

Justin Shipley '95

Director, Photographer & Editor

Rather than following a given path, Justin Shipley '95 is more apt to create his own. That is how he has always lived his life, and it is one of the reasons he has found professional success in the film industry and a love and passion for his craft.

Today, Justin works as a director and director of photography for the Traveling Picture Show Company, which is based in Los Angeles. Mostly involved with commercials and documentaries, he has the unique opportunity to be on both the production and post-production sides of the business. "My job is to deliver stunning images, stories, and human moments," he said. "Being able to make the agency and the client happy while still fighting for what I feel is right is very satisfying."

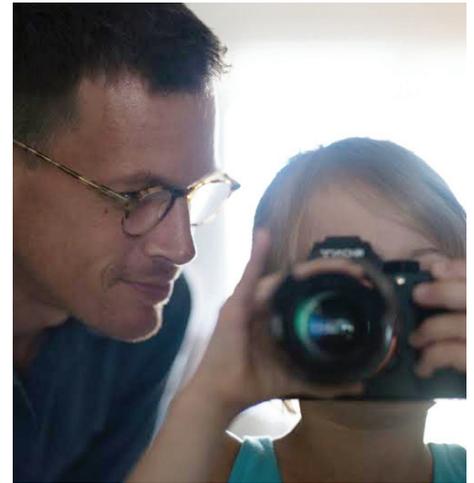
Justin began at Benchmark as a summer camper who had been struggling with organization skills and writing. After quickly seeing an improvement in his abilities, he stayed on at Benchmark for all of his middle school years. Though Justin said much of his drive and persistence comes from his parents, it was his time at Benchmark that reaffirmed those characteristics and has continued to contribute to his success.

"At Benchmark, it was the first time I remember learning *how* to learn," he said. "Benchmark helped me feel as though I could succeed...which was a great motivator. I have very fond memories of my time there and appreciate that Benchmark understood that everyone learns differently."

With self-confidence in tow, he moved on from Benchmark to The Shipley School, where he spent his high school years becoming increasingly interested in film and photography. Having been exposed to the film industry for his entire life (his father was a director), Justin knew that he wanted to be an editor by age 16.

After high school, Justin took a leap of faith and drove to Los Angeles to find work in the film industry. Beginning as a design assistant and production artist, he quickly gained experience as a director, director of photography, and editor. "As I grew in my shooting and editing style and my work took me further out in the field, I found that I was drawn to all parts of the process," he said.

As a young film enthusiast, Justin was up for just about anything—including traveling to places such as East Africa, Costa Rica, Guam, France, and England to film. Many years later,



his assignments continue to take him to a variety of locales and settings, ranging from air-conditioned sound stages to extreme conditions (his personal favorite!). "If I'm really muddy, sweating, and sore when I get to where I'm shooting, then that's when I feel like I'm actually doing something. I throw my passion into any product and love the feeling of working hard," he said.

One would never believe he had organizational problems as a child since his work requires him to be highly organized. In fact, he said the organizational skills he learned at Benchmark "couldn't be more applicable" to his career. "It's all about having everything organized and being ready to work. If I'm organized, it not only helps with the efficiency of the project, but it also helps in post-production when editing."

His strong organizational skills, coupled with his drive, have led Justin to many successes over the years, including an Emmy nomination in cinematography for his work on *The Horseman Cometh*, a one-hour documentary that aired on PBS in 2012.

Despite many accolades, Justin has no plans to curtail his work or his ambition. "I feel like I'm at 10 percent of my capacity," he said. "I have great drive and ambition for never-

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Photo courtesy of Traveling Picture Show Company

ending growth and want to be able to separate the money from the drive. My goal is always to be better than I was a week ago and to continuously sharpen my craft.”

While Justin is incredibly passionate about his work, he is quick to point out that the most important and favorite part of his life is spending time with his wife, Ann, and his children, Willow (9), Scout (6), and Jude (4), in their Chester County home.

The future is wide open for Justin—and it appears that nothing is out of reach. His advice to Benchmark students is to “be honest with yourself and pursue what you enjoy the most.... And when you fall on your face, get up and move forward.” 

Justin Shipley '95 Named Benchmark's 2017 Outstanding Alumnus

During the Middle School Celebration of Accomplishments and 8th Grade Graduation on June 14, Benchmark Alumnus Justin Shipley '95 was honored as the school's 2017 Outstanding Alumnus. In addition to receiving the honor, Justin had the opportunity to impart an inspirational message to the students and their families who were in attendance.

Although he could not be there in person to receive the award due to being on-location for a commercial, Justin addressed the audience with a pre-recorded message and said that he was honored to be named a Benchmark Outstanding Alumnus. “To be recognized in any way from the school now so many years after I was here is really a special feeling,” he said.

Justin went on to say that while as a young student he often got “reprimanded for seeing things backwards or the way they weren't meant to be,” one of the greatest aspects of how he performs in his job as a film director and cinematographer is “seeing things upside down, or in an abstract way.” To that end, he told the graduates to “enjoy the things about yourself that you have worked on here that may be different from other people at the schools and jobs that you will move on to. Recognize the things in yourself that you are driven towards and follow them. Learn to love those things about yourself and embrace them.” His final advice to the graduates was to be confident. “Benchmark has prepared you well and you will all learn how to apply everything that you've learned here out in the real world.”

“Justin was chosen as the 2017 Outstanding Alumnus because of his fabulous success in the career he has chosen in the world of directing and post-production film making,” said Head of Middle School Eleanor Gensemer. “He has demonstrated tremendous resilience and persistence as he has worked through almost all of the tasks connected with producing a film, and he is an excellent model for our students with his willingness to learn an industry from the ground up, and his creativity and innovation.”



Head of School Robb Gaskins (left) and Head of the Middle School Eleanor Gensemer (right) with Benchmark's 2017 Outstanding Alumnus Justin Shipley '95.