

THE DIRECTOR

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*The Funeral Director
in Popular Culture*

Getting Grace





Sometimes
When Death
Calls,

Life Stops



pens

Behind the scenes of the forthcoming feature film *Getting Grace*.



SNEAK PREVIEW

By Edward J. Defort

The portrayal of funeral directors in the majority of movies and television shows seldom strays far from the clichés of yesteryear. Few productions focus on the human side of the funeral director, who is usually a minor character, sometimes sinister and often eccentric.

The forthcoming independent feature film, *Getting Grace*, is an exception. Actor Daniel Roebuck, who also co-wrote and directed the film, portrays Bill Jankowski, a funeral director who has seemingly withdrawn from life and whose life is turned upside down by a 16-year-old girl dying of cancer. “The dying girl is more alive than he is,” Roebuck says of his character.

Best known for his roles in feature films such as *The Fugitive* and *U.S. Marshals*, as well as TV series including *Matlock* and *Lost*, Roebuck can currently be seen in the critically acclaimed Amazon Prime series *Man in the High Castle*. Glancing at his list of credits, it would probably be easier to list the programs in which the veteran character actor has not appeared rather than the ones in which he has.

But despite having such an extensive film résumé, Roebuck calls himself a frustrated funeral director, and it was a label that seemed to follow him throughout his life.

Born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Roebuck worked in a food store while attending Bethlehem Catholic High School, known as Becahi. “One day, a woman came up to me and told me I would make a great funeral director,” he says. “I was 15 at the time. So I asked her what it was about me that would make her come to that conclusion.”

For starters, the woman told Roebuck he had a great personality. “It had everything to do with interpersonal communication,” he says. “It’s funny how something can land on you so specifically at such a young age, and that you get it.”

This wouldn’t be the last time that someone suggested Roebuck become a funeral di-



profession. “We met at a comic book store as kids and were inseparable until I moved to Los Angeles,” Roebuck says. “We were in touch constantly when I was gone. When he died, Cantelmi Funeral Home [in Fountain Hill, Pennsylvania] took great care of him and did such a great job. He had been sick for so long, and when I saw him, he looked the way I remembered him from our best days together. The solace I had because they took such good care of him really helped me move past [the grief] and recall the good memories of our times together.”



The Path to the Big Screen

The long journey to bring *Getting Grace* to the big screen began almost nine years ago when Roebuck was given the script by producer Mark Rupp to see whether he’d like to be in the film.

The screenplay, originally titled *Bending Spoons*, was written by Jeff Lewis, a writer from Michigan. Roebuck was intrigued by the story. “Jeff’s script was so wonderful,” he says. “There is no *Getting Grace* without Jeff Lewis. He is a very talented writer.”

When Roebuck read the script, he not only wanted to be in it, he wanted to direct it. That was quite a reaction for the actor, considering he had not directed a feature film before. “One does learn through osmosis,” he says. “It’s hard to work with great directors and not have them imprint on you.”

The story was originally set in Lewis’ native Michigan, but among the changes Roebuck suggested was moving the setting to the Lehigh Valley. “I begged one of the producers to let me make the film in the Lehigh Valley,” he says.

“I just saw such potential in the work,” Roebuck adds. “I wanted to take a swing at it because I was a lot more familiar with the funeral business.” During the rewrite, he also tried to lighten the script a bit with more humor, which was well within the character and personality of Grace, the teen with terminal cancer.

The original script had as main characters Grace and Bill Jankowski, the funeral director. Roebuck describes his character as a little stuck in time, and not because he is a funeral director – it’s just the cards he had been dealt in life. “I had great joy taking the character and putting him in three-piece suits, placing him in parks and hot dog shops where he was always uncomfortable,” Roebuck says. “He wasn’t directing a funeral, so he was uncomfortable. He has a sister who is a funeral director and it is suggested throughout the movie that she is the one who deals with the public and he’s the technician.”

rector. As a student, he took high school aptitude tests designed to suggest a career path for students. More than once, the path suggested for Roebuck would lead to a funeral home.

