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UNFORGETTABLE FIRST CRUSH
Walla Walla Movie Crush launches with wildly successful inaugural edition

The tagline for the inaugural **Walla Walla Movie Crush** (WWMC) contained a promise of sorts: *You never forget your first crush*. After a weekend screening 85 American shorts, including 11 World Premieres, a dozen visiting filmmakers, one movie icon (**Tom Skerritt**) and one of America's top-ranked table tennis pros (**Wally Green**), many indelible memories were formed at the Crush's sole venue, **the GESA Power House Theatre**.

The festival closed its two-day run on Sunday night (July 2nd, 2017), with two special programs. First, **The Movie Crush Challenge**, which showcased ten new shorts by ten different filmmaking teams in response to this prompt: *Your First Crush*. The WWMC's **Artistic Director Warren Etheredge**, who also selected the filmmakers, explained the particulars to the audience beforehand, that the only parameter beyond the prompt was that the resulting films be no longer than seven minutes. Also, that no one (including the festival staff) would see them until they screened that night truly making them World Premieres. Acclaimed indie filmmaker **Caveh Zahedi** only completed his short 38 minutes before showtime. His entry, MICHELLE RICH, detailed his efforts to overcome his shyness to win the heart of his titular love — the names were not changed to protect anyone — yet instead wound up only kicking her in the shin. He would apologize later in life, but with surprising results. **The Adams Family** — a creative collective of mother, father and two daughters — contributed EVER, a poetic recitation redefining "crush" against majestic Pacific Northwest backdrops. Filmmaker and puppeteer **Genevieve Anderson** re-evaluated her first unrequited love in 3 DEGREES OF SCOTT BAIO, a once-silly, then somber reflection on misplaced emotions.

Following the presentation of the Challenge films, Etheredge was joined on-stage by the Crush's Executive Director, **Nancy Dragun**. (Etheredge and Dragun are partners off stage as well as behind the scenes.) Together, they announced the awards for the inaugural fest. Best Animated Short, Best Narrative Short and Best Documentary Short were all determined by juries of highly-accomplished and greatly-respected industry pros. (The awards themselves were designed and hand-crafted by Walla Walla metalsmith **Paul "Smokey" Good**.)

Best Animated Short — as selected by Genevieve Anderson (TOO LOUD A SOLITUDE), Tess Martin (Haptic Animation Amplifier), Nirvana Mullick (THE BOX MAN) Wilbert Plienaar (DESPICABLE ME) and Mark Shapiro (Laika) — went to **Alicja Jasina** for her elegant **ONCE UPON A LINE**. Plienaar explains the choice, "It is a well-crafted and entertaining film that utilizes the medium with an inventive style that adds to the experience. The use of color immediately brought Bruce Block's principles to mind."

Best Narrative Short — as selected by Joanne Feinberg (Fein Films), Reinaldo Green (STOP), Duncan Jones (MOON; SOURCE CODE), casting director Marci Liroff (E.T.; POLTERGEIST) and Jen McGowan (KELLY & CAL) — was awarded to **Joe Talbot** for his biting satire **AMERICAN PARADISE**, which cunningly decimates white privilege from a quite unexpected, unpredictable "black" perspective.

Best Documentary Short — as selected by Talmage Cooley (DIMMER), Dan Geller & Dayna Goldfine (BALLETS RUSSE; THE GALAPAGOS AFFAIR), Brian Knappenberger (NOBODY SPEAK; THE INTERNET'S OWN BOY) and Jeff Malmberg & Chris Shellen (MARWENCOL; SPETTACOLO) — went to **AJ Schnack** for his searing indictment of gun violence, **SPEAKING IS DIFFICULT**, a succession of 911 recordings from mass shootings over footage of the locales where they occurred. Almost 17 minutes long, it is a true work-in-progress as the documentarian intends to continue adding to the film as more of

these horrific events occur. In his acceptance, Schnack soberly noted: “I’m glad it’s a film that can provoke conversation, discussion and thoughtfulness about ways in which we can do a better job [addressing this crisis].”

Additionally, Etheredge bestowed a **Curator’s Choice Award** upon **Laura Seay**, the writer, director and star of **SPEAK**. He explained: “SPEAK is a poignant, powerful and promising short film. Its content is heart-rending, a testament to the talents of Laura Seay. This triple-threat is already an accomplished actress and her future as a storyteller is bound to set her apart as a force in the film world.” Seay, in her acceptance, refocused the attention to her film, “[SPEAK] is a story about people contending with great pain and stepping outside of themselves to communicate that to another person and, hopefully, heal from that. So, case in point, the more people that see this film, the more it supports this message.”

The last honor of the evening was a highlight for Etheredge, “The first and only honest **Audience Award** ever to be presented at a film festival because it was the first ever to be voted on **ONLY** by movie-lovers who watched every single entry in the Crush. These movie-marathoners comprised the festival’s “Iron Ass” Jury and presented their top honors to **Joshua Seftel** for his doc, **ZAIN’S SUMMER: FROM REFUGEE TO AMERICAN BOY**. In this short, Seftel — who had also completed a crowd-pleasing Challenge film, co-starring his mother! — tracks a young Pakistani in New York City as he prepares for a life in a second language and a brand-new world. 22 out of the 85 shorts screened at the Crush received votes in this exclusive balloting. Runners-up for the Audience Award, in order, were: Jon Bunning’s **THE TABLES**, Matthew K. Firpo’s **REFUGE**, Robin Comisar’s **GREAT CHOICE**, Nick Frew’s **PERFECT ROAST POTATOES**, AJ Schnack’s **SPEAKING IS DIFFICULT** and Jim Cummings’ **THE ROBBERY**.

Other highlights of the festival included:

- * Q&As with filmmakers **Josh Lunden**, **Drew Christie**, **Wendy Jo Carlton**, **Ty Huffer**, Granger’s own **Rick Castaneda** and teen-team **Braden Henricksen** and **John Williams**
- * ping pong pro **Wally Green**’s presence in support of **Jon Bunning**’s beloved doc, **THE TABLES**
- * **Walla Walla After Dark: THE CRUSHENING**, a late-night collection of offbeat, off-color, silly, sexy and bloody shorts hosted by Seattle Film Maven **Heather Marie Bartels**.

The Walla Walla Movie Crush kicked off on Saturday, July 1st at Noon with a program of shorts about veterans’ issues. This served as a bridge from Friday night’s fundraiser (also at the Power House Theatre) for **The Red Badge Project**, founded by **Tom Skerritt** and for which Etheredge serves as the primary instructor. The Red Badge Project teaches storytelling skills to veterans and active-duty soldiers coping with PTS and TBIs. (All proceeds from the inaugural WWMC benefitted The Red Badge Project.) Skerritt called the opening cinematic salvo “Brilliant!” and vowed to return again and again, calling both the work of his non-profit and that of the filmmakers presented at the festival as “life-changing.” He added: “Stories — in all their forms — heal us. They make us better people. They make the world a better place. It is the truthfulness of these stories that shape us, that bring us together.”

Dragun and Etheredge promise that they will bring filmmakers and film-lovers together again next year for the 2nd Annual Walla Walla Movie Crush, and have begun setting dates with the team at the Power House Theatre. The WWMC received support from the City of Walla Walla and the Walla Walla Public Library.