

Overcome the Podcast - Episode 7
By Christian Bowman

Booking Prison Break was an incredible feeling. The character was only a small supporting co-star role, but it was going to be recurring. After driving up to Dallas , I checked in at a fancy boutique hotel near Mockingbird Station and had just gone up to the Ghostbar rooftop lounge at the swanky W hotel to soak it all in. The next day, we were filming at the Fort Worth Nature Center. The greensmen and production design team had made this cold Texas winter morning look like a hot Panamanian summer afternoon. I met the cast I would be working with, Dominic Purcell, Jodi Lynn O'Keefe and Marshall Allman. Vincent Misiano, the director then introduced me to Eric Norris, Chuck Norris's son, who has become a powerhouse of a stunt coordinator in television and films. We walked the scene and, while we were wearing big thick coats shivering from the cold, we had baby oil applied to us to make it look like we sweating. It was so chilly that we had to put a little bit of ice in our mouths to equalize the temperature so you wouldn't see our breath when we talked. We were coming into the scene after a van had wrecked and Dominic was going to come careening up in his car, shoot the driver of the van, pull Jodi out of the passenger seat and I was going to hop out of the back of the van with a gun to Marshalls head and then, we were going to have a good old fashioned stand off. It was awesome!

Things were going great! Giselle and I had bought a house, I was bartending at the hottest club in Austin, I suddenly had this little bit of fame and that brought a bunch of regulars to the bar, I had a steady gig on a TV show, and everything seemed to be

falling into place. Then, five episodes later, the writer strike hit. The show shut down. All production stopped. Almost immediately afterward, the relationship fell apart. I lost the bartending job, along with hundreds of other people in Austin, when eleven bars shut down overnight. The owners, The Yassine's, were suddenly raided for money laundering, drug and gun charges and, worst of all: tax evasion. You can't cross the IRS in America. I lost the Jeep, the house, the Harley, the marriage, I had to file for bankruptcy and I was afraid I was about to lose my son.

My name is Christian Bowman, and this is Overcome.

Things got dark. Real dark. I would go so far as to say, at one point there, I hit rock bottom. I had a nightmare rebound that ended almost as poorly. I had risen to a point where the fall hurt when I did hit the ground. I struggled... for awhile.

Fortunately, I found a project management job in Advertising. Almost everything about the job was great except I shared an office with my boss. And my desk was offset looking forward, and his was right behind me looking forward at my back, and he just watched my computer screen all day. I could see him in the reflection for eight hours. But project management was a great career and I was really good at juggling everything.

I was working full time, had a decent place and had gotten 50% custody of my son. I could see him everyday. And I did. I made it a point to either have lunch or dinner with him every day, as best I could.

Then, one morning, I parked the car, grabbed my laptop and and walked into the office building. I saw a small crowd of coworkers gathered in front of the Advertising company. Then I saw the chains. The doors were locked. The owner had allegedly stolen a bunch of different clients money and bailed. And we were all fucked. I was out of a job, again, along with dozens of other people at the company.

This was the third time that my job was abruptly stopped in ways that were out of my control. But something had to change. I began bartending again as I planned my next move. Bartending was an easy way to make cash in Austin. Perhaps, too easily. The lifestyle pulls you in.

I met some of the most amazing people working in the bars. I didn't need to approach anyone, I had thousands of people coming to talk to me every night. It felt good and I felt at home in that world. Aside from the constant ego boosts and consistent flirtation, there was the inherent danger of how easy it was to forget everything and just drink, to stay distracted.

It's difficult to think ahead when the only thing you're surrounded by is the party, chasing after the moment night after night. After I lost the acting and the ability to express myself through story, I survived on an almost hollow adulation in the nightclubs. A false love if you will, although I did generate some truly amazing authentic relationships, there was this participation award feeling of people slightly

impressed by some small past achievements of mine and that masked the fact that I missed being on set. . I no longer had the outlet to express myself in ways that were productive, which resulted in some dangerous behaviors. The carrot of attention on a string was misleading and I was being a jackass. I take ownership for everything, even if I regret some of my actions.

