



***Brokeback's* Basque, David Trimble,  
at his home in Calgary.**

Rare is the *Brokeback Mountain* fan who doesn't have a special fondness for the endearing character of the Basque, portrayed in the film by Calgary actor David Trimble.

Trimble, who had the opportunity to work closely with Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, and Ang Lee, graciously agreed to share his observations with Lauren Gurney and Jim Bond.

## **Interview with David Trimble, *Brokeback Mountain's* Basque**

July 22, 2007

The atmosphere was so relaxed at David's house, where this interview was done, that the lines became blurred between introductions, playing with his dog, and starting the interview. It wasn't until we got back to the United States that we realized we had forgotten to record some preliminary information. David told us later that he is a Calgary native and that he got his start in acting at the age of eight, thanks to his mother's encouragement.

**It was scripted for the Basque to drive Jack and Ennis to the drop-off, but we don't see that in the movie. Is that a scene that was ever shot?**

Oh, yeah. I drove them out to the mountain and we had all this dialogue and we talked. It was kind of an interesting scene because it was cramped—two big boys and this little Basque, driving this old truck.

And then I picked them up at the end, after they had fallen in love out on the mountain. I picked them up and I drove them back, and that scene was really interesting. I had five or six questions for them and got not one answer. It was just super sort of awkward and quiet, and it was completely edited and turned around to be different, for whatever reason.



The Basque drives the boys towards Brokeback Mountain.  
(Deleted Scene)

### **Do you remember where it was shot?**

Yeah, we went to Carseland to shoot it, and I drove the truck myself, which was an adventure in its own right. Number one, I'm a little guy and just to reach the pedals and pop the clutch on this big old—I think it was like a 3-speed or 4-speed—and it was on a gravel road.

And Ang said, “We want you to go around the corner faster,” and it was almost like I was my own stunt driver. And then they wanted me to stop, of course, right on the mark, so that was sort of a challenge, but we managed to do it in about six or seven takes.

And it was kind of neat in terms of my character’s development because now, as you know, the Basque just kind of pops out of nowhere. It’s kind of like, “Wow! Where’s this from?”

There’s no historical context or continuity, anything that explains why there’s just all of a sudden this Spanish guy in the middle of nowhere, where historically it was true that a lot of the Basques worked in the area because they actually fled—I wouldn’t necessarily say they were refugees, but they got out of the country because of all the troubles that were going on there—the fighting between the Basque and the Spanish, and the Basque and the French. Because they considered themselves kind of an independent country. They’ve got their own flag, and this rickety fence that goes all the way around what they consider their area, their country.<sup>1</sup>

### **Do you remember any of the dialogue that took place when you were in the truck?**

Yeah, let’s see if I can remember. The dialogue driving out was something like—Joe was the boss, so it was talking about the boss—something like, “Whatever you do, don’t piss Joe off because you wouldn’t like him when he’s mad.” That was driving them out.

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<sup>1</sup> For more about Basques in America, see [www.cowboyshowcase.com/basque.htm](http://www.cowboyshowcase.com/basque.htm)

And then driving home, picking them up and driving them back, the questions were “So, did you have enough to eat?” Nothing. “You seem awfully quiet.” Nothing. “Alright then, fine. I can tell you don’t want to talk” and I just kept driving.

You know, when I think about why they may have cut it, maybe the sound didn’t work, or for numerous reasons they already changed the story, or they wanted to simplify it, which I understand.

But a huge rainstorm came in just as we were hooking up the trailer for the shot, the final of me picking them up when I was driving them back—a huge rainstorm. So the sound was very difficult and we only got in about two takes—that was it—and we wound up running for cover.

### **The truck was on a trailer at this point?**

Yeah, it was on a trailer. They were towing the truck; I didn’t have to drive.

### **That’s really interesting because none of the scripts that we have include that scene after the mountain.**

You know, I could go down and dig up the script I have and see if the scene is in there. I’ll hang onto that script forever.

