

## Calvin Starnes, grip

Over the past two decades, Calvin Starnes has worked as an assistant director, a grip, and, most recently, a screenwriter. This interview focuses on his work as a grip, a career he recently quit due to his frustrations with changes in the industry. In what follows, he recounts his concerns about diversity, safety, training, work hours, and relentless budget cuts. Starnes blogs about his experiences in the industry at [writercalvin.tumblr.com](http://writercalvin.tumblr.com).

*Describe your career in the industry. Where did you start? Where did you end up?*

I went to Boston College from 1990 to 1994. During my junior year I was interning at the Coolidge Corner Theater and this movie came through, which I think was the first US-Russian cooperative film after the Berlin Wall came down. It was called *Banya*, produced by Mark Donadio. He gave me my first job as a production assistant, which got me started working in the Boston film industry. I did PA [production assistant] work on commercials and movies and worked on student films and low-budget productions as an assistant director or a grip or an electrician.

I came out to L.A. in 1996 and did AD [assistant director] work for three years, but burned out quickly. You typically have the same arguments over and over again, especially in the lower-budget, nonunion world. You always have a UPM [unit production manager] or line producer who tries to cut corners, like skimping on the transportation department or failing to hire a location manager. They make those cuts without realizing how important the jobs are and that somebody has to do those tasks whether you hire someone or not. So, in those situations, the AD often ends up doing those things on top of their main responsibilities.

In 1999 I had a friend who was doing this Ken Loach movie, *Bread and Roses*. Ken is very pro-union and the show was going to start nonunion, but was guaranteed to flip. If I signed on to grip for Ken, I would get all of the days I needed to join the union. More money? Less responsibility? Sign me up. I threw all my AD stuff in the trash and gripped from 1999 to 2014.

At the time, being a grip seemed attractive. Once you got in the union, you were able to work on bigger shows and make more money. Back then, you didn't have as many low-budget shows and the tax incentives hadn't destroyed the L.A. industry yet. If you were good at your job, you always had work. And I was fortunate to work a lot and make good money.

*What does a grip do?*

Not all grips do the same thing. You have canvas grips who mend and sew all the flags and rags. You have construction grips who might work with the art department or be on loan to another department. You have rigging grips, who generally come in before shooting to set up these massive green screens or steel towers and scaffolding or build tents or anything that is labor and time intensive.

Then you have set grips, or "show ponies," as some like to call us, who work the set. We're the sister department to the electrical department. They set the lights. We shape, color, diffuse, and cut the lights with various flags and frames. We also design and build rigs for lights when they need to be in places that you can't put a light stand, like on the ceiling or off the side of a building.

Or if they want to put a camera on a roller coaster, motorcycle, boat, or car, we're the ones who have to figure out how to do it. We also do all the camera work in terms of dollies and cranes. That's the dolly grip. Dolly grips are unofficially part of the camera department because even if they wanted to help us they are often chained to their dolly and their camera operator.

*It sounds like grips have their hands in a little bit of everything. Does that make union classifications and job functions complicated? Do the boundaries between departments ever blur when it comes to who does what?*

Officially, each kind of grip has a specific list of duties, but we always end up doing more than what is officially written into our contracts. If other departments show up not having done their work or are unprepared, they will probably call grips to fix it. There's an old set joke: "What's the heaviest piece of equipment the grip department carries? The art department." But it all depends on the department head. I had a boss—a key grip—who was a yes man. He presented himself and his grips as the guys who could do anything. And I understood why. He wanted to make himself look good, which in turn makes him more hireable. The

flip side to that is that he got to look great saying “yes,” but we had to do the extra work.

Of course you also get other key grips who refuse to do anything outside their specific responsibilities. They don’t care if other departments aren’t prepared or don’t have the right equipment. These guys just say it isn’t their job. And I can definitely see that side of it, too. It depends on who you work with. There’s a delicate balance between being a team player and doing someone else’s job for them.

*Do you think producers want to film in other parts of the world because they can escape union work rules and regulations?*

It’s probably naive to say they aren’t a factor, but labor cost is a small fraction of your budget compared to cast, location fees, and equipment. So it’s a factor, but subsidies are a much bigger factor. Studios are not choosing to go Louisiana because labor is cheaper. They are going to Louisiana because Louisiana is going to give them a big bag of free money.

