

The letter carrier of a thousand faces

When Robert Emery made home movies with his four sons when they were young, he never thought moviemaking would amount to anything more than a few laughs. But in 2017, a trip to meet actor Val Kilmer led the Phoenix, AZ Branch 576 member on his own filmmaking path.

With his then-wife, Emery went to the historic town of Tombstone, AZ, for a “DOC HOLLI-DAYS” weekend festival, an annual event celebrating John Henry “Doc” Holliday, a well-known 19th-century gambler and gunfighter. Holliday had played a major role in Wyatt Earp’s O.K. Corral gunfight, as documented in the 1993 Western movie “Tombstone.”

Kilmer, who played Holliday in the movie, was going to be there. “So, my ex-wife, that was her favorite movie, and he’s a wonderful actor, so we made a trip down there and I signed up for the [Doc Holliday] lookalike contest,” Emery said. “But I kind of got a little obsessed about it and put a lot of money into the outfit and practicing. Anyway, it turns out I won.”

“I just kind of fell into the Western scene,” he added, explaining that he began to be known in Western film circles and started accumulating Western wardrobe and gear. He soon was invited to do live performances and reenactments of gunfights that had occurred in the old West. “I did that for a couple of years with the Arizona Gunfighters,” he said. “I learned a lot and developed more outfits.”

Acting was never on his bingo card. “It was never a bucket-list item,” he said. “I never perceived it as a possibility.”

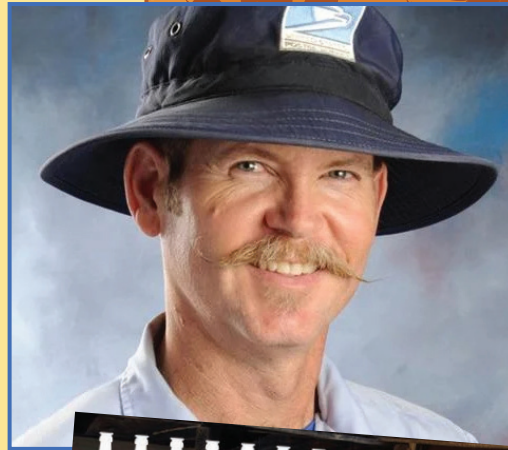
Emery joined the Postal Service in 1992, working first as a mailhandler and then as a clerk before becoming a letter carrier in 2006. Though his postal career doesn’t allow him a lot of time to schedule acting gigs, he does it whenever it’s feasible.

The carrier stepped foot onto his first movie set during the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020. When a friend posted on social media about an independent film she was doing for which the director was seeking background characters, Emery reached out.

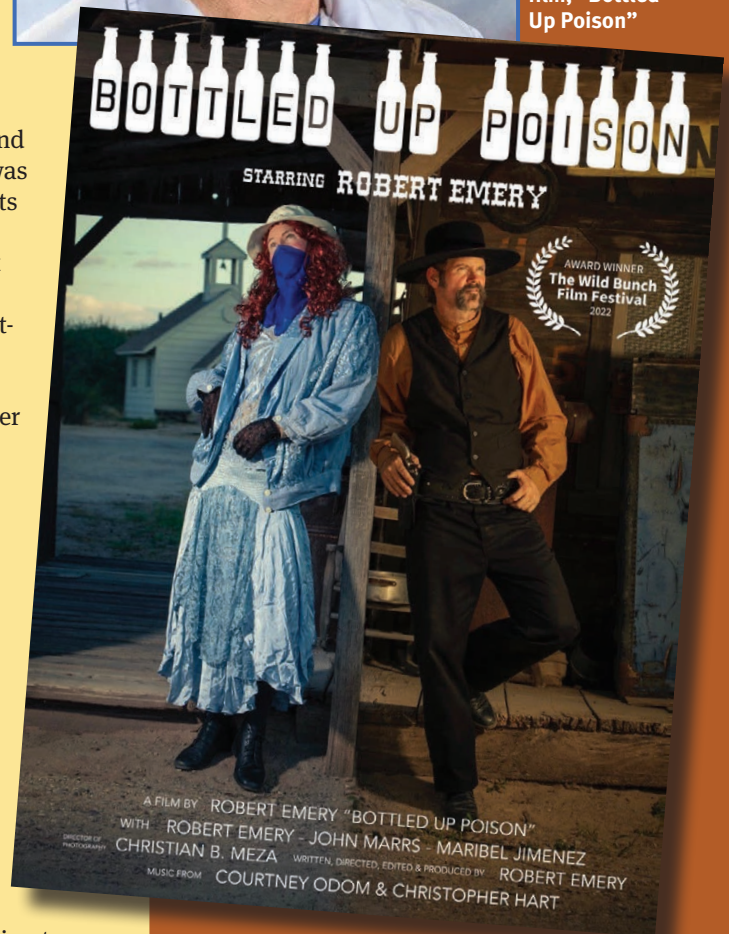
“I got just background, but that was pretty eye-opening, seeing the actual cameras and lighting, and you know, ‘OK, you go.’ [There’s] a lot of waiting around, but still, it’s thrilling,” he said, added that he’d tell himself, “I can actually do this.” So from then on, it’s like, ‘Ooh, what else can I do?’ ”

He had been cast in a speaking role in a new movie in late 2020 when he tested positive for COVID-19 and had to tell the director that he needed to bow out to quarantine.

