

TRUTH IN THE ART OF FILM MAKING

The Canadian filmscape offers more challenges and less stardom. Yet, there are filmmakers in Canada for whom the art of filmmaking itself is potent. AV writer Preeti Thandi caught up with two budding filmmakers at the fifth anniversary of the ReelWorld Film Festival.

Jason DaSilva is an up and coming documentary filmmaker who has been nominated for an Academy Award. Jason wants to portray truth, and his most recent film *Lest We Forget* documents truth with impact.

Gaurav Seth finds the art of filmmaking "sacred". Interestingly, his first feature, *Passage to Ottawa*, paved Gaurav's way into Canada. He saw an ad on the internet from a couple in Ottawa who wanted to produce a multicultural film. The film has received many accolades and traveled to several prestigious festivals. Gaurav's most recent venture, *Pink Ludoos*, won the Award for Best Canadian Feature at the 2005 ReelWorld Film Festival.

Jason DaSilva

Jason is very picky about the stories he does. It is imperative for him to portray the truth and that's the reason he leans toward the non-fictional medium. Tracing his roots to Goa, India, Jason was born in Ohio, U.S.A. He grew up in South Florida and went to highschool in Vancouver. It was in the third year of art school that he decided to pick the film medium for creative expression. Jason's first film, *Olivia's Puzzle*, traveled to 30 film festivals and

qualified for the Academy Awards in the Short Films category in 2004. Jason's latest film, *Lest We Forget*, examines racial profiling following September 11 and contrasts it with the racial profiling of the Japanese in the US during World War II.

Jason had just returned from India a week before September 11. "You could feel the shifting perception and dynamics," he says. Soon after, two thought-provoking incidents happened. "I had just got a tattoo in Sanskrit which meant 'there's nothing better than truth'." One day a friend was joking around with

