Film Student Dave Silver Wins Top Short Film Prize at Utah's Sundance Festival

BY LORALEE NOLLETTI

"Gasline" is not your typical suburban film. Set in New York's 'burbs in the midst of the second gas shortage of 1979, Ben Crosby, the film's protagonist, has the unlucky fortune of owning a gas station. And his station is running low on gas.

Over the course of a very bad day, Crosby's faces angry customers, indiscriminate whole-salers, an attendant with an attitude, a failing marriage, a woman from his past and a vul-

erable son. He tries to navi-
gate a path through it all and comes within inches of surviv-

ing with his world intact.

Crosby's survival story in "Gasline" was the creative work of graduate student Dave Silver of the School of the Arts film division. Silver made the film as his thesis and, in what is a rare honor for American short films, on Jan. 19 at the Sundance Film Festival.

Chosen from 2,100 entries, "Gasline" was one of 79 short films featured at this year's fes-
tival, which ran from Jan. 10 - 20 in Park City, Utah.

The Short Film Jury Prize—sponsored by American Express—was awarded to a film of outstanding achieve-

ment and merit. In the short film category (films under 30 minutes in length), the judges were judged for their individu-

ality, artistry and charm.

Short films are a way of introducing new talent as they demonstrate the power of a filmmaker's storytelling. The short films are exhibited before features or combined in fea-
ture-length programs, and are thought to capture the creative burst that is the essence of independent filmmaking, according to the Sundance Institute's executive director, Dan Kleiman, chairperson of Columbia's film division, and Silver's short "one of the best-directed student films I have seen in my 30 years of teaching. All of us in the Film Division are proud of what Dave has accomplished and expect great things from him in the future." Silver's film also received the Kine's Video Award at last year's pole Ralph Lauren Columbia University Film Festival.

As a student of the film divi-
sion, Silver has served as assis-
tant to the directing faculty and is a directing fellow. Prior to film school, he was a creative direc-
tor at Ogilvy & Mather, a worldwide advertising agency, where he won numerous awards including Finalist at the Cannes International Advertis-
ing Festival.

Silver returned to film school in 1998 to pursue a career as a film director. He grew up in New York during the 1970s, and received his BA in Philosophy from Wesleyan University.

Silver has recently complet-
ed work on two feature length screenplays: a horror/thriller about a bioengineering experi-

ment gone haywire and a dark comedy on the American West.

"I'm thrilled with the award, as you can imagine," said Sil-

ver. "But my future as a direc-
tor will have more to do with the years I've spent with some very special and talented teach-

ers than recognition for one short film. I'm especially thankful to Nick Proffers, Bette Gordon, Antony Breg-

man, and Lenore deKoven. Columbia taught me the tools for dramatic storytelling, with-

out which I would never have gone to Sundance."

Silver wasn't the only Columbia student to see his work featured at Sundance this year. Two other current stu-
dents in the Film Division, Amanda Zarranz with her film, "Tall Girl" and Claudia Myers with her film, "Buddy and Grace," had their short films featured. In the feature catego-

ry, two alumni had their works presented: Bertha Bay-Sa Pan (MFA '99) who directed "Face" and Ernesto Porotona (MFA '00) who co-wrote and pro-

duced "Better Luck Tomor-
row," developed from his thesis script.

In the last two years, Columb-

ia's short films have won the three most prestigious short film festivals in America, the Next Wave Festival, the Palm Springs International Short Film Festi-

val, and now the shorts compe-
tition.

In addition, Columbia stu-
dents have won the most sought after awards in the U.S., the Student Acade-

my Award, four times in the last five years; all of these awards went to different films.

"The student filmmakers, of course, deserve the credit," Kleiman. "But I'm pleased that there is increasing recogni-
tion for the strength of our fac-

culty and the distinctive film-

making curriculum we have developed in the School of the Arts.

Former Senator Mitchell Joins SIPA's Center for International Conflict Resolution

Mitchell, Senate majority leader from 1989 to 1995, led the bipartisan congressional efforts for the passage of the Americans with Disabili-

ties Act, landmark legislation extending civil rights protec-

tions to the disabled.

With former U.S. Senator and former Defense Secretary William Cohen (R-Me.), he wrote "Men of Zeal: A Can-
did Inside Story of the Iran Contra Hearings" (Viking 1988). He has also authored "World on Fire: Saving an Endangered Earth" (Simon and Schuster, 1991), a description of the greenhouse effect and the author of the first national

Harlem Students Display Healing Art at Annual Show

On view through March 4 in the Low Library Rotunda, the exhibition entitled "Triumphant Artists" is a tribute to children of the World Trade Center who have overcome physical and emo-

tional challenges through their art. The show, selected from this year's young artists whose struggles with the mean-

ing of the tragedy and the disaster are apparent in their art, and past artists, for whom painting is a means of art, the exhibition—sponsored by the Office of Public Affairs in celebration of the World Trade Center's 10th Mon-

th—open to the public Monday-Friday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. A reception honoring the artists will be held Thursday, Feb. 21, 4-6 p.m. in the Rotunda. Columbia students and staff are welcome to attend.