



Angelo Pizzo's next film, based loosely on his own youth, is set in 1962 Bloomington and will be filmed here beginning this fall; (inset) 14-year-old Pizzo (right) with his then-friend Roy, who inspired a character in the film. Courtesy photo



Someone Saved My Life



FALL OF 2024 A NEW FEATURE FILM SHOT ENTIRELY ON LOCATION IN

BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA

On his first day of Jr. H.S. he had no idea this would be the most important year of his life

Angelo Pizzo's Most Personal Movie To Be Filmed in Bloomington



1962



*By Peter Dorfman * Photography by Martin Boling*



(above, l-r) Jo Throckmorton, Regional Emmy Award-winning local filmmaker, and Angelo Pizzo, auteur, director, and Bloomington native, will start filming *Someone Saved My Life* in Bloomington this fall; (right) Pizzo's best known films include *Hoosiers* (1986), *Rudy* (1993) and most recently *The Hill* (2023).

Motion picture cameras will roll again in Bloomington, starting in October if all goes according to plan. Feature films have been made here before, but this time, *auteur*, director, and Bloomington native Angelo Pizzo is determined to portray his hometown as it truly is—or was in the early 1960s, when Pizzo was a diffident middle schooler undergoing a crisis of identity.

The movie is based on a script that veteran screenwriter Pizzo has had locked away for years. Pizzo is best known for uplifting sports-themed films like *Hoosiers* (1986), *Rudy* (1993), and most recently *The Hill* (2023), a baseball-focused film starring Dennis Quaid that was the No. 1 film on Netflix for eight days earlier in 2024. *Someone Saved My Life* will be different—easily Pizzo's most personal work, based closely on firsthand experience. Some of it could be uncomfortable viewing for his Bloomington contemporaries.

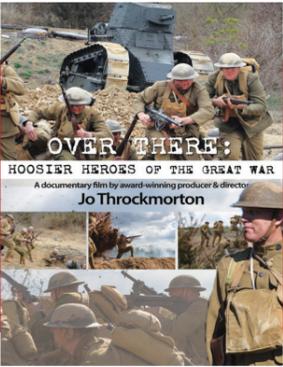


“This is unlike any movie I’ve ever done,” Pizzo says. “Nobody is going to be carried off a playing field. It’s pretty dark but also humorous and entertaining.”

With Regional Emmy Award-winning local filmmaker (*Over There: Hoosier Heroes of the Great War*) Jo Throckmorton serving as producer, the film will be shot on a small budget by Hollywood standards and with an intentionally small, agile crew. Pizzo expects to sign a name actress to play the lead, but the supporting cast, as much as possible, will be Indiana-based professionals. Extras will be recruited locally.

To the extent that moviegoers know anything about Bloomington, it generally is by way of Peter Yates’ 1979 film *Breaking Away*, a coming-of-age story with Indiana University and its famed Little 500 bicycle race at its center. Compelling as it was, Pizzo and Throckmorton believe their vantage point as Bloomingtonians will help them better represent what is essentially Bloomington.

“I wanted to capture the spirit of what we did with *Hoosiers*, where 98% of the cast and crew were from Indiana,” Pizzo says. “Yates shot Bloomington like a generic college town. All of our locations will be within two miles of each other, places like Southdowns and Bryan Park, and at the Binford Middle School.



Throckmorton, who teaches a course at IU Indianapolis and is developing a similar course for IU Bloomington, says IU Indy students will get course credit for pre-film work, work on the film, and post production work. “We’ll do something very similar at IU Bloomington,” he says. *Courtesy photo*

We’re shooting a ton on [the IU] campus because a lot of things happen there. I want to capture the beauty of the fall here, the leaves.”

The largely autobiographical film is set in 1962, Pizzo’s eighth grade year. “It’s very personal and very close to the truth,” he says. “Just about every scene actually happened. I’ve been nervous about this because one of my first screenwriting teachers told me, you shouldn’t write what you know. You should write what you respond to emotionally in the outside world, because then you’re with the audience. If you write from what you know first hand, you can fall into the trap that he called ‘the fallacy of primary experience.’ You have no objectivity about those experiences. It was intense for you, but maybe no one else will care.”