But it was the acting bug that had taken hold of him from a young age. The first time he wrote and directed a play was at St. Ann’s School in Bethlehem when he was 6 years old. Since he didn’t know how to write at the time, he instead drew a storyboard, and one of the nuns let him do the play.

“I worked in a circus at age 12; I did magic shows,” he says. “I’d always been an entertainer.”

But Roebuck still heard the echoes of the voice of the woman in the supermarket who told him he should be a funeral director. So one day, he went to Long Funeral Home in Bethlehem and spoke with one of the funeral directors. “He gave me some mortician’s wax to take home because he knew I liked monster makeup, and he said, ‘You have to try this stuff,’” Roebuck recalls. “That was my first foray into the world of funeral directing.”

In 2011, the personal loss of his best friend, Scott Brunell, deepened Roebuck’s appreciation for the



Top: The cast of *Getting Grace* rehearses a sequence of the film with director Daniel Roebuck.

Above left: Daniel Roebuck and Madelyn Dundon filming in Downtown Bethlehem.

Alexa Mcfillin takes direction from cinematographer Cory Geryak on the set of *Getting Grace*.

Roebuck explains that being a funeral director is just one aspect of his character. "I thought about this guy for years after reading the initial script and going through my rewrites," Roebuck says. "I just kind of went with instinct. There is an event portrayed in the movie that took this guy off of one path and sent him down another. He's going through life trying to do the best he can until this amazing kid comes into his world and flips everything around."

The movie draws a parallel that, in reality, the world is deaf. "Bill lives in the world and he works in the world," Roebuck explains. "Grace is going to die, and he's going to live. But she is more alive than he is, and it has nothing to do with the fact that he's a funeral director – it's just a jumping-off point for the drama of our story. He's disconnected from the world because of an event in his life."

Roebuck admits that he probably couldn't have made this movie years ago but is at a point in his life now where the movie has morphed into his personal point of view: If you don't live every day to the fullest, you're cheating yourself. "This perspective is one of the uplifting takeaways of the movie," he says.

While the movie does have death, it's not a downer. Yes, Grace is going to die. She meets an author who wants to write about her and tells him that since she won't be around to fact-check his work, it would be okay for him to write that she had super powers, to which the writer replies, "You don't think you do?"

"She has altered everyone's life in a positive way in our story," says Roebuck. "I'm excited to get the story out."

The Valley

In filming *Getting Grace* primarily in his hometown, Roebuck called it a labor of love. The local press have called the film a "love letter to the Lehigh Valley." "It has been my dream to film a movie in the Lehigh Valley for quite a while," he says.

And not only is the Lehigh Valley the setting of the film, but Roebuck used local crews to make the movie and also harvested some local talent. Madelyn "Madey" Dundon, a 2016 graduate of Beca-hi, was cast as Grace, the terminally ill teenager who goes to Jankowski Funeral Home to ask the funeral director what is going to happen to her after she dies.

"I am not an experienced film director, but I am not an unexperienced director," says Roebuck, who has directed more than 50 plays, as well as a number of short films and documentaries. "I have a well-tuned ear."

While most teenagers would jump at the chance

to star in a motion picture, this film had a big caveat. Whoever was selected to play Grace would be required to shave her head for the role.

"When I met Madelyn Dundon, it was Christmas 2015. I had gone to visit my high school and was given a tour by two students, one of whom was Madey," he says. Roebuck says the character of Grace was modeled after his own daughter, who is also named Grace.

"When I met her, I thought this kid is as much of a loon as my daughter – sometimes inappropriate and exasperating," says Roebuck. "Grace is funny and fascinating and will get her way. She is equally serious and silly."

Roebuck also knew Madey's family. Her father is a lieutenant colonel in the Army. "I had directed [him] in a play when he was 13 years old," he says.

"I read a lot of kids and saw a lot of great actors," Roebuck recalls. "I said it has taken eight years to get *Getting Grace* made because I had to wait for Madey to get old enough."

