

The *Parent* Stage Mom Survival Guide



**SECOND
EDITION!**

Learn the skills you need to:

Sniff out a good agent

Protect your child on set

Meet the folks at ACTRA

Survive with a kid in the biz

**for parents of young performers in
the Canadian film and television industry**

by Robyne Baruchel



ACTRA

THE STAGE PARENT SURVIVAL GUIDE

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(Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists)
625 Church Street, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M4Y 2G1
1-800-387-3516

www.actra.ca

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ACTRA

THE STAGE PARENT **SURVIVAL** GUIDE

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GUIDE

by Robyne Baruchel



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A Message from ACTRA National Children's Advocate, Theresa Tova



Welcome to the wonderful world of show business. The entertainment industry attracts those with dreams of Hollywood stardom and those with the passion of a true artistic soul. However you find yourself looking at this parent's handbook, I congratulate you for taking the time to do the research before making the decision to pursue this life for you and your family. There are incredible rewards watching a child blossom as an actor but there are also many struggles and pitfalls. When torn out of school or away from family and friends for long periods of time it can be overwhelming trying to maintain grades, or have time for the normal and healthy activities of childhood. We are all too aware of the horror stories of child actors losing their footing along the way; Drew Barrymore entered rehab for the first time at age 13 for drug and

alcohol abuse, Michael Jackson's career forced him to lose his childhood and both Lindsay Lohan and Britney Spears live lives on the edge.

As parents of talented, precocious cuties brimming over with excitement and charm, it is you who must protect your child from inevitable disappointments while supporting their dreams. And to those newcomers out there, may I respectfully say, what you don't know about this business is a lot.

Having said that, you are not alone. Keeping kids happy and secure is a job equally shared by parents, ACTRA, and the producers. We have negotiated agreements with rules and conditions that ensure a proper environment for our working kids with extra care given to health, education, morals and physical safety. Even so, don't forget to be a parent. **If something smells fishy it probably stinks. Speak up. Get help. Call your agent. Call ACTRA.**

When my own children started working in the business I remember being shocked at how little the producers thought I knew about the industry. As a career actor, I knew very well how performers on ACTRA sets were treated with utmost respect and support so that they could do their best work. Yet as a stage parent I was asked to disregard ACTRA agreements, to let my young children work overtime and was even offered money under the table to break rules. It was then that I personally got involved. With ACTRA staff supporting me, we won three grievances and started a cam-

paign to improve the conditions for children working in the industry. In 1996 we negotiated the newly expanded minor's section of the IPA, which regulated in stone what the good producers were already doing to ensure education, health and safety for kids working in an adult business. After reading this handbook I strongly urge you to pick up a copy of the agreements and have them with you on set as a reference.

About that same time, **Robyne Baruchel**, a former agent and stage mom of two young actors in Montreal came to us with an idea of a resource that spoke straight talk to parents helping them figure out what it really means to pursue the life of an actor. I can't thank Robyne enough for her wisdom, tireless energy and willingness to share her knowledge with those just starting out.

How proud we are to see the careers of those cute little kids take off as they have. We were there at the Toronto International Film Festival to cheer **Jay Baruchel** on. What a talented and genuinely nice man! With all the success coming his way he remains both gracious and grounded. As he accepted the Playback Hall of Fame Award in 2010, Jay included these words: "If I have ever achieved anything in my life or my career, it is all because of my mother, Robyne Baruchel. She gave me the greatest life I could possibly ask for and has been my best friend in the world since I first came into it. So mum, this is all yours."

Robyne has done something right!

I know that by immersing yourself in this handbook (the second edition of *The Stage Mom/Parent Survival Guide*), you will have a great head start. Too often I get calls from parents seeking help after they have made costly mistakes. Please contact your local ACTRA branches and get involved. I look forward to seeing you at new membership meetings or at parent training courses and even better yet, on set.

Theresa Tova

Actor

ACTRA National Treasurer

ACTRA National Children's Advocate

An Open Letter

By Jay Baruchel



Jay Baruchel's recent credits include *She's Out of My League*, *How to Train Your Dragon*, *The Trotsky*, *Notre Dame de Grace* and *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*. Jay was the 2010 recipient of ACTRA Montreal's Award of Excellence.

When I decided to make a go of acting when I was all of 12 years-old, I distinctly remember my Mum hammering one point home in particular, one idea, one principle to be held above all others. Mum looked me in the eyes and said, “Jonathan,” (my actual full first name and my mother’s go to for moments of importance), “do this as long as it’s fun. If it stops being fun, you quit.”

I remember thinking two things when Mum said that to me: 1) fair enough, and 2) no matter what happens I’m safe and sound because this woman will always be watching my back, because she is my mother and she is very, very good at her job.

With her trademark working-class Irish Catholic work ethic and her shrewd antique dealer’s intellect my mother very quickly versed herself in every aspect of ACTRA. She committed to memory every scintilla of information she could, knowing from the word ‘go’ how important the union is, was and would be, for me and whatever would become of my career and eventually my little sister Taylor’s. She became the *de facto* expert on the subject of ACTRA child performers and developed something of a reputation for hawkishly defending their rights on set, earning herself what I think is a hilarious nickname ‘Robyne Barracuda.’

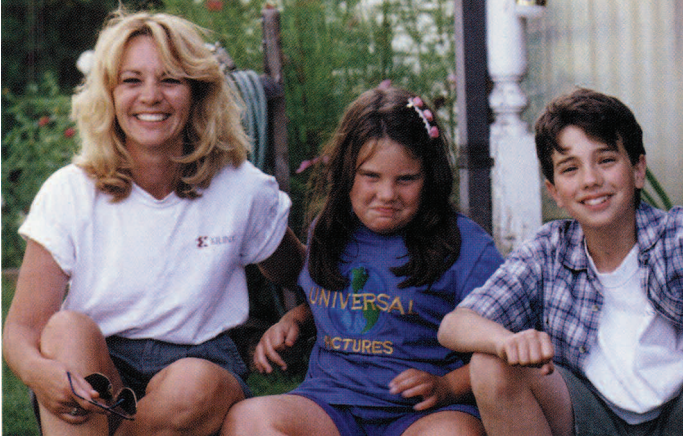
My mother took her role so seriously that she penned *The Stage Mom Survival Guide*, an amazing resource for anyone wishing to introduce parents and guardians of school-aged children to the Canadian film and television industry. *The Guide*, now updated for 2012, spells out all of the rules ACTRA has bargained for and enforces to protect child actors.

Just as important, my mother also understood that knowing and defending her children’s rights would all be in vain if producers, or whoever, found her or us too difficult to deal with. The last thing she wanted to do was live up to the stereotype of the crazy stage parent.

This is to say Mum got it. She got that there is a middle ground to be found, that you can, in fact, protect your child and be a pleasure to deal with on set at the same time. As I approach the 17th year of my career, I can say with the utmost confidence that my mother did both those things. Everything I have achieved is because of Mum and her saint-like patience, effort and strength. Because of her, it never stopped being fun.

Under the watchful eyes of responsible and caring parents, child performers can have rewarding experiences in film, television or commercials. Parents, please enjoy this updated version of *The Stage Mom/Parent Survival Guide*; take the time to learn and understand what both you and your kids need in order for everything to be as fun, worthwhile and generally awesome as possible.





Robyne Baruchel with her young children (daughter Taylor and son Jay) at the time of the original edition of *The Stage Mom Survival Guide*.

INTRODUCTION

From one (stage) parent to another

In the introduction to the first edition of this guide I said:

“I wrote *The Stage Mom Survival Guide* because my own apprenticeship as an inexperienced, ill-equipped Stage Mom had me learning the ropes by trial and error. Granted, I did manage to become a competent guardian for my children eventually, but only after many fumbles, faux pas and goofs and often at the expense of my kids. There had to be a more effective way to acquire the tools of the trade. So after years of driving the folks at ACTRA nuts with questions, complaints and generally making a nuisance of myself, I decided to stop whining and do something about it. I decided to create a survival guide for stage parents. I figured if I could devise a tool to help parents survive their tenure as guardians with their sense of humour and sanity more or less intact, they might be better equipped to cope with some of the problems that are part and parcel of raising working kids in the entertainment industry. It was also an opportunity to give something back to an organization that had given so much to me and my children.”

Well over a decade has passed and here I sit writing the forward to the second edition (with the new title *The Stage Parent Survival Guide*). My own child actors: Jay, one of Canada's most successful young actors is now a writer, producer and soon-to-be director, and Taylor, Varsity Rugby player, academic all-Canadian, perennial collegian straight-A student, (did I mention... she was the youngest ACTRA council member at our local branch?), and... future Canadian Prime Minister, are grown, happy, healthy and self-sufficient. Each are hugely successful in their own career choices and truly, since I'm exercising my 'parental bragging rights,' remarkable humans. Acknowledgement, as I finally exhale, that I did something right.

So now you, fellow stage parent, are at the beginning of your own most excellent adventure. Many things have changed for the better thanks to the dedication and hard work of our union, ACTRA, since I began my own adventure with my own working kids back in 1995. What has not changed however, is just how hugely important it is for you to get to know and understand the **Independent Production Agreement and the National Commercial Agreement** (and yes, they are written in code, so yes, you will need your decoder ring. I'm kidding of course. But... if you don't happen to have your decoder ring handy, you can read this guide).

What has also not changed is the fact that being the parent of a child actor is a tough job. Or how important it is to know what you are getting yourself into and making sure you are doing it for the right reasons. Listen, it's no secret that I think sneaking the occasional vicarious thrill through our kids is one of the best perks of parenthood. I do it all the time. But if your motives are financial gain or personal glory, you will be disappointed. Even more importantly, you could find yourself and your child in potentially dangerous and emotionally damaging situations. If I've done my job right, this guide will help you to avoid these and some of the many challenges you will face along the way. It is a comprehensive, easy-to-read, and I hope, somewhat humorous manual for stage parents. It is meant to be used in tandem with the many ACTRA agreements, but primarily the Independent Production Agreement and the National Commercial Agreement since these are the conventions your children will most likely be working under.

I called the first book *The Stage Mom Survival Guide* because it appealed to my oddball sense of humour. Seriously, if I had a nickel for every time I've heard someone call me a "real stage mom" I'd be living in the south of France eating escargot and sipping champagne and orange juice for breakfast. Well, maybe not escargot... that's just wrong, but definitely something that didn't involve macaroni noodles and cheese. It made me chuckle because I knew real stage moms and dads are some of the hardest-working people on the planet. Real stage parents are nothing like the negative stereotype we often hear about.

Here, let me take a moment to tell you what I know about real stage parents, who we really are and what we really do.

We are sincere parents who put the interests of our creative children before our own. We are our kids' guardians, career advisors, personal managers, publicists, business managers, investment counsellors, bookkeepers, chauffeurs, gofers and one-person pep squad. We accept no monetary consideration for our efforts, but we do reserve the right to exercise our parental bragging rights when accosted at social gatherings by 'hockey dads' and 'soccer moms.'

We are parents who know our kids are passionate about acting professionally and want to do it more than anything else because like most things, it only looks easy. Our working kids miss out on a lot of family, social and school activities but we still make sure they keep their grades up. We know that even adults crazy enough to choose this profession can have a difficult time with the whole auditioning process so we take special care that our kids are handling it without it affecting their self-esteem in a negative way. Seriously, imagine what that can do to a child.

Our child actors aren't the only kids that may struggle with self-esteem issues. Sometimes the other young people in the family feel that no matter how many As they get in science, no matter how many times they win the Spelling Bee, their accomplishments will never measure up. It's awfully hard to compete with the serious coolness factor of being on television or in the movies. Even more painful and potentially damaging, is having more than one budding thespian in the family and one child is more talented or more in demand or just plain luckier than the other. Raising happy, healthy kids and allowing each one to shine in their own right is hard under any circumstance. So we think about how we're going to handle sibling rivalry before it even crops up. Difficult stuff.

One of the many challenges we face is to not let what we do become part of our identity. For quite a few years both my kids worked often and I'll admit, there were a few times when it was almost all consuming for both me and my family. Then, much to my chagrin, just when I was patting myself on the back for having it all together, my son turned 18 and I realized my services were no longer required.

I was a stage mom out of a job.

Oh sure, I still got to do the boring stuff like making sure his union dues were up to date, preparing his tax returns, managing his investments and doing his laundry when he came back from a shoot, but somehow, it was so not the same. Fortunately, I managed to avoid what I like to call "the stage mom syndrome." (Kind of like the empty-nest syndrome... with bonus points). I had made a deliberate effort to have my own work and interests and made sure my kids always knew that acting was just something they

did for fun. Which is a good thing, otherwise I probably wouldn't have written this book!

So why then, if being a stage parent is so difficult, would anyone want to do it?

Well, for me it was because I believe there is more to raising kids than making sure they have food on the table and clean underpants. I knew it would be a seriously cool adventure and we would have a whole lot of fun and along the way, my kids were exposed to some pretty valuable life lessons. Auditions became opportunities to meet like-minded people and make enduring friendships. Film sets became opportunities for my kids to develop a strong work ethic that they have to this day. They learned patience and to accept disappointment with poise. They learned to be gracious and to respect fellow cast members and crew. One of the benefits, and certainly a touchy subject, was the income my kids earned. Under ACTRA, mandatory regulations are in place to set aside a certain percentage of a minor's earnings, in trust, until they reach 18 years of age. When the cost of a formal education is beyond many families, as it was for mine at the time, the opportunity to create a nest egg for my children's future was a blessing.

And so, dear stage parent, if you enjoy reading this guide and learn a few things along the way, then I have accomplished what I set out to do. First, to give you a tool to help you decipher the collective agreements. Second, to help those parents who are now where I once was, diving in feet first, full of good intentions without the slightest idea of what challenges await them. Just because I had to learn the hard way that there is more to being a stage parent than hanging around film sets, gabbing with the ladies and drinking bad coffee from styrofoam cups, doesn't mean you have to. I wish you all the fun and excitement this business has to offer!

Still just a Stage Mom

Robyne Baruchel

Stage Moms Are People Too!

I didn't plan on becoming a stage mom. I didn't even know I was one until the day I realized my monthly purchase of *Country Living* magazine had been dropped in favour of a year's subscription to *Playback*. To me the term 'stage mom' conjured up pictures of an obnoxious overbearing mother pushing her little darling Shirley Temple look-alike onto a stage saying, "Smile for the nice man, sweetie." I would like to state for the record that I have never dressed my son up like Shirley Temple. Furthermore, the only coaching I did with my children was to tell them to introduce themselves at an audition with a firm handshake and to never answer a question with a one-word answer. Since my own acting experience consisted of a single performance as a member of the chorus in the sixth grade, I figured a lesson in the social graces was about the limit of my expertise.

I knew I had joined the ranks of this much-maligned and misunderstood sorority when it occurred to me that I spent more time chauffeuring my kids to auditions than I did making them dinner. My conversation, now peppered with words like callbacks, sides, SOC, ADR and feedback were met with blank stares and concern that for some unknown reason I seemed to be suddenly speaking in tongues.

Perhaps that's why I enjoy the company of other stage moms so much. They know what it's like to be the parent of a child who can memorize five pages of dialogue, yet can never remember that Thursday is garbage day. Kids who can hop out of bed, shower, brush their teeth and comb their hair in about 4.5 minutes for a 6:00 a.m. call, yet cannot be uprooted from their bed on a school day without threats of serious bodily harm. They know what it's like to face the skepticism of other presumably more 'normal' parents, smug in their certainty that we must be living out our fantasies vicariously through our children, the toll on one's personal life to nurture the goals and aspirations of each child, meeting one child's needs without neglecting the other's.

I have the greatest admiration for people who have chosen the performing arts as their profession. I have spent more hours than I can remember sitting on the sidelines, watching them use their considerable talents to make magic in front of the camera. I have watched in amazement as crew members set up and wrapped locations with clockwork-like precision, yearning to be included in that easy camaraderie that develops over the course of a really great shoot. For me, one of the difficult things about being a stage

mom is, aside from being responsible for the health and welfare of my child, I have no actual function on a shoot. An actor is a member of the cast. An AD, a grip, even the winnie driver is a member of the crew. I am none of these. I'm just that harried, stressed-out, worried-looking woman trying to keep her eye on her kid, striving unsuccessfully to stay the heck out of everybody's way. Of course it doesn't help matters being called "Mom" by all and sundry thank you very much – the generic moniker assigned to me to avoid confusion and embarrassment because – let's face it – who remembers the kid's mom anyway?

Make no mistake. Being a stage mom is a tough job. Aside from all that must be done before a child even gets the role, remember, it's the parent who is responsible for a child's behavior during a production. This could include anything from nixing that blue popsicle three minutes before their close-up, to having them treat their fellow cast members and crew with respect. Sometimes the fact that this is a business gets lost in all the excitement and fun. On the other hand, a stage mom must be prepared to stand up to pressure if she feels her child's welfare is at stake. Even if it means delaying the production. And believe me, that's not as easy as it sounds.

In spite of all my complaining, which as a stage mom I have down to a science, I love doing what I do. I get to watch my children do extraordinary things. I get to meet and make friends with some of the most amazing people who thrive on challenging their creative spirits. Nevertheless, I still believe stage parents are the unsung heroes of the film industry. I think there should be a **Best Stage Mom** category for some of those award shows. *Well okay, maybe not... but a credit would be nice.*

Chapter 1

What Language Are They Speaking Anyway?

“Hi Ms./Mr. Stage Parent! I’m the 3rd AD. The 2nd AD says the DOP needs your son/daughter for blocking. So after you’re finished in the honey wagon, just go to craft. It’s right behind the third winnie next to the crane. The PA will take you on set. Your child can be miked after he/she sees the head dresser. Oh and... You do have the sides, don’t you?”

Huh?

New stage parents often find themselves wondering if their comprehension skills have suddenly deserted them. Like any industry, this business has its own buzz-words. Here are a few definitions that might help you avoid nudging the person beside you and asking “What did he say?”

1st AD. First Assistant Director. The person who makes sure everyone does what the director wants. Distinguished from the director by the ever-present walkie-talkie. Often referred to as “She (or he) who must be obeyed.”

2nd AD. The Second Assistant Director is responsible for all the organization and scheduling of cast and crew, as well as all the paper work that comes with the job. The 2nd AD is definitely the person to see if you want to know what’s happening.

3rd AD. The Third AD is usually the person who makes sure everyone is where they are supposed to be and ready when they are needed. This is a good person to ask for food, or to inform when you need to go to the bathroom, etc.

Actor. A person engaged for a role with five or less lines of dialogue. It can get a little tricky with stuff like interrupted dialogue and such, but a line is 10 words or less. So if you have a longer speech, every 10 words would be considered a line.

