


questions

Interview by Michael Koryta, Photography by Tom Stio



You can go
home again

Angelo Pizzo: screenwriter

Angelo Pizzo is a Bloomington native who recently returned to his hometown after enjoying exceptional success as a screenwriter in California. Pizzo and his former roommate at IU, director David Anspaugh, teamed on *Hoosiers* and *Rudy*, two of the most beloved sports films of all time. Pizzo, 58, now lives in Bloomington with his wife, Greta, and sons, Anthony, 11, and Quinn, 8. He sat down with *Bloom* to take 20 questions for this inaugural issue.

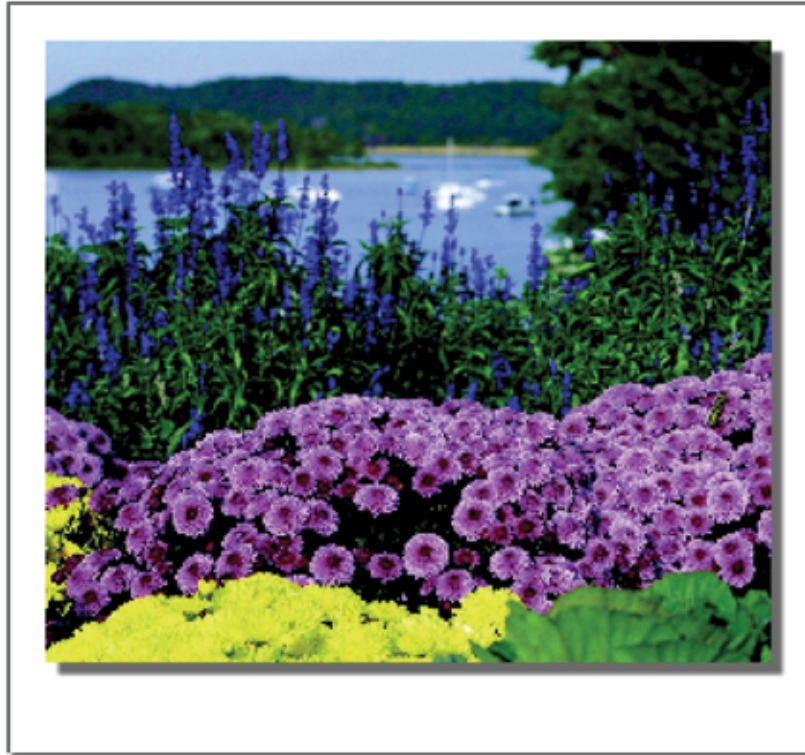
BLOOM A quote from your film, *Hoosiers*: “You know, during all those years away there were a few things I missed not being here. I miss knowing that nothing ever changes, people never change. It makes you feel real solid.” Is this just a quote from a movie, or were there some shared sentiments?

PIZZO Just a quote from a movie, I think. There is a fluidity and an ever-changing dynamic to Bloomington that I really like. I think sameness can be stifling. But because of the university, because of the constant influx, there is a vitality that has always appealed to me and I thought would appeal to my sons. It was certainly something that my wife Greta responded to.

BLOOM You were living in California before you came home. How long had the possibility been weighing in your mind, and what were the most important motivators?

PIZZO The reason we are back, the driving force, was my wife. She grew up in Chicago, and she just never took root in California. When we had our children, we agreed that it was not the place to raise them. We were living in a little town called Ojai. It was an attractive town we thought would work out nicely, but it didn't. We didn't connect to the people or the place. It was a bit of a bedroom community and a bit of a lost-soul community. There was no “there” there. It had no center. We were both longing to be part of something that was bigger than ourselves, bigger than our little family unit. College towns have a structure that is very

Continued on page 40



If this doesn't look like
your backyard,
look again.

The Fourwinds Resort & Marina is located on the shore of peaceful Lake Monroe. Beautifully landscaped grounds ensure the resort complements its natural surroundings. Peace and tranquility set the stage for a quiet getaway of boating, fishing and relaxing by the pool before dining by sunset. It's all here. Where the road ends at the water.



9301 S. Fairfax Road, Bloomington • (812) 824-BOAT (2628)
Dining & Lounge • Boating • Fishing • Tennis • Nature Trail • Miniature Golf • Indoor/Outdoor Pool
Hotel • Conference Center • Banquets • Weddings
Contact us today and learn about our getaway packages • Escape To Your Own Backyard
www.fourwindsresort.com

Pizzo continued from page 38

important to bringing up children, in that you don't have to talk about the importance of education—the importance of education is just *there*. It's part of the town.

BLOOM Did you have any trepidation about the return to your hometown?

