

# CARTS OF DARKNESS

The vehicle drifts across the centre-line, its speed pushing 70 km/hr. As it races downhill, the rider hangs on. Metal screams and rattles, and small wheels struggle to grip the pavement. Welcome to the picture-postcard community of North Vancouver, where local bottle pickers have turned the act of binning into a thriving subculture of shopping cart racing. Murray Siple, a former snowboarder and sport film director injured in a serious car accident ten years ago, returns to filmmaking to capture their story in the documentary *Carts of Darkness*.

This brotherhood of the dispossessed includes men like Big Al, a fearless cart-rider who bombs the mountainside; Fergie, a still-handsome alcoholic who rambles between his bush hideout, the homeless shelter and the drunk tank; and Bob, a gentle artist/musician who collects just enough bottles to support his flower garden and his art. Cut off from regular jobs and family, these men live in the margins, almost invisible in a society obsessed with success and appearance. "I discovered that like them, I face an obstacle-riddled culture of judgments based on first impressions and stereotypes," says Murray.

Big Al's wild rides come at a cost -- shopping carts are routinely stolen and the wheels literally melt off on slopes that descend from the sky to the sea. "Shopping carts ain't free," offers Big Al. But escape from the daily world of poverty, addiction, even death is worth the price of jail. As the affinity between them grows, Murray's need to recapture the visceral rush that he remembers from his snowboarding days will take a final act of daring and trust.

Shot in stunning high-definition, *Carts of Darkness* borrows the cinematic language of snowboarding and skateboarding films to put you right in the middle of the action. POV shots of Big Al carving down a hillside blur together energy, mass and the pull of gravity into one moment of pure outlaw joy. Featuring tracks from Black Mountain, Ladyhawk, Vetiver, Bison, and Alan Boyd, of Little Sparta, this is a story of endurance and resourcefulness, that captures the risk and intensity of life lived on the very edge.



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## Short Synopsis

The vehicle drifts across the centre-line, its speed pushing 70 km/hr. As it races downhill, the rider hangs on. Metal screams and rattles, and small wheels struggle to grip the pavement. Welcome to the picture-postcard community of North Vancouver, where local bottle collectors have turned the act of binning into a thriving subculture of shopping cart racing. Murray Siple, a former snowboarder and sport film director, returns to filmmaking to capture their story in *Carts of Darkness*.

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**Murray Siple, Director**

Director Murray Siple began his film career making extreme sports videos including the cult classic *Cascadia* (1996) and *The Burning* (1995). In 1996, a serious car accident changed Murray's life forever when he became a quadriplegic. Ten years later, Murray returns to filmmaking, incorporating his passion and distinct viewpoint in the documentary ***Carts of Darkness***.

***Carts of Darkness*** is produced by the National Film Board of Canada.



# CARTS OF DARKNESS

## Brief Biographies of the Main Subjects

### Big Al

At 6'5", 200 lb., Big Al is a charming rogue, an occasional criminal and natural-born hell raiser. Al learned to ride shopping carts as a teenager as a means of escape from a world of alcohol abuse and as a way to get to school. A veritable walking contradiction, as fun as he is unpredictable and dangerous, Al is an anomaly in the conservative neighbourhood of North Vancouver. In his own words, "I don't have any furniture, I have no wife, I have no kids to look after, I got nothing!" An entirely self-determined man, he is a fitting guide to the shadow world of poverty and homelessness.

### Bob

Originally from Wimbledon, England, Bob has lived in North Vancouver for over 25 years. A gentle soul, he collects bottles on his bike from a nearby skateboard park, tends his flowers, paints, writes, cares for animals, and waxes philosophical upon the vagaries of life. "If you have one friend, you're very, very rich. I have cultivated a large number of friends, and I am without a doubt the richest person in this area," he says. With his corona of white hair and soft-spoken manner, Bob resembles nothing so much as an aging cherub. A senior statesman in the bottle-collecting community, he takes a dim view of cart riding.

### Fergie

With a profile worthy of a Renaissance saint and a gaze that speaks to a world of hurt, Fergie takes a gently acerbic view of contemporary society. Fergie lost his parents in a car crash when he was just a teenager. He survived the accident, but was left with a damaged sciatic nerve resulting in a permanent disability. Battered but still-handsome at age 49, Fergie lives moment to moment, plays his guitar, hits the bottle (hard) and makes just enough money bottlepicking to survive. "Can't live on fresh air and good looks," he says.



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## Director's Statement

I have not always relied on a wheelchair for my mobility.

