



Did I ever tell you about the time on “Sweet Home Alabama” when I lost Reese Witherspoon’s \$4,000 custom-made wedding ring from Tiffany’s? About how I had visions of ending my film career by being stomped to a pulp by Disney’s studio goons and Tiffany’s prissy New York jewelers? I didn’t? Well obviously it all worked out for the best, and it’s hardly as exciting as it sounds, but I figure the statute of limitations has run out and it’s safe to tell the whole story...

It was the first day of almost a month of shooting that we were scheduled to do, in the small town of Crawfordville, the seat of government for Taliaferro county (pronounced locally as “Tall-uh-fur”), which was reputed to be the poorest and least populated of Georgia’s 159 counties. Our crew was just coming off of a four-day Thanksgiving vacation and one quick day of shooting south of Atlanta at Starr’s Mill, so we were fairly rested and ready to settle into a long stay at the closest approximation to a backlot available in Atlanta back in 2002. Before our brief holiday vacation we had spent more than two weeks filming the movie’s wedding scene up in Rome at Martha Berry’s grand historic home, just down the road from Berry College. While there, we met a lot of neat people, saw some beautiful scenery and managed to shut down the town’s only sushi restaurant. One benefit of shooting in small towns is that the locals treat film crews like rock stars.

Compared to Rome, Crawfordville was a giant step backwards through forty or fifty years in time. And I don’t mean that in a snobby way, it’s true. While it actually is a one-light town, Crawfordville has buildings and shops that indicate that it was once occupied by businesses and must have been bustling at some point in its past, probably before the state ran an interstate two miles south of main street. About the biggest thing Crawfordville had going for it in those days was the fact that it was the historic hometown of the Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens.

So we were kind of a big deal.

We spent our first day in town shooting a bunch of little street vignettes with various members of our ensemble cast. The first location was outside a little country store at an intersection just across the street from the courthouse. A few blocks west of us, beneath a water tower that had been imported from Texas (just to add character to the town), the grips were lashing speedrail to a Silver Saab convertible belonging to Reese Witherspoon’s character “Melanie”.

THE TIME THAT DREW LOST REESE WITHERSPOON’S WEDDING RING

The remainder of our day was scheduled for driving shots of Reese zooming through the countryside talking on a cell-phone, and I was the poor sucker nominated by my Propmaster (Dwight Benjamin-Creel) and my co-2nd (George Lee) to ride in the follow van, which is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand you get to sit in a nice comfy seat for hours and hours while you ride around following the process trailer, occasionally getting out to wipe a few dead bugs off the windshield between the actors and camera, spending the remainder of your time napping or talking to the hair and makeup girls. On the other hand, it’s incredibly boring. Remember: this was in an age before Facebook, Twitter or sexting, and the only videogame on our Nintendo Gameboy was Tetris.

There’s a lot of departmental passive aggressiveness associated with follow vans... when you’re the poor sap stuck in a follow van, listening to makeup girls talk about crystal healing, prayer teas and hot pink chakras, you pray to heaven that your crewmates are working their butts off, just as they, in the extremely unlikely event they actually are burdened with hard work, hope that you’re stuck on a back road trying to scrape a bugs off the windshield of the hero car while the shooting crew tap their feet impatiently.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, because the scene outside the country store was only just finishing up. Our 1st AD Louis D'Esposito announced that they were sending Reese from makeup over to the process rig, so we pulled all of the props that Reese's character "Melanie" would need for the driving scene, stuffed them into a variety of resealable plastic bags which I began jamming into the wild assortment of pockets afforded by my signature cargo pants. I turned and hopped on our set bike and zoomed off to meet up with Reese over at the car.

It only took me half a minute to ride down to the process trailer, which was parked about 50 feet from our prop truck so I rolled over to the tailgate of our truck, set the kickstand on my bike and began pulling plastic bags out of what seemed to be dozens of pockets. Watch, cellphone, sunglasses, wedding ring... um, wait.... where was the wedding ring?

Another search of all those pockets: Nope. Again. Nope. Again. NOPE!!

It was the ugliest version of the Macarena you've ever seen and by the fifth time of patting myself down I was feeling sick. I gamely called up Dwight and George on the radio and told them that I couldn't find the ring, that it was lost. Staying calm, we all went through the on-set tub where we normally kept the hero props... with no luck.

The ring was GONE!

Now this wasn't just any ring. This was a special ring, a ring that Tiffany's would NEVER want to get out into general circulation because the diamond, while very large and very juicy, was also VERY artificial. Tiffany's was especially protective of these fake diamond rings, stating that they planned to destroy them at the completion of the film in order to prevent an official fake ring from Tiffany's from ever making it out in the general circulation.

Fortunately, it turned out that I'd gone and lost the "day-to-day" version of the hero wedding ring, which we used for 99% of Reese's shots - it was only worth about \$4,000. Nothing like the \$100,000 diamond Dwight had been saving for close-ups. Of course I knew none of this at the time, so I thought that I had lost the Mother Of All Diamond Rings and was pretty sure that the producers and studio heads wouldn't be able to write off such a simple mistake -- they'd think that your old pal Drew had stolen the darned thing.

As panic began to set in I saw my film career flashing before my eyes, which was kind of a bummer because it started off with me dropping Kevin Costner and bouncing a grenade off of Daniel Baldwin's forehead.

While Dwight went to get a backup ring from the safe, he sent me to ride back over my path from the truck back to the intersection we'd been set up at all morning. Nobody else on the crew knew what I was doing, pedaling around in big lazy looping circles, head craned down to the ground. Townsfolk were walking up and down the same street and I couldn't help wondering in terror if one of them had already found the ring, pocketed it, and kept on moving. At one point an older gentleman asked me what I was looking for so I told him that I'd dropped a pencil - I wasn't about to take anyone into my confidence. If word got out about the missing ring everybody in the county would be downtown in minutes.

After what seemed like 6 hours of searching I had finally looped my way back up to the area where the crew equipment had been staged all morning. All the carts had long since been rolled away, leaving a big empty gravel parking lot. I stared at the ground in utter despair.

And there it was: a little plastic bag with a pretty diamond ring nestled inside. I must have missed a pocket when I was putting all those other plastic bags into my cargo pants.

In that wonderful moment of discovery I experienced a glimmer of the magic that diamond rings must bring to women when their boyfriends propose to them. If there had been a preacher nearby I would have married that gravel parking lot in a heartbeat.

According to the notes in my timesheet journal, that frantic search only lasted ten minutes but it felt like an eternity... by the time it was over I was all too ready for a long comfortable van ride. I don't think Reese was ever aware that her old pal Drew had misplaced her prop ring or that in all the excitement he'd forgotten to pull the cellphone headset from her character drawer. Luckily, I used the same Nokia headset her character did in the movie so I let her use my headset for those shots. And no, I won't sell you that old headset with her earwax in it.

I'm pretty sure that I lost it :(



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