*What are some of the complaints that producers make about work rules and job categories here in L.A.?*

Producers want to do more with less. There’s no doubt about it. How can we do this for less money? How can we get rid of more people? If they can do it with six guys instead of nine and make them work longer, they will do it. In the 2012 contract negotiations, the studios wanted cross-utilization between the art department, electricians, and grips. Cross-utilization would allow the studios to hire fewer people and make those people do more work. But not everybody can do what a grip can do. Not everyone can do what an electrician can do. I can’t. Asking us to do more for less or do something we’re not trained to do ultimately creates an unsafe work environment.

Not every executive or producer wants this. There are some genuinely great producers and execs out there who get it. But this is often the cost-cutting mentality of the people driving the negotiations. Clearly they have no clue what anyone does on the set because if they did they would never ask for this. But, far be it for an executive to step over a dollar to pick up a dime.

*Do they actually see a lot of cost savings in cross-utilization? Or is it a bargaining chip? Is it something they throw in to muddy the waters so they can later say, “We’ll take this off the table if you take that off the table”?*

It’s tough to say. By all accounts the lead negotiator of the AMPTP [Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers] does not seem like a pleasant

person, and during the last negotiation she didn't give a shit about anything that our side had to say. I wasn't there, but those were the reports coming out of the negotiations. It dovetails nicely with the subject of income inequality and the fact that corporations don't care about labor at all. Basically they say, "If you break, we'll get a new one. You are replaceable." So I do think cross-utilization was a legitimate request, especially when you look at the latest Writers Guild of America negotiations, where studios asked for an obscene amount of rollbacks. Of course you're going to ask for more than you're going to get. That's negotiation. But I think it says a lot about what they think of us when they ask for *so* much. It just seems there's this new cruelty coming from their side. We're in negotiations right now. I've heard that after the 2012 negotiations, our health plan is in good shape, so this round we're focused on working conditions. I think this next contract will be very telling. It will illustrate whether the union is willing to hold the line or if working conditions will continue to decline.

*What do you think is driving the decline?*

Media conglomeration. Six companies own 90 percent of *all* media. Nine tenths. I don't think you can point to a particular individual on a set and say he or she is responsible for the decline in working conditions. But you do feel the effects of media conglomeration. It's too easy to chart the rise of the multinational corporation alongside the decline of our protections and entitlements. Multinationals rolled in with more money and more lawyers. We have money and lawyers, too, but the guys running my local union are grips. They didn't go to business school. They didn't go to law school. It was just a bunch of set guys trying to look out for one another. Now they're facing a wall of corporate lawyers backed by lots of money and education.

The multinationals are using their power to reshape our contracts in a way that benefits them way more than it does us. We consistently lose during negotiations. For example we have a lot of contracts stating we don't get double time unless we work more than fourteen hours; as a result fourteen-hour days have become standard. Five fourteen-hour days, plus lunch, is a seventy- to seventy-five-hour workweek. Everyone's tired. It creates an unsafe working environment. And it's not just the low budget-productions that are doing this and benefiting from this.

Up until recently, HBO for example had a sweetheart deal. HBO! You might have heard of them because they have a couple of popular shows on the air. Initially HBO executives got a special deal because it was a new network, but they've had this deal for many, many years—even after establishing a track record of hit shows and high profits. You can't help but wonder how this all happens when

you're driving home late at night after working a fourteen-hour day on *True Blood* (2008–14) for lower wages.

*You've mentioned safety several times. Describe some of the safety concerns on a set. Have you seen those concerns increase over the course of your career?*

The biggest concern is fatigue. Everyone needs to watch Haskell Wexler's documentary *Who Needs Sleep?* (2006). He's made "long hours" his cause, and I'm sure glad he has. I understand that if you're in your twenties, a seventy-hour workweek may not seem like such a bad thing. You're young. You're resilient. You're still in the romance phase. You're in love with the glamour of working in this industry. But you're going to get older. You won't want to work seventy-plus hours a week forever. You'll want a life, a family.

Plus, it's horribly inefficient. If you need to shoot a TV show in eight days but you're asking us to do it in seven, you'll need to bring in a second and third unit to get it done. That may create more work for more people and it may cost more, but if you don't do it, everyone gets beaten down. You're overworked. You're exhausted. Your health declines. Your family life declines. Your entire quality of life declines. Again, I'll point to *True Blood*. They will finish at eight in the morning on a Saturday, only to have to be back at six or seven in the morning on a Monday. Your Saturday is fucked because you can't function. Sunday you're barely back to normal, and then you're heading to work on Monday. And they're paying you less money than you deserve.

