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## The 'most likeable' gaffer

Movieland mourns well-loved techie

**CARMELA FRAGOMENI**  
SPECIAL TO The Hamilton Spectator

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God must be making a movie, said an online tribute to Chris Howard.

It may be the only way to explain the untimely death of the well-loved film lighting technician at 49.

The Ancaster native and Mohawk College graduate died Feb. 2 of head trauma after falling from the rooftop of his Toronto home while installing a satellite dish.

At Filmport Studios in Toronto, 1,500 co-workers, family, friends and filmmakers honoured and remembered him.

Among them were Stuart Dryburgh, cinematographer for *The Piano* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*, and Mira Nair, director of *Vanity Fair*.

Chris was what is known in the industry as a gaffer -- the person in charge of lighting on a motion picture or a television set.

But he was also so much more. He was a friend, confidant, adviser, mentor, protector, jokester and all-around lovable man, even in the sometimes hard-nosed business of making movies.

"He was the most likeable person I've ever met in my life," said Rico Emerson, who worked with Chris on many projects and was to start one this month with him about comic book character Scott Pilgrim.

Their last movie was *Amelia*, the story of Amelia Earhart.

Chris was helpful to everyone, Emerson said. "It didn't matter who you were, where you were, what title you held. He treated everyone with the same amount of respect."

And his great laugh and smile were constant, regardless of what problem, breakdown or big ego he may have encountered during the long days on set.

Chris worked on movies that included *X-Men*, *Bride Of Chucky* and *Hairspray*.

He often got the ultimate compliment on his job -- the callback to work on new films, said Emerson.

His prankster nature once got him into a bit of trouble when he tied a baby carriage to a cinematographer's car bumper, expecting it to be noticed quickly, Emerson said. But Chris had to call the driver, on the Gardiner Expressway by then, to tell him he was dragging a baby carriage.

Chris was also the first person to stand up for the crew with producers, about rights and money, Emerson said.

He touched so many that his memorial was in a large film studio to accommodate the crowd. "We knew no funeral home could handle it," Emerson said.

"People said they've never seen such a wide cross-section of the film community in one room, from producers to directors of photography, to fellow workers and his crew ... and from New York, Vancouver, Winnipeg ..."

Chris is survived by wife Mandy Ketcheson, a former assistant film director, and their daughter Kate, 10, his parents Bruce and Georgina Howard of Ancaster, and his brother John and sister Patti.

They and a group of old Ancaster high school friends also attended the film studio gathering.

Former CHCH producer and Mohawk College TV broadcasting instructor Steve Dunn, who has been the Howards' neighbour in Ancaster for 50 years and was also Chris's instructor at Mohawk about 28 years ago, said he was an A-1 student and a leader.

"He was always in a good mood and spread it to all of his classmates, which made for a very comfortable (teaching) environment."

Chris "loved making movies," said his brother John. "To him, it was magical."

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