ACTRA The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists. This is the full name of our union. ACTRA has nine branches across the country, each with local offices.

Actra Fraternal Benefit Society. AFBS. This is a separate organization from ACTRA. These folks are in charge of managing RRSP contributions and benefits for ACTRA members.

ACTRA PRS. This is the ACTRA Performers' Rights Society. The folks who work at ACTRA PRS keep track of, collect and distribute performers' royalties.

ADR. Additional Dialogue Replacement. When a performer records their voice off-camera for their own character. Usually done during/after production to correct something or add or change dialogue.

L'Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec. APFTQ. This is the Quebec independent producers' association. The APFTQ is one of the associations that negotiates the Independent Production Agreement with ACTRA.

Audition. We all know what *that* is.

Background performers. These wonderful people create atmosphere, background or crowd scenes. You may still hear them sometimes inappropriately referred to as "extras." Personally, I like to call them "the ladies and gentlemen of the background."

Base camp. An area near or at the shooting location where the company operates out of and where you will find parked vans, trucks, producers', directors' and cast trailers, equipment, wardrobe, hair and make-up, craft services, dressing rooms, catering, background performers holding area and the like.

Best boy. The nicest boy on set? (Ha! I crack myself up...) Actually, he would be the assistant to the gaffer or key grip.

Blocking. Sets up the basic movement and placement of the performers so the camera and lights can set up for rehearsal or filming.

Booking. The notification to a performer and acceptance by the performer of an engagement on a definite day or dates.

Boom guy. Holds the microphone over the actor to record the sound.

Breakdown. A synopsis of the story for a film or TV program, commercial etc., along with a description of the characters and their physical characteristics.

Callback. This is when a performer is called back to do a second or subsequent audition. (*These are good... very good.*)

Call sheet. A detailed description of the shooting schedule for the day. It includes the names of all the cast and crew and when and where they should be. It lists who has to be picked up at what time, even when lunch is planned. Also, any specific instructions for the wardrobe, props and other departments along with any health and safety considerations.

Call time. The hour that the performer is expected to arrive for work.

Canadian Actors' Equity Association. CAEA. The union for live theatre performers.

Canadian Media Production Association. CMPA. This is the Canadian independent producers' association. The CMPA is one of the associations that negotiates the Independent Production Agreement with ACTRA.

Casting director. Sometimes known as **casting agent.** Not to be confused with talent agents. Casting directors are engaged by producers to find the performers for their films, TV programs etc. They send out the breakdowns to the talent agents to ask which of their clients would best suit the roles.

Cattle call. (Such a lovely term. Speaks for itself don't you think?) A cattle call is an open call to audition. This means the people holding the auditions have not given individual appointments to performers. Performers must be auditioned one at a time or in small groups. And just so you know, ACTRA members must be seen first!

CCM. Cheveux, costume, maquillage. Only in Quebec, I think... hair, make-up and wardrobe, *en français.*

Check the gate. Film cameras sometimes develop little slivers of film that block the lens and ruin the shot. So, before moving on to the next shot, the camera crew checks the gate on the camera to make sure it's clean.

Clapboard. The striped rectangular thingy they clap in front of the performer's face just before the director yells "Action!"

Continuity. This person has to make sure things are exactly the same from one shot to another. They take precise notes on everything that is shot.

Costume designer. Finds, designs or purchases all the clothing to be worn by the performers.

Craft. The place where you find the food, drinks etc. and where everybody likes to hang out and shoot the breeze.

Crew call. The time the crew must show up for work. Bet you didn't know this, but calls for performers are not necessarily the same as those for the crew. Oh... you did...? *Never mind.*

Dailies, aka rushes. The immediately processed, unedited or rough cuts of a film made for the director (producer, cinematographer, editor etc.) to review, to see how the film came out after the day's (or previous day's) shooting.

Deal memo. The deal memo is a pre-contract document that lays out all the information that should appear in the contract itself. Particularly handy when a deal is struck for any extra stuff that is above the ACTRA minimum such as higher daily fees, transportation, private dressing room, DVD copies of the film... private jet. (Just kidding.)

Demonstrator. This is a performer who is engaged to demonstrate a product in a commercial but whose face you can't really see.

Digital media. *See new media.*

Director. Directs the performers, lighting crews, techies, costume, art departments (basically everyone) on how the script should be shot.

DOP. Director Of Photography. (Aka the cinematographer). Works in tandem with the director to figure out what lenses to use and how to light the film to give it a specific look and feel.

Dresser (aka Wardrobe). The infinitely patient crew member who has to get the cast in and out of their costumes. They have to keep track of who wore what and when they wore it. They have to make sure it's clean, catalogued and ready when needed.

Dubbing. The voice synchronization off-camera to match a performance in a production originally produced in a language other than English.

Flash! What they yell just before they snap a Polaroid or use a camera with a flash. It lets the camera person and lighting people know that the flash is not from a lighting problem.

Gaffer. Head electrician.

Grips. The crew people (usually big and sweaty) who wrangle the camera equipment and the thingies that block the light.

Hair and make-up. Fairly self-explanatory. Sometimes known as 'The Pretty Department.'

Honey wagon. Hair and make-up trailer, often with washrooms. How sweet it is!

Independent Production Agreement. IPA. ACTRA's main collective agreement providing rules and regulations for audio-visual projects produced by independent producers. It's also known as the "green book."

Insert shot. A shot that occurs in the middle of a larger scene or shot, usually a close-up

of some detail or object that draws the audience's attention, provides specific information, or simply breaks up the film sequence.

Key grip. The most important grip.

Line producer. The person who does all the real work. Organizes everything from hiring the crew to balancing the budget.

Lip sync. Replacing the voice of one performer with another performer's voice. This is not dubbing. A whole other pay scale here!

Manager. A talent manager/artist manager is an individual or company who guides the professional career of artists in the entertainment industry. They oversee the day-to-day business affairs of an artist; advise and give counsel on professional matters, long-term plans and personal decisions that may affect their career.

Martini shot. *See window shot...* without the bad joke.

Meal penalty. When the producer fails to supply a meal break at the appropriate hour, they must pay the performer a penalty.

Miniseries. A continuous story divided into a series of short, fixed-length segments, ending in the final segment. (And by segment I mean episode... The legal folks made me change it. Sigh).

Minor. A performer 17 years-of-age or younger.

MOS. Mit out sound... No, seriously, it really is filming without sound. No one really knows how this industry term came to be – a true Hollywood mystery.

Movie-of-the-week. MOW. A made-for-TV movie.

National Commercial Agreement. NCA. The document containing all the rules and regulations around wages and working conditions for performers in English-language commercials for television, radio and digital media (aka new media) in Canada. It's also known as the "red book."

New media. (aka digital media) Internet, webisodes, computer multimedia, video games, iPhone apps, online commercials and all that fun stuff.

Off book. When a performer has completely memorized his/her lines.

On-Set Liaison Officer. OSLO. An ACTRA member who is sent by ACTRA to set as an observer. They are the eyes and ears of ACTRA on a film or TV set.

PA. Production assistant. The hardest-working people on the planet in my estimation. These folks do everything from setting up the entire set to keeping the coffee hot.

Per diem. Moolah, dinero, cash, money given to performers and their guardians to cover expenses for their meals while on location.

Performer's calculation sheet. The form that accompanies the performer's payment. It lists the days, hours, fittings, rates as well as all the deductions and taxes used to calculate the dollars owed to the performer. Make sure you get one!

Photo double. A person who doubles for another performer on camera, usually for photographic long shots. For obvious reasons, they are usually only seen from the back or in parts – feet, hands etc.

Pic'n res Photo and résumé. Pronounced “pick-n-rezz,” as in, “Do you have a picknrezz?”

Pilot season. Refers to the time, generally around January to April, during which actors are auditioned and cast and producers and networks shoot their pilots for consideration for network pick up. This applies mostly to the U.S. and less so to Canadian production.

Principal. A person engaged for a role in a film or television project (or any project under the IPA for that matter) with six or more lines of dialogue. In commercials, this is an on-camera performer who speaks any dialogue at all!

Producer. The head honcho, the big cheese, the person who runs the whole shebang.

Production coordinator. One down from the production manager. Responsible for getting the paperwork (such as scripts, contracts etc.) together and organized.

Production manager. Like the line producer, just one link lower in the chain of command.

Production office. The central location for a film. Remains fixed for the entire length of the production.

Production secretary. One down from the production coordinator.

Prop shot. A photograph of a performer that is used as a prop in the production.

Rider. A document that is separate from the contract but still part of the contract. For example, nudity or stunts would go on a rider. Since your child will not be doing nudity or stunts, we don't need to talk much about it.

Room tone. Recording without anyone speaking or making noise. Used to provide continuous background atmosphere for the scene. Usually when the grips get caught taking power naps... the snoring gives them away.

Roster. A talent agent's list of clients.

Rough cut. An early edited version of a film – with all the pieces of the film assembled in continuous, sequential order, but without any fancy editing.

Second unit. The film crew that shoots the scenes that do not involve the principal cast, such as stunts, car chases or establishing shots.

Set time. The hour that a performer is expected to be physically in front of the camera.

Sides. Scenes from the script that are to be shot on any given day, shrunk down to pocket size and distributed to cast and crew. Agents also use this term for the text a performer has to learn when called for an audition.

Sign-in sheet. The official sheet of paper you sign in and out at auditions. Every audition should have one of these for you to sign.

Slate. The term used for identifying yourself on camera at an audition.

Sound man. Puts microphones on the actors, records the sound. Constantly listening so they never get to gab with anybody. Don't forget to ask them to turn off your child's mike before that trip to the bathroom...

SOC. Silent On Camera. Here's an interesting fact: under the NCA, this is a performer who doesn't speak but whose face is recognizable AND their performance must also illustrate the commercial message.

Squib. An explosive device attached to a performer to simulate being hit by a bullet. If you are squibbed, you are a stunt performer. *It is forbidden to squib a minor.*

Stage mom (aka Stage Parent). A mother, father or guardian of an aspiring thespian.

Sizzle reel. A sizzle reel is made for promotional purposes, where you get to see more of a movie than the trailer; to create a buzz, a sizzle to entice people into wanting to see more of the movie.

Stand-in. Literally stands in for the performer for all the boring stuff like lighting and camera set-up, allowing the actor to do the exciting stuff like change costume or sulk in their Winnebago.

Steady-cam. A weird device that allows for complex tracking shots. The cameraperson literally wears the camera. The equipment balances the camera so the image isn't so jerky.

Steward. The ACTRA staff member who makes sure the rules set out in the collective agreements are enforced on set. I think they should wear superhero costumes...

Talent agent. The person or agency you sign up with to represent you or your child. Talent agents suggest performers for auditions, negotiate contracts, take care of schedules, payments and all that other stuff for which you pay a fee, which should be a percentage of your child's gross earnings.

Time Sheet. Officially known as a Performer Work Report. The time sheet lists the names of all the performers who worked that day, the time they arrived, went to make-up and wardrobe, were on set, started and ended meal break and wrapped. The time sheet is used to calculate the payment to the performer so make sure it's right before you or your child signs it!

Trailer. A preview, an 'advertisement' for a feature film that will be exhibited in the future.

Turnaround. The time off between one workday and the next.

Union of British Columbia Performers. UBCP/ACTRA. A branch of ACTRA in B.C.

Unit manager. The production assistants' boss.

Unit publicist. Responsible for publicity during the shoot. Arranges media interviews with cast and crew. Writes press material such as news releases and production notes that eventually become the press kit.

Video assist. Sometimes they run a video feed off the camera so they can videotape whatever they shoot. Great for continuity, instant replays, etc.

Video village. A small encampment of set chairs positioned around monitors pulling in video feeds from the cameras. It's where the director, continuity person, producers, some cast members, etc. sit to watch the action!

Voice over. When a performer's voice is heard but the performer is off-camera.

Voucher. The short-form contract that background performers sign on set.

Walla. Another word for background noise, conversation, ambience etc.

Window shot. Last shot of the day as in "Window we go home?" I know, I know, really bad joke... but crew get kinda punchy after 14 hours on set.

Winnie, Winnebago or RV. A trailer used for resting or changing wardrobe.

Work permit. Authorization to work as a performer on a production under ACTRA's jurisdiction.

Work report. (*see time sheet*)

Wrap time. Hour the performer is finished working. AFTER they are out of make-up and wardrobe and they are able to leave the set.

Chapter 2

How Do I Get Started?

Okay, you've thought about it... weighed the pros and cons, mulled it over with your significant other. You're thinking—budding thespians or not—if I have to sit through one more living room performance of *Fame*, I'm going to go nuts! To maintain your sanity, you realize your only recourse is to let your kids try their hand at the acting profession.

Before you do, however, ask yourself these three questions:

1. *Am I ready for this?*

When kids start acting professionally, you might as well kiss any hope of a personal life goodbye. Okay, that's an exaggeration, but you get the point. Parents of young performers are dedicated people who are willing to put their time, energy and commitment into the job. And yes, contrary to what some may think, it is definitely a job, albeit an unpaid one. The folks at ACTRA have worked long and hard to create rules and regulations to ensure a safe environment for minors working on ACTRA sets, but ultimately you have to be sure you can and will put the health and welfare of your young one above all else in this highly stressful and competitive adult world.

So... you believe you are up to the challenge and you are prepared to arrange photo sessions, draft résumés, pick up scripts, schlep all over town for auditions, callbacks, fittings and rehearsals, quite often with very little notice, be hooked up to the Internet, have access to a printer, have an answering service, a cell phone and all that jazz, be available to accompany your child on set for hours, days, sometimes weeks at a time. If you are prepared to stand up to pressure if need be, to put your child's best interests above all else and most importantly, if you are confident that you can help your child maintain a happy, healthy attitude toward themselves and the people around them and handle their school work... if you can do all these things and more, congratulations, you're a stage parent!

2. *Can my child handle this?*

The film and TV industry is a wonderful, exciting and sometimes highly stressful adult environment. For an actor, it can be a roller-coaster ride of flattering attention one day

and rejection the next. Keeping a steady level of confidence in who you are and what you do is a tall order for a young person. Just like the grown-up actors, they have to be able to separate their emotions and egos from their work. They have to want to do this more than anything else as they often miss out on many of the typical social activities that most kids enjoy. Then, when you combine the stress that accompanies an acting career with the regular concerns of school, well, that is a very heavy load indeed. It's not easy for a child to stay connected to his peers, maintain his grades and be able to work at the same time. All this to say, if your child is struggling socially, emotionally or at school, this is definitely not the extracurricular activity for her.

3. *Will having a child actor in the family impact us as a unit?*

This is an important issue that some stage parents often overlook. Families with child actors have to deal with immense focus being placed on one particular child. Your young performer needs your encouragement and support but it cannot be at the expense of his brother or sister. The rest of the kids in the family need to know that their interests, their aspirations and accomplishments are just as important. Which, of course, they are!

That being said, if you think this is something you, your child and the rest of the family can handle, the first thing you need to do is... start preparing your child's 'tools of the trade!'

Tools of the trade... Like what?

A good photo of your child for one thing! You will be happy to know that a good digital photo of them will do just fine to start. You do not, in fact, you should not, need to spend a fortune on a professional head shot before your child starts working professionally. Why? Well, he may decide that he isn't really interested in acting after all and the photos will end up gathering dust along with forgotten hockey equipment and the expensive saxophone he just had to have. Besides, kids grow and change so quickly you may have to repeat the process in six months.

Can I use their school picture?

Certainly, but again, I would suggest a good digital photo instead (if you have a digital camera that is). It could be a head-and-shoulder shot, or half-body shot, enough that your child can be clearly seen. In other words, the family photo of mom, dad, the kids, the turtle and the dog would not be appropriate. A nice, natural photo of your child in casual clothing would be fine to submit to an agent when you are ready to start looking for representation. Once you find an agent to represent your child however, be prepared to invest in a professional head shot.

Really? So I should pay the agent to take my child's head shot using their in-house photographer?

Hmm... How shall I put this? (Think, think, think.)

Okay, we'll chat about how reputable talent agents work a little further on, but this is such an important issue, the dedicated, hard-working Child Advocates for ACTRA felt it needed to be addressed specifically since so many new and therefore vulnerable performers and parents of young performers are taken advantage of in this regard. Reputable talent agents do not specify you use their in-house photographers as a condition for their representational services. Based on my own experience, a reputable agent might, if you don't know where to go, suggest a photographer they have worked with before and whose work and style they prefer, but that's about it.

Okay, but I don't have a lot of money. Shouldn't I wait until my child has earned some income before I invest in a professional head shot?

This is something you can discuss with your child's agent. For the most part, a reputable agent will probably want a professional head shot of your child to submit to casting directors and the like. They are, after all, representing professional performers and will want their clients to be perceived as such. That being said, there are lots of agents out there who, when dealing with a young performer who is just starting out, would be fine with using a digital photo to submit to some of the smaller productions or perhaps if they (or you) are not sure if your child will work (or want to work for that matter) on a regular basis. Perhaps you are located in an area of the country where fewer productions are happening and therefore professional head shots are not necessarily required. In any case, we are not talking about a portfolio here. A professional performer, regardless of age, needs only one photo, one head shot that accurately represents them. More than that, especially this early on in the process, is simply a waste of money.

I haven't a clue what makes a good head shot. I need help!

A good head shot is one that accurately represents your child. This is not a glamour or fashion shot. This is a professionally done photo of your child, looking their age, being natural, being themselves in age-appropriate, neat and clean kid's casuals. (No logos or text on T-shirts, avoid bold patterns and jewelry or clothing that may be too trendy and therefore distracting.) No make-up for a young kid, you want them to look their age remember? The same goes for teens. However, if your teen has a few blemishes that can be covered easily with a little cover up, by all means do so but a good head shot photographer can correct any minor imperfections so tell your teen not to freak out.

Anyway, once your child has a talent agent, they will be able to help you with finding the right photographer and choosing the right head shot. Remember, kids have to update their head shots far more often than adults so don't spend a lot of money. Don't order a large quantity of copies, as you may have to redo them before you know it and

you'll be stuck with a pile of unusable photos (I used the backs of my kids' outdated head shots for scrap paper). You'll probably only need about 25 to 50 8"x10" hard copies to start.

Prepare your child's acting résumé

Yes, yes... I know. You're thinking, "Résumé... but she hasn't done anything yet." What am I supposed to put on it?" Don't worry, no one expects kids to have an extensive list of credits to their names at this point. Just use the sample of a standard acting résumé that I've included at the back of the book and you'll be fine. Be sure to include height, weight, hair, eye colour and date of birth. List any school plays they participated in, drama courses or extracurricular activities, special skills, sports, talents, etc.

