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IWU Emeritus Theatre Professor Pens Bio of Filmmaker Pakula

September 2, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.- Emeritus Professor of Theatre Arts Jared Brown, enjoying a not-quite-typical retirement from Illinois Wesleyan University, came home one day to a phone message from Harrison Ford.

Brown, who was writing a biography of director Alan J. Pakula, had contacted Ford's publicity manager a few days earlier, hoping to interview the blockbuster star for the book. Ford not only gave the interview, but he eventually wrote the foreword to "Alan J. Pakula: His Films and His Life."

Released this month, the book gained a positive review from the Washington Post, which is coincidentally the setting of one of Pakula's most successful films, "All the President's Men."

Through an interview with the film's star and producer Robert Redford, Brown learned something Redford recalls telling no one before: that he and Pakula, though uncredited, actually rewrote the script for which William Goldman won and accepted an Academy Award.

The biography traces behind-the-scenes details about the late Pakula's life and work, compiled from dozens of interviews with people who knew and worked with Pakula before his death in a freak car accident in 1998. In addition to Ford and Redford, Brown's sources included Meryl Streep, Jane Fonda, Kevin Kline, and former neighbor Peter Jennings (who spoke with Brown before his recent death from lung cancer). The interviews were surprisingly easy to secure, Brown said, largely because Pakula was so well-liked – particularly by actors.

"He was not interested in flashy camera work or showing off his directorial technique. He was interested in telling a story and developing the character," Brown says.

Kline, who made his film debut opposite Streep in 1982's "Sophie's Choice," found working with Pakula to be unforgettable.

Brown said that Kline told him, "[With Pakula] it was all about the character, all about finding further dimensions of the character. We'd talk endlessly." According to Brown, most directors don't do that, they just say, "Learn the lines and let's shoot the scene." Kline said the experience with Pakula was remarkable and he's never duplicated it.

Brown himself was drawn to Pakula as a subject because so little has been written about the self-effacing director.

"All the books I've written have been about either people or phenomena that I don't think have been covered very well. I thought that Alan Pakula had been very much underappreciated as a filmmaker. (His best films) are pictures that almost everybody's familiar with, but very few people know the name of Alan Pakula and certainly don't realize that for four decades, he was making outstanding movies."

Brown's previous books include "Zero Mostel: A Biography," "The Fabulous Lunts," and "The Theatre in America During the Revolution."

Brown will introduce a showing of "All the President's Men" and sign books following the film at Normal Theater, 209 W. North St., on Sept. 6 beginning at 7 p.m. He also will speak and sign books at Bloomington's Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 1701 E. Empire, on Sept. 17 at 3 p.m.

To arrange to speak with Brown about Pakula, call Jeff Hanna or Ann Aubry at (309) 556-3181.



Jared Brown