On August 4, 2008, *Brokeback Mountain* was honored by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences [A.M.P.A.S.] with a screening at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater, in Beverly Hills, California, as part of the fifth, and final, year of its series for Best Picture nominees, *Great To Be Nominated*. The series showcased the film from each Academy Awards® year between 1993 and 2007 that received the most nominations without winning the Oscar® for Best Picture.

Those in attendance were elated to see that Diana Ossana, who, with her writing partner, Larry McMurtry, won an Oscar in 2005 for *Writing - Adapted Screenplay*, was in attendance. Following the screening, Ms. Ossana spoke with us for over an hour. What follows is the text of that evening's discussion.

Discussion with Diana Ossana at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater, August 4, 2008

A.M.P.A.S. Photo

Diana Ossana and Randy Haberkamp at the Samuel Goldwyn Theater

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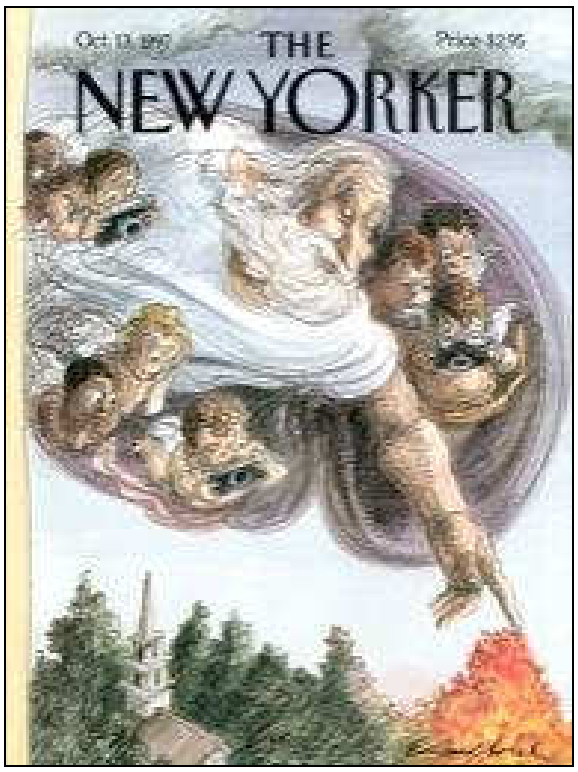
I'm interested in when you started the journey and reading the piece of material, and then what you reacted to in it, what really got you about it, and then maybe take us through what it means to you now. Is there any change? I know that's pretty heavy stuff, I'm just curious about a little bit of the journey that you've been through with this project.

I think probably most of you know that I read the short story in *The New Yorker* in 1997. I was staying in Texas at the time, at Larry's [McMurtry] big house, and a good friend of mine, one of my closest friends, was staying there with us, too. We had a couple of people there who were all writing together, and Mark [Poirier] gave me *The New Yorker*

and said, “There’s a story in here that I think you ought to read.” He didn’t tell me anything about it, and I laid it on my bedside table.

I have insomnia, I can’t sleep, it’s a chronic problem I’ve had since I was a child, so I picked up the story, read it, and, it’s funny, when I first started reading it I read the first column, and it was beautiful prose but it was a western and I had been writing westerns, working on westerns, for several years, and I said, “I don’t want to read this.” I put it down, but I was still pretty wound up and I said, “Oh fine, I’ll read it.” So I read it.



“There’s a story in here that I think you ought to read.”
The New Yorker October 13, 1997

Now mind you, in the collection *Close Range*, the collection that Annie ultimately put together with that story, there’s a prologue in that version that was not in *The New Yorker*, and that prologue gives you a little hint. What it sort of says is this old man is thinking about someone from his younger days, a man. But that was not in the story I read, so when I came upon the scene in the tent, when they make love, right away I thought, Oh my God, what’s going to happen to these young men? And I was racing through the story because I wanted to see what else happened.

If I recall the feelings that I had when I put the magazine down, in retrospect I think what it tapped into was my own, sort of, sadness. I mean, the way that you connect with characters or a story or a film is the way that it makes you feel, and you may not recognize right away what it is about it that touches you; the humanity in it touches you. And I think what it did for me was that it tapped into my own well of grief over lost loves, or what might have been, or could have been and never was, that kind of thing. But there was something else about it, and I can’t articulate it. You see it on the screen, and you feel it when you watch the film. There’s something about it that’s very powerful, and

urgent, almost, when you see it, and the feelings it gives you, you think, My God, other people need to see this, they need to feel this, they need to experience this, for whatever reason.

And I've learned so much in the last eleven years [of] my experience with this story, with this film, about people and about the human race. Somebody asked me—during the award season people would ask us occasionally—"Can you put this in one sentence?" "Can you describe this film in one sentence?" and I thought, That's impossible. But we often had to do it for the studio or for publicity, but as time's gone on I think my feeling about this film, [and] the one word that describes it better than anything, is "compassion." [With] this film, more than anything, I felt compassion for these men and for this story, and I just thought and felt things, and understood things, I think, just about human nature and people, that I didn't know before, just by reading the story. And all I could think about is that I wanted to get this thing out in the world somehow, and the widest way I could get it out would be a film.

