

= Charles B. Pierce =

Charles B. Pierce ( June 16 , 1938 ? March 5 , 2010 ) was an American film director , screenwriter , producer , set decorator , cinematographer and actor , and is considered one of the first modern independent filmmakers . Pierce directed thirteen films over the span of 26 years , but is best known for his cult hits *The Legend of Boggy Creek* ( 1973 ) and *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* ( 1976 ) .

An Arkansas resident most of his life , Pierce made his directorial debut with *Boggy Creek* , a faux documentary @-@ style film inspired by the legend of the Bigfoot @-@ like Fouke Monster . The low @-@ budget film grossed roughly \$ 25 million , and Pierce followed that success with several inexpensive , regional films set in the southern United States , including *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* , based on the true story of the Phantom Killer murders in Texarkana .

Pierce continued directing films into the 1980s , when he wrote the story for the Clint Eastwood film *Sudden Impact* . For that screenplay , he is said to have written the phrase , " Go ahead , make my day , " which became one of the most famous movie quotes in history . After years of pressure from producers , Pierce directed a *Boggy Creek* sequel , *Boggy Creek II : And the Legend Continues* , which he considered the worst film of his career ; it was later riffed on by the comedy television series *Mystery Science Theater 3000* .

= = Early life = =

Charles B. Pierce was born in Hammond , Indiana on June 16 , 1938 , one of three boys born to Mack McKenny Pierce and Mayven Bryant Pierce . His family moved to the southwestern Arkansas city of Hampton when he was just a few months old . There he was a childhood friend and neighbor of future film and television director Harry Thomason , and the two made home movies together in their backyards using an old 8 mm camera . His first professional foray into media entertainment was in the mid @-@ 1960s as an art director at KTAL @-@ TV in Shreveport , Louisiana . He later became a weatherman and hosted a children 's cartoon show for that channel .

Pierce continued working in production jobs at television stations in Arkansas , Louisiana and Texas until 1969 , when he moved to Texarkana , bought a 16 mm camera and started an advertising agency . He started a contract with Ledwell & Son Enterprises , a Texarkana @-@ based firm that built 18 @-@ wheel trailers and farm equipment . Pierce developed commercials for the company that played throughout the Southwestern United States , using mostly footage he shot of trucks on the highway and farming equipment being used . He said the reputation he developed with those commercials later helped him launch his film career . Also during this time , Pierce played a character named Mayor Chuckles on *The Laffalot Club* , a local Arkansas children 's television show . Pierce launched his independent film career in the early 1970s , when he sought funding from L.W. Ledwell , the owner of Ledwell & Son Enterprises . Ledwell was skeptical of the idea , but ultimately agreed to provide about \$ 100 @,@ 000 of the \$ 160 @,@ 000 budget for Pierce 's first film . Prior to his directorial debut , Pierce worked as a set decorator for television shows like the Western series *Hondo* and for films like *Waco* ( 1966 ) and *Coffy* ( 1973 ) .

= = The Legend of Boggy Creek = =

Pierce 's directorial debut was *The Legend of Boggy Creek* , which was inspired by the Fouke Monster , a seven @-@ foot @-@ tall Bigfoot @-@ like creature said to live in the swamps near Fouke , Arkansas . Pierce said he did not necessarily believe in the legend , but was fascinated with the stories . After interviewing Fouke residents who said they encountered the monster , Pierce became impressed with their authenticity and down @-@ to @-@ earth qualities . He approached Earl E. Smith , an acquaintance from the advertising business , to adapt those eyewitness tales into a screenplay . The film was shot at locations in Fouke , Texarkana and Shreveport , using a camera Pierce built himself at home . It was filmed in a faux documentary style , and included interviews with Fouke residents mixed with dramatizations of their supposed encounters with the creature . Like

Pierce , the film 's financial backers and many of the actors had never been involved in a film before

Pierce cast the actors by approaching customers at a local gas station whenever he saw somebody that looked like they fit one of the parts . He hired high school students as crew members who helped load and move equipment . For the creature itself , he limited the sightings to shadowy figures because he felt the film would be more frightening if the creature was left to the viewer 's imagination . Pierce sang the theme song featured in the film . Once the film was completed , he put the reel into the trunk of his car and drove to Los Angeles seeking post @-@ production services . He met Jamie Mendoza @-@ Nava , who owned a small post @-@ production company and agreed to work on the film for limited up @-@ front pay and a small percentage of the film 's box @-@ office receipts . Pierce could not find a major studio willing to distribute it , so he rented a local movie theater in Texarkana for one week to screen the film . He cleaned the property himself to prepare for the debut .