You can put your personal contact info on your child's résumé for the purpose of submitting it to agents when you start looking for representation. However, once you are with an agent or agency, they will put the information from your child's résumé on their own letterhead and your personal contact information will be, or should be, removed!

Check out the résumé sample that we've included at the back of this book.

Wait! Should I be signing my kid up for acting lessons?

Listen, acting lessons are always beneficial. Even the most seasoned performers use acting coaches to hone their skills. They take acting workshops throughout their professional careers to work on their craft and keep themselves fresh. An acting class will spark a child's imagination, help them step outside themselves and teach them to focus, not to mention enhance their memorization and reading skills – valuable attributes regardless of what career path they take. Nonetheless, it's not absolutely necessary. Lots of kids have a natural talent and would do well with or without lessons.

What might be a good idea though, for older kids and teens, since this is film and television we're talking about here, is an 'acting for the camera' class. That is to say, an acting class that includes some of the fundamental technical skills that film and television actors need for this work, i.e., cold reading, eye-line, hitting your mark, being comfortable in front of the camera, auditioning skills... stuff like that.

Next! (And this is really, really important.) Find a reputable talent agent.

The critical thing for you to remember is that this is a buyer beware situation. The best thing you can do for your child is to be informed. So take your time on this one. Ask around. Investigate. Anyone can wake up in the morning and call themselves a talent agent. Fortunately for us, in Canada there is an industry standard. In fact, there is an entertainment industry coalition that brought together many different organizations in the Canadian entertainment industry. These folks created **The Entertainment Code of Ethics** that you can find online on many of the ACTRA branch websites throughout

the country. Many of these websites also list agents who belong to associations like TAMAC (Talent Agents and Managers Association of Canada). These agents have agreed to abide by industry standards so that would be a great place for you to start when you and your child are ready. Come to think of it... let me give you the code right here so you can read it now:

THE ENTERTAINMENT CODE OF ETHICS*

*Taken from *The Guide to Talent Agents, Managers & Casting Directors in the Toronto Area* published by ACTRA Toronto.

- An agent will be truthful in his or her statements to the client
- An agent will represent all clients in good faith and recognize the uniqueness of the client's abilities.
- An agent will maintain an office, records and such materials necessary to conduct business normally deemed necessary to function as an agent.
- An agent will agree to be equipped and to continue to be equipped to represent the client ably and diligently in the legitimate entertainment industry and to so represent the client.
- An agent will maintain the confidentiality of all dealings on behalf of the client both during representation and after the representation has terminated.
- It is not a condition of representation that an agent stipulates the photographer, printer, school or any other service provider for the client. Should an agent have any financial interest in above-named businesses, full disclosure about said interest must be provided.
- An agent will not advertise to the general public for the purpose of soliciting clients through advertising placed in any form of printed or electronic media (newspapers, flyers, magazines, telephones, the Internet, fax, CD-ROM or mailings, etc.)
- If an agent recommends a service provider in which they have a financial interest, it must be disclosed to the client at the time of recommendation.
- An agent will not accept employment as an actor.
- An agent will maintain an accessible office and telephone during all reasonable business hours.
- An agent or designate will be available, at all reasonable hours, for consultation with the client.
- An agent will, upon request, make available to a client or prospective client a complete current list of clients represented by the agency.
- An agent will inform the client, upon request, of any/all activities undertaken on the client's behalf.
- An agent will maintain proper financial books and records.
- An agent will make all books and records pertaining to a client available to the client on a regular business day upon forty-eight hours notice.
- An agent will not commingle monies belonging to clients with monies belonging to the agent, but will keep such monies in a separate account, which may be known as the client's account or trust account.

- An agent will pay each client his or her share of all monies received on behalf of the client in a timely manner. All monies belonging to the client received by the agent shall be faithfully accounted for by the agent and promptly paid over to the client.
- An agent will tell the client at the time of signing a representation agreement which deductions from the client's share of money the agent may take for expenses such as materials, photos, voice tapes, commissions and so on. However, the agent will make clear the client's option to undertake the management of any or all of his own materials.
- An agent will inform a new client that commission due to a former agent be kept current.
- An agent will use all reasonable efforts to assist the client in procuring employment in the legitimate entertainment industry.
- An agent will make no claims or guarantees of employment to prospective clients that cannot be immediately substantiated.
- An agent will accept no employment on the client's behalf without informing the client of his or her obligations, such as details of fees, performance credit, working conditions and so on.
- An agent will negotiate terms and conditions of any employment opportunities offered in consultation with the client.
- An agent will recognize and uphold the client's prerogative to refuse any and all employment opportunities offered.

Can you go over how reputable talent agents work in general?

Well, let's see. First of all you will find that not all agents operate in exactly the same way. For example, an agent in Toronto or Montreal may work differently than say, an agent in a city like Halifax or Calgary. Some agents are perfectly comfortable with a verbal agreement and don't require you to sign a contract. If the agent you have chosen to represent your child requires you to sign a contract, make sure you familiarize yourself with the industry standards before you sign!

A reputable agent does not try to sell you something or ask for money up front. They do not advertise to the public for the purpose of soliciting clients so beware of those agents who set up in shopping malls, trade shows or websites advertising casting calls, etc. They do not provide photographic services or require your child to take their acting classes as a condition of representation with their agency. (Personally, if I found myself in this kind of situation my spidey senses would start tingling and I'd run like the wind...).

A reputable agent does not guarantee work or promise to make your child a star. They are not personal managers and usually have a fair number of clients, on their roster. Once they decide to accept your child as a client, they will suggest him for the appropriate roles, do their best to introduce your child to casting directors through auditions

as well as sending out her photo and résumé to the relevant people. In Canada, as per the industry norm, talent agents require a fee of 15% of the client's gross income for film and television, 10% for live theatre, payable only when the client is paid.

Finally, remember what the ethics code states: "An agent will tell the client at the time of signing a representation agreement which deductions from the client's share of money the agent may take for expenses such as materials, photos, voice tapes, commissions and so on." But it also says, "... the agent will make clear the client's option to undertake the management of any or all of his own materials." Basically, what this means is you should be allowed the option of paying for these expenses yourself rather than paying an ambiguous administration fee. Don't forget, you can always go to an ACTRA website for more information. They're there to help you! Any more questions?

Actually, I do have one... Now what do we do?

Ah, did I mention one of the prerequisites for stage parent status is the ability to 'hurry up and wait'? In the meantime, let's talk about auditions. The following chapter explains all about the auditioning process and gives a few helpful hints to stage parents on making this aspect of the business a fun experience for both parent and child. After all, isn't that what it's all about?

Chapter 3

All About Auditions

Auditions can be a blast! They are terrific opportunities to meet other stage moms, dads and kids with the same interests. More than likely, you will run into the same people at each audition, so it is a good idea to be gracious and friendly. Naturally you want your child to get the role, but that doesn't mean you and your child can't wish the other kids good luck, or "break a leg" as they say!

How can I help my child prepare for an audition?

Most of the time, the casting people send you or your child's agent the text or 'sides' for your child to learn – usually a small scene taken from the script. Encourage your child to rehearse these lines well so that he or she will feel comfortable and confident during the audition. You can 'run the lines' together to help them get the scene down, but be careful not to criticize their performance or tell them how you think it should be done. Place the emphasis on understanding the words and not just repeating them mechanically. This is supposed to be a fun thing and in any case, the director could very well ask them to do it exactly the way you told them not to. In other words, leave the directing to the director. Just relax and have a good time.

Hmm, what if it is an audition for a big role? Should I hire an acting coach?

It's up to you. If you think your child would benefit from a little extra coaching by a professional for an important audition, and you have the means, then go ahead. Just remember, it's not always necessary. Often it's the child's natural exuberance and talent that will land the role.

But my child is a young teen! Shouldn't I be doing something different?

With a young teen, it is even more important not to criticize their performance. Most teens are awkward and uncomfortable just getting up in the morning. The last thing you want to do is undermine their confidence, so hiring a professional acting coach for a session (if you can), to help them prepare for a big audition might be just the thing. If your young teen is okay with it, just offer to run the lines with them so they'll be 'off book' for their audition. Off book just means they have the text memorized.

Should my child dress the part for the audition?

If they are asked to, certainly. However, like most things in this regard, it really comes down to a personal choice. There are many adult actors who find dressing the part helps them get into character, while others are more comfortable at an audition in casual clothes and some feel having a single prop works for them. So bottom line? Do whatever makes your child feel comfortable.

We'll be given plenty of notice that an audition has been scheduled, right?

Not necessarily. Most of the time auditions are booked at least a day or two in advance, however sometimes things move more quickly. You may get a call in the morning for an audition in the afternoon, so flexibility is certainly a factor for stage parents.

And do we have to go to every audition the agent gets for us?

Well, no. You can decline auditions for any number of legitimate reasons. However, keep in mind that this is a business. This is how your child's agent and the casting directors earn their living. A lot of work goes into arranging auditions and if you keep turning them down, eventually they will stop calling.

But, can we say no to an audition for... oh, I don't know... a role in a movie with adult content or because my child would have to use foul language?

That would most definitely be a legitimate reason to decline an audition! In fact, you should say no if you or your child are not comfortable with the project. That's just good parenting. Never feel pressured to accept an engagement that you find inappropriate for your child for fear of jeopardizing her future chances. It just doesn't happen.

I'm worried about my child missing too much school. When are auditions usually scheduled?

Good question! According to ACTRA regulations, auditions for minors must take place after school hours and be finished no later than 8 p.m. Agents and casting directors are well aware of this, so if you are asked to pull your child out of school for an audition, don't. Remind your child's agent of this regulation and ask him or her to schedule the audition after school hours.

Hmm, so what happens at an audition anyway?

There should be an official ACTRA sign-in sheet for you or your child to fill out. This is to keep a record of who attended the audition and how long they were there. Make sure you indicate your child's membership number on the sign-in sheet and be sure to write clearly. These sheets are sent to ACTRA. If performers are made to wait more than one hour before their audition, they must be paid. ACTRA needs the performer's membership number to identify who gets paid for being detained. This regulation is meant to discourage unnecessary delays. This is a good thing, since young performers (and stage parents) are usually fitting auditions in between soccer and band practice. Another good thing to know is, if your child is called back even once for a commercial,

or for a third or subsequent film and television audition (for the same role in the same project), she must be paid for these as well.

Have your child's photo and résumé ready to give to the person conducting the audition. Don't hand it over in an envelope or plastic sleeve. You don't want the people in the auditioning room to have to fiddle with it. Just staple the head shot and résumé "back to back" at the two top corners and you're good to go. The hardest part will be sitting in the waiting area with all the other anxious stage parents while your child auditions in another room. While you are outside biting your nails, your child will be having a great time dazzling them with his charm!

Can you tell me who will be present at my child's audition?

Auditions for film, television and commercials are almost always taped so there will be a camera person, the casting director, a reader (someone to do the scene with) and possibly the director with your child. They usually do something called a 'slate.' This is when the performer says her name, age and the name of her agent, before she performs the scene. She may be asked to do the scene a few times, or she may not. Don't worry. Everyone has their own way of doing things and each audition is always a little bit different. Oh, and don't forget to sign the time sheet on the way out!

How many auditions does it take before my child gets a role?

It could take five auditions, or 50 or perhaps only one. Who gets chosen for a role depends on a multitude of things. Often the person casting the role already has an idea of what the character should look like or they have to match up the kids with the actors cast to play the parents or siblings or any number of other reasons. So don't be discouraged if your child doesn't get the part. It may have nothing to do with his performance. It may just mean they were looking for a brunette and not a blonde.

But it's been four days! Why haven't we heard anything?

You probably haven't heard anything because they are still auditioning, or they haven't decided yet or the role went to someone else. Frankly, it could be any one of a hundred reasons! Most of the time you won't hear anything at all unless your child actually gets the part. However, you can certainly call your agent and ask for feedback on your child's audition. Sometimes though, when things are really hectic, even your agent may not be able to get any information for you. This is the nature of the business.

Waiting and wondering if your child got the role is enough to drive even the most seasoned stage parent up the wall. Smart moms and dads will get kids to focus on having fun and doing a good audition rather than actually getting the part. This philosophy keeps us sane but more importantly, it takes the pressure off the kids and this way, landing the role is a bonus!

If we get a callback, does that mean my child will get the part?

No, but it does mean they have narrowed down the search and your child was chosen for a second look. Getting a callback is great. It shows that the talent is there.

Is there anything else I should know about auditions?

Don't arrive with an entourage! An over-crowded waiting area puts everyone on edge, especially when it's filled with people who don't have to be there. The auditioning process is stressful enough without adding to the stress unnecessarily. Get into the habit of arriving at least five or 10 minutes early so your child has a chance to settle and compose herself before she is called in to audition. Think about keeping the volume down while you and your child are waiting for your turn. You wouldn't want the casting people distracted by noise during your child's audition. Extend the same courtesy to the people ahead of you. If your child is very young, you may want to bring some crayons or a book – something to keep them occupied while you wait. Encourage your young teen actor to learn how to avoid distractions (which is not as easy as it sounds), to focus on getting into character while they wait their turn. The ability to focus in challenging surroundings is one of an actor's primary skills.

If at all possible (and this will be tough on stage parents with more than one child, since babysitters don't magically appear whenever we need them), try to leave the siblings at home. To be honest, it's just plain boring for them. Besides, your young performer needs your attention to help her focus on the task at hand. Listen, as parents, we know it's never easy for kids to watch their brother or sister get all the attention no matter what the circumstance. Child actors get an inordinate amount of it, so now is the time to think about how you are going to handle any sibling rivalry; way before your child lands a role.

Finally, it's very important that you're on time for auditions. Aside from just being polite, it shows that you are serious and professional. Call ahead if you are running late or have to cancel. Your thoughtfulness will be appreciated and noted.

My child got the role! Now what do we do?

Congratulations! Now the fun really begins... and a lot of hard work too! It's time to put on your business hat and find out about contracts and the agent's role in the negotiating process. Don't worry. Everything you need to know is included in this book. That's why it is called a survival guide! Go on, turn the page. It'll be painless. I promise...

Chapter 4

The Agent's Role and What Stage Parents Should Know About Negotiating Contracts

Oh, the thrill of getting that first gig! The smell of the grease paint! The roar of the crowd... Wait a minute, that's theatre (sorry, got a little carried away there). Anyway, take a deep breath and clear your head. You will be committing your child and yourself to a business transaction so you have to be in full control of your faculties. Your child's agent has a big job ahead and so do you. The following chapter will give you a little insight into the agent's role and an overview of the negotiating process.

The agent got my child the job... Isn't the rest up to us?

Actually, your agent got the audition. It was your young actor who landed the role! But arranging auditions is just a tiny fraction of what agents do. Agents negotiate contracts, get updated scripts to their clients, keep track of rehearsals, costume fittings, shooting schedules and date changes. They also help their clients with the whole ACTRA work permit thing, something you will have to do... but we'll talk about that later in Chapter 5.

Something else you should know all about is the **Minor's Trust**, a very cool thing that protects your child's money. I'll tell you all about that later in Chapter 14 and the special rules and regulations in place to keep kids safe on ACTRA sets which you can read about in Chapter 6. But don't worry, your agent should be well informed about all this so don't be shy. Ask questions! You, your child's agent and ACTRA will work together to make sure your child is protected!

That's reassuring. So what are some of the things the agent will tell us about the job?

Once an offer has been made, the agent will have more information about the nature of the engagement. Your child's agent should be able to tell you what sort of project it is,

when and where it's shooting, if your child will be shooting indoors or outdoors, how many days your child will be working, who your child will be working with, (production company, director, other cast members, etc.) and what the producer is offering in terms of fees.

If I think we might have some problems... Should I tell the agent?

Absolutely! You and your child must be available and able to do the job. If, for example, you have no way of getting to the set, or you can't accompany your child on one of the scheduled shoot days, you should discuss these and any other problems with your agent before you accept. Remember, all minors must be accompanied on set by a guardian and that goes for minor background performers too! So if you can't be there, it's your job to find a guardian to accompany your child on set and I really, really, really recommend it be a person with some 'on set' experience if possible... or at the very least someone who's read this book! Lastly, it will be your agent's job to help you work out the details with production.

Since it's my child's first job, how do I know if the money he is being offered is fair?

This is something to discuss with your child's agent. You have to rely on their experience and expertise to some extent to know whether the fees are acceptable. The offer could be based on the size and nature of the role, the production budget or even on your child's experience. In any case, performers working on, let's say, a movie under ACTRA's jurisdiction, must be paid no less than the minimums stipulated in the Independent Production Agreement (the IPA, or as I like to call it, "the little green book"), or one of the many other ACTRA agreements.

I see. Umm... What's the Independent Production Agreement?

The IPA is the agreement between the independent producers of film, television and new media and the union (ACTRA) specifying the terms, wages and working conditions that all parties have agreed to. We'll talk about that and what you will have to do now that your child will be working on a union production in the next chapter.

Okay then, let's see... Can we arrange for other things to be included in the deal?

Agents know what they can and cannot negotiate for their clients. Ask your child's agent if it is possible to negotiate additional items you feel would be important to have in the contract. If, for example, your child has a fairly large role, a front credit (her name at the beginning of the film) might be possible. You may need transportation to and from set, a private dressing facility or perhaps a copy of the film. Your child may need special tutoring requirements while on set. Your child's agent will be able to tell you what things are negotiable. (This would also be a good time to mention to the agent any food allergies or certain food restrictions your child may have so she can inform the production at the appropriate time.)

So once this is all figured out, what happens next?

Well, the agent goes back to the person she is dealing with and tries to negotiate the best possible arrangement for your child. Once both parties agree, the producer must send a signed, written contract to you or your child's agent for your signature. According to the IPA, the performer should receive the contract at least 48 hours before the commencement of work. It is very important that you and your child's agent check the contract for missing or incorrect information before you sign it! It's also fairly common to give a trusted agent a limited power of attorney and let them sign on your behalf.

Really? Just so I'm sure I understand, can you tell me what 'power of attorney' means?

Okay well, by a power of attorney, one individual appoints another to act for him or her. So, by giving your agent a limited power of attorney, you are giving them the legal authority to sign contracts on your behalf. This can be a good thing when you are up to your eyeballs with stuff, but that doesn't mean you don't still keep a watchful eye on these things. Contracts are serious business and smart stage parents make sure they read and understand what legal obligations they are signing their child up for. It's just good business.

Yikes! I've never seen an ACTRA contract before. What information should be on it?

There is a standard ACTRA contract for every engagement except dubbing. (For a dubbing engagement, the Performer Dubbing Time Sheet acts as both the performer's work report and the contract). And of course, commercials have their own contracts. See the sample contracts online at www.actra.ca.