So I was very anxious to get him [Larry] to join me in writing this movie, and he's so stubborn. Trying to get him to read this story was a challenge. You know, he didn't want to read it because he doesn't read short fiction, because he can't write it. He had all these excuses. I said, "Just humor me and read the thing." So he went upstairs and read it, and when he came downstairs he didn't say anything, which, for Larry, is a big deal. If he's dismissive about something right away he'll say, "I hate it, it was awful, never mind," but he didn't say anything so I was thinking, Yes, this has affected him.

"He didn't say anything, which, for Larry, is a big deal."
Larry McMurtry

I've known this man for 23 years now and it's really the first time, and the last time since, that he's agreed with me right away about something. I said, "Do you think we could write a script?" and he said "Sure" and I was thinking, My God, what happened?

So we wrote Annie a letter right then. We wrote her a little single page, like a fan letter. We just said, "We admired your story. Would you consider optioning it to us to write a

script?" And about a week later we got a letter back from her, and she said, "Well, I don't really see a movie here, but have at it." And so we did, and we wrote this script. And it was so much fun writing the script because when we got up in the morning we really looked forward to this because the material is so rich. And we finished the first draft and then sent it out into the world, and we began to get response immediately. Our agent sent it out, and within a couple of days Gus Van Sant flew to Texas to see us. He wanted to direct the film. And Scott Rudin came on board as a producer, and Columbia optioned it, and it just was a long, long road. I mean, the biggest obstacle was getting the Ennis character cast. We had actors who were willing to play Jack, but no one that would commit to Ennis.

Why do you think that is? What was the thing that was so difficult about this man?

Well, what Larry and I figured out was that the representatives for these actors, and there were several major, young film actors, but when push came to shove their representatives just dissuaded them from it. Because they would hang onto the script for three or four months, and they wanted to do it, wanted to do it, thought it was the most amazing script they'd ever read, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But when it came down to signing the contract they would just back away, so…that was what we figured.

So how did Ang Lee come to be associated with the project? How did it end up away from Columbia?

Oh, well, their option ran [out] and then somebody in Scott Rudin's office didn't calendar the option—and I'm sure they're buried in Mexico somewhere—the option ran, and Annie wouldn't renew the option to him because she didn't feel he was working hard enough. Annie would get discouraged, and Larry just kept saying to me, "Diana, don't worry." Larry doesn't worry about anything; he's not a worrier. He said, "It'll find its way."

I'm trying to remember now exactly. James Schamus was with Good Machine, and he read the script and they optioned it from us for about $5000, I think, and he sent it out to about four or five different directors. The only director who really expressed any interest was Joel Schumacher and, as it turns out, I think he pretty much just wanted to meet Larry, which he never got to do. Larry was disgusted with him because he didn't make any movement forward with it.

Shortly before Ang did *The Hulk* was right about when James' option was going to run, just a couple of weeks before the option was going to run, and I had seen *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* at the theater, so I called him up and I said, "James, why don't you show the script to Ang?" Well, before I even did that I had Larry see the film and he agreed, at least visually, because Annie was very concerned about this, as were Larry and I, that we would lose the landscape. We wanted the landscape, that great vastness of the West, and the intimate stories as well, and that's what *Crouching Tiger* was, the huge Mongolian plain and these intimate stories of repressed love. And, of course, I loved *The Ice Storm*, you know, which is Ang's film, too.

"We wanted the landscape."
Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, 2000

Anyway, so a couple of weeks later James called me back and he said, "Well, you know, Ang read the script and he really liked it, but we're going to do *The Hulk*." And I said "Okay…well…gee…" So that came and went.

Larry and I used to get letters and cards and messages from people who had read the script, just random people, actors and agents, and they'd say, "Oh my God, it was an amazing script" and I would respond and say, "Okay, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to do anything about it?" And they'd say, "Well, uh…" and we'd say, "Fine, yeah, we know it's good, so never mind." I just had to be relentless about it, and I couldn't not think about it because we believed in it so strongly. I did, too. I just thought it was an amazing story…powerful….

You talked about Annie before, being worried. Were you concerned about her reaction? Were you getting feedback from her?

No. Larry and I finished our first draft, finally, after about three or four months, and then we sent Annie a copy to read, as a courtesy. We wanted to know what she thought, but we weren't afraid or anything. And Annie called, and I talked to her on the phone for a couple of hours. We went through the script, and there were just a couple of things, like a word here or there that she thought the character might say this in Wyoming instead of this word. We did that, and then we had some discussions about the scene where Ennis goes into the gangway [alley] after he and Jack part on Brokeback. In the script I say something about his "stinging tears," and she said Ennis wouldn't cry, and I said, "Well, you know, Annie…" and I started to explain to her why I thought he might. I said, "He's 19, he's young, he has these feelings that he doesn't know where the hell they've come from or what they mean; he thinks he might have had a bad meal. But he's just full of this emotion, so I think it would seem appropriate if it happens, if the actor does it or he doesn't, but you know, I'm very concerned that he doesn't cry a lot in the film because when we see him at the end it needs to have an impact."

"Well, you know, Annie…"
Annie Proulx

Oh, and the other thing she said—this is funny—is in the last scene when Ennis takes that bottle of wine out of the refrigerator in the trailer. She said, "Oh, whiskey-drinking Ennis wouldn't have wine" and I said, "Oh, that's just a bottle that Cassie left there two years ago" and she said, "Oh, that's great, I love that!"

So, you've lived with these characters?

