

A story of second chances arrives in theaters this month to entertain & bring attention to America's wild horses.

by Diana DeRosa

California socialite Stella Davis is living the proverbial “perfect” life until the day everything comes to a crashing halt when her husband is killed in a car accident. And her heartbreaks are just beginning. Soon after the memorial service, Stella is confronted with the possible forfeiture of her home, Double Diamond Ranch, which has been in her family for four generations. In an attempt to save the ranch, her late husband had mortgaged it off to the tune of \$6 million, with 90 days to go before the loans would be due.



That's the plotline for Running Wild, a new film out in movie theaters this month, on video-on-demand soon and on DVD in April.

Portrayed by Dorian Brown Pham, Stella is faced with losing her farm or finding a way to save it. As she puts it, she could “be a victim or put on her big-girl boots.” She soon discovers the answer in the form of convicts and a bunch of wild horses that have wandered onto her property from the adjacent government property through a break in her fencing.

She comes up with idea of creating a prison rehabilitation equine program designed to help the horses and the convicts who work with them. The hope is that programs like this could give these endangered horses a chance for survival, while also rehabilitating the prisoners.

Running Wild is a movie with many messages, which was the goal for co-writers Brian Rudnick and Christina Moore when crafting the script. (Christina also produced and acted in Running Wild as Jennifer Hutchins, the sister of Meredith Parish, the character played by Sharon Stone).

We spoke with some of those behind the scenes to get a sense of how the script unfolded.

Q: The story starts on a sad note. Is there a backstory to that?

Moore: In 2014 a friend of mine was killed in a car accident. It shook me to the core. He left behind his partner of 10 years, whose life fell apart. I was struck by the fact that life can change in an instant and the survivor's struggle to create a "new normal" is real and burdensome. I mirrored Stella Davis after her. Davis is the reluctant hero who is thrust into an unknown world where she must learn to sink or swim.

She also becomes the eyes and ears of the audience in experiencing the ranch, the wild horses and their plight and the overall possibility of redemption that exists for her, the horses and the convicts. Ultimately Running Wild is a tale of redemption—that is its universal theme.

Q: Where did you shoot the film?

Moore: Ali Afshar, one of the executive producers, learned about the K2 Ranch property through a high school friend. Ali has friends, family and helpers in his home town of Petaluma. We were fortunate enough to secure the K2 Ranch, a stunning 28-acre privately-owned horse ranch in the heart of Napa Valley wine country, as the backdrop for our film.

Q: Why this film? Why this theme?

Rudnick: We were hired by ESX Entertainment to create a film that would raise awareness of the current state of wild horses in the American West, while also creating a rich narrative story. One of our main goals was writing something entertaining with a universal theme so that a wide audience could relate to the story.

Christina and I conducted interviews and did our best to understand the unique, historical bond between man and horse. What we discovered was a connection with the potential to transcend the physical.

The next step was deciding how to best illustrate this relationship. A professor at the University of Oklahoma suggested we look into the Wild Horse Inmate Program (W.H.I.P.), run by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Q: You had a great lineup of actors starting with Sharon Stone. What was it like to work with her?

Moore: Stone played the billionaire animal right's extremist. She is a consummate professional. She is brilliant, powerful and clearly an American cinema icon. She had ideas about the script that we willingly incorporated into the storytelling because they made the movie and her character so much richer. She explained the pitfalls of creating what she called a "paper villain" – a two-dimensional moustache twirling baddy. She was very careful to create a multi-faceted, multi dimensional character with genuine conviction.

Q: Christina Moore, how did you manage so many hats?

Moore:



Being a writer, producer and actor all at the same time is exhilarating and exhausting. For about two months I don't remember sleeping or eating, but I was stimulated beyond measure, pulsing with creativity while putting out fires (even literally).

Being a producer is like being a wedding planner, only you are throwing a wedding every single day for the length of the shoot, which for us was 22 days. Rewarding as heck, but hard work. Funny enough, the acting was the easy part. It is what I have been doing for 20 years. So it's old hat. Plus Hutchins does a lot of "sunglass acting" while driving around in her Aston Martin. That may have been the only time I sat down during the entire shoot.

Q: Ultimately, what do you want people to take away from this film?

Michael Girgenti (who played convict Matt Barker): I was attempting to portray two wild beings that helped each other get back centered again.

Tom Williamson (who played the convict Debrickshaw): My goal was to show how the horse helped the "convict" find some meaning in his life.

Director Alex Ranarivelo: "Our goal was to make an entertaining film that would shine a spotlight on the wild horse problem in the West. Our core story was a widow who's given a second chance at life. When our writers came across the wild horse rehabilitation program that gives wild horses and convicts a second chance, it just felt like it was meant to be. Second chances became a theme!"