PIZZO I actually did research on college towns in the Midwest, because I had some resistance moving back to the town I grew up in. There's that notion, the Thomas Wolfe thing, that you can't go home again. When you leave your hometown, you are not a fully formed adult with adult power. You have a lot of memories of being a powerless child, and you don't want to have that feeling of reverting which a lot of people have when they return. During my 20's, I rarely came home. I really created a gap between my childhood identity and my adult identity. A lot of times the reason people have



“College towns have a structure that is very important to bringing up children, in that you don't have to talk about the importance of education—the importance of education is just there. It's part of the town.”

a problem coming back home is that the family and the community tend to think of them as little Johnny Smith, and can't see them as big Johnny Smith. *Rudy* and *Hoosiers* took care of that for me.

BLOOM Filmmakers and screenwriters are certainly more common fixtures in California than Indiana. Were there any concerns about having a more visible public presence?

PIZZO I thought it might be a concern, but it didn't turn out that way. When people find out the projects I have been involved with, they might tell me they loved the movies, and then we go on about our business. There was a moment, my son Anthony's first day of school, when someone showed him a book of Indiana legends and I was in there. And his reaction was “What's my dad doing in this book?” He had never thought the movies I did were any big deal.

BLOOM Myra Fleener in *Hoosiers* talks about her father saying he always knew she'd come back. Did the move surprise your parents?

PIZZO I don't think they had any sense I was going to come back. The decision was like a

three- or four-year process. We had been talking about the possibility, but when we actually pulled it off, I think it was a big surprise.

BLOOM A town changes when you're gone for any real length of time. What stood out as the best changes when you came back to Bloomington?

PIZZO One of the things that I remember about Bloomington was that you'd have to drive to Indianapolis to buy certain things. Your choices are greater today. There wasn't a restaurant as good as Tallent when I was here. I love that restaurant. And you can get great fish and meat at Butcher's Block now. You couldn't get great fish in Bloomington when I was here. That's why I like the town getting bigger. I mean, no one likes traffic between the Bypass and 3rd St., but if that's the price you pay, that's fine.

BLOOM What things do you miss the most from the town you grew up in?

PIZZO I miss the advantages of a small town, mostly for my kids. I remember when I was seven or eight years old, I would ride my bike to Bryan Park and to campus, and I won't let

my kids do that now. I think that is a combination of the town and the times, really.

BLOOM What places in Bloomington did you think of most often when you were in California or wherever your travels took you?

PIZZO The basketball court. That's where I wanted to be. I used to take a subscription to the *Herald-Times* during basketball season because there was no Internet and I loved Bob Hammel and wanted to read about the IU team. I also have a great fondness for the campus. I think IU has the most beautiful campus I've ever seen. The images or snapshots in my head are fall and spring, when things are blooming and turning colors. The campus, and all those beautiful paths, that was my playground. I lived on a bicycle.

BLOOM How did your friends and colleagues in the film business react when you told them you were moving back? Did they think it was a professional mistake?

PIZZO They really fell into two camps. The bigger camp, honestly, was envious. People who live in Los Angeles know it is not the greatest place. It is a soul-bruising place, not spiritually nurturing. There were those who had to defend the place where they lived, and they would throw out comments like—oh, you have to go through those winters. But nobody really told me it was bad for business, because they knew it wasn't. You can write anywhere, and I've never shot a foot of film in L.A.

BLOOM Let's talk about your work now. You are writing character-driven stories in which sports happen to be the backdrop, but you've become known as a writer of "sports movies." Do you find that label frustrating, or have you been able to embrace it?

PIZZO It has become both a burden and an opportunity. I get some great stories coming at me because of the success I've had. But every time I make a sports story I say I'll never do another one. Out of every 20 ideas I am offered, 19 will be about sports. I usually jump at the chance if someone offers me something different. I can't do another team sport where a coach is involved. I am fundamentally incapable of writing another locker room scene.

BLOOM You and I have talked in the past about a number of projects you worked on that never appeared on the big screen. That seems to be a given in the film business. Is it accurate to say that 80% of screenplays that are sold are never made?

PIZZO Try 99%. I wrote *Hoosiers* on spec, but ever since, I've been hired to write the screenplay. So the nice thing is I am guaranteed a paycheck, but I lose all control of the script.

BLOOM Of those projects that died on the studio shelves, for which do you feel the most regret?

PIZZO One was about the Harlem Globetrotters. I did a dramatic, emotional rendering of the story, and David (Anspaugh) still says it was the best thing I've ever done, but the head of the studio was fired and the new person decided she wanted it to be a comedy. I don't think she even read the script, but she wanted it to be fun and funny and that was definitely not what I had written. I had written a racial drama about misery and the powerful story that was there. I was fired, and that was ten years ago. I believe since then they have had eight or nine writers take a shot at it and the movie hasn't been made. I wish I had written that one on spec, because then I would still control it and I would probably have gotten the movie made by now.

BLOOM *Hoosiers* is not a Bloomington film, but set in the very small rural communities of the state. Did you get out to those communities much while growing up in the area?