What’s interesting is, in the script that I’ve got, they added lines and the part with me picking them up. When they called me up they said they definitely wanted me for three days, maybe as many as eight, but they booked me for five days. But there were scenes that were given to me on the spot. I think the writer [Diana Ossana] was writing as she went along. She was there deciding what worked and what didn’t.

### **Who actually contacted you about the part?**

My agent. Yeah, my agent. She gave me a ring and said “Here’s your auditions” and I read the script and I just knew immediately that I wanted it; I had to have it. I have Spanish blood but it’s not very often I get to play a Spanish role.

I grew a handlebar [moustache] and started to tan, and then went to the audition completely in character. And I went for two callbacks and my second callback was with Ang Lee, and it was really interesting. It was in the Pallister Hotel where he did the final callbacks.

And I was super focused and really wanting to stay in character, even as I was waiting to go in, so when I went in I was still that character.

And I did it, and remained in character. Got in there and remained in character. Cracked him up. Ang was laughing his head off and the producers were laughing their heads off. And Ang looked at me and he said [speaking slowly] “Where are you from?” And I’m still in character so I’m like, “What do you mean?” And he said, “Where do you live?” And I

broke out of character and I said “Oh, I’m from Calgary.” And then I thought, “Oh no, what have I done?!” I thought I had completely blown it.

And what ensued was that a call came directly to my home, not to my agent, to my home, from New York at a random time, and they were really, really, really vehement about the fact that I had a Spanish background, and as it turns out I do. It was my mother’s grandma who came from Cadiz, Spain, and that’s all they needed to know. Because they really wanted to cast it authentic, and they really wanted me, which I felt honored about, of course, but they just had to make sure that there was some sort of Spanish heritage or link.



A Bronzed Basque at the Sheep Staging Area  
Morley, Alberta

**[Holding up a photo] How much of this is tanning and how much is makeup?**

That’s tanning. That’s just tanning. They did not put a lot of makeup on that. They put some dirt and stuff, and some henna solution.

[David’s wife, Tanya, joins us.]

**What did they tell you about the role?**

They didn’t tell me much about the role.

A lot of it came from the script. A lot of it came from my own research about the Basques and the Basque influence in Wyoming during that time period.

I’m not a big wig. I don’t have a personal assistant. I have to figure it out on my own. And the more you do that, the more you can bring authenticity to whatever character you’re trying to play.

**Is that the way it usually is—someone gathers up all this information for you?**

I don't know. [Laughter] I've never been there. I just assume that they would have people who would say, "Here, read this. Read this. Read this," as opposed to me getting my library card and going to the library and trying to figure it out on my own. But I don't really know; it's a different level.

**Ang Lee directed you?**

It was Ang. Super, super particular. Super particular. At the Basque Bridge, we sat—for the right lighting—we sat for that for about an hour-and-a-half by the bridge. At one point Heath had his shirt off, his jacket off, and [pointing to screen cap] see that wire there? He was hanging and going hand over hand along the wire.

Ang kept looking through his finder and waiting and waiting and waiting, and people were making fun, and the great thing—Ang has a great sense of humor—so they were taking the piss out of him, and he was taking the piss back out of them. It was such a relaxed, amazing set because of him. It's trickle down, right? And Ang Lee, right at the top of that totem pole, being such a sweet man, affected everyone. Like for Heath to be able to take off his shirt and start monkeying around just shows you how relaxed it really was.

But then, as soon as the right light started to come, I remember Ang at one point looking up and he said, "Okay, ten minutes. We have ten minutes. Everyone be ready in ten minutes." We probably only have five, maybe ten minutes to get this shot in. So everybody, just like gangbusters, getting ready, getting set up to get this shot in, and he's like, "Okay, here it is, here it is. Ready? Ready? Go."



Ang Lee waited for the perfect light for his memorable Basque Bridge scene.  
Galatea Day Use Area Spray Valley Provincial Park Alberta

And we probably did four takes. Four takes was it, and then the light was done. That's it—we can't shoot anymore because the light's done. And then it was over. We waited an hour-and-a-half for five minutes of franticness.