"I could have made the movie without her, but it wouldn't be what it is now," he continues. "I was fortunate enough to capture these amazing performances by her and the other kids in the movie, all of whom were cast in the Valley. Two of them had never even been in a play, and none had been in a movie. They all have potential to be great actors. And beyond that, I have found other people



Below left: The Bethlehem Fire Department lends a hand to help create a rain sequence while filming at Herron Family Funeral Home.

Below right: Daniel Roebuck and the crew of Getting Grace filming at Herron Family Funeral Home.

Bottom: Writer and director Daniel Roebuck directs his father, John Roebuck, on the set.





Top left: Onlookers and supporters gather to watch the filming of a key scene in *Getting Grace*.

Top right: Daniel Roebuck and Diane Wagner portray brother and sister funeral directors in the movie.

Above: Script supervisor Harri James and director Daniel Roebuck review a scene outside Herron Family Funeral Home.



in the Valley, [including] the actress that plays my sister in the movie. It was just amazing.”

The movie is full of firsts. Roebuck had never directed a feature film and Jeff Lewis had never written a screenplay that had been produced. “There are a lot of people working on a movie for the first time,” says Roebuck. “Everybody was at the highest level of their game and ready to take the next step. I took full advantage of that, and as a result, the movie looks good. I had a crew of people that wanted to show what they could do, and that shows in the film’s end result.”

Cast as Grace’s mother, Venus, is Marsha Dietlein, who is known for her role in the 2006 movie *Little Children*. Also cast are Duane Whitaker, who appeared in *Pulp Fiction*; Bret Anthony of *Holiday Switch*; and Timothy E. Goodwin of the daytime drama *Days of Our Lives*.

The Set

For 26 days last summer, Roebuck filmed *Getting Grace* in and around Bethlehem. The main setting was John F. Herron Funeral Home, owned by funeral director Demetri Herron. His sister, Paula Herron, is supervising funeral director.

Herron Funeral Homes has two locations, one in Bethlehem, which served as the main location, including all of the exteriors, and Sell-Herron Funeral Home in Allentown. About a third of the shoot took place in one or both funeral homes.

“The main location is a classic Victorian house

and the other is more of a neighborhood-type location,” Roebuck says. “Both funeral homes look so good in the movie.”

Demetri Herron met Danny Roebuck back in their Becahi days when Herron’s family moved from New York to the Lehigh Valley just before their junior year. For Roebuck, the funeral home was made to order. “It is a grand building and perfectly placed, perfectly situated, old-fashioned – it was everything I wanted for my guy in the movie,” he says.

“In Pennsylvania, funerals are still a very big part of the experience of a family,” he adds. “There are a lot of immigrant families in the area. To them, the traditional funeral experience is still something everybody wants.”

Before agreeing to allow their funeral homes to be used in the filming of the movie, the Herrons verbalized their concerns to Roebuck. They quickly learned that he shared their concerns and was sensitive to them.

“Funeral directors are not being treated too kindly by popular culture,” says Roebuck. “They are like dentists and lawyers – everyone can make fun of them, but we all run to them when we need them.”

“That’s why it’s imperative for funeral directors to be community leaders because they are always fighting against the notion that there is something different about them,” he continues. “But when someone close to you dies, of course you want someone who will respectfully take care of your loved one and present the end of his or her life in a manner that is appropriate.”

Most important for the Herrons were the assurances offered by Roebuck that even though they were making the movie in the funeral homes, nobody’s loved one would be compromised in any way. “There were a number of times we shut down the movie and walked out of the funeral home so a family could come in,” says Roebuck. “After the arrangements had been made, we started again.”

In the movie, there is footage of the actors in an embalming room, but Demetri and Paula were ad-

amant about preserving the sanctity of the embalming room. So, in a spare room in the Herrons' funeral home in Allentown, a staged embalming room was completely fabricated with the help of Tony L. Moore, director of funeral service education at Northampton Community College, also in Bethlehem.