And to whom is the payment cheque made payable? My child... or his agent?

Some agents require their clients to grant them signing authority to deposit cheques made out to their clients into their company account. If you are asked to do this, make sure the agent has a trust account set up so that their client's money is not commingled with the agent's money.

Is getting the ACTRA work permit the next step?

Say... you're getting the hang of it already! Yes, getting the ACTRA work permit is exactly what your agent will help you do next. The next chapter gives a detailed explanation of why and how you purchase a permit. In addition, it will tell you everything you need to know about the ACTRA Apprentice Membership Program. Sounds like a lot of work I know, but trust me... you're gonna love it!

Chapter 5

Permits and Payments and How They Work – How to Become an Apprentice Member

Okay, are you ready for some paperwork? Don't worry, it's not as complicated as it sounds. Besides, you're a stage parent. You can handle it. But if you have a question that isn't answered in this guide, the folks at your local ACTRA office will be more than happy to help you. That being said, you may be wondering...

What is a work permit and why do I have to get one?

A work permit is authorization for your child (who, I assume, is not a member of the union, otherwise you wouldn't be asking) to work on a union production. A fee is charged for each work permit.

Well okay, but how much do they cost?

That depends on the kind of production, the agreement and what category the role is, so you are going to have to contact your local ACTRA branch office to ask. Some branches have this information on their websites, as well.

I can tell you this though:

Under the Independent Production Agreement (IPA)

- A permit lasts seven consecutive calendar days on a project or episode.
- A single permit is good for one category of performance.
- Continuing work beyond the seven days requires subsequent permit(s).
- One permit equals one credit.

Under the National Commercial Agreement (NCA)

- Permits apply to each television commercial or each radio session.

One permit counts as one credit (except for a background performer permit, which does not count as a credit).

Do I have to get a permit every time my child gets a job?

Yes. All non-union performers working in ACTRA's jurisdiction must purchase an authorized work permit. However, every time your child gets an ACTRA contract for any speaking role or an SOC role in a commercial and pays for a permit, he acquires one credit towards full membership. Once your child gets her first permit she is eligible to join ACTRA as an apprentice member. Yay!

As an apprentice, each permit you purchase represents a credit. Once he acquires three credits, he is eligible for full membership in the union – ACTRA. At that point, you will be required to fill out the application forms and pay the initiation fees for your child to become a full ACTRA member. You may also have to attend a mandatory Apprentice Member Initiation Course so check with your local ACTRA branch to see if this is something you need to do.

Remember, getting a work permit does not mean your child is automatically a member of ACTRA. It just means he is 'eligible' to join.

Is there a limit to how many work permits a person can acquire before joining?

No, there is no limit on the number of work permits that can be issued to a non-member working in ACTRA's jurisdiction – but it can get expensive. After the third work permit, a surcharge of 50% (plus applicable taxes) is added to all subsequent work permits. When apprentice members apply for their third permit, ACTRA's constitution requires that they join ACTRA as a full member or their file will be closed and their previous credits will no longer be counted toward full ACTRA membership. Yikes!

Are there benefits to being an apprentice member?

Oh my, yes! For one thing, as an apprentice member, any permits accumulated will count toward full membership. Did I mention work permits issued to non-apprentice members do not count toward ACTRA membership? I did? Excellent.

Also it can help to get work. Apprentice members are offered the opportunity to have their photos in ACTRA's searchable online talent catalogue *Face to Face Online* (available from ACTRA's website at www.actra.ca), which is kind of neat because it makes it easier for engagers to find them. So don't forget to keep your info on *Face to Face* up to date.

Apprentice members also get to attend ACTRA meetings, ACTRA conferences, awards presentations and training programs and receive the ACTRA magazine as well as other interesting mail. They get to put their two cents in as part of the ACTRA family on issues of importance to performers in the industry. The best part is, they will be able to audition for work that is only available to ACTRA members and apprentice members. You see, ACTRA agreements have something called 'preference of engagement.'

What is preference of engagement?

Well, it goes something like this. When a producer auditions performers for a particu-

lar role, they must make sufficient effort to hire an ACTRA member. If they cannot find an ACTRA member to fit the role, only then will ACTRA consider issuing a permit to a non-member for that role. Simple, huh?

Yes, it sounds great! So, how do we get a work permit?

As soon as ACTRA knows your child has been booked for a role, all you have to do is drop by your ACTRA branch office in person and say you want to pay for your child's permit. ACTRA staff will help you every step of the way. They will ask you the name of the production company, the title of the production, the category of the role (e.g. Actor, Principal etc.), and when your child is scheduled to work. I should mention however, ACTRA is moving towards digital documentation so procedures may vary depending on your local branch. For example, in some branches, you can do what's called an 'assignment of fees' which is a very cool thing, so check with your local branch to see if these options are available in your area.

Okay, I'll bite. What is an assignment of fees?

An assignment of fees is a form that you sign authorizing the production's accounting department to deduct the cost of the permit directly from your child's payment. An assignment of fees is pretty handy, especially if you find out you're supposed to shoot the next day. This does happen on occasion.

And just so I'm clear on this... getting the first credit does not automatically make my child an apprentice member, right?

That's right. It just means they are 'eligible' for apprentice membership. As I mentioned, unless your local ACTRA branch has moved into digital documentation, to enroll in the Apprentice Membership Program, you must go to the ACTRA office in person to fill out your application form. This allows you to meet with ACTRA staff who can fill you in on all the procedures and answer any questions you may have. You are welcome to bring your child along, but it's not necessary.

Once you pay the small fee that covers the first year's dues, your child will be issued an apprentice member card and number. Make sure you give this membership number to your agent and that it appears on future contracts.

Joining is a big decision. Will we have some time to think about it?

You have six weeks to sign up for the Apprentice Membership Program with your child's first work permit if you want the credit to apply toward membership. After that, the permit cannot be used as a credit toward the membership program. You will have to wait for the next one before you have a chance to sign up again.

Do apprentice members pay yearly dues?

Yes they do. There is an annual fee. An invoice is sent out one month prior to the anniversary of the sign-up date. If apprentices don't renew, they lose their apprentice

membership status and forfeit all their accumulated credits. Sheesh. This could mean they run the risk of being the oldest person on the planet to finally apply for full membership.

But do they still have to pay for the permits?

You bet. And it is important to note that once they become apprentice members, they are not permitted to do any non-union work. Doing so will result in being brought before a disciplinary committee and may lead to loss of eligibility for membership in ACTRA.

Why can't members do non-union work?

This is a serious question that deserves a serious answer. ACTRA believes the craft of acting is a unique and valued one. Performers in Canada have worked a very long time, more than 60 years in fact, to establish the minimum terms and working conditions they so justly deserve. Among other rights that have been secured are specific protections for minors. Non-union productions do not provide decent pay and offer no guarantee of fair working conditions. Performers, most importantly child performers, are often completely unprotected.

Being an ACTRA member means agreeing to abide by all the regulations, and not just those that suit one's personal agenda. If members work on non-union productions, they undermine all that their fellow performers have done on their behalf. They undermine ACTRA's ability to represent and protect the rights of their members both on a daily basis and at the negotiating table.

Hmm... What about low-budget productions?

Every ACTRA branch has access to different low-budget agreements designed to encourage new filmmakers. You should verify with your local ACTRA office that the low-budget production has been approved before you agree to anything.

What is ACTRA's position on student films?

If your child is an ACTRA member or apprentice member and she is contacted to work on a student film, call your local ACTRA branch and get approval first. They may have agreements with local universities or colleges. Film students are our young directors and producers of tomorrow and deserve our support. Besides, a student film is a great way for kids to gain practical on-set experience!

When will my child be ready for full membership?

Woah! Not so fast. We'll get to that later on. Besides, I don't know about you but... all this membership stuff is giving me a headache.

Actually, this would be a good time to talk about the special rules for kids, known far and wide as the 'minors' sections' of the Independent Production Agreement (IPA) and the National Commercial Agreement (NCA). It's extremely important to get to know these rules so you can do your job as guardian. Ready? Let's hit the books!

CHAPTER 6

Special Rules for Minors – Because They’re Just Kids After All!

Before we get into the rules and stuff, let’s talk a little more about ACTRA’s collective agreements, primarily the Independent Production Agreement, (the little green book) and the National Commercial Agreement (the little red book). They have special rules for kids, as do the other ACTRA agreements. They are agreements between the producers and the union on a certain code of behaviour and standards that all parties agree to follow. The producers and the union came up with these rules together, which is why we call them “collective agreements.” In your case, the union, the producer and the parent collectively agree to abide by these terms and conditions to ensure the health and welfare of your child. You can always pick up a copy of these agreements at your local ACTRA branch. (There may be a small fee.) You can also view or download a copy from ACTRA’s online document library at www.actra.ca.

So ACTRA and the producers make up these rules?

Exactly! ACTRA and producers work together to create an agreement that regulates the conditions under which performers will work and how they will be paid.

What are the responsibilities of the producer prior to the shoot?

There is a lot of information the producer is obliged to give you prior to the shoot. You can find out what the producer’s obligations are by looking up **Conditions of Engagement** in your ACTRA agreement. For example, producers have to give special notification of a night shoot, or if there are any special skills required of your child.

And the parent? What are my responsibilities?

You have to familiarize yourself with the requirements of the role your child has been engaged to play. You will be given forms to fill out, such as a **Declaration of Parent in the Engagement of Minors**, **Chaperon Forms** and the **Emergency Medical Authorization Form**. You will also have to disclose, in writing, any medical history that might affect your child’s ability to perform. You must not interfere with the production unless

it is required to ensure the child's safety. For more details, look up **Parental Responsibilities** in your copy of the applicable ACTRA agreement.

Okay, so until what age is a child considered a minor?

A performer is considered a minor up until she reaches the ripe old age of 18. At 18, the performer is considered an adult.

Which means?

Which means that if a child is under 16, he must be accompanied by a parent, legal guardian or an appointed chaperon. This person must be accessible to the minor at all times. They must accompany the child to and from the set or location and they have the right to accompany the minor on hair, make-up and wardrobe calls. If your child is 16 or 17 years of age, you have the right to accompany him, but you are not necessarily obliged to. However, all minors must be accompanied by a parent or chaperon when the shoot takes place at a distant location.

So, if my child is under 16 and I can't be there... I have to appoint a chaperon?

That's right. If for any reason, you are unable to accompany your child, you must appoint a responsible chaperon. This person must be not less than 21 years of age. This should be a family member or a reliable friend – ideally someone with film set experience. It must not be someone connected to the production. It's unfair to put a child or a crew member in a position where a conflict of interest might present itself.

Let's start with auditions and fittings and stuff... Can they be scheduled during school hours?

Nope. Auditions, interviews, individual voice and screen tests, fittings, wardrobe, make-up tests, photo shoots and all that stuff can only take place after school hours on school days. They must end before 8 p.m. on evenings prior to school days. This doesn't apply to actual workdays, but in any case a minor can't be required to work beyond 11 p.m. without the parent's consent.

Okay, so let's see. Um, how long is a work day for a minor?

The basic work day for film and television is eight hours plus a one-hour unpaid meal break. So, no more than nine hours in total.

That's a long day... Do they get any breaks?

You may find that most of the day consists of waiting to be called. However, there are limits to how long a child is allowed to remain before the camera.

2 years and under: 15 consecutive minutes (minimum break of 20 minutes)

3 to 5 years: 30 consecutive minutes (minimum break of 15 minutes)

6 to 11 years: 45 consecutive minutes (minimum break of 10 minutes)

12 to 15 years: 60 consecutive minutes (minimum break of 10 minutes)

16 and over: 60 consecutive minutes (minimum break of 5 minutes)

Can the production call them in to work for less than a standard eight-hour day?

Yes, in all projects under the IPA (and in made-for-new-media commercials), kids under the age of 12 can be called for a minimum of four hours. The minimum fee for a four-hour call is one-half the minimum daily fee. But, if they work beyond the four hours, then it automatically reverts to an eight-hour call (a regular day's pay). For 'regular' commercials though, the standard eight-hour day prevails, even though the actual work time may be less.

Err... What do you mean by commercials made for new media?

Oh, didn't I say? Those are commercials that are made directly for the Internet.

What about infants? Are there any special rules for them?

Absolutely! First, in case you're wondering, an infant is defined in the ACTRA agreements as a child performer who is less than two years old and it is forbidden for babies less than 15 days old to be engaged.

Now, most of the rules for minors are consistent in both the NCA and IPA, but the work-day length is different; Under the Commercial Agreement, an infant under the age of one year cannot be kept on set for longer than six hours, while under the IPA, the work day is a maximum of eight hours. The IPA recommends that parents get a written statement from their physician stating that the infant has been examined and is in good health. Under both agreements, the producer must provide a separate, sanitary room for care and rest of the infant. There should be a crib, changing table and a quiet, warm room where the baby can be fed. All accessories provided must be sanitized at all times. The wardrobe used by the infant must be laundered and props must be sanitized before they can be used by another infant. Bottles, nipples and pacifiers must not be exchanged among infants. If you have more than one baby (in the case of twins for example), it is your responsibility to ensure that there is one adult to care for each infant.

Back to the work day stuff... Can minors be asked to work overtime?

Remember this because you may be asked to allow your child to work extra hours. You may even be offered cash. Under no circumstances will ACTRA permit children to work more hours than those stipulated below. There are serious consequences for both the producer and the parent if cash is offered and accepted for additional work time. The allowable overtime is set up in the following manner:

Kids 11 years of age and under are forbidden to do overtime (no exceptions)

Kids 12-15 are allowed a maximum of two hours per day. If the child works a total of four hours of overtime over three consecutive days, then they cannot work any overtime on the following day.

Kids 16 and over are permitted to work up to a 12-hour day – that works out to four hours of overtime under the IPA. These limitations do not apply under the NCA.

But what if my young one wants to work longer... May I give my permission?

No, absolutely not! This is not your call. The question of overtime for younger minors is a very sensitive subject in this industry. As much as our union would prefer to have a steward on every shoot that engages minors, they just don't have the available staff. ACTRA is relying on you, the parent, to make sure this particular regulation is strictly adhered to.

I've heard of the term 'turnaround.' Can you tell me what it means and how it affects my child?

Sure. Turnaround is the time between when your child finishes work and when he starts work the following day. The minimum turnaround time for minors goes something like this:

- Kids under the age of 12 have to have a rest period of 12 hours from the time they arrive at their home to the time they leave their home for the set the next day (door to door).
- Kids 12-17 must be given a rest period of 12 hours between the end of one work day and the beginning of the next work day (set to set).

When the producer is required to provide transportation, they must ensure that the minor leaves the set within 30 minutes of the end of the minor's work day. Also, under the IPA, the producer must provide transportation for any minor wrapped after dark!

Can the production ask my child to do something dangerous?

No way! Under no circumstances may a child be placed in clear and present danger to life or limb. If you believe your child may be in danger, do not be afraid to speak up! You have the right to say "No"! Get your child away from the danger to a neutral place. If the situation is not resolved, contact the ACTRA steward in charge of the production immediately!

What if the danger was of a psychologically damaging nature?

You're talking about a film with mature subject matter? Well then, prior to production, it will be determined whether the producer should hire a properly accredited psychologist or therapist to guide and assist the child to handle the emotional and mental stress of the subject matter, which may include the psychologist or therapist remaining on set. In any case, the child will only be present during such scenes when it is essential for the child to be on-camera. Nonetheless, if you or the tutor observe that your child appears to be suffering emotional, physical or mental stress during the course of a production where a psychologist was not determined necessary, then a psychologist or therapist must be engaged at that time.

Speaking of tutors... How does that work?

Okay. Here's the deal. Under the IPA, the producer must engage a properly qualified tutor who has provincial certification or teaching credentials as required by your child's

regular school. If your child's regular instruction occurs primarily in a language other than English, teaching in that language will be provided. For obvious reasons, they don't have to provide a tutor for kids under the age of six.

That's great! But, are there any instances where they don't have to provide a tutor?

The producer is only required to provide a tutor when your child is required to miss at least two days of school during a school week or five days of school over the course of the entire production or series. If required, the tutor must be there on your child's first day of shooting. In commercials, a tutor is only required if a production goes beyond three days.

What if my child was only supposed to work one day but ended up working more?

They still have to provide a tutor, however, not on a retroactive basis.

Who makes the arrangements with my child's school?

You do. Speak to the principal or teacher before your child starts shooting. Find out what work needs to be covered for the days your child will be away from school. It is your responsibility to provide the tutor with all the schoolbooks and assignments for your child.

Will I be able to show the teacher that my child really is being tutored?

Yes. The tutor must prepare a weekly written report covering attendance, grades, assignments, etc. You will be given a copy to give to the school.

How much tutoring will my child actually get each day?

Your child must have a minimum of two hours (maximum of five hours) tutoring during the course of the shoot day in blocks of no less than 30-minute sessions. This means a minimum of 10 tutoring hours per five-day work week. Plus, they can also do something called 'banking.'

Banking... ? What's banking?

Okay, here goes... On long-term engagements such as a television series or a feature film, sometimes, depending on the shooting schedule, your child may have days where they are not working in front of the camera very much or days when they are working a lot. This means that some days your child may be able to have more than two hours of tutoring, and some days it will be impossible to have two hours of tutoring.

So, if it is an unusually slow week, the producers can bank or 'save up' up to four additional hours of tutoring to be credited toward the following week if the shooting schedule is then too heavy for your child to receive the full 10 hours.

For example:

Week one is a slow week. Your child receives 14 hours of tutoring.

Week two is a busy week. Your child receives only six hours of tutoring. That's okay because the producer had four hours of tutoring saved up from week one.

The reverse is also possible, with a busy week first, with hours made up in week two. However, the producer must have the permission of the tutor and the parent for this privilege and you can decide to stop the banking of hours, at any time, if you and the tutor decide it is not in your child's best interest.

So the producer can owe up to a maximum of four hours of tutoring per week?

That's right. They can accumulate four hours no earlier than the week immediately prior to your child's first day of principal photography and they must be made up by production no later than the week immediately following.

Does that mean tutoring can be done at any time, as long as my child gets 10 hours per week?

Not exactly. The tutoring must start within the first three hours of your child's work day, so they can't tack the hours on at the end of the day. Tutoring can't be done while being transported to or from a location and is exclusive of personal breaks. Your child has to be under the supervision of the tutor to qualify as banked time. It can't be done on days when the production is not shooting (production down days) or weekends and homework doesn't count as banked tutoring time.

Can they call my child in to work just to do tutoring?

Well they can, but they have to pay a full day at the contracted daily fee. However, the maximum amount of tutoring per day is five hours.

Do I have to keep track of all this stuff?

