

Made in Manhasset, Playing at Sundance

By MARGO NASH

MANHASSET

DAVID L. PATERSON, a volunteer firefighter with the Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department, “gives 100 percent all the time,” said Brian Morris, the department’s chief. “He’s good to have on your team.”

And, the chief added, Mr. Paterson does not brag about other things he does, like writing plays — his newest “Come Sing, Jimmy Jo,” opens in Louisville, Ky. — or writing and producing an independent film, “Love, Ludlow,” which is to premiere in the coming week at the Sundance Film Festival in Utah.

“Love, Ludlow,” the first screenplay Mr. Paterson has had produced, is a romantic comedy about Myra, a Queens office temp. It was directed by Adrienne Weiss and stars Alicia Goranson, who was in “Boys Don’t Cry.” The film cost \$75,000 to produce; 90 percent of it was shot in Manhasset last summer, Mr. Paterson said, including at a church, two bars and a Laundromat.

At his home here, seated in a green velveteen wing-backed chair that was in the movie, Mr. Paterson recalled the day the costume mistress asked what her budget would be.

“The costume mistress said, ‘I

need a \$20,000 budget for props,’ and I said, ‘I will give you \$500.’ I said, ‘Come to my house, and come to the attic.’ “

Mr. Paterson built the set for Myra’s Queens apartment himself, in the basement of the parish house of Christ Church, Manhasset. He used lumber donated by a local Home Depot, and furnished the set with furniture from his home.

“We had never looked at ourselves as a burgeoning movie studio,” observed the Rev. David Lowry, rector of the church, which Mr. Paterson and his family attend. “Everything was a challenge, but he got it all done.”

Mr. Paterson, 39, is a can-do sort of person. He sailed a boat to the World Trade Center on Sept. 11, hoping to help. When the authorities made him turn back, he returned a few days later, getting to ground zero that time and joining in the rescue.

He contributed an account of what happened to him in “911: The Book of Help” (Cricket, 2002), a collection of essays written by various authors. After working with firefighters at ground zero, he joined the Manhasset-Lakeville fire department.

Mr. Paterson, who grew up in Takoma Park, Md., and in Norfolk, Va., said his practical side came from three generations of Presbyterian ministers, including his father. But



A scene from “Love, Ludlow,” which was shot largely in Manhasset.

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Kirk Condyles for The New York Times

David L. Paterson at the Manhasset-Lakeville Fire Department.

the storytelling part comes from his mother, Katherine Paterson, a celebrated children's book author, whose work has won two National Book Awards and two Newbery Medals.

Mr. Paterson has written three plays based on his mother's work. They include "Come Sing, Jimmy Jo" and "The Great Gilly Hopkins," of which he was co-author, based on her novel of the same name. That play had a brief run at the New Victory Theater on 42nd Street in 1998, and toured afterward.

Mr. Paterson was originally interested in an acting career. He started acting in community theater at age 13, and continued in summer stock and at the Catholic University of America.

In 1987, he took a year off from college to study stage combat at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London, hoping to act or do stunt work. But meanwhile, he met his muse, and she was from Queens. Her name was Ariana Tadler; she is now his wife.

Mr. Paterson wrote his first play, "Offending Shadows," while in London. Loosely based on his courtship of his wife, it was produced in London in 1988. It would be produced at many theaters across the United States under another title, "Fingerpainting in a Murphybed." In 2004, Mr. Paterson turned the play into the screenplay for "Love, Ludlow."

As for Mr. Paterson's acting career, he continued to act on his return to the United States from London in 1989, joining a national tour of "Wind in the Willows." In 1990, he moved to New York, and married Ms. Tadler.

Starting in 1992, he had a recurring role in the daytime television drama, "One Life to Live." That and the carpentry he learned building sets in summer stock helped put his wife through law school. These days, she is a partner in a New York firm.

Over the last 15 years, Mr. Paterson has written 26 full-length plays, 17 of which have been produced around the country, including "Stone the Crows," "The King's Horses" and "Pieces of the Sky," which was produced off Broadway in 1998, and won an Urban Stages Emerging Playwright Award.

Mr. Paterson gave up acting in 1997, when his son Carter was born.

"It was beautiful to think about writing as opposed to auditioning," he said. "No one can say, 'Thank you and you can leave now.'"

When his son Decker was born in 2000, the couple moved to Manhasset from Middle Village, Queens.

After helping his wife become a lawyer, Mr. Paterson said, he is entitled to be "a stay-at-home mom." He does not like to call himself a "stay-at-home dad" because, he said, "it sounds like a man who lies on the couch with a six pack watching TV and tells the kids to keep it down."

After his chores are over, he said, he works on his screenplays and plays. He still does carpentry work and brief walk-ons for "One Life to Live." If an alarm comes and he has to head out for to a fire, he takes the children to a neighbor's.

This week, he will be in Sundance. The pen Mr. Paterson likes to give out says it all: "The hardest-working man on the periphery of show business." ■