

SOMETIMES



LISA EVERY  
ERIC JORDAN  
CARTER RODRIQUEZ  
JENN RUZUMNA  
SARA THIESSEN

ONE WEEKEND



CHANGES



EVERYTHING

A JOHN HELDE FILM

# BROWN'S CANYON

A TRY THIS FILMS PRODUCTION IN ASSOCIATION WITH BASH THEATRE A JOHN HELDE FILM  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY ERIK AHO COSTUME DESIGNER RON LEAMON PRODUCTION DESIGNER TANIA KUPCZAK DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY E. RYAN McMACKIN LINE PRODUCER CONSTANCE VILLINES  
PRODUCED BY LISA EVERY JENN RUZUMNA JOHN HELDE STORY BY LISA EVERY ERIC JORDAN JOHN HELDE CARTER RODRIQUEZ  
AND SARA THIESSEN SCREENPLAY BY JOHN HELDE DIRECTED AND EDITED BY JOHN HELDE

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[www.trythisfilms.com](http://www.trythisfilms.com)



# SYNOPSIS

## LOGLINE

Two life coaches hoping to resuscitate their stalled careers head into the Utah wilderness to launch a women's mindfulness retreat, but soon discover that the Universe (and a handful of uninvited guests) have other plans in mind.

## SYNOPSIS

Setting out with dreams of launching a new business and finding inner peace, two life coaches plan to resuscitate their stalled careers by hosting a women's mindfulness retreat in the Utah wilderness. But, when surprise guests, a mudslide, and other small disasters conspire against them, they're forced to take a hard look at their own messy lives over the course of one very awkward weekend.

## LONG SYNOPSIS

Life coaches Allison and Stephi plan to resuscitate their careers by co-hosting a women's mindfulness retreat in the Utah wilderness, but when Allison's husband, Thom, and his sidekick, Billy, unexpectedly crash the party, the ladies' zen dreams begin to unravel, forcing them to face their own shortcomings (not to mention a mudslide and a bowl of spoiled chili). A lot can happen in one weekend, especially in *BROWN'S CANYON*.



## FILM INFO

A Try This Films Production  
In Association With Bash  
A John Helde Film

### STARRING

Lisa Every, Eric Jordan, Carter Rodriguez, Jenn Ruzumna,  
Sara Thiessen

### DIRECTED BY

John Helde

### PRODUCED BY

Lisa Every, Jenn Ruzumna, John Helde

### SCREENPLAY BY

John Helde

### STORY BY

Lisa Every, Eric Jordan, John Helde, Carter Rodriguez, Jenn  
Ruzumna, Sara Thiessen

### RUNNING TIME

95 minutes

Filmed on the Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera  
Shooting format: ProRes 1080/24p  
Exhibition Format: DCP, Quicktime 1080p

### WATCH THE TRAILER

[trythisfilms.com](http://trythisfilms.com)

[facebook.com/BrownsCanyonMovie](https://facebook.com/BrownsCanyonMovie)  
twitter: @Browns\_Canyon

### HIGH RES IMAGES

Link: <http://bit.ly/2mc37c2>





## CAST & CREW

Directed and edited by John Helde

Screenplay by John Helde

Story by Lisa Every  
Eric Jordan  
John Helde  
Carter Rodriguez  
Sara Thiessen

Produced by Lisa Every  
Jenn Ruzumna  
John Helde

Cast  
(in order of appearance)

Stephi Roberts	Lisa Every
Allison Lujan	Jenn Ruzumna
Pat Erickson	Sara Thiessen
Thom Lujan	Carter Rodriguez
Billy Lyons	Eric Jordan

