

Down East Films presents

Islander

A Film by Ian McCrudden



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Synopsis in Brief

Eben has lived on a small island off the coast of Maine for his entire life, part of a close-knit community whose lives revolve around lobster fishing. **When mainland lobstermen brazenly stray into waters reserved for Islanders, threatening their already tenuous livelihood, Eben loses his temper.** Dire consequences result and the fisherman is forced to leave the island. Ian McCrudden's emotionally charged feature follows Eben upon his return home five years later. The community that Eben left has changed, and he is no longer wanted there; his presence opens old wounds that most would prefer to forget. But Eben is ill equipped and unwilling to start again somewhere else, and patiently begins trying to reestablish a claim to the only life he has ever known.

Synopsis in Detail

On a small fishing island off the coast of Maine, families have lived and worked off the sea for generations. Everyone knows each other. Birthright is akin to law and men inherit their fishing territories. Eben Cole, like the other fishermen, continues his family's legacy of harvesting lobsters from the waters surrounding the island. Every year, the lobstermen's catch gets smaller, thanks in no small part to the Mainlanders encroaching on the local claim. Tired of watching outsiders haul in his territory, Eben turns to enforcing territorial lines himself, angering some of the other fishermen including his own father. One morning Eben sets out to confront the mainlander who has been fishing in his territory. When he finds the fisherman and his sternman hauling traps, Eben fires a warning shot. This shot, aimed squarely at the buoy the boy was hoisting out of the water, is proof enough that Eben is serious. In a panic the fisherman hits the throttle on the boat, not realizing the boy's foot is ensnared in a rope trailing overboard. The teen is thrown into the icy waters of the Atlantic, vanishing immediately. Shock descends over Eben's face as the full scope of his actions settles in. He sinks down in the stern of his boat, leaving himself adrift until the coast guard arrives to take him into custody.

After serving five years on a manslaughter plea, Eben returns to the island a felon and a pariah. His homecoming is bleak: his now ex-wife Cheryl has moved in with Eben's rival and refuses to let him see his daughter Sara; his estranged father died while Eben was in prison; and, seeing him as a harbinger of bad luck, no fisherman wants Eben anywhere near his boat. From the whispers and turned backs, it is clear no one is ready to forget the

past. Humbled, he is determined more than ever to rebuild his life on the island, mend his relationships and win back the respect of his daughter.

Eben takes a job at the local dump, the only place willing to hire an ex-con, but still dreams of getting back out on the water. He slowly regains his footing in his changed community. Emily, the local doctor he meets after landing in the clinic with a nasty injury, is the first person to look beyond his past and see him for the man he has become. Popper, an old fisherman from his father's generation, hires Eben to work as the sternman on his lobster boat, an opportunity no other fisherman would consider. This old islander is weathered and gruff but kindhearted; he shows Eben the support and affection he never received from his own dad. Though Sara, Eben's now school aged daughter, is hesitant to reconnect with her father, ultimately her instinct to learn more about her dad is too powerful to resist.

Islander is a classic American story, portraying the gravitas in the everyday as one man learns to accept the consequences of his choices with grace. Eben discovers that self-respect is the hardest thing to earn and that in community he must find it. *Islander* is a authentic portrait of human weakness and human courage.

Director's Comments

“They say you can pick your friends, but not your relatives. On an island we’re all related. Whether we like to think so or not.” That was the first line I wrote for the *Islander* script. When Tom Hildreth first brought me to Vinalhaven, Maine, the location for the film, I was instantly attracted to the idea of a man rebuilding his life on this island. There are forces at work here that are unique, a lot of which stem from the insular, tight-knit community. Because everyone knows each other, islanders have a tough time experiencing outside forces. But their lives are intertwined, and one personal act can impact the whole population. The character I was writing in the script is an independent bull headed person. Eben Cole is a rational guy and a good person but his let-me-do-what-I-want attitude also alienates people. He’s very rigid, controlling and territorial—in a sense, he is an island too. Those are the qualities that ultimately force him to leave, returning five years later as an outsider himself. It is a different place than when he left but Eben has to find out the island means enough to him to stay. I like to say *Islander* is about a man coming to find some grace in his own life.