"Throughout the filming in both funeral homes, there were places, obviously, where our crew was not allowed to be," Roebuck explains. "In one instance, we used part of the second funeral home to make it seem like it was part of the first funeral home, a basic editing trick. While we were shooting in the fake embalming room, which was off to the side, the funeral home had to prepare for a viewing the next day. Demetri went through great pains to remove us from that area of the funeral home. There was a wall built that would separate the staged embalming room from the actual funeral home, which allowed funeral home staff to transport a casket from the hearse to the viewing room without any of the movie crew seeing the process. That was imperative to Demetri and Paula. We all worked together in the process."

Roebuck states that what the Herrons did for the film is incalculable. Not only did they let the crew shoot in their funeral homes (many locals allowed Roebuck to shoot in their homes as well and on their property), but the Herrons also brought the technical expertise that lends authenticity to the film.

In one scene in a visitation room, a body is seen in a casket. Roebuck had his friend, Barney

Burman, a makeup artist who was part of the team that won an Oscar in 2009 for their work on the *Star Trek* motion picture, design a corpse.

"Plan A was putting my father in the casket, and then, of course, he would fall asleep and ruin every take," says Roebuck. "Plan B was to make a body. You'll never be able to tell it's not a real guy."

"So we're getting ready to shoot the scene and Demetri comes over to me and says, 'Hey, Danny, do you think this guy could have been a veteran?' I said, Yeah, we're playing him as 80 years old. He said, 'Do you want me to put a flag in the coffin?' Demetri and Paula pinned the flag in the casket, and that detail made it look completely authentic. The word I use is verisimilitude."

Ironically, about 20 years ago, Roebuck was researching a role in a movie set in the world of funeral service, which never was made. "Demetri's dad gave me all of his books on embalming, as well as old *Director* magazines," Roebuck says. "This family has been on my side for a long time, so it is no surprise that we came together to make this movie."

In the film, slated for release in theaters later this year, Roebuck says there are things he has never seen portrayed. "This guy is a funeral director, but he goes through an extremely wonderful personal transformation," Roebuck says. "The person he is at the end... he's the same physical person and he is still a funeral director, but he is completely different." ■

Edward J. Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.



*Getting Grace
cast photo.*

QUIET ON THE SET: INSIDE THE FILMING OF *GETTING GRACE*

BY EDWARD J. DEFORT

Daniel Roebuck
as funeral director
Bill Jankowski in
Getting Grace.



*EDITOR'S NOTE: As the feature film *Getting Grace* is being readied for theatrical release later this year, funeral directors Demetri and Paula Herron, along with Tony L. Moore, director of funeral service education at Northampton Community College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, sat down with Ed Defort, editor of NFDA Publications, to talk about their involvement in the film.*

When actor and filmmaker Daniel Roebuck wanted to shoot his movie, *Getting Grace*, in the Lehigh Valley, he engaged an old high school friend for the project. Since the movie deals with death and dying, Roebuck reached out to Demetri Herron, owner of John F. Herron Funeral Home in Bethlehem, and his sister, Paula Herron, supervising funeral director, about using their funeral homes (their second location is Sell-Herron Funeral Home in Allentown) as settings for a bulk of the movie's scenes.

As a setting, the striking Victorian funeral home in Bethlehem was just what Roebuck was looking for. The historic building, known as the Dodson Mansion, was built around 1865. A carriage house sat on the Dodson property and was later moved in the 1950s to make room for a caretaker's house. The mansion then became a Lehigh fraternity until the early 1950s. By the late 1950s, the Dodson Mansion became a funeral home when it was purchased by H. Scott and Verna Ashton, who owned the funeral home until they retired in

1979. That year, the Dodson Mansion was purchased by John F. and Katherine D. Herron. The John F. Herron Funeral Home continues to be a prominent historic building in Bethlehem, and the current owners are committed to maintaining its historic nature.

HOW DID YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH THE MOVIE COME ABOUT?

