

## Brian Wayne Peterson

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Still, he already is schmoozing with powerful executives and planning a number of upcoming projects. He and his writing partner, Kelly Souders, have been pitching new television shows to the networks and last year sold a pilot to CBS.

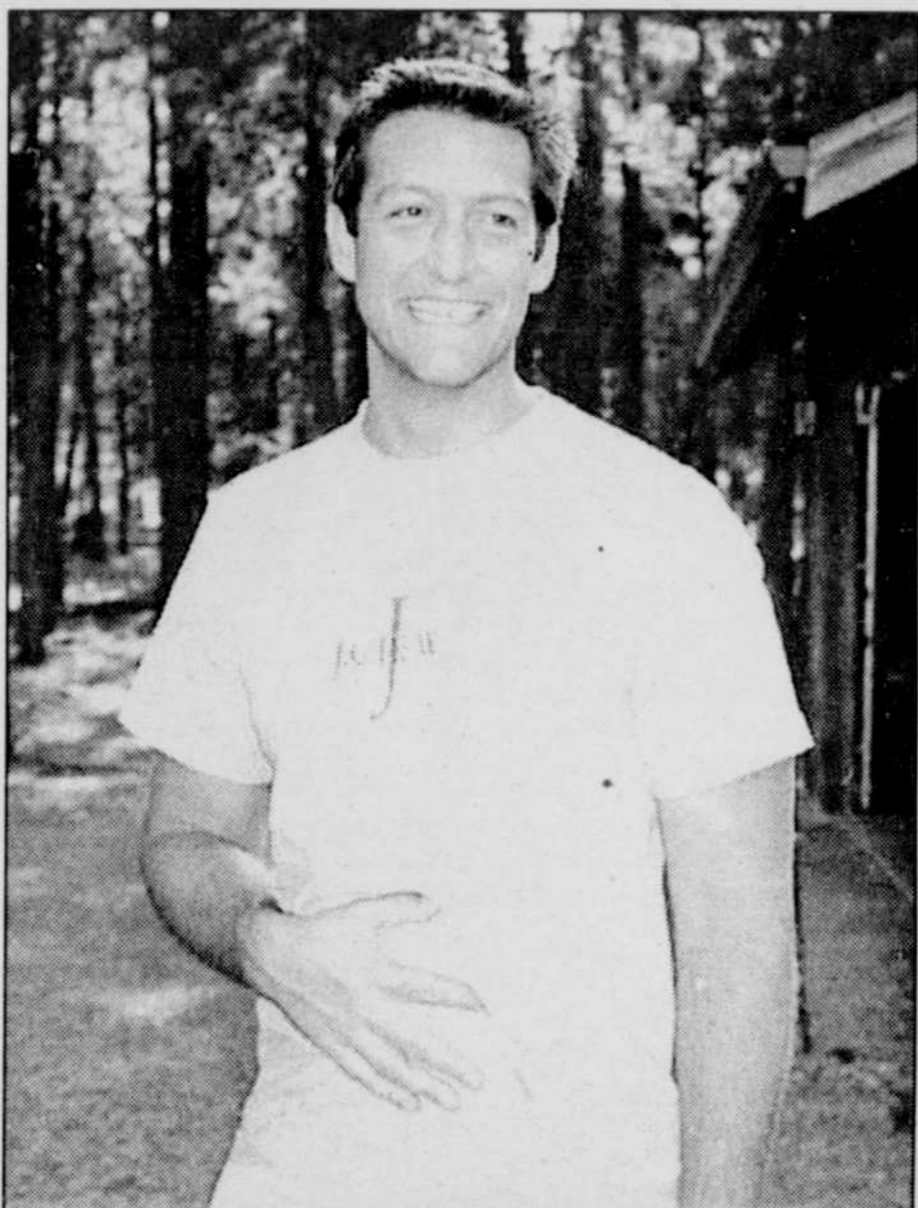
Peterson also just finished a feature project, which he compares to *In & Out*. Someday he wants to return to Oregon to direct a coming-of-age story with a religious twist in the vein of *My Own Private Idaho*.

Meanwhile he pays the bills by working in alumni relations and fund raising at USC School of Cinema-Television, but that might not last for long. The 31-year-old is concentrating on writing scripts for more big-budget, mainstream movies so he can get a financial foothold.

**Jim Radosta:** Did you ever think your script would be made into such a widely seen movie?

**Brian Wayne Peterson:** If I had thought that, I definitely would've negotiated more money in the contract! But I got a lot of experience on the set and in casting, and [director Jamie Babbit] kept me very involved all the way through, so it was definitely worth it.

**JR:** In helping with casting, did you push for any actors?



Peterson camps out near Sisters during his Oregon days

**BWP:** My first choice for the leader of the rehab camp was Allison Janney. I think she's amazing.

But I think Cathy [Moriarty] did a great job. They just would've brought very, very different sensibilities to the script.

The stud, Eddie Cibrian, was my call. We had a hard time finding somebody that was beefy and willing to play gay but didn't really overplay it. So that's my one little casting coup.

**JR:** Did you draw on any real-life experiences in writing about right-wingers trying to convert homosexuals?

**BWP:** When I lived in Oregon it was during the first Measure 9 campaign, and I actually got my hands on a video that Lon Mabon did called *The Gay Agenda*. It's just horrendous; it's ridiculous. It's like a Nazi propaganda film.

