

Season 5

Season Five of *Queer as Folk*, the final one of the series, was a personal oxymoron. For one thing, although I participated in more filming days during season five than for any previous season, I was on camera for the least amount of time. In fact, although I participated in Episodes 502, 503, 505 and 508, I am not visible in any of these. All of the work I did was left on the cutting room floor. And in episode 509, the first one where you can see me, I am only visible in a brief two second cut, blurred out in the background of the frame.

On a second note, in previous seasons, most of my work for the show took place during the first half of filming before the series went on a three week hiatus for Christmas break. During season five, the opposite was true. I got very little work from the show before Christmas and then a massive amount of bookings in the second half, especially in episodes 511, 512 and 513.

Since my participation was minimal in episodes 502, 503, 505, 508 and 509, I decided to provide a quick overview for each of these episodes before returning to full descriptions of the final three episodes of series, for which I did have noticeable involvement.

Episode 502

October 6, 2004

Call Time: 11:30 am

Wrap Time: 7:30 pm

Set: Poppers Dance Club

Location: 5ive Night Club, Toronto

This scene involved Brian, having bought Babylon, checking out the competition at Poppers, another gay dance club that seemed to have stolen all of the business away from Babylon.

We shot this scene at a Toronto gay dance club called 5ive located off Yonge Street near to but not actually in Toronto's Gay Village. It was the only dance club scene I was ever involved with that was not a Babylon scene. We staged it exactly like Babylon though with us dancing to some initial music and then continuing to dance once the music was shut off. I kept thinking to myself that this must have been what the original Babylon shoots were like in season one when Babylon was first at a club called The Guvernment and then at another club called Fly. The biggest surprise of the night was seeing Scott Lowell with bleached blond hair and having no idea why he had changed his hair colour.

Ironically, 5ive was also the location of the QAF Background Wrap Party that was held the Tuesday following the last day of shooting for the series. It had been put

together by one of the background cast who had connections with 5ive and while it was not officially sponsored by the QAF production per se, they did give the night its blessing and several of the QAF crew who had worked with the background cast over the years dropped by to help us celebrate (unfortunately none of the main cast were able to attend as all of them had left town by then).

Episode 503

October 25-26, 2004

Call Time: 7:30 am / 1:00 pm

Wrap Time: 12:00 pm / 11:45 pm

Set: Woody's Bar / Liberty Diner

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios "B" Studio

The scene shot on October 25 was a quick Woody's scene where Ben and Michael confront Brian with the revelation that he was paying for Lindsay's lawyer during the custody fight that she, Melanie and Michael were waging for Jenny Rebecca. It was a tight shot that focused on the three actors and, as I had been placed behind a pillar in the bar set, I was off-camera during the entire shoot. I was wrapped as soon as the scene was done.

Once I got home, I was online when my agent, who often contacted me through MSN Messenger, asked if I could do another shoot the next day. I agreed since this would give me the first opportunity to work on the show on back-to-back days. I was also eager for another booking since I had felt I had not made much of a contribution earlier in the day.

Little did I know that the October 26 shoot would be the single most disappointing day during my entire association with *Queer as Folk*. For the only time during my four years with the series, I was never called to set even though I spent a total of almost 11 hours at the studio.

It was simply a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time at the wrong moment. Even more disappointing was that this was Rosie O'Donnell's first day of shooting for the three episode's she had been signed to appear in. Both scenes to be shot that day were Liberty Diner scenes.

Usually when there were two scenes scheduled to be filmed on the same set in one day, the background cast would be divided into two groups, one for the first scene and one for the second scene with a small group appearing in both scenes. On this day, I was selected for the second group. So while the first group went to the Diner set to film, I remained in holding.

Hour after hour went by. The first group came and went a few times, and then we had our "lunch" break for an hour. Then the first group went back to set. More time passed. Along about 10:30 pm, some of the production

assistants came into the holding area and announced that the first scene had run longer than expected and that it was not going to be possible to finish the second scene that night. Because of this, they said that anyone who would be part of the second scene had to return to the studio the next day to finish shooting (this is often referred to as a continuity shoot).

So, rather than sending the second group to set for the next scene, they started calling off names from the background cast roster and asking each person if he or she could be available tomorrow. Once they started doing this, I knew I was doomed. I had already taken two days off my regular job to do these shoots and, despite the fact I felt that I had done very little for the show, I also knew that it was not a responsible thing to miss a third day of work from my regular job.

Very, very reluctantly, when my name was called, I had to answer that I was not available for the next day. Once the list had been fully called out, the assistants announced that all of the actors who were available could get ready to go to set and the rest of us were wrapped. So, I ended up never making it to set for either scene.

My one and only consolation was that at one point during the filming of the first scene, George, the on-set 3rd AD, did ask for a few additional background people to come to set and I was chosen for this. We were escorted to the set and while waiting to enter, I spied Sharon Gless and Rosie O'Donnell talking off set. So at least I got to see Rosie in person, even if from a distance. But, as luck would have it, a few minutes later George decided he didn't need our extra group and we were sent back to holding where I remained until being wrapped later in the evening.

