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## WRITER CLARISSA JACOBSON ON WRITING THE HORROR FILM LUNCH LADIES

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Growing up, we often ignore the people around us, like the people who work at our school, but they are people with lives, hopes, and dreams, just like us. Two sisters, Seretta and LouAnne, work as lunch ladies, but get the chance of their lifetimes when they get a chance to meet and work with Johnny Depp in a contest. Unfortunately, they need to keep working to afford their plane tickets and the stress is getting to them. When one of the ladies has a certain incident with a student that could ruin everything, the two take inspiration from a certain Johnny Depp film to save themselves. I don't want to spoil too much, but the movie I'm talking about is Sweeney Todd.



([https://www.fronrunnermagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Lunch-Ladies\\_still\\_4-1024x895-1.jpg](https://www.fronrunnermagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Lunch-Ladies_still_4-1024x895-1.jpg))

Mary Manofsky (left) and Donna Pieroni (right) in the horror short film Lunch Ladies.

**What inspired the story, besides, of course, Sweeney Todd (and probably Hansel and Gretel...maybe that one Simpsons Treehouse of Horror where they ate the kids?)**

There were no other inspirations for the story other than Sweeney Todd – though Hansel and Gretel would've been a good choice... one wonders if Sweeney Todd was inspired by that! Simpson's Treehouse I have never seen. Sweeney Todd is my favorite musical and one that I find incredibly horrifying, funny, and sad all at the same time. It has heart. That's the feeling I wanted for the Lunch Ladies as characters, but of course on a happier more ridiculous over-the-top tone. A story about two murdering Lunch Ladies with heart who are pushed into a corner like Todd was. People who do awful things, but that you seem to love anyhow.

As for the inspiration of writing about Lunch Ladies period, I owe that to Donna Pieroni, who plays the lead in the film. We had been friends for years. One night while we were out to dinner she had mentioned she would love for a film to be made about Lunch Ladies because it would be a great part for her and two middle-aged women could be leads – something that rarely happens. That made me excited – I love writing stories about women, and I have a dark sense of humor and like quirky character pieces so I immediately wanted to write a story about these unlikely heroines.

**Did you ever think of using a made-up celebrity instead of Johnny Depp or was the Sweeney Todd aspect always a focal point?**

That's interesting, I never did, but it would work. I still think, however, it is stronger whatever actor used – whether made up or not – to have been in Sweeney Todd. Spoofs have been done so often about Sweeney Todd, that I think it's funnier to just admit that one is stealing the idea. Further, that way it's also not so devious, you can like the Lunch Ladies more, because they're just obsessed fans stuck in a terrible position who look to their idol for guidance. On some level, you forgive them more than you would had they just come up with that horrible idea on their own.

**What inspired the use of classical music in the film?**

JM Logan, the director had been toying with a scratch track for the film and originally put in Danny Elfman's scores from several of the Tim Burton films. It just seemed right and gave us the magical crazy feel we wanted. We loved it and were actually very concerned about getting something that would be different enough but similar and fresh.

In the past, JM had worked with Federico Jusid who is an Oscar nominated composer. Federico loved the film, but was too busy to write the score, so suggested that he produce the music and find us a composer. He brought Antoni M. March to us, a young musician from Spain. JM (who has scored before as well) worked with Antoni to get the feel he wanted and Antoni created a John Williams meets Danny Elfman score that worked beautifully. Then the magical thing happened and Federico was able to arrange for a 60 piece orchestra in Hungary – The Budapest Art Orchestra – to record it. Antoni did the most perfect score we could ever imagine.

**Due to the nature of the story, which parts of the story were harder to film?**

The hardest part of the whole film was the dance sequence. Joe Bratcher, my writing mentor who runs Twin Bridges Writing Salon and helped produce the film, was a tap dancer on Broadway at one time. He came up with the idea of the choreographed lunchroom insanity.

In my screenplay I wrote it very rhythmically with trays being dumped in time. Joe told me that he had an idea instead to do a mosh up of tap dance, Hip Hop and ballet and make it this wild crazy out of control cafeteria. I didn't know what he was going to do but he's the most talented person I know and told him to go for it. The day of the filming we were all nervous because we had no idea what it was

going to look like.

Joe and his other choreographers, Monika Felice-Smith for Hip Hop and Rebecca Ruschell for ballet had been working their ideas for a few months – but it had not been rehearsed with dancers as I couldn't afford to get people together before the day of filming. On top of it, we only had a few hours in the cafeteria to film and get it right.

JM had chosen Prokofiev for the music which was not easy but a brilliant choice. The dancers had to learn the choreography in less than an hour to this difficult piece and JM had to integrate the dancers with the non-dancers. When it succeeded so beautifully we were ecstatic because we all knew it could've been a huge disaster! We took a chance on preparation and great ideas and it paid off.



(<https://www.fronrunnermagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/REV-LunchLadies-2.jpg>)

### **Why is it in fiction that just makes the “other, other white meat” so delicious?**

Not sure I understand – Do you mean Why is it in fiction that “other, other white meat” is so delicious? I'll answer that and if wrong let me know!

In this case, the reason the “other, other white meat” is so delicious is because the Lunch Ladies have been forced to make meals for years out of pink slime (that's a disgusting practice that was blown wide open a few years ago of treating meat and supposedly it was used in schools) due to limited public school funding. So, when the opportunity arises – whether it is white meat or dark meat, it doesn't matter. It's about the freshness. When the Lunch Ladies finally get some fresh meat they're really able to create something... er... wonderful.

### **Was the contest than Seretta and LouAnne won legit?**

In Seretta and LouAnne's world it is. 😊 Of course they do get a “personal letter” from The Depper and there are some misspellings but that doesn't mean it's not real... does it?

### **Tell us about your future projects!**

I have a sweet coming of age road trip script called Stella by Starlight which was recently optioned by Norman Stephens and Bev Nero with an eye to filming it in Tulsa. I also have a gothic horror about Elizabeth Bathory and a woman in jeopardy thriller which are optioned as well and another horror about ghost hunters that's being shopped. Lastly, I'm working on a chick flick comedy with my friend Shayna Weber who was also a producer on Lunch Ladies and member of Twin Bridges Writing Salon.

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