



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Organization + creativity = movie success

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on the lighter side

This article on movie producer Bill Ryan and his father, Allan Ryan, FSA, is the second on entertainment personalities who are the children of Society of Actuaries (SOA) members.

A popular maxim teaches that early risers get ahead in life. With that in mind, maybe Allan Ryan should have foreseen success for his son Bill from childhood.

"But no matter how early I got up," Allan, a director at Deloitte and Touche, New York said, "I'd find Bill, dressed, having done his homework, ready for the day."

It was the family joke that Bill never had a childhood. "He's been like an adult since he was eight years old," according to Allan, who described his son as driven.

Allan said Bill was a member of the local Audubon Society as a child. "Just him and all these much older people. He would go out bird watching, and he had to keep a log of the birds he saw. It really helped refine his natural organizational skills."

Bill was 12 when movie passion hit full force. He was taken to see "Star Wars." When he got accepted into a program for high school students at UCLA film school, the die was cast.

After high school, he enrolled in the University of Southern California film school. He had completed his sophomore year and was giving tours at Universal Studios when he landed a part-time job as an intern with Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment.

Another employee mentioned that film-maker John Hughes was looking for an assistant. Bill got the job and put his education on hold.

Now 26, Bill has enjoyed a rapid rise from office assistant to head of Great Oaks Entertainment, a Chicago-based production company formed by Hughes and Walt Disney Studios. He has worked for Hughes, creator of the "Home Alone" movies, "Sixteen Candles," "Pretty in Pink," and the "Breakfast Club," for five years.

When the company is filming, Bill wears a producer's hat. He was executive producer on "Baby's Day Out," the remake of "Miracle on 34th Street," and associate producer on "Dennis the Menace." He described the job as "overseeing the production of the film, the quality control, and the work of the line producer."

To be successful, Bill said, you have to be able to handle the stress, work very hard, and keep sight of the big picture. "You have to be able to maintain the project unity in your mind. John Hughes pretty much writes all the films we do, and so, creatively, it's taking his words and script and getting them onto the screen in a way that works."

"Home Alone" remains Bill's favorite Hughes' project. "It was the first movie I worked on with John. I was his assistant from start to finish. No one knew at the time how big it was going to be."

Allan feels Bill's success hinges, at least in part, on his phenomenal organizational ability. Bill disagreed, "Not really. I certainly can do that part of it. Coordination is important, but I'm more interested in the creative side." It's that side he hopes to fulfill someday as a director.

Allan claims no credit for his four children's creativity. Bill described his mother, Ellen, a great lover of movies, as "very imaginative. She's the right brain to my father's left brain. All three of my siblings are more artistic than I am," he claimed, referring to his brother Kevin, 24, and sisters Katie, 17, and Tara, 11. "They're all into the visual arts."

Before fixing on a movie career, Bill considered several career choices, according to his father, but not, apparently, the actuarial profession. Though good at math, Bill said he is "still a little boggled" by his father's job. Asked whether he understood what his father did when he was little, he replied, "You could say I understood it as well then as I do now."

When he asked if it is possible for a producer to watch a movie as any other audience member would, he said, "I try to be an innocent audience member, but it's tough when you know what's going into it. I'm a tough critic. But I still love to go into a dark theater and just be entertained."



The Ryan family enjoys a Christmas gathering including (back row, l-r) Ellen and Bill (front row, l-r) Tara, Katie, Allan and Kevin.