“So, then I’m at home for 10 days, so what am I going to do?” Emery said. “I’ve got all these outfits, so I said I’m going to



Robert Emery and the poster for his award-winning short film, “Bottled Up Poison”



The letter carrier of athousandfaces



The awards Emery's film, "The Woman Who Cried, Ringo!" won at the Wild Bunch Film Festival 2023

Emery in a scene in "The Dog Bite Murders"



Courtesy "The Dog Bite Murders" and Director of Photography Clint Clarkson

take photos of all these outfits to post for future jobs.”

Trying on costumes turned into, “Why don’t I just do a video?” he said. “So, I did. I made a little movie, a little 11-minute thing. Put it out on YouTube. Had fun with it. You know, a lot of it was a learning experience, but it was fun.”

Friends were amused, especially with Emery playing several characters, including a woman. But he wanted to do more with it. “I want to try to improve on it and practice and make it a little bit better and then finish the story, because it kind of had an ending, but not really,” he said.

That opportunity soon came. In late 2021, he and a friend were selected to be in “1883,” the prequel to the popular TV show “Yellowstone” as background, and he took a week off from work to film in Texas. “I was kind of hopeful maybe something more would come [from it],” he said. “You never know—when you’re on set, things could happen. So, I was excited.”

He was prepared to show up with his period-correct clothing for the wardrobe department to look at when he received an email that his role had been canceled because they would not be allowing any outside wardrobe.

Disappointed and finding himself with a week off, Emery made the best

of it. He called a friend who manages a Western movie set and asked about availability of the space, then lined up a photographer friend to film the full-length version of what became a 26-minute film, “Bottled Up Poison,” in which he played 13 characters as well as wrote and directed it.

Playing the more than one dozen parts took some coordination. “I had to go from a full beard down to just a little bit of a mustache,” he said, so he tried to do all of one character at a time. “If I mess up on the scene, oh well. I’m not going to wait another eight, nine, 10 months to grow a beard again.”

The Western-themed short film is a humorous look at a woman “who is getting away from a toxic ex-boyfriend and he finds her in the in the town where she escaped [to],” said Emery, adding, “She’s got a new relationship and he comes in and wreaks havoc.”

After some praise from friends who saw it, Emery decided to submit it to the Wild Bunch Film Festival, an annual event held in Tucson featuring short Western films created in Arizona. His film was selected, and he won awards for “Best Originality – Short Western” and “Director’s Choice – Comedy.”

He had submitted films the previous year and had been rejected, though he wasn’t upset about it. “Don’t be afraid to suck and just keep going,” he said. “That’s how you get better.”

To win was thrilling, he said. “I try to look at it from the realistic perspective,” he added. While it’s not on par with Sundance Film Festival, the country’s most prestigious independent film festival, “those smaller film festivals are just fantastic for people trying to get in and learn, so I’m very grateful for it.”



A promotional image for Emery's short film, "Cursed"

Emery and girlfriend Kasey Haas with actor and filmmaker Billy Bob Thornton

He has support within NALC as well. "Robert Emery is a union brother with many talents and accomplishments," Branch 576 President **Cynthia Staley** wrote to *The Postal Record*. "Who knew Branch 576 had a movie star among us?"

Emery has acting credits in 15 independent films, including "The Prototype," "The Pleasant Valley War," "Noche," and will have his biggest role to date in the upcoming film "The Dog Bite Murders," based on an event that took place in Globe, AZ, in 1910. "I'm looking forward to that one. I play the attorney who defends the alleged murderers," said Emery, who was excited to work with director Clint Clarkson. "He's a great guy. Just fantastic skills at lighting and camera work, so being on set with him, he makes me look far better than I am."

Emery and his girlfriend, Kasey Haas, have since made another movie, the five-and-a-half-minute "The Woman Who Cried, Ringo!" and it was selected for the 2023 Wild Bunch festival. The film won "Best Film Twist," "Film Fest Director's Choice – Best Western Mini Short" and "Best Actress for a Mini Short Western."

"We filmed it during the weekend that they had the 30th anniversary of the movie 'Tombstone.' So, a lot of actors were down at Tombstone," Emery said. With permission, they were able to incorporate a cameo from actor

Michael Biehn, who had played Johnny Ringo in "Tombstone." "I'm very grateful that he is gracious enough to allow us to put his image in our little thing," the carrier said.

Haas plays a town crier who is trying to warn everybody that Johnny Ringo's in town "and nobody seems to care," Emery said, adding with a laugh, "It's a cute little comedy, I think."

Emery has multiple YouTube channels and a website, kraseylove.com. Besides his job as a carrier, where he says he gets to "exercise, socialize and fantasize" and making movies, he likes spending time with his family and sharing Christmas poems with his customers, a tradition that's more than 20 years strong.

After he retires in a few years, Emery will consider doing more films and potentially joining the Screen Actors Guild if eligible; he also plans to concentrate on some other projects. "I've got a couple screenplays in my mind that I want to write, and I want to do my own little stop-motion series," he said.

"I just love storytelling," Emery added. And as long as he's continuing to create and share stories, this storyteller will be happy. **PR**

