

BLAME IT ON LOVE

WA-BASED HUSBAND-WIFE TEAM RYAN HODGSON AND MELISSA KELLY'S FIRST FEATURE FILM, **BLAME**, PREMIERED AT THE TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL LAST MONTH. THEY TELL SAM DALLAS HOW THEY MET AND WHAT IT'S LIKE WORKING TOGETHER WITH A YOUNG FAMILY.



PHOTO BY JAMIE DAY FLECK.

We don't always get the balance right – more so me to be honest, as I find it hard to stop working and relax.

Blame is the hardest thing we have ever done together. That's not to say it was a bad experience – it wasn't – but we threw all of ourselves at the film for a year and a half and we did it with two children under four and all the time we continued to make TVCs – so we could eat.

It was exhausting, but I wouldn't have done it with anyone else. In fact I'm pretty sure I couldn't have done it with anyone else.

In the future I would like to do less TVC production – but not give it away completely – and focus on more long-form drama. We have one project in development, a feature adaptation of a book that means a lot to the both of us that I really want to make happen.

MELISSA KELLY

RYAN AND I first met at an AWG conference in Terrigal.

He had the flu and was using medication to combat the symptoms and subsequently has an extremely vague memory of the meeting. Eighteen months later we met at an industry drinks function in Perth and he's had my mobile number ever since.

We first worked on developing a historical documentary series together. We weren't "a couple" at the start of the job but we found the experience so compatible that we ended up realising our friendship was something stronger.

Working with my husband can be the best and worst thing; we can talk to each other about every aspect of our working day – when we are not in production, Ryan produces TV commercials while I manage our development slate – but the downside is I never seem to leave the office.

This is exacerbated by the fact that I now work from home as we recently had our second baby and while I'm extremely lucky that I'm able to work and be close to our kids while they are small, I sometimes never leave the house, unless we need food.

We both find it very grounding working from home as one minute we could be discussing potential international co-production partners and the next, changing a nappy.

Ryan is very gregarious and I'm far more reticent and subsequently he ends up doing a lot of the talking. I like to read, analyse and process scripts while Ryan is really good at pitching so in combination we're a good team.

Whenever we do have a disagreement it's normally derived from the fact that we deeply care about our projects and our work but we never stay angry for long.

Ryan is a great communicator and he likes people. He can talk for hours and has great recall about specific details. Ryan also has a very high work ethic and stamina. He can power through extremely long days for weeks on end. Did I mention how much he likes to talk?

He swears a LOT when he is stressed. Coffee is also his kryptonite. One cup and he can't function but he loves the smell of coffee and sometimes he gets distracted and thinks he can drink it. Be very afraid people.

Blame is the project we are most proud of and I'm so glad we did it together.

We wanted so much to get our first feature right, so we surrounded ourselves with specific mentors on the production so that even if the film didn't meet with everyone's expectations, we knew it wouldn't fall flat.

On this particular production we had to join forces more than ever as our daughter Jessie was only 5 months old and was still waking one or two times a night. We relied on each other incredibly to get through the physical and emotional drain of running straight from financing into production and then into post.

I think we are stronger people now and an even tighter team.

In the future we want to make great Australian drama and the project we are most excited about is the adaptation of the historical novel *The White Divers of Broome*. We hope to bring this and more engaging stories to Australian audiences.

RYAN HODGSON

WE MET AT AN AWG Conference in Terrigal, apparently. But I was unwell with a cold that became a nasty chest infection and so heavily medicated that I can barely remember the conference – let alone meeting Melissa.

She remembers meeting me however.

The first time I do remember meeting her – and I remember it very well – was at a Small Screen Big Picture Conference in Fremantle a year or so later.

Firstly, Melissa and I developed a couple of documentary ideas together. I found that we had very complimentary research and writing styles – we both edit/re-write the other's work well and can finish something the other has started – so it was a good experience and one that helped set up the way we still work together.

Her patience (often with me), focus, determination and her good humour are great assets. She also has good instincts for both stories and people and she is very good with story and character development.

We both have shortcomings, none so bad that they're worth highlighting – well at least I hope she doesn't highlight mine. But if you have to know, chocolate is her great weakness. But as long as she leaves some for me I'm okay with that.

For the most part working together is good but I would be lying if I said we didn't have our disagreements. I'm sure that's true of all work partnerships, but our real problem is – because we so often work from home – separating work from our home/family life.