Being back in world of the nightlife in Austin, TX introduced more stories than I could possibly ever tell, but there was this one night in particular, that changed things for me. I had been driving with a coworker over to my best friend Jacques' place after we closed the bar down. It was about 4:30 in the morning. We were driving down South Congress avenue coming from dirty 6th Downtown. Up ahead, a black SUV suddenly flipped into the air right in front of us. The kid driving was thrown through the windshield but was still alive. We skidded to a stop in the middle of the road and ran out to help. When the truck landed upside down, he was pinned under the hood. His feet were sticking out a little near the front bumper, the wreck had stripped him of his pants, and his head was near the wheel-well. At first, Yasser, my co-worker tried lifting the front wheel while I tried pulling his feet out but Yasser yelled that I was stronger and we switched spots. The engine of the truck was still running hot and the weight of it pulled the hood down into the kids torso. I told the kid we were going to get him out of there. I tried lifting the wheel with all my might, looking straight into this young man's eyes. I told him "Hold on" and then watched his life end. The police arrived on the scene along with EMT and Fire literally right after he died. The officer on duty told us we did everything we could.

It got me thinking. A lot. I continued to think about the kids from the car accident I was in. I wondered how they were, all grown up. If they were battling some of the same issues I was. Escapism, hiding behind sex and alcohol. Running.

This was the first time in a long time that I was surrounded by death again. I suddenly realized that I still hadn't been grieving. I had a little time to process things before my son was born, but ever since, it had been pretty non stop. And now, watching this young kid's eyes become still. I had an existential freak out. I needed to do something. I felt like I needed to do something big, but I also felt a little trapped.

I decided that I was happiest when I was performing and I signed up for acting classes with an amazing acting coach, Laurel Vouvray. Acting coaches sometimes have to also be therapists, redirecting peoples feelings away from their own lives and into the scene. There are schools of drama-therapy designed specifically for that, but Laurel's class was top tier Meisner Technique. She had previously been a casting director in LA and she was honest... brutally honest. It was hard to get open up this shell I had built around me but she got it cracked every once in awhile. I met some amazing friends there, lifelong friends, and found my release again.

Laurels class took the month of December off that year, as the holidays made it too difficult to keep everyone scheduled throughout. I was still hungry though and

convinced some of the students to try to film something over the month. The idea was that each week we come up with a scene and shoot it so we keep our edge when class started back up in January.

As it was my idea, they told me to go ahead and put something together. So, I did. Nobody else put together anything and it looked like my project was going to be the only one we did that month. The next thing I knew, I had written a short film, put up some money, organized the gear with friends and rented what we didn't have, then directed and acted in this little short film. It was not a great story, but it was so much fun to shoot. I had just put my project management skills to work by producing and directing a film. It was amazing! I was a filmmaker.

My younger brother was about to graduate from college and kept convincing me that I should go. I was so proud of him for going but I never thought I could do it. I loved sneaking in on the classes back in Philadelphia when I was a teenager, and I always dreamed of having a foot in the academic world, but I didn't have any transcripts. All the public schools didn't transfer and I only had my GED. But he pushed me. Both of my younger brothers had their shit together and were pragmatic about things. I respect the hell out of them for how they managed their lives, but school was scary for me. I was worried I wouldn't be good enough to get in and that fear prevented me from even trying. I did love taking the acting class though and the nightlife was only chasing itself in circles. So I decided to apply.

It was such a long shot. I never really imagined I would get in. But I did dream about it. Just like after an audition, ripping apart your performance: I ripped apart my essays. I didn't think my test scores were as strong as they could have been. I worried about the fact that I was going to school late in life and that I would be the same age as the professors, not the students, and wished I had thought about it earlier. I superficially thought about all the negatives, but really, in my heart, I had hope. When a letter from the University of Texas at Austin arrived in the mail, I was so nervous, I didn't want to open it. When I read the first sentence, I dropped into my couch almost sick to my stomach. I was in!

