's film does, despite being made in only 10 weekends with a total budget of \$700.

"It was either dumb luck or providence," Freeman said. "I had a talented crew. Maybe we didn't know what we were doing, but it's different when you're getting paid to do something and when you're doing what you love."

**Erin Ryan: 672-6732**

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Sunday, September 23, 2007 - 6:18pm | **DavidPVanHouten**

**Good Job!!!!**

Way to go Brandon! It is nice to see others recognize your God given talent! I am proud of you! David

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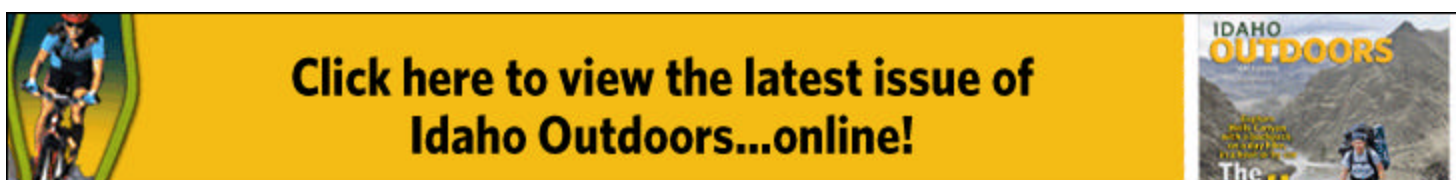
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