Pizzo, 76, wrote the screenplay roughly 15 years ago, as a form of therapy, as he describes it. The actual events took place over a year and a half, but the script compresses them to three months.

“The first people I gave the script to were my brothers and sisters,” Pizzo says, “and they all said the same thing: ‘You cannot make this while Mom is still alive.’ My mom comes across pretty dark and negative. She passed two years ago.”

Pizzo’s mother was Patricia Murphy Pizzo (1927–2021). She had degrees from IU in art history and library science, founded the Fine Arts Bookstore at IU’s art museum, and was a force in the Bloomington arts community. Angelo was the first of her eight children with Anthony Pizzo (1921–2015), a pathologist.

“I was the golden child,” Pizzo recalls. “My mother had had a terrible childhood and wasn’t able to do any of the things that interested her. Only later did I figure out that she was living her un-lived life through me. She was a true stage mother. I was in every play that needed a kid my age. I was in *The Nutcracker* every year as one of the parents. I was an extra in operas. But, she really wanted me to be an artist. I took five years of piano lessons.”

Pizzo went along, unaware that he had a choice in any of these commitments. “My father had handed over running the household and raising the kids to her—a very Sicilian thing to do,” he says. “I never questioned her dictatorship, right through my seventh grade year.”

Dictatorship is exactly the way he remembers it. There was zero tolerance for dissent. Discipline could be stern and quite physical. ▶



Pizzo says that during his childhood, his mother lived her un-lived life through him. She signed him up for piano lessons, every play that needed a kid his age, and operas. “She really wanted me to be an artist,” he says. *Courtesy photo*

“This is unlike any movie I’ve ever done,” Pizzo says. “Nobody is going to be carried off a playing field. It’s pretty dark but also humorous and entertaining.”





Bloomington's downtown Square in September 1963, one year after the film takes place. Photo courtesy of Indiana University Archives

“What I didn't see, that other people saw, was that he was a true sociopath. I went down a rabbit hole with him and did some really bad things.”



The next year, however, Pizzo became friends with a boy who brought about an extraordinary transition. “He was powerful, charismatic, extraordinarily confident—and everybody was either in awe of or afraid of him, because he was one badass guy,” Pizzo says.

He was at the new Binford Junior High School, which had a tackle football team. Pizzo's new mentor was, inevitably, the quarterback. While not an accomplished athlete, Pizzo was fast. He finished second in the city track meet as a seventh grader.

“He wanted somebody fast to throw his bombs to,” Pizzo explains. “He came up to me and said, ‘I need you to be a wide receiver.’ I was thrilled that he was even talking to me, but I told him, ‘My mom won't let me play.’ He looked at me like I was speaking a different language. In essence his response was, ‘Well, why don't you tell your mom to go fuck herself?’”

Spellbound, Pizzo did just that. “I didn't use those words, but I did not go to my next piano lesson,” he says. “I joined the football team. I loved football; we had some vicious games. And I blew up my relationship with my mother. The entire family was affected. My dad had to do some triage. It got so bad that I left home—I actually moved in with this guy. What I didn't see, that other people saw, was that he was a true sociopath. I went down a rabbit hole with him and did some really bad things.”

Really bad things consisted principally of stealing from the university, he says. The boy's father was in charge of the old steam heating system at IU, which was serviced via underground tunnels to every building on the old campus.

“My friend had his dad's skeleton key,” Pizzo remembers. “We went to the Kinsey Institute and got crazy. We went into the anatomy building—he loved to play with cadavers. We'd go into the catering building and steal food and silverware and books. He would fence this stuff, and he'd throw me some money. He knew I loved the Little 500 and riding bikes. So, he and I stole some Little 500 bikes from the old stadium. He could jump-start cars, and he did that all around Bloomington.”



