

Ashley Matthews

Midterm -Interview with a member of Production.

For my midterm, I chose to Interview my friend [REDACTED]. She recently worked as a P.A. (Production Assistant) on the set of the Netflix show OBX and as an Assistant Set Decorator on the HBO series The Righteous Gemstones. Below are her comments on her experiences on these projects and others.

Interviewer: Ok, state your name, the degree you went to school for and your current position or most recent position.

[REDACTED]: My name is Nevada Bower, my Bachelor's is in Media Arts from the University of South Carolina and my last position was as a Set Decoration Assistant.

Interviewer: Ok, do you feel like school prepared you for the industry?

[REDACTED]: Yes and no. USC tended to focus on um what I think I would describe as above the line positions or studio position for this industry...

Interviewer: Now when you say above the line positions, can you break that down in layman's terms?

[REDACTED]: Yeah, so above the line are gonna be people like producers, your directors, your screenwriters, your executives, those are your above the line positions. And also studio jobs are a bit different than what I do here, um they are a little more 9-5 jobs, full time jobs, that encompass, that work for bigger corporations that encompass several shows or several movies that may be going on at once.

Interviewer: ok

[REDACTED]: Um, which is great because I learned a lot of technical skills, I learned a lot about the industry in a business sense, um but something I think I missed out on that they (school) didn't prepare me for was people who were below the line and those jobs and how to get those jobs and especially in South Carolina, where we do have a film and television community that could have been tapped into that I don't think really was, I think it was a missed opportunity.

Interviewer: Now when you say below the line jobs, can you list a few of those for people who may not be familiar with the terminology?

[REDACTED]: Below the line jobs are kind of going to be all your regular workers, their going to be your assistants, your coordinators, your art directors, your construction workers, your locations people...

Interviewer: Ok, what are some shows or projects that you worked on?

[REDACTED]: My two biggest I have worked on are season 1 and 2 of the Netflix show Outer Banks (OBX) and I did the second season of the HBO show the Righteous Gemstones. Before that I kind of started with small gigs doing reality TV when it would kind of come through, such as America's Got Talent, a pilot for Food Network that is still running, stuff like that.

Interviewer: Now did you do the same job on all those projects, or did it vary based on what they needed?

[REDACTED]: It varied based on what they needed. So, kind of when I started out and was doing reality TV, um I did set assistant jobs, which is um, with reality TV it's a little bit of everything, your gonna have to do whatever is needing to be done while they're shooting the show, or preparing for it, so it could be moving props, um it could be setting up whatever, it could be a bunch of different jobs. But when I went

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to Outer Banks, I was an office assistant, which deals with a lot more paperwork and production schedules, and script management. We kind of help take care of all the other departments while the production is going on. And then on Gemstones, I worked in the Set Decoration department as an assistant, which is set decoration it is like it sounds. We provided all the set decorations for the show.

Interviewer: Alright, out of all the projects you've done, what is your favorite one and why?

██████: Um it would have to be both Outer Banks and Gemstones. Outer Banks was my first long term gig and is my first kind of real leap into this industry and I really lucked out and got to work with a really great crew and a really great cast, and we were a really close knit group, and we got to see this show that we made become very popular and it was nice. Gemstones I really liked because I got to experience a different department which is what I wanted, and I got to have a little bit more creative input which made me a lot happier, and I also got to work with some bigger names in the industry. Not only are they bigger names, but they are people that I watched and respected and have been a fan of for a really long time, so that's always really cool to be able to do.

Interviewer: What is the most challenging part of your job?

██████: If you're going to work in physical production like I do, it's really demanding, it is a really hard life and work balance. I mean we all work 12+ hours a day five days a week, six days a week and so while we love it can be a lot and it's not for everybody

Interviewer: What's your least favorite part of the job?

██████: I think the least favorite is like we try to be as organized and possible because you have to, there's so many things going on there's so many people that are doing a bunch of different tasks. You have to be on a schedule, but some days that's not gonna happen, some days it's going to really suck because the weather might be bad and we can't shoot a scene and we're just sitting and waiting. Like we don't always have as much control over our environment as we would like to, and then especially when you are working long hours, you're around each other a lot, you know, people get a little testy. So that might be my least favorite. Sometimes it just really sucks and there is nothing you can do about it but keep going.

Interviewer: What surprised you?

██████: Um.. I think what most surprised me is, like I mentioned before, below the line positions, I think we all realize there's a lot of people making a television show, but until you're in it, you don't really realize how many people that really is. There's a couple hundred of us a day working with each other, working around each other, and it's kind of this big puzzle and that we all have our own little piece of it to make this work and it's a cool thing to see, but also a surprising thing to see how many people there really are making this one television show.

Interviewer: What would you tell someone who wants to start in this industry?

██████: Um if you don't have any contacts, or know someone who is already doing it, its going to be really hard to do. This industry is very much about the people you know. I think I'm lucky starting out in a smaller community of it because once you're in it, you are kind of in. Like your next job is going to be the people who worked with you on your last job, like that's what it is. They are going to take you on to the next job. You've got to be prepared for that coming into this and you also have to be prepared to

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like, ask for what you want. Like the reason I got the job on Gemstones was because I literally one day was just talking to Sheena who was my boss on Gemstones, but she was also the Set Dec. Coordinator on Outer Banks, and I was like hey I think I'm really interested in that department, would you want to sit down sometime and talk about your job, what you do, you because I'm trying to move up and I'm trying to figure out what that is. We never even had the conversation because we got so busy and never got around to it. But when she was going back to gemstones she was like "hey do you want to be my assistant because I know you were interested and I was like "yeah", so that's how I got my next job. It's crucial to always be networking.

Interviewer: What do you wish people knew about the production industry?

██████: I think when people think of production or think of this industry in general, they think of the actors, they think of the directors, they think of the producers, they think of the well off people who made it, or that they have aspired to be that high on the ladder, but most of us are just regular people working a job. It not this glitz and glamour thing that I think a lot of people might think of when they think about people making television and movies.

Interviewer: So what are your long term career goals?

██████: So for me, long term and top tier goal is to produce and or write. That's always been a dream of mine and the longer I work, the longer I want to creatively produce.

Interviewer: Where to do see the future of production going with the rise in technology with things such as A.I. (artificial intelligence), robotics and the development of advanced animation.

██████: Even with all those things, our jobs still exist in the production industry. Technology is great and its going to help us with making better content. Its going to shift how some of us do our jobs, but I think this is and industry that is going to stay true to heart about how things are made. I think Covid has taught me that. We had to learn how to come back and do our jobs differently during Covid, but at the heart of it, it was still the same. I don't think technology is going to force it into something incredibly different.

Interviewer: With the pandemic, are there any shortages on jobs in the production industry?

██████: No, they are always hiring and training and looking for new people to come on. However, like how everyone else is having a shortage of help, we didn't have that. I think because we are all such a tight knit group here and there's not a lot of people who can come in and out of it, we all just came back to work. We came back in person, and it was really tough. We were the first Netflix show to go back into production and one of the first shows in general to go back into production after Covid. Our jobs can't be done virtually.

Interviewer: OK, well that wraps up the interview. Thanks for your time.

██████: Your welcome.