Episode 505
November 23, 2004

Call Time: 3:30 pm

Wrap Time: 3:30 am

Set 1: Liberty Avenue sidewalk

Location 1: Church Street, Toronto

Set 2: Exterior of Babylon

Location 2: Maitland Street off Church, Toronto

Two location scenes were scheduled to be filmed this night on or around Church Street. The first was a stock flashback shot of people walking up and down Liberty Avenue. For this scene, I was paired with another older background actor. We simply walked hand-in-hand up Church and at the corner of Church and Maitland, turned left and continued walking up Maitland. A lot of footage of many people walking up and down Church Street like this was filmed over the course of many hours but ultimately only about five seconds of this footage was used in the episode and my part wasn't included.

The second shot we did that night, or more correctly in the wee hours of the morning, was an outdoor shot of Babylon. The shot involved Justin jumping the queue to get inside Babylon and being admitted ahead of everyone else in line. Normally, the exterior of Babylon was filmed in an alley near John Street in the west end of the city. For whatever reason, the producers decided to film this scene in an alley off Maitland in the Gay Village.

The shot involved a crane camera sweeping down over the queued up crowd and terminating at the front of the line followed by a ground camera shot of Justin being granted permission to enter Babylon ahead of the crowd. In the original setup, I had been selected along with another background actor to walk into the alley from the street together so that we could get into line.

The cool thing about my "partner" was that he told me he had been one of the football cast members from another Toronto-produced TV series called Playmakers which dealt with a professional football team and aired on ESPN in the US (and eventually on Showcase in Canada). In fact, several QAF production people also worked on Playmakers as did Patrick Antosh's "cock sock" which was used by a few of the main Playmakers cast for their sex scenes. I wonder if any of those Playmaker's actors actually ever knew where the idea for the "cock sock" originated.

Playmakers was actually so realistic and controversial that the NFL made ESPN take it off the air by threatening to cancel ESPN's contract to telecast NFL games. Having seen Playmakers myself, I can understand why.

My QAF "partner" that night was certainly built like a football player and he told me a lot of interesting things about doing Playmakers in between our takes of the scene. And, he sure was nice eye candy so I was very happy to be walking hand-in-hand with him during the filming of this exterior Babylon shot.

But, when the episode was eventually aired, I immediately saw that the first portion of the scene had been cut so that all you see are the last couple of seconds of the boom camera panorama of the crowd followed by the ground shot of Justin. The part of the scene where I was visible was left on the cutting room floor.

Episode 508
January 17, 2005
Call Time: 4:00 pm
Wrap Time: 11:30 pm
Set: Babylon
Location: Dufferin Gate Studios "B" Studio

By the time I was called back to do QAF in mid-January, it had been almost two months since I had been on the

show. I didn't know if this was because the production had simply cut back on the number of background cast they were able to use or that the parts available were not suitable for my agents to propose me to the productions (like the fact my body type was not suitable for any carnal scenes).

This was a Babylon shoot and involved one of the final scenes of episode 508, after Brian had won his bet with Brandon as to who was the better stud and then, having won the contest, refused to collect his "prize" (I'm sure most of you remember what the prize was). In the scene, Brandon was still coming to the bar and attracting a lot of attention. Seeing this, Ted, who seemed to be working as a Babylon bartender that night, offered to throw Brandon out to which Brian decided it was not worth the bother.

This was the second time I was allowed to dance topless at Babylon. This time, unlike the topless scene I did in Episode 301, I wasn't pre-selected but instead the wardrobe people simply asked if anyone would be willing to dance topless during the filming. I jumped at the chance and was one of about 10 or so who volunteered.

Once again I got to dance topless at Babylon knowing that I had fewer clothes on than Brian did which I really liked a lot. Unfortunately, the way the camera was positioned, I ended up off camera during the pan-in shot to Brian where he and Ted discuss throwing Brandon out of the bar. For a second shot of Brandon and his entourage, I was simply asked to climb up the staircase behind Brandon's group and was not visible doing so.

Finally, what I thought was my break came when all of the topless dancers were asked to come forward and several takes were made of us dancing while the cameras filmed us both in wide angle and close up. I figured surely this would be used as the establishing shot of the scene and that I would finally get to be seen topless at Babylon.

Well, as Justin once said to Brian, "No such luck." During post-production, the director and producers made the decision to use a series of quick transition still frames that were made of some of the podium dancers and a few of the regular club guys before switching to the pan-in shot of Brian and Ted. Once again, my contribution ended up on the cutting room floor.

Sadly for me, and I didn't know it at the time, but this night turned out to be my Babylon farewell as I was not asked to be in any other Babylon scenes for the remainder of the series.

Episode 509

January 25, 2005

Call Time: 1:30 pm

Wrap Time: 8:30 pm

Set: Woody's

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios "B" Studio



This is the first episode of season five where I am actually visible on camera although as you can see from the still frame, I am far back in the scene and as a result out of focus. This is the scene where Ted, desperate to find a partner, attends a Jewish Gay mixer being held at Woody's and is briefly successful.