Although, I had applied to the Radio Television Film program, I was only accepted for my second major pick, Psychology. I was determined to get into the RTF program. I figured I could convince the Dean to let me transfer if I brought up my grades and produced some content that would strengthen my application. So that summer, I set out thinking about how to make a film. I was going to make one, I wanted it to be a little better than the first. I didn't really understand story. I didn't really grow up watching TV or many movies. I only knew what I felt in that theater and that I wanted to be a part of that.

I had a couple of regulars that would come in to the bar I was working and we always had a great conversation. When I told them I had gotten in to UT, they were thrilled for me. Leticia De La Rosa Creasey was a former longhorn and Ryan Robnett was traveling into see her in Austin as they were handling business together. He had

graduated from the University of North Alabama and was stoked that I was going to go to school. They had already known about my past as an actor on the TV shows Lost and Prison Break. I had also gotten to work on some other shows and movies like Sin City 2, A Dame to Kill from Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller. I told them about my major, being accepted to Psych, but that I was going for RTF. Then I told them my plan and we began talking about making movies. I told them I had written, produced and directed before and they told me they were in a situation that would allow them to try something new.

Seeing as I didn't really know what I was doing, I talked to some of the people from the acting class who had been in a couple of other film projects I was a part of and one of them convinced me that he knew how to get distribution and had experience as a producer. Leticia and Ryan were in and they came on as executive producers. A few weeks later, we were filling out a Limited Partnership with the State of Texas.

There is a lot that goes into making a feature film. From insurances to vendor contract negotiation and casting and locations and every detail led to more and more. The more I did, the more I realized I had no idea what I was doing, but I had these people that expected me to know and I was learning on the fly, doing my best. We didn't have that much money to begin with, we didn't have much time for development. We only had a small window to take care of principal photography, and I didn't want to lose the momentum or lose the chance. I didn't have a script or a story in mind, so I was

scrambling to put it all together. I cast my girlfriend at the time as my girlfriend. Cast my son as my son. Used my apartment as my apartment, etc.

I wanted the film to work as a catharsis. Not just for me but for others.

I had this naive hope that, even if the film touched just one person, it would have done its job. I had no idea how powerful putting that thought into existence was actually about to play out and change my life in ways I couldn't even imagine. I had no idea how far this would actually reach and had no way of knowing what was about to happen afterward.

In terms of how I stumbled into the film industry, literally, I was kind of this regular guy, ish, who happened to find himself in extraordinary circumstances. Usually, kind of fucking it up and then learning from the mistakes afterwards. I had experience but I was biting off way more than I could chew. What I really wanted to do was just reach into my heart and scoop it out and hand it to the film and say hey, if you're watching this and you're having a tough time, it's ok. You're not alone. We're all dealing with something and it might not seem like it's going to get better, and sometimes it doesn't, but if you survive and you learn from it and you can pass on that knowledge to someone else to help them, then maybe, together we can make the world a little better.

I sat down and tried to think of the worst possible thing imaginable, as far as an instigating circumstance to frame the film. Aside from murder or crime, to which I know but I don't know, my personal experiences led me to think that the worst possible thing imaginable would be to lose a child. Losing an elder is life. Losing a peer of the same age group is tragic, but to lose someone young, before they've had a chance to live, that is devastating. I thought about how Vanda must have felt about losing Sonia. How the mother of that little girl Katie, must have felt from the other car.

So I began learning about the psychology of grief and pieced together a film following the Kubler Ross model: Denial, Anger, Depression, Bargaining and Acceptance: again, in no particular order. I also titled it "Overcome". My concept was a father who loses his only son, and goes on a fall from grace journey, riding the bottle all the way down until a possible suicide attempt, only to rebound and find some acceptance. As this was a film I was making Before I went to film school, it lacked structure, subtly or finesse. It smothered itself in gratuitous preciousness and, as the writer, producer, director, lead actor, crew member, and editor, the film suffered. But the making of was quite an experience!