A basketball team photo from Pizzo's youth. Pizzo is standing behind the player wearing No. 51, and his friend Roy is wearing No. 45. (Future Indiana University hall-of-fame football legend Jade Butcher is wearing No. 33.) Courtesy photo

What makes the story, of course, is Pizzo ultimately pulling himself out of this relationship. Eventually, he returned home. But his relationship with his mother was demolished, and it never recovered until after Pizzo's success with *Hoosiers*.

Pizzo drifted. A poor student in high school, he partied and treaded water in college. Afterward, handed a no-strings gift of \$50,000 from his father, he lived in Aspen, Colorado, for a year, and then went to Hawaii.

“I had a mini nervous breakdown in Hawaii, because I had done some hallucinogen,” he says. “My dad flew me home. I decided I was going to get serious and make a life for myself. I had to figure out how to be a grownup. My dad asked me, ‘What do you love?’ I said movies were the only thing I loved, but I didn't know how to make a living at that. My dad suggested I go talk to the head of the IU Comparative Literature department, who taught classes on the academic approach to film. He said, ‘If you get a doctorate from NYU, UCLA, or USC—the only grad schools that were giving doctorates in film studies—I will have a job for you.’”

Pizzo got into USC and excelled in a film production class. But he felt himself tilting toward another breakdown. “I couldn't go to class,” he says. “I was having panic attacks. Driving into campus I would have to pull over, sobbing. I had no clue what was happening to me, and I was terrified that I was going to have to drop out.”

He found a therapist on campus, who asked about his relationship with his parents and his childhood experiences. Pizzo told him about his middle school adventures.

“He didn't say anything until the very end,” Pizzo says. “He said, ‘It's very interesting. This boy, who was clearly a sociopath—the paradoxical thing is that he saved your life.’ I asked, how so? And he said, ‘If you had kept on saluting to the generalship of your mother up until now, it probably would be too late for me to help you. The fact that he gave you the power to individuate from her means you have a shot at coming into your own. You associate failing with being your own person. And now you can let that go.’”

After two years of therapy, Pizzo did let go. “That's where the title of this film comes from: *Someone Saved My Life*,” he says. “The irony is that it's a crazy person who saved my life.” ▶

“That's where the title of this film comes from: Someone Saved My Life,” Pizzo says. “The irony is that it's a crazy person who saved my life.”



(above) Bloomington's downtown Square back then. Photo courtesy of Indiana University Archives (below) Pizzo, sitting in the blue chair, dressed to the nines at a middle-school dance. Courtesy photo





(above and below) Bloomington's downtown Square in the 1960s. Photos courtesy of Indiana University Archives

"Angelo is a genius at casting," Throckmorton says. "I know that from experience with the short films we've worked on in the past."



A professional departure for Pizzo is the planned budget for *Someone Saved My Life*, about \$2 million. His 2015 film, *My All-American*, was budgeted at \$24 million. It was \$6 million for *Hoosiers* in 1985, and \$13 million for *Rudy* in 1994.

But Pizzo has long wanted to do an entire movie on what industry insiders call a "microbudget." Pizzo and Throckmorton had collaborated on commercials in and around Bloomington, including five for IU. "We had a very small, mobile crew, and we got a tremendous amount done in multiple locations," Pizzo explains. "I turned to Jo and said, 'This is the way I want to shoot a movie. I don't need five trucks and 200 people sitting around.'"

As a producer for the Bloomington film, Throckmorton had several things going for him: He knew how to put together a budget, he knew Bloomington—the locations and the principals involved—and he could put together an efficient crew.

"One of the biggest expenses on a film is housing and food for people you're flying in," Pizzo says. "You keep that to an absolute minimum. Jo's knowledge of the people and the resources available to make films in this state is critical."

Someone Saved My Life is deeply personal, and Pizzo was determined to make the film's funding a friends and family investment.

"I couldn't ask somebody else to come in with big money, because then they'd have a say-so," he asserts. "I don't want anybody telling me what to cut and what to keep. I've been with my current agent since *Rudy*, which was my fourth script—I've written 44 since then. He thinks this is my best script, and he is by far my toughest critic. He said, 'If you get a major actor for that role of the mother, with your resume, for a coming-of-age film with a small budget, you know you'll at least get your money back.' And I've already got commitments [from backers]."