For this scene, my first position was at the pool table. During the scene, I was asked to do a cross around the table to the back wall of the bar and then pair up with another background actor just behind where Ted is seated at the bar for the remainder of the scene. It is during the cross that you can see me.

Episode 511

February 15, 2005

Call Time: 11:30 am

Wrap Time: 5:00 pm

Set: Local Pittsburgh Church

Location: Applewood United Church, Mississauga.



Without a doubt the scene we filmed on this date was probably the most surreal of any I ever did while I was a member of *Queer as Folk*'s background cast. I knew this wasn't going to be just any ordinary scene when my agent told me that the filming was to take place in a church in Mississauga not far from Dufferin Gate's Studio "B".

I had never done a church scene before although there had been many such scenes during QAF's first four seasons so as I was driving to the set, I was trying to imagine what we were going to film. At this point, I had become aware through the grapevine that Babylon had been bombed during a filming that had taken place the previous week (a scene I did not take part in because I was in Ottawa at the time). So naturally, I began to think that someone important might have been killed during the bombing and that the scene we were going to film was a funeral.

That suspicion became stronger once I got to the church and began talking with fellow background cast members. Some of them had been part of the Babylon bombing shoot and told me that in the story, Michael had been seriously injured and might not pull through.

And, to top it off, we were all asked to wear darker formal clothing for the scene. So, putting everything together, I had come to the conclusion that perhaps the producers had killed off Michael with just a few episodes to go and that this was going to be his funeral.

Looking back now, of course, we all know this wasn't the case but at the time, it seemed plausible. Adding to this thought was the knowledge that the HBO series *Six Feet Under* had killed off one of its major characters a few episodes before its series finale.

We all went through the usual wardrobe, hair and makeup clearances and when the time came, the ADs led us into the main area of the church. The producers had spared no expense here. The entire main church area was fully set up for a funeral including a prominent casket positioned at the head of the centre aisle in front of the altar area.

Then came the real surprise. Each of us was given an extremely realistic program prop that outlined in very specific detail the sequence of the service that was supposed to happen. Although Michael's name was not actually mentioned in the printed program, one of the final items during the service was a "eulogy" to be delivered by one Mr. Benjamin Bruckner. It sure looked and felt like Michael's funeral. To me it was amazing that the production company had gone to this much trouble to produce and print realistic programs for a mock funeral scene that actually ended up running only a couple of minutes in the episode.

One by one, we are asked to come down the centre aisle and find a place to sit in one of the pews. Originally, I was placed in the sixth row, one seat in on the left side of the aisle. I remained there for a short time until 3rd AD George came by and asked me to switch with another actor. Thus, I moved up one pew and sat down in the area second from the aisle.

Once I sat down, I immediately noticed the ubiquitous tape mark that was stuck to the area immediately to my right. By now you all know what that means....someone from the main cast was going to sit there. In fact, what actually happened was quite remarkable. For when the "first team" was called to set, Peter Paige and Scott Lowell sat down in the pew directly in front of me and who should sit down next to me but Randy Harrison (who else could it have been since this was about the sixth or seventh time I had been placed in his personal space for a shoot).

To this day I don't know how or why I ended up sitting or standing next to him in so many scenes over the years. I'm sure it was total coincidence but I would never complain about being around Randy. So, in a block of four people, there were three main members of the cast and me.

Now, while my head was in the clouds and I couldn't believe this luck, don't get the idea that any of them even noticed me. As I have mentioned before, the standard protocol for a TV or film shoot is that the background cast is generally ignored and that as a backgrounder you never speak to a main cast member unless spoken to first. In this case, I was quite aware that all three cast members rarely if ever spoke to the background cast. And even though I was sitting almost shoulder to shoulder with Randy, I kept my professionalism throughout and tried as best I could not to pay any attention to what they were talking about. None spoke a single word to me throughout the four hours of actual filming. I wasn't disappointed and totally expected this to happen. The protocol is very rigid.

I did learn of one very important piece of information before we actually started filming by listening to some of the conversation between Scott, Peter and Randy. And it actually made me feel better about the shoot. The scene was actually going to be a fantasy sequence. The guys were even trying to remember all of the fantasy scenes they had been in and why some of the characters seemed to have had more of them than others.

When I heard that, I figured the scene was going to be about a delirious Michael recovering in the hospital and dreaming of his own funeral, à la Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. It wasn't until I saw the scene when it aired months later that I realized that it was actually Brian's nightmare.

When we filmed the scene, it was Brian walking down the aisle and offering his condolences to his friends and Debbie before he stops at the casket. There were close up shots taken of Peter, Scott and Randy and since I was sitting with them I had high hopes that I might be visible during this sequence. Unfortunately for me, the shots of Peter and Scott were made using a forward looking camera and I was blocked out of the shot. The close up of Randy, which was made from a side-view camera, was so close up that all you can see of me is half of my face while I am on camera for about 2 seconds,.

