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Melinda Hughes '03



Melinda Hughes as Nancy Smith, pictured on the set of her upcoming webseries "Dumbass Filmmakers."

From "the Hill" to Hollywood: Melinda Hughes

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A journey from South quad to California is something that many Denison performing arts majors dream of. But, sometimes with a little bit of hard work and perseverance that dream of making a career from the "hill" to Hollywood can become reality. That's just what Denison alum Melinda Hughes '03 took to heart.

Progressing from the stage at Burke Hall to finding her way behind the camera, Hughes, a former theatre performance major, is appearing in an upcoming webseries titled "Dumbass Filmmakers" which will premier this summer.

Hughes explained that a webseries is a new type format for filming that streamlines the process of a series attempting to get picked up by a network. She said that, "We used to film pilots, but those are expensive. Webseries are much cheaper."

As a student at Denison, Hughes said she was deeply involved in every aspect of theatre production. She worked lights and sounds, in addition to being a regular cast member. She auditioned for every production during her four years here, earning several top roles.

Highlights of Hughes's acting career at Denison were when she played Lysistrata in "Lysistrata," and Kate in "The Taming of the Shrew." As a student, Hughes also produced the "One Acts" as well as

"The Vagina Monologues," in which she starred as Eve, the narrator.

When she graduated, Hughes was the recipient of the David Rounds Theatre Prize, an award given to the most promising senior in the theatre department.

Hughes was without a doubt a special and active member of the Denison community. In addition to her theatre involvement, Hughes took singing lessons at Denison and was a member of the Denison Dance Team, which she was the president of her senior year. She also worked as a student host for admissions.

After graduation she went to the Barns Theatre in Augusta Mich., a summer stock theatre. Barns Theatre also produced the famous career of another Denison alum, Jennifer Garner '94.

Hughes worked at the Michigan theatre for just over four months before she returned home, where she worked for a year to earn enough money to move out to Los Angeles.

Hughes said that when she was a senior, Jennifer Garner came to Denison to speak to all of the theatre majors. Even though Gardner had a good message, Hughes remembered that she failed to address some the most important things she had wanted to hear.

According to Hughes, "I think it would have been great as a student to be given a heads up about what is expected out here, for someone to explain what real life was like in show business."

Upon arriving in Los Angeles, Hughes discovered that the acting and production scene was very different from what she expected. As an actor in in the business at her own level, Hughes said, "you can't be as creatively involved."

Actors are expected to come, do well, and then leave. In Los Angeles, theatre is a director's medium. Hughes found that disconcerting after the level to which she was involved in the whole production as a student. She explained that since you are a part of every aspect of production as an undergraduate, "more of your personal self is invested."

So, Hughes decided to find that creative outlet in production. Hughes started her own production company, Minderful Movies, named after her Denison nickname Minderful. Taking this step was perhaps one of the best things she ever did.

Hughes said that producing made her a better actress, as it gave her new perspectives and understanding of the process. As actors at her level do not have much control, Hughes has found that producing has "been a little more rewarding for me."

Hughes said that when she got to Los Angeles, she found herself at a time of serious personal and professional growth. She noted that she had been nervous about auditions, but eventually found that people were respectful and receptive to what she did. In fact, she had already been through the hardest part of the process, as she described, "the hard part is going to be selling yourself to the people who get you the audition."

Hughes also commented on how to make the dream become a reality. "You really have to be a go getter. You can't sit around hoping something comes your way, because then it won't," she said. You have to take some initiative and work hard. And also, of course, get connections.

According to Hughes, it really is all in who you know in Hollywood. She said that "auditions are hard to come by. Most of the work you do here is based on who you know."

Hughes got in touch with her current project, "Dumbass Filmmakers" because she had been in a class with the main producer.

Hughes was brought onto the "Dumbass Filmmakers" project from a production angle. She was hired as an associate producer in addition to her role in the cast. This will be the second project she has associate produced. In her role, Hughes' duties include organizing costume meetings between the wardrobe department and the actors, and scouting locations.

The show is described as "an existential comedy webseries" in a press release and will be released in summer 2011. Hughes added that the series "follows loveable losers" trying to make it in show business, and they are completely "clueless," leading to the title "Dumbass Filmmakers."

Hughes describes her character, Nancy Smith, as "the quintessential actress." Smith is "all about technique, [...] an all-American beauty pageant type" and a real personality. Hughes said that there is also a degree of jealousy between her character and the lead, Vicki Moretti, played by Elizabeth Gordon.

Hughes is very excited about her roles in "Dumbass Filmmakers," both as an actress and in production. She enjoys being so deeply involved in the creating of the series, and sincerely enjoys her life in theatre.

This summer, keep on the lookout for the premier of "Dumbass Filmmakers" at www.dumbassfilmmakers.com.

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