

Bentley Miller



Talking to Bentley Miller is far easier than finding him. Working in a profession where crowded conditions are quite common, Bentley has ably concealed himself deep in the bowels of Studioasis. His current job title is Director of Photography for the BBC-Catalyst co-production of *Noddy*, a children's television series based on the books by Enid Blyton. Bentley's work station in the studio is parked out front of a storefront facade called Aunt Agatha's Hats — a part of the set that is scripted to sell head wear, but which really stores electrical and lighting equipment between shots. It is unlikely that Bentley Miller minds the crush. For the past 20 years he has worked in similar circumstances all over Canada and has gone as far as Hong Kong working on television shows and concerts.

Bentley Miller was born in the town of Grimsby, ON, which lies between Hamilton and St. Catharines on the Niagara Peninsula, in Southern Ontario. His exposure to the entertainment industry came at an early age when he saw his first grade teacher perform with a local acting troupe in a production of *The Mikado*. This gave Bentley his first inkling that he might like to work in the entertainment industry, but his own chance to pursue that interest did not come until he was at Laura Secord, a St. Catharines high school. There he was a member of the theatre and got his first taste of working with lights.

After high school, Bentley sifted through various post secondary options before choosing to attend Ryerson Polytechnic. Ryerson had a strong influence on Bentley, who returned to teach there for two years in the late eighties, and still continues to teach the occasional seminar and workshop. After graduating from Ryerson Polytechnic with a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Radio and Television in 1978, Bentley went to work for the fledgling CityTV in Toronto as a lighting technician. He stayed with CityTV until May of 1988, by which time he had worked his way up to Lighting Director. "City was a lot of fun," explains Bentley, "It was a good place to learn, to expand your mind, until they moved into their new building..." CityTV's

success was ultimately what convinced Bentley to leave. "It went from being rough around the edges, a sort of dangerous place to a more structured one." CityTV had been bought by CHUM, a media giant, which wanted to see more return for its substantial investment. As a result CityTV had to regiment itself more and, inevitably, become less playful. "I wasn't really happy there and my options were: I could stay and go up the ladder, be a technical director and be unhappy, or I could leave."

Even so, his time at CityTV left Bentley with many fond memories. "When I left City the guys gave me a plaque with a lens on it and it says 'Light is Evil'. We were doing a show for MuchMusic and this director wanted us to do a complicated set-up. I said 'this will cost you a lot of money,' and he said 'Why?' So I said 'Light means cable. Cable means time and time means money' and someone yelled 'Cable is evil' and it turned into a joke."

Bentley left CityTV in 1988, returning to Ryerson for his teaching stint. In many ways, teaching is Bentley's second job. He has taught at Sony's professional workshops, and spent five weeks in Hong Kong helping to teach technicians at Wharf Pictures. He also worked with the Ontario Provincial Police, "because after a number of incidents they decided they needed to learn about public relations, how to present themselves on air and things like that." Bentley helped them to develop training videos, news conferences, television technique, and determine "how to tell someone a loved one had been killed."

Now, over ten years later, Bentley is an independent — and an established one at that. He and his two usual assistants, Phil Sutherland and Mike Bawcutt, are well established in the Toronto film and television community. Bentley has worked on several children's shows, including *Elliot the Moose is on the Loose*, and has also worked with Patrick Watson and WTN, the Women's Television Network.

Bentley approaches his work with a teacher's eye. There is "always more to learn ... sometimes

you teach by example, sometimes by direct instruction and sometimes you ask a question: 'What did you do right and what did you do wrong on what you just did?'"

Clearly, Bentley has the patience of Job as he continues to enjoy the teaching aspects of a business in which attention to detail is of paramount importance. "In 1995 we were up where they shoot *The Road To Avonlea* and there [were] these actors in a pond. The characters came from an institution, and they were supposed to be washed in this pond, and we were lighting the scene — 12,000 watts running on a ballast. Someone was adjusting it and one of the hot fell onto the ground by the pond ... and the ground was real wet..." Bentley has the healthy respect for complex equipment that all professionals have. Not only is he instrumental in creating the look of a production, he also helps to ensure that the equipment is used safely.

When he is not working, Bentley lives in the beaches area of Toronto with his wife of 17 years, Catherine Leblanc — Miller, who also acts as his assistant, accountant and person — Friday. They have three children, Jessica, Desmond and Evan, all of whom Bentley encourages to take an interest in his own personal hobby: photography. "I like vivid colour," which is only a small surprise given his career, "Reds, magentas, fuchsias ... you know." Bentley's football days are behind him but he has taken up rollerblading and gets out and about as much as possible.

Working now as the Director of Photography for *Noddy*, Bentley Miller comes across as a patient perfectionist. He works efficiently and feels strongly about those who try to rush, ending up botching the job. "The greatest problem in any business is that people will rush ahead, thinking they're saving time. It's funny, so many times there is enough time to do something twice, but not enough time to do it right the first time."

Ed Stewart is a Toronto-based freelance writer.