

Okay, I admit it--I am a hopeless romantic when it comes to Christmas. And I'll also admit to seeing a bit of myself in these scripts...alright, maybe more than a bit. I can probably find any number of hand-written, half-started gift lists in my coat pocket, glove box, kitchen drawer.

And I know firsthand what cherished, but slightly timeworn ornaments look like—I have boxes of them I pull out every year, year after year. And I've driven from one mall to the next frantically trying last minute to fulfill gift obligations to aunts, uncles and cousins from a list that's seemingly never-ending.

And I love it all. There's an undeniable excitement beyond anything materialistic or obligatory. Maybe it's that one time of year that compels us beyond excuse to make a few little dreams come true. It's a jigsaw puzzle of extended-family dinners, gift-wrapping after the kids are asleep, rushing home to decorate, to clean house, to bake another four-dozen snowmen cookies and somehow live to do it all again next year.

But sometimes the jigsaw puzzle is more a Rubik's cube. There's always that one year when the decorations go from "charmingly worn" to just worn out. Or those cute \$12 fleece gloves you got your niece last year, must now be a pink, flip cell-phone. And suddenly there's not enough time and more than enough seemingly insurmountable challenges...

...which is probably closer to the memory and emotion most of us and your target are already gearing themselves up for. So let's be true to that experience. And, offer a little extra help in solving the Rubik's cube this holiday season.

Walmart.

It's not a fairytale ending, it's a real-life answer. Our stories just don't reflect life, they reveal it in all of it's down to the wire, tired to the bone, last minute shopping for the pink cell phone reality. The families and faces we see are genuine--they could very well be our own neighbors. And each vignette tells a story with which we're all too familiar. But this time, the story has a different ending. And this time, we not only know we'll make it to the next Christmas, we're actually looking forward to this one.

Environments

We are not selling homes here so let's be careful to not let the type of home and how it is decorated take over. In fact let's subtly inject the idea that these people spend way more time "living" than shopping. They get the most out of life because they are not too precious about it. The homes we see are nice, but haven't been agonized over and each "invites" us in with surfaces that can withstand a beating.

While we certainly can relate to these family settings, they will ultimately be brought to life through the essence of each performance. So the home (and our van), will be real but it's the experience that will be elevated. Our exhausted mom falls asleep for a few precious moments on the chair—awoken by the sound of the mail slot clanking shut as mail arrives.

Our couple in the van don't just drive around the corner—we see them from a distance

driving down a busy expressway. Inside, the van is truly a working family's vehicle—coffee's in the cup holders, kids DVD's dot the dashboard. While a precious five year old cuts out shapes from colored paper—and the walls of her home are adorned with her wall-art.

Since we are selling life lets approach this spot accordingly. Memories and the reality of these events do not revolve around carefully styled images. They revolve around us, our smiles, our blunders and our loved ones. So let's stay away from the natural impulse to over glamorize things. It will look great, make no mistake, but it will BE life and we'll provide all those wonderfully detail-rich elements that make it real.

#### Casting

This is the most important single element of every frame. Our choices need to be attractive but definitely NOT model like, or "faux-real". Our fatigued mom from The List would be more Toni Collette than Eva Longoria. In our mind's eye, we know without thinking what authentic people look and feel like.

So our talent has to convey that very subtle weariness of the mother who sighs upon acknowledgement that her favorite decorations have seen better days. And her son isn't an uncaring teenager who's trying to derail mom's fun, he's just a kid who's grown past the innocent charm of all things Santa and would rather be with his friends.

Our families are innately human and flawed by their humanity—they care, feel and wear their emotions on their sleeve. We don't look at them and think "Walmart", we see them and think "Phew, how am I going to get the kids to help me decorate this year". And that is the brand culture—authentic experience, relatable at every level. Our cast will reflect this from top to bottom.

#### Shooting Style & Pace

These are small and nuanced moments that quietly and without fuss find an unexpected and very appreciated resolution. And the camera, edit and lighting will combine to create this arc of emotion so that it looks and feels like a found moment, not a commercial. It all feels very real yet there is a refined sense of warmth that triggers an emotional response as we act out and recreate our yearly rituals.

The realness will come partly through our filmmaking techniques--a slight float in the camera, with an almost handheld feel will give an intimate quality, alternately steeped with energy, gentle and imperceptible. Acting and reacting to the mood of the situation--getting right in there as if the camera is a family member. Using longer lenses can create the sense that we just happened upon a moment yet wider lenses have an extremely candid and authentic feel.

The overall look has the intimacy of a home movie—with the beauty of a well crafted film shot with candid lensing. I would stick to predominantly a wider lens, like a 40, particularly at the height of activity and reserve the long lens for specific and gentle moments--our mother asleep on the chair, a five-year old's face as she focuses on cutting out a shape.

