



Meredith Dabney

Interview by Carol Wright
Photography by Sheldon Botler

You act and write, is creativity something that was encouraged in your home growing up?

Yes! I remember that for a long time “imaginary play” was my favorite part of the day. Since I was homeschooled, I had flexibility in my day and I would do a chunk of math, then play, science, then play...You get the idea. As I got older, I began to write my “play” ideas down and loved to create and develop characters and even whole worlds of my own. I think having a parent with a musical background definitely helped as well and I was encouraged to begin an instrument at a young age (cello, piano) and supported in my curiosity to try and experiment with different artistic formats (drawing, art, creative writing, drama, theatre). As it turned out, I first found a love in imaginary play, then on paper, and now paper to stage to filmmaking, all the arts coming together!

How did the idea for *Here Today* come about?

Well, the short answer is I feel like every experience and action/reaction that has happened in my life thus far has propelled me forward and eventually came out on the page. A more complex response would be that *HERE TODAY* is a culmination of both my own struggles and those of my interaction with many friends who have endured the challenges brought to light in *HERE TODAY*. As we have shared our truth with one another, a system of mutual compassion has been created and now we are sharing it with the world. In other words, the emotional and physical battles that have attempted to bring us down have instead made us stronger and more vocal, and that voice of strength, hope, and vulnerability needs to

“I think one of my goals is that conversations are started about these and other topics. Mental Health. Identity. Friendship. These are all such powerful topics that so often are swept under the rug because they are complicated items to deal with head-on.”

be heard. My goal with HERE TODAY and creating, in general, is to encourage opportunities to talk, grow, and share through the voices of many while fulfilling my need to “tell and share stories that need to be told” which has become the mission of my production company, ASTRABETA CREATIONS.

What was the hardest part of bringing *Here Today* from script to screen?

Hmm, throughout the process, different parts have been tricky, for a variety of reasons, but always ending in a positive way, in spite of the challenges. At first, making the commitment to even pursue this project from page to screen was difficult. Since it is such a personal and important story, I was both passionate and terrified about doing the topic justice and telling the story in a way that it would be both truthful to those who it represented, while also helping others by sharing in a positive way. It took a lot of courage and digging deep as well as prompting and encouragement from others to believe confidently that I was capable of creating this film. More recently, post-production has been a wild ride for a completely different set of reasons... but definitely worth the determination and perseverance to finish strong. The common thread in working through all of the challenges has been to build a strong creative team to support and

aid the process. I was extremely fortunate to work with a great director (Erica Arvold), incredible cinematographer (Isaac Deitz), and to have a fabulous coach and mentor (Erik Lingvall) who, along with many other cast and crew, came together to make this project what it has become. A HUGE THANK YOU to all for their personal and collective commitment to each step of the process!

***Here Today* deals with a lot of big themes such as mental health, identity, and friendship. What do you hope audiences take away from the film?**

Well, you put it a great way. I think one of my goals is that conversations are started about these and other topics. Mental Health. Identity. Friendship. These are all such powerful topics that so often are swept under the rug because they are complicated items to deal with head-on. However, since we all experience these items on some level, I see this as an amazing opportunity to bring unity and connectedness, and my hope is to find a way to capitalize on our similarities rather than our differences.

Was it fun to play a main character in a story that you wrote? How did that impact the filming experience?

Yes! The idea of different paths that we can go down as complex people is one that is near and dear to me, and as such was a special component of this film. In fact, each of the characters represents a different part of me, and I felt both extremely vulnerable and incredibly honored to watch the amazing cast and crew bring my thoughts, characters and ultimately this creative vision to life in the form of the film, *HERE TODAY*. It was definitely a challenge to be both writer and actor and I often had to work hard to separate the two in order to get outside my own head and be most effective in the role I was playing at the time. So, to answer your question, yes, it was definitely fun, but also very challenging and oh so worth it in the end!

You’ve been going through the festival circuit with *Here Today*. What has that experience been like?

Exciting. Crazy. Special. And I’m pretty sure this incredible ride has just begun, so stay tuned!

What other projects do you have on the horizon?

I’m currently in production for a film I wrote titled, “BLINK!” which is part of a trilogy. This work addresses important topics such as family dynamics, internal emotions, nature vs nurture, and accepting change. My production company, ASTRABETA CREATIONS is producing this film while working hard to stay true to our mission of “telling and sharing stories that need to be told.”

What advice do you have for aspiring film-makers?

Please, please share YOUR truth! It’s scary as hell, but so empowering, touching, and impactful to see works of art overflowing with identity, truth, and love. Don’t be afraid to stick to what you believe in, no matter what the outside voices are saying. It’s hard, especially if you’re young because others may have more experience and a stronger and more influential voice, but if you are writing/creating truth, NO ONE can share your truth better than you!