



Creating a Life in Film: Jack Serino '90

By Christina Young, Director of The Center for Engagement

Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best way to predict the future is to create it." For many of the students who attended Franklin Pierce during the time of Walter Peterson's presidency, creating one's future wasn't just an option, it was an encouraged expectation. During the 80s when Jack Serino attended Franklin Pierce, students were immersed in hands-on learning, given the power to help turn the college into what it has become today, and most importantly, led by a man who not only knew everyone on campus, but believed in the potential each student had in creating incredibly bright futures. **Jack Serino '90**, talented director, writer, actor, and producer, was one of the many students who attended Franklin Pierce at that time, and attributes his success at Franklin Pierce to Peterson's leadership.

College Days

Originally from Upstate New York, Jack had a radius of how far from home he wanted to travel for college, as

well as how close to home he wanted to be. Since the early age of 5 years old, Jack knew he wanted to make movies! Growing up, he was under the assumption that it could only happen in California and New York, but he did not consider himself a "city guy." When he first visited the Rindge campus, he immediately loved that Franklin Pierce was on a lake in New Hampshire, and he knew that was where he was meant to go to college. The size mattered to him as well. His older brother had gone to the University of Connecticut, but to Jack, that was massive, and he was looking for a smaller atmosphere. His younger sister, Laurie, joined him at Pierce a year later.

During his first campus visit, Jack met Nancy Stone and was "totally impressed" because he thought she was "fantastic." The fact that Franklin Pierce had a Mass Communication program appeared ahead of the curve. Franklin Pierce also claimed that the students who attended the program were going to "get their hands dirty," and the students knew they would be in plays, work

on the lights, build the sets, etc. “You couldn’t snooze and get away with it, that was for sure,” Jack shared, “but everyone was so close due to the smaller class size, that if you missed a class, you could talk to anyone and get completely brought up to speed.”

Jack was the vice president of his class for both his sophomore and junior years, and enjoyed being part of the student council. During his senior year, he was the intramural organizer, coordinated hiring all the referees, and ran Air Jam. “The whole school got into it,” Jack said. People would get together with their buddies and choose a song to perform. You couldn’t use instruments, but you could make them.” The best performances from his recollection were Andy Scher and Chris Bodes’s performance of ZZ Top, Brian Adams and John Perry’s of Place, Karen Weaver and Kim Kalef’s *Madonna*, and Mark Linneal’s moonwalk to *Michael Jackson* was epic. Jack got involved with Air Jam when Carl Heiberg was a senior and handed down the microphone to Jack to take on the role of MC for the remainder of his time at Pierce.

Heavily involved in athletics, Jack was captain of the Baseball team and third base starter, played on the Ice Hockey team as back-up goalie, was a member of the Golf Team with Owen Houghton, and was also part of the Flag Football movement his junior and senior years. Due to his connection to the Ice Hockey team, Jack helped to plan The Hockey Bash, which was an event that people waited all year for. It was a fundraiser for the hockey team, as well as the most sought-after ticket you could get. Alumni flew back from all over the country; it was a major hit!

Jack, a Theatre minor and Mass Communication major, recalls his most memorable professor, Phyllis Zrzavy, and takes pride that he was her first student. Jack stays in touch with as many alumni that he spent time with as he can, but wishes he did more. There was a very solid alumni crowd from ‘88-’92 that had a good bond during the years spent at Franklin Pierce. “You could push the limit and learn from mistakes,” said Jack. He attributes a lot to President Walter Peterson. “Walter was amazing. He represented the school so well that you wanted to live up to that example. You always saw that he had the utmost character and a ton of pride for Franklin Pierce that he pulled out of everyone he met.” Jack was so proud to receive the Walter Peterson Award as a senior, because he felt that the award represented Franklin Pierce College to the fullest and was very pleased to think others thought he deserved it.

Facing the Real World

Jack always knew he wanted to work in the entertainment business, but over time he determined that he wanted to make independent films. He knew he had to choose

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between New York city and California; his heart told him to make the trek to the West Coast, and he hasn’t looked back since. Jack arrived in California in September 1990, just months after his graduation. He laughed as he recalled the trip, explaining that for the first seven days out there, he was living in his car, because you couldn’t get a job until you had an address, yet no one would rent you an apartment if you didn’t have a job! The first job Jack secured was as a car salesman, which was convenient because it required him to be by a phone all day. He then got a job as a production assistant (PA) and worked behind the scenes, until he got lucky and was cast in an episode of *LA Law*. From then on, his phone rang off the hook! And seemingly out of nowhere, lots of Franklin Pierce College alums came out of the woodwork.

By that time, Jack had an apartment where many alumni found refuge as they, too, took a chance and moved to California. So many alumni came to see him that at one point, Jack had 10 alumni staying in his apartment. “We were so broke we were living on mac and cheese to survive. When it got to the point we couldn’t afford that, I called the Franklin Pierce Alumni Office and asked for help,” Jack said. “I just needed someone to talk to in California who might be able to hire these people who were in every inch of my apartment.” The Franklin Pierce Alumni Office led Jack to **Matt Reiss ‘82**, who was running the Page Program at Paramount Pictures. Jack contacted Matt, and Matt was able to get them all jobs as PAs. “You learn quickly that how hard you work is how far you go, so some made it, and some left. But some of them, like **Tracy Yates ‘89**, **Matt Berman ‘92**, and **John Perry ‘92** stuck with it and have done really well for themselves.”

Reflecting on his transition from East Coast to West Coast, Jack admitted that at the time, he always thought he would eventually return to the New England area,

Alumni Who Come Back to Give Back

Speaking of those guys who crashed at Jack's apartment way back when, let's take a look at a couple of them and see what they are doing these days!