I used that tape to go to fraternities, and I did a whole bunch of

cheesy educational Gay 101 programs. So I used a lot of that kind of information in the script, and we...did tons of research on the rehab facilities.

The sad thing is that what we portrayed is really no more ridiculous than what really happens. It really is that ludicrous the way that they try to condition people and the behaviors that they try to have people learn.

**JR:** Didn't *Cheerleader* encounter some problems with the Motion Picture Association of America?

**BWP:** Yeah. It was really funny because the same week that we got an NC-17 rating for having a girl talk about eating another girl out, I went to see *Election* [a 1999 Matthew Broderick-Reese Witherspoon comedy].

Some of the lines in *Election* are far worse, but they're in a straight context, so they skated through [with an R]. It was obviously the combination of teens and gay material that we ran into problems with.

I actually was writing what I thought was a much more mainstream movie. Jamie shot it with a different tone than I expected as far as the bright colors and the set design.

I was trying to write a fun *American Pie*. I wasn't trying to write what I think a lot of critics wanted, which was a scathing satire on how ridiculous this is. Because to me it's so ridiculous in itself, I just wanted to have fun with it.

**JR:** When *Cheerleader* received some mediocre reviews, was that hard to take?

**BWP:** It really wasn't. It was frustrating because...I don't know anybody who didn't have a good time when they saw it.

What concerned me was that when [critics] write these reviews...they don't have to back up their opinions. They're writing to impress people with their own writing, so it's this weird situation where they're trying to be funnier than the movie in criticizing it, yet they're not really saying anything. They're just throwing out empty adjectives.

**JR:** What did you think of Oregon?

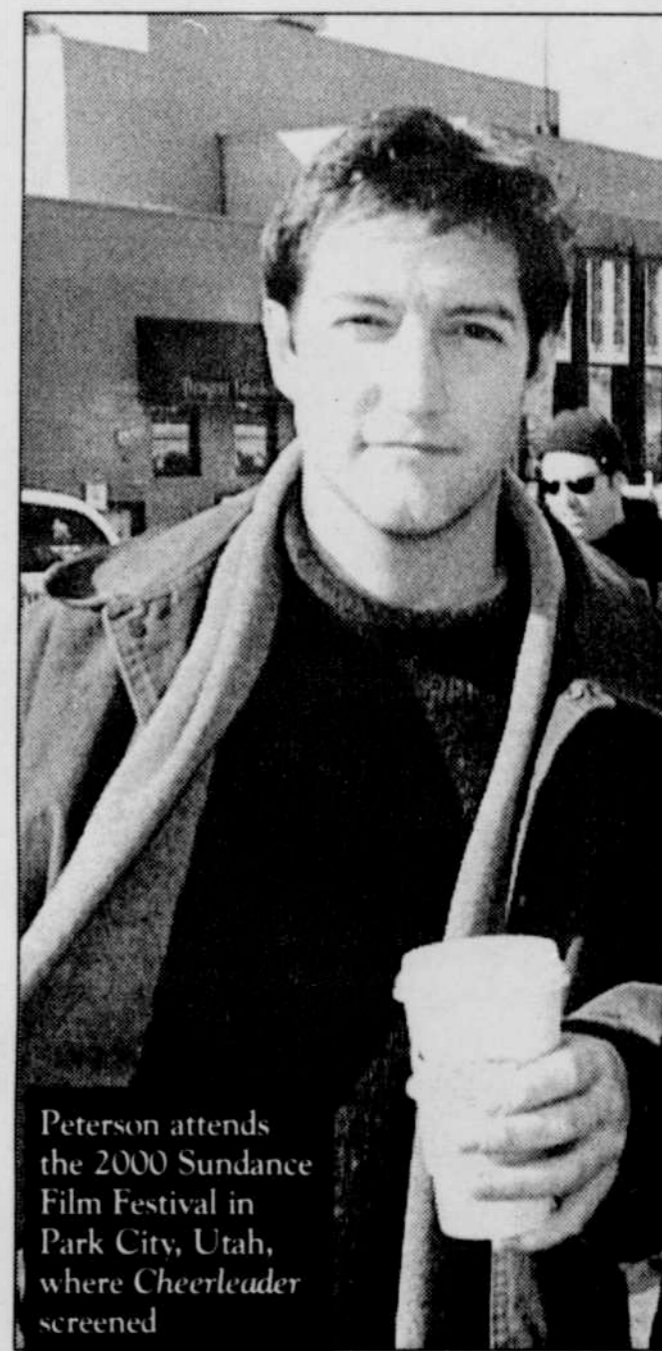
**BWP:** I loved it. I would move back in a

heartbeat, except it was awfully rainy.

I still really identify with the Pacific Northwest, and actually one of our new shows is set in Seattle. But the problem with that is, except for Gus Van Sant, who is amazing, if you want to succeed as a writer, there are just so many more job openings and opportunities down here.

**JR:** When it comes to writing mainstream movies, do you find it difficult to leave your queerness on the sidelines?

**BWP:** It's not really a problem. I pledged to myself way back when that I would always write one gay character into every single script, one good representation of gay or lesbian people. A lot of the things that we go through in life are universal and can translate.



Peterson attends the 2000 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah, where *Cheerleader* screened

And now that I write with a straight writing partner she can help me get a better perspective when I write really awful, mean straight characters. She helps me see through that. [□]



Cathy Moriarty torments Natasha Lyonne in *But I'm a Cheerleader*

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