DEMETRI: I knew Dan from high school. Our family moved into the Lehigh Valley area between my sophomore and junior years.

HOW DID HE PRESENT IT TO YOU?

DEMETRI: Dan's idea was to have himself, a professional actor, and some other professional actors in the movie. But as we were considering whether to do this, we also considered that Dan was giving an opportunity to the Charter Arts School, Bethlehem Catholic High School, the diocese, local businesses and various other locations in the Lehigh Valley.

WHEN I SPOKE TO DAN, HE CALLED HIMSELF A "FRUSTRATED FUNERAL DIRECTOR."

DEMETRI: He was always told he should be a funeral director. Every time

there was a test in high school about what career suited you, he was always told he should be a funeral director. He was always infatuated with the funeral business.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST HEAR OF THE *GETTING GRACE* PROJECT?

DEMETRI: Years ago, Dan came here and said he was thinking about doing a movie in the funeral business. My dad said to him – well, we *all* said to him – a movie about the funeral business is never a positive story. It's always negative and we're always the bad guys.

Then, out of the blue during the summer of 2015, Dan called with more details about the movie *Getting Grace*. And before we said yes or anything, we wanted to read the script. We thought it was a quirky story; it has humor in it.

PAULA: Dan did do his homework. He spoke to Demetri a lot. Once he had the final script, he had to work with the municipalities because there were places that were integral parts of the script. He gave a lot of opportunity to people who would never have experienced a movie.



Left-right: Tony Moore, director of funeral service education at Northampton Area Community College; funeral director Paula Herron; Connor J. Herron, a funeral service student at Northampton; and funeral director Demetri Herron stand before a painting by Charter Arts School graduate Ana Raiola, which is central to the plot of Getting Grace.



Jacob Williams, Madelyn Dundon, Wyatt Root, Daniel Roebuck, Alexa Mcfillin and Colin Moore at Herron Family Funeral Home.

WAS THERE ANYTHING IN THE SCRIPT YOU FLAGGED AS YOU WERE READING?

DEMETRI: We did question a couple of things. We thought long about how this was going to affect us day to day with the business. After all, a movie shoot, with all of its moving parts, has to run on schedule, but the funeral business can change at any time.

We had reservations about one part of the script that called for visitors to the funeral home to be eating cookies in the viewing room. Of course, Pennsylvania prohibits food in the funeral home. In the film, a group of children being treated for cancer crashes a funeral. There was a body in the casket, which was actually a prop created for the movie.

All of a sudden, the man's widow sees the kids peeking in the chapel and invites them in. There was no funeral director around and these kids had cookies.

We had the issue of food in the funeral home right from the beginning, but then

we realized it was not the funeral home providing the food and it was the deceased's loved one telling the kids they could bring in cookies, not the funeral director.

In that same scene, one kid commented that she thought the casket was boring and said there should be some kind of designs on the side. The widow offered a marker and invited the children to write on the casket, saying how much her husband loved children and how he would love that they did that.

PAULA: Being exposed to a funeral helps children, as well as adults, be less afraid of death. Parents with young children don't want them to come into the viewing room. But it is a part of life.

WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR TAKEAWAYS WHEN YOU FIRST READ THE SCRIPT?

DEMETRI: For the most part, the story-line showed that the funeral director is a real person. And the audience finds out that the funeral director has a back-story that shaped what kind of person he is – not what kind of funeral director but the kind of person. It all boils down to this picture that is hanging on the wall of the funeral home [above and on the cover], and that is the way he always was until Grace came along.

Early in the movie, Grace's mother, Venus [portrayed by Marsha Dietlein], sees Roebuck's character on the porch of the funeral home sweeping, and she says, 'Who would ever want to do that for a living?' People do say that all the time.

TONY: Most people's perception of the funeral director is the person who opens the door for everybody.

