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Sharp focus rewarded New Bedford native Todd Dos Reis



Courtesy of Todd Dos Reis Todd Dos Reis poses with fellow Bay State native Mark Wahlberg, producer of "Entourage."

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By **ALEXIS HAUKE**
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 August 28, 2010 12:00 AM

Long before Vince, E, Drama, Turtle and Ari, Todd Dos Reis had an entourage of his own: Captain Kirk, Bruce Lee and Cleopatra Jones.

Director of photography for the HBO series "Entourage" (two episodes shy of its Season Seven finale, which airs Sept. 12), Dos Reis, 46, spent chunks of his youth in the State Theater (now the Zeiterion), absorbing triple features for a buck and devouring every genre that the 1970s had to offer. "I didn't know back then, but (movies) might have been my love," he says. "I mean, even for a kid growing up in the projects, a dollar was nothing. And you could go see an R-rated movie back then."

Dos Reis was raised by a single mom in the Westlawn housing project. "I mean, back in the day, growing up young and stupid, you don't know 'projects' is a bad word," he says. "I had a great time. I wouldn't change it for anything. Being an only child, you would think you would be lonely, but there's always someone outside playing."

Todd and his mom lived in a section next to the community basketball court; he started playing seriously when he was 8. And by the time he got to New Bedford High School, Dos Reis established himself as a dominant hoopster and an eager protege in TV production class.

"Everybody who knew me knew where to find me: I'd be in the gym or in the TV studio," says Dos Reis, who not only had accolades for his sportsmanship when he graduated, but also all A's and a spot on the honor roll.

The Standard-Times picked Dos Reis for its "Perfection Player of the Week" multiple times and he made the newspaper's list of 10 regional all-stars his senior year, and it was the love of basketball that led him to Babson College for a year. But then film won out, and Dos Reis switched to the University of Southern California, drawn like a moth to the flame of its film program, even if it meant sacrificing the net.

"I had to let go because I knew that at 5 feet 9, there was more chance of making it in the film industry," he says of the end of his basketball career. After eagerly moving out to the West Coast, Dos Reis says it still took two years to get through the waitlist for the official film program at USC, which he filled with general course requirements as a liberal arts major.

"I think the film school just got tired of seeing my application on their desk," he says, and the persistence paid off at last. He graduated in 1987 and applied the same determination to his new field as he had to winning games in high school.

"There was no question he would do well," says Ed Rodrigues, the now-retired head coach who presided over Dos Reis's two championship seasons at NBHS. Rodrigues' more than quarter-century coaching career in varsity basketball began with Dos Reis's team, and he easily recalls the smart, positive, well-liked player, who he adds was usually intense: "Being small, he had to be tough."

In 1981 and 1982, the NBHS Whalers only gave up five games a season, Rodrigues says, and they were conference champions twice, losing in the state semi-finals Dos Reis's junior year, and in the finals his senior year.

John Souza, a police sergeant at UMass Dartmouth who graduated from NBHS two years after Dos Reis, says he always admired his high school friend's focus: "There's some older players that don't pay any mind to the younger players. He wasn't like that. He was the type of guy that kept reminding players that were younger to work hard." Dos Reis and Souza kept in touch through the years, and even got together in July to watch the World Cup final at Cafe Funchal.

Like many from New Bedford, Dos Reis is closely tied to his Cape Verdean heritage. His great-grandfather arrived in 1906 from the island of Brava, and Dos Reis can recall being surrounded by masses of extended family throughout his early life (his mother, Joyce Dos Reis, passed away in 2003, but his Aunt Marie still lives downtown).

Though he did get to visit Cape Verde in 1993, on a documentary project that later fell through, Dos Reis says, "You don't have to go to the islands to know where you came from. If you grow up in New Bedford, it's just there, it's around you everywhere you go."

When Dos Reis graduated from USC, he jumped right into work as a production assistant (or "gopher," he jokes), working on the cheesy horror flick "Critters 2: The Main Course."