Oh my God, have I!

Talk about the first draft of the script, and then what we see on the screen. How much of a change did you go through? Did you go through rewrites or is it pretty much as you originally conceived it? What were some of the things that were brought to it in the development stage?

Well, the script really didn't change very much at all through the years it went through Gus, and James, and company. When Ang got it we had some discussions right away about it. Ang seemed very concerned about the scene where Alma sees them kiss. He felt it was too much, and that the audience would be so shocked by this that there would be sort of a sag afterwards that they wouldn't recover from. Larry and I were a little

baffled by that. I mean, we understood the concept he was talking about, but we didn't understand why he felt this. So I asked him, "What do you think about the sex scene?" and he said, "Oh, that doesn't bother me, but when we first see them kiss, it's not such a good idea."

So, it took me about three weeks. I wrote this letter explaining all the reasons why she had to see them kiss, and I was very nervous about this, because, my God, that's a pivotal scene in the film; so much hinges on that. And one of the things that struck me about the story, right away, the first time I read it, was that I kept imagining in my head, What are the wives thinking? What are these two children…? What are these two men…? Their relationship did not happen in a vacuum, you know, there's a big picture here that is interesting, and I'm curious about it, and how they're affected by it, and how the people around them are affected by it, what this means in the world, you know? So I wrote him a letter and I just explained all the reasons why, and he read the letter, and called me, and said, "Okay." And I'd written him…we'd made a couple of changes in the script, so I did two different versions of the script, I have them on my computer, one that says "sees kiss" and one that says "doesn't see kiss" and he didn't even look at those. He just read the letter and he said fine. So, that was a relief.

I think a couple of major changes—well, what we felt were major—the scene where, after they see each other again, after four years, and Ennis and Jack leave to go camping, you know, the dialogue that takes place at their little campground there, around the fire. Annie had placed it in the motel room, we had it there, and Ang wanted to separate it out and, I think, put it in a more pastoral setting; we're not certain. Larry and I just assumed because it was kind of a western, and he wanted it more pastoral, so we made that change; we shifted that to the outside.

"Ang wanted to separate it out and, I think, put it in a more pastoral setting."

We added the scene where Ennis comes back and gets his things together and Alma's there, because that was not in our original script. I think we felt that might almost be too cruel, but we put it in, and I think that's pretty much it for changes.

Let's talk about when you finally get the whole thing together, and you're going to Canada and Larry's staying home, and there you are with the troupe up in Canada, and you've got this cast. Talk about what the production process was like, and also your sense of seeing the word come to life, basically.

That's really hard to put in a nutshell. Maybe we can get more specific questions from people out there.

Talk about the casting process first.

Well, we went through lists of girls for the Anne Hathaway and Michelle Williams parts. We had lists of women, and we all had our pick. So, when the list for Alma came around and I saw Michelle Williams on it, I thought that was a great choice, because I'd seen her in *Dawson's Creek,* and I wondered, What the hell is this girl doing on this show? She's so good and she's head and shoulders above the other actors on here. She just didn't fit. So I just felt we were very lucky to have her. And Ang had never seen *Dawson's Creek*, he'd never seen her in anything. She just came and auditioned, the same as Annie Hathaway. He didn't know what she'd done before, and he just chose those two girls based on what he saw when he met them.

"I'd seen her in Dawson's Creek*."*
Michelle Williams, age 17

Joaquin Phoenix had actually expressed interest for a long time in playing Jack, and he came in, and I think he was choosing between *Walk the Line* and this. I think he got the part for *Walk the Line* before Ang made his decision, and we had Jake. But Larry and I

had wanted Heath for several years. My daughter, in fact, brought him up to me, I think that was about in the year 2000, and she said, “Mom, you really ought to look at his work,” so we had a little festival of his movies. I thought that he was a very interesting looking actor, and I loved the fact that he was Australian because I thought it might bring a different sort of, you know, not having an American actor would bring more of an outsider’s point of view to this. Plus, there was something behind his eyes, there was something very intelligent. He seemed like a really fine actor in some not-so-fine movies…you know how you see that sometimes. And then *Monster’s Ball* came out and I said, “Okay, now I’ve got to show this to Larry.” So I made him sit down and watch the movie. He sat there and he watched it until the young man kills himself, and he sat there for a few more minutes and again he didn’t say anything, and then he said, “I don’t want to watch anymore, just turn it off.” So I turned off the movie, and he just stood up and he looked at me and he said to me, “That young man’s Ennis” and he walked off. So I thought, Well, okay, now I’ve got Larry.

“That young man’s Ennis.”
Heath Ledger in *Monster’s Ball,* 2001

Then my friend Michael Costigan called me out of the blue, and he said that he had just randomly read the script. He said that it sat on his desk for three months. “It was called a gay cowboy movie and I thought it was a joke, but I didn’t have anything else to do last night so I sat and read the script, and it broke me in half. And then my fiancé read it, and she was devastated. You have to make this movie.” And I said, “Sure, I know that.” And he said, “What can I do to help?” And I said, “Well, if you want to come on board great, but there’s no money, I’m just telling you that, there’s no money to be had, yet, and maybe someday there will be, but you’ve got to commit to this.”

