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THE RADAR FILM

OHLENDORF
INTERVIEW BY MIKE MCGREGOR



TEENAGE WASTELAND *Writer-director Jess Manafort was discovered by Martin Scorsese and nabbed *Gossip Girl* Leighton Meester to star in *Remember the Daze*, her first feature film. Now, this 25-year-old Alexandria native is burning a path through Hollywood with a film that touches close to home*

So, not another teen movie, huh? I wasn't interested in the popular clique vs. whomever film. My film is a coming-of-age story that follows a bunch of suburban seniors on their last day of high school in 1999.

What was high school like for you? The movie's exactly what my life was like growing up in Virginia. It was easy living. My friends and I didn't have that much to do, so we'd end up getting wasted on the weekends. But I got to make a movie about it, which somehow validates it as time well spent.

How did you get into filmmaking? My mom says I've been making movies since I was three. I was always doing big productions with the neighborhood kids. Both my parents are lawyers, so I'm the oddball in the family.

And Martin Scorsese? When I was trying to get into film school, I made a short film and sent it to a bunch of people, hoping that I could get a recommendation for NYU. I still don't know how he even saw it or who passed it to him. But

I received a letter from Martin Scorsese, which I still have tucked away, and he said that he thought my film was really sensitive and clever, and that he would be happy to give me a recommendation. I'm a huge fan, obviously.

Your film takes place in 1999. Why? That was the time when my own story took place, but it could've been anytime. However, making it believable took paying attention to little details like cell phones and the clothes all have references of the late '90s. The music, of course, was especially important.

What was shooting like? I scouted many locations and Wilmington, NC, fit the best. It was funny—the actors and I are all around the same age, so 20 of us rolled around like a big pack. We'd go to dinner, bowling and out to a beach house on weekends. We all came out from L.A. and were so isolated that we developed quick friendships. Everyone said it was like camp! ■

"Remember the Daze" is now playing at Loews Shirlington 7, Arlington.