Great attention to color palette and light will carefully consider the spot, finding colors that make each moment enticing. Yet none of this will be overly stylized, in fact it will be styled by us, to appear completely authentic and real. The light will bring another level of realism to each frame. It will be polished, rich and beautiful, but never feel like obtrusive beauty lighting. Daylight will stream through windows, low-value winter light will cast shadows through rooms. In the parking lot, our couple walks to their car amidst a textured nightscape illuminated by headlights of nearby cars and overhead lights.

Nighttime during the holiday season is really quite magical and evening comes early. There is something very moving about the cozy warmth of a home, while outside the world is muffled in a blanket of snow, the darkness illuminated by the light spilling from windows and dappled with Christmas lights. The trick to the authenticity you are after is simple--casting real people and styling things to resonate is only half the battle. The shooting style itself needs to be transparent--it cannot impose a "look" on the occasion but rather document it, take it in. So it is imperative that we set the scene up in its entirety, and let life unfold within it.

### Story

Let's build each story, starting with the quiet moment at hand as each situation slowly unfolds. But let's discover what sets each moment apart from the other, and open each scene with a bit of innocuous mystery—our van drives away, the couple inside waving to kids we see reflected in their rear-view mirror. Are they parents, friends?

A darling five year old stares intently downward, focusing her efforts and attention—but on what? People love solving puzzles. So we'll open each time in a way that engages the eye and piques the curiosity. All will be made clear momentarily, but its an elegant compliment to our viewer that we give the story and them, a few beats alone.

But the unfolding is unrushed. We're not holding on moments so long they become maudlin, but just enough so these small interactions can breathe and become quietly animated with meaning. The teen son mocks elves—clearly wanting no part of tree decorating festivities. Our mother in the van reads from a seemingly impossible to fulfill gift list—and we can hear the question in her voice ("How do we afford this...") hang in the air, louder than words.

And from each of these small but charged moments, we leverage the next. There's no instant fix, only a measured evolution of action/reaction that over the course of :30 becomes a true to life experience. People will relate to this arch as we expand and contract moments, using the edit and film speed to build then release.

### *Electronics*

We know all too well that holiday shopping is a behemoth event. It takes planning, strategy and leaving the kids with your sister. Which is where we'll open—we see the kids in the rearview mirror as the couple waves goodbye. It's a scene so familiar, our mother won't need to state the obvious ("It's so great...").

Similarly, we all know that you don't drive around the corner and complete your holiday list in twenty minutes. Sometimes, a lot of times, you have to make a journey. Which is

what we see here. The couple's journey—both in the van, and outside.

Inside, the journey is about the emotion our couple shares—both spoken and withheld, but felt. There's an air of concern, the conversation is punctuated by an unspoken question "How will we afford all this?". We don't provide the answer, rather we expand the tapestry of the story outside. We cut out to a wide of the van on a busy expressway. The shot is locked off as we watch the van move across frame, through holiday traffic.

But we can still hear the unanswered question in the air. Back inside, their van is ornamented ala working family--coffee cups in holders, kids DVD's on the dashboard, bills in envelopes stuck in the visor. We juxtapose the intimacy and subtle tension of their unfinished conversation with a running shot, as they turn down a street, cutting wide as they navigate a busy four way stop. Until at a red light, we're close on them, shooting through the driver's window. And our mother's final question hangs heaviest in the space between them:

*Well, I don't know how we can get...*

As she turns and spots a Walmart across the street. We don't need to telegraph anything with a look. She just turns her head, and we see the Walmart sigh. In many ways, the shot's non-committal. We can guess at the outcome, but for a fairly long beat we don't know for certain. And then, from a wide we see the couple walking across the Walmart lot to their car, pushing a shopping cart that's full. Now, we know. There's something beautiful about a parking lot at night. There's a kind of suburban texture that's very human and working class and satisfying in a pedestrian-poetry way.

And on film, they're fantastically graphic. Overhead, the lights cast illumination cones that surround the couple's van. Headlights from cars arriving and departing flicker on and off, casting tunnels of light through the surrounding darkness. This is how people live and shop and relate. And out spot is that uncomplicated, yet relays every detail and emotion that makes it real.

### *Decorations*

Decorating the tree brings out the charming innocence that give holidays patina of wonder. And, the slightly sharp edge of reality that demands you unravel miles of twisted lights and carefully pluck fragile ornaments from a box that couldn't protect them from a year of neglect.

We're in a world of weathered cardboard boxes spilling with miles of lights and hand me down ornaments from long ago. It's that family moment rendered not so fun as dad struggles with Gordian knots of extension cords and lights plugged into each other, none of them aglow. Our teenage son's the reality of old boxes full of timeworn ornaments hauled out for another go at the tree. He's not dismissive or cruel, just a teenager who's outgrown the wonder of all things Santa and would rather be playing Nintendo with friends.

