

Screenplays by Julius Wachtel

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“Three-Eighty”

“Three-Eighty” is a chilling, factual account of what happens when unscrupulous gun dealers ply their trade. Based on a true story, it connects the dots between the murder of a Beverly Hills teen to the killing of a beloved LAPD officer two years later.

Three-Eighty begins as the officer and his partner are met with gunfire when they investigate drug dealing at a sleazy Hollywood motel.

In flashback, Three-Eighty recounts the story of a divorcee with money problems who uses her Federal gun dealer’s license to supply dozens of .380 caliber pistols to her teenage son. Her convenient pretense is that he and his thuggish running-mate are working for another licensed dealer. To help his mother and finance his and his friend’s dope habits, the son repeatedly sells the guns in quantity to a spoiled rich kid with connections in the ‘hood. These weapons wind up with gang members and are used in many crimes.

Before long a dispute leads the son and his friend to murder the rich kid. They stuff the body into the trunk of his BMW and abandon the car at the Greystone mansion. Their amateurish work leads to their prompt arrest and, thanks in part to the mother’s testimony, their conviction on first-degree murder and sentences of life without parole.

As the flashback ends, the story returns to the officers’ visit to the motel. It turns out that one officer – his true name is Charles Heim – was killed, and his partner was seriously wounded. When confronted by SWAT the next day, their assailant commits suicide with the same gun he used to murder officer Heim. This weapon is traced by ATF to one of the batches acquired by the mother.

Before going on patrol, officer Heim, a horse lover, was on the mounted squad. Three-Eighty ends with a scene depicting his star on LAPD’s version of the Hollywood walk of fame, set to Willie Nelson’s “Mamas Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up to Be Cowboys.”

“The Second Amendment”

“The Second Amendment” depicts how a gun changed the lives of the people it touched. It is an account of gun owners, gun victims, gun sellers, the agents who enforce gun laws and the individuals who for various reasons and justifications, break them.

A young woman is gravely wounded during a carjacking. That brutal crime leads her roommate Sarah, a Federal agent, and her colleagues to embark on a quest through a criminal underworld of exotic car theft, prostitution and corrupt gun dealing. Its unexpected but highly plausible conclusion has implications for our definition of justice and for the conduct that we should expect from prosecutors and the police.

“Bums”

Plucky homeless persons investigate and turn the table on corrupt public officials and greedy developers who seek to drive out a homeless shelter. Light-hearted but insightful exploration of homelessness, police treatment of the mentally ill, effects of redevelopment and the influence of money in politics. Suitable as a MOW or small feature. WGAw 802097.

A big-city (read – L.A.) mayor and his heartless redevelopment director push a plan backed by big money to gentrify downtown. But a homeless shelter and its many clients stand in the way. When police botch the job of kicking out the vagrants and needlessly wound a harmless old tramp, the shelter’s outreach coordinator – himself a recovering alcoholic – organizes a posse of homeless “detectives” to investigate. What they discover turns City Hall upside down.

“A Very Naughty Christmas”

Valentin, the sharp Deputy Chief of the North Pole’s two-elf Police Department, is heartsick. Does his beloved, the lovely schoolmarm, Nellie, love him or a competitor?

Meanwhile, in the lower forty-eight, Mr. Bruno, a brilliant swindler, flees in his helicopter, one step ahead of the widows and orphans he cheated out of

their savings. With him is his lawyer, Marty, a dim bulb but handy with computers. Mr. Bruno tells Marty to wake him in an hour. Marty wakes up eight hours later. Their craft nearly collides with Santa's sleigh and crash-lands at the North Pole.

The voyagers are warmly welcomed. Mr. Bruno snoops around. He discovers that the "North Pole Information Center," a high-tech elf bureaucracy that prepares Santa's lists, has been zealously labeling children "naughty". So he plots to gain the bad kids' loyalty. He could rule the planet!

Valentin grows suspicious. Unable to get his bumbling Chief to act, he alerts the North Pole's direct link to the World of Giants – Sgt. Braveheart of the Yukon. In time the good Sergeant arrives with wanted posters for Mr. Bruno and Marty and the jig is up.

Mr. Bruno and Marty flee in the mail plane. But another navigational "error" crash-lands them in the *South* Pole.

Using a Swiss bank account and the Internet, Mr. Bruno assembles a flying sleigh pulled by penguins and fueled by herring and secret flight powder.

Mr. Bruno is steamed. Sgt. Braveheart froze his bank account, and as Christmas nears he cannot order presents for the naughty. So he has Marty hack the NPIC website and reverse the filenames of Santa's lists. Let "Naughty" be "Nice". Why not let the jolly one deliver on their behalf?

Valentin discovers the filename switch, but only after the big guy's gone. And Santa delivers to the "Naughty"! Parents around the world couldn't be more pleased. All the children caught up in the NPIC's ever-expanding dragnet get a present. Bad kids reform and the good kids, being good, understand. Santa appears on national TV, again a hero to all. High-tech gives way to a more personal touch, and the NPIC becomes the North Pole Community Center. And Valentin marries Nellie, with an honor guard of Mounties in attendance.

Oh yes, Mr. Bruno and Marty. Well, they're brought in by the Mounties, and this time they don't get a break. Both are convicted of aeroplane theft and sentenced to work at the reindeer stables for a year. In *elf* time.

“A Heritage of Terror”

“A Heritage of Terror” is a historical drama, set mostly in Russia between 1936 and 1972. It chronicles the coming-to-age of the male lead, David Williams. We first meet him in Act I as a middle-aged journalist when he gets kicked out of Russia during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Act II flashes back to Moscow in the late 1930’s. David, a young journalist, covers the Great Show Trials, which Stalin used to liquidate Soviet officials he didn’t trust. American policy was to turn a blind eye. Most observers – including American journalists – reported that the trials seemed fair, but David suspected otherwise. As we now know, the trials were scripted, and confessions were secured by torture. David’s quest for the truth leads a cell of Russian counter-revolutionaries to kidnap the secretary of a secret police official. It also brings David into contact with key historical figures, including Harry Hopkins, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, F.D.R. and Stalin.

In a subplot, David becomes romantically involved with the female lead, Lilya, a Russian journalist and staunch supporter of Stalin. David later discovers that Lilya bore him a son. He journeys to rescue her during the German advance on Kiev, where she has gone to die with her father, a Russian Army Colonel.

In key supporting roles are Earl, an older British journalist who becomes David’s mentor, and Cathy, David’s American girlfriend.

Unlike most Russian stories, this tale has a happy ending. After his adventures in Russia, David is drafted, serves during the war and marries his American girlfriend. In Act III, which takes place in 1972, the key players, now senior citizens, reunite in Moscow. On that occasion, David is introduced to his son with Lilya, Aleksei, a Russian police Major, and to his grand-daughter, Raisa.

Note: Julius Wachtel’s published novel, “Stalin’s Witnesses,” is an account of the Moscow show trials, and of a real Soviet spy who was sacrificed to help Stalin cement his rule.