There was one minor surprise that occurred during filming but it wasn't fully realized until the episode actually aired months later. During the filming that involved the background cast, when Brian stopped at the front of the casket, and the director cut the scene, it was actually Michael that popped out of the casket, dressed in traditional mourning clothes. We filmed a second shot where Gale looks over his right shoulder after stopping at the casket and sees Hal there. Then the director wrapped the background cast and that was it.

Those of us who followed the show were now sure we had just witnessed Michael's funeral, or at least a fantasy version of it. It was quite a surprise that when the episode was aired, and the camera looks down into the casket, it is Brian we see, not Michael, this giving a whole different meaning to the scene. Without a doubt, that final shot must have been made after we had been wrapped and Gale filmed it alone with the crew.

Episode 511
February 18, 2005

Call Time: 2:30 pm

Wrap Time: 5:30 am

Set: Candlelight Vigil in Liberty Park

Location: St. James Park, Toronto



This is the day I refer to as my 41 hour day. I literally got up at 7:00 am on the 18th, went to work at my regular job, then filmed all night with Queer as Folk. After that, I drove like lightning to Pearson International Airport in time to catch an 8:30 am flight on the 19th to Orlando, Florida to attend a conference for my regular job and didn't actually go to bed or get any sleep until about midnight on February 20.



The all night shoot for Queer as Folk involved the Candlelight Vigil that was held for the victims of the Babylon bombing. The production had hired about 300 of us for the scene. The filming was to take place in St. James Park, across the street from our holding area which was a building that was part of St. Lawrence Market.

This shoot was an ordeal in itself and possibly the most difficult filming I was ever involved with. There were so many intricate shots that had to be made, the weather was uncooperative and, with such a large crowd, there were bound to be unavoidable problems.

Because of the large number of background cast, our call time was 2:30 pm. Once we got to the holding hall, we became aware that the filming could not begin until after dark which, at the time, was about 7:00 pm. So, right from the beginning, we had a long wait. Most of us were held in a giant hall with a portion of the others being held in auxiliary rooms off the main hall. Throughout the almost five hour wait, various members of the wardrobe crew circulated among us to approve our wardrobe. Mostly they wanted to be sure we would be warm because the weather forecast for that night called for bitter cold.

After an eternity, we were all finally led across the street to the Park where a gazebo had been set up for the speeches to be given during the scene. Because of the sheer volume of cast, there were several production assistants to help out George, the main 3rd AD, set us up. It took a while since people were constantly being shifted around. There were at least a couple of standard cameras as well as a crane-mounted camera to sweep down on the crowd.

Initially, I was placed right next to the Gazebo but soon after was moved back to the area where the Park's gate adjoins the street. This was where Melanie and Lindsay were set to walk into the scene from the street. Each of us was given a lit candle for the Vigil. In the first part of the shoot, Melanie and Lindsay walk into the park from the street (past me at the gate) and join the crowd where the speeches are being given. Then, both Drew Boyd (Matt Battaglia) and Debbie (Sharon Gless) give very moving and heartfelt speeches. I was in awe the entire time.

But one thing kept getting in the way and forcing take after take -- the weather. That night it was very windy and the temperature dipped down to -17 degrees Celsius (that's 1 degree Fahrenheit for my American friends). The candles kept blowing out, everyone froze, particularly the main cast who had to wear lighter clothing since the scene was supposed to be early spring, not the dead of winter. It was so cold in fact that we had to take a 20 minute break every 2 hours to keep from being frost bitten.

After about 6 hours, the opening portion of the scene had been filmed as had some of the speeches when we broke for "lunch" and some needed warmth for an hour. Then back to the cold and the second half of the shoot.

This second part occurred after Debbie had made an impassioned speech about how fortunate it was that Michael had survived the bombing, when the anti-gay religious group shows up and their religious leader proclaims that Michael should have died.

The scene played out where Ben, in a fit of uncharacteristic rage, rushed towards the Reverend of the group and proceeded to punch him out and pummel him to the ground. In the background is a group of gay activists who rush towards the Reverend's flock to prevent them from intervening in the fight.

Now, knowing the things that needed to be filmed, remember that it was still well below zero temperature and the ground was frozen solid. In order to soften the ground a bit, the crew got some heaters and tried to warm up the ground. Unfortunately the frozen water in the ground thawed and what was left was something of a small quagmire. So then to prevent the actors from getting wet and dirty during the scene, papers and blankets had to be put down.

While this was going on, George was looking around for his group of six gay activists to charge the religious flock. Luckily, I got his attention and was picked to be one of the activists.

So, at about 2:30 in the morning, we started filming the remainder of the scene. It began with the confrontation between Debbie and the Reverend and continued with Ben rushing through the crowd. The scene required that Oliver Becker who played the Reverend get pummelled, take after take, by Robert Gant. He was a real trooper to take the punishment, even in a mock fight, when it was so cold and the ground was half wet and half frozen.

For each take, our group of gay activists would rush the religious group and hold them back and mock scuffle with them. We must have done this for at least 6 takes of the scene. There were also close up shots of the scuffle between us and the religious group and various other

close ups of the fight, Ben's friends rushing from the crowd to try and hold him back and the shot of the police car arriving on the scene.

