

= Early life of David Lynch =

David Keith Lynch (born January 20 , 1946) is an American filmmaker , television director , visual artist , musician and occasional actor . Known for his surrealist films , he has developed his own unique cinematic style , known as " Lynchian " , and is characterized by its dream imagery and meticulous sound design . The surreal and , in many cases , violent elements to his films have earned them the reputation that they " disturb , offend or mystify " their audiences .

Although born in Missoula , Montana , Lynch spend his youth traveling across the United States due to his father Donald 's job for the Department of Agriculture ; as a result , Lynch attended school across several states . Raised in a contented , happy family , the young Lynch was a member of the Boy Scouts of America , reaching the highest rank of Eagle Scout . However , Lynch took to building fireworks and playing the bongos in a Beat Generation nightclub as acts of rebellion , before discovering that he could translate his childhood fascination with drawing and painting into a career in fine art . Lynch and his close friend Jack Fisk travelled to Austria hoping to study under Oskar Kokoschka , but the artist was not present at the time .

Returning the United States , Lynch enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia . Although initially focusing on oil painting and sculpture , Lynch found himself beginning to experiment with short films . After completing several short animated and partly animated works , Lynch was prompted by his mentor Bushnell Keeler to apply for one of four annual grants from the American Film Institute to fund another film project . The resulting film , *The Grandmother* , paved the way for Lynch 's scholarship at the AFI Conservatory ; while studying there , Lynch wrote and directed a film which would take several years to gestate ? his feature @-@ length début and the beginning of his commercial film career , *Eraserhead* .

= = Early life = =

Lynch was born on January 20 , 1946 in Missoula , Montana to Donald and Edwina " Sunny " (née Sundholm) Lynch , who met as students at Duke University . David was the eldest of three siblings . For the most part a housewife , Sunny also tutored English lessons , having earned her degree at Duke . Donald Lynch worked for the United States Department of Agriculture , which necessitated moving the family around the country ? they relocated to Sandpoint , Idaho , when David was two months old , before his fourteenth birthday the family had lived in Spokane , Washington , Durham , North Carolina , Boise , Idaho , and Alexandria , Virginia . The young Lynch easily coped with this transitory lifestyle , and was popular throughout his school years , having found it easy for an " outsider " such as himself to make friends after moving to a new school . Lynch 's elementary and junior high school educations were taken in Boise ; he attended high school in Alexandria .

Lynch recalls having a happy childhood , although he suffered from bouts of agoraphobia in his youth , especially after having been scared by a screening of Henry King 's 1952 film *Wait Till the Sun Shines* , *Nellie* , when he was six years old . He would develop a brief habit of wearing three neckties at a time , which he understands to have been a manifestation of his personal insecurity . He also points to a particular image from his childhood that shaped his understanding of the world ? " [my youth] was a dream world , those droning airplanes , blue skies , picket fences , green grass , cherry trees . Middle America as it was supposed to be . But then on the cherry tree would be this pitch oozing out , some of it black , some of it yellow , and there were millions and millions of red ants racing all over the sticky pitch , all over the tree . So you see , there 's this beautiful world and you just look a little bit closer and it 's all red ants " .

Finding the calm and contented nature of his home life frustrating , the young Lynch sought ways to secretly rebel against his parents . He and a friend took to building bottle rockets ; after a particularly powerful rocket severely damaged his friend 's foot they switched their focus to making and detonating pipe bombs for fun instead . A large pipe bomb which they detonated in a school swimming pool was heard by several neighbors , and resulted in Lynch and his friend being arrested . Lynch was also a member of the high school fraternity Alpha Omega Upsilon , and learned to play the bongos while frequenting a nightclub popular with the Beat Generation , earning the nickname "

Bongo Dave " .

Lynch was a member of the Boy Scouts of America , attaining the rank of Eagle Scout . His childhood friend Toby Keeler posited that this experience and the " be prepared " Scout motto formed the basis of Lynch 's " do it yourself " approach to filmmaking and art , and shaped his ability to " make things out of nothing " . Lynch had initially joined the Scouts in order to " put it behind " him , but continued at the urging of his father ; he eventually summed up his biography as " Eagle Scout . Missoula , Montana " in a 1990 press release for *Wild at Heart* . As a Boy Scout , Lynch was present at John F. Kennedy 's presidential inauguration , which took place on Lynch 's 15th birthday . When Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 , Lynch was the first in his school to hear of it , as he was working on a display case rather than attending class .

= = Art student = =

Lynch 's interest in art began at an early age ; he recalled his father bringing home large amounts of paper from his government job , and because his mother would not let him use coloring books , he would draw and paint on this spare paper . Lynch 's early artwork mostly depicted war @-@ related imagery ? weaponry and fighter planes ? based on his collection of toy military equipment . He frequently depicted the M1917 Browning machine gun , calling it a favorite of his . Later in life , however , Lynch was summoned for conscription for the Vietnam War , and declared 4 @-@ F , " unfit for military service " , for undisclosed health reasons .

At the age of 14 , Lynch 's family visited Hungry Horse , Montana , staying with his aunt and uncle near Hungry Horse Dam . Their next @-@ door neighbor was an artist named Ace Powell , whose style was similar to that of Charlie Russell and Frederic Remington . Powell and his wife were both painters , and would let Lynch work with their materials while he was staying in town ; however , Lynch found it difficult to believe that art was something in which he could forge a career , believing it to be a hobby peculiar to the Western United States . Returning home to Virginia , Lynch met Keeler 's father Bushnell , who was also an artist . Lynch rented space in the elder Keeler 's studio and , alongside his friend Jack Fisk , worked on his art until he had finished school . From there , he enrolled in the School of the Museum of Fine Arts , Boston , but soon dropped out .