It would be wise to keep a personal record just in case, but it is the responsibility of the producer to ensure that an accurate weekly record is kept showing when tutoring time is banked and when it is used.

How many kids can the tutor have in the classroom at one time?

For regulars on a series, the ratio of tutors to minors is five children to one tutor. However, the tutor can instruct up to 10 children (Series Regulars and Non-Regulars) in the classroom at the same time, provided the educational needs of the Series Regulars are not compromised.

Is there someone specifically in charge of the kids on a set or is that the tutor?

Okay, here is the way it is supposed to work. When kids are engaged, the producer is supposed to designate one person to coordinate all matters pertaining to the welfare and comfort of the children: the Minors' Coordinator. This could be the tutor, provided all the kids are being tutored at the same time. However, if there are six or more children, the Minors' Coordinator must be a person whose primary responsibility is the welfare and comfort of the children.

What about the tutoring area and school supplies?

The teaching area should, where practicable, approximate a classroom setting. It should

be quiet, clean, climate controlled with adequate lighting and ventilation. Again, where practicable, for kids five years and under there should be a separate, cheerful play room with toys and games. The producer is responsible for providing the basic school supplies, appropriate furniture and equipment. This should include a computer and printer if required as part of your child's school curriculum.

What about food? Any rules on food?

As a matter of fact, there are. The producer must provide a selection of milk, juices and healthy snacks. Kids under 14 should be fed their meals by a schedule that approximates their normal meal times. They can have their meal during a personal break, but it does not count as their unpaid meal period.

And finally, the Minor's Trust... What's that?

It's pretty simple. ACTRA will keep track of your child's earnings. Once your child's total lifetime earnings reach \$5,000, 25% of any future gross income will be put aside in a trust account. The producer will deduct the 25% from the total of each payment to your child and remit it to the **ACTRA Performers' Rights Society**. ACTRA PRS and the trustees will administer the trust on behalf of your child until your child reaches legal age. *Find out more about the Minor's Trust in Chapter 14.*

Is that it? Please say that's it... My eyeballs have dust on them.

Hey, that's the condensed version! Anyway, there's still some stuff you should know about before the shoot. That's why I called the next chapter...

CHAPTER 7

Stuff You Should Know Before the Shoot – From Wardrobe Calls to Transportation and Per Diem

The production process varies from project to project. Naturally, the size and budget of the production will have a lot to do with how much pre-production stuff will be done. This section should give you a general idea of how it works.

I got a message that someone from wardrobe called. Err... What's wardrobe?

Depending on the nature of the production, you may be called by a person in the wardrobe department. They'll ask you for your child's measurements, or at least what size shirt, pants, dress and shoes she wears. Smaller-budget productions may ask if you could have your child arrive in let's say, jeans and a white T-shirt for example. This is often the case for smaller, actor category roles as well. They can ask you to provide two changes of clothing. More than that and they will have to pay you. You can check out your ACTRA agreement (that little green or red book) for the rates. Of course it goes without saying, these clothes must be neat and clean (no, really, you'd be surprised...).

Now they say we have to go for a fitting, what's that all about?

Again, depending on the nature of the production, you may or may not be asked to go to the production office and have your child try on the wardrobe or 'costume' they have prepared for him. It is a good idea to keep track of your child's growth spurts. Saves you from having to say, "But, but, but, he was a size eight-and-a-half shoe two days ago... I swear!"

Umm.... Does my child get paid for this?

Yup. The producer must pay your child her contracted hourly rate. This is a minimum

two-hour call for all productions under the green book (IPA). That means even if it only takes 15 minutes, they still have to pay the minimum two-hour call. The same thing goes for hair and make-up, read-through or rehearsal calls. They are all minimum two-hour calls. Under the Commercial Agreement the minimum is a one-hour call for wardrobe or make-up and four hours for rehearsals.

It is important to remember to sign a time sheet at all of these calls to ensure your child gets paid. I still find it amazing to get paid to get your hair done, instead of the other way around (shrug). Maybe it's just me...

I know the dates but is someone going to tell me the time and place?

If you're working on a smaller project, more than likely someone from production, usually the 2nd AD, will call you or your agent with your child's call time and the location of the shoot. If it's say, a film or an episode of a television series, you will probably be given a call sheet. The call sheet will contain all the information you need. Keep in mind though, on some projects, you may only find out what time you need to be on set the day before.

Only the day before, why is that?

Because no matter how well the shooting day is planned, inevitably something will go awry and changes will have to be made to the schedule. Sometimes they can only determine the call times for the following day's shoot at or around the end of the day.

Fair enough. But listen, do I have to find my own way there?

Let me put it this way. If it's a local shoot, within a 40-kilometre radius from the city centre or other specified central points, the producer is not always required to provide transportation. However, your agent can try to negotiate transportation to and from the set. She may or may not be successful depending on the type of production. If it's a low-budget project or if your child only has a small part, the chances of wrangling transportation might be pretty slim.

Hmm, and how about food, do I pack a lunch?

Although most productions do provide a meal, on local shoots they are not obliged. Bring along a few bucks just in case. However, there will be craft services, drinks, coffee, snacks, stuff like that. Oh, and if your child has any food allergies, be sure to tell the production.

What if it's an out-of-town shoot?

Ah, then the producer must provide the food, or give the performer and their guardian money for their meals, in addition to transportation and living accommodations of course.

Is that what they call a per diem?

Yup. Expense money for breakfast, lunch and dinner if the production is not providing

them. There are various ways in which the producer can provide for the performer and his guardian's travel and living arrangements. You or your child's agent can always contact your ACTRA steward for these details.

How do I know who my ACTRA steward is?

Simply call your local ACTRA branch office and ask who the steward is for the project your child is working on.

Is the time my child spends traveling paid too?

Yes it is. They are paid their contracted hourly rate for each hour they spend traveling up to a maximum of eight hours in a 24-hour period.

Okay, I'll admit it, I'm getting a little nervous. Any last words of advice before I don my Hollywood shades?

Ha! In our climate, it's more like donning your long red underwear. Listen, once you get on set, there may be times when you feel like you're in some kind of weird dream sequence. Gee... Almost like you're in the movies! (Wink!) Seriously, if you have any concerns or doubts, the smartest thing you can do is call the ACTRA office and find out which steward has been assigned to the production. It is their job to ensure your child's rights are respected. In the meantime, the next chapter is full of advice for novice stage parents – advice being the operative word here. It is meant to be used as a guide to help you get a general idea of how stuff works. Use what you think is best for you!

CHAPTER 8

The Tools of the Trade – Set Smarts, Set Etiquette and How to Use Them

Life on a film set is a unique experience. It would be hard to find another profession where the work day is so filled with excitement yet so painfully boring at the same time. You may feel a tad intimidated on the first day. Just remember that thousands of stage parents have gone through it and lived to tell the tale. Before you know it, you will be swapping ‘war stories’ with the best of them. This section deals with life on the set along with some hints on how to handle yourself and your child when certain circumstances arise. Do not underestimate the value of proper set etiquette. How you and your child behave on set could make the difference between a wonderful experience and a disaster.

Okay. The first thing I want to know is... What should I wear?

Ah! This is where that famous stage parent common sense comes into play. First, you need to find out if your child will be shooting interior or exterior scenes. Naturally, what you should wear will depend on what the weather is like on those days where you will be shooting outside. In the cold months, pretend you are taking a trek to the Arctic Circle and dress accordingly. Even on mildly cold days, standing around for long periods of time can chill one to the bone. Interior shoots, even in the winter, can get very hot because of all the equipment and lights. Dress in layers so you can adjust your clothing according to the temperature.

Wear comfortable clothing! This may come as a surprise but film sets are not glamorous. With all the equipment, cables and wires lying around, you may want to leave those four-inch heels at home. Unless of course, you don't mind taking a flying leap over a cable or ending up with feet the size of footballs at the end of the day. Jeans, T-shirt and running shoes are probably your best bet. Bring an extra pair of cotton socks you can change into midday. You will be surprised how refreshed it makes you feel! In winter months, those little packets of *Hot Shots* are great for warming your child's hands and feet.

Got it. Now what will happen when we get there?

When you arrive, you will be met by a crew member, usually the 2nd AD or 3rd AD. They will show you where you need to go – either to the wardrobe area, make-up area or your child’s dressing room, depending on how the set is arranged. If no one greets you, just grab anyone who looks like part of the crew and ask to be directed to wardrobe and make-up. Every cast member has to start in those departments so they’re the best place to go if you’re not sure where you’re supposed to be. If the production is providing transportation, your driver will know where you need to be.

Always be on time! The crew is working on a very tight schedule and they’re the ones that have to answer to the director if your child is not ready when called. Also, ask the 2nd AD for a call sheet if you don’t already have one. This will help you familiarize yourself with the names of the people with whom you’ll be working.

What am I supposed to do while my child is busy with the wardrobe person?

It is always a good idea to be on hand to help your child get into his wardrobe. If your child is old enough to take care of himself, or if space is limited, try and find a place where you are not in the way, but available if needed.

Offer to help. The wardrobe department can sometimes use an extra pair of hands. Especially when dealing with kids! Since your child may have to remain in wardrobe for a lengthy period, do your best to make sure it remains clean and tidy.

But isn’t that the wardrobe person’s job?

It is the wardrobe department’s job to prepare the clothes, give them to the performer, collect them for cleaning and storing and prepare them for the next shoot day. Avoiding hot chocolate spills, dripping popsicles, accidental rips and the inevitable mustard stain is not in their job description. If you want your presence on the set to be welcome and appreciated, make it a part of yours.

When my child is called to set... Should I go too?

Absolutely! You are responsible for the health and welfare of your child. Besides being a lot of fun to watch, it is important for your child to know that you are there if they need you. Remember, your child will be surrounded by adults intent on doing their jobs. They may not notice that your child is showing signs of strain, or is getting tired or hot or chilled or heaven forbid, has to go to the bathroom.

But what if I get the impression that the director doesn’t want me around?

That’s the director’s problem. The official rules say, “The parent has the right to be present at all times when their child is working.”

Try to be inconspicuous. Stay out of the way of the camera and equipment. Let the director do her job. Make sure your child is behaving in a manner appropriate to the situation. If your being there has a positive influence on your child’s performance,

the director and crew will soon welcome your presence on set.

So I just look for a place to sit?

Well, quite often there will be chairs set up for the Stage Parents, and other people who are not actually involved in the work. Your best bet is to ask the 2nd or 3rd AD where you should go.

First rule of filmmaking... Never stand in doorways! The trick is to find a space where you can watch the action without getting in anyone's way. Look to see which direction the camera is facing and find a place behind it. Try not to cross frame, which means always walk around and behind the camera and lights. This is so the DOP (camera guy) is not bothered by people moving in and out of the frame while he is trying to set up, focus and light the shot.

But what if there really isn't any room for me, what should I do?

Remain close by. If you can't see, then at least you can hear what is going on.

Ask to peek in from time to time. No one would object to you checking to see if your child needs a break, is thirsty or has to go to the bathroom. You'd just be doing your job!

How do I enforce those minimum breaks?

Filmmaking is not an exact science, which means you are going to have to rely on your own common sense. However, if you see your child is tired or hot or needs to go to the bathroom, tell the 2nd AD your child needs a break.

There will be many opportunities for your child to take a break away from the camera. Stay alert to what is happening. If, for example, you see that they are reloading the camera or about to do a lighting change, this would be a perfect time for your child to get a break. However, first you must ask the 1st, 2nd or 3rd AD if it's okay for your child to step off set.

Will we be able to get a snack before lunch?

Sure! There is usually a craft table set up for the cast and crew with some fairly decent munchies – fresh fruit, veggies, cheese and crackers, water, juices, soft drinks, coffee... Stuff like that. If they plan the meal break to be six hours after the call, then they have to serve a substantial snack – substantial snack being sandwiches or soup or something similar. Besides, kids under the age of 14 should be fed meals according to a schedule that reasonably approximates their meal times – which can be done during a personal break. He still gets to take his meal break when everyone else does.

Remember to inform the production of any food allergies your child may have. It's a smart idea to keep an eye on what snacks your child chooses as well. Avoid anything that drips or stains or promotes nervous energy. A chocolate bar and a pop may not be the wisest choice if your child is to maintain a steady energy level for eight hours.

So, the meal break is six hours after my child's call time?

That's right. It can't be more than six hours after the call. In film and television productions, the production is permitted to calculate the meal break from the crew call, which can sometimes be later than the cast call. They can only do this however, if they provide a 'non-deductible first meal.' A non-deductible first meal is just another way of saying the performer is offered a hot breakfast (if possible) or has access to the craft services when she first arrives on set.

You might want to keep a record of when you break for lunch. If the meal break is called beyond the six-hour maximum, the production is subject to meal penalties. They have to pay the performer an additional fee of 200% of their hourly rate until the meal break is provided. For example, let's say the meal break should have been called at 12:00 p.m., but they only call the break at 12:15 p.m., the performer has to be paid a penalty for 15 minutes or 1/4 hour at 200%. Getting paid extra is kind of cool, but what's more important, meal penalties help to ensure that performers get to take their breaks and eat proper meals. In commercials, a flat rate penalty applies for each infringement.

How long is the meal break?

Usually, the meal break is one hour. The lunch is set up buffet-style and both cast and crew queue up at the buffet table to serve themselves (a one-hour meal break is not paid).

The cast and crew have only a single hour to eat and rest. Sometimes they end up spending most of their break in the lunch line up. Conversely, stage parents have plenty of free time at their disposal. Use this opportunity to extend a courtesy to the people your child is working with. Go with your child to help him with his lunch but you may choose to wait until the crew passes before you get your own food. It's a small kindness, but one that will be greatly appreciated. Just keep in mind, "If you take care of the crew, the crew will take care of you!"

You said "usually." Are there occasions when the meal break can be longer or shorter?

The meal can be half an hour. If this is the case, the producer is obligated to provide the meal. Or the producer can extend the meal break by half an hour (maximum), but only if all the performers have their meal break extended. Here's another little tip; if the meals are not provided on set, any time spent in traveling to a restaurant is considered work time and not part of the meal break.

Rules governing these unusual meal lengths vary from agreement to agreement so if you find yourself in a situation not covered in this guide, or you are unsure, remember you can always call your ACTRA branch for information and guidance. Ask for the steward in charge of the production your child is working on. They are there to help you.

Suppose it's close to wrap time for my child but it looks like they are still working. Should I say anything?

Yes! Around 15 or 20 minutes prior to wrap time, you can bring it to the 2nd AD's attention. A gentle reminder would not be considered inappropriate.

Keep in mind, at this point, it has been a long day for everyone. You may have to deal with some very tired, stressed-out individuals who are trying to get the last shot of the day. It is important that you maintain an air of calm but resolute determination. Be polite but firm. Show them you fully expect your child to be wrapped on time.

What if it's wrap time and they are in the middle of the last shot? What should I do?

This is one of the situations where you will have to make a judgment call, so don't be afraid to use your common sense. You can allow them to finish the shot.

Don't be taken advantage of, though. Finishing a shot should not take more than five or 10 minutes. As your child's guardian, you have the absolute right to remove your child from the set at this point. In fact, it is your obligation to do so. The producer, the director, the entire cast and crew are aware of this so don't be intimidated. You are just doing your job.

I heard that sometimes they pay the kids cash to work overtime. Is that true?

Let's be really clear on this point. At no time is a minor allowed to work more hours than are stipulated in the ACTRA agreement. Failure to abide by the collective agreement could mean serious consequences for both the producer and the parent of the minor with grievances as well as fines and loss of union membership for the performer.

This cannot be stressed enough. Don't be fooled into believing it's okay to accept cash for extra overtime. It is not okay. Everybody doesn't do it. Parents who accept cash for letting their kids work overtime are not held in very high regard by the union, the production or their peers.

What happens when my child is wrapped?

Once your child is wrapped, you will be asked to sign a time sheet (or contract for a commercial). This is a record of the call time, make-up call, set call, lunch times and wrap times. This sheet is used to calculate your child's payment, so make sure you check that the times are correct. Remember, your child is not wrapped until she is out of wardrobe.

If you notice that something is not correct on the time sheet/contract you can bring it to the attention of the AD. However, if you feel uncomfortable about doing so, write the word "disagree" beside your initials and inform the ACTRA steward in charge of the production. It can be disputed at a later date. You should keep your own time record using the sample Young Performer Work Report included in the back of this guide. It might come in handy in a situation like this.

My child is working tomorrow. How will I know when and where?

Wrap time is usually when the call sheets are given out for the next day. Make sure you get one from the 2nd AD or whoever is signing you out. The call times for all the cast and crew will be indicated along with other important information.

Keep your call sheets until you receive your child's payment. They are invaluable when there is a discrepancy in the payment.

Will we get the script for the next day's scenes?

If you recall, the 'sides' are scenes taken from the script and shrunk down to pocket-sized sheets of paper. They are only the scenes that are scheduled to be shot on a particular day and are usually given along with the call sheet at wrap time.

Don't lose those sides! Your child needs them to memorize his lines for the next day. Make sure your child has enough time to go over his text. Remember, your child is now a professional actor. A professional always arrives on set prepared.

Anything else?

Well, now that you mention it... It's all in the attitude! Kids take their cue (no pun intended) from their moms and dads. Let your child know how important it is to be well behaved, polite and respectful to the crew and their fellow cast members. Set a good example by being thoughtful and appreciative by doing little things like folding or hanging up your child's clothes to assist the wardrobe person once your child is wrapped. An offer to help or even to get a cup of coffee for a crew member will go a long way in creating an atmosphere of camaraderie instead of an 'us and them' attitude.

Remember, crew members are not babysitters. This is a business and your child is working. As your child's guardian, so are you. It is your responsibility to stay within eyesight of your child when on set or waiting to be called, and to ensure that your child is behaving appropriately. This goes for teens too. Your teen actor may or may not be mature, but this is an adult environment nonetheless and you still need to keep a watchful eye on what's happening. Just think of a way to do it without embarrassing the heck out of them. You need to get to know and understand the collective agreement so that you are prepared to step in if you feel your child's rights are being violated. Like any industry, there are good guys, and some not-so-good guys. Don't be intimidated by any bad guys you may encounter along the way. Don't be afraid to call the union steward for assistance. ACTRA can't help you if they don't know there's a problem.

In a perfect world, the producer will go above and beyond the minimums stipulated in the collective agreement to meet your child's needs. If we are to be realistic, however, we need to accept that this may not always be the case. This is not to say you should ignore violations. They should be dealt with immediately. A smart stage parent is always prepared for those times when things are not exactly perfect. (Suppose lightning hits the

craft truck, you may wanna keep a cheese sandwich in your purse.) In the real world mistakes and accidents do happen and sometimes you just have to work with what you've got. So be flexible, take care of your own child... and choose your battles.

