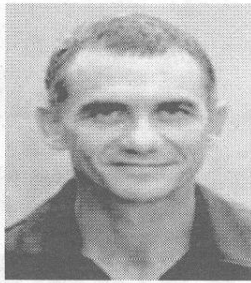


In Memoriam

Mark Krasnoff—Actor, Activist, Mentor

By Gary Michael Smith



Friend, colleague, and an inspiration to all who knew him, Mark Krasnoff—"Kraz" as he was affectionately known—left us on September 17, 2006. At 43, Mark departed far too soon, but his legacy lives on. Those in the film and theatre industry knew Mark for his intuitive and impassioned acting in roles ranging from detective to reporter to fisherman, among many others. His appearances in more than two dozen films can be described as "incandescent," and earned him a Big Easy Award in 1998 and two Marquee Awards in 1998 and 2003. One theatrical reviewer called his performance "eloquently anguished," and I knew Mark to be "impassioned" and "intense" in everything from his work to daily life. His acting career included roles in such works as *Belizaire the Cajun*, *The Big Easy*, *Runaway Jury*, *Oil Storm*, *The Skeleton Key*, *Glory Road*, and *Thief*. I personally worked with Mark on *Flakes* and *Solstice*, and learned so much from him during our downtime conversations that I wrote an article and updated my film book to include his insights—all basics of his acting class at SwampCity Studio.

Mark studied and performed in New York City with the Actors' Ensemble from 1986 to 1993 and at the Michael Chekhov Studio under Beatrice Straight, Hurd Hadfield, Ted Pugh, and Fern Sloan. He also studied Michael Chekhov technique in Russia under Vladimyr Ilyan and even had a role in a Russian-language film there. Mark was a founding member of Actors' Voice Theatre Group in New York as well as the Actors' Box Theatre Group in New Orleans. He also was a founding member of Circle in the Sky Film Production Co. in New Orleans, and he taught acting at the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts. Moreover, he co-wrote *Acapulco Gold* with Montreal director and filmmaker Marc Andre Forcier and was featured in the title role of this Official Selection of the 2004 Toronto World Film Festival.

When not working in film, Mark campaigned to protect mores and traditions of Louisiana life while working toward progressive efforts to safeguard local economies and cultures threatened with extinction. He focused primarily on the French Houma Indians, Isleno islanders, and Vietnamese fishermen in Plaquemines Parish while addressing such issues as coastal erosion, pollution, cancer, and poverty. He promoted and presented at free public symposia centered on strategies for both reassessing and reimagining the relationship between urban infrastructure and regional ecology, sponsored by such institutions as Columbia and Princeton Universities. At one particular symposium (*Regrounding New Orleans*) held at Columbia, subjects addressed infrastructure repair and redesign, wetland ecology, economic development, environmental justice, urban planning, and architecture. Other presentation venues included New York, New Jersey, and Venice, CA (*Lost Bayous*), where Mark was a part of insights and inquiries led by some of the country's most acclaimed architects, theorists, and writers.

Mark was born in New Orleans but grew up in Ville Platte, LA, and he maintained not only his love of indigenous people but fought a heart-felt battle to preserve and protect a way of life that he saw as endangered. Most recently, his partner Monique and he traveled throughout the country, displaying her regional photography while he spoke on "situations involving all things Louisiana, hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and our present state of affairs involving our cultures of the Louisiana Cajuns and native American Indians of the marsh." In the aftermath of the storms, Mark co-founded a shelter that provided beds, toys, television, Internet access, and Cajun-Creole cuisine to evacuees. Even with his intensity in acting and passion for altruistic activism, Mark maintained his *joie de vivre*. He loved acting and the art of filmmaking. During our last conversation regarding film work and acting, as he and I stood on location near a bayou wearing our law enforcement uniform costumes, he gave me words of advice: "Know the camera, and respect the crew. These two tips," he guaranteed, "will give you a good perspective on the overall filmmaking process, while helping you have fun."