There are great unit production managers and line producers who know that more humane schedules actually make the crew more productive, more efficient. They would love to schedule ten-hour days. But the overlords who control the purse strings will only give them fifteen days to shoot something they know really needs twenty days to do properly. There is this misconception that shorter schedules mean greater efficiency, but that's not always the case: you're paying more in overtime. You have to bring in additional people. You have potential injury costs. You have lower quality of work because everyone is rushing. You're missing shots. Ultimately, it lowers the product's quality.

If you're working on a great show, you're willing to give so much of yourself. If you feel that they care about you, and they are not beating you down because of the bottom line, you will go that extra mile when it's necessary. But if I feel they don't give a fuck, which is often the case, then I won't give a fuck. I'll do my job, but I won't give them anything extra.

*Have you worked outside of Los Angeles? How do those experiences compare?*

I worked in New Mexico. I did two movies there. I also worked in Atlanta. The labor pool I was exposed to at the time didn't measure up to what I was used to

working with in Los Angeles. There's a local top tier that is great, and then there's everyone else. As the town gets busier, the qualified people get snatched up and you end up with kids you can't trust to do certain things. They might hurt themselves, damage the equipment, or hurt somebody else. We did *Due Date* (2010) in New Mexico. It had tons of car stuff, tons of car rigs, and you need to be able to do that type of work efficiently. When you're in these new locations with kids who might not know how to do certain things, you have to double-check their work or not ask them to do it at all. You might have to ask them to just stand there and hold your wrench.

At this point, some locations are beginning to train more and more people. That's because they have a lot of work, so they've developed training programs of their own. They're probably getting better every day. But the bulk of people in L.A. are professionals. They are going to get it done well and fast. And that's the critical difference. It's the trade-off production companies are willing to make. They can get all kinds of free money when they leave L.A., but the quality of work often suffers.

*You said "kids"?*

When I say "kids" I mean the level of experience, not necessarily age. But in New Mexico there did seem to be a lot of grips in their twenties and thirties. Same in Atlanta, but also some in their forties. You don't see a lot of older grips working on set. You see a few in their fifties and sixties working sets, but it's a young person's game, especially with the hours we have these days. There is some ageism. You might not get hired because there is a perception that you're weaker or slower. Gripping is hard work. It's hard on your body.

*Let's talk more about the -isms. How have you seen racism, sexism, or ageism affect working conditions?*

I'm a young, white, straight guy, so I don't get any abuse, but I've seen and heard a lot of offensive things. I've worked with homophobic guys. I've worked with racist guys. I've worked with guys who say horrific things about women. Film sets can get very "high school locker room" very quickly. You look to producers to set the tone, especially in television. Directors come and go, but the producers are the constant fixtures.

The cast also can play a role in bad behavior. Male cast members are often the worst. If they begin to misbehave, then it becomes okay for everybody else to misbehave. And if nobody shuts it down, like the producer, then the bad behavior gets out of control. Certain decorum is ignored. Bad behavior becomes the rule of the day. Comments that shouldn't be said are said.

I think a lot of women would like to say something, but don't come forward for fear of losing their spot or for fear of looking like they're "difficult." But they should come forward. I know it's easy for me to say that because I'm not the one who has to deal with this stuff. And to be fair, men should also come forward to confront someone who is saying or doing something they shouldn't. Just because someone like me doesn't get any abuse doesn't absolve us of responsibility to step up when we see it happen. Only by coming forward do we even have a shot at changing the environment or reducing the number of times it happens. Right now everybody does it because everybody gets away with it.

*Of all the people on set during your career, what percentage have been white, straight males?*

I would say like 70 or 80 percent. Probably more. You have a lot of women in certain departments: makeup, hair, wardrobe, the art department. I would say there's a sizable percentage of lesbian and gay people within the industry as well. That said, I've never met an openly gay grip. It's weird. Sometimes you spend your day on set talking about random, benign stuff then all of a sudden someone will say something homophobic and you realize not everybody thinks like you do.

I've only been in a position to hire and fire a handful of times. At the end of the day, I don't care what color you are or if you're a woman. If you can do the job, great, that's what I want. But not everyone operates that way. I'm not suggesting that anybody has an evil motive or goes out of their way to never hire people of color or women. Maybe they just want to hire their friends, and all their friends happen to be white males. That said, I know there are racist or sexist people who would probably never hire people of color or women.