PAULA: People would see the funeral director in a nice suit and driving a nice car. You don't see the other emotional aspects. As my father used to say, someone is coming to you at the worst possible time in their life. They don't really know you, but you are there to help them, and it's amazing how you develop a relationship with them. And that is what happens in the movie.

Daniel Roebuck,
Madelyn Dundon
and Marsha
Dietlein Bennett at
the press conference
announcing the
cast of *Getting
Grace*.



**WHAT DO YOU THINK
ABOUT THE PORTRAYAL OF
A FUNERAL DIRECTOR IN THIS
MOVIE?**

DEMETRI: They portrayed the funeral director as a family-oriented man. The closest comparison would be the portrayal of the funeral director in *My Girl* [played by Dan Aykroyd].

PAULA: There is a definite difference between Dan's character and his sister in the movie. Their personalities are different and their comfort levels are different.

DEMETRI: There is some quiriness in how they speak, and it is real, but it doesn't negatively reflect on funeral directors.

PAULA: There are people in the funeral industry – some want to be with the families while others just want to stay behind the scenes and do the technical jobs.

DEMETRI: I was concerned with some of the humor in it, but you can't make a movie about cancer and funerals without some humor because it won't sell as a movie.

**HUMOR IS A PART OF EVERYDAY,
REAL LIFE.**

PAULA: In our business, we see families come in, they are upset, a kid will say something innocent, someone will laugh, and the tension is broken. You can't always be somber. There are elements of the movie that I think would be informative to the general public, where they might be curious about something [but] feel embarrassed to ask a question, even though they may or may not want to know the answer.

There's even a scene in which Grace asks Bill, the funeral director, if she could have a female funeral director.

I've been called by other funeral homes that may not have a female funeral director on staff who tell me that the family wants a female funeral director to dress their mother. It is a very real sequence of events, where Grace questions the establishment, if you will.

DEMETRI: There was also a quirky aspect to the movie where Grace reads a book by a psychiatrist talking about mind over matter, using bending spoons with your mind as the metaphor.

PAULA: It's not a film just about death and dying. It is very psychological and touches on a number of phases.

Dan's character was very rigid because it goes back to an experience he had as a teenager that shaped his personality. The sister is more personable, theatrical. In fact, the woman who plays the female funeral director actually teaches acting at the Charter Arts School.

**TONY, AS AN EDUCATOR, WHAT WERE
YOUR THOUGHTS WHEN YOU HEARD
ABOUT THE MOVIE?**

TONY: I don't have as much of a history with Dan as Demetri and Paula do. I also had some reservations. Most movies that deal with funeral service have cast the funeral director in a negative light. But when Demetri and Paula explained the storyline to me, I felt like this would be good because funeral directors need some kind of positive portrayal to the public.

Most of what the public sees or hears about funeral directors would be something on the news when an unfortunate incident happens; one or two bad in-

stances make everyone bad. Since this movie casts a positive light on funeral service. I think it will be a good thing.

**WHAT WERE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT
DANNY'S REQUEST TO USE THE
FUNERAL HOME IN THE FILM?**

PAULA: I think we were more cautious for our families. Demetri was very concerned, but Dan agreed that there would be no filming while there were families in the building.

DEMETRI: Originally, my thought was to use the morgue here [in Bethlehem] to do the filming, but then I thought that would really be next to impossible. I didn't want any film people there if we had someone's loved one in our care. That was non-negotiable. To me, a morgue is a sacred place, and I want people to know that room is always private. Everybody on the film crew was absolutely respectful of that.

So we created a fake morgue. We had some space at our other funeral home [in Allentown], and we literally created a morgue. Although it was built at the Allentown location, in the film, the morgue is portrayed as part of the Bethlehem funeral home.

TONY: Northampton Community College is located just a few miles from here. Dan wanted to have a stainless-steel look to the morgue; apparently, white porcelain wouldn't show up as well on film. We had a lot of equipment at the school that was stainless steel. Dan looked at our equipment, and whatever he needed for the film, the school provided. And maybe one or two students made it into the film as extras.