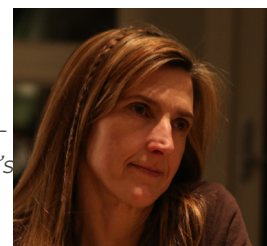
Line Producer	Connie Villines
Director of Photography	E. Ryan McMackin
Production Designer	Tania Kupczak
Costume Designer	Ron Leamon
Original Music by	Erik Aho
Re-recording Mixer	Dave Howe, C.A.S.
Assitant Directors	Gary Wortman Connie Villines Gary Wortman
Art Director	Gary Wortman
Location Sound Mixer	Matt Sheldon
Script Supervisor	Jo Ardinger
First asst. camera/ B-camera Operator	Coburn Erskine
Gaffer/Grip	Justin Salva
Makeup and Hair	
Department Head	Shalyse Lopez
Original artwork by	Joy Every
Associate Producer	Amy Corcoran
Production Assistant	Ben Lawrence
Still Photography	Kristan Jacobsen Tim Aguerro Anne Herman Brooke Henn Dave Howe, C.A.S. Mike McAuliffe Julie Etheridge David Gallander
Make up/Hair: Stills	
Dialogue Editor	
Sound Effects Editor	
Foley Artist	
Foley Recordist	
Audio Services	
Manager	Wendi Wills
Audio post-production	
services provided by	Bad Animals/Seattle
Colorist	Eric Rosen, Lightpress
Main Titles	Brian Berdan
Editorial Interns	Evie Bellew William Putnam
Press Kit Writer	Lyndsay Dyk
Legal Services	Law Office of David Ruzumna





## CAST & FILMMAKER BIOS

**Lisa Every (“Stephi Roberts”, producer)** is a founding member of BASH Theatre. She studied locally at Freehold Theatre and previously at Rice University where she had the privilege of working and studying with in-residence members of the Royal Shakespeare Company. In Seattle, Lisa has performed with REACT Theatre Company, Centerstage, Second Story Rep, Art Attack and BASH (formerly The Community Theatre). Favorite productions include *As You Like It*, *Fool for Love*, *Sylvia* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Most recently Lisa played Lisa in *Beating Up Bachman*, a co-production with Radial Theater written by Gregory Award winning local playwright Wayne Rawley.



**Jenn Ruzumna (“Allison Lujan”, producer)** is a film and stage actress. Her film and TV credits include *Nothing Against Life* (NAL LLC and Paradigma Prod. - Special Jury Award San Marino International Film Festival), *Phoebe’s Father* (Try This Films), *The Wish Fish* (Fishy Tale Films), *Signs Everywhere* (Paradigma Productions), the award-winning *Manic Pixie Dream Wife* (The Pixie Collective) and others. She has performed on stages all over the Northwest, including Theater Schmeater, On the Boards, West of Lenin, Studio 4 Seattle, and Woodinville Rep. Recent stage roles include Pork Filled Productions’ *A Hand of Talons* and *The Twelfth Story* at The Annex Theatre. Jenn will be shooting the short film *Return to Sender* (Kontent Partners) this fall, and will be seen on stage at The Annex Theater in *Scary Mary* in the winter of 2017.



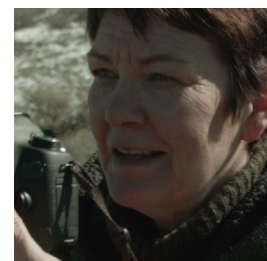
**Eric Jordan (“Billy Lyons”)** has appeared in numerous roles in New York and Seattle and was a founding member of Sight Nine Theatre and the improv troupe Elastic Picnic; favorite roles include Cot in *Hotel Paradiso*, Charlie in *Speed the Plow* and Yvan in *Art*. His original solo show, *An Evening with Chuck*, was featured in venues around Seattle. He has performed as a principal in various short films and, since recently rededicating himself to film, has written two screenplays and played principal roles in the feature films *Phoebe’s Father* and *Brown’s Canyon*. He received his MFA from Sarah Lawrence College.



**Carter Rodriguez (“Thom Lujan”)** is an actor, musician, and visual artist. Film and TV credits include *Singles*, *Police Beat*, *Manchego!*, *Grimm*, *Z Nation*, *Colton*, and *Brown’s Canyon*. He was last seen on stage as Juan in the world premiere of Nick Stokes’ *Duels* at 12th Ave Arts in Seattle. He has performed with Pony World, Seattle Shakespeare Co., Wooden O, Book-It Repertory Theatre, Thriving Artists, Theatre Schmeater, Capitol Hill Arts Center, 14/48, Café Nordo, NW New Works Festival, 12 Minutes Max, and many others. He is also a core acting teacher at Freehold Studio/Theatre Lab and teaches for Freehold Theatre’s Prison Residency Program at the Men’s Correctional Complex in Monroe, Washington. He is a current and founding member of critically acclaimed absurdist trio, Le Frenchword and a company member at Pony World Theatre.