*Do you think this trend has anything to do with the way crews are put together at the beginning of each production? Do cohorts develop and then tend to stick together?*

Definitely, you have to fit. You spend more time with these people than you do with your family, so you have to get along. It's tough to break into crews that travel together, no matter what color or gender you are, because there is a preexisting core. You can come in as a day player and then come in more regularly, but once you have your team, that's it until somebody leaves.

There's no way to establish top-down hiring policies that would make teams more diversified because that would break up the logic of how crews form and travel. Teams have to create their own affirmative action plans. If you're forcing me to hire someone, you're creating a situation where I don't know if I can trust them, and I don't know their skill level. You're also telling me to hire an unknown over someone I already know and trust.

Here's the thing: technically, the unit production manager or line producer hires and fires. But they tell us, "Bring in your guys because you know who you like to work with." If production gave us a team of their own choosing it would be inefficient. It would potentially cost them money and could create an unsafe environment. We would have to start over with each production—getting to know each other and how each person works, and then building up the trust that's necessary to do the job well. As I mentioned, we're already under a massive amount of pressure to do so much in such little time.

*You don't want to bring in inexperienced people, but every member had to break into the crew at some point, and as a relative unknown, right?*

Well, yes. There are a few ways to get a spot on a crew. One, you all started in the business at roughly the same time and came up together. Two, you have someone who will vouch for you. I have a handful of guys that I will vouch for. If you come with a vouch, it's like *Goodfellas*. Somebody is speaking up for you. You're trusted.

Sometimes you lose a guy due to sickness or family emergency. Or suddenly production just added something to the schedule and you need to bring in guys immediately, so you end up having to call the [union] hall. When you call the hall you never know what you're going to get. We call it "quick picks," like the lottery. And sometimes you get lucky. I made a great friend who is an awesome grip from a hall call.

Other times you get guys who are drinkers or don't want to wear a radio or have attitude or just aren't good and never will be no matter how great their attitude is. They demonstrate the imperfection of that system. In the purest sense, unions can't put one guy over another. We're all supposed to be equal. But we're not all equal. You build your reputation, and your reputation precedes you. If you are great, that reputation goes forth and people call you. If you're difficult or bad at your job for whatever reason, then that reputation goes forth and people won't call you.

But if the set is 70 or 80 percent white already, when people are crewing up, they only are thinking about people they've worked with before. It becomes a self-perpetuating system that excludes people of other ethnicities. I don't know the answer. I don't know how we break that cycle. How do we make sets more diverse without forcing people to hire new and unknown people?

If just one person on your crew had to be someone new who was not a white, straight male, that might be a way to get started. It could almost be a lottery, so you don't know what you're going to get. The downside would be that the new guy would take a spot away from a core team member. I'd have to tell my friend, "You can't work because I have to hire this guy."



I think a good starting point might be if you could create an additional spot on a crew. But that is something that would have to be created by production. For example, we were told to hire the brother of the UPM of this TV show we were on. But we didn't have to lay anyone off. He was going to be an extra guy. So we said, "Sure, bring him in." He didn't know anything, but he was a good guy. He wanted to learn and he worked hard. We taught him a bunch of stuff. That's the perfect scenario. If it's an extra person who won't take a spot away from a core team member, give me whoever you've got. It diversifies the crew. It creates more work for more people. And it trains a larger, better workforce because it's putting the new guy among a solid, experienced group of grips.

*What are the top four things that keep grips up at night?*

Tax incentives. Tax incentives. Tax incentives. Tax incentives. Is that four?

In my opinion, they are destroying the industry. It's a race to the bottom. Everyone is trying to figure out what they can do to attract productions to their town. But incentives should be for a start-up business, to help it gain a foothold and become sustainable. But these are billion-dollar companies. They make a net profit *every* year. Even at the height of the recent recession, they were profitable! And yet they're getting money from all these states. To be fair, I don't blame the studios. If someone wanted to give me money, I'd take it. Who wouldn't? But after these temporary communities are built on incentives or subsidies, the state legislature could determine the tax incentives aren't beneficial, which they aren't, and shut off that money and production would just leave. You would then have all this infrastructure gathering dust and people without jobs who invested in a career that no longer exists.

For thirteen years Louisiana has been enticing productions to shoot there with huge handouts, and production would stop almost overnight if they turned off the tap. How long have we been shooting in L.A.? More than a hundred years? Maybe in one hundred years Louisiana can be sustainable, but right now in 2015 it's a false economy propped up by taxpayer handouts to billion-dollar multinational companies.