"Some people are lucky and they do a great film and someone sees them," he explains. "Some people like me have to work their way up the ladder." During this single production, Dos Reis moved up those ladder rungs three times, graduating to camera assistant, then second assistant cameraman, then loader (manually inserting film magazines into the camera). While "Critters 2" may have given moviegoers little more than indigestion, it provided Dos Reis the chance to work with cinematographer Russell Carpenter, who later won an Oscar for his cinematography in "Titanic."

"I learned so much from other cinematographers," he says of the early years. It was during those days that he'd also take side jobs in commercials or "whatever came along." On weekends, he even practiced loading.

As a camera assistant on Tim Robbins' 1992 satirical gem, "Bob Roberts" — a "mockumentary" about a Bob Dylan-ish folk singer who sings about conservative issues like wanting to make money — Dos Reis describes feeling like finally the tide was turning in his favor. To this day, he says it's still one of his favorite movies he worked on. And he kept going, with camera credits on IMDB on "Dante's Peak" (1997), "Dr. Doolittle 2" (2001) and the 2004 indie "Ugly," by writer/director Moon Unit Zappa, Frank's daughter.

But if those other films were 5K races, "Entourage" has been a marathon. Dos Reis began on day one of the first season, which premiered in 2004, as camera operator. As always, Dos Reis worked steadily upward until he debuted as "DP" for Season Five. It has been a great experience, he says, but he's still looking ahead.

Up next, he's commuting back and forth to Pittsburgh from Los Angeles, directing the second unit (meaning stunts, minor characters and stadium shots) of John Singleton's (another USC alumnus) new film, "Abduction," starring were-hearthrob Taylor Lautner and Maria Bello, Alfred Molina and Sigourney Weaver.

As "Entourage" winds to a close, Dos Reis is still dreaming of those movies he grew up with as a kid. And he aspires to work with the likes of Sam Mendes, Spike Lee or Michel Gondry. The DP is "the director's right-hand man," after all, he says; taking the director's vision and translating it onscreen. He clearly has a knack for it: Translating the dreams of a West End kid into a vivid Hollywood reality.

TODD'S FIVE TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Todd Dos Reis is director of photography for HBO's "Entourage." A DP is in charge of camera and lighting crews, making artistic and technical decisions about a film's image.

- 1. Education.**
 "A college degree is now the minimum that you have to have in order to compete in the work force. Don't fight your teachers; challenge your teachers to teach and make you a better student. Be a sponge. Absorb all that a good education has to offer. Learn from everyone around you - parents, teachers, coaches and intelligent peers."
- 2. Perseverance.**
 "You have to have the attitude that nothing is going to keep you from your goals and your dreams. My goal was to graduate from USC even though I had to have financial aid and take on loans that would take me nine years to pay off. Then my goal was to have a career as a director of photography even though I didn't have any connections in Hollywood [...] Nothing comes easy for most people. You have to earn it."
- 3. Thinking Outside the Box.**
 "When I knew I wanted to study cinema, I knew I was going to have to leave my family, friends and city of New Bedford. The two 'Meccas' for my profession are Los Angeles or New York. [...] New Bedford will always be my hometown, and I visit as much as I can, but sometimes it's better for everyone in the long run to expand your horizons in other places. Take chances. Put yourself on the line to experience new things. Travel when the opportunities arise. 'I believe the most important single thing, beyond discipline and creativity, is daring to dare,' (said) Maya Angelou."
- 4. Passion.**
 "To be successful in a career, you have to find something you would want to do even if you weren't getting paid to do it: 'Would I be involved in this profession if there was no monetary compensation for it?' Anyone can have a job, but you should want a career: something you just love doing, something you can't live without."
- 5. Practice.**
 "I believe in the concept of the 10,000-hour-rule. It takes 10,000 hours and sometimes longer to be great at something [...] It's all a matter of practicing your craft, your art, your sport, your emphasis of education and your way of life."
 - Todd Dos Reis

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ANATOMY OF A SUCCESS

Today's story is another in an occasional series about people who have achieved significant success in their lives.

The people we profile in this series reflect triumphs of a variety of scales and on personal and professional levels. We hope their stories not only inform readers, but inspire them, too.

To bring a success story to our attention, e-mail features editor Anne Humphrey at ahumphrey@s-t.com

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