"You have to make this movie."
Michael Costigan and Diana Ossana Campsite 2 Summer 2004

So we set out to do this together and sent it to various people, I think Edward Norton as the director. A lot of people looked at it and really loved it, but again, they just backed away from it. And then, like I said, *The Hulk* just sort of came and went, and at that point Schamus had formed Focus Features and was now the head of the studio, and Michael and I got on the phone, and I said, "Michael" and he said, "Well, I can talk to John Lyons over there. What do you think? Should we send the script back there?" And I said, "Yeah, let's just send it over there again and see what happens." I mean, *The Hulk*? I can't even imagine Ang being happy doing that movie, but I don't know. It just didn't seem like his kind of movie. Although, I thought the visuals on it were really interesting. But anyway, we sent it over there, and within three weeks we were making a deal. So, that's how Ang came on board.

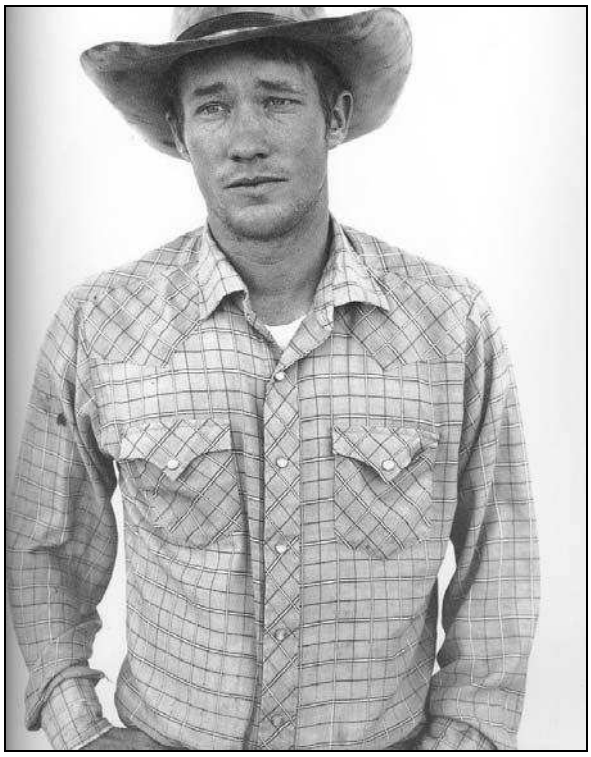
"So, that's how Ang came on board."
Ang Lee Campsite 2 Summer 2004

Judy [Becker] was supposed to be here to talk about production design.

Oh yeah, Judy; she's great. We just love her. She's such a character, and she's so spot-on about things. She grew up in New York, but she's so instinctive. We took Ang and Judy to Texas and showed them around over there where Larry grew up, showed them the ranch house where he grew up, just kind of so they could absorb things, showed them pictures of Larry's family. Larry's father and his eight uncles were all ranchers, and Larry was a cowboy, too, until he was 22, when he became a writer. So they just absorbed that, and Judy especially. Then we sent them up to Annie [in Wyoming] and I think Ang spent one day with Annie, but Judy just drove all over the state of Wyoming.

And then we sent them some books, and we talked about them. I had Richard Avedon's[1] book, *In The American West*, and showed them those pictures, and there's a fellow in there, there's two pictures of him, he's very young and then just 12 years later, and he looked 20 years older, and that's sort of the look that we had based Heath's look on in the film. If you could see those pictures, you'll see why.

[1]For a short article discussing Richard Avedon's work, written by Annie Proulx, see http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/nov/23/usa



"That's sort of the look that we had based Heath's look on."
Richard Avedon photo of rancher Richard Wheatcroft
Jordon, Montana June 1983

Judy was just great. We sort of made this film a family affair, mainly because we didn't have any money, and so my daughter worked with Judy as a production assistant on the film. It was the first day of shooting, and it was the day that…we filmed two scenes that day. There was the one on the toboggan, and the Thanksgiving scene in the house where Alma was with Monroe now, and they had that confrontation in the kitchen, and we walked into the house and [my daughter] said, "Judy, don't these people mind us being in their house? Look at all their stuff." And Judy said, "That's OUR stuff," but it just looked so real. And the great thing about Judy's production design—she did that Zach Braff film *Garden State*—if you see her production design it's so much a part of everything that it doesn't stand out. You feel as if you're a voyeur, that you're looking in on these people's lives, that you're really in their home, that you're really in their lives, and that's what's so great about her production design. She's terrific.

"You feel as if you're a voyeur."
Lee shows production designer Judy Becker a prospective shooting location.
Fort Macleod, AB Spring 2004

Talk about the actual shooting. Was there a lot of discussion, or changes in the script, or did everyone pretty much approach it as it was?

Oh, yeah. Well, the one thing I didn't finish, the casting, Heath, for example. Heath was not the first actor who committed to the role. Another actor committed, and Larry and I had suggested Heath, but the studio didn't feel that he was macho enough. [Mumblings from the audience.] We were sort of Okay, okay, and Ang auditioned actors, and he chose an actor and the actor committed, but for some reason I just had this sense that this young man was not going to…I thought he was going to drop out. And I was talking to…I have a good friend who worked with Heath on *Brothers Grimm* and had been talking to Heath about the role, and then I was also talking with Heath's agent, Steve [Alexander] and I were talking, and I kept calling him saying, "Just hang in there, hang in there, hang in there. I think that something's going to happen." This was in, I think, August, that the actor committed, and by December, right before Christmas, sure enough, he dropped out. And I called Heath's agent and I said, "Okay, get him a script." So they got him a script to New York, and he and Naomi [Watts] read it on their way to Australia for their holiday, and when we got to the set Heath told me, "You know, I read the script and I wanted to do it, and Naomi read it and she was jumping up and down on the bed saying, 'Heath, you have to do this movie, you have to do this movie.' I would have flown to Taiwan for 20 hours just to meet with Ang, because I wanted to be in this movie. Once I read the script, I just wanted to be in the film." So Heath and Ang met, and Ang instinctively said, "Yes."