**Sara Thiessen (“Pat Erickson”)** is an actor, improvisational playback theater artist and reader’s theater performer, and a graduate of Freehold Theatre Lab’s Ensemble Intensive Training program. Stage roles include *It Can’t Happen Here* by Sinclair Lewis, and Wayne Rawley’s Seattle premiere of *Beating Up Bachman*, produced by BASH Theatre. Sara can next be spotted in a 2017 production of *The Starry Messenger* by Kari Margolis.





## CAST & FILMMAKER BIOS

**John Helde (director, producer, screenwriter, editor)** is the founder of Try This Films, a production company based in Seattle. John's award-winning short films include *Hello*, starring Eric Stoltz and Susanna Thompson. His first feature documentary, *Made in China*, played the festival circuit to critical acclaim, and subsequently debuted on the Documentary Channel; his recent documentary *Field Work: A Family Farm* is on public television. John's narrative feature film *Phoebe's Father*, shot entirely in Seattle, premiered at the 2015 NYC Independent Film Festival. John worked with some of the same cast on his new feature *Brown's Canyon*, which will debut in 2017. He is developing *Open Doors*, an independent comedy/drama.



**Ryan McMackin (director of photography)** has a great variety of filmmaking experience including documentaries, music videos, commercials, shorts, and feature films. His credits include music videos for Brandi Carlile, and The Head and the Heart, as well as the feature films *Your Sister's Sister* (dir. Lynn Shelton), and *Big in Japan* (dir. John Jeffcoat).

**Tania Kupczak (production designer)** has production designed many shorts and features, including Guy Maddin's *Brand Upon the Brain!* (Toronto Film Festival 2006), Lynn Shelton's *We Go Way Back* (Slamdance Grand Jury Prize 2006), Matthew Lillard's *Fat Kid Rules the World* (SxSW Audience Spotlight Award 2012), Dayna Hanson's *Improvement Club* (SxSW 2013), and art directed Lynn's recent features *Touchy Feely* (Sundance 2013), *Laggies* (Sundance 2014) as well as Megan Griffith's *Lucky Them* (Toronto Film Festival 2013). She holds a BA from Oberlin College and an MFA in Visual Art from Vermont College, and likes climbing rocks when she's not on set or at her computer thinking about color. She makes artwork about the weather.

**Ron Leamon (costume designer)** has designed films, television series, and commercial productions for over 30 years, featuring the talents of Alan Arkin, James Earl Jones, Dolly Parton, Parker Posey, David Lynch, and many others. His work has been showcased at MOHAI and the Festival International Cinéma Costumes et Mode in Paris which celebrates costume design in film. Feature films including the Sundance Award-winning *Smoke Signals*, Lynn Shelton's *Laggies*, David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, and Stephen Gyllenhaal's *Grassroots*. His television series work includes *Twin Peaks* and Stephen King's *Rose Red*.

**Erik Aho (composer)** has written music for television, film, commercials and video games. Erik has orchestrated for countless television episodes including *The Family Guy* (Fox), *Timeless* (NBC), *Quantico* (ABC), *The Whispers* (ABC). His most recent composition work includes the theme and original music for *Blood Relatives* (Discovery). In the summer of 2013 Erik was invited to attend ASCAP's prestigious Film and Television Composer's Workshop and became the 2013 recipient of the ASCAP Foundation's David Rose Award. Chosen by over 60 musicians from the Hollywood film scoring community, he also received the 2013 RMALA (Recording Musicians Association of Los Angeles) Grant. Erik holds a BA in Philosophy from the University of Washington and studied music at Berklee College





## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*Brown's Canyon* was developed collaboratively with the cast, which is fairly unusual in the world of narrative movies. We start not with a script, but with the actors. Through several months of improvisation work, I work with the cast to create first their characters, and then the content of story that forms the shooting script. I love this process because it gives me the opportunity to work with the cast for a much longer period than usual, and because it brings the energy and spontaneity of multiple creative minds to the story.