The scene ends with the Reverend's wife rushing towards her husband to try and comfort him while a mixture of his flock and several of us gay activists, myself included, surround him, all of us in horror at what has happened while the camera zooms in on the little circle of us around him.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You don't remember the opening shot of the scene as the boom camera sweeps across the crowd to focus on Melanie and Lindsay coming through the gate and you don't remember the Reverend's wife, flock and activists circling the fallen Reverend. Well, that's because the first 30 or so seconds of the scene and more than the last minute of it were cut out of the final edit of the episode.

In fact, as you know, this entire scene was inter-cut with a second scene that focused on Ted's inability to cope with what has happened by having mindless sex with a stranger. When we filmed our scene, I thought it was one of the most powerful statements that QAF had ever created. The speeches were heartfelt and sent a strong message by themselves. It was some of the best work I had ever seen Sharon and Matt do.

However, once I saw the finished episode, I realized that the Candlelight Vigil was not the focus of the message but just to highlight that Ted couldn't deal with what had happened. The real focus was on Ted. This disappointed me a great deal. Not because of all of the work we had done, and not because parts of the scene were cut out of the episode but because I really thought that the scene stood on its own and I think its message was diluted because of the way in which it was presented.

I had heard that the Season 5 DVDs were going to contain deleted scenes and had hoped an unedited version of the Candlelight Vigil would be included. In fact, there is an alternate version on the DVDs...except that it's an alternate version of Ted's sexual encounter. I am really sad that the entire Candlelight Vigil scene will never be seen unedited so that everyone can see how powerful it was and the full intensity of its message. It's the only creative judgment made by the show's producers that I strongly disagreed with during the series' five seasons.

We wrapped shooting at about 5:30 am, just in time for me to get myself out to the airport to fly to Florida for a week-long convention. I was so overtired I couldn't sleep until the following evening. So it was truly a 41 hour day.



Episode 512
March 3, 2005
Call Time: 1:30 pm
Wrap Time: 11:00 pm
Set: Woody's
Location: Dufferin Gate Studios "B" Studio



Without realizing it, today's filming was actually a birthday present to me from *Queer as Folk*. I had just turned 49 two days earlier when I was called to set for what turned out to be another pivotal scene as the series was coming to an end. And, it allowed me the chance to again work with the two actors I had had the most memorable experience working with during the previous season -- Peter Paige and Matt Battaglia.

Almost exactly one year previously, I got to dance at Babylon with Peter and Matt during Emmett's dream sequence of taking Drew the quarterback to Babylon for the first time. That night of filming had been magical for me and for many months after, I often played the song "I'm The Main Man" by Jason Nevins which is what we all danced to that night.

Never expecting that I would get a second chance to work with both actors, I came to the studio expecting some form of Woody's scene and knowing that this shoot might very well be the last time I would be working on the Woody's set.

After the usual check-in etc. one of the assistant 3rd ADs came into the holding area and did something that was a first for me on QAF. The AD actually ran through the scene with all the background cast present and even read some of the dialogue. This was unprecedented and appears to have been something the production had decided to do for the background cast for the final two episodes of the series. It was at this point I knew that both Peter and Matt would be present.

Once we went to set, I was placed at the end of the bar and paired with another actor. During the scene, we were to engage in mimed conversation throughout. So as I made my way to my first position, I spied that fa-

mous tape again on the set floor. I couldn't believe my luck. And then, in come both Peter and Matt to be given their set up for the scene. And it was then that I knew I was going to be right behind Matt for the entire scene.

You have to understand that I have a lot of respect for Matt Battaglia for the courage to do *Queer as Folk* knowing that he was always known for his tough male action adventure roles (such as *Universal Soldier II and III*) and that he is also a very religious and spiritual man, something that normally doesn't allow for a man to be accepting of gay and lesbian people, let alone playing a gay character on TV.

And, to be brutally honest, and with some apologies to Matt himself since he is straight, I happen to think that he is a very attractive man. While not at his football player build anymore, he is still a very ruggedly handsome man and, as we say in the gay world, great eye candy. I always tried to maintain total professionalism on the set at all times but I have to admit to sneaking a peak at Matt between takes every now and then. For a gay man, someone like Matt is a work of art and should be admired as such. But, I can assure one and all I was as discreet as I could be. Rule One is never disturb any of the main cast or guests and I never violated that rule ever. But it should be OK to look every once in a while, shouldn't it?

And finally, even though I know his character's name wasn't named after me, I still felt like I was connected to the character since I had never seen another TV series where a character had been named Drew before.

So here I was, doing my final Woody's scene, with the main cast member I admired most (Peter) and the guest star I felt most connected to (Matt). It was a great birthday present to be once again working with them, just like at Babylon. Although today's scene was going to be far different than the one we filmed a year earlier.

As we all know now, Emmett had finally brought Drew to Babylon for real (in a scene I am unfortunately not in) and found that Drew had been overwhelmed by the whole experience. Instead of remaining with Emmett, Drew allowed himself to be carried away with the atten-



tion some of the other Babylon studs were giving him. And that's when Emmett realized Drew was not ready to be in a gay relationship.