Matt Berman '92 and John Perry '92

Matt and John returned to campus back in April to speak with Franklin Pierce students and to host a film screening of their latest joint endeavor, *The Wedding Pact*. Matt was the director for the film and John the executive producer. They brought along actor Scott Michael Campbell, one of the stars in the film. All three fielded a lively panel discussion with Mass Communication students who soaked up the knowledge and advice offered by Matt, John, and Scott. Later, students and the community at large were treated to a special screening of *The Wedding Pact* in Spagnuolo Hall, complete with buttered popcorn.

John and Matt were both Mass Communication majors at Franklin Pierce who broke into the film world with hard work and a little help from their friends from Franklin Pierce. John currently works for Paramount Pictures in Hollywood, and has directed and produced the *Dr. Phil* show for many years. John was also the recipient of the Fitzwater Center Medallion for Leadership in Public Communication by an Alumnus this year. Matt, both a director and a screenwriter, is known for his work on *Hollywood and Wine*, and *Big Wind on Campus*. Like Jack Serino, Matt and John both generously give back by offering support to up and coming Franklin Pierce professionals.

David Robinson '01

Dave (who did not crash at Jack's place!) was a Theater major who also came back to campus this year to offer his expertise and advice to Franklin Pierce students. He gave a lecture in a Mass Communication class and ran a Lighting Workshop as well. Dave is the Lighting Director for CNN Crossfire out of Washington, D.C. He initially did an internship with *Crossfire*, and that paved the way to his road to success. "I love going to work every day," Dave said enthusiastically.

One of the highlights of Dave's career thus far is that he has "lit" every living President. His hands-on Lighting Workshop was fascinating and showed the complexities of lighting, demonstrating what a difference excellent lighting can make.

but one year turned into 10, which turned into 20. When Jack left the East Coast, he felt like he was going in blind. "No one was there to help map it out for us; you had to just figure it out as you went," he said. "It was like the school of hard knocks for me. That's why I come back to Franklin Pierce to talk to students as much as I can, because I want to be able to help them the way I wish someone had helped me." Since Jack was one of the first trailblazers from Pierce to make it out to California to pursue a career in Hollywood (compared to the many alumni in the field now), there weren't as many examples to follow. Today he is proud to serve as a sounding board for the younger generation of Franklin Pierce alumni pursuing the same passion.

In Demand

An average day for Jack starts at 4:30 a.m. At the time of this interview, Jack's latest project was working on the set of *Teen Wolf*; the month before he was working on the sitcom *Mike and Molly*. "Every day is different," said Jack. "You're shooting *The Lake House* one day, or *The Hangover* the next, but then you get 10 phone calls asking if you want to go to Baton Rouge to work on *The Fantastic Four*, or *X-Men*, and you just pick and choose." He is the most passionate about independent films, especially *The Connecticut Kid*, which he wrote, produced, and directed. He is not the only one who



Top photo: Perry, Berman, and Campbell at Mass Communication Career Panel.

Upper photo: Perry, Christina Young, and Berman at Fitzwater Awards.

Photo below: Robinson at Mass Communication lecture.

Bottom photo: Robinson demonstrates lighting at workshop.





Dan Desrochers '08, Jack Serino '90, and Andrew Scher '88 at a Career Panel.

was passionate about it; the film won awards at 14 film festivals – an incredible achievement. But for Jack, he feels that his greatest achievement is yet to come.

Jack had always dreamed of working with Robert Redford, so he volunteered at Sundance for eight years with the hope of working with him. Jack enjoyed it greatly because he felt he truly helped bring the director's vision to the screen there. On the large films that most readers would be familiar with, such as *Thor*, *The Hangover*, and *The Twilight Saga*, there are so many producers involved that Jack said it can often feel like "too many cooks in the kitchen." On the independent films and the short films at The Sundance Festival, there is generally one producer on the film, where there is more opportunity to exert control and a clarified vision.

Looking to the future, Jack has always wanted to teach a bit to help students design a path to what they want to do. He would also love to make more independent films, especially low budget, small crew projects. "Everyone has a story to tell," said Jack. "My advice to those starting out is to do a short story first. Don't do your passion first. Take the time to practice and really learn the business, so when you are ready for what you are most passionate about, you are well prepared."

Risky Business

There are defining moments in life, where the dreamers take risks, aware but unafraid of the consequences, and the safe-steppers analyze every equation, making choices based on the least risk-heavy outcome. But there are also significant people who guide those defining moments by giving us the confidence to take a risk, because they believe we can handle whatever it brings.

For Jack, after attending Franklin Pierce and working with mentors like Walter Peterson, Nancy Stone, and Phyllis Zrzavy, the risk of packing up and hitting the road to head to the West Coast did not seem too costly. It seemed like the best and only option, because Jack felt prepared to handle whatever was at the end of that road trip.

Nearly 20 years later, Jack Serino is still working each day to create his future, remembering the words of wisdom he learned at Pierce, implementing the hands-on lessons, and giving back to the students who fill the classroom seats at Pierce that he once sat in. He reminds us that no matter what road we take in life, it is best not to get caught up in fame, but to enjoy the purity of what our passions inspire our days to become.

Jack's accomplishments with *The Connecticut Kid* exemplify much of what we should genuinely strive to achieve: our very best selves, defined by our own standards. Not only is Jack a phenomenally talented director, writer, producer, and actor, but his charm, humility, warm sense of humor, and kind-natured personality are an ideal depiction of Franklin Pierce alumni. The Center for Engagement at Franklin Pierce University is proud to highlight Jack's achievements in this edition of the *Pierce Radius*.



Kevin Bacon and Jack Serino.