DEMETRI: The president of Northampton Community College, Dr. Mark H. Erickson, was really open and of-

Lehigh Valley
Charter School for
the Arts graduate
Ana Raiola created
the painting seen on
the cover, which is
central to the plot of
Getting Grace.



ferred whatever Danny needed for the film. Everyone saw this movie as something positive for our community.

PAULA: It was all very realistic. They even made name plates for the hearse, 'Jankowski Family Funeral Parlor,' and renamed our other funeral home D'Am-brosio Funeral Home.

DAN DID CREDIT YOU FOR KEEPING THE DETAILS AUTHENTIC.

DEMETRI: When we did the scene with the body in the casket, I asked if the man could have been a veteran, and I secured a flag for the casket. We tried to make everything authentic.

PAULA: There was another scene shot at the Allentown funeral home centering on a young girl who passed away and, to me, it wasn't realistic how she was positioned in the casket, so we adjusted her to make it more real. [The crew was] looking at it from the movie aspect, but we were looking at it from the actual funeral home perspective, and that was important to us.

DEMETRI: For that scene, the young actress was placed in the casket. Her real-life mother was on set and everyone could see she was getting emotional. Finally, the girl sits up and says, 'Come on, Mom, it's just a movie!'

PAULA: There were some glitches. One time at the Allentown funeral home, a Medivac helicopter flew overhead, which caused a scene to be reshot. Another time, a car alarm went off during a lengthy scene and caused the whole scene to be reshot.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO HAVE ALL OF THIS GOING ON IN THE FUNERAL HOME?

DEMETRI: What I got a kick out of

were the young graduates from the Charter Arts School and DeSales University who have never been in a funeral home before looking around. The mom of one of the young actors was petrified – [her daughter] was floating around the funeral home. But the kid was like, 'Mom, I've never seen this before.'

PAULA: Even adults said that they were always afraid of being in a funeral home, but you could see them getting more at ease being here.

WAS THE MOVIE SCHEDULE DISRUPTIVE TO THE FUNERAL HOME?

DEMETRI: Dan was good with the schedule. If we had something going, he'd change it on the fly. We did have to make some changes. If someone called to say they were coming in or if someone walked in, he would clear the building or go to another location.

PAULA: We did have two families walk in in the middle of filming. One woman saw the equipment and said she had heard about the movie, so Demetri took her to an office downstairs. Some even wanted to get a glimpse of the crew, actors and equipment.

DEMETRI: Since the film was shot in the summer, the air conditioning would be on in the funeral home, but when they actually started filming, we had to shut the units off. The building got warm fast!

I READ WHERE THE LOCAL MEDIA COVERED THIS QUITE WELL.

DEMETRI: This was a great thing for the Lehigh Valley. Two months ago, Bethlehem was recognized by *Money* magazine as the best place to retire on the East Coast.

PAULA: I remember when Dan did the initial press conference about the movie in the funeral home. Demetri was out seeing a family and I was here, and all of a sudden, people started coming like we were having a viewing. Then the mayor came. The film has been very well received and people of all ages came. They thought it was great for the city. They gave Dan a lot of credit.

DEMETRI: The town of Bethlehem gave him a green light for everything. The fire department was here one night doing a rain scene until 4:00 in the morning. That night, I was up late because of it. They would stop traffic occasionally. I remember these two young women were getting really upset with the traffic blocked off, and they were screaming, 'What's going on here?' Someone told them they were filming a scene for the movie *Getting Grace*, and one of them said, "Oh, my teacher from the Charter Arts School is in that movie!" And that calmed them down a bit.

PAULA: Restaurants would call and volunteer food. It was great how the whole community came through and supported this film. The night the movie wrapped up, there were a lot of people here.

DEMETRI: I'm sure you're going to have some funeral directors nitpick some of the quirky parts of the movie, but to be honest, the storyline shows the human side of the funeral director. You sweep the pavement, you go to a diner, you are a normal person. ☐

Edward J. Defort is editor of NFDA Publications.