One day, we got to Dripping Springs to Erin's family's land, to shoot a nightmare scene. We built a bonfire. There was already an existing burn pile with a few tree's in it, but we added a bunch more. Watching my best friend, Jacques, walk over it with gasoline got me really scared. The wood pile was massive. I had a couple volunteer firemen that were going to be on set and a nurse scheduled but the firemen got in an

accident on the way over and the nurse was called in to an emergency at the hospital before she could arrive. When the sun went down and we lit it up, the fire was bigger than anything I could have imagined. Fortunately, the family had mowed the grass down but there were still trail fires rolling out away from the main burn. We had production assistants running around with hoses trying to wet the ground. We had positioned the pile to be as close to the middle of the field as possible, and there wasn't supposed to be much wind that night, but then about half an hour into it, the wind began blowing. I sat nervously thinking the fire was going to jump and light up the hill country. The had wind steered the upper flames in the direction of the treeline and I thought my career would be over before it began. We had to move the camera's and gear so far away from the blaze to not melt that in the final picture, while the flame does fill the frame, the forced perspective doesn't adequately show the monstrosity of it.

It was important to me to shoot that nightmare scene. I had lived with nightmares for so long and with this near football field wide fire burning before me, it was a a powerful feeling for me to flesh it out and move past it. Everything went smooth. Nobody got hurt and we got the shot.

Toward the end of production, the producer we brought on began stealing money from the account. I caught him, a little too late, and we had to restrict the financials. After we wrapped, he threatened to destroy all the data from the hard drives. I had to beg him for the film back and after weeks of him making personal and professional threats, he finally delivered all the drives in a plastic grocery bag out the window of his

girlfriends car as she drove him over to drop it off. It was the mired in stupidity. I worked to bring in some additional editors from school but even with their help, realistically it came down to me alone finishing the film night after night working tirelessly. It took months of being locked in the darkness cutting it all together before I was able to have the composer work out the score and the colorist finish the final. But it was finished! I had a film in the can. And it was terrible. I had no idea what I was doing. But I was proud it was done.

We created a crowdfunding campaign for the film. It was a heartfelt introduction to this story about the car accident and how it affected me and what I wanted to do to help, if I could. The Indiegogo campaign was developed in part to help finish the movie and to pay for the film festival submissions, which averaged about a hundred bucks a pop. But I had also hoped to piggyback a percentage of the funds that might come in and route them over to a non profit that Vanda had created in Sonia's memory: the SOciety for New Initiatives and Activities. According to the website linked to this podcast, it's a lay and multicultural organization engaged in issues related to the self-determined and sustainable development of marginalized and vulnerable groups (indigenous peoples, youth, children, women and migrants) in the global South.

The indiegogo campaign unfortunately failed to attract a large donation base. The funding had run out and with low confidence in the film, it was shelved. I had leveraged the experience, along with a hardball tactic with the Dean of Admissions at UT to get the transfer over to the film school. I was finally accepted into the RTF cohort

after being denied twice. I apologized to Ryan and Leticia for failing to launch a film that generated a return for their investment. They were amazing about everything and the experience of filmmaking was an adventure in and of itself. Fortunately, they are both fine. Ryan had a co-starring role in the film and had a great time shooting and I was really happy to be able to include Leticia and her beautiful daughters in a music video I later directed for a band: The Bright Light Social Hour.

Leticia and Ryan released themselves from the Limited Partnership and things were put to bed on the film.

After the dust settled, I was in school full time and knocking out assignments left and right. I had moved to West Campus and lived just a few blocks away from the Drag. On December 3rd, 2014, I was walking over to class at the Moody College of Communications and opened up my Facebook account. I froze when I read the message waiting in my inbox.

Hello, This may seem weird but were you involved in a car accident in 1992 near Peoria, Illinois? If so, I was in the other car. Also, I want to let you know that, if it is you, I have no ill feelings toward you. I'd like to chat about it sometime if you'd be ok with that.

It was Jenny.