Released in 1972 , The Legend of Boggy Creek premiered at what was later called the Perot Theatre , where lines stretched around the block to see it . Pierce did not expect it to become a financial success , but it made \$ 55 @,@ 000 in the first three weeks from that single theater . Eventually , Pierce entered into a distribution deal with Joy N. Houck , owner of the independent distribution company Howco , who paid Pierce \$ 1 @.@ 29 million for a 50 percent interest in the film . Pierce and Houck signed with American International Pictures for foreign and television distribution . It became a hit at drive @-@ in movie theaters , eventually gaining a cult status and bringing Pierce a semblance of fame . The film went on to gross about \$ 25 million , making it one of the highest grossing films of the year . At the time of the film 's release , Pierce incorrectly predicted to newspapers that it would win several Academy Awards . Several similarly @-@ styled films about strange and allegedly true phenomena were released in subsequent years due to success of The Legend of Boggy Creek . Julius E. " Smokey " Crabtree , a Fouke resident who appeared as himself in the film , became disgruntled with the production company and filed a lawsuit against Pierce and his financial supporters . Pierce declined to speak to the media about the suit .

= = Post @-@ Boggy Creek career = =

Following the success of The Legend of Boggy Creek , Pierce was encouraged to film a sequel , but resisted because he wanted to prove himself as a filmmaker rather than duplicate the same idea . He continued to make inexpensive regional films set in the southern United States , primarily targeting small @-@ town and rural audiences . His family said Pierce liked to be continuously working and would start a new film immediately after finishing the last . His sophomore effort was Bootleggers ( 1974 ) , a period action @-@ comedy film about rival families making moonshine in the Ozark Mountains . It featured Slim Pickins and the first major performance of Jaclyn Smith , who went on to play Kelly Garrett in the television series Charlie 's Angels . Pierce followed that film up with two Westerns released in 1976 . The first , Winterhawk , was about violence erupting between Blackfoot Native Americans and white villagers . The film proved difficult for Pierce to shoot due to challenges from the weather and problems with the horses on the set . However , according to Pierce , Winterhawk was more widely seen than The Legend of Boggy Creek . His second Western was Winds of Autumn . Pierce co @-@ wrote both films with his Boggy Creek partner , Earl E. Smith . Pierce made a trademark of casting his friends in his films , and Pierce himself performed minor roles in both Winterhawk and Winds of Autumn . During this period , Pierce continued working as a set decorator for films such as Black Belt Jones ( 1974 ) .

Pierce returned to the horror genre with the 1976 film The Town That Dreaded Sundown , based on the true story of the Phantom Killer , an unidentified serial killer who murdered five people in Texarkana in 1946 . Pierce remembered being scared by news stories about the killer during his youth in Hampton . He received some criticism for the graphic violence portrayed in the film , particularly one scene where the killer ties a woman to a tree , attaches a knife to the end of a trombone , then repeatedly stabs her while playing the instrument . Pierce said he purposely made the film violent because he felt the real @-@ life situation was horrific and did not want to glaze over

it . While filming horror scenes , he tried to create a suspenseful mood by clearing the set of only the essential cast and staff , then refusing to let them talk to each other as the scenes were shot . Pierce appeared in *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* as police Patrolman A.C. " Spark Plug " Benson , an idiotic comic relief character . The name " Spark Plug " was a real @-@ life nickname given to the director due to his energy . Pierce described *The Town That Dread Sundown* as a very easy and enjoyable shoot with no major problems on the set .

During this period , Pierce worked as set decorator on films *The Outlaw Josey Wales* ( 1976 ) and *The Cheap Detective* ( 1978 ) . The year after *The Town That Dreaded Sundown* , Piece directed and co @-@ wrote *Grayeagle* , a Western based on a Cheyenne legend of a white man whose child ( with an Indian wife ) is kidnapped by a young warrior named *Grayeagle* . Pierce appeared in the film as Bugler , a half @-@ insane white man who takes on a Shoshone identity . He then wrote and directed *The Norseman* ( 1978 ) , which starred Lee Majors as a Viking prince who traveled to America to rescue his father from Indians . Working with a multimillion @-@ dollar budget , Pierce shot the film in the Florida locations Hillsborough River State Park and New Port Richey . The next year he co @-@ wrote and directed *The Evictors* ( 1979 ) , another documentary @-@ style horror film about a young couple who move into a rural Louisiana farmhouse and find their lives endangered by a series of strange events . Pierce was inspired to write the script after reading a true story in a detective magazine about a Kansas family who murdered somebody trying to evict them from the property . In order to match the late @-@ evening sunlight in his cinematography at the farmhouse set , Pierce set up reflectors outside and deflected the sunlight through the windows , which were fitted with sheer white curtains to give the actors an eerie glow . *The Evictors* was little @-@ seen and did not do financially well , which was a disappointment to distributor American International Pictures , but Pierce believed it one of his better films . He also considered it his most downbeat film , and said of the unhappy ending , " I probably just didn 't have any other way to end it . "

= = Later career = =

In the 1980s , to further his career as a filmmaker , Pierce moved to Carmel , California , where he met and befriended actor Clint Eastwood . Pierce shared a film treatment he had developed with Eastwood , who liked the story and helped Pierce develop it into *Sudden Impact* ( 1983 ) , the fourth entry in Eastwood 's *Dirty Harry* film series . Pierce was given a writer 's credit for the story along with Joseph C. Stinson . Pierce is said to have written the phrase , " Go ahead , make my day , " the film 's most famous line , which went on to be identified as one of the ten best movie quotes of all @-@ time by the American Film Institute . The phrase was inspired by something his father once told Pierce in his youth while encouraging his son to mow the lawn : " When I come home tonight and the yard has not been mowed , you 're going to make my day . " However , whether Pierce truly invented the phrase has been brought into question , since the same line was used in the action @-@ drama film *Vice Squad* ( 1982 ) the previous year . Around this time , Pierce also directed *Sacred Ground* ( 1983 ) , which was released the same year as *Sudden Impact* .