Bushnell Keeler has commented that Lynch 's dropping out of the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston " worked to his detriment then , but may now be one of his greatest assets " . Keeler recounts that Lynch left the school after allowing one of his tutors to use his dormitory room ; the tutor , who was in the process of divorcing his wife , spent several nights in Lynch 's room with his mistress , while Lynch obligingly slept on the floor . Rather than confronting the tutor about this situation , Lynch felt it would be easier to leave school instead . Keeler and film critic Greg Olson posit that this desire to avoid confrontation has shaped the characters he has written , who often seek an " escape route " in the face of adversity rather than face it directly . Olson has further added that several of Lynch 's later works ? *Dune* and *Twin Peaks* ? would have " been less compromised " had Lynch been of a more adversarial personality ; as they were , both projects featured interference from film and television studios respectively .

After this , Lynch and Fisk planned a three @-@ year strip to Austria , planning to study under the expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka , who was one of Lynch 's " least favorite painters " . However , when Lynch arrived in Salzburg , he found that the artist had left , prompting him to return to America . Before leaving Europe , the pair travelled to Athens by train , to visit Lynch 's girlfriend at the time , who was holidaying there . However , when they arrived in Greece they discovered that she had already left for home ; Lynch and Fisk departed for America shortly thereafter . Upon his return , Lynch enrolled in the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia , devoting himself to painting and sculpture . Lynch 's paintings , which were influenced by the works of Francis Bacon , were executed in oils , and following an incident in which a moth landed in a still @-@ drying piece , he began embedding insects in his work .

Life in Philadelphia was disturbing for Lynch , who had by this point married his pregnant girlfriend Peggy Reavey . The two had met in 1964 , and wed in 1967 , shortly before the birth of their daughter Jennifer .

Lynch and his family spent five years living in an atmosphere of " violence , hate and filth " . The area was rife with crime , which would later inform the tone of his work . Describing this period of his life , Lynch said " I saw so many things in Philadelphia I couldn 't believe ... I saw a grown woman grab her breasts and speak like a baby , complaining her nipples hurt . This kind of thing will set you back " . In Olson 's David Lynch : Beautiful Dark , the author posits that this time contrasted starkly with the director 's childhood in the Pacific Northwest , giving the director a " bipolar , Heaven @-@ and @-@ Hell vision of America " which has subsequently shaped his films .

= = Short films = =

Lynch 's experiments with moving sculptures led to his piquing interest in the medium of motion picture film . In 1966 , with the help of Fisk , Lynch animated a one @-@ minute short feature called Six Figures Getting Sick ; the project cost \$ 200 and was filmed with a sixteen millimeter camera . The sculpture @-@ motion picture was a simple animated loop of several figures growing increasingly nauseous before vomiting down the screen . This loop was repeated several times and accompanied by the sound of an air @-@ raid siren ; however , it was projected onto a cast of Lynch 's head in order to distort the footage further .

After Six Figures Getting Sick was completed , one of Lynch 's classmates , H. Barton Wasserman , offered to pay \$ 1000 for a similar motion picture to be made for an art installation in his home . Lynch purchased a clockwork Bolex movie camera , and began to teach himself cinematography . Lynch worked on the commissioned motion picture over the next two months , crafting a mix of live action and animation in a split @-@ screen format . However , when the film was developed , an error along the way had rendered it indistinguishable and unusable . Wasserman allowed Lynch to keep the remainder of the budget , which he used to fund the production of a new motion picture project , The Alphabet .

Similarly to Wasserman 's unfinished commission , 1968 's The Alphabet was composed of both live action and animation . The abstract 16mm movie was inspired by an experience related by Lynch 's wife Peggy , who had once seen her niece reciting the alphabet in her sleep while suffering from a nightmare . Peggy was the sole live action actor in the film , which depicted in animation the nightmares of a young girl . The film displays several elements that would continue throughout Lynch 's oeuvre , including the use of meticulous sound design to convey unease . The sound of his infant daughter crying was recorded on a faulty cassette recorder and included in the film 's soundtrack ; the malfunctioning of the recorder not only lent the sound a desirably distorted quality but allowed Lynch to return it to where he had purchased it from upon finishing the film .

Although Lynch was enthusiastic about the medium of film , he realized that the wages from his job as a printer would not stretch to cover future budgetary needs . Bushnell Keeler recommended that Lynch apply for a grant from the newly formed American Film Institute (AFI) . Together with a copy of The Alphabet , Lynch 's application included an eight @-@ page treatment for a project titled The Grandmother . The submission was successful , and Lynch was awarded one of four annual grants from the AFI , totalling \$ 5 @,@ 000 . The Grandmother was filmed in Lynch 's home in Philadelphia and starred his friends and colleagues . Lynch 's initial grant of \$ 5 @,@ 000 was later supplemented by a further \$ 2 @,@ 200 also supplied by the AFI . Completed in 1970 , it relates the story of a family grown from the ground like plants ; the neglected and abused son seeks to create stability in his life by growing a grandmother from a seed . Once again , the film mixes animation with live action footage , and features the use of both pallid stage make @-@ up reminiscent of the silent film era , and a similarly washed @-@ out use of colour to The Alphabet . Running for thirty minutes , the film has been described by critics Colin Odell and Michelle Le Blanc as " fall [ing] into that twilight category of film that is too short to be a feature and too long to be a short film " .

= = AFI Conservatory = =

Having completed The Grandmother , Lynch realized that filmmaking was the career he wanted to pursue . He accepted a scholarship at the AFI Conservatory , Lynch moved to Los Angeles ,

California , with his family , and recalls having felt " the evaporation of fear " after leaving the crime and poverty of Philadelphia . Lynch was dissatisