

August 30, 2010

This ran in the Saskatoon *StarPhoenix* and included a small head shot of me on the front page, no less. I've had several articles done on me over the years but this one is definitely proving to be the most popular. I can't believe how many calls and emails I've received. I'm sure it's because of the connection with Les. His fan base is very solid and loyal. Also, Cam is one of the best writers on the paper and I've been a fan for years. I was very pleased when the paper phoned and said they were having him interview me.

Survivorman's logistics men Saskatoon trio co-ordinates Les Stroud's first adventure in new series

By Cam Fuller, The StarPhoenix August 25, 2010



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Les Stroud (left) and Saskatoon's Jason Schoonover

Photograph by: Supplied photo, courtesy Dragon Lady

Saskatoon's Jason Schoonover didn't just survive his adventure with Les Stroud, he thrived.

"I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. It was very enriching," Schoonover said this week. He was the local "fixer" in what turned out to be the lead-off episode of Les Stroud's new series *Beyond Survival*. It's a follow-up to Stroud's *Survivorman* series, which ran for three seasons on OLN in Canada and Discovery Channel in the U.S.

The new show takes Stroud to far-flung places in search of indigenous people, documenting their survival skills before the outside world makes their cultures extinct. Schoonover was responsible for all the travel and accommodations, from renting helicopters to dealing with passport issues. His local knowledge was crucial; he's wintered in Bangkok for 35 years and made seven trips to Sri Lanka.

"I love spring, summer and fall in Saskatoon. They're the best in the world. But I just can't stand winter," Schoonover laughs.

He's known Stroud since 2004 when Schoonover approached him to join The Explorer's Club. More recently, he suggested Stroud check out the Devil Dance exorcism in Sri Lanka, "one of my major interests in all my life in that area." The dance stems from the belief that a sickness is the work of outside forces that have to be warded off.

"It's a very dramatic, all-night exorcist ritual," says Schoonover. "It was just a given that this was a natural for the show."

A crew of 11 spent more than two weeks shooting the episode. There are actually three Saskatoon connections, Schoonover points out. His partner Su Hattori was a field assistant. And Bryan Potvin (of Northern Pikes fame) was in charge of sound and second camera. Stroud's first career was in the music industry, including a stint at MuchMusic when it was just starting. He's collaborated with the Toronto-dwelling Potvin and the Pikes on music projects.

"In the end, the shoot was fantastic. It has all the elements," says Schoonover.

But the preparations didn't always go smoothly. Schoonover spent hours finding the perfect household for the Devil Dance, only to lose it at the last minute due to a death in the family.

"So my blood pressure goes right up to the level of the coconut palms."

With little time left, he managed to find an even better site.

The series debuts Friday in the U.S. and early September in Canada. It's a departure from *Survivorman*, which featured Stroud alone with the camera. This time he has a crew around him. But the intimate feel is very similar, says Schoonover.

"There are going to be a lot of parallels."

He describes Stroud as bright, sharp, focused, incredibly disciplined and genuinely interested in the people he visits.

"I was impressed with how respectful he is to the indigenous cultures. He really is an anthropologist at heart."

Schoonover, who read the final script only a few days ago, can't wait to see the edited episode for the first time.

"I've been wanting to do a documentary on this for 30 years."

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