In 1985 , Pierce released a sequel to *The Legend of Boggy Creek* called *Boggy Creek II : And the Legend Continues* . American International Pictures had been encouraging him to make a *Boggy Creek* sequel for years because they believed it would be financially profitable , but he was resistant to the idea . He did not participate in an earlier sequel , *Return to Boggy Creek* ( 1977 ) , which directed by Tom Moore , and did not like the final film . In his own *Boggy Creek II : And the Legend Continues* , Pierce starred as an anthropologist who brings three students on an expedition into the bayou to track down the creature . His son , Chuck Pierce , Jr . , co @-@ starred as Tim , one of the students . Pierce ultimately considered *Boggy Creek II* his worst film , believing his own role was too large and that he cast too many of his friends in supporting roles . *Boggy Creek II* was featured in a 1999 episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* , a comedy television series in which the characters watch and make jokes about bad films . The episode ultimately increased Pierce 's visibility to a wider audience .

Pierce largely fell from the movie industry 's public eye shortly after the release of *Boggy Creek II* .

In 1987 , he directed Hawken 's Breed , a Western film starring Peter Fonda as a drifter who meets and rescues a young Shawnee woman . While shooting that film , Pierce met the woman who became his second wife , Beth Pulley . In 1996 , he directed Renfroe 's White Christmas , an adaptation of the classic children 's book Renfroe 's Christmas . Starting in 1997 , he began production on his western film Chasing the Wind ( 1998 ) , a gritty epic about a mountain man . It proved to be Pierce 's final directorial effort , although he continued working as a set decorator for several television shows including MacGyver , Remington Steele , The Twilight Zone and Fresno , a Carol Burnett miniseries parodying prime time soap operas . Pierce 's work on the latter show earned him a Primetime Emmy Award nomination for Outstanding Art Direction for a Miniseries or a Special .

Pierce began writing the screenplay for a sequel to The Town That Dreaded Sundown , but the film never came to fruition . Around 2008 , while developing the horror film The Wild Man of the Navidad , directors Duane Graves and Justin Meeks sought out Pierce , who they cited as a major influence on their work . Graves and Meeks wanted Pierce to work as a consultant on the film , but he turned them down because , according to Graves , " if he 's not running the show , he 's not interested " .

= = Death and legacy = =

In 2008 , Pierce was honored at the Little Rock Film Festival , where festival producers screened a retrospective of his films , and presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award . Also that year , the festival 's best film award was renamed in his honor to the Charles B. Pierce Award for Best Film Made in Arkansas , In October 2009 , the Arkansas Arts Council honored Pierce with the Judges ' Special Recognition Award at the Governor 's Arts Awards ceremony in Hot Springs . Pierce died of natural causes on March 5 , 2010 at the Signature Care nursing home in Dover , Tennessee , where he had moved a few years earlier . He was 71 . Pierce directed thirteen films over the span of 26 years . He was considered one of the first modern independent filmmakers , and was credited with breaking new ground for other independent filmmakers , particularly for the Arkansas film industry .

Director Harry Thomason , Pierce 's childhood friend and neighbor , praised him for finding success independently at a time when the film industry was so controlled by major studios . Daniel Myrick , co -@ director of the documentary @-@ style The Blair Witch Project ( 1999 ) , said he was strongly influenced by The Legend of Boggy Creek , which was one of his favorite films growing up . Myrick said he and fellow Blair Witch director Eduardo Sánchez wanted to " tap into the primal fear generated by the fact @-@ or @-@ fiction format like Legend of Boggy Creek " . In an Orlando Sentinel article that ran on Halloween , Myrick identified The Legend of Boggy Creek as the one film that most inspired him . On September 2 , 2010 , Pierce was inducted into the Arkansas Entertainers Hall of Fame in a ceremony at the Arkansas Governor 's Mansion in Little Rock .

= = Personal life = =

Pierce was married to Florene Lyons Pierce for 17 years and they had three children : Pamula Pierce Barcelou , Charles Bryant Pierce Jr . , and Amanda Pierce Squitiero , along with six grandchildren . Pierce briefly married Cindy Butler , who appeared in a role in his film The Town That Dreaded Sundown ; they also later divorced . He later married Beth Pulley , gaining two stepdaughters : Betsy Mathis Gillespie and Melissa Mathis Daley , and three step @-@ grandchildren . Pierce was a fan of the Arkansas Razorbacks , the University of Arkansas college sports teams .

= = Selected filmography = =