

Volunteer Spotlight Interview



MICHAEL HOLLAND

Nadine: What is your day job?

Michael: I work for Nova Scotia Power in the IT department, as a Business Systems Analyst. I was a consultant for many years, and a lot of times, when I was off work, I would volunteer at the Festival. It worked out great for me because it filled my time.

I started my IT career when I was hired fresh out of school for the Y2K scare in '99. I was hired in Ottawa, worked there for five and a half years, and ended up with an opportunity to move home to Halifax.

N: How did you get involved with FIN? How long have you been a volunteer?

M: I think it was Events Nova Scotia—it was a profile that I had, and they sent emails to the distribution list to gain interest in volunteerism. At that point, the Festival was using that profile, and I responded. I love movies—I'm a huge movie buff, so it made sense for me to volunteer at the Festival. And then, when I got to the Festival, I was like, yeah, I'm never leaving! I ended up through the summer doing the Outdoor Film Experience [now FIN Outdoor] and I did the youth festival [now FIN Kids]. There was one year I literally was full-time volunteering at FIN!

N: I'm sure they appreciated it!

M: It's so fun that I can't imagine myself not doing it.

N: From all those years, then, could you identify your favourite FIN Atlantic International Film Festival memory?

M: There was one Festival, I was standing at the door waiting to scan tickets, and all of a sudden this person comes around the corner with a big huge spotlight. It was the year that the movie DANNY featured, about Danny Williams, the premier of Newfoundland—and he comes around the corner. It was so cool, because he had an entourage and everything, and the cameras were all on him.

And the time I met Jason Priestley. I didn't even know he was there; I just finished managing a theatre, closed it, came out, all of a sudden I turn, there's Jason Priestley. I went up and said hi, and he thanked me for volunteering, that sort of thing.

I could go on and on about examples because you never know what happens at the Festival, you never know who you're going to meet. The one thing I find amazing about the Festival is you could be watching a film, see an actor, and then literally the movie ends and you see them in the audience. Or you go to the next cinema, and they're sitting beside you as a fan.

N: What part of the film festival would you recommend to a first-time festival goer or volunteer?

M: The front of house—being the ticket scanners and theatre managers—is really the best place to be as a volunteer because you get to see everyone. Being there, scanning tickets, managing theatres, going from theatre to theatre, you end up seeing a larger amount of people and you engage with more people than being in any specific location for the entire time. I find the front of house is the best department for that exposure to the Festival participants, the directors, and even the public. I've run into so many people!

You get to see the popularity of the Festival when you're front of house because you literally see people lining up to see a movie, it's so popular, and you're the one doing crowd control. You get a sense of how successful the Festival is for that particular year. Without even looking at the statistics, you can tell that every cinema is filled up. It is chaos, but it's good chaos because it gives us the sense that we're doing the right thing, because it's popular.

N: What do you most look forward to every year at FIN?

M: I look forward to the participants because I like to make sure that people have a good time. When I see the smiles on their faces, that provides me with what I want out of the Festival.

The odd part is, I enjoy the movies—but I don't specifically seek out the movies. I've seen some pretty good movies accidentally. One time, I was managing a theatre and I got switched to another theatre. I ended up in a cinema with the movie BROOKLYN. It was based in New York in the 1930s. It's about an Irish girl who came over, and the story was amazing! I would have missed the entire movie had I not switched cinemas and accidentally seen the movie. I like that kind of unknown—the unknown jewels that are within the Festival.

N: This is a common theme as I talk to people who go to the festival! People say they've seen things they wouldn't have picked, but that end up being great. It says something about the power of cinema, and also about "not judging a book by its cover."

M: Like MOONLIGHT. I ended up seeing it twice. And MAUDIE was another one that I got to see at the theatre. I appreciated the fact that I got to see it because I talked about it to other people and they ended up going to the cinema to see it. One thing I also like about the Festival is getting to see movies for free as a volunteer. That is an amazing perk!

N: My next question is my favourite question to ask: what is your favourite film?

M: I don't want to do any other films a disservice by not selecting them as my favourite movie, but I do tend to go back to the movie BROOKLYN. It was an amazing movie. I've got this thing about New York, I love movies set in New York. And it was back in the 30s; I like that era. It was such a simple movie. It wasn't action-adventure, it wasn't a really a love story, but it was kind of. It was just an immigrant moving to New York and trying to make her way in the big city and finding love. I think I did shed a tear, I think I did laugh, and I think I did smile. I would have to pick that as my favourite movie currently, though that will probably change.

N: Last question! What's your favourite movie snack?

M: Oh, it would have to be popcorn, obviously. I do get the popcorn with the fake butter and the fountain pop. The fountain pop is unhealthy, the fake butter is unhealthy, but it doesn't matter, because when you're at the theatre you do it anyway!