Authenticity was extremely important to me as well. We wanted to make a film that captures the true spirit of one of these fishing communities without condescension or pretension. It was extremely important to cast the film carefully and, moreover, to work respectfully in the community. We cast a lot of real people and it’s fantastic to see people who have never acted before sharing the screen with a great character actor like Philip Baker Hall. In my mind, it’s one of the elements that make the film work.

--Ian McCrudden

March 2006

Production History

Choosing the rugged Maine coast as the location for *Islander* was in no way incidental. Writer/actor Thomas Hildreth has deep roots in the state: he grew up in Maine, often spending summers on the island of Vinalhaven (the primary location for the film), his grandfather, Horace Hildreth, was governor from 1944 to 1948, and much of his extended family still lives there. For Thomas, Maine is home, a sentiment that infuses the film with a very personal touch. “Maine is rich in character—very distinctive, very rugged, moody and old world. I always knew this island, where men once made their living digging granite out of the ground, would be a compelling and beautiful backdrop for a drama.”

Thomas first worked with director Ian McCrudden six years ago on the play *Mr. Smith Gets a Hustler* in New York. Ian directed the film version a year later and kept Thomas in the small but pivotal role of the killer. Ian immediately sensed the strength of Thomas’s acting range and, shortly thereafter, they began to brainstorm on additional collaborative projects. “Thomas suggested we set a film on this island he used to visit in his youth,” Ian said. “He took me up there to scout the location and I was immediately struck by the beauty of the island.” Vinalhaven is one of hundreds of small islands off the coast of Maine but one of the few remaining, self contained fishing communities. The location fit easily into an idea Ian had been mulling over in his head. “My uncle and brother were commercial fisherman in Alaska. I always wanted to write about that lifestyle because it’s so unique and this island was the perfect platform to do that,” Ian said.

The initial plot idea stemmed from a real incident that occurred many years before. Having served his time in a state prison on the Mainland, a local man returned to the island upon his release. He found rejoining life in this tiny community difficult. Thomas recalled the poignancy of this man’s journey as being instrumental in developing *Islander*. “To me it was very powerful that the guy came back to this small island and was forced to confront society in a fundamental way. He could have gone anywhere on the mainland, but he came home, to this island.” Ian and Thomas used elements of this

story to craft a compelling narrative of redemption. “Eben’s journey leads him to accept the consequences of his actions” says Thomas. “ Though he returns to ‘get his life back’ , he is humbled in the process. “Ultimately, self- acceptance and grace is his reward”. “Eben’s change is reflected by the community”, says Ian, “ for me that’s what life is about, not carving your name in the world.”

Ian and Thomas set out to write a screenplay that Ian would direct, and Thomas would play the lead in. They were determined to accurately capture island life and the mystique of fishing culture. “Because of my uncle and brother,” Ian said, “I already had a deep respect for the occupation. It’s hard work but respectable in a proud, simple-life sort of way.” Ian and Thomas actively sought out input from the community to ensure the characters, fishing jargon and localisms were as believable as possible. “The typical Hollywood depiction of New Englanders is very quaint, over simplified and often condescending.” Coming from Maine, it was imperative to Thomas to write the characters with the folksy wit and humor customary of the people. But when it came time to shoot the accident scene, local customs superseded the production: No fisherman would allow a man or dummy to be thrown off his boat. “Fishermen are superstitious about accidents at sea. We couldn’t even stage a fake accident on one of the boats because it is seen as bad luck,” commented Ian. In the end, the scene was shot with neither man nor mannequin tossed into the water.

Forrest Murray produced Ian’s two previous films *Mr. Smith Gets a Hustler* and *The Big Day*. “The first time I saw Thomas on the set of *Mr. Smith*, he reminded me of the great actor Sterling Hayden.” Forrest read the script and his response was unequivocal: “When I read *Islander* for the first time, I felt we could make it into a truly authentic and literate American independent film.” As a veteran producer, Forrest also gave the otherwise young crew a more experienced look. With pre-production underway, Ian, Thomas, Forrest and co-producer Melissa Davis scouted locations and began to visualize the cast.

