

# NEVER MESS WITH WHIT

You never forget your first real film set; the directors chairs, the big lights, the fancy cameras, all the people named “JJ” - it can be pretty overwhelming when you realize that you’re standing smack dab in the middle of an actual movie set and someone is yelling at you. LOUDLY.

## GET OUT OF THE %\*\$#ING SHOT!!!

As a PA, you spend a lot of time trying not to stare at the crew as they do their job – it’s terribly fascinating but not the sort of thing you can learn in one day. The most you can hope for is to stay out of the way of the people who do know what they’re doing and to pick up a few bits of knowledge along the way. Some people aren’t cut out for the fast pace and pressure of a film set, but the ones who do have that special quality that I like to call “getting it.” That is to say, they have an instant and inherent comprehension of the processes of a shooting set.

My friend Day Permuy was one of those people who “got it.” I knew the first time that I met her as a fresh-faced PA on the set of a spec shoot for a horror movie that she would have a solid career in the film business. If you’d told me that 15 years later she’d be one of Atlanta’s busiest production coordinators, I wouldn’t have been surprised.

Recently, I dropped by the production office of the DeNiro/Tra-  
volta show “Killing Season” to spend a few minutes with Permuy to find out the most important lesson she’d learned during her days as a PA. The answer was surprising: “Never mess with Whit.”

She was speaking of Whit Norris, a sound mixer who taught her the classic C-47 game. For those who don’t know, “C-47” is a mock technical specification for clothespins, unique to the motion picture industry – specifically the electric department. Look it up, it’s on Wikipedia.

Electricians will always have a few C-47s clipped to their person because at some point the gaffer will growl into his walkie-talkie, “put some Loving Amber on it.” That’s not a sly dating maneuver; it’s an instruction to attach a sheet of reddish-orange gelatin to the frame in front of a light in order to warm up the skin tones of the actors standing under the lights . . . and clothespins are cheap and easy clamps for getting that done.

The C-47 game is simple: just slip up behind someone and surreptitiously clip a clothespin to their shirt, or their hat – someplace really, really obvious to everyone else but them. It’s the film set equivalent of a “kick me” sign, and it’s especially fun when you take turns clipping C-47s to the ones already hanging off of an unsuspecting mark. It isn’t uncommon to see a long tail of clothespins hanging off a slow-moving 1st AD.

You more often see PAs playing this game and Permuy confesses that she had become rather addicted and had “possibly” developed a reputation as the “clothespin girl” around set. Her only mistake was when she decided that “the student had become the master,” and she tagged Norris with a clothespin. When he discovered the clothespin clipped to his shirt he knew that Permuy was ready for her next level of training.

As the crew headed to lunch, the young PA Permuy was assigned to count the crew and call “last man through” the line.

She noticed a group of grips headed down to the parking lot with some toolboxes and thought nothing of it until they returned grinning. As the guys went through the line one of them turned to Permuy and said, "You might want to take a look at your car."

Permuy strolled down to crew parking expecting to find her car up on blocks, but when she got there it looked fine. She walked around it twice, looking for signs of tampering. Convinced all was well, she went back up to the set and informed the grips that she knew that they'd just been messing with her.

"You'd might better take a closer look," was the reply she received.

She worriedly snuck back down to look again, but there was no visible tampering on the outside. She opened the car and sat down inside to look around. The radio was still there, the windows were in place, and the seats were fine, what was the big deal?? In frustration she went to rest her head on the steering wheel, and missed.

## HOLY CRAP! THE CAR HAD NO STEERINGWHEEL!!

She beat a line back up to set to find out where her steering wheel had gone, but the grips weren't talking. Since she was still

fairly green, Permuy had been assigned different tasks near set, but not directly on set, and as a result, she could only look for her missing steering wheel in so many places.

As the day wore on, more and more people from other departments would walk past Permuy and give her a special knowing smile, and each time her panic would ratchet a little tighter . . . how in the heck was she going to get home without a steering wheel on her car? How did everybody but her know where it was?

Finally, she found an excuse to go directly up into the shooting set. Trying not to look frantic, she scoured the place for her missing steering wheel. Every cart got the once over. She looked to see if it had been raised way up on a stand or mixed into the camera department's gear. Finally, near defeat, she paused to watch the scene being filmed when her stomach suddenly lurched sideways, for there, on the wall of the set, directly behind the actors, was Permuy's steering wheel. It had been incorporated into the artwork hanging on the wall and it had been established in the shot! There was no way she could retrieve her steering wheel now because it would wreck the continuity of the scene if it went missing!

For the remaining days they shot at that location, Permuy had to drive to work and let the grips take the steering wheel off her car and hang it on the wall, proving the point: Never mess with Whit.



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