Super particular cinematographer. It was interesting to see how he worked. I mean, you wish you could see what he sees. He sees something completely different. For him, he needed those clouds like that [pointing to picture], he needed the sun like that. He saw it in his head before he ever shot it, right? So that was neat.

**Have you gone back there at all?**

No, I haven't. I want to though. I couldn't drive there if I had to right now!

**It's a beautiful, beautiful place. And so close to the road.**

Yeah, it is. Better for them. Easier access for the cameras and whatnot.

**What instructions did you receive? Do you remember what Ang said to you?**

[Laughs] Yeah, for this particular scene, "It's too early in the summer to be sick of beans," he basically just said—he's real soft spoken, so in order for you to hear he just comes right up close, and he gives you his direction, and his direction was "You know you're funny." And he looked at me and I'm like, "Okay, yeah, I get that." So in other words, don't try to be funny, you know you're funny.

So that was his direction—"You know you're funny."

**What were your impressions of other people in the cast?**

Amazing. Yeah. I worked mostly with Heath and Jake. That's all I worked with; Heath, mostly. Massive auras, massive auras in terms of, well, they're brilliant, they're gorgeous. Let's just call it for what it is—they're gorgeous human beings. And that's part of what the aura is. And so, you've got to work with them, so you've got to get inside that aura. And once you get in you realize that they're just a couple of kids, having a good time, enjoying what they're doing, and fun. Just as interested in me as I was in them. Had some great conversations, had some great laughs, and yeah, they're just a couple of really good looking young guys. Super fun to work with and super relaxed.

And working with Ang, same thing...I've been on many film sets, and it was special.



Colleagues Rodrigo Prieto and Ang Lee

**Rodrigo Prieto – what were your impressions of him?**

The DOP [director of photography]? He came up to me my very first day on set and he said [random Spanish words], so I said “Hablo poquito España” [sic] and he said “Oh...okay,” but jokingly, you know? And he walked away.

He’s very professional and he runs a super tight ship. That’s my perception of him. I think he was hoping that here was someone—I might have had a better rapport with him. I think he was disappointed I couldn’t speak Spanish with him.

**What was it that he said to you?**

I have no idea what he said; I just made that up! My response to him was “I only speak a little Spanish.”

So that was that. Super professional. He runs a tight ship. And he expects you to work in a professional manner, and if you do you get on, and you do your job professionally, as best you can. You don’t want to get in the way. You don’t want to be that guy.

**Do you know any of the other people who were in the cast?**

Yeah, what’s interesting is a lot of the locals that I know about that were in the cast were edited out.

One of the ladies, she had a full day working with Heath and Jake. I think she said she was a bar manager or something like that, and then, at one of their meetings later, after the mountain, she hung out and talked with them as her character. She had a wonderful scene with them but she was cut right out of the movie.

But if you look at the credits, her name is Val Planche, she's in the credits at the end of the film, but she's not even in the movie. So, I know her.

I know Duvall Lang. Once again, he was only shown briefly but he is the announcer at the rodeo. He runs a theatre company in town here called Quest Theatre, and he's a local actor, actually lives right up the street there. Super nice guy, super nice guy.

Steve Gin, of course. I know Steve.

Tom Carey, he's the cowboy [rodeo clown] who Jake goes up to in the bar. I forget the comment he makes.



Tom Carey and Jake Gyllenhaal at the Electra Bar  
Calgary, Alberta

There are a lot of local actors who were in it. Another friend of mine, Jim Leighton, he was in it. That got cut right out. And you often wonder why—it didn't work, or they have to edit, which I understand. And you talk to some people and their theory is that when you come and shoot in Alberta there's a mandate to actors, which is the union [rules], that you have to hire a certain percentage of local actors who have to be part of the film up-front payroll, so they do this. But then when they start to edit, a lot of it gets cut right out. It happens quite a bit when these movies get to post-production. I tend not to believe in that because everything I've ever done, except for the odd edit here and there, has shown up, you know? It would be hard to say. But there were quite a few, quite a few that I know, and, like I said, two of them didn't even show up, and Du's [Duvall Lang's] face isn't shown, but his voice is there.