"Angelo is a genius at casting," Throckmorton says. "I know that from experience with the short films we've worked on in the past. When he casts, he knows instantly whether that actor is someone he can work with."

Everything, Pizzo agrees, turns on successful casting. "The four main roles are the two boys, a girl their age, and the mother," he says. "If I don't have the right two boys, I don't have a movie."

A lot also depends on the lead actress, who must not only bring box office appeal but have the depth to bring a complex character to life. "The actress who plays my mother won't be my mother," Pizzo declares. "I'm not trying to do a docu-drama. She'll want to know who my mom was, but she'll bring her own interpretation."

As for the supporting cast, Pizzo and Throckmorton plan to cast locally. "There are a lot of other parts," Pizzo notes. "We're not going the amateur route the way we did with *Hoosiers*. These will all be professional actors."

There will, however, be numerous opportunities for extras on the film. That's only one of the ways Bloomingtonians can get in on the fun of having a big-time movie created in their midst.

"I'm going to need the help of Bloomington people," Pizzo says. "For example, catering. I'm going to ask restaurants to cater a day. The first person I asked was Michael Cassady [owner of The Uptown Cafe], and he said, 'Count me in.' Evan Martin of Community Cars is going to help with transportation for us. I need favors like that all around town."

The cast and crew will be small; Pizzo estimates they will bring in less than 10 people from outside. But they'll need hotel rooms.

"A lot of memory films are sentimental," Pizzo notes. "This is not sentimental at all. This is a very strong point of view film, told through the eyes of this boy."



Professionals will secure assets like 1960s wardrobe, but the production will need vintage cars and bicycles.

There's a role for IU students as well. Throckmorton teaches a course at IU Indianapolis and is developing a similar course for Bloomington students.

"Everything that Angelo is doing in town, including the commercials, has had an educational component," Throckmorton says. "Students are paid to work for us. On this project, IU Indy students will get course credit. They'll do pre-film work, work on the film, and post-production work, and then they'll be required to write papers on their experience. We'll do something very similar at IU Bloomington."

Pizzo also plans to work with film composition students at the IU Jacobs School of Music, who will be guided and taught "from script to the final mix" by Larry Groupé, an A-list composer (*Promiseland*, *The Outpost*, *Straw Dogs*, *Commander in Chief*) and professor of composition at the Jacobs School. "They'll get the script this fall, and they'll play with themes," Pizzo explains. "Normally you hire a composer after the film is finished, but we'll ask them to think about composing at the script level."

Veteran videographer and Indiana native Larry Blanford will oversee the shooting as director of photography. "He is very excited about doing this and returning to 'the true meaning of filmmaking' by going small, intimate, and personal," says Throckmorton. Blanford's credits include *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*, *X-Men: Apocalypse*, *Iron Man 3*, and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*.

While it is not a typical sports film, there will be football action scenes. They serve to reveal character, Pizzo explains. It's one of the film's most violent sequences. "It's a sort of boy-becoming-a-man segment; it's not something he's ever done," he says.

Pizzo will rely on the look of the film to convey the intensity of the story. "A lot of memory films are sentimental," he notes. "This is not sentimental at all. This is a very strong point of view film, told through the eyes of this boy. He's obviously hormonal at 14. He's going through the most intense crisis of his life. Everything is going to be vivid. The color saturation has to reflect his inner state of mind. It has to be bright and intense. There are going to be some scary-looking night scenes. But we have to do that without making it look stylized."

As in his previous successes, like *Hoosiers* and *Rudy*, there will be a lot of humor. "That's how I write," Pizzo says. "There will be laughter of recognition, and laughter of outrageousness. Because I don't hold back on my mom. She sings some arias." ✧



(above) Bloomington's downtown Square around the time the film is to be set. Photo courtesy of Indiana University Archives (below) Larry Groupé, A-list composer and professor of composition at the Jacobs School, will guide IU film composition students who will help compose the film's score "from script to the final mix." Courtesy photo (bottom) Larry Blanford, veteran videographer and Indiana native, will be the film's director of photography. Courtesy photo