Tax incentives and subsidies bribed so much of the work in Los Angeles to other states and countries. And California is having to bribe them to come back with our own massive tax incentives. I have potholes the size of the Grand Canyon on my street. But instead of fixing my street and our infrastructure, we get to give our tax dollars to profitable media companies just to keep them in town—that is, until someone offers them even more money to shoot somewhere else.

I don't know. I made a good living as a grip in L.A., but I don't know how much good work is left here. TV pays well, but the features were destroyed by incentives. Back in the day, you had huge features shooting in L.A. all the time. They were taking anyone off the street to fill crew positions. Those days are gone. I would advise anybody looking to get in the business to be very wary. A booming production hub today could easily become a ghost town tomorrow. Look at Michigan.

*Some years during your career, you were doing a TV series as well as a feature film or two. That seems like a hefty schedule. How did you manage that workload?*

It depends on the projects. I did *Scrubs* (2001–10) for many years. Those were five-day episodes, anywhere from eighteen to twenty-two episodes per season. If you run that schedule all the way out with twenty-two weeks of no hiatuses, that's still only five months, which leaves you seven months to play with. There were years when I needed to work all of the time. And there were years I could afford to be a little lazy and not work so much.

It's really about what you can stomach. If you can handle working that long, go for it. If you land all the right shows and work quite a bit, you can have a big year—a six-figure year for sure. That's not everybody, though. For anybody breaking into the business, I would say that's not the norm.

*What would you estimate is the average gross income for somebody who works a reasonable amount of time over the course of a year? We know what the hourly rates are. We know it gets adjusted for overtime. But on average, what do you think people are making annually? Are there any figures out there?*

No, there aren't. IATSE should be compiling this data. It is tough to narrow it down because there are so many different rates. If you work thirty weeks a year at some of these lower rates, you're not making that much. The tier-one rate is \$17 or \$18 an hour. It's obviously well above \$15, the gold standard in minimum wage debates, but \$18 an hour over thirty weeks a year is not a ton. It ends up being like \$39,000. It depends on what your overheads are. I think during my biggest year I grossed \$95,000 or \$96,000. That was a combination of one particular show that was just brutal, along with some other work. It wasn't fifty weeks or anything like that. It was just a lot of hours crammed into a short period of time. It's referred to as "blood money." You're happy when you get the check, but you hate when you're earning it. The scars are there. You had to work hard for that. Some of the younger guys are enthusiastic: money, money, money. Or people who make poor financial decisions and need to work those hours because they have seven boats,

two ex-wives, and fourteen kids. They need to work eighty hours. In my opinion those hours shouldn't even be an option.

*Let's talk about your career transition. Why did you quit?*

It's a great profession, and I don't mean to hate on it at all. There are a lot of great men and women who do it, and they love it. I wish I could be that person, because I would have continued doing what I was doing until I was sixty and had my sixty thousand hours. But there was this constant feeling that "they" didn't care about us. It beat me down. I felt like we were machinery. I needed to get out. I just didn't know what to do after that.

Then, one day my wife and I were watching a movie and this idea for a story evolved. I decided that I'd try to write it, with the naive hope that maybe I'd get lucky and sell it and I could get out. Well, I got lucky. And once I got my foot in the door, I thought maybe I would give writing a go. I'm fortunate enough that my wife works and makes money, so I can give it some time without having to worry about money. If I don't have any further success, I'll have to reassess. But for now my tool belt is hanging in my closet, hopefully never to come out again.

*What's an example of something that happened on a set that made you feel like you were just viewed as a machine?*

I've had UPMs turn off heaters even though people were freezing because they needed the heat for the night exterior we were shooting the next day. It was complete cluelessness. I've had UPMs who would nickel and dime you over every single thing. They would ask if I really needed everything I asked for. Well, no, *I* didn't need it; *they* needed it to shoot *their* show. You want to say no? That's fine, but then you tell the DP why I can't do what they're asking me to do.

It's a general lack of awareness of the bigger picture on the side of production. I've been on shows that did way more hours than were necessary. Not because of maliciousness; it was just inefficiency and incompetence on the part of the people running the show. Some producers and ADs don't have their shit together.

There might be times that you'd be standing on set waiting for something to happen. Finally a crew member would ask, "What are we waiting on?" And the AD would say, "Oh, yeah, I guess we're ready." If you add up all that standing-around time, and I've done it, you realize the amount of time wasted when you're not running a tight ship.

