

## Women in Horror 2013: Lindsay Denniberg talks her "VIDEO DIARY OF A LOST GIRL"

Written by Vivienne Vaughn  
Wednesday, 13 February 2013 18:42

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Horror film enthusiast and indie filmmaker Lindsay Denniberg kicked off her feature career with the surreal, dreamlike VIDEO DIARY OF A LOST GIRL ( [see our review](#) ). The film centers on Louise (Priscilla McEver), a succubus named after the eponymous silver screen legend Louise Brooks, and details the hardships that come with being a descendant of the demonic Lilith herself. Fango chatted with Denniberg about what occurred behind-the-scenes of the film to create the on-screen visual madness.

**FANGORIA:** How was the experience of shooting your first feature?

**LINDSAY DENNIBERG:** It was probably the most fun I've ever had. Exhausting and overwhelming, but also the greatest opportunity to be creative with friends; a lot of fun, but also totally scary. I've done so many shorts with people I love, but working on something this big over such a long period of time is a very different experience. You get closer with the people you work with but it also tests your relationships. Luckily, we all survived and had fun, watched a lot of horror movies and ate a lot of hummus. At the best moments it was like one really long, weird, creatively satisfying sleepover, or summer camp.

Sometimes it's hard to keep the big picture in mind, you're putting a lot of little pieces together (like Frankenstein's monster), and with this project, there were so many layers, formats, materials, tenses – it wasn't easy. I think we just kept fun, honesty, spontaneity and a real love for what we were working on in mind. The film holds together because we kept those ideas in mind more than anything. Also, working on something so fragmented, in a formal sense, makes it a little easier; you have more liberties when it comes to variation from scene to scene. But ideals seemed to help unify it all with a healthy dose of and goofing off and nudity.

**FANG:** How did you conceive the idea for VIDEO DIARY?

**DENNIBERG:** The film is very autobiographical. Granted, my vagina unfortunately doesn't suck

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the souls out of rapists or ooze bloody TV static by the gallon every month, but the whole “I love you, but I'm afraid to touch you” theme is definitely all me. I've always had a bunch of intimacy and body issues, so I've learned to deal with that crap over the years by creating personal films about body horror (David Cronenberg is more of a self-help guru than a filmmaker for me). I originally got the idea of a girl needing to have sex to live when I was a lonely, horny teenager, watching EDWARD SCISSORHANDS over and over alone in my dark room (while eating a lot of pizza and Doritos). EDWARD SCISSORHANDS has always been my favorite film and the one that inspired me to become a filmmaker in the first place. Because of that, I promised myself I would someday make a film as personal for me as that film was for Tim Burton.



Later on, I learned about Lilith (the Mother of all demons) and started daydreaming about my own mythology that I could create as an origin tale for this “girl” who needed sex to live. This girl was always me, and my obsession for Louise Brooks in G.W. Pabst's DIARY OF A LOST GIRL naturally drove home the need to name my main character after her. This idea was many years in the making, so as I grew up and changed, so did Louise's story. I always knew I wanted sex and death to be two sides of the same coin for Louise, as they are really the only two subjects I am interested in. All the characters in the film are based off of real people (or an amalgamation of many) in my life. If I were an immortal succubus who worked at a video store, I would be Louise.

**FANG:** Can you talk about your writing process for the screenplay?

**DENNIBERG:** I first started writing the screenplay in my undergrad feature writing class at UCF, taught by Barry Sandler (who wrote Ken Russell's CRIMES OF PASSION). I wasn't expecting it to go in the direction of a comedy, but when it was read out loud, the corny dialog that naturally comes out of me just guided it from there. I remember very clearly the first time I talked about the idea to my good friend Chris Shields on our porch when we were roommates in Florida. Chris has been my main collaborator for years and I wouldn't be the filmmaker I am

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today without him. He understood the story on a level like no one else, and contributed things to this film that are too numerous to even list. We would talk about the screenplay a lot, but eventually it was put on the backburner when I moved to New York to intern at Troma (where I was later hired as Lloyd Kaufman's assistant).

The next year I got into grad school at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and decided on the plane ride there that I would make VIDEO DIARY for my thesis film. So as soon as I landed I called Chris and we just picked up where we left off. We collaborated by phone and Skype for the next year, both saturating our minds with '80s horror movies to get in the right mood. Chris and I are both pathetically terrible romantics, and horror and bad romance is what really draws us together. We love horror romantic comedies in a deep way, but we're also experimenters and fans of the avant-garde. I decided to combine the two because that's usually how I operate as an artist: Collaging and mashing together all the things I love into one pot and not holding anything back.

