

# ARTS

**Pants are on fire in film shoot at church**  
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## Filmmaker focuses on ethical dilemma

**“How do you talk about this business? What happens when your dad lies? It’s an uncomfortable place to be.”**

Maureen Bradley,  
producer of *Pants on Fire*



**MICHAEL D. REID**

*Behind the Screen*

“Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in.” I couldn’t help but think of Al Pacino’s famous line, as aging mobster Michael Corleone in *The Godfather III*, during a chat with Maureen Bradley the other day about *Pants on Fire*, her new short film that began a five-day shoot in the Cedar Hill area yesterday.

Bradley, a lapsed Roman Catholic, is going back to church for the first time in years this week.

She’ll likely be flooded with memories once she enters the hushed, hallowed confines of Our Lady Queen of Peace, the charming little Catholic church on Old Esquimalt Road that is doubling as a key location.

“I was a good Catholic girl. I don’t practise these days, but it had such an impact on my psyche,” said Bradley, recalling her days as an altar girl at Montreal’s St. Ignatius of Loyola church. “They needed servers during funerals, so I’d get pulled out of class to serve a funeral,” she recalled. “It’s not necessarily the most positive thing for a kid to be doing.”

Maybe not, but growing up Catholic gave Bradley an artistic foundation she’s building upon.

“When I first saw that guy on the cross, I thought to myself, ‘I want some of that [status or power].’” says Bradley, emphasizing that her droll parable is not a condemnation of the church.

The film, which Bradley, 40, is directing from her own screenplay, focuses on Miriam, a devout, precocious eight-year-old Catholic girl about to make her first confession. The title refers to the penance she decides to give her father after she catches him with a skin magazine. She believes it will save him from damnation, since he won’t repent.

His sin isn’t just about having impure



Thea Gill demonstrates a scene in the film *Pants on Fire* when she rushes in to douse the flames of a young girl’s penance.

Bruce Stotesbury/Times Colonist

thoughts. When she confronts him in front of her mother, he also lies about it.

“How do you talk about this business?” asks Bradley. “What happens when your dad lies? It’s an uncomfortable place to be.”

Set in the 1970s and shot on 16mm film with funding support from the CineVic Society of Independent Filmmakers and the B.C. Arts Council, *Pants on Fire* is semi-autobiographical. When Bradley was a child, she caught her dad in a “white lie” when he denied owning a naughty magazine that he accidentally left on a bus.

“I didn’t light my father’s pants on fire, though,” she adds with a laugh. “I wasn’t quite that bratty.”

Although her film is laced with humour, like its cartoonish climax, it conveys a serious message.

Bradley says Miriam’s Christian righteousness is a metaphor for “the practical flaws of monotheism.” She says the film is also a subtle anti-war allegory and addresses the challenges children face as they grow into morally ambiguous adulthood.

“Sadly, it seems the root of most wars are religions with one God — Christianity, Judaism and Islam,” she observes. “Buddhists aren’t usually the ones trying to kill each other.”

Bradley says it wasn’t until she was able to let go of the “need to be right” that she felt liberated.

“There’s so much righteousness but what we’re reading in the New Testament isn’t necessarily what people are practising,” she says, wondering aloud how many churchgoers take the time to think about prayers rather than just reciting them.

Bradley, president of CineVic and a film professor at UVic, appears to have had some divine intervention.

She has been blessed with a dream cast. It includes Thea Gill (*Queer as Folk*), shooting her first film here before moving to Los Angeles; Dean Wray (*Da Vinci’s Inquest*); eight-year-old newcomer Grace Vukovic; and UVic theatre department instructor Jan Wood as a nun.

Local special-effects wizard Bill Mills (*I, Robot*, *The Pledge*) is also coming on board work his F/X magic and do stunts.

He’ll fall down a home’s front steps with his pants on fire, and create burning effects augmented by CGI from Race Rocks Digital.

The film, produced by Sandy Mayzell and Stacey Horton, will also shoot on a heritage bus and at a Dallas Road pond.

Bradley, who lived in Vancouver and Regina before moving here three years ago, has dozens of films, TV productions and art projects to her credit.

They include her “unforgettable” stint in 1992 as a director-videographer for two seasons of CBC-TV’s weekly series *Road Movies*. She describes it as “boot camp — eight kids, eight cameras, shooting anywhere and everywhere.”

Other noteworthy accomplishments include her short films *Go Dyke! Go*, which won awards at the Austin and Philadelphia Gay and Lesbian Film Festivals; *Forever*, a Best Experimental Film/Video at Chicago’s Reelings Festival; and *Queer Across Canada*, winner of a Best Short Film/Video prize at the Santa Barbara Gay and Lesbian Film Festival.

She also took part in the Women in the

Director’s Chair at the Banff Centre for the Arts, worked on the CTV series *Corner Gas* in 2004 and has had videos screened at New York’s Museum of Modern Art and international festivals.

Then there was the gruelling 18-month gig editing 150 karaoke videos for keen young filmmakers.

“It was actually pretty fun. They’d tell me about their vision and I’d go, ‘Dude. It’s karaoke, OK?’”

Bradley says she’s still attached to short-form filmmaking: “I don’t have the patience for features.”

Inspired by her experiences in Regina’s fledgling independent scene, she still roots for the underdog.

Her current passion is encouraging development of indigenous projects here.

“There are lots of folks in the movie business here who are working, but there’s not much of an indie scene. I hope we can build that.”

“Big shows come in, local people get skills and then they can go play with their friends.”

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