So essentially this scene was going to be bittersweet. Emmett knew his relationship with Drew was over but only because Drew just wasn't ready for a commitment. During the scene, he mentioned to the bartender that Drew should have a Shirley Temple drink to signify that in "gay years" he was still a teen, just finding his way into the world. In breaking up, Emmett applied the old adage (and Sting song) , "if you love someone, set them free." And, of course, Emmett promised to see Drew again when he was "21" signifying when Drew was ready to have an adult gay relationship.

If you find the scene poignant to watch, I can tell you it was even more intense to see it performed live. Peter and Matt were amazing and you can tell they were putting their heart and soul into the scene. Standing behind Matt the entire time, I was able to partially observe what was happening and to hear all of the dialogue. No one mailed in this performance believe me. It even had me a bit choked up by the time it was over.

To complete the "birthday present", at one point the camera pans around the two and catches me together with them. Although I am on camera for only about a second, as you can see from the still frame, it provided me with what I consider to be the best looking shot I took as a member of the background cast. It shows Peter and Matt in deep thought as they realize their relationship is over. And then, right next to them, is me.

You'll notice that I have a rather happy smile. That's two-fold. One is that I was told to look like I was having a good time. Those of us in the background weren't supposed to know what was going on between Emmett and Drew so we were told to ignore them. By this time, Drew had been out for several episodes so it wasn't a big deal anymore that this hero NFL quarterback had announced that he was gay (a fact that would be totally contrary to real life as NFL players are among the biggest homophobes there are...any active NFL player who would dare announce his gayness would probably be badly beaten up by his own team-mates...for a more realistic dramatization of this, check out episode 9 of the ESPN Playmakers series I've previously mentioned).

The second reason for my grin is of course the situation I was in. I was thrilled to be at Woody's even if it was the final time, and getting to be in another scene with Peter and Matt. It was as great a birthday gift as I could get and one of the scenes I will remember the most from the show.

All too soon, it was over and we were wrapped. Just before leaving the set, I turned around and gave it one

last look. Although this wasn't the exact set I began my QAF association with, it was Woody's that was my first scene and so I just looked around and visually took in the bar, the pool table, the signs, everything that was signature to the Woody's set. Then, I said a silent goodbye and walked off set back to holding to check out and head home.

Episode 512

March 7, 2005

Call Time: 5:30 pm

Wrap Time: 8:00 pm

Set: Local Pittsburgh upscale restaurant

Location: Joe Nightclub, Richmond West, Toronto

After the amazing filming four days earlier, the filming we did this day was, at last for me, quite anti-climactic. When I was booked for the shoot, I was asked to bring my car. I was told that the scene was going to be set inside a restaurant and that several cars were going to drive back and forth to simulate traffic. We were shooting in the west end of Toronto and the scene involved Ted and his new boyfriend (the one who turns psycho on him in the last episode) having a quiet dinner together, getting to know each other.

There were six of us that were asked to drive back and forth in front of the restaurant with their cars and vans. We met with one of the production assistants prior to the shoot and were told where to park our vehicles. Each of us was given a hand-written tag with our names on it so that the crew would know which car belonged to whom. And, we were told that each vehicle would have a Pennsylvania licence plate attached to it.

When it came time to go to "our set" we walked out to the street where our cars and vans were parked and the first thing we noticed was that none of the vehicles had any Pennsylvania plates. When we asked the assistant about this, he checked with the production inside the restaurant and shortly after gave us the bad news.

He told us that, unfortunately, while the shot was being blocked (set up), the 1st Assistant AD had decided that the cars wouldn't be visible the way the camera was going to be positioned to film Ted and his boyfriend. So, it was decided that the vehicles would not be used after all. The six of us were to sit in our vehicles outside and wait there on the offhand chance that there might be a change of mind.

That never happened, so I sat in my car for over two hours outside in the cold weather while the scene was shot inside the restaurant. I never knew what actually happened during the scene until I saw the finished episode months later. The only positive thing about the experience was that we did get a bit of extra pay for bringing our vehicles. But since doing QAF for me was

never about the money, I was more disappointed that I had not gotten the chance to see the scene play out. And by this time, there were only a few more weeks of shooting left in the series and I had no way of knowing how many more times I would get to work on the show.

Episode 513

March 10, 2005

Call Time: 11:00 am

Wrap Time: 8:00 pm

Set: Liberty Diner

Location: Dufferin Gate Studios "B" Studio



In many ways, this day's shoot was both an honour and bittersweet. It was an honour because I was one of a select few that was chosen to be part of the last two scenes that were going to be filmed at Liberty Diner. The production had hired only 47 background actors for the two scenes and, by ACTRA (the Canadian actors' union) rules, 25 of us had to be members of the union. That left only 22 spots for non-union background like me. With so many background actors available in Toronto, I really felt honoured to have been chosen to be among the 22 non-union members for this day's background cast.

