



43RD
YOUNG ARTIST
ACADEMY AWARDS

SEJAL PATEL Interview

Project: *Life With The Patels*

How would you describe the plot of this project?

In this comedic short film, three different, true storylines within the Patel family are brilliantly twisted to culminate in a shared lesson learned by all.

What was your fondest memory from working on the project?

My fondest memory from working on this film was collaborating with my family during shoots. Since all of the storylines in the film are true, it was fun for everyone to relive all of these funny moments. The McDonalds story with the trash can was super fun to film since my aunt had to experience this funny moment again in front of my whole family! Overall, shooting this short film was one of the most fun and exciting experiences because of the memories I created with my family.

Were there any cool locations or sets that were fun/different/strange?

Most of the scenes in the film are shot in my house. But, finding a quiet and closed McDonalds was the hardest part. We woke up early on Christmas Eve to drive around to find a McDonalds that has an odd-looking trash can. And, we finally did! But there was a busy intersection right next to the McDonalds. So, we would wait until all of the cars were stopped to shoot the scene.

Do you recall any particular memories with castmates or crew that were impactful?

Because I was working alongside my family, the entire process created lasting memories! Since none of my family members are actors/actresses, it was fun to see them act in front of the camera. We probably had more than 20 takes of my aunt trying to get her line right! But this made shoots full of laughs. My grandpa came to film his scenes and it was funny seeing him try to remember his long monologue in one scene. After he finally got it right, we all cheered and laughed!

Did the project inspire you to see the world differently? Or did you learn anything new about the production process?

Life with the Patels was my first scripted short film. I was so excited for this project that I wrote the script in 1 day! I remember sitting down on my bed and laughing while writing the script (when I should have actually been studying for my biology test). During this process, I learned how exhilarating it is to direct and write a scripted short. The whole process from writing, to planning, to filming, and editing made seeing the finished film so much better. I am not a very talkative person and I normally sit quiet in the background. So, creating a comedy film was daunting at first. But after I saw the audience reactions after watching my film, I knew I wanted to make people laugh. Film is a way for me to come out of my shell and be myself without the fear of being judged. Working on this film not only taught me about directing scripted shorts, but it also showed me how to express myself and become a more extroverted person.

What stands out to you from working on this project?

The thing that most stood out to me from working on this project was how much I could do with a \$0 budget. All I had was my camera, my family, my house, and me. I had to improvise with sets and props and try to film and edit everything during my 2-week Christmas break. For props, we didn't have time to get a burger on Christmas Eve since everything was closed. So, we took a piece of bread in our fridge and put a piece of lettuce in it. And, nobody even knew it wasn't a real burger!

If you were to produce a sequel or a continuation of this project, what would that be like?

I am actually working on a sequel to this project right now! I wanted this short film to be a pilot in a comedy tv series. Because of the success in my community of this project, I knew I wanted to make more. When any family member or relative came to my house, they would always ask if I was going to make another one. And, I finally decided to. This next episode, also based on true stories, will take place in a hotel and include many funny stories of the Patel family on vacations.

What do you love most about the Entertainment Industry? What do you wish could be better?

My favorite thing about the Entertainment Industry is its focus on diversity. Great films are created by a village. This village includes people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, personalities, and genders. This diversity is what makes the film industry so great. By having a variety of people working on films, the film industry keeps progressing into the future as it promotes inclusion and acceptance, two

vital components in our society. The diversity of the entertainment industry allows for a wide variety of films whose goal is to entertain the public and provide an escape from reality that can only be achieved through authentic storytelling. Although the entertainment industry is trying to achieve diversity, the gender gap behind the camera is still large. Women need to be represented more behind the camera. If the entertainment industry can hire more women, films will have a more authentic viewpoint in female led films and the industry will gain even more diversity.