So as I wrote, Chris would read and tell me his thoughts, and things would just evolve from there. He was great at helping me reign it all in, because I usually have way too many ideas at once and he would keep me focused. There's so much of us both in the script: Our taste, our humor, our friendship, our love of monster romance, and I think that is what makes it unique. For those who know Chris, it is obvious that Charlie (Louise's love interest) is based off him, so of course it made the most sense to have him play Charlie (I mean, who wouldn't want to put the dark love child of Adam Sandler and Lloyd Dobler in a movie?). So much of it was also written in the middle of the night with him on the phone as he worked at Dunkin Donuts. It's a very haunted script.

**FANG:** What was the production of your film like? Do any moments particularly stand out as being memorable?

**DENNIBERG:** The intro with Lilith and Adam was shot months before everything else, and it kind of set the aesthetic for the rest of film. Everything with Priscilla McEver (Louise) and Chris Shields (Charlie) was shot over the course of a month at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I flew them in from New York, and then we had maybe a day to rehearse and hang out, then immediately started shooting. It was a very intense schedule. We all did so much on the film; it's kind of a blur. We took the bus everyday to set, worked all day on the green screen stage, goofed off, and then took the bus home, hung out and watched some horror movies, then passed out.

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After two weeks of shooting the green screen and sound stage scenes, we filmed the rest at my apartment (where Priscilla and Chris were staying too). I had a very small and intimate cast and crew of wonderful friends that graciously worked for free out of the kindness of their hearts. We were shooting pretty much 24/7 for the whole month of July, so it was hot as hell and kind of gross with all the blood and FX stuff (very much a summer camp of horror).

The most memorable moment of the production would have to be a prank my producer, AD and green screen cinematographer played on the rest of us. I would often say jokingly that if anyone was uncomfortable with being naked in front of the camera that the entire crew would just get naked too. So when some of us got back from a smoke break, all three of them were naked pretending to shoot a scene without us! There's nothing more inspiring than seeing a naked woman behind the camera or holding a boom. I would say that moment is a perfect example of the kind of fun attitude we all brought to the set.



**FANG:** Can you talk a bit about creating the visuals of VIDEO DIARY? How much was practical, versus done in post-production?

**DENNIBERG:** The film is half green screen sets and half regular world sets. The choice to have a scene in green screen really just came down to trying to take advantage of the fact that we had no budget. I don't believe in having a big budget to make a movie. I think it's so much more exhilarating to make something beautiful out of trash than it is to dump a \$1,000.00 on a stupid jib shot that no one cares about (let the record show that THE PLAYER is excluded from this statement). Sorry for the money philosophy rant, but I think budget has so much to do with the integrity of how a film is made these days. Anyway, I created miniatures for any scene that was green screened, which was usually constructed out of poster board, paint, trash, broken CDs, Barbie dolls, animal print, glitter, Christmas lights, TVs and duct tape. The sets were usually built around a TV so that whatever I put on the screen would show through as the moon in a night backdrop, or window in an interior. Honestly, the entire film was a big experiment because it was the first time I ever used green screen. I did all the post-production effects

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myself, and would usually spend eight hours a day editing for the next year, just trying new things out as I went and keeping what worked. The intense color palette was the Dario Argento and Mario Bava color scheme screaming to get out of my brain. My cinematographer Casey Puccini (who also plays Michael, Louise's manager and best friend) is really great at capturing that kind of light and mood. We talked a lot about how I wanted it to look like an '80s new wave *giallo*

on VHS. The flashback scenes in the 1920s are shot on VHS, and I wanted to go for the look of an Elvira set, or PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE. I pretty much felt like I was in an Ed Wood RPG the entire time.

**FANG:** What prompted you to choose to go with the unique aesthetic of the film?

**DENNIBERG:** I wanted VIDEO DIARY to look like that horror movie I never found (but knew existed) in the haunted video store that's been my life. Since I was a kid I was obsessed with going to the video store just so I could look at the VHS covers in the horror section. I wasn't allowed to watch any of the "scary movies," so ironically my fantasy of what the horror movie *might*

look like inside the box always ended up being scarier and more surreal than the movie itself.

The German Expressionist/'80s VHS cover aesthetic just feels the most welcoming and instinctual to me. I also think certain media I saw as a kid had a weird imprint on my aesthetic sensibilities, like PEE WEE'S PLAYHOUSE and the BEETLEJUICE cartoons. My lead actress Priscilla McEver is actually one of the biggest Pee Wee Herman and Lydia Deetz fans I've ever met, so her playing Louise was just meant to be. She also was a child of late '80s imprinting, and because of that our friendship and collaboration has a very sci-fi, X FILES twist to it (I know that she knows where the bodies are buried in the Winona Ryder wasteland of our youth).

When Chris first arrived on one of the sets, he said it felt like he had just stumbled into my brain. I feel like my set design is my primary way of directing a film for the actors and crew. I think I'm good at choosing the right, talented people to interpret my characters, and giving them a surreal world to exist in. I'm just lucky that these talented people happen to be my good friends.

**FANG:** Can you talk a bit about the music in the film?

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**DENNIBERG:** Friends' bands and some other folks I met through Danny Gallegos, the first AD and the main punk in the movie. He introduced me to Bestial Mouths, whose music is all over the film. I saw them play and asked if I could use their stuff and they said sure. Danny's band Cemetery contributed a great song "Stateward," and all the songs Chris sings are his originals from his one man punk project, Mr. Transylvania. Other stuff came from people and bands Chris and I knew from playing music and performing in Florida, like Outmode, Father Finger, and Counters. The song played in the intro 'Shadow's Connected to the Light' is actually the only song written specifically for the movie by my friend Matthew Donovan, who also goes by Teadora. Teadora also plays Adam in the Garden of Eden. The film's aesthetic and music are very much one homemade, collage-y, intense, and colorful makeshift.

**FANG:** You're obviously a genre fan yourself. Can you name some of the inspirations for your film?

**DENNIBERG:** Oh god, here we go: Chris and I are such video-holics, it's sick. When we lived together we devoured at least three a day. Fassbinder and MORGAN STEWART'S COMING HOME, Andrzej Zulawski and Stephen Sayadian. It was a constant high brow/low brow roller coaster. I think that's largely where the film comes from. I'm a huge fan of Albert Pyun, and because of VIDEO DIARY, I actually have become friends with him since our films showed at the Pollygrind Film Festival together. He helped get me out to the festival since I'm still poor as ever, and it really is a dream come true when a filmmaker you admire actually likes your work! RADIOACTIVE DREAMS is such a big inspiration!

{vimeo}47488668{/vimeo}

MY DEMON LOVER and ROCKULA were the biggest influences for the tone and humor of VIDEO DIARY. My great affection for romantic horror comedies of the 80s and 90s is their sleazy innocence that just makes me swoon. Chris Shields is manic for MANNEQUIN and MANNEQUIN 2, so that shines through in the script as well. People have told me on more than one occasion that VIDEO DIARY feels like an experimental John Hughes film, and I can't deny that THE BREAKFAST CLUB and WEIRD SCIENCE had some kind of wonderful effect on forming my cinematic identity. To me there is nothing more romantic than making out in a graveyard, or watching a horror movie while eating pizza, or just plan 'getting the shit scared out of me'. Now, in one last quick breath: Lloyd Kaufman, Woody Allen, Catherine Breillat, Tony Oursler, Clive Barker, Frank Henenlotter, Agnes Varda, Derek Jarmen, Jodorowsky, LIQUID SKY, Argento, Bava, Maya Deren, John Waters, NADJA, Jean Rollin, Paul Naschy, George Kuchar, George Romero, Nick Zedd, Jerry Lewis, ROCKY, Buster Keaton, Roger Corman, Hammer Films, David Lynch, Guy Maddin, HEATHERS, CLUELESS and last but certainly not

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least, Tim Burton.

**FANG:** What project(s) are you working on currently? Do you foresee doing more horror in the future?

**DENNIBERG:** Chris and I are working on another feature! It's a horror anthology very much in the style of VIDEO DIARY, only this time we want to push the insanity of the visuals even further. It's about a haunted video store in the middle of a graveyard, which sets the stage for five horror tales, all romanticizing the act of watching a horror film in their own unique way. I will direct two, Chris will direct two, and the fifth one will be a collaboration of both of us. The tales of terror will consist of a cyberpunk Medusa, werewolf women, sex cannibal lovers, a Dr. Frankenstein celebrity video mortician, and a gender-bending haunted nerd frat house. My main influences for this one are HOLY MOUNTAIN, BOXER'S OMEN and Ancient Greek mythology, whereas Chris's are more in the realm of George Romero, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Stephen King. There are many different body parts we are using for this next video creature we that we like to call making a movie.

I've also developed a new way of experimenting with different looks and moods by working with video installation and performance. Right now I am a part of a noise performance group called Viral Swan with my friends Caleb Yono and Cassandra Jackson (which I sometimes say feels a lot like abstract post-apocalyptic LARPing). Many of the psychedelic sequences in VIDEO DIARY were remnants from previous projects and performances in the same way.

**FANG:** Anything else you want to share?

**DENNIBERG:** I guess I would just like to share the crazy irony in general I'm feeling right now. FANGORIA has always been one of my favorite horror magazines since I was a teenager, and the first boy I ever had a crush on is the one who introduced to me to it. It's so bizarre for me to experience the horror and romance involved in just doing this interview in the first place, it is very surreal for me. My friend Casey yesterday told me that he remembers me talking about dreaming about getting interviewed by FANGORIA someday when we were in pre-production for VIDEO DIARY. We laughed thinking it would be crazy if that ever happened. And yes, this is totally crazy that this is happening, and it is awesome!

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For much more on VIDEO DIARY OF A LOST GIRL, visit the film's [Facebook](#).