Finally, it's customary to thank the director at the end of a shoot (provided it was a pleasant experience of course). Don't forget to thank the crew for all their help and hard work. Film crews are the hardest-working people on the planet. They deserve our appreciation and respect.

Thanks for the advice. So, what's next?

Next we are going to work on how to make sure your child has been paid correctly once the payment arrives. The following chapter is all about learning how to check the cheques!

CHAPTER 9

Verifying Your Child's Payment or 'Hey This Doesn't Add Up!'

The cheque has arrived. Yippie! Before you invest in that college fund, or your child hears the local mall calling her name, you need to make sure the payment is correct. Don't tell yourself that it's probably right, sometimes it isn't. In this section you'll learn how to check the calculation sheet that accompanies the cheque. It may seem like a job for a chartered accountant, but it's really not that complicated, once you have seen a few of them.

Easy for you to say... But I don't even know what a calculation sheet looks like!

Calculation sheets vary, however they should all have more or less the same information. To avoid complicating a ham sandwich, let's start with the basic stuff. The following is an example of the things you need to look for to calculate the total hours, make-up, meal break, overtime (if applicable), travel time, etc.

A little FYI before we get started, and to help guide you through the example below:

- **Travel time** applies when the filming location is in a city other than the performer's city of residence. Or, if the set location is outside a 40-kilometre radius of the city centre or other specified central points.
- **Wrap time** only starts when a performer is finished work, out of make-up and costume, transport is arranged (if necessary) and they are able to leave the set.
- **Costume fittings or hair and make-up tests** are usually a standard minimum two-hour call, so times are not always indicated.
- **The 0.25 make-up time deduction** we're going to use in the calculation is only for IPA productions. Don't include this if you are checking a commercial calculation sheet!
- The example on the next page is based on a one-hour lunch period which is the norm, but if your child's lunch period was 1/2 hour or 1 1/2 hours please check with your local ACTRA office)

Ready? Here we go!

Travel start	Time performer is picked up at designated pick-up spot or home.
Travel finish	Time performer arrives on set (i.e. studio or location).
Call time	Time performer is asked to be on set.
Make-up start	Time performer is in the care of the make-up and wardrobe people.
Make-up finish	Time performer is out of the care of the make-up and wardrobe people.
Set time	Time performer is in front of the camera.
First meal start	Time meal break is called.
First meal finish	Time meal break is finished.
Wrap time	Time the performer is wrapped.
Travel start	Time performer leaves the set to travel home.
Travel finish	Time performer arrives at his/her home or designated drop-off place.
Rehearsal start	Time performer is asked to be present for rehearsal.
Rehearsal finish	Time performer finishes rehearsal.
Fittings, make-up, hair	When performer is asked to be present for a costume fitting and/or hair or make-up test.

Okay, so what's the first step?

The first thing you should do is verify that the information recorded on the calculation sheet is correct. This is where your own notes on the times or your copy of your commercial contract would really come in handy. You could use them to make sure the call time, meal break and wrap times are correct.

Cripes! This is starting to get complicated already!

Not if you remember this simple equation...

Wrap time minus **Call time** equals **Total hours**.

Total hours minus **8 hours**, minus **1-hour meal break**, minus **0.25 make-up time** equals **Total overtime hours**.

I'll take your word for it. Is there anything else that needs checking before I continue?

Yep. You can check that any required meal penalty payments have been included. These occur when the meal break is not provided on time. For example, you can check that the meal break was no later than six hours from your child's call time. (If a substantial snack was given) or from the crew call... Remember they can do that if they provide a non-deductible first meal when the child arrives on set. Also, check that the turnaround time is correct.

Hmm, can you give me an example of a typical day on a local shoot?

Okay, let's do one – a regular day, no penalties, but with a little overtime (allowable only if your child is 12 or older) just for calculation purposes. To make things easier, we'll use a 24-hour day and break it down into quarter hour increments:

Call Time	Makeup		Set Time	First Meal		Wrap Time
	start	finish		start	finish	
6:30	7:00	7:15	7:30	12:30	1:30	5:30

So, converting clock times to 24-hour times with decimals, the calculation should go something like this:

Wrap time (5:30 p.m.)	17.50
Minus Call time (6:30 a.m.)	- 6.50
Equals total hours worked	11.00
Minus regular hours	- 8.00
Minus meal break	-1.00
Minus make-up	- .25
Equals total overtime hours	1.75

Okay, but how do I calculate the dollar value?

Let's use a daily rate of \$500, an hourly rate of \$62.50 and an overtime rate of \$93.75 (These are not actual rates but only an example.)

This is how it works:	
8 hours at the daily rate	\$500.00
0.25 hours make-up at the regular rate	+15.63 (0.25 at \$62.50 per hour = \$15.63)
1.75 hours at the overtime rate	+ 164.00 (1.75 at \$93.75 per hour = \$164.00)
Total	\$ 679.63

Is that it?

Nope. Now you have to calculate the residual, prepayment or advance and add it to the total.

What do you mean residual, prepayment or advance?

The producer must pay the performer for the right to use their 'recorded' performance. This is what is called 'use fees.' There are several options the producer may elect to use. (Refer to your copy of the IPA for details on film and television and to the NCA for commercials.)

So for calculation purposes, let's pretend this is a feature film and the producer has elected to use the standard 130% prepayment. This means he or she must pay an additional 130% of the total net fee:

Total net fee (as we calculated on pg. 46)	\$ 679.63
130% prepayment	+ 883.52
Subtotal	\$1,563.15

Now add any additional monies earned for fittings, hair and make-up, rehearsals, meal penalties (monies owed for stuff that's not considered part of the net fees). In other words, all the 'non-recorded' stuff. So let's say your child had a fitting a few days before the shoot and they've included it in this payment.

Total net fee	\$ 679.63
130% prepayment	+ 883.52
Fitting	+ 125.00
Total gross fee	\$ 1,688.15

Hey, neat! Now what about the deductions?

I'm getting there, I'm getting there. Full ACTRA members have two types of deductions which are, at the time of this printing:

- **3% of the total gross fees** – the performer's contribution to his or her retirement plan (or 4% under the National Commercial Agreement).
- **2.25% of the total gross fees** – the performer's payment towards membership dues. Apprentice members' deductions are a bit different. The retirement contribution is deducted from their payments, however the money does not go into their retirement plan. Only full members get to keep that money. The good news is apprentice members do not pay 2.25% working dues because they have to purchase a work permit instead. If you

did the assignment of fees thing for a work permit (we talked about this in Chapter 5, remember?), this amount will be deducted from the total gross fees.

I still don't get it.

Alright, I admit this written explanation is confusing. If it doesn't make any sense, your best bet is to call your child's agent or the ACTRA office and ask for help. Believe me, it's worth the effort!

Okay, but what if I find an error in the calculations? What do I do then?

You or your child's agent should inform the accounting department of the production (in writing) of the error and request an adjustment. Send a copy to the ACTRA steward in charge of the production your child has worked on or to the ACTRA branch rep. For commercials, you should contact the ACTRA branch office directly with your inquiries. Don't forget you have 30 days from receipt of the payment to report an error.

By the way, when is a payment due? I mean, how much time do they have to pay the performer?

Late payment regulations vary by agreement. For example, under the National Commercial Agreement, the producer must pay the performer within 15 business days for session fees and 20 business days for residuals.

Another example is: under the IPA (as of this printing), the producer must pay the performer within 15 calendar days of the date of the performance. After 15 days following performance, late payments incur a penalty fee of 2% of the total gross fee for the first 30 days the payment is late, an additional 2% for the next 30-day period (or part of it) and so on. For those IPA late payments, your child's agent should e-mail the producer, with a copy to your local ACTRA office. By the way, keep the envelope from the payment with the postmark so that the date can be substantiated.

Well, that was grueling. Still with me? I know, I know... This stuff is dense. Certainly not the most exciting way to spend your time, but mistakes do happen. It's our job as stage parents to make sure our kids are protected and that includes protecting their financial interests. Making sure they receive all the money they are due is part of our job description.

If you need to get up and stretch your legs, now would be a good time because the chapter that deals with commercials is coming up. Yep, we are going spend a little time talking about kids and commercials... Now there's a challenge!

CHAPTER 10

Kids and Commercials – A Whole Other Agreement So, Just the Basics Please!

Kids and commercials, sounds like fun! It is fun, but it can be a wee bit confusing when it comes to figuring out what's what regarding session fees, residuals and all that good stuff. Film, television, animation, dubbing and voice work are covered by the IPA. Radio, television and digital media commercials have an entirely separate agreement called the National Commercial Agreement. There are many variables to commercials that depend on the situation. The following chapter is designed to give you an overview of the National Commercial Agreement – a general understanding of how it all works.

Are there special rules for minors under the Commercial Agreement?

Yes. When your child goes to her first audition, you will be asked to sign a form acknowledging that you have read and understood the **Parental Audition and Consent Form**. Basically, this form sets out the responsibilities you have as a parent. You can view a copy of this form on the ACTRA website, www.actra.ca, in the document library section. Also, kids 12 to 15 years old are permitted to work up to two hours of additional work time. This additional work time cannot be scheduled in advance and the parent or chaperon on set must give their permission.

And the kids have to have a guardian, right?

Right. The Commercial Agreement states that each child must have a parent or legal guardian present on set. If for some reason the parent or legal guardian is unable to be present, they must designate a chaperon to be responsible for the child for the duration of the engagement. The chaperon must be at least 18 years of age and cannot be someone who works for the engager, except in an emergency.

Okay, and what's the deal with that Preference of Engagement thing? Do they do that with commercials too?

Yes. There are very specific regulations regarding **Preference of Engagement** for full ACTRA members as well as the permitting of apprentice members and non-Canadian performers. You can get the details about how it works in **Section 7, Preference of Engagement, of the Commercial Agreement**. You can also view or download a copy of the National Commercial Agreement from the document library section of the ACTRA website at www.actra.ca.

So apprentice members and non-members have to apply for work permits for commercials?

That's right. Each TV, new media commercial or radio session requires a permit. It's the same procedure as for film and television. Prior to the commencement of work, the engager must apply to ACTRA for a non-member work permit. In the application, the engager must give the details of the commercial, including the type of role being cast and a list of members and apprentice members who were auditioned. If ACTRA approves the work permit, in addition to the permit fee, non-members and apprentice members are still required to pay a service charge.

Okay, how about auditions? Are they different from auditions for film or television?

Well, the basic auditioning process is more or less the same. Auditions, callbacks, wardrobe, everything but the work session itself must take place after school hours. However, things move at a faster pace with commercials. Your child could audition for a role in a commercial and find himself on set the following day.

If my child is called back for a second audition, will that be paid?

You bet! Anyone called back for a second and subsequent audition will be paid a callback fee. That's why it's so important, both for members and non-members to complete and initial the sign-in sheet. Be sure to check that the times are right and that you have correctly indicated if it's your child's second, third or fourth audition. The engager sends payments for callbacks to ACTRA. ACTRA then issues payments to the performers for each audition they were called back for. Also, if your child was detained for more than one hour at an audition, she'll be reimbursed for that too! Again, use your copy of the Commercial Agreement to find out the current rates for all this stuff.

When should we get the contract?

The agreement states you should get the contract (complete with details and signed by the engager) at least 15 minutes before your child starts to work. However, if your child has been engaged for above-minimum fees, it's your right to see a copy of the contract 24 hours before the shoot. Either way, you don't actually sign the contract until the end of the day.

Are commercial contracts really different from the film and television ones?

Yes they are. Since there are so many different variables, these contracts are designed to include all the information needed to determine the type of commercial and whether your child was contracted for minimum or above-minimum fees.

I guess the rules and rates are different for commercials than they are for film and television?

Well, there are many similarities. However, the Commercial Agreement breaks down the commercials into several different categories. This is one reason the contracts look a bit different.

Oh? Can you tell me about the different types of commercial rates?

Hmm, let's see. Okay, it goes something like this:

National: I guess you could say this is the standard rate. Don't be confused by the name. It doesn't mean it is a commercial that will be shown across the country.

Local & Regional Addendum: These are commercials that will air in specific, limited areas. This addendum doesn't apply to Montreal and Toronto. Commercials produced in these two cities must fall under the National rates.

Short Life: These are commercials advertising a special event, such as a sale or limited promotion that can only air for a short period of time.

Infomercial: An infomercial is any commercial that is three minutes or more in length.

Woah, so how do I figure out how commercials are paid then?

It's quite simple really. Performers are paid a session fee depending on the category of the role and the type of commercial. They are also paid use or residual fees based on where and how long it airs. Certain categories such as demonstrators and all background performers do not receive residual fees.

Okay, so can you tell me what some of the categories are?

Well let's see. For television, there's Principal, Silent-On-Camera (SOC), Voice-over, Stunt, Demonstrator, Singer, Background or Group Background performer. For radio, there's Single Voice or Solo Singer and Multiple Voice or Group Singer. So find out the category of your child's role, then refer to your trusty Commercial Agreement and figure out the session fee.

Is there a minimum time for these sessions?

Yup. The minimum call for minors engaged for a television commercial is eight hours. Voice-overs on television commercials are minimum four-hour calls. For radio it's a minimum two-hour call. By the way, a performer can be asked to do one or two cuts of a radio commercial for the minimum session fee, so long as it's during the same session and for the same sponsor.

Can they put my child on hold to work?

No. A performer is either booked or not booked for the engagement. Sometimes a casting director may tell your child's agent that your child is being considered for a role in a commercial and ask if his schedule is clear. However, you are under no obligation to hold a day in readiness if they ask. This is not the same thing as a holding call. The producer can issue a holding call for a specific day if weather is a factor. However, there is a holding call fee for each day the production is postponed due to weather.

And what happens if my child is asked back to fix something? Is that paid?

Yes, but listen to this: if your child is called back to correct a technical error or to make changes in order to comply with laws, government regulations or network or station codes, she will be paid a minimum recall fee. However, if it's for creative purposes, then she must be paid a full session fee. Check out the rates for both television and radio in the Commercial Agreement.

Can you explain residuals and how they're paid?

Basically, residuals are use fees. For a television commercial, the performer is paid a session fee for their recorded performance for each day of work or per commercial, whichever is greater. Once the commercial goes to air, the engager must also pay for the right to use it. How much the performer is paid in residuals depends on where and for how long the commercial is aired. They call that the 'cycle of use.'

What do you mean 'cycle of use'?

The cycle of use is the determined period of time for which the commercial is on the air or 'used,' so to speak. The most common cycle of use for both television and radio is 13 weeks.

How are the residuals for radio commercials paid?

The first cycle of use is included in the minimum session fee for a radio commercial. Residuals are only attracted on the second and subsequent cycle(s) of use.

You said residuals also depend on where the commercial is aired. Can you elaborate?

Sure. Each city in Canada has been assigned a unit value depending on the population. The larger the city's population, the larger the number of units assigned. Each unit represents a dollar value. Add the whole thing up and you have the total amount of the residual payment.

How will I know when the commercial is airing?

It is the obligation of the producer to make the appropriate payments. When you receive the payment, you will notice the dates for the cycle of use are indicated on the pay stub. Keep these for your records. Also, if you do manage to catch the commercial on air outside the paid cycle of use, be sure to jot down the time, the date and the channel. If you

don't receive a residual payment within the allowable time period, inform your child's agent or call the ACTRA office in your area. They will require the time, date and channel information in order to make enquiries about a payment.

Hmm... How long does it take to get paid for a commercial gig?

The engager must pay your child the session fee no later than 15 working days from the date of the production. The residuals must be paid no later than 20 working days from the date the commercial is first aired. By the way, all commercial payments are made payable to the performer and sent to the ACTRA office. ACTRA bills the producer for any late payment penalties.

Can you tell me what they mean by a 'double shoot'?

Oh, that's an easy one! A double shoot is when both the French and English versions are produced with principal performers speaking on-camera. All performers appearing in the English version sign ACTRA contracts and all performers appearing in the French version sign Uda (Union des Artistes) contracts. If a performer appears in both English and French versions, then two contracts apply. Some of the rates will be split 50/50 between the two. For example, wardrobe fees or travel time.

What if it's a Uda commercial, non-speaking roles... and they put an English voice-over?

Saaay... You are a smart cookie! Then that voice-over performer is contracted under ACTRA in the principal on-camera category instead of the voice-over rate. Pretty cool, eh?

One last thing... What do they mean by 'exclusivity' in commercials?

Exclusivity means for the minimum fee, a residual category performer agrees not to accept an engagement for a competitive product. The period of exclusivity is no less than 12 months from the last air date of the commercial. Competitive products would be, for example, *Pepsi* and *Coke*, *Ford* and *Chevrolet*, *McDonald's* and *Burger King* and so on. It is the engager's responsibility, prior to the audition, to indicate products and or services that would be considered conflicts. It is your job (and that of your child's agent) to inform them of any conflicts that your child may have.

What is a residual category performer?

A residual category performer is a performer who receives use fees. In the commercial agreement we call these residuals.

I'm afraid to ask... Is there anything else I should know?

Way more than we've covered in this section. Besides, this is just a guide to help you with the fundamentals. If you need more details, I'm afraid you're going to have to tackle the Commercial Agreement. Personally, I think it's written in code... Anyway, in the next chapter we are going to chat a bit about what happens when your child gets a voice gig. Ahem... !

CHAPTER 11

And Now a Word About Voice Work

Oh, the versatility of the off-camera performer! Off-camera performers do all sorts of interesting stuff from recording the original voice of animated characters to dubbing live action. They do off-camera narration or commentary, lip synchronization and even stuff like recording crowd noises. Pretty cool, eh? This chapter will give you a rough idea of what to expect at a recording session and some tips on what to do while you're there. Since lots of kids are involved in this vital part of the entertainment industry, I've also included some regulations and thrown in a few explanations of industry terminology for good measure.

What is an off-camera performer?

Exactly that! An off-camera performer is a performer who acts out a role or character off-screen. Their voice is heard, but they're not seen. (Hey, that rhymes!)

My child has been booked for some voice work. Where are these sessions done?

Most voice work is done in a recording studio. The studio is a sound-proof room divided by a glass wall. Your child will sit or stand on one side of the glass where there are microphones and headphones. The sound technician sits on the other side in front of a confounding array of recording equipment.

Sounds kind of scary. Will he be all alone in there?

Not necessarily. Sometimes there's more than one performer at a time. Sometimes the director is in the booth with the performer, but sometimes she sits with the technician on the other side of the glass.

Where should I be while my child is working?

Usually, stage parents sit just outside of the studio in a sitting area. If at all possible, don't bring grandma, grandpa, the rest of the kids and the dog. There's just no room!