So what about the shooting in Canada? Was that problematic at all? Ang seemed to indicate that everything went very smoothly.

I had worked with a lot of the people on our crew before, because I had done three miniseries up there. I'd already filmed 18 hours of movie up there, so I knew our wranglers, and I knew our transportation people, and I knew our locations scout. I knew a bunch of the folks already, and I knew how great they were.

"I knew how great they were."
Brokeback Mountain Cast and Crew Photo Moose Mountain July 2004

It was a very smooth production in terms of our crew. We had an amazing crew. They worked so hard and never complained. We had 26 different locations and, technically, 42 shooting days, which is insane to move everybody and do all the things that we did. Everybody was, and I know this sounds Pollyanna-ish but it's the truth, they were so committed to this. When I got there, within the first two weeks, every person on the crew had come up to me at some point and said how grateful they were that they were working on this film, and how much it meant to them, and how wonderful the script was. A couple of the people on the crew came out to me within the first week, and it was just like we were all drinking the same Kool-Aid, you know? It was really strange, but it was wonderful in that regard. And everybody worked their butts off. I shared my set trailer with three guys, and it was tough, and I got pneumonia while we were making the film, but I suffered through that and kept going. The place where we filmed actual Brokeback Mountain, those scenes, no one had ever filmed there before [Moose Mountain]. The road was 45 minutes in, it was a two-hour drive and then you had to go 45 minutes in four-wheeling, but you could only go *in*, or *out*, because the clearing was so narrow, so that was quite a challenge.

But that's why it looks so pristine, too.

Sure, yeah.

So the film's finished and then you had, I'm sure, a rather interesting discussion about how to market this thing. What was that like?

Well, we didn't have that until we had a couple of passes at the movie, so…

Okay, well, talk about that. Were there scenes changed or moved around?

There are some scenes that aren't in the film, but…the first cut was rough. I mean, we lost our first editor [Geraldine Peroni] the day the filming wrapped. She died. And we had to bring in a new editor [Dylan Tichenor] and bring him up to speed, and we had to do it quickly. And even though James was the head of the studio, it was very hard on us. About three days before we wrapped, Ang came up to me and he said, "This isn't a 'low budget' film, this is a 'no budget' film. I want two days of second unit; I can't have it." He was upset, we were both upset, but you just have to do what you can.

We did the first pass; Larry didn't see that one, I did. We gave notes. Michael and I gave notes and about 80% of them were addressed on the second pass, and that's when I took Larry, and that's when we knew we had something great.

It was so funny because, when Larry came…Larry is such an odd fellow. He's very humble and unassuming, and he doesn't grasp the weight his words carry when he speaks, so he just says what he thinks, very direct. That's a little scary in Hollywood. So when we all went to the screening of the second cut, we got there and nobody said anything; they were very nervous. And Larry was just himself. He sat down by himself sort of in the middle of the theater and I sat way over on one side. We saw the film and the lights came on, and I looked over at him and there were tears coming down this man's face. I've only seen him cry two times in 22 years. The first time was when his son called to tell him he was getting divorced, and that day. That's it. That's all. So we knew we had something special.

We had a meeting afterwards, we were all talking, and we would have been thrilled if *five* people came to see the movie, we were so happy with it. But James said something like, "Well, who's our audience?" And Ang said, "Gay people." And James said, "No, women. Yeah, that's how you get the men in there, too. The wives and girlfriends, they drag 'em in there." And that was pretty much it, and that's kind of how that all started.

"Gay people." "No, women."
Lee and Shamus at the Lonesome Ranch June 2004

I'm going to open up for questions [from the audience].

Audience: In terms of Ang with his schedule, does he like shooting in the morning, like early, six o'clock, or is he an afternoon person?

You don't have that luxury. When you're making a film you have just so much time; sometimes you have to make daylight in the middle of the night. We had 12- and 16-hour shooting days, and we were shooting seven days a week. We just didn't stop.

And everybody was into that?

Well, they did it. They didn't have any choice. You either did it or you left.

Audience: [This person said thank you, that he had seen the film 16 times on the big screen, and that this viewing was just as powerful as the first time he saw it.]

Well, you're welcome. Thank you for seeing it. I couldn't watch it. I had to leave. Right now it's still too fresh; and it's so powerful. When I saw it for the first time with everything done, the music and everything, because, you know, you did it in pieces, and we picked out the music, and had the songs and all of this. And before Larry and I sort of went out into the world to talk about it we saw it on a big screen in Tucson, and I invited all my friends and some family. I invited this wide cross-section of people because we wanted to know what they all thought and felt, what it did for them, you know? And the responses were amazing. They were fun, too, but I just remember how it affected me, and it still does.

Audience: That's what I was wondering about, if you see things in it now, after you haven't seen it for a little while, that are new for you.

