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The Austin Film Festival is dedicated to the writer as the heart of the creative process of filmmaking. For the last 14 years, it has prided itself on seeking out films with strong storytelling, both written and visual. AFF uncovers outstanding, emerging filmmakers; serves as a creative catalyst for legendary, contemporary and student writers; fosters their development through panels, workshops and master classes conducted by professionals; recognizes, encourages, and challenges the talents of new filmmakers and provides outreach opportunities to writers and filmmakers.

By Anna Hanks

## Dog-Tired at the "Hair of The Dog" Brunch

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*Sometimes you just can't do it*

I started Sunday with a whole lot of other festival attendees at a Hair of the Dog brunch at Ranch 616 restaurant. Admittedly, it took my husband bringing me two cups of coffee to pry me out of bed for the 10 a.m. event. The demands of the festival are starting to wear on me.

The cute little diner where they are having the brunch is located on the fringe of downtown. It's a neighborhood where the stately homes of the early part of the last century have been converted to law offices and fancy corporate headquarters. Thank goodness these expensive-to-maintain downtown mansions mostly weren't torn down as they were in so many cities! Most of the buildings in the area are one, two, or perhaps even three stories, so the feel is much more residential than commercial.

When I arrive at the event, the snug spot is proving no match for the gazillions of people sedately storming the southwestern breakfast buffet. The line to get grub snakes out of the door and down the sidewalk. The restaurant has set a few tables outside, but the overflow crowd is taking over the neighborhood. Across the street from the diner, they've even claimed the nice, high retaining wall in front of the grassy lawn surrounding the mansion of Milkshake Media.



At the buffet, I grab a disposable plate and snag some diced potatoes, fluffy scrambled eggs, and some locally-made flour tortillas. There are meat options, but not being a meat-eater, I try not to even glance at them. Luckily, I got some of the wonderful green sauce, which goes beautifully with the eggs. Maybe I'll have to actually come back and eat breakfast at this restaurant.

I cross the street and end up sitting on a step at the end, talking to a fellow from Brooklyn. He's here in support of the short *June Weddings*, and somehow I end up with a tiny flyer for the film.

Next to me, the crowd on the curb has grown. I later plan to scan the people, to see if anyone is wearing one of those yellow Livestrong wristbands that the Lance Armstrong Foundation sells to support their cancer survivor programs. After all, we're sitting right in front of the offices of Milkshake Media, who was responsible for that Livestrong campaign.

When I pop back into the restaurant, the girl at the door reminds me that the place has probably cleared out because the panels are about to start. I make my way to the hotel, where I manage to get into a filmmaker roundtable. At the event, guests sit at a large round table, with one place saved for a panelist. Three panelists visit the empty chair

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during the event.

I end up sitting right next to Mike Akel, who won last year's AFF nan [Parties, Brunch & Times of Use](#) award for his comic teacher mock-documentary *Chalk*.

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At the panel, Akel gets into the details of getting *Chalk* made. He discusses how he financed his film, and the importance of finding an excellent lawyer to draw up your contacts. He advises buying a camera for shooting a feature. This is partly because after he used his camera, he rented it out for a bit to someone he knew. He then sold the used equipment, complexly recouping the costs of the camera. He also tells us *Chalk* had a theatrical release and is now out on DVD. That's a real AFF success story!

After the panel, I notice lots of festival people seem to be leaving the hotel. I see a camera crew packing up just outside the hotel's bar. The screenwriting portion ends Sunday, but the films continue through Thursday.

Exiting the Driskill through the bar, I stop to introduce myself to the bartender, David. Earlier in the week a source had told me that I absolutely had to talk to him. David is still setting up the bar, and doesn't really have time for conversation. He confirms that he's been working the hotel's bar for 25 years. I make a mental note to join him later for a chat.

Given my early-for-me morning, I head back home. This is partly because I had rushed out of the house to the Hair of the Dog Brunch without managing to feed my very own 120 lb dog. Ironic, yes, but the pooch will still be hungry.

My next film goal: *A Yeti in the City*, an AFF world premiere.

"It tells the tale of what happens when an abominable snowman enters a strange city where humans and animals try to coexist," or so the AFF program tells me. The program also features a photo of a human in a furry white suit, who may or may not be adorned with a gold chain. This quirky film has my name all over it.

Yet, as I manage to smash a little finger against a doorjamb in my own house, then trip over a plastic floor protector, I realize that I need to change my plans. I'm too exhausted to safely drive myself to the movie. Another time. Sleep calls.

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