

Get To Know Your Carolina Film Alliance President, Linda Lee.

In her own words, Linda Lee's Biography—a fascinating life story with entertaining adventures, from her long and well-established career in the film industry.



Photo by John Wilson

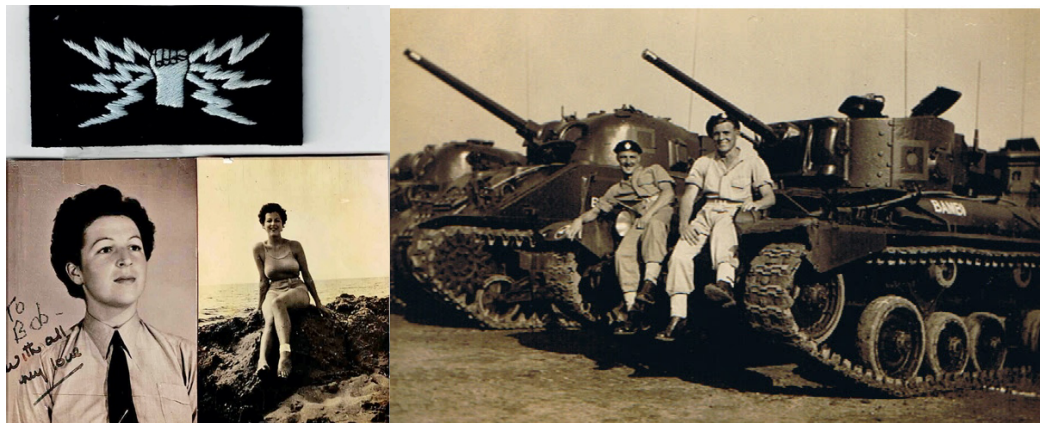
I was raised on a picturesque farm in Buckinghamshire, England, near the village of Hedgerley. Our surroundings were always being used by film crews and I was fascinated. My father was a horse trainer so I could ride at Four, drive a tractor at Five (Daddy bought a little tractor with the clutch in the steering column since my feet couldn't reach the pedals). He would take a nap while I plowed a field. There was still a lot of post-war rationing so late at night I would hold a lantern while he butchered hogs which we loaded into our American Hudson's trunk. I would put on my school uniform and sit in the car while he made deliveries in nearby towns. I was supposed to distract the Bobbies if they became suspicious. We never got caught, but there was one day when the car's engine caught fire and the Bobbies helped me put it out. Luckily, they never looked in the trunk. Daddy, who had been watching from a nearby window made a big show of thanking them for saving me.





My family emigrated to the United States in 1957. I can remember everyone on the train to South Hampton reading about Sputnik – the first artificial satellite launched by Russia. We boarded the French Liner *Liberte'* for the ocean crossing, and that was quite an adventure. I made friends with a Canadian girl, and we were constantly being searched for by the crew as we invaded every area of that beautiful ocean liner, breaking all the rules applying to third class passengers. I was almost banished in New York when I refused to have my bookbag searched by a very rude customs officer.

Both my parents had served in World War II – my father in the Royal Tank Corps and my mother in the Women's Royal Air Force Signals Corps (she would teach me Morse Code with a flashlight in the barn). My mother's best friend in the WRAF had married an American pilot and they were our sponsors. We took a bus to their farm in Sumter, SC. Talk about culture shock.



The worst shock for my sister and me was attending American schools. They didn't know what to do with us. At age 9, I tested to be in the Eighth Grade and Diane, at age 7, tested to be in the Sixth Grade. School officials would have none of that. They put me in the 6th Grade, and Diane in the 4th Grade. Diane adapted beautifully and I became a nightmare for my teachers.

Things got better when we moved to Columbia and to a school where I made some friends and teachers appreciated my knowledge. I played flute in the band and acted in school plays. By the time we settled in Charleston, I had learned to adapt – I loved my high school English teacher and my Art teacher - I was even a cheerleader.

I had planned on going to USC and majoring in Journalism, but my parents did not agree with my choice and decided I should work for a year before going to university. I worked at Kerrison's on King Street as a salesperson in the Lingerie Department. My boss was a formidable woman who demanded respect and honesty from her employees and her bosses. I had never seen a woman take charge like that and I was impressed. By year's end she had convinced me to go to school in Atlanta and major in Retail and Design. She also arranged a part-time job at Rich's Department Store to help pay expenses. My parents went for it.

Fashion Institute of America



The Student Council members and officers from left to right: Larry Gunning, Linda Lee - Recording Secretary, David Gettings - Activities Chairman, Mary Beth Dana, Jack Phillips - President, Ernest Coleman - Treasurer, Lee Ford - Vice President, Jo Ann Bebb, Gayden Call - Corresponding Secretary.

JUST LIKE HIGH SCHOOL, BUT WITH NICE CLOTHING AND BEEHIVE HAIRDOS.

After graduation, I accepted a job with Maison Blanche Department Store in New Orleans as an Assistant Buyer and then moved to D.H. Holmes as a buyer of Costume and Fine Jewelry.

While working at D. H. Holmes, I met Louis Sahuc, a well-known photographer who was dating a friend of mine. On my days off, I modelled for him and began helping him with styling and makeup for other models. Then other photographers and directors asked me to work for them. I needed to decide. Could I make a living doing this? I left D. H. Holmes and some people I really adored, but I had found the work that made me happy and fulfilled.



Photo credit Louis Sahuc



Photo credit Louis Sahuc

It was New Orleans in the early 70's and I was a production coordinator/stylist/makeup artist/location scout. In those days you had to do a bit of everything. Then, a local ad agency creative director asked me if I had ever "produced." I replied, "Of course," having no idea exactly what that meant. I managed to pull off the first one without a hitch and from then on, I was a producer of local commercials, but still worked as a location scout/production coordinator for the nationals.



Photo credit Louis Sahuc

Then one night I was working with a photographer who was doing a political commercial. We were in a television studio. Completely different lighting and equipment for both of us. He panicked and I just took over. Told them which lights to use and where to put them, which filters to use, changed the background, all the time talking to the client to keep him calm and confident. It was great and it was successful. I ended up doing his entire campaign.

I formed my own production company and began producing and directing local commercials. I even had a small equipment truck which I shared with the local Key Grip and kept in my driveway, much to the detriment of my relationship with the New Orleans French Quarter Preservation Society.



First Directing Job. Do I look scared?

When Saturday Night Live came to New Orleans to do a Mardi Gras Special in 1976, I signed on with the Art Department to keep them from being taken advantage of by the local merchants. That's how I met my ex-husband, who was the Art Director. The following year, I moved to New York, where I worked on Saturday Night Live for the incredibly talented and possibly insane, Jim Signorelli, as his line producer. We did parody commercials and short films. I also did some NBC specials with the same group, and I was a Segment Producer on "The New Show," which was cancelled. After nine years in New York, spent working on numerous television shows, plays, and television specials, plus a year as a repo woman – often referred to as the revenge year - when I repossessed my ex-husband's lawyer's BMW and the Mustang belonging to a writer who stole an idea for a parody.



Danny and Billy in New Orleans



Jim Signorelli



Linda and Leo in Killer Bee Costumes at Mardi Gras

When I returned to Charleston in 1990 after Hugo, I re-connected with old friend David Boatwright and production managed a series of local commercials for him. I also signed up with the S. C. Film Commission as a location scout – a job that continues to the present day.

This was followed by more Art Dept./Set Dec. related jobs with Alex Hailey's QUEEN, THE YEARLING for CBS, and then I found THE tree for Jon Avnet's THE WAR, and suddenly I was a location scout, Asst. Location Mgr., and Location Manager. Crazy business.

I was taught the job of Location Manager by Diane Ketchum on SCARLETT, and went on to Location manage OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS directed by a British Lord; WHITE SQUALL directed by the brilliant Ridley Scott; AN OCCASIONAL HELL starring Tom Berringer for HBO, and DECEIVER directed by the brilliant and adorable Pate Brothers. (I did not go to the secret bar that Tim Roth and certain crew members went to every night).



"Other Voices, Other Rooms"



Gaffers always want the genny closer



CFA Meeting with Amy Heath



"The Yearling"



"The Yearling"



The former Captain George Brisbon



Comforting the First AD - Other Voices, Other Rooms



"Other Voices, Other Rooms"

Then there was ANIMALS (and the Tollkeeper) written and directed by another brilliant youngster, Michael Di Giacomo. I do love working with young directors – they bravely ignore the rules. Tim Roth again. I wonder if they found a secret bar on Edisto.

On to CARRIERS – the TV version of OUTBREAK where we turned everywhere between Beaufort and Charleston into African jungle, Delaware, Atlanta, Mississippi, Boston, and of course, USAMRIID.

Then THE TEMPEST – Shakespeare during the Civil War. One time I would say, Thank God for Santee Cooper. Followed by “O” – one of my favorites – a modern take on “Othello” with a marvelous young cast including Mekhi Phifer, Julia Stiles, Josh Hartnett, Martin Sheen and directed by Tim Blake Nelson.



'The Patriot' Columbia Pictures, Inc; Filming In Rock Hill.



'The Patriot' Columbia Pictures, Inc; Filming on Meeting St., Charleston. Photo by File/Staff The Post & Courier

THE PATRIOT was the biggest show I had ever done with a possibly psychotic director, Roland Emmerich (when I was having trouble securing a location, Roland said “Why don’t you sleep with him?” I replied, “Why don’t you?”) I worked on it for a year.

Cast & crew were in SC for over 7 months; principal photography took 90 days to complete. Production hired 22,100 extras throughout the filming, 3,000 pairs of stocking were used, Winner of the 2000 Award for Best Cinematography from the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC). Caleb Deschanel, D.P. Cast: Heath Ledger, Jason Issacs, Joely Richardson, Kim Murphy, Leon Rippey, Mel Gibson, Rene Auberjonois.



'The Patriot' at Cypress Gardens. Photo from Columbia Pictures.

The Patriot filming on Tradd St. Photo from Columbia Pictures.

After THE PATRIOT, I had to take a few years off for cancer/stem cell transplant/recovery. I had secretly been having chemo treatments while working. I would open the set, make sure they got the first shot off, then get to Roper for an hour of chemo, then back to the set. I have been involved with Carolina Film Alliance since the beginning. The CFA put on a fundraiser for me in 2000 to help pay for a bone marrow transplant, which saved my life. Now I can pay back this organization by serving as a very active board member and contributing whatever talents I have to the growth of CFA and the passage of more legislation to grow the film industry in South Carolina.



**Life for Linda: April 22, 2001
& May 11, 2001**

On April 22, the Carolina Film Alliance and Charleston IMAX Theatre hosted a screening of Cirque du Soleil's *Journey of Man* to benefit Linda Lee, a Charleston film locations manager who has been battling a rare form of cancer. Friends and family, including (above) Rebecca Smythe, Ellen Lee, Diane Aghapour, and a regally attired Richard Futch, enjoyed the film, food, and festivities. On May 11, Linda (right, seated at center) joined her supporters at Fred for a wine tasting and appetizer fundraiser.





Linda with Governor McMaster at the SC State House. Photo credit Sam Holland



Linda with Danny McBride and Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter. Photo credit Connie Rouse

Brandon James, David Gordon Green, Governor McMaster, Danny McBride, and Linda Lee. Photo credit Sam Holland

When I came back it was a whole new world. Incentives were the thing that made everything happen, and SC didn't have enough funding to keep us working all year round. That's when I became more involved with Carolina Film Alliance. CFA constantly works to improve incentives and rebates and has been successful at passing legislation towards that goal. This year we hope to do even better, but time will tell.

In May of 2013, S.163 increased the Payroll Rebates from 15% to 20% - 25% for SC residents, and the Supplier Rebates from 15% to 30%

In early 2016, the Film Commission had un-committed rebate funds available for a series that sought to move to SC. I matched locations to the show's first season in Mississippi, the producers were thrilled, and they applied for rebates. When the application went to SCPRT, the money was gone – disappeared. For months, every day that I was not scouting was spent researching, questioning, and demanding answers.



Photo credits John Wilson. Linda with former SC Film Commissioner Tom Clark, Boyd Brown of TT&B, and Film & Television Producer Barbara D'Alessandro.

That research became the foundation for the changes CFA and its legislative advisors have accomplished and are still working towards. Since that time, CFA has passed two important Provisos: 49.15, which allows the Film Commission to pay rebates without distinction of the source of funds (previously, if supplier rebate money ran out, the leftover wage rebate money would revert to SCPRT), and Proviso 49.8, by which committed and uncommitted funds would carry forward from the prior fiscal year and be used solely for Wage and Supplier rebates and may not be used for any other purpose.

During the 2022-2023 Session, H. 4020 passed the House and still must be approved by the Senate. This Bill increases the Rebate amount from \$15.8M to \$30M which all comes from the General Fund, thereby eliminating the former source of funding from Admissions Tax.

CFA continues to work closely with Legislative Advisors and House and Senate Committees to increase the funding for the SC Film Commission and bring more productions to South Carolina.

These days I mostly scout or manage locations for everything and everyone. THE BAY, RECKLESS, IDENTITY, SOUTH OF HELL, VICE PRINCIPALS, THE SINNER, HALLOWEEN, OUTER BANKS (Three Seasons – started the Fourth, then the strike), HARVEST MOON, GIRLFRIENDSHIP.



Photo credit John Wilson



"Outer Banks"



Photo credits, Clockwise from top Left: John Wilson; John Wilson; Jack Crawford; John Wilson.

Pictured from Clockwise from top Left: Linda Lee; Lee Donaldson Owner of Griporama LLC, Harrison Palmer President of IATSE Local 491 and CFA BOD, and Ms. Linda Lee; James Heyward Script Supervisor and CFA BOD, Jason Gourdine of Crown Vision Media and CFA BOD, and Linda with Robert Hopkins of Breakthrough Pictures and CFA BOD; Senator Paul Campbell and Linda.

Since the WGA – SAG/AFTRA strike, which we all support, CFA has put out the word on our talented and experienced crews that are available for other work until the strike is over.

I am currently continuing to work in the industry and plan to return to Outer Banks TV Show when filming resumes, while also continuing the good work with the Carolina Film Alliance. My hope is to see the future of Filmmaking in South Carolina secured for many years to come. –Linda Lee



Photo credit John Wilson