In keeping with the authenticity of the film, casting the right actors for *Islander* was paramount. It was clear to Ian that the role of Eben was a natural fit for Thomas. “He’s a

great actor, he's from Maine, he's got the accent. He understood the character in every dimension," said Ian.

Thomas worked extensively with the Classical Theatre Lab, a Los Angeles group that attracts prominent actors to workshop Greek Classics and Shakespeare. It was here Thomas first met Philip Baker Hall while working on *The Iliad*. Knowing he was the perfect actor to play the craggy fisherman Popper, Thomas floated Philip a script. "A year later Philip called me and said, 'I like this script you and Ian wrote. It's good. Call my agent and make the deal.' So I did."

Ron Canada and James Parks, fellow Lab members as well, loved the script and jumped on board. James, who plays Eben's sternman Pokey, was thrilled to join the cast. "Making a low budget film, rich in heart and honest intentions, is as good as it gets in this business. And to have the chance to play a character that is well written, was icing on the cake!" Ron Canada was a champion of *Islander* from the beginning. A busy character actor himself, he turned down lucrative work to fly cross-country for one day of shooting.

Judy Prescott, the doctor and Eben's love interest in the film, worked two seasons with Thomas at the Williamstown Theatre Festival. She charmed Ian from the beginning: "I fell in love with her curls!" A Maine native herself, Judy was the dialogue coach throughout the film. "She is such an unpretentious and generous actress. We were so lucky to have her," remembers Ian. For Thomas, it was a rare gift to be reunited with Philip, Ron, James and Judy—a group of actors he admired so deeply. "You gain a unique trust and confidence when you share the stage with other actors and develop a performance history with them."

Finding the right actress for Cheryl Cole was a bit more difficult. Though she was one of Ian's favorite characters, many actresses were unsure about playing an unlikable woman. Amy Jo Johnson turned out to be a terrific fit. She grew up on Cape Cod and was all too familiar with the "towny" epithet. She also happened to be the daughter of Portuguese fishermen. Perhaps most importantly, Amy Jo was never afraid of playing a difficult role. "I don't view my character as unlikable, if anything I see her as strong and persevering. She did what she had to do for the benefit of her daughter." Ian was inspired

by Amy Jo's performance. "She is definitely a gutsy actress. She took on this tough character and gave her the depth that other actresses might have overlooked. Her performance is every bit what I could have hoped for."

To make the film as convincing as possible, some of the actors and several extras were actually local residents. Both Emma Ford and Zach Batchelder, the actors who play Sara and Wyatt, are Maine kids who the casting director discovered. At that point, neither had had any acting experience. "Ian has a real charm and a knack for coaxing good performances from non actors. It was fun to watch." Thomas said.

Cast and Crew Biographies

Thomas Hildreth, *Eben Cole*/Writer/Producer

Thomas played the one of the lead roles in the stage and film versions of Ian McCrudden's *Mr. Smith Gets A Hustler* starring Larry Pine in the title role. He also played principal roles in the films *Pawn To A King* starring Ron Canada and *Here Dies Another Day* starring John Randolph.

He has performed extensively with both The Williamstown Theatre Festival and the Berkshire Theatre Festival working with notable actors such as Paul Giamatti and Patricia Clarkson. With WTF, Thomas appeared in the world premieres of Arthur Miller's "American Clock" directed by Austin Pendleton, John Guare's *Moon over Miami* by Nikos Psacharopoulos, *Widows* by Ariel Dorfman, *The Devil's Disciple* starring Richard Thomas and directed by Stan Wodjewodski and played Hamlet opposite Peri Gilpin. Thomas appeared in the New York revival of Jean Paul Sartre's *The Respectful Prostitute* and, as a member of the Classical Theatre Lab in Los Angeles, performed in *Joan of Arc* directed by Ron Maxwell, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Ideal Husband*, *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and Michael Weller's *Split* directed by Ron Canada, and *The Iliad* starring Philip Baker Hall.