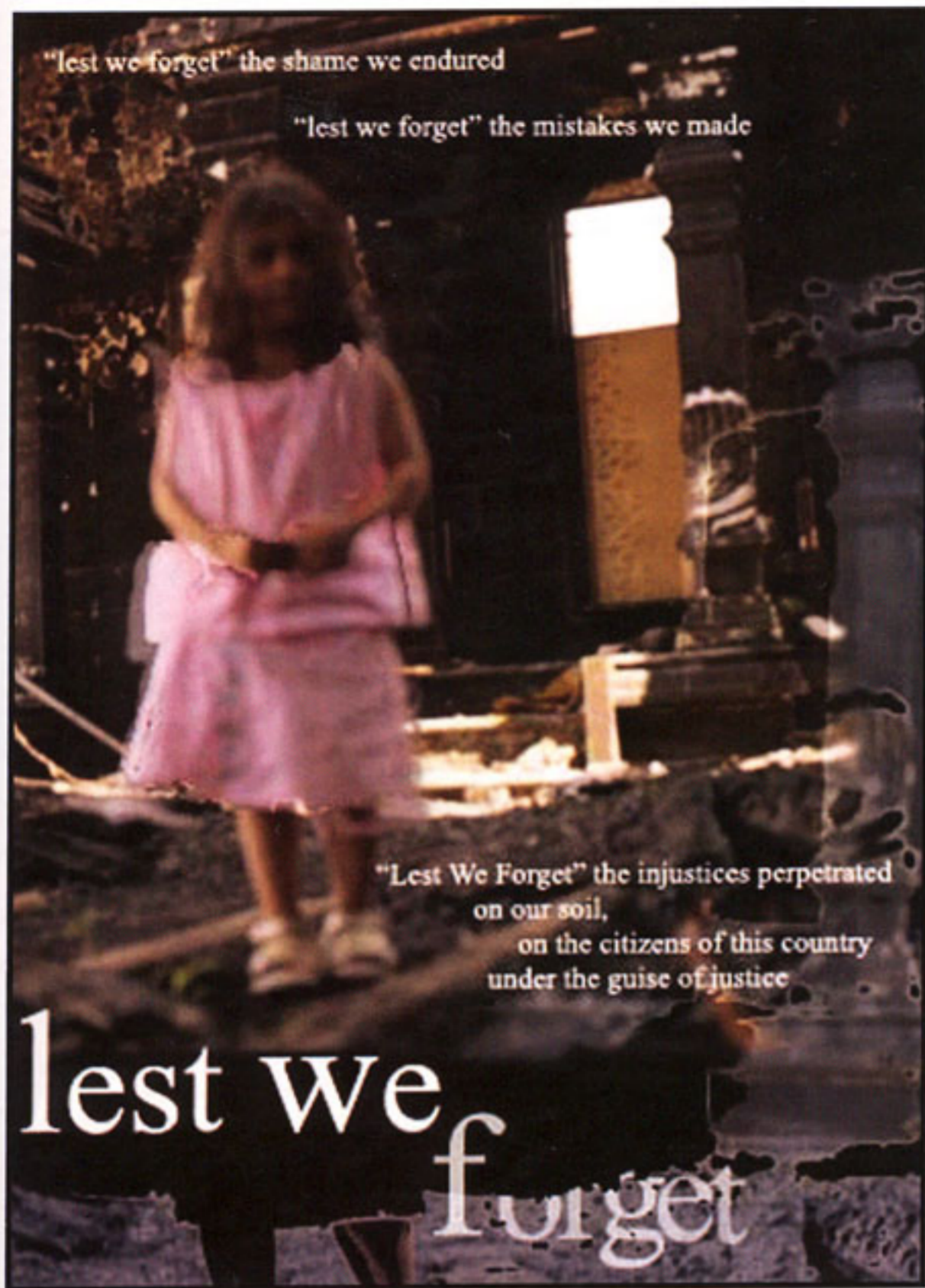


me, he looked at my tattoo and said, 'Maybe, you are the terrorist.' That got me thinking. A few days later I was on a bus from Vancouver. The bus driver was Sikh. A passenger got on who did not have enough change, and the driver told him that he could not get on without enough money. Some people on the bus offered money, and the passenger returned to the bus driver and said, 'Why don't you go back to your own country?' I was waiting for someone to say something but nobody did so I said, 'There's no need to be

racist,' and the passenger replied, 'I'm not racist, I just hate everyone equally.' That really got me thinking - who is going to be the first person to say something if we don't say it?"

Merely 25 years old himself, Jason strongly believes in raising a voice for a cause. He uses the Japanese experience as a parallel in *Lest We Forget* for the same reason. In his film, Jason uses snippets of films used by the War Re-location Authority at the time, which was creating propaganda for the internment camps.

"You don't see much of how it really impacted Japanese families," he says. Yuri Kochiyama inspired Jason the most. She was born in San Pedro, California, in 1922 and her father was taken away after the Pearl Harbor attacks. Yuri was held in the World War II Japanese internment camps, and later she became involved in the civil rights movement. She was a close friend of Malcolm X and a member of many organizations. "She inspired me in creating connections with communities," says Jason.



I want to put into words and images those feelings we all have that are so real, and yet are so difficult to name, and ultimately, to tell the truth in such a beautiful way that we realize we cannot live without it.

Lest We Forget highlights the experiences of different communities: Alex Goldsmith (name changed for privacy), a South Asian Muslim spent six months in detention in the custody of INS after being tipped by a local in his apartment in Queens that he may be a terrorist. Later, he was deported. On September 15, a Hindu Samaj temple was burned down to the ground in Hamilton, Ontario. It was presumed to be a Muslim mosque. Shokreia Yaghi's husband was taken for investigation soon after September 11 and was never returned. Though he was completely innocent, he was deported to Jordan. Roy Toshir Tsuji was sent to a small town in Alberta instead of the internment camps. He worked there in forced labour conditions. Roy parallels the Japanese internment experience to what South Asians, Muslims and Arabs are facing now.

As a filmmaker, Jason believes that South Asian representation in film needs to increase. "I am part of a generation where we want to see our stories being told," he says.

Jason has started working on a fictional film that is about a boy who travels to Goa to find his father.

Gaurav Seth

"Cinema means everything to me," says Gaurav Seth. "It's sacred. I am humbled by its tremendous potential and power to cause change, motivate and affect everyone - including my own self. We always talk about how films affect the audience,

but we never talk about how much filmmaking changes the filmmaker."

Gaurav grew up in Bombay, India. He studied film at the Russian federation State Institute of Cinematography (VGIK) and has a master's degree in cinematography and film direction. His hour-long Russian feature called *The Art of Dying* was broadcast on



Russian TV to much applause. Following this, Gaurav was assigned to make a biographical film on the life of a saint by a business magnate. Then, an opportunity to produce a multicultural film triggered Gaurav's move to Canada. *A Passage to Ottawa*, which is a sweet, sentimental story of a 7-year-old Indian boy searching for a superhero, was completed in the fall of 2001. It won five international awards at film festivals including a Special Mention at the Berlin Film Festival 2002.

Gaurav's latest film, *Pink Ludoos*, is a romantic comedy produced by Brightlight Pictures. The script for the film is written by Vancouver writer Belle Mott. It won an award at the Praxis Screenwriting competition. After *A Passage to Ottawa*, however, Gaurav was all set to make a psychological thriller called *Bardo*. He pitched the idea to Brightlight Pictures, and to his surprise, in two hours he received a call back from Andrew Boutilier who offered him a chance to direct *Pink Ludoos* instead.

"The main thing that really inspired me in the script was the way the subject matter was handled," says Gaurav. "We are raising pretty serious issues here - of gender bias and female infanticide - but it is done with humour and in a very palatable way. I knew it would be a challenge when I read the script!"

Gaurav found working with young, inexperienced actors fun. "Young and new actors more than make up for their lack of experience with the raw energy and motivation they bring to the set," he says. "I was really impressed by our lead star Jay Kazim. The only really accomplished actor we had on the show was Shaheen Khan. She is one of those actors whose mere presence lights up the frame," he adds.

Pink Ludoos was shot in 16 days and edited in 14 with a budget of \$1.2 million (Cdn).

Interestingly, Gaurav's psycho-thriller script *Bardo* was also loved by Andrew Boutilier and he hopes it will go into production by the end of the year. Seth is also negotiating a comedy-drama called *Karma Chameleon* with another producer and is also in the works for a sci-fi thriller called *Quantum*.

Gaurav says that he aspires to tell stories, which provide a meaningful emotional experience. "I want to put into words and images those feelings we all have that are so real, and yet are so difficult to name, and ultimately, to tell the truth in such a beautiful way that we realize we cannot live without it." AV