

# Valley Scene Magazine ONLINE EDITION

## From Beer Keg Genies to Oscar-Winning Falafel Stands: Meet Joey Naber

By Mona Loring



Joey Naber's recent Academy Award success for *West Bank Story* did not come easy. Naber has definitely paid dues to get where he is in his career right now, and he is absolutely not letting anything stop him anytime soon.

It all started when Naber found his passion for acting by chance. He was going into junior high. The school had passed out a sheet of paper that gave students a choice on which elective they wanted for 7th grade. The only two elective options were music or drama. Naber knew he would not be successful playing an instrument, but at the same time, he was not certain if he knew what the elective "drama" really entailed. Regardless, he picked it anyway. He figured he had a better shot doing anything over playing music. Surprisingly, by the end of his first day of drama class, Naber knew what he wanted to do with his life. He was already in love with the creative art of acting.

Although Naber has professionally advanced to star along sides of beautiful Halle Berry, rugged Mark Wahlberg, and legendary Debbie Reynolds, his acting roles did not start out as glamorous. In fact, Joey Naber's first on screen kiss was not with a beautiful woman-- but with a camel. The kiss was in a movie of the week called *Knee High PI*. Since his camel smooch, Naber has directed many theatre productions as well as actors' showcases. Most recently he has directed an infomercial, a 3-hour medical DVD and a short film called *Final Resolve*.

Although Naber has produced almost every project that directed, the exception is one of his favorite projects. It is a 35mm, 22 minute short film entitled *Five Wishes*. *Five Wishes* is about a snotty college girl who is cut off financially from her wealthy father. The girl's luck turns around when she goes to a frat party and finds a genie in a beer keg. Not only did Naber direct the film, but he played the eccentric role of the genie. The hilarious short film successfully screened in numerous film festivals such as *Rain Dance* in London and *Foyle Film Festival* in France. The film secured several awards including esteemed honors from *The Family Film Festival* in Santa Clarita California and *The Cincinnati International Film Festival* in Ohio, among a few others.

Joey Naber loves acting, directing and producing more than anything. Okay, not exactly everything. His family is his pride and joy. His kids and wife are the most important aspects to his life. His wife, Paula Price, is also an actress and film producer. She wrote and co-produced *Five Wishes* with Naber. Naber jokes, "My wife is very supportive and understanding. She must be since she allowed me to kiss that camel!"

When asked what Naber prefers best between acting, directing and producing, Naber shared, "I prefer to act although directing is something I feel I need to do. Directing allows me the freedom to create. However, I know that acting is my artistic passion and true calling. I love the challenge. It is great having the ability to express my thoughts and actions within a specific character."

Naber struck gold when he decided to take a lead role in Academy Award-winning short film, *West Bank Story*. Perhaps some would say the movie struck gold when it found him. Naber brilliantly played the hilarious role of lovebird Fatima's older brother, Ahmed. According to Naber, the short film was one of the most difficult, yet most exciting projects he has ever worked on. Apparently, the *West Bank Story* director, Ari Sandel, had a creative plan from the very beginning. He kept it to himself throughout the entire production. Naber says, "We all knew it was already a great script, but it turned out to be so much more than that. It is an amazing story of hope and viewers get to laugh through the whole inspirational message."

*West Bank Story* is a musical comedy about how Israeli soldier David, falls in love with Fatima the Palestinian fast food clerk. Similar to the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, they are a couple who fall in love amidst the hatred of their families' dueling falafel stands in the West Bank. The couple's love leads to the destruction of both families' restaurants. This crisis forces everyone to come together to survive the catastrophe-which inevitably... well actually if you do not know yet, go see the movie.