Every show is different. But I've seen far more negative than positive in my experience, and I've been on film sets for twenty years. It's a pervasive feeling of "The crew doesn't matter." The crew is often the last consideration after the budget and the actors.

*How concerned are you about safety?*

I'm curious to see if there will be any changes in the industry after the Sarah Jones tragedy. I was very unhappy with IATSE's response. After she died, they made all the right noises and gave speeches and had marches, but did nothing to enact meaningful change. In fact, I had friends who were behind the Pledge to Sarah website and they designed their own web app to address safety concerns on set, but they met a lot of resistance from the camera guild. There was a petition for IATSE to set up a national safety hotline, and on the day the petition launched, the president of IATSE, Matt Loeb, released a statement saying that they indeed had a national hotline in the works. I'll be interested to see if it ever materializes. Creating something like a national hotline would be a stand-alone thing that could provide an additional layer of safety for people to have at their fingertips. Hopefully IATSE is true to its word.

*The tragedy seemed to bring these issues out and put them on the front page. Were you surprised?*

I wasn't surprised at all. There are so many factors that went into that particular accident. I haven't read all the transcripts or reports, but you could easily see how it happened. You have faith in the ADs and production: if we're here, we must have permits. We must have this and that. I don't know the experience level of the people who were there, but maybe they didn't know any better. I have heard stories like that with more innocent scenarios. The mentality is, we're just going to pop a camera here and get it real quick. It's no big deal. A lot of times it isn't, but in this case, it definitely was. Just three weeks prior to that event I had to shoot pickups in the L.A. Metro tunnels for *Godzilla* (2014). I had to take a special class and get certified to be on the train tracks. I learned about all the stuff that could happen, like how fast you can get killed even if you know what you're doing and you're a railroad employee.

At the independent, lower-budget, and nonunion level, filmmaking can be very Wild West, either by choice or by ignorance. You need people there who are experienced enough to know when to speak up and who are willing to speak up. I read in some of the interviews that there were people saying prayers to keep them safe. So they knew enough to pray before getting out there but not enough to say, "I'm not fucking going out there." I also understand not wanting to speak up because you don't want to lose your job. Some of these people were women, so again they are faced with the added weight of potentially being seen as difficult. Maybe Sarah had reservations but didn't want to speak up. Or maybe she was dedicated and believed that if her boss, the director of photography, was out there, then they were safe. I don't know. I wasn't there. But when I read about it, I could see it. Anyone

who has spent any length of time in the industry understands exactly how the accident happened.

*Have you felt unsafe on sets?*

Yes. One time I was in a condor [an elevated work platform, like a cherry picker]. A condor has a big base, big wheels, and a long articulating arm. We'll often rig twenty-by-twenty-foot frames onto them with grids to diffuse the sun. We had two of them, and we were working in a neighborhood. The wind was up. We were under power lines. I had been up there for a while, and I had to pee. It was my first time ever peeing in a condor. You bring a water bottle up with you because you could be up there for a while. I had my blanket around so nobody could see me. It was a very delicate procedure because you have a small bottle and the wind is blowing. All of a sudden my radio starts blowing up, they're calling me, "Calvin, are you okay, are you okay?" I'm like, "What the fuck? *Now* you're calling me?" They're like, "Bring your condor down. Bring your condor down!" I looked and the wind had bent part of the rig that was holding the twenty-by-twenty frame and now I'm bobbing up and down even closer to the power lines.

One production company, which I think is now out of business, specialized in low-budget action films and their sets were notoriously unsafe. They had a stunt guy die. I saw them prematurely blow a cannon roll, which is when you essentially set a bomb off under a car to flip it over. And on the same show the *next* night I was almost hit by a flying windshield from a semi truck that they blew up. Very unsafe. And always because they were rushing.

Whenever I was in charge, I was always the guy who erred on the side of caution. If it was too windy, I would be the first one to tell you to take it down. A lot of other key grips, probably well within the range of safety, would say it's fine. Then there are ones who probably keep it up longer than they should, especially when they get in a high-dollar situation, like commercials. There's this underlying pressure to keep going until you get the shot. And that pressure comes from the top down.

There's also stuff that happens within departments. There was the electrician on *Selma* (2014) who got electrocuted because they were rushing. He was working on swapping out a bulb on a lamp and another dude energized the light and zapped him. From what I hear, he's physically wrecked and unable to work. I've seen guys who rush, rush, rush. But you have to take the time to do it right; otherwise people get hurt.