Working with the actors through the improvisations is an incredibly thrilling and uncertain ride. As I watch the improvisations unfold, it's a little like being a fly on the wall of an episodic TV show that's playing for me alone. We grow a backstory for these people, and through their conflicts a central story emerges. Although the process is "organic," in the sense that I do a lot of listening and I tend to trust the actors' choices, it's also my job to guide the actors to explore pathways that develop conflict, and to keep the big-picture elements of the story moving forward.

The story that emerged for *Brown's Canyon* is about five characters at turning points in their lives. Allison (Jenn Ruzumna) and her partner and cousin Stephi (Lisa Every) set out to host a mindfulness retreat for women, accompanied by Allison's one-time mentor Pat (Sara Thiessen), an out-of-sorts photographer. When Allison's husband Thom (Carter), and his sidekick ski-bum Billy (Eric) arrive unexpectedly, things go south and the five are stuck in the house for a weekend where they face an unraveling thread of secrets and deceptions.

What I'm always looking for in the work I do is authenticity – of character, relationship, place. I feel like in *Brown's Canyon* we created a truthful imaginary world, in which these people are grappling with real conflicts. I wanted to investigate the real mid-life pains of these characters – identity, career, sex, infidelity, alcoholism – while leaving space for humor. These people all started out in one direction, yet find themselves in places where they hadn't expected or wanted to be. When we meet them in the movie, they're all facing deceptions and avoiding the truth – about their loved ones and about themselves. Out of one awkward weekend, they have to find a new way forward.

To me, *Brown's Canyon* became about change versus acceptance at the core. It's about how people try to change themselves and others. It's about the tug between that and accepting oneself and others for who they are.

-- John Helde





## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

**BY LYND SAY DYK**

In February 2015 a small group of Seattle filmmakers descended on a remote mountain home outside of Park City. Using mostly natural light and the slim Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera, 14 cast and crew would produce the feature film *Brown's Canyon* over 10 days while eating, sleeping and working on location in Utah. The comedy/drama explores the territory of unmet expectations that arise from lifelong relationships, and it had its origins in a unique process. The actors and the director, John Helde, built the story from months' worth of improvisational sessions. Before those sessions, nothing about the film was set except for the location—a stark valley filled with sagebrush just east of the Wasatch Range, which John and Lisa Every (co-producer and actor in *Brown's Canyon*) had visited the previous winter. “I told John we should make a movie at this house,” Lisa said. “I was sort of joking but he bit on that and when we returned to Seattle we were like, ‘We should make this movie.’”

John, Lisa and their co-producer Jenn Ruzumna had worked together before. In 2010, Lisa and Jenn had asked John to lead a workshop at their Seattle theater company BASH. Inspired by director Mike Leigh's process and his gritty kitchen-sink realism, John worked with the BASH actors to create a set of short films in which the actors created their characters. In 2014, John brought a similar approach to his first feature *Phoebe's Father*, which premiered at the New York City Independent Film Festival in 2015. After its successful run, and Lisa and John's Utah inspiration, the three were eager to work together again and take the process even further. Whereas in developing *Phoebe's Father* John had a planned plot framework, in the *Brown's Canyon* project everyone was starting from zero.

First, John evolved the characters with the five actors (Lisa Every, Jenn Ruzumna, Sara Rucker Thiessen, Eric Jordan and Carter Rodriguez). “It was interesting,” said Eric, who plays Billy in the film. “We just dove in, saying ‘I wonder what kind of story is going to emerge from this.’” They worked alone at first, at coffee shops and city-park basketball courts, developing the personality and life story of each character from birth, and acting through key moments beginning in young adulthood. Every moment of backstory in *Brown's Canyon* was a real moment—it physically happened. “When we got to the point [in production] where things were scripted, I had actual memories from the improv,” said Jenn, who co-produces and plays Allison in the film, “We did the scene and I had physical memories that would pull at my heart. You literally created memories as the character.”

Slowly, John introduced the characters to each other, and much of the material in the final improvisations, set in 2009, was incorporated into the script. “It evolved truthfully,” John said of the plot. Every small decision made by each actor was interpreted, built upon and integrated into the narrative. John guided the direction of the sessions by implementing natural constraints and limitations into the characters' world. He stopped them occasionally, asking questions like ‘what happens if?’ Each session was recorded. “This method is tricky,” John said. “It's full of experimentation and the unexpected. Some writers say they hear their characters talking to them, but this is like writing in 3-D—the characters really are talking to you.”

# ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

## CONTINUED

The story that emerged is a *Big Chill*-like ensemble comedy/drama set in 2009. Two self-help gurus, Allison (Jenn Ruzumna) and Stephi (Lisa Every), plan to resuscitate their careers by hosting a women's mindfulness retreat atop a remote Utah mountain. When Allison's husband, Thom, reeling from a financial disaster, arrives unexpectedly with his flighty sidekick, Billy, the weekend quickly unravels. The road washes out, leaving the group of intimates stuck for two long days, during which they are forced to come face-to-face with their own shortcomings.

*Brown's Canyon* is not a film that has answers, or traditional heroes and antagonists. Instead, the questions it asks are complex and ambiguous. The characters are forced to confront the results of their unexpected life turns. But these problems—infidelity, betrayal, alcoholism—are laid flush against the irreducible connection of intimacy. John, discussing the risk of making a film in this style, also touched on the mirror experience the characters face in the film: "Going into this process, I had zero preconceived notions about who these characters would be. As the actors developed them, the scariest part for me became, 'Where will we end up? And will anyone want to see that?'"

To reflect and capture the way this film was created, John and Director of Photography Ryan McMackin had to devise a unique plan for the shoot. "One of my desires was to find a way to take the improvised nature of the origins of the story—of the process—and bring that into a scripted movie," John said. He had written a loose script to shoot the movie but did not want to lose the feel of the film's improvised beginnings. The process called for spontaneity, and Ryan was game for the challenge. "Our approach to coverage varied from scene to scene," Ryan said. "We often shot early takes with a roaming, reactive camera." Using that responsive camera technique, Ryan could rove from character to character, intuiting their movements. The actors, in turn, were free to use the blocking as more of a guideline. "This [movement] gave the storyline a natural credibility and energy," Ryan said. "This technique served us particularly well during dialogue-heavy scenes featuring several actors. Once we began with this approach to coverage, it became difficult to avoid anticipating the actor's action and dialogue with each subsequent take." Not all moments would be covered on all characters, but they had to live with that. "We couldn't expect 100 percent coverage," John said. "That's just the way it is, and it becomes part of the style."

Because the house could accommodate just 10 crew, everyone wore multiple hats on set. Lisa and Jenn worked double time as producers and actors, though they brought veteran producer Constanze (Connie) Villines on for the shoot. Connie was instrumental in helping *Brown's Canyon* get fully crewed and keeping it on schedule in Utah. Gary Wortman acted as both assistant director and the art department. "I would never know when we started a scene who would be holding the slate and calling the shots," John said. "It would seamlessly change between Gary and Connie. Whether Gary had to drive the snowplow, or pick up a piece of furniture, or Connie was on the phone—they had it under control."

"It was such a unique and fantastic experience," said Carter, who plays Thom in the film, "to be locked up in a house in the middle of nowhere with everybody. We [were] all eating together and playing together and finding our way together. Small crew, small cast—I don't know if I'll ever get that again."





## Q&A WITH DIRECTOR JOHN HELDE

### HOW DID YOU DECIDE TO SET THE FILM IN REMOTE UTAH?

The plan that (actors & producers) Jenn and Lisa and I concocted at the outset was that we'd shoot the film – whatever story we came up with! – in a house that, fortuitously, was available to us in the Wasatch Mountains of Utah. In February 2015, we set off with a tiny crew to shoot the movie. The thing I love most about working this way is when the actors come to shoot the movie they've lived in these characters for a long time. They know what experiences happened to the character, events that really happened in the past. Part of the joy of this project also came from focusing very intensively on the project while we shot it. Everyone was under one roof, and we shared in each others' creativity and friendship while getting the movie made. We're certainly not the first to do it, but it is truly the best experience I've ever had making a movie.

### HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO KEEP THE STORY FEELING SO INTIMATE?

In the shooting I wanted to find a style that meshed with the improvisatory nature of the story, one that would feel spontaneous and as authentic as a documentary. In prep, I talked with cinematographer Ryan McMackin for some time about how to achieve this, and he was game. We both enjoyed making choices that involved very specific limitations – for instance, to use natural light if at all possible, and to let the actors' initial movement guide us toward the shots, not the other way around. The camera is always hand-held, always moving, and we tried to give Ryan a lot of improvisatory power as well. Each take is somewhat different, and we'd evolve our camera work with each pass. The result is a lot of choices in the edit, both for acting and camera, that strengthen the fly-on-the-wall perspective.

### AND YET THE STORY IS SET IN SUCH AN OPEN WILDERNESS.

The house where we shot is situated over a wide, sparsely inhabited valley. I wanted to emphasize the natural expansiveness, and the isolation of these characters. While their human conflicts play out on a very intimate scale, they are perched amid the permanence and solidity of nature. Remarkably, the winter we shot was a sparse one for snow. This turned out fortuitously I think, as the undulating brown mountains have texture and stark power. Our production designer Tania Kupczak did an amazing job of creating an earth-toned color palette for the film, both indoors and out, which is only occasionally broken by bright tones.

### WHAT IS YOUR INSPIRATION FOR WORKING WITH A SMALL CAST?

I had been thinking a lot about how to develop the story with the actors—for instance, how to work with them more in the generative process as opposed to bringing them in strictly to shoot the movie. I saw Mike Leigh's *Happy Go Lucky*, and *Secrets and Lies* was also a longtime favorite film of mine. It's about real-life family issues. You were dropped into the very real environment of these characters, and that is the thing I love to do. So I began researching how Mike Leigh works, for inspiration. I liked the uneven number of cast, as it seemed to create potential for unusual dynamics. Although I considered some typical tropes – that they all might be family, or sets of couples – I rejected those ideas in favor of more random connections. There is one married couple at the center – Allison (Jenn Ruzumna) and Thom (Carter Rodriguez) – while the other characters orbit them in different ways.





## A CONVERSATION WITH THE CAST

### WHAT IS IT LIKE TO WORK ON AN IMPROVISED MOVIE WHERE YOU HAVE SO MUCH INPUT?

**Lisa Every (Stephi):**

"We have worked with John for a long time. We did a workshop together, then the film *Phoebe's Father*. Our brains are fragmented usually, right? You have an hour to do this and then you have to go pick up the kids and make dinner. So [in production] the fact that we would film a scene and then we would go sit on the bed and rehearse and then film another scene—having the luxury of 'this is all I have to think about for 12 days'—it was really cool."

**Eric Jordan (Billy):**

"I did a film with John the year before, *Phoebe's Father*, and Jenn and Lisa were in that as well. The four of us improvised in that. The biggest difference between *Brown's Canyon* and doing other acting work was the process beforehand. [John is] there while you're improvising with other people and looking for moments where he can inject conflicting needs between two characters to see what happens."

**Carter Rodriguez (Thom):**

"John gave me a template for how to construct a character based on stuff he was working on. I had never worked like that before, so it was a really interesting process. I've done some film and some TV work and usually it's like, 'You know your lines? Good. Go!' You just have to bring it and charge through because everyone is on a deadline, everyone is freaking out. *Brown's Canyon* was the opposite of that. John creates a very safe environment to do your best work while still being the director at the same time. So you get the best out of your acting potential through his gentle spirit. He's guiding you bit by bit towards the rising action, whatever the story needs to keep moving forward."

**Jenn Ruzumna (Allison):**

"Ninety-nine percent of our personal work, in terms of our backstory, is not in dialogue or scripted. It was weeks and months of work that I think, when I'm watching the footage anyway, is so fascinating because I think you see all that work in the characters. It's very subtle but they feel like real people. I think it's fascinating."

**John Helde:**

"My job is to simultaneously give the actors the freedom to find their own way, and also to guide them. To stop occasionally and ask them 'what happens if' or 'what if you pursue this?' To also come up with certain circumstances, to move the story forward. But it's tricky, it's full of experimentation. Full of the unexpected—but that is what I love about it.... It's less my job to come up with the initial ideas—it's my job to sift it and move the ideas forward. To make it dramatic and find the interesting parts. It also draws on my editing experience that way—the part of editing that says, 'This, not that. This, not that.'"