No. I've lived with it for so long, and I was there for every scene that was shot. I was on the set the whole time, and I talked to the actors about things, and the wardrobe people, and the wranglers—had to wrangle them. So, no, I know the script by heart and all of that. There's no surprises there for me.

Audience: I was wondering how much direct input you got during the process of the writing, or filming, probably not the writing, from people who are gay. I find it kind of miraculous that Annie got it as right as she got it. Not because I think she didn't know gay people, but because she captured an experience… All the men from that period I've ever talked to, the first thing they say is, "She got it so right." I was really wondering whether, during the process, there was direct input…

No. The best way I can respond to that is, as a writer…Larry's a good example because Larry writes incredible women, and how does he understand? He's a man, he's never been a woman, and yet when he writes he gets in their heads so clearly. And honest to God, he's as clueless as the next guy in real life, but when he's writing it's a different experience. And as a writer myself, I just know that when I'm writing—and he described it recently, and he was right on when he said this—when you're writing and you're doing it, it's almost trance-like. You're in the story so deeply, and these characters become more real to you than the real people in your lives. I can remember, when I'd be writing a scene for the script, when my daughter would come talk to me and I didn't even know she was in the room. That's just kind of what happens. It's a kind of knowing. It seems ultra-sensitive; I don't know what it is. Maybe another writer could explain it better, I don't know.

"These characters become more real to you than the real people in your lives."

I've grown up observing people. I've always been an observer, much less of a participant. I'm not comfortable participating. I'm much more comfortable watching, and I'm very intuitive about people and things, and I've read an unbelievable amount of stuff, and I had gay friends growing up.

I remember when I was a little girl; my mother pointed this out to me. I got my third grade report card, and I always made really good grades. I was a real nerd; I was quiet so I studied all the time. But she got the report card from my teacher and she talked to me about it; she was upset. She said that the teacher said that I got along really well with the other students, but I had this tendency to gravitate towards the lost children, the children that got made fun of or the ones that were sad, and that she felt this might not serve me well when I grew up. My mother said this to me and she said, "Now you know, you need to make better friends." I didn't know what the heck she was talking about because all I knew was I didn't make fun of children, I didn't have those kinds of feelings Maybe I didn't have a strong sense of irony as a child, but when other people would do that it would get me really angry, and I remember feeling that.

The thing that I'm curious about that I'm always so struck by, and I think it comes across not only with Heath's character but also with Michelle's, there are moments where a lot has to be said by the actors, yet they don't say anything.

You mean where there's no dialogue?

Yes, exactly. So, were you concerned about that in the script, that what needed to be said was understood? Were there discussions about this as it was being shot?

I thought about that a lot when we were writing this script. I used so much of Annie's prose, her narrative, in the script itself because I felt like no matter who we cast in these parts they would be very young and they would have to be really fine actors, because that's what acting is, when you're seeing the emotion on the person's face rather than it coming out of their mouths in the dialogue. So I felt like the script should be sort of a road map to where they were going in character, so that's a lot of what was in the script. There was a lot of that sort of guiding in the script in the sense of the emotions and the things that were obvious on their faces.

"You're seeing the emotion on the person's face."

For example, Michelle, on the first day shooting, injured her leg and wound up in the emergency room all day, and she was really nervous because she didn't think she was going to be able to continue. And I said, "Don't even think that. It's not going to happen." We were talking about her character—she [Michelle] was born in Montana—and she and Heath are very similar in the sense that they're both instinctive actors, they're very natural, they know exactly what to do. They just knew, whatever it was. Even though they had never had the experiences, they read it, they figured it out, and they just knew.

The first day on the set with Heath—Jake came later; his part didn't start for a couple of weeks—I had typed up this single page to give to the two boys, and all it was, essentially, was a lot of the discussion I had had with Annie and Larry over the years about these characters and their story, all of it sort of condensed, about who they were, and what their relationship was, and where it went, where it had gone, and what they were like as men. I typed this up single spaced from beginning to end and I gave it to Heath the first day and I said, "Listen, if you ever feel lost, if the day comes when you're there on the set and you start to feel confused or lost about where you are or who you are, just read this and it will help you sort of find your way back." So he took it, and a couple of weeks later he came back to me and he said, "Diana, would you print up one of those again? I had it in my jeans and washed it ,and it disappeared." And then, when Jake came, I did the same thing with him. Of course, they knew they were open to speak to us whenever they could, me or Larry or whoever, because I had a hot line to Larry with the cell phone. And then, the day that the boys did their kissing scene, they did such a great job, I had Larry on the phone and he wanted to talk to them, and they were so excited, and I let them talk to Larry on the phone, and he said, "Diana said you just were amazing" and they were like little kids; it was great.

Was there a distinct difference in the way that Jake approached the material?

Yes, they were very different. Every take Jake would vary it slightly, so Ang had a lot of choices. Heath, though, was very specific. When the cameras weren't rolling, Heath was Heath. He was bubbly and funny, like a little boy, just jumping all over the place and making jokes. But as soon as "Action" he was just—it was eerie, it was instantaneous—

he would just fall into character. There was really only one scene that we shot where I could tell that it was very angst-filled for him, and that was the scene when he finds the shirts. For one thing, we filmed way into the middle of the night; it was playing night for day. We had lights everywhere. It was very, very emotional for him. He had to go someplace that it was very difficult for him to go. But all the other times, when the cameras weren't rolling, he was just happy and funny and running around like a little kid.