His television appearances include "Numbers," "24," "First Mondays," "Dharma & Greg" and several daytime dramas.

Amy Jo Johnson, *Cheryl* (Eben's Wife)

Amy Jo Johnson is well known to television audiences for her roles as a champion jockey in ABC Family's "Wildfire," a rookie cop in the Lifetime drama series "The Division," and, previously, for her role as a series regular on the hit WB show "Felicity." Other television appearances include the Hallmark Channel movie *Hard Ground*, with Burt Reynolds and Bruce Dern, and guest starring roles on "Spin City," "ER," and the upcoming ABC series "What About Brian." Her latest project is co-producing *In Memory*

of my Father, a dark independent comedy starring Jeremy Sisto, Judy Greer, and Monet Mazur.

Equally passionate about music as she is about film, Amy Jo recently released her first full length CD, "The Trans-American Treatment." The CD is available on her official music website www.amyjojohanson.com .

Amy Jo's also loves to work with children. In addition to participating as a tutor for refugee kids through the International Rescue Committee's summer program in the Bronx, she has made frequent trips to Bosnia as a volunteer with the Global Children's Organization.

Philip Baker Hall, *Popper (The Old Fisherman)*

Hall began his career in the theatre, appearing in many Broadway, Off-Broadway and regional productions. Since then he has worked extensively in Hollywood with some of the biggest names in the business including Ridley Scott, Michael Mann, Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson.

Hall received critical acclaim for his starring role in Paul Thomas Anderson's debut feature *Hard Eight*, culminating in a IFP Spirit Award nomination for Best Actor. He then appeared in Anderson's next two films, the Oscar nominated *Boogie Nights* and *Magnolia*. Recently, Hall co-starred in the hit comedy *Bruce Almighty*, with Jim Carrey, Lars von Trier's *Dogville*, with Nicole Kidman, the Weitz Bros' *In Good Company* opposite Dennis Quaid and Topher Grace, *The Matador* with Pierce Brosnan and Disney's remake of the *Shaggy Dog* with Tim Allen and Robert Downey, Jr.

Hall currently stars in the Fox comedy "The Loop" and is also known to television audiences for recurring roles on David E. Kelley's "The Practice" and "Boston Legal". He has guest starred on such series as "Seinfeld," where he played Mr. Bookman, the library cop; "3rd Rock from the Sun," "West Wing" and "Curb Your Enthusiasm" among others.

He was also seen in the NBC miniseries *Witness to the Mob*, produced by Robert De Niro.

Ron Canada, *T. Hardy* (Eben's Defense Attorney)

Ron's numerous film credits include the box office smash *Wedding Crashers* and the critically acclaimed *Cinderella Man*. He recently appeared in the films *National Treasure*, *The Human Stain*, *The United States of Leland*, and *The Hunted*. Canada received the Dallas Film Critics Award and significant national attention for his performance as Otis Payne in director John Sayles' acclaimed feature film *Lone Star*. Other memorable films include *The American President*, *Man of the House*, *Home Alone 2*, *Honey I Blew Up the Kids*, *Adventures in Babysitting*, and *Last of the Finest*.

On television, Ron has guest starred on more than 50 programs. He currently recurs on four series: *Boston Legal*, *The West Wing*, *The Shield* and *One on One*.

Ron began his professional acting career at Washington D.C.'s Arena Stage after achieving acclaim and an Emmy Award in the broadcast news world. On stage, Ron starred as Iago opposite Patrick Stewart's Othello in an acclaimed production of the play at the National Shakespeare Theater of Washington, DC. Ron won a Dramalogue Award for Outstanding Performance for his work in *The Boys Next Door*. He has starred in the Los Angeles productions of *Macbeth*, *Miss Julie* and Romulus Linney's *Love Suicide at the Schofield Barracks*. Other favorite roles include the title role in *Sizwe Banze is Dead* (San Jose Repertory), *I'm Not Rappaport* (Cincinnati Playhouse) and every Shakespearean role he has ever performed.