As an able-bodied person I was a high school quarterback, dedicated mountain biker, skateboarder, and a snowboarder. It sounds like I was a jock but I just liked being athletic and getting outdoors. I went to college at Emily Carr and ended up spending all hours of the night editing footage I shot, appropriated, and found. I'd make films on a Steenbeck with old footage from the NFB's "destroy" pile or I'd take the school's equipment and go film skate and snowboarding. The school didn't like the idea of me heli-boarding on weekends while everyone else at school was looking for "objects" in alleys or performing art in a cage of some type. So I pushed off and moved to Whistler.

I lived in Whistler, B.C and directed five independent action sport videos that were pre-"X-games" and pre-"mainstream extreme". I set down deep roots in a short period while living in the mountain community; and traveled internationally filming snow and skateboarding. That lifestyle/ dream was destroyed in 1996 when a high-speed motor vehicle accident compounded by an emergency room error rendered me a quadriplegic.

Throughout the following eight years, I continued to hope that my life could still somehow include my passion for filmmaking. Eventually, I was able to renovate a home in North Vancouver that became a model of accessibility and independence. But outside the comforting accessibility of this new home, my vantage point was largely limited to flat pathways, accessible public buildings, and shopping centers.

I learned to drive a van which extended my freedom, but my limited hand dexterity made it difficult to work a camera like I had before. So in spite of solid gains in the direction of freedom and mobility, I found myself largely retreating from the dream of returning to filmmaking. The next few years were chiefly spent adjusting to my disability and trying to ignore the craving to make films.

I discovered the story behind ***Carts of Darkness*** when I was grocery shopping one evening. I noticed some loud individuals who were cashing in bottles. I had a romantic vision that both of our lifestyles were stereotypes to the passing customers: the drunken and comically disordered bottle returners, and me, wheelchair-bound and precarious in my adapted vehicle. When I approached the men with the idea to make a film, a world was revealed to me I had never expected to discover in my own neighbourhood.

[www.murraysiple.com](http://www.murraysiple.com)



# CARTS OF DARKNESS

**Michael Brockington, Editor**

Michael Brockington has been editing in Vancouver since 1995, working on indie features (*On the Corner, Protection*), documentaries (*Bevel Up: Drugs, Users and Outreach Nursing*), series TV (*Alienated*) as well as short dramas and performance films. He has won Leo Awards for editing both feature drama (*Eve and the Fire Horse*) and documentary (*Island of Shadows*).

Michael has directed a handful of short films, and published fiction and articles in magazines and newspaper and is a graduate of the film production program at Simon Fraser University.



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## **Christian Bégin, Director of Photography**

As a cinematographer and director, Christian began his filmmaking career 20 years ago. He has worked in locations all over the world and was the founder of Radical Films, and is now based in Squamish, BC. In addition to directing the highly successful feature film *Locomotion* (1995), and the mountain biking trilogy *Krunked*, Christian has worked as a DOP for a number of commercials and ski and snowboard films, including *Ski Bums*.

## **Kevin Shepit, 1st Unit Cinematographer**

Growing up in a small mining town in the East Kootenays, there was no shortage of adventure right outside of Kevin's backyard. Over the years, Kevin's passion for the camera lead him to being a professional cameraman trotting around the world. From expedition shoots in the far reaches of the world to the devastation of New Orleans immediately after Hurricane Katrina; from sitting nervous under the suspicious eye of Fidel Castro to heli-skiing with the "have-lots", one thing the camera has given Kevin is perspective.

## **Mike McKinlay, 2nd Unit Cinematographer**

Mike McKinlay was born in North Vancouver and raised in the Okanagan Valley. During his eight years as a camera man, Mike's film subjects have varied. From skateboarding to wildlife to West Coast culture, Mike has had the opportunity to work within the genres of both the corporate and documentary world. When not behind the camera recording an event, you will find Mike riding his skateboard. Mike is also Big Al's cousin.

## **Jamie Mahaffey, Sound Supervisor**

With over 16 years of sound design and mixing experience on projects ranging from corporate video, television and radio commercials to television series, film and broadcast documentary, Jamie has done it all when it comes to audio and sound supervision. Now, with four Leo Award nominations and owning and operating his own commercial audio post house, The Mix Room with partner Marty Taylor, the future looks, or should we say sounds bright.



# CARTS OF DARKNESS

Tracey Friesen, Producer (NFB)

Tracey Friesen is the Executive Producer for the National Film Board of Canada's Pacific and Yukon Centre. Since joining the NFB, Tracey's producer credits include: director Bonnie Klein's **SHAMELESS: The ART of Disability, ScaredSacred, Being Caribou** and **Citizen Sam**. Recent productions also include **Dirt** directed by Meghna Haldar and **Finding Farley** directed by Leanne Allison.