"He had to go someplace that it was very difficult for him to go."

In between takes, a lot of times, Jake would make jokes. He would sing show tunes and then he would do impersonations of old producers, and he was just a riot. All the crew would laugh and laugh.

But they were very different. Heath was very—he was Ennis. When the cameras rolled, he was that character. And Jake was a little different. He would just give it shadings and different things. And even the boys in real life were in some ways similar to their characters. Heath wouldn't talk a lot about himself, but he would engage other people all the time, and at one point he brought 14 of his grade-school buddies to the set. They visited for a week and they all had fun.

Audience: How long did it take you, from 1997 until you finished the film?

We finished filming in August of 2004. It really didn't start to happen until the end of 2003. We had a very short pre-production and then we started shooting. It was 47 actual shooting days.

Audience: I'm just interested in your method of working with Larry. What's a typical day of writing with him, and how did you divvy up the job of writing the script?

Oh, this script was very specific because it was a short story. We had never adapted a short story before. First we talked about it, what we thought it needed. And then we

decided to go ahead and script what we had in the story first, write those scenes, and then we went back through and decided what we wanted to add. That was pretty much essentially how we did it, but we worked every day until we had that first draft. It was a little over three months.

Our methods are very different. He gets up first thing in the morning, he takes his bath, he takes his walk, and then he sits down and writes. On this script he wrote five pages a day. I would take his pages, put them in my computer, and either trash them, add on to them, you know, that kind of thing, and then I would print them out when I was done and give them to him that evening so he'd have them the next morning to start fresh from, his five pages. He'd stop in the middle of a sentence. He just stops. And he still does that, except now he writes 10 pages a day; never, never, never more.

Audience: When Michelle sees them kissing, why did you make it so long before she chose to confront him?

Do you mean why didn't she confront him right away? [Yes] Oh, Michelle and I even talked about that. This is what I said to her; this is just my understanding of it. I told her that Alma is a very young woman, that her entire future, in her mind, had always been getting married, having children and settling down, and being a wife and a mother, and she was in her early 20s. She saw what she saw, but she may not have even been certain of what she was seeing, but she just knew that some geologic shift had taken place in her life. She may have heard about homosexuality, or not even been aware. Michelle and I talked about this back and forth. I said she may not have even heard the word, didn't know. Maybe she had a hint of it. She was probably too embarrassed to ask her mother. She may have had to go to the library and get it figured out, but she sensed something was very amiss. And again, [sometimes] you don't grasp things right away.

"She just knew that some geologic shift had taken place in her life."

So, a lot of why she didn't confront him immediately—what was she going to do? Where would she go? Her parents maybe lived in a trailer. Would they have room for her and her two girls? No. There was no such thing as welfare. What she did, essentially, from

mine and Larry's point of view, she found Monroe. She found a man who loved her and would support her and the girls, somebody that would take care of her, so she shifted out of that. But another reason, and I think it's made clear in the film if you looked at it again, you know, Ennis was a man with a short fuse, and it could be set off. He's very angry. I think we sort of know why, but he didn't know why, and I think he was very volatile, and she was afraid of him. She was just trying to feel her way, and she felt her way out of that relationship. It took her time, though. She had these babies, she was young, she was naive, she was learning about the world.

Audience: What was Alberta's part in the production? What was their participation in the film?

Do you mean Alberta, Canada? Oh, that's where we filmed the whole thing. We filmed up there because we could afford to film there.

And it had the scenery.

Oh, it's an amazing place. It's very raw. Ang was even surprised at how much some of it looked like Wyoming. So was Annie.

"Oh, it's an amazing place."
Postcard Mountains Mount Lougheed and Wind Tower

Audience: Do you ever have the feeling that this film has advanced the political dialogue in ways that you might not have expected when you wrote it?

I know that I'm the kind of person that doesn't like being told what to think, or how to think. I just don't like being preached to, but I also believe that this kind of a film, because of the way the world is, when you bring up something like this to people it becomes political on its own, without even trying. And what I said earlier about this film being about compassion, I think that that speaks volumes. I think seeing this movie was an educational experience for a lot of people, people who didn't really think about the fact that gays feel the same way that straight people feel, that they have the same feelings, the same needs and the same emotions, love, hate, whatever, and they're human beings, for God's sake. This validated that. This acknowledged that, and I think that that was an education for a lot of people. It may have been uncomfortable, it may have been disturbing, but it was there none the less, and it's something that, because it's not hitting you over the head, it's not polemic—it's very realistic, and it's very raw—it works it's way into your psyche in a way that you kind of can't control, which I love about it.

That was the other thing, that was the power of that story, The story was very spare, but there was something in it, an undercurrent of something that I felt very strongly, and I sensed it very strongly, and it moved me, and I felt, This is important, there's something important about this. But I couldn't have even articulated it to anyone, I just knew it. I knew it here, instead of here. So whatever it's done in that regard has been sort of like a bonus, it's like icing on the cake. We tell you the story, you take from it what you need or want or whatever it is you take from it, and think about it and process it.

Audience: I just have a small trivia question. There's a difference between Annie's novel and your story that centers around the name of the younger daughter, which you changed from Francine to Jenny. I'd like to hear the story behind that.