Larry Pine, *Old Man Cole* (Eben's Father)

Larry is an accomplished film, television and theater actor. He appeared in the Woody Allen films *Melinda and Melinda*, *Celebrity* and *Small Time Crooks*, Tim Robbins's *Dead Man Walking* and Wes Anderson's *The Royal Tenenbaums*. Other recent credits include *Empire Falls*, *Door in the Floor*, *Particles of Truth*, *Maid in Manhattan*, *A Foreign Affair*, and *The Shipping News*.

On Broadway, Larry starred as Roy Cohn in Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* as well as appeared in *The Seagull*, *End of the World*, and *Bus Stop*. He starred in the Off-Broadway productions of *Saved or Destroyed*, *Uncle Vanya*, *The Disputation*, *Aunt Dan and Lemon*, *The Mandrake*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Talk Radio*. Larry's Los Angeles theater credits include *Enemy of the People*, *Wrong Mountain*, *Light Up The Sky*, *Heartbreak House*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Night of the Iguana*, *A Life in the Theatre*, *Joe Egg*, *Henry V* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Larry's has appeared in recurring roles on the television series "Gilmore Girls," and "Oz," and guest starred on "Law & Order," "Law & Order: Criminal Intent," "The Webster Report," "The Street", the movie of the week "A Will of Their Own", "New York Undercover," "Prince Street," "Feds", "All My Children", "One Life to Live" and much, much more.

Mark Kiely, *Jimmy* (Eben's Adversary)

Mark has appeared in such notable films as *Bruce Almighty* with Jim Carrey, *Gods & Monsters* with Brendan Frazier and Ian McKellen, *The Edge* with Anthony Hopkins and Alec Baldwin. Mark has appeared in numerous television series and movie of the weeks but is probably best known for his role as Gil Myers on the hit show "Beverly Hills 90210." He continued to work with all the major networks and many of the leading producers, writers and directors, in television for more than a decade.

Mark's next projects include the title role in *Johnny Virus*, a film written and directed by W.W. Vought, *American Black Beauty* and *Xenophobia*.

Currently Mark is a bi-coastal actor living with his loving wife Ellen and their three boys on the east coast.

Judy Prescott, *Emily* (The Doctor)

Judy's television credits include guest starring roles on such series as "Cold Case," "Six Feet Under," "King of Queens," "The Bernie Mac Show," "Judging Amy," "Chicago Hope," "Roseanne," "Murphy Brown" and "Fresh Prince of Bel-Air." She was a series regular the television adaptation of "Working Girl," and appeared in the movie of the week films *The Case of the Hillside Stranglers* and *Murder 101*.

Judy Prescott also starred in *Hit and Runaway* which took the best screenplay prize at the 1999 Los Angeles Film Festival. Other feature film work includes *Say Anything*, *Ladies Room L.A.*, *Dragonfly*, *Bug*, and the upcoming HBO comedy *My Buddy Bill*.

James Parks, Pokey (Eben's sternman)

James has been a working actor for eighteen years. Quentin Tarantino is a fan of James's work, casting him in alongside his real-life father actor Michael Parks as Earl and Edgar McGraw *Kill Bill, Volume I*, with plans to reprise the roles in a production this summer. He also appeared in *The Listening*, *Daltry Calhoun*, and *House of the Dead 2*.

His recent television credits include numerous guest starring roles on hit shows such as Fox's "Bones," CBS's "CSI" and "Numbers," and HBO's "Deadwood."

James worked regularly in theater, previously appearing with Thomas Hildreth in the Classical Theater Lab's production of *The Tempest* in Los Angeles.

Ian McCrudden, Writer/Director

Ian got his start at Stanford University, where he received the Golden Medal for writing and directing. His production of "Night Baseball" won the National College Theater Festival, and Stanford University Press published his thesis on Samuel Beckett. Ian has directed several films including most recently: *Indestructible: The Life and Times of Anita O'Day*; *Trespassers*, a surf-horror film; *The Big Day* starring Julianna Margulies, Ivan Sergei, and Dixie Carter; *Mr. Smith Gets a Hustler* (which he first developed as a play at the New York Performance Works), and *Trailer – The Movie*. He has directed numerous original plays in the US and abroad and is the author the screenplay *Cowboys*

and Indians, and the play *Man of the House*.