### **What was your reaction to the film overall?**

It's amazing. It was a great film.

We went with a group of about twenty people when we went to the theater to see it the first time—paid to get in—and I was sitting next to my oldest friend, Shane Miller. We tree-planted together and we were super close; as super close as two guys can be



without being gay. And it was our story. We both said “Yeah, that’s us.” We get it. We understand that connection.

When you’re working in the middle of the woods tree-planting it gets really primal, it’s all stripped away and then here you are. So we actually understood the primacy, the primal connection that these people felt for each other, and Shane and I love each other and that’s the way it is, right? The movie meant a lot to me.

It was a love story, plain and simple, and a tragic one at that, but the story is so simple. And to me that’s the best part of it.

It’s amazing what we can convey just through simplicity. We don’t need complex themes, or complex plot lines, or this and that. It’s a simple love story. Star-crossed lovers who for whatever reasons aren’t allowed to...It’s Romeo and Juliet, you know, but simpler. The Montagues and the Capulets.

I have a lot of friends of mine, homophobic friends of mine, who won’t go to see the movie because they know it’s a “gay cowboy movie.” They’re missing out on so much, living their lives in that fear, that fear that I don’t understand but I feel bad for them.

### **Has it changed your career?**

Yeah, I had a really good run after *Brokeback*. It was back to back to back to back. Every part I auditioned for, I got. But it’s tapered off right now. The film industry in Alberta right now has dropped, because the Canadian dollar is almost at par with the American dollar. There’s only one American film being shot here right now. I think even that summer there were five films being shot, with this film being the biggest one. Last summer there were fifteen films, movies of the week and feature films.

So I had a super good run there for awhile, a run that will continue once the industry picks up again...or we move.

Tanya: Your agent retired.

David: That’s a good point. That’s a really good point. I had a really good agent. She loved me. I wasn’t a number. With Susan I was a person, and that makes a huge difference. I was a person with her. She’d bend over backwards to get me auditions like this. She had an idea of what I was good for or what I wasn’t good for.

So yeah, we should move or change agents!

### **Where would you move to?**

Tanya: The beach. [Laughter]

David: We’ve talked about it quite often. It’s a dream—just to sell everything that we’ve worked so hard for, all of this, and move, and live on a beach and open a little bed and breakfast, have a simple life and just raise our child. We love the ocean. Maybe in Spain or Portugal. Yeah, really move. Go for a complete life change.

**I was going to suggest Maine, but I guess Portugal would beat that!**

Maine is beautiful, too.

Tanya and I were in Las Vegas—August of last year? We were staying at Caesars Palace and we were standing in a big, long taxi queue, and it was hot, hot as stink, and these sedans drove up and we started thinking that maybe we should just hop into one of those nice Lincoln Town Cars and have them take us. And there was this Hummer which was gold, this limo thing that pulled up, with gold hub caps and all, and it was like there was a spotlight on it. And the driver comes around and opens the door and Jake Gyllenhaal and Kirsten Dunst come running up to the Hummer, and we were standing there in the taxi queue again. It just put it all in perspective. Hopped in his Hummer, living the life.



Dave, Lauren, and Tanya

**It must have been a heady experience when it was on everybody's mind.**

It still is.

Tanya: His friends called him Dave "*Brokeback*" Trimble.

**What are you doing now?**

I'm in rehearsals for a play that I wrote. It's a one act. I'm also acting in it, reluctantly. I would like to have just seen it done. So that's this project, and it will sort of dovetail into what will be my theater season, which has already started. Another year—it pays the

bills. Live theater is my bread and butter. I really enjoy doing film when it's available. I really, really enjoy doing film if it's available.

I'd do film over that if I had a choice, but theater is something that I'm very good at, and something that pays the bills right now. So keep her going; life is too short. Do what you love.

[Signing screen caps of the Basque and Ennis at the bridge.]

I should write "Keep your hands off my ass."



**Write whatever you want, David, whatever you want. Ang Lee had it right. You are a funny guy!**