His eight-year-old sister's our touchstone for magic. She still believes. Even when the nose on her Rudolph ornament falls off and she flatly, though without accusation declares:

*Tell that to the decorations.*

She's not crestfallen, just the tiny voice of reason that speaks the loudest. And even though dad's doing his best to be the man of the moment, even he can't help but mirror the same doubt that makes their tree-top star flicker with only faint possibility.

It's the moment our mother doesn't want to admit—but can't ignore. For her it's the dream of what these ornaments mean to her, meeting the reality that everything must change. We live this extended moment with them through a camera that's loose enough to feel humanly observed. And maybe moves just a bit with her as she sees the star in the Walmart logo on a bag on the counter. Does she smile just a trace?

When we fade back up, the tree's decorated top to bottom. There's a new star. All the lights work, blinking in perfect colorful unison. And the Rudolph ornament is even there. Little nose glued back on. Even her son stayed to help decorate. It's not necessarily a feel good moment, but a true moment fought for and won by this family. And we can hold on it for a just a second.

*The Toys*

We open in a home, shooting through a doorway where we see two small children, 5-8 years old playing crafts at a table. The home is warm and lived in. A child's plastic tricycle sits in the living room. There's a few different dolls laying about, abandoned in mid-play when a better opportunity for fun presented itself.

The camera moves like a family member, from one room to another. Now from a side angle we see the kids are cutting out shapes from paper, pasting them onto paper. At another table, mom concentrates as she works. From over her shoulder we see the kids head on, snipping and pasting while mom crunches numbers on a work pad. Dad walks past camera, past frame.

We hear ambient sounds—the kids giggle, their safety scissors “whish, wish, wish” as they cut through paper, mom calls out to dad—it's a real life soundtrack that can be heard, but never becomes the focus. The sound isn't our narrative, the images are. But sound cues us in time with the images. Our children hold up their projects for their parents' unconditional support. Which almost goes unnoticed by dad at first, until he walks back into frame to get a better look at what his daughter's handing him.

His silence is what captures our mother's attention—she reaches over and lifts up a Walmart flier—and sees spaces here and there where images of toys have been cut out. Maybe our father holds up the “art project”, turns it mid-air for his wife to see—just what she thought. Images from the flyer cut and pasted onto paper—the kids' gift list.

Mom smiles. The kids are still hard at work, cutting away. They're not done yet. And this year it's not a problem.

*The List*

We're in the world of our wife/mother as she moves through her day and her life with that one relentless reminder that the holiday season's upon her—the gift list.

Our environments should reflect her life—both interiors and exteriors. And in each shot the list is a character, and though it doesn't have to become a wearisome concern, it's definitely as much a part of her daily routine as anything else. When she walks home from the kid's bus stop she fishes the list from her pocket, and makes notes as she walks. A cold winter morning only adds a kind of determined spirit to her actions—come rain or shine...

...or long line at the coffee shop. As she waits for the barista to make her drink she grabs a napkin and continues the list she's been compiling in her head. We see her write next to "Uncle Jeremy"..."reading light?". As she leaves the shop, she drinks with one hand, holds the list up and reads to herself with the other.

At home we find her in the kitchen. Winter light falls in flat, low shafts through the window. We see the aftermath of dinner-in-progress. The counter's chock full of sliced vegetables, wrappers from packages and spice jars.

She's tending to pots and has the portable phone wedged between shoulder and ear, multitasking. Then she gets an idea and from her pocket pulls out a different gift list. Each time she finds a list, the paper it's on is different, maybe the pen she used a different color. To this list she quickly jots down ideas next to names as she reaches to turn down the burner under a pot. We cut to her as she quietly pulls a bedroom door shut behind her. We can just make out a cute child's nameplate in pastel on the door. Mom carries a stuffed animal with her, probably forgot to leave it on her daughter's bed when she fell asleep next to her.

In the living room, mom plops on a chair—tired. She gives a tired smile to the bear and closes her eyes. We fade back up on her as headlights play over her face in the now darkened room. She hears the "clank" of the mail slot and the sound of the front door.

Her husband walks into the living room, lets his jacket drop from his shoulders as he smiles and plops the ream of mail on the table. From her perspective, she can just make out her gift list next to the mail pile. And on the top of the pile, she sees a flyer from Walmart. She smiles. Her day just got better.

Although I am extraordinarily clear about the visual style and the authentic nature of every detail within the frames of the spot, I am eager to provide you more in terms of a broad narrative that can be felt as the back story for all we will see. If we are on the same page so far, I will complete this part next... Its something that I do for perspective and so that the world we are creating for the spot has context that adds a visceral texture to the project that is often never seen, but can leave an indelible emotional affect.

Thanks for the opportunity to pitch on this project.