Forrest Murray, Producer

Forrest has been making movies for forty years, the last twenty as a producer. He produced the award winning indie films *Five Corners*, *Bob Roberts*, *Dead Man Out* (HBO), Denis Leary's *No Cure for Cancer* (Showtime) and *The Spitfire Grill*.

Forrest has produced five primetime specials for BNC and written, directed and produced two election spots for MoveOn.gorg. Forrest has been a career long supporter and Mentor in the world of independent filmmaking. He has been a longtime faculty member at the American Film Institute and at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Melissa Davis, Co-Producer

Melissa Davis is the founder of élan entertainment, an independent production company. She is developing future projects with Ian McCrudden and is currently producing *Indestructible: The Life and Times of Anita O'Day*. She also co-produced the surf-horror film *Trespassers* which was released in 2006 by Image Entertainment.

Melissa received an MFA in Motion Picture and Television Producing from the University of Southern California's Peter Stark Producing Program and received her Bachelor's degree from the University of Michigan.

Dan Coplan, Director of Photography

Dan Coplan is a Los Angeles based director of photography, Steadicam operator, and digital imaging technician. He started his career in entertainment with visual effects and editing, spending a brief period with George Lucas's company Industrial Lights & Magic. However, the lack of sun and human interaction motivated him to seek a different creative field. On a whim, Dan bought a miniDV camera and started shooting projects for free to gain experience and material for his reel.

One small break led to another as Dan moved from volunteer work to earning a living. Seeking a wider variety of productions with larger budgets, Dan begrudgingly left his

great friends and apartment (with parking!) in San Francisco, packed his bags, and moved to LA to make the most of his career. Since then, Dan has worked on numerous projects for a wide variety of clients and is a member of several associations including the International Cinematographers Guild, Society of Camera Operators, Steadicam Operators Association, and Digital Cinema Society.

Billy Mallery, Composer

Billy Mallery started his career as a composer in New York, where he landed his first commercial score for Gallo Wine, performed by a 60 piece orchestra. He has since composed original scores for such accounts as Levis, Nike, Got Milk?, BMW, Sony and Pepsi, for which he received a CLIO Award for original music. Many years of scoring commercials has led him to work with such directors as David Fincher, Michael Bay, Mark Pellington, Joe Pytka and Zack Snyder. Billy has also composed numerous corporate logo scores including XBOX Sports (XSN), ROGUE Pictures (a division of FOCUS Features) and most recently, the new LIONSGATE logo released in front of the film *See No Evil*. His first dramatic film project was *Crossing Over*, written and directed by Wayne Kramer (*The Cooler*, *Running Scared*), followed by *Dos Corazones*, directed by the renowned acting coach Larry Moss. One of Billy's unique qualities as a composer is that he is also passionate about sound design, and frequently merges music with sound within his scores. Last year he was invited to speak at UCLA's Extension Program focusing on music and sound design for television and film.

Cast and Crew Credits

Thomas Hildreth ----- Eben Cole
Amy Jo Johnson ----- Cheryl Cole
Philip Baker Hall ----- Popper
Ron Canada ----- T. Hardy
Larry Pine ----- Old Man Cole
Mark Kiely ----- Jimmy
James Parks ----- Pokey
Judy Prescott ----- Emily
Emma Ford ----- Sara Cole
Zach Batchelder ----- Wyatt
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Ian McCrudden ----- Director
Ian McCrudden & Thomas Hildreth ----- Writers
Thomas Hildreth ----- Producer
Forrest Murray ----- Producer
Melissa Davis ----- Co-Producer
Dan Coplan ----- Director of Photography
Marc Jozefowicz. ----- Editor
Daniel Boxer ----- Production Designer
Billy Mallery ----- Music

Islander was shot on Sony Varicam and edited with Final Cut Pro.