



## Production Notes

“Raising Flag” is the first major motion picture in years to be both financed and filmed entirely in Oregon.

Directed by Neal Miller, the zany comedy-

drama marks a reunion between the award-winning Eugene filmmaker and the actors – Oscar-nominee Alan Arkin and Barbara Dana – who play the lead characters, Flagg and Ada Purdy.

Twenty years ago, Arkin and Dana (who were married at the time) starred in the critically-acclaimed “A Matter of Principle,” produced and co-written by Miller for PBS – American Playhouse.

Like “Raising Flagg,” the first film was based on a John D. Weaver story in which Arkin and Dana played...Flagg and Ada.

Miller recalls that a few years after “A Matter of Principle” aired, Weaver's agent sent him a collection of the author’s other short stories, including "Don't You Cry For Me” about a rural couple who were so similar to the Purdy’s that they might as well have been called Flagg and Ada.

Miller sent the story to Arkin and Dana in the late 1990s with a note that read: "Hey, these are the same characters 15 plus years later!" Word came back that they were aboard.

Because of other commitments, several more years passed before Miller and his wife, Nancy – also his writing partner on “A Matter of Principle” – were able to work on the screenplay.

“As we completed each draft, Alan and Barbara gave us notes,” Miller says of their input in both shaping the story and making casting suggestions.

Finally, in 2002, Miller called Arkin to check his schedule. To Miller’s utter surprise, Arkin and Dana had just divorced after 35 years of marriage. “When I found out, my heart sank,” he says. “But Alan said, ‘No, no, it’s okay. We want to work together. I want to do this.’ In fact, he made it very clear that if we didn’t do it with Barbara, he wasn’t interested.”

Meanwhile, Miller had been trying to raise the money to finance the project with no success. At the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, he was introduced to an executive producer who claimed he would raise half the budget. But the day production began, Miller realized the money wasn’t coming at all. The Millers – now in the tough position of deciding whether to shut down production or take their chances and go ahead with production – decided to keep the cameras rolling.

“We had to borrow half the budget and put ourselves in debt – because I had this incredible cast and crew assembled and we were starting to shoot. I was not going to pull the plug,” Miller says.

It was not the first time the Millers had put their own money on the line to bring a production to screen. They found themselves facing the same dilemma in the early 1980s when financing fell through at the last minute on “Come Along With Me,” which Miller had hired Joanne Woodward to direct.

### **The Locations**

Filming on “Raising Flagg” took place over 22 days in one of the coldest, wettest Oregon winters in years. But it was the only time Alan Arkin was available.

Miller had originally hoped to shoot entirely in the Eugene area, where he has lived since 1988. But his line producer, Julie Cook, took one look at the budget and said, “You can’t shoot this film in Eugene, because we’d have to bring too many people in.’ So we ended up shooting it outside of Portland and it worked out fine, because I got a great crew up there,” Miller recounts.

It took three weeks of scouring the countryside within driving range of Portland to find the farmhouse that served as the Purdy family home in the film. “I must have looked at 30 farm houses,” Miller says of the exhaustive search.

Ironically, they found Gus’ general store first, in North Plains, about 20 miles west of Portland. Then, a short drive down the road, the location manager discovered another gem: the kind of classic turn-of-the-century farmhouse that has virtually disappeared from America’s rural landscapes.

“The minute I pulled into the driveway, I said, ‘This is it!’ If the inside is like what I think it is, we’ve found it!” says Miller. Indeed, the house featured high ceilings, allowing the crew to hang lighting grids in every room, and it was occupied by firefighters who were more than happy – with a bit of financial coaxing – to stay elsewhere while the production took over their quarters.

“The Purdy House personifies what we saw in our mind’s eye when we were writing the screenplay, and the surrounding landscape added to the feel of the story. Working at realistic locations like that has a very positive affect on the actors.”

Miller found the film’s courthouse, Grange, and the other needed exteriors in and around St. Helens and Yankton.

“Those communities were wonderful to work with,” he says. “When we didn’t have the money in the budget to pay for all the extras to make the Grange dance scene look realistic, people in the area volunteered to work the entire evening.” In appreciation, the Millers gladly made a donation to a local charity.

### **Casting Surprises**

For the principal roles, Miller used a casting director in Los Angeles. Who would have guessed that one of the Hollywood actors they would hire would be an Oregon native – Jan Hoag, who plays the exasperated judge in “Raising Flagg.”

And then there was the coincidence of bumping into legend Clifton James, who happened to be visiting his son, Hardy James, the Associate Producer on “Raising Flagg.”

Miller remembers, “We’re sitting there at Hardy’s house in Oregon City, and the door opens behind me and I hear this voice. I’m thinking, ‘I know that voice!’ I turn around and it’s Clifton James!”

“So I turn to Nancy and said two words: ‘Ed McGyver.’ At that point, we were still in pre-production and I hadn’t cast that role yet. I had auditioned a number of people

and couldn't find the right one. But the minute I heard Clifton's voice, I knew we had him.”

It turned out that the popular character actor of such films as “Cool Hand Luke,” “Live and Let Die,” and “The Man With Golden Gun,” lives in New York but graduated from the University of Oregon.

### **Rehearsing**

Few low-budget indie films attract such a remarkably talented and experienced cast, all dedicated to a labor of love. Just as you'd expect to find the Purdy family sitting around the kitchen table talking over their day, the actors and director began rehearsals by discussing the relationships they were about to portray.

A full week before the cameras rolled, Miller brought the cast out on location for a read-through of the script. “I borrowed a technique that Alan told me Jean Renoir, the famous French filmmaker, used. I'm sure many other directors use it, but I had never tried it before. Everybody read their part like they were reading the phone book – no emotion, and no attempt to interpret their character in any way. This helped the actors avoid some of the ‘tricks’ they learn over the years and brought freshness to their character,” he says.

Miller also decided to have the Purdy family kids cook a dinner together in the set kitchen one evening. “I thought it would help them bond as a family.” Alan loved it. He said, ‘Oh, wonderful. I don't have to do anything!’ So Alan got the night off, because his character (Flagg) would never go into the kitchen.”

“Once we started shooting, Alan brought a new dimension to Flagg and a level of humor I didn't anticipate,” he continues. “There were many times when we all had to restrain ourselves from cracking up in order not to ruin the sound track. He is an amazing actor who found a way to let the audience know he was just looking for sympathy, without being tragic about it. Alan always senses the right level of comedy and avoids going too far.”

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