PIZZO Oh, yeah. All the high schools used to play in the small towns around here, Smithville



Celebrating Lifelong Learning

35 Years

1971-2006

INDIANA UNIVERSITY BLOOMINGTON
CONTINUING STUDIES
 Learning for a Lifetime

Whether you want to upgrade your professional skills, earn a degree, or learn a new topic just for fun, IU Bloomington Continuing Studies has lifelong learning opportunities for everyone!

(812) 855-4991
continue.indiana.edu

• Dishes • Silver • Glassware • Cabinets • Couches • Rugs • Dressors • Chiffarobes • Head/Foot Bed frames •



Once upon a time, after many adventures in exotic spots, A daring middle aged couple opened Blue Moon - a true consignment shop - A place where gently used household items Could be cared for Until they found new homes.

Many wonderful people have consigned and many happy people have adopted lovely and useful things and some truly rare finds.

Please visit our shop and discover world travelers collections, a few odd antiquities and that special something to be found Once in a Blue Moon.

Blue Moon
 FURNISHINGS & FINDS
 CONSIGNMENT

615 W. Kirkwood
 334-8119

Hours:
 Tues. - Fri. 10:30 - 5:30
 Sat. 10:30 - 5:00

Mirrors • Cushions • Crystal • Wicker • Object d'Art • Cabinets • Couches • Glassware • Cabinets • Couches •

Head/Foot Bed frames • Art • Dishes • Media Cabinets • Couches • Dressors • Chiffarobes • Night Stands • Lamps •

and Unionville and Oolitic. Those small towns are part of the fabric of my memory. Now, they are all gone due to consolidation.

BLOOM Seen any high school basketball since coming home, or has the class-system ruined it for you?

PIZZO The class system ruined the tournament for me. I had seen the title game when Damon Bailey played in front of 45,000 people in the Hoosier Dome, and then I was invited back to see the tournament in 2001 or 2002 at Conseco. You had eight teams playing, and during each game about three-quarters of the spectators didn't care about what was happening on the court. The energy of the place was so shot. I can't tell you how disappointed I am in the people who made that decision to go to the class system. They have ruined the tournament.

BLOOM What do you think of Coach Kelvin Sampson and IU basketball heading into the new season?

PIZZO I think that the fans long for someone who is a proven success, who understands the culture of basketball at Indiana, and who puts

out a team that plays hard for 40 minutes. I have always admired the way Sampson's teams have played. He puts that chip on his team's shoulders, and I think that Indiana fans are really going to like him.

BLOOM You were recently honored by your fraternity, Sigma Nu, and I know your experience there was a mixed one. What can you tell us about that?

PIZZO When I was at Sigma Nu it was about button-down shirts and business majors and law school goals and keggers and connecting to the best sororities. Then two years later a bomb went off, culturally, and all those things changed completely. An alternative lifestyle and an alternative set of choices came with it. That was a real attack, an affront, to many people in our fraternity. I chose to go the other way, and I was asked to leave.

“A lot of times the reason people have a problem coming back home is that the family and the community tend to think of them as little Johnny Smith, and can't see them as big Johnny Smith. Rudy and Hoosiers took care of that for me.”

BLOOM Have you ever talked to your friend and colleague, David Anspaugh, about coming back to town?

PIZZO He was really watching me as a test case to see how I made the adjustment. And the move was so productive for me and my family that I think it has really encouraged him. I think it is just a matter of time.

BLOOM If you could pick one actor, one actress, and one director to work with on a film, who would they be?

PIZZO The first woman who comes to mind is Meryl Streep. I am in such awe of her talent. She is a gift to our culture. It's hard to single out one director, but I suppose I'd say Martin Scorsese. I think he is the most accomplished American director of our time. As for an actor? You know, an actor I would just love to get in

the right part is Robert Duvall. I think when he connects to a character in a visceral way, it becomes a transcendent performance.

BLOOM What's on the Angelo Pizzo reading list?

PIZZO I am a big fan of Umberto Eco. I just love him. I have every one of E.L. Doctorow's books, Richard Ford, Tim O'Brien. Milan Kundera hasn't written a bad sentence as far as I am concerned. He is a real writer's writer. John LeCarre is a masterful storyteller, and so literate.

BLOOM To people out of state, the word Hoosiers often means your film. If someone asked you for your definition of the word, what would you say?

PIZZO Someone who lives in the state and is a member of the tribe. It is a sense of belonging to the place that is Indiana. But they have to claim it. Living in Indiana for a few years doesn't make you a Hoosier. You have to claim the place. ✨



Introducing...

bellabella FloorDecor



bella  **bella**
art by lara moore

P.O. Box 1087 Bloomington, IN 47402-1087 • t: 812-323-1637 • f: 812-323-163 8 • www.bellabella.com