I don't know about this... Shouldn't I be inside the studio with my child?

Here's the thing. Recording studios are usually kind of small with not a whole lot of room to move around. Most directors, technicians and even the kids find it distracting to have a bunch of people in the studio. However, if your child tells you he'd be more

comfortable with you in sight, you could certainly ask the director if you could sit quietly in the back somewhere.

Do you have any other tips for me?

Hmm, let's see... Don't shuffle paper or crinkle candy wrappers. Make sure your child isn't wearing clothes that make rubbing or squeaking noises that may be picked up by the microphone. Remember this is a sound studio. Make sure your child makes a trip to the bathroom before the session. For heaven's sake turn off your cell phone... And be careful with that coffee! Keep water on hand for dry throats, and an apple can work wonders when your child's mouth is gummy.

I get the picture. Say, are there supposed to be contracts for these sessions?

Yes. All engagements under the IPA (with the exception of dubbing) must have an ACTRA contract and there must be a time sheet! Make sure you verify the information on both the time sheet and the contract before you sign them.

What about voice work for commercials?

The actual recording sessions are pretty much the same and you must be provided with a commercial contract at the session. Don't forget, commercials are done under the Commercial Agreement and have completely different rates, minimum calls, etc. For specifics regarding commercials, just take a peek at **Chapter 10 Kids and Commercials – A Whole Other Agreement**.

Okay, now for the fun stuff... What the heck is a 'walla' session?

Sounds silly doesn't it? But imagine a courtroom scene with a few people mumbling, "wallawallawalla," and voilà! You have a crowd conversing in a low tone. Neat huh? Sometimes this is also referred to as a loop group.

Actually, a walla session is vocal background work, creating atmosphere for a scene. It's paid at the off-camera, actor category rate for a minimum four-hour call plus use fees.

How about lip sync, post sync and ADR... What's the difference?

A most excellent question! You would be surprised how often people get these terms mixed up.

Lip sync The voice synchronization by a performer off-camera to match the on-camera performance of another performer (minimum four-hour call plus use fees).

Post sync The voice synchronization by a performer of her own voice to match her own performance (minimum two-hour call plus use fees).

ADR (Additional Dialogue Replacement) Means the same as post sync and is the term most often used when booking a performer to add to, or correct his own dialogue (minimum two-hour call plus use fees).

Is there a difference between ADR for animation and ADR for film and television?

Both ADR sessions are a minimum two-hour call, but the rates for the session fees are different and there are no use fees for ADR in animation. Unlike ADR for live action productions, in animation, you may perform ADR for more than one program or episode in a single session for one session fee. In other words, doubling does not apply to ADR.

Okay, cool. Umm... What's 'doubling'?

Doubling is when a performer is engaged to do more than one role in a single session. Sorry, participation in crowd noises or incidental sounds during a regular session is not considered a performance. I know that's a lot of information so you might want to dust off your trusty copy of the IPA and check out the rates for ADR and doubling.

I just might do that. Now let's talk bumpers... What are bumpers anyway?

Bumpers are phrases like "Stay tuned" or "We'll be right back," stuff that doesn't identify a particular broadcaster or station. In animation, these can be recorded during a regularly scheduled session for no additional compensation, but if your child is booked solely for the purpose of making bumpers, she must be paid at the principal rate for a four-hour minimum call. In live action productions, bumpers have an entirely different fee. Good thing you just opened your little green book!

What are the minimum fees for voice work?

Let me see... For live action, the fees are based on the categories principal or actor, and the session is a minimum four-hour call. Additional work up to eight hours is paid at an hourly rate and work beyond eight hours is paid at an overtime rate. All payments are plus applicable use fees, of course.

For animation, the fees are the same as above, unless the production is less than 10 minutes running time.

So, the minimum fees for short animated productions are different?

Yup. For animated productions of 10 minutes or less running time, there are no categories, just a minimum fee that includes one hour of work and an hourly rate if the work goes beyond one hour.

What about narrators and commentators then?

Hmm... Let's see if I can explain this. Ahem... The fee for narrators and commentators is determined by dividing the production into 10-minute segments. For example, let's say the entire length of the production is a total of 30 minutes. If your child's voice is heard in the first 10-minute segment and the last 10-minute segment, he will be paid for two 10-minute segments. There are different fees for the first, second, third, fourth and subsequent segments. Each segment comes with one hour of work time and any time in excess of one hour is paid at an hourly rate. Does that make sense to you? Me neither... Better look it up in the little green book or call our buddies at the ACTRA office.

Is it true that sometimes the producer can get a discount?

Yes, some productions are eligible for discounts, but these discounts depend on the production meeting certain criteria. They are not automatic. The performer must agree to these discounts and they must be clearly indicated on the contract. If you have trouble finding the clauses regarding discounts in your little green book, remember you can always call ACTRA.

Can you give me the skinny on dubbing now?

Dubbing is the voice synchronization off-camera to match a performance in a production originally produced in a language other than English.

Some say dubbing is more technically challenging than other voice work. There are several methods that are used. For example, your child may have to watch the scene she is dubbing while a rhythm band moves across the screen. This band displays the text (words or sounds) that your child will have to match up with the character on the screen. This is not easy, particularly if a child's reading skills are not up to snuff.

Yikes! Sounds really difficult. So, how are these dubbing sessions paid?

Okay, there are two separate fee schedules (rates), one schedule for dubbing live action and one for dubbing animation. For both, the fees are based on the length of the booking, or the length of time actually spent recording or the line count, whichever is greater. Also, dubbing payments are not subject to use fees.

And there are no contracts for dubbing engagements?

That's right. What you'll have at the session is a **Performer Dubbing Time Sheet**. That sheet along with the performer's payment is sent to the ACTRA office. The Performer Dubbing Time Sheet acts as both the performer's work report and the contract so make sure all the information on that sheet is correct before you sign it! Just so you know, there's a whole separate section for dubbing in the IPA. Take some time and look it over.

Anything else I should know about voice work?

Hmm... Let me think. Well there is something I'd like to mention. Sessions for voice work are frequently scheduled during school hours. Because these sessions are often only about two to four hours in length, the producer is not under any obligation to provide a tutor. You and the kids are on your own when it comes to keeping up with school work.

The next chapter covers everything you need to know about your child becoming a full member of ACTRA. Some seriously cool stuff coming up!

CHAPTER 12

Full ACTRA Membership – Who's Eligible, How Much, and How It All Works!

You made it. Yay! Welcome to the ACTRA family. Whether it took a while or it happened quickly, getting that last credit is always a thrill. It's an honour and a privilege to qualify for full membership in ACTRA. Your child will join her peers as an honest-to-goodness, bona fide, full-fledged, card-carrying, feet don't fail me now, full member of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists. This affords him all the bells and whistles that accompany ACTRA full membership, including voting rights. Once the celebrating is over, you and your young 'artist' will need to know a few things. This next chapter explains the steps for application for full membership, dues, producers' contributions and other info on what must be done once your child has met the criteria.

Criteria? What criteria...

Remember in Chapter 5, we talked about the credits? An apprentice member must accumulate three credits in order to become a full member. Only Canadian citizens and landed residents can apply for apprentice or full membership.

Phew! I thought I'd forgotten something. Whoah, don't scare me like that!

Sorry (sheepish), but you know, there are ways other than the apprentice membership program that one can become a full member of ACTRA, but let's talk about full membership for performers coming up through the apprentice program first, okay?

Okay, sure. So what is step number one?

As I mentioned earlier, ACTRA is moving towards digital documents but at the time of this writing, when your child receives their third credit as an apprentice, you must go to your ACTRA branch office in person to fill out the application for full membership as soon as possible. ACTRA will provide your child with a card with his or her full membership number and the validation date.

Why do we have to apply right away?

You have to apply promptly because your child will be given a new membership number. It is very important that this new number appear on all future contracts. This number is used to credit contributions to his retirement plan and insurance, as well as to track other pertinent information. Also, if an apprentice member does not apply for full membership upon application for their last qualifying permit, their file will be closed!

Dare I ask how much this is going to cost?

Okay, there is a one-time initiation fee but don't freak out. ACTRA deducts any qualifying permit fees that you paid (including any fees you paid for membership training courses, if offered by your branch). That way, each qualifying permit fee you paid as an apprentice member reduces the outstanding balance of the initiation fee.

That sounds fair. Any other benefits to becoming a full member?

As a full member your child will not have to pay for any more permit fees! Yahoo! Better still, your child will now be keeping that 3% (4% for commercials) of the gross that was automatically deducted from her payment. It will now be contributed to her retirement plan along with the portion the producer must contribute. We'll talk about that in a moment.

Do we have to pay it all at once?

Flexible payment and installment options are available, but this may differ a little from branch to branch.

So we pay the initiation fee and the annual membership dues... and that's it?

Pretty much. Remember though, in addition to the annual dues, members still have to pay working dues. At the time of this printing, working dues are 2.25% of her gross income which is automatically deducted from every payment she receives.

Is someone going to let me know when we will have to pay the dues again?

An invoice goes out to all members in March. If you do not receive this invoice it means that something's wrong! Contact your ACTRA branch to make sure your contact information is up to date. I mean good grief, what if a residual cheque is waiting for you? And by the way, it's your responsibility (not your agent's) to make sure your child's dues are paid and that your contact information is up to date. I'm just saying...

What happens if we don't pay the annual dues?

Your child will be put on suspension and will not be allowed to work during the suspension period. To regain status as a member in good standing, you must pay the amount owing (maximum two years' dues) plus a reinstatement fee.

Oh? So what happens if we accept an engagement while on suspension?

Not a good idea. Any member who works while on suspension will be fined.

Could my child lose his membership if I don't pay the annual dues?

Unfortunately, yes he can. After a member has been suspended for non-payment of dues for a continuous period of more than two years, she is sent a letter indicating that her membership will be resigned unless payment is received and her membership brought up to date. That is to say, she will no longer be a member of the union (ACTRA).

Is there any way to get it back?

There is, but it costs a fortune. His membership can be reactivated by paying a fee plus three years of outstanding annual dues, and any outstanding working dues. Or they can start all over again through the apprentice member program.

Gosh, that doesn't seem fair. Isn't there anything they can do to avoid this?

Well sure, remain a member in good standing and pay the yearly dues!

Okay, okay, but what if I know in advance that my child will not be working for a few years? It's going to be difficult to pay the annual dues. Isn't there anything I can do?

I'm glad you asked that question because there is something you can do! Full members who have been in good standing for at least one year can arrange to go on withdrawal, that is to say, become an inactive member for a period of time.

Hmm, I'm listening... What is 'withdrawal'?

This is so cool. Okay, say you plan to leave the country or your child will be focusing on school for the next few years, whatever. To arrange to go on withdrawal you must contact ACTRA and explain that your child will not be working for a while. You just need to pay 25% of the basic annual dues and any outstanding working dues to have your child's membership become inactive or frozen until she's in a position to work again.

How do we reactivate the membership?

Just call the ACTRA office and let them know you would like to reactivate your child's membership. At that time, you have to pay the current basic yearly dues.

What are some of the other ways a performer can become a member of ACTRA?

Well, for instance, under the reciprocal agreement, performers who are members of Equity (CAEA – Canadian Actors' Equity Association) can become full members with their first film, television or radio engagement by paying a reduced initiation fee plus annual dues. Even an engagement as a background performer would apply.

Then there are those performers who can join under 'exceptional circumstances' by submitting their application for approval to their local ACTRA branch council. Once the application is approved, they must pay an initiation fee plus annual dues to be a full member. Performers affiliated with any recognized international performers' union can also join with their first ACTRA contract for a role in a residual category. For example, if they are members of SAG (Screen Actors Guild) or AFTRA (American Federation of Television and Radio Artists) and have landed immigrant status or Canadian citizenship, they can

become full members by paying an initiation fee plus annual dues.

You've mentioned retirement plan deductions and the producer's contributions to insurance and retirement. Can you talk about that now?

Sure. As I mentioned earlier, your child is now entitled to that 3% (4% for commercials) of the gross fee that was automatically deducted from each of their payments. Awesome, right? That money will now be put into a retirement plan for them! In addition, the producer will contribute a total of 12% of your child's gross fees to his insurance and retirement plan. These percentages are negotiated between ACTRA and the producers' associations during collective bargaining, so they can change from time to time and as I keep saying, check your copy of the current IPA, NCA or other agreement for the latest numbers.

Wow! You mean on top of everything else, my child will get an additional 12% or more of their gross earnings?

Hold on now! You won't see it reflected in the payment. The producer sends that money directly to ACTRA with a report indicating what was deducted from the performer's payment and how much the producer has contributed. These monies are handled by ACTRA's insurance company of record, **Actra Fraternal Benefit Society (AFBS)**.

Wait, wait... Actra Fraternal? Is this another organization?

As a matter of fact it is. These folks watch over the insurance and retirement benefits for ACTRA members.

Oh, so if I have any questions about my child's retirement plan or insurance, I should contact Actra Fraternal?

Exactly! They send stuff out to members throughout the year regarding their retirement plans and how the insurance thing works.

Anything else I should know about full membership stuff?

That pretty much covers the full membership deal, except to remind you to keep on top of the annual dues thing. It is really, really important to keep ACTRA's database updated with any changes to your child's records. I mean, what if a cheque came in and they only had your old address on file... bummer.

In the meantime, if you want to know more about insurance and retirement, read the next chapter. It will give you a general overview on all that stuff. Frankly, (yawn) not the most exciting part of being a stage parent... Right up there with vacuuming in my books. But if we don't watch out for our kids' money, who will?

CHAPTER 13

Actra Fraternal Benefit Society – A Whole Other Organization

Most stage parents get involved with the entertainment industry because their kids want to act and think it would be fun. So when the big question is where to send the kids to summer camp, the last thing on their minds is a retirement plan or insurance benefits for their eight-year-old. It's tough enough for moms and dads to figure out how to finance their own golden years. Nevertheless, as full members of ACTRA, kids are entitled to the same benefits as adult members. This chapter is designed to inform you about a most excellent organization that was created to provide security for performers in Canada, who would otherwise have no insurance or retirement plan to rely upon.

Okay, my first question is, what is Actra Fraternal and what do they do?

Actra Fraternal Benefit Society (AFBS) is an insurance company that was created by ACTRA in 1975 to provide and administer Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs) and insurance plans for ACTRA members. It is important for you to understand that although it is dependent on ACTRA for contributions, AFBS is a completely separate organization.

Oh really? So where do they get the money to run this organization?

Good question! The collective agreements that ACTRA negotiates on your child's behalf, always include insurance and retirement (I&R) contributions. When ACTRA is bargaining with the producers, they always try to ensure that there is an increase not only in the rates, but also the amount that the engager has to pay into I&R. This money is collected by ACTRA and sent to AFBS. That means that all the benefit money a full member earns goes to her benefits directly. Your child receives full credit for all insurance and retirement contributions received on her behalf at AFBS. The administration of the insurance and retirement plans is funded by both insurance premiums and non-member income received from producers. You see, producers also pay into Fraternal when they engage non-members. Any surplus at year-end at Actra Fraternal goes back to full members as an insurance subsidy. Which is a cool thing because it reduces the members' cost of

insurance. Much of the cost to administer the RRSP program is paid from non-member income with members paying a very small MER (management expense ratio).

So how does Actra Fraternal know when someone becomes a full member?

When a performer fills out the Full Membership Application, he's issued a membership number. ACTRA then forwards the information to AFBS for their records.

Ah, I see. How does AFBS know when a member has a contribution to their RRSP and insurance plan?

Okay, as I mentioned earlier, every time your child works under an ACTRA contract, the folks in the accounting department of each production deduct a percentage from your child's fees to go into their retirement plan and insurance (about 3%). Meanwhile, the producer contributes an additional percentage. The percentage paid by the producer is negotiated by ACTRA during bargaining of the IPA, so check your little green book for the current contribution percentages. The producer sends the money directly to ACTRA with a report indicating how much the producer has contributed and how much was deducted from your child's fee. ACTRA ensures that the funds received are correct and forwards the contributions plus your child's file to AFBS.

Are the contributions for work under the Commercial Agreement the same as under the IPA?

Just like they do with the IPA, ACTRA negotiates with the advertiser and advertising agencies' associations to determine I&R contribution percentages. Each ACTRA agreement specifies the amounts that producers must deduct and contribute. Check the NCA if you want to find out the current percentages. They differ very slightly from the IPA.

Hmm, how about the working dues? Does some of that go to Actra Fraternal as well?

Nope. The working dues and annual dues are what your child pays to be a member of the union.

Wow, what a lot of paperwork! How do they keep track of all this stuff?

ACTRA keeps track of everything and sends it to Actra Fraternal. Then Actra Fraternal uses your child's ACTRA membership number to keep track of their RRSP and insurance. That's why it's so important that the correct membership number appears on all your child's contracts.

So, how do I know how much money is in my child's retirement plan?

First of all, all contributions to I&R are in the ACTRA Membership System (AMS), so you can easily track them. Check out the ACTRA website at www.actra.ca and go to Work History.

When your child's retirement plan account is in excess of \$2,500 you will receive a quarterly statement from AFBS. It will tell you how much money has been contributed and what the plan is worth. For accounts under \$2,500, Statements are sent annually at the end of each calendar year. Prior to the end of February each year, they will also send you confirmation of contributions received for income tax purposes. A further contribution receipt is sent towards the end of March and reflects contributions made during the first 60 days of the current year. Information about the program, as well as dates on which important information has been mailed are also available on the AFBS website, www.actrafrat.com.

How do I find out about my child's insurance coverage?

AFBS will send out an insurance package to your attention as the parent or guardian once they have received notification from ACTRA that your child is now a full member. As part of the benefits to its members, AFBS provides \$10,000 of both life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance immediately and at no premium cost to your child. (Residents of Quebec are provided with \$12,500 of life insurance only.) This package also includes a copy of the full members' insurance brochure which you should review.

Each March you will receive a statement of insurance benefits that shows the insurance benefits available to your child for that current benefit year (i.e. from March 1 to the end of February of the next year). In certain situations there are options which you can choose on your child's behalf and there is a timeframe by which AFBS must be notified of your request. The timeframe is noted on the statement of insurance benefits and the benefits staff at AFBS are available to discuss any questions you might have about your child's insurance coverage.

Is there a limit to how much a producer contributes?

Well, this differs from agreement to agreement. For example, under the IPA, the producer's total contribution to a performer's retirement plan is based on the child's gross income, maxing out after they earn more than \$100,000 per production, per year. So, a performer's contributions from one producer could max out on one production and not on another in a given year.

Suppose we don't want a retirement plan for our child? Couldn't we get the producer's portion included in the payment?

