



A conversation with award-winning BIFF screenwriter Margaret Ford Rogers

Interview by Mark Shaffer

Throughout its first decade the Beaufort International Film Festival has built a dedicated following of fans and filmmakers – a family, if you will – who rarely, if ever, miss a chance to attend. Charleston based screenwriter, Margaret Ford Rogers, is a charter member of that family along with her friend and fellow writer, Marcia Chandler Rhea.

The two share the festival's very first screenwriting award handed out on a chilly February evening under a tent in Habersham. "I remember it was cold," says Rogers. "But we won and that was sweet."

As BIFF gears up for its tenth anniversary, Rogers is back for what's become something of an annual tradition: kicking off the festival season with a shot at the screenwriting title. The competition's tough this year and there's more of it with eleven scripts making the cut, including one from her old partner, Marcia.

2015 was a big year for Rogers with two scripts on the film festival circuit. She was a

semi-finalist in Nashville and a finalist in Las Vegas, Oaxaca, and at the ninth BIFF. Her commissioned screenplay “Hell and Hallelujah!” (based on Shaytee Gadson’s debut novel) took home the trophy at the Harlem International Film Festival. An experienced documentary filmmaker and photographer, she’s in the early stages of developing a project with fellow BIFF alumnus, Ken Wyatt on an infamous episode in South Carolina’s history. We spoke by phone from her home in Charleston.

(Above: Marcia Chandler Rhea and Margaret Ford Rogers at the first BIFF.)

Mark Shaffer: I think the general public has a sort of romanticized idea of what a screenwriter does. The truth is screenwriting’s a tough, highly competitive gig. Only a very small percentage of the biggest names in the business ever see their original scripts optioned much less produced.

Margaret Ford Rogers: Absolutely. The best thing for me is to get options and commissioned work. With commissioned work you get paid whether it’s produced or not.

Now, I’ve turned some commissioned work down because either the short story or the book doesn’t have enough meat or I’m not interested enough in it. The truth is you just can’t live off being a screenwriter unless you’re in Hollywood and hit on something fantastic.

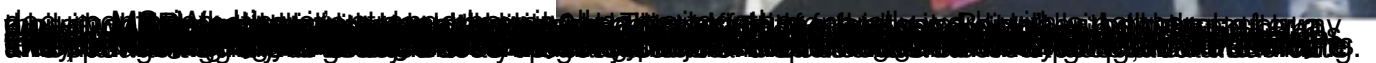
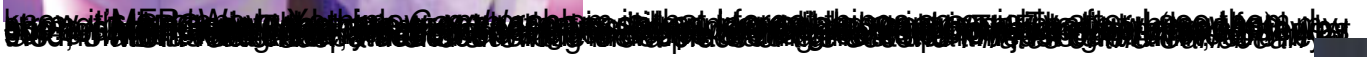
MS: Or get really lucky.

MFR: Right.

MS: Do you have an ideal script, one that comes to mind as a model screenplay?

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