Oh, it's a simple story. They have to check on names, and if it belongs to a real person you have to get them cleared, so that's why the names are changed. That's the only reason, because we didn't get clearance from the real people.

Audience: On* Oprah*, Anne Hathaway said that she thought it was obvious whether her character knew what really happened, when she's on the phone with Ennis near the end. Does she really know what happened to Jack?

Well, I'm not sure any of us really know what happened to Jack. I mean, the way that we wrote it was that it would be ambiguous; that what we see when we see that flashback, when Ennis is talking to her, is what he [imagines]. This is his worst fear, after all. This is why they couldn't be together. He was sort of brainwashed, when he was very young, into thinking that this is where they would end up. So when we see that scene in the film, this is what Ennis is imagining, his worst fear.

Now, whatever Annie [Hathaway] said on *Oprah* at the time, and again, this was talked about…She asked me, "Did she love Jack?" I said to her, "As you're getting older in this marriage…" and that's why Ang had her do the big hair, the really blond, he wanted her to become extreme, because she got bitter and angry. She knew something was up with her husband, but when she's talking to Ennis on the phone, whatever happened there, we talked about it then. I said, "Annie, you know, you're not really certain, but you do know that this man, when you're talking to him, you figure out very quickly that this was one of his lovers, this was somebody that he must have been with because, you know,

the Brokeback Mountain thing, and he said, 'We herded sheep.' And 'he used to talk about it' and 'I just thought it was a pretend place.'" And she's kind of angry, you can see it, and she's also hurt. There's all these complex emotions on her face. But when she said that on *Oprah*, I think that was just looking back when she said that, because at the time, shooting the scene, that's not what was going through her head. There was a lot of, sort of, under ground stuff going on, you know, all these little awarenesses coming as she's talking to this man on the phone.

"She's kind of angry, you can see it, and she's also hurt."

Audience: Was it an accident?

Well, it's whatever you think. Larry and I would go back and forth about it. We would argue about it, too. [Diana mimicking Larry's voice] "Oh, people got hit in the face with tire rims all the time, you know? It still happens." I said, "I know." But you never know. We used to go back and forth. When we talked to Ang about this we felt that it should be left that way.

Now there's a scene, I don't know if you remember the trailer, there are these two guys, these mechanics. The studio wanted us to shoot the scene of [Jack] and Randall kind of like parting and these two guys watching them, in case the audience didn't understand. And Larry and I are like, "What? That's just silly." But we shot the scene, and it was never even put in any of the cuts.

"The studio wanted us to shoot the scene…in case the audience didn't understand."

Two more questions before I have to wrap up. Diana, could you talk about that scene with Jack's parents in that home, the way it looked? It looked like it stepped right out of the Great Depression and Dorothea Lang[2].

That was Judy. Judy Becker did that. That was amazing. I mean, it was so stark and so raw, and to Larry and myself, in the story and in the film, that's where the great tragedy comes, is in that scene. This is something we talked to the boys about, too, and Heath, that night, when we filmed in that house. I mean, there were things, when you talk about somebody bringing something to the film… In the scene in the trailer at the end, it was Heath's idea, of course, to change the shirts. When he finds them his is inside Jack's, and at the end, Jack's is inside his. That was Heath. He was so excited, like a little kid that day. "Wait 'til you see what I've done; I've got a surprise for you."

But in the scene where he sees the mother, and he comes, and she gives him the bag and all that…yeah…that was really…that's the clincher to me.

[2] Dorothea Lange (May 25, 1895 – October 11, 1965) was an influential American documentary photographer and photojournalist, best known for her Depression-era work for the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

"Judy Becker did that…That was amazing. I mean, it was so stark and so raw."

His environment is so stark...

And you can see why he would want to leave there. Because Jack was a person with imagination, and he was a romantic. He saw life as possibilities. Sort of, in a way, like *Don Quixote*, Sancho Panza and the Don. Heath was the realist, and Jack was the dreamer.

Okay, who's got the last question?

Audience: I wanted to ask you something about the DVD. Is there a reason why the commentary wasn't done? There were a few featurettes on the DVD, and they were good as far as they went, but there could have been so much more.

I just watched those for the first time about a month ago, and they were very sparse; I was surprised. They did a lengthy interview with me and Larry in addition, and there's very little of that on there. I don't know. I really have no answer for that. As for the other DVDs of Ang's, I know Mr. Schamus and he worked together on a script and so forth, so maybe that's why, because they would do it together or something, but that wasn't the case here. I don't know. I can't explain that really. You'd have to talk to Focus about that.

"They were very sparse; I was surprised."
Diana Ossana at the Fight Hill June 2004

You don't need a DVD commentary; you got it right here. [Applause.]

I definitely want you all to hear this. When you create something as a writer, or a filmmaker even—and Larry and I both feel this way—once it's gone out into the world…I mean, I still feel a deep connection to this because…it's very hard for me, because every day on the set…I have memories of things here that it brings out, that make me very sad, you know? Bittersweet. But this film, and that's why I can still watch it and it moves me as if I've never seen it before, because it's its own thing now, its own being, it's its own creation. It lives on its own. It's out in the world and it will keep making its way probably long after we're gone, but it is what it is and I'm very proud of it. But even if you never talked to me or never heard a word from me, everything you need to know is up on that screen, it's right there.