Nope. One of the neat things about being a full member is that under the collective agreement the producer must pay insurance and retirement contributions on behalf of all members. That's why every full member has a retirement plan account and all deductions and contributions are made automatically. Accommodating the individual wishes of each performer would be an impossible task!

Is there any way for us to have access to this money if need be?

Well, the whole point of a retirement plan is to put money aside for your child's future. Cashing in an RRSP is never recommended. Besides, AFBS has an excellent track record for making very profitable investments for members. However, if you absolutely need to access this money, you may request a refund for your child. There is a form on the AFBS website www.actrafrat.com for this purpose. Remember though, AFBS will withhold the appropriate taxes and you must report this money as income in the year the refund is made.

Okay, and what if I know ahead of time that my child will have an over-contribution. Is there any way to stop the contributions?

You bet! You know that Notice of Assessment the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) sends you after you file your income tax? It indicates the maximum RRSP contribution for the following year. Send a copy of your child's Notice of Assessment to AFBS and they will limit the contributions to your child's RRSP and refund any over-contributions. However, members are allowed to contribute 18% of their earned income to the current CRA maximum. Plus they're allowed a \$2,000 over-contribution without incurring any penalty.

So what happens if we do make an over-contribution?

A Canada Revenue Agency T3012 form has to be filled out and filed with your child's income tax return. The government approves it and sends it back to you. You send it to AFBS and they will refund the money without penalty.

Fair enough. Will AFBS send me some thing to file with my child's income tax return?

Yes they will. In February of each year, AFBS sends tax receipts to all members showing the amount of contributions made to their RRSP for the previous year. These tax receipts must be filed with your child's income tax return. The receipt for the first 60 days of the year that can be used for either the prior or current calendar year is also issued before the end of March.

And what about T4s? Who issues them?

Your child should receive a T4 from each production he's worked on during a given year. Remember, the producer's contributions will be reflected in the gross income indicated on the T4 as a taxable benefit.

Let's talk about the insurance now. How does that work?

Okay, here it is in a nutshell. The total contributions made by the producers in your child's name over the course of the calendar year will determine your child's insurance benefit level for the following benefit year (commencing each March 1). If you would like to have more details about how the benefit level is determined and what sort of things are covered by the program take a look at your child's Insurance brochure (the same information is also available on the AFBS website www.actrafrat.com) or, feel free to call. They're a nice bunch over there at AFBS and will answer any questions you may have.

Say, does AFBS take care of the use fees thing for performers too?

Nope. That would be the ACTRA Performers' Rights Society, more commonly known as ACTRA PRS. Take a peek at the next chapter. It's all about the workings of use fees, what the performer is entitled to and when. It's pretty interesting stuff. So grab another cup of coffee and let's see if we can make sense of the whole thing.

CHAPTER 14

ACTRA Performers' Rights Society – Making Sense of Use Fees Or, Why We Love ACTRA PRS

Ya gotta love this gang. Even their name is cool... **ACTRA Performers' Rights Society**, champions for the rights of ACTRA members everywhere! Nutnanana...! Okay, so I'm a little punchy. I've been at this for a while and I may be losing my grip on reality. ACTRA PRS is the organization responsible for tracking, reporting and ultimately remitting payment to those performers who are entitled to use fees for their work. The following chapter contains the basics on what use fees are and who gets 'em.

Okay, so how come this is the first time I've heard the name ACTRA Performers' Rights Society?

Possibly because ACTRA PRS only handles the payments for use fees that are owed to a performer after a certain length of time. In other words, ACTRA PRS's main role in the process starts after most everyone has forgotten about it.

So can you go over what use fees are again?

Of course. First of all, when a producer contracts a performer, the producer has to declare the intended use of the production. There are several options from which the producer can choose. You can find out about all of them in your **IPA in the section B3 – Declared Use**. So, depending on which option is chosen, the producer must pay the performer a certain amount of money, for a certain amount of time, for the right to exhibit or use the performer's recorded performance. That is what is referred to as 'use fees'.

Whoa, this sounds really complicated.

Hey, you've figured out everything so far haven't you? Check out Section B in the IPA to

get the full picture and trust that the big cheeses know what they're doing. Remember you can always call the folks at ACTRA PRS. They're happy to answer any of your questions. For now, we can discuss a few of the more straightforward options to explain how this stuff works.

Okay, can you give me an example?

There is an option that is used more often than most. It's called the prepayment option. Currently in the IPA, the prepayment option allows the producer to prepay the performer at the time of production for the right to use her recorded performance. This payment covers use of the particular performance for a four-year period from the date the project is first released in theatres or aired on television, whatever is outside the 'declared use.' They call that the 'residual market' in the IPA (e.g. theatrical use is declared and afterwards it is released to Pay-TV. Pay-TV would then be the residual market).

Sooo, how much is the prepayment?

For now, the prepayment option is 130% of the net fees for theatrical use and 105% for television and other productions.

Hmm, even outside Canada or the U.S.?

Yup. They can sell it, show it, or air it wherever they want. They can make as much money as they please with it, without incurring any additional payments to the performer within that four-year period.

So what happens once the four years are up?

Ah! That's when our good friends at ACTRA PRS arrive on the scene. You see, once the four years are up, the producer must pay the performers 3.6% of the distributors' gross revenue on the monies earned after the four years. ACTRA PRS keeps track of all the sales and makes sure the performers are paid for everything they are entitled to. Don't ask me how they do this, but they do. Actually, they do it through broadcast tracking, research and a good rapport with distributors and producers.

Yikes! 3.6% of the distributors' gross revenue, that sounds like it could be a lot of money!

Yes well, that depends on the sales and how well the program is received around the world. The producer calculates 3.6% of the distributors' gross revenue and sends it off to ACTRA PRS. This money is divided up amongst all the performers in the production based on each performer's original fees. This is a very simplified explanation. For more details, you can look at **Distribution of Payment** in **Section B** in your trusty IPA. Or do what I do, just call ACTRA PRS!

Can you give me another kind of option a producer can choose to pay the use fees?

I was afraid you were going to ask that. Okay, are you ready? A producer can choose something called the **advance option**. Again, at the time of production, the producer

may pay the performer an advance as a down-payment against their share in the distributors' gross revenue. Basically it works like this:

If the producer elects to pay an advance of 100% of the net fees, the performer participates in 3.6% of the distributors' gross revenue.

Performer's Advance	Performer's participation in Distributors' Gross Revenue
75% of Net Fees	4.6%
50%	5.6%
25%	6.6%

Once the producer has recouped or earned through sales the total amount of money paid out for use fees to all the performers at the time of production, the performer receives the appropriate percentage of their share of the distributors' gross revenue. That percentage of all on-going sales is sent to ACTRA PRS and ACTRA PRS divides and distributes the money to the performers. There are exceptions to these rules, however. If a show is made for the Internet or some other new media, or if they move a show from conventional TV or film to, say, the Internet, then the terms are different. Remember, these are simplified examples. Check your IPA Section E for the details. And if this is giving you a headache, you can always call ACTRA PRS with any questions.

What about the 25% of the gross that will be held back for minors... What's that all about?

This is the best thing ever. **The Minor's Trust** is administered by ACTRA PRS and works like this: once your child's gross lifetime earnings have reached a total of \$5,000, an amount equal to 25% of the gross earnings of each payment will be held back and deposited into a trust fund. This money will remain there for your child until he reaches the age of 18.

Sounds like a great idea! Will I have a say in how this money is invested?

You certainly do. As I said, ACTRA PRS will place the money in a trust fund, in your child's name. ACTRA PRS administers the trust, but you elect how it will be invested. Remember, you can always talk to ACTRA PRS about your investment options.

Can I opt out of this plan on behalf of my child?

Only if there is an existing irrevocable trust already set up for your child that is of equal or greater value and you have executed an Exemption Form obtained from ACTRA PRS.

Yes, but can I access this money before my child turns 18... in an emergency situation, for example?

Don't forget, this plan is in place to guarantee that no matter the circumstance, each child will have at least 25% of their gross income set aside for her until she reaches adulthood. That being said, you can access this money in an emergency situation. It's done through a submission process with the board of ACTRA PRS. Call the folks at ACTRA PRS to get the specifics.

When my child reaches 18, how does he access this money?

When your child reaches the age of 18, ACTRA PRS will close out his account and send the funds directly him.

What about the kids who work on union productions with permits only? Does the plan apply to non-members too?

It does indeed. This program is in place to protect all minors working in ACTRA's jurisdiction!

Is this an optional thing? I mean, suppose I feel I can do a better job at managing my own child's money?

You must provide proof that you are setting aside at least 25% of your child's earnings, and you must satisfy ACTRA PRS that an irrevocable trust has been established. The important thing to remember is, ACTRA must protect all the kids working under their jurisdiction. In order to do so, there must be a procedure that will safeguard all minors across the board. This method will guarantee that no matter what the circumstances, each child will have at least 25% of his gross income set aside for him until he reaches adulthood.

Well (stretch) it sounds like ACTRA PRS has a pretty good handle on things. Anything else?

That just about does it. Keep in mind though, these are only the basics. If you want to understand the bigger picture, you are going to have to dig up your copy of the IPA and read it. Okay, so it will never make the bestseller list and you may have to use your secret decoder ring. Just remember you can always call ACTRA PRS or check out the ACTRA PRS information on the ACTRA website at www.actra.ca/prs. You can also email ACTRA PRS at prs@actra.ca. They're there for you!

And that's all I have to say. Except, break a leg stage parent! Remember, you have a lot to offer the film and television industry. Use the tools provided in this guide. Trust your instincts and your good old common sense. Do it as long as your children are having fun, because they are just kids after all!

Oh, wait... One more thing... **That's a wrap!**

Contact ACTRA!

ACTRA National

416.489.1311
1.800.387.3516
www.actra.ca

**ACTRA Performers'
Rights Society**

416.489.1311
1.800.387.3516
www.actra.ca/prs

UBCP/ACTRA

604.689.0727
www.ubcp.com

ACTRA Alberta

403.228.3123
1.866.913.3123
www.actraalberta.com

ACTRA Saskatchewan

306.757.0885
www.actrasask.com

ACTRA Manitoba

204.339.9750
www.actramanitoba.ca

ACTRA Toronto

416.928.2278
www.actratoronto.com

ACTRA Ottawa

613.565.2168
www.actraottawa.ca

ACTRA Montreal

514.844.3318
www.actramontreal.ca

ACTRA Maritimes

902.420.1404
www.actramaritimes.ca

**ACTRA Newfoundland/
Labrador**

709.722.0430
www.actranewfoundland.ca

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

(2002)

So many people have helped me stay sane over the past few years – my thanks to each and every one. Thank you to all the stage parents who attended the Stage Mom Seminars. Your contribution to this guide is immeasurable.

Now, there are some people I must single out:

Lynne Adams, past ACTRA Montreal President, for knowing a good thing when she saw it and bringing The Stage Mom Survival Guide to the attention of the Powers That Be. Council member extraordinaire Susie Almgren for getting them to listen to me when I couldn't get their attention. Council member Maria Bircher for championing my cause. The awesome ACTRA Montreal branch stewards, Daintry Dalton, Claire Martell, Carmela Algeri and Assistant Branch Rep. Micheline Russo for their wisdom, their patience and their willingness to go above and beyond the call of duty. ACTRA's Eastern Regional Executive Director Raymond Guardia for giving me credit for being more than just a Stage Mom. ACTRA National President Thor Bishopric for recognizing the potential of The Stage Mom Survival Guide and his unrelenting resolve to get the darn thing published. Cheryl Alleyne for patiently sitting with me and explaining the membership section of the guide when her desk was piled to the rafters with far more pressing matters. The Montreal branch staff; Randy Duniz, a gifted writer; the indefatigable Shannon Joutel; Donna Tinman, Carmy Renda and Cheryl too, for always being there to answer my questions and for calling me up and singing "You are my Sunshine" when I sent them cookies. National Organizer Gary Saxe from whom we expect great things. Chris Kelsey-Epstein for listening to me whine once a year, and the rest of the gang at ACTRA PRS for their invaluable help with the ACTRA Performers' Rights Society section. Jane Nelson of Actra Fraternal without whose help I would never have figured out the insurance and retirement thing. And Kim Hume at ACTRA National communications for actually getting the job done.

A very special thanks to my partner in crime, Montreal ACTRA steward the unsinkable and seriously cool Molly Ann Rothschild, whose determination to fight the good fight for young performers and their parents surpasses even my own.

And most of all my two kids, for maturing into two remarkable human beings in spite of my dubious parenting, or should I say stage-parenting skills. Unassuming and kind yet unmistakably professional, their respect and graciousness toward fellow artists and production crews both on set and off speaks volumes. Without them, I would not have the privilege of being a stage mom and there would be no *Stage Mom Survival Guide*.

Well done Jay and Taylor... Well done.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Part Deux (2012)

ACTRA Toronto Film and Television Steward Barbara Larose (IPA) and ACTRA Toronto Commercial Steward Cathy Wendt (NCA). With their expert skill and knowledge, Barbara and Cathy tirelessly read through every word of the sections pertaining the rules and regulations to ensure that my interpretation was accurate and stayed true to the spirit of the collective agreements.

ACTRA Toronto Children's Advocate and council member Taborah "Tabby" Johnson. Tabby's wealth of experience and understanding of the needs of inexperienced stage parents brought a unique perspective and intelligence to the guide.

ACTRA National Treasurer Theresa Tova, a tsunami of Canadian child advocacy. Theresa's determination and commitment to ensure the protection of child performers is legendary and she brought her elemental powers to the project bringing *The Stage Mom/Parent Survival Guide* to a whole new level.

ACTRA Montreal Assistant Branch Representative Carmela Algeri. If there ever was anyone who deserved to be called a superhero, it would be my long-time colleague and dear friend Carmela. Her contribution to both the first edition in 2002 and this revised edition was and remains immeasurable. Once again Carmela carved out time from her ridiculously busy schedule to assist me at great length. I am humbled by her knowledge, her wisdom and her noble spirit. She is truly the 'gold standard'.

A very special thank you to ACTRA National Director of Research Marit Stiles. Updating *The Stage Mom/Parent Survival Guide* was a collaborative effort that required consensus from quite a few individuals at ACTRA, ACTRA PRS and AFBS. Tough job. Marit was the driving force behind this Herculean task and did it with stalwart determination, limitless patience and mindful appreciation of my efforts to reach out to other stage parents with my own voice.



ACTRA **YOUNG PERFORMERS WORK REPORT**

Performer's Name: _____ Parent/Guardian: _____

PROJECT TITLE: _____ PRODUCTION: _____

Check appropriate box Lip Synch Post Synch Narration ADR

DATE	TRAVEL TO		BREAKFAST		CALL TIME	OVERTIME Starts at
	Start	Finish	Yes	No		

(for office purposes only)

Snacks served

TUTORING HRS DATE	TIME IN TIME OUT		TIME IN TIME OUT		TIME IN TIME OUT		TIME IN TIME OUT	

Name of Tutor _____

Signature _____

SAMPLE

ACTRA No. _____

DATE: _____

Animation Fittings (Fittings should be after school hours. See IPA A2713.)

MAKE-UP		MEAL BREAK		WRAP TIME	TRAVEL TO		PERFORMER INITIALS	PRODUCTION INITIALS
Start	Finish	Start	Finish		Start	Finish		

FYI:A2707 2 years and under 3 to 5 years 6 to 11 years 12 to 15 years	Time before Camera or Rehearsal 1 15 consecutive minutes (minimum break 20 minutes) 30 consecutive minutes (minimum break 15 minutes) 45 consecutive minutes (minimum break 10 minutes) 60 consecutive minutes (minimum break 10 minutes)
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SUBJECTS COVERED	TUTORING HOURS	HOURS BANKED		TUTOR'S INITIALS
	Daily Total	Saved +	Used -	
	TOTAL HOURS	TOTAL HOURS BANKED		

FORMAT RÉSUMÉ

YOUR NAME

ACTRA/UDA/SAG <---union affiliation if any

HEIGHT: WEIGHT: EYE COLOUR: HAIR: D.O.B: <---children only

FILM & TELEVISION

BIG TIME TV SERIES LEAD SCHMOOZ PROD/JOHN DOE
HOLLYWOOD MOVIE PRINCIPAL DREAMWORKS/S. SPEILBERG
ANOTHER MOVIE ACTOR CREEPY PROD/R. BARUCHEL

VOICE WORK <---optional

MOO THE CAT ACTOR AVENGE PROD/RANDY SMILE
BY THE SEA NARRATOR CBC RADIO/ GAIL DIRECTOR

COMMERCIALS

...complete list available upon request <---if any

THEATRE

A REALLY FUNKY PLAY JESSIE
CENTAUR THEATRE/G. MCCALL
HERE AND THERE DONNA
HOMETOWN THEATRE/H.STONE

TRAINING

Dawson College Professional Theatre Program (DOME) – Graduate
Acting: Bertrand A. Henry/Winston Sutton; Improv: Barbara Kelly/Fred Ward; Movement: Cynthia Hendrikson;
Stage Combat: Kimberly Barfuss; Camera Tech.: Gary Plaxton; Text: Fred Ward/Victor Knight; Voice: W. Steve
Lecky/Stephane Zarov/Jude Beny The Studio - On Camera Acting Workshops with Suzanna LeNir;
Voice/Speech/Dialect training – Julie Lenardon; Acting Workshop – Warren Robertson; Etc., etc., etc.

SPECIAL SKILLS AND INTERESTS

Dialects, Singing (Soprano) Classical, Broadway, Pop, Piano, Weapons handling, Stage Combat, rapier and small
sword technique for the stage, Jazz, Hip Hop, Modern Dance, Stand-Up, Taekwondo (Black Belt) Horseback riding,
Champion swimmer, Skateboarding, etc., etc., etc.

123 My Street, Anytown, Ontario A2B 3C4
Ph 123 445 6789 • Fax 514 789 1012 (until placed with agent)

SAMPLE

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About the Author

Robyne Baruchel has her tongue planted firmly in her cheek when she refers to herself as **Just a Stage Mom**. She knows that anyone who knows anything about parenting children in the entertainment industry will recognize the absurdity of such a moniker. The parent of two professional actors, Robyne is an avid writer and has been a regular contributor to the ACTRA Montreal Branch newsletter. Robyne left her career as a talent agent to implement her evil plan to use her hard-earned expertise to improve the standards and raise the benchmark for protection of children in the film and television industry. She is currently Director of Montreal's On-Camera Acting Workshops at **The Studio** and **Just a Stage Mom**.



Robyne Baruchel and her son **Jay Baruchel** at the 2010 ACTRA Awards in Montreal, where Jay received the Award of Excellence.

Photo: Tom Disandolo