On the other hand, it was a bittersweet experience because these were going to be the final Liberty Diner scenes. Liberty Diner was always the focal point of the series. It was where all the Liberty gang went to talk or seek out advice from Debbie or just to express their friendship together. Most people probably saw Babylon as the focus of the show but I always believed the Diner was really where the lessons of life were learned and where the QAF characters really bonded together. I was a bit sad that this was going to be the last time I would ever see or be on the set live.

The first of the two scenes we filmed was, to me, the more important and more poignant of the two. This was the scene where Michael and Ben call Hunter over to their table to tell him that he passed all of his subjects and can graduate with his class. Then they present Hunter with a diary book engraved with the initials H.N.B., for Hunter Novotny-Bruckner and tell Hunter that they would like him to be their real son. In a very touching gesture, he writes his first entry in the diary in

front of his new parents by recording that "Today Michael and Ben asked me to be their son, and I said yes."

During this scene, I was asked to make a cross from the front part of the Diner to the back and sit down in the last booth which I did. You can catch a glimpse of my torso briefly and a quick shot of me sitting down mid-way through the scene. That's quite ironic since the first image of me at Liberty Diner many years previously was also a shot of my torso.

Much more importantly, I was able to get a close up view of the final half of the scene including the diary writing. I think you'll agree that the scene was very powerful when you saw it on TV. And yet, as powerful as it was when it was presented on the small screen, it was even more powerful when it was performed live. As I watched Robert, Hal and Harris run through the scene take after take, you could see the real emotion the three of them had. And that totally came through in their performances. I am not ashamed that a tear came to my eyes a couple of times while we were filming this scene because, for me, it seemed so real.

As a fan of the series first, and later as a member of the background cast, it wasn't difficult to invest in the emotional component of the series. That's always the mark of a successful TV show...that it becomes so real that its fans begin to think of it as real, and to invest emotions in the characters and the situations the characters find themselves in. That was certainly true for me.

But I had the additional experience of actually seeing scenes like this one played live as if it were real. Actually seeing Hunter write in the diary, actually hearing Michael and Ben ask Hunter to be their real son, it all seemed real and plausible. It is to their credit that Harris, Hal and Robert performed so realistically that, seeing it happen in person, you could easily suspend reality and believe what you were seeing was happening for real. In fact, I would put this scene among the top three most moving of any of the ones I was personally involved with during my four years with the show.

The second scene we filmed that day, which was actually presented earlier in the episode, involved only Harris and Sharon. I'm seated in the front table of the Diner and the camera pans by my table, following Debbie as she moves to the back of the Diner to talk to Hunter. The pan shot was so quick that I am not much more than a blur in the frame. But, once again, I did get to see the scene filmed live.

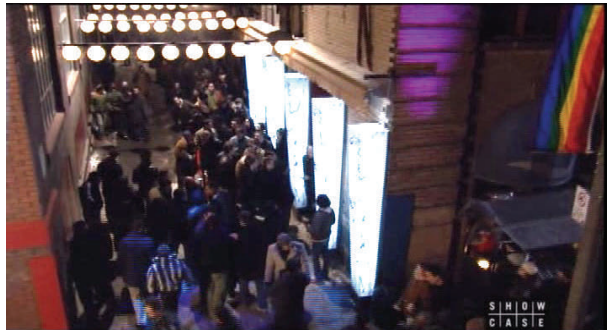
This scene primarily involved Debbie trying to help Hunter with his homework by naming, without hesitation, Henry VIII's six wives. Now for me, that was easy since I was a history major in university. I can name all six wives by heart: Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn,

Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Catherine Howard and Catherine Parr.

But for this scene, Sharon was required to also name off all six wives in rapid succession and it was apparent that she didn't know the names as well as I did. It took a number of takes before she was able to rattle the names off quickly enough to satisfy the requirement of the scene. And each time we did a take (by this time I was off camera), I would mentally speak the names of each wife in hope that I could send her the information telepathically. Don't laugh, I was really hoping I might have been able to help in that way since I knew the names so well. Eventually she did get all the names correctly and in the right order.

Before you knew it, it was 8:00 pm and we were done and wrapped. There was no special ceremony or anything. We all simply left the Diner set for the final time and the last one closed the lights. I was told later on that Sharon had asked the producers if she could keep a few of the props from the Diner that were close to her which of course was granted. And so, with the signing of my voucher, I completely my final studio shoot for *Queer as Folk*.

Episode 513
March 14, 2005
Call Time: 5:00 pm
Wrap Time: 11:30 pm
Set: Exterior of Babylon
Location: Alley off John Street, Toronto



Four days later, I was part of a group of 200 or so background cast that stood around in the cold weather in the west end of Toronto while a single scene representing the outside of Babylon was filmed. Although we took more than four hours to film the scene, only about 5 seconds of it was actually used in the episode...its the cut-away shot from the interior of Babylon you see in the very last scene of the series. I'm in the shot about half way down the crowd line but I would have to point out the exact spot since we all looked like dots.

To the best of my knowledge, the alley where we shot this scene was the same one that QAF had used in the very first episode in 2000 as the entrance to Babylon.

Part of the reason it took over four hours to finish was that a lot more was filmed than was actually included in the episode. If you've seen the deleted scenes from the Season 5 DVDs, you know that the scene we filmed this night included an homage to the show's first episode by having a Justin look-alike approach Babylon just like Justin did in the first episode. It would have made for a nice full-circle but the producers decided not to use it.

Since I had not been called for the final inside Babylon scene, I was at least happy that I had been a part of the final scene in some way, even if it was only an outdoor cutaway shot.

Episode 513
March 16, 2005
Call Time: 1:00 pm
Wrap Time: 8:30 pm
Set: Pittsburgh Auditorium
Location: The Carlu Auditorium, Yonge Street, Toronto



Throughout my four years working on *Queer as Folk*, I always eagerly anticipated every shoot that I was involved with. And so it was with this scene. But, there was also a feeling of finality this time. For tonight, we were going to shoot the very last scene of *Queer as Folk* involving a background cast. There were still two and a half days of filming left for the series following tonight's shoot but the Producers had arranged it so that these would involve only the main cast to allow them to exchange their goodbyes, both on and off camera.

Our final background scene was held at Toronto's famed Carlu Auditorium, in the former Eaton's department store building. This building has a great deal of history to it and many movers and shakers from Toronto, Ontario and Canada had held functions there over the years.

Over 300 of us were assembled into one of the giant former dining rooms off the main auditorium for the scene where Michael was to deliver a speech on behalf of the Committee For Human Rights in support of the

No vote for Proposition 14, a referendum on banning adoption by gay families.

Our call time was 1:00 pm and it took about three hours to process all of us and to set up the auditorium for the shoot. When it came time to fill the auditorium, we were led from our holding area to the auditorium and asked to fill the seats. After some initial confusion about where we were going to sit, I found myself seated near the front of the auditorium next to a prop camera that was going to be used during the scene. Michael's speech was supposed to be heavily covered by the local Pittsburgh TV and newspaper media.

Because the scene was rather intricate, we had to run through many takes and it took about four and a half hours to complete. Although a standard QAF scene in many ways, the message that Michael delivered was one worth noting and again, brought a tear to my eyes when I first heard him deliver it as part of one of the first takes.

As Michael says in part, "Do we all have to have the same lives to have the same rights? I thought that diversity was what this country was all about. In the gay community, we have drag queens, leather daddies, trannies, and, couples with children...every colour of the rainbow. My mother who's standing way in the back with some friends...my friends...once told me that people are like snowflakes. Everyone is special and unique. And in the morning you have to shovel them off the driveway. But being different is what makes us all the same. So it makes us....family."

I don't think a more powerful message, save possibly Michael's final soliloquy of the series, had ever been delivered by QAF before and it was a fitting message to take home with. QAF was always good at delivering an accurate view of a part of gay life (and never claimed to ever represent all of our community despite the criticisms over the years) but was always even better at delivering messages of support for GLBT equality and fraternity and reaching out to the more open minded members of straight society. No message like that was ever better delivered than the one Michael spoke during this scene.

And, then, directory Kelly Makin called his final cut and it was all over. We slowly walked back to holding to pick up our possessions and got in line to have our final vouchers signed by the production. As if to really make it a final send off for me personally, Harris Allan spotted me coming off set and said hello to me and I wished him well with his career.

For me, it was the end of an era. As a non-actor who simply fell in love with this TV series that dared to dramatize one form of my lifestyle and make me see it as a partial role model, it had been a stroke of unbelievable

luck that transformed me from simply being a fan to being part of the series itself.

For four years, it was as if I was able to fly through the TV screen and become a part of the Queer as Folk world. And in a very real way that's exactly what happened. I got to live a dream that most fans will never get the chance to experience. It will be something I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Despite the fact my contribution was small, I am very proud to have been a part of this ground-breaking series that caused people in both Canada and the United States to re-examine how they perceived and treated GLBT people.

It made a lot of difference in my home country Canada where gays and lesbians now have full rights including that of legal marriage. Even though QAF's impact in the US has been far less than could have been hoped for, a few minds no doubt have been changed and the climate for the acceptance of gays and lesbians has hopefully improved somewhat.

I sincerely believe that if Queer as Folk had not been made, then we would not have had The L Word, Noah's Arc, Dante's Cove and other various realistic gay characters in recent dramas and comedies on TV...and, if I may be permitted to be so bold, a climate of tolerance enough for a company called Focus Features to take a chance and release a big screen film made from a seven year old screenplay called Brokeback Mountain, which won numerous awards including the Best Picture Award from the Golden Globes and Oscars for Best Screenplay and Best Director at the Academy Awards.

Perhaps the real significance of Queer as Folk will need years to be fully realized. But I believe someday, this series will be given its full due as being the project that opened up a climate of tolerance to the last great persecuted minority group. Only time will tell. But no matter what happens, my participation in Queer as Folk will remain one of the proudest achievements of my life and a lasting contribution to my community.

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A copy of my one of my final pay cheques from working on Queer as Folk. Note that I am Queer as Folk employee number T00027730. EP Canada is a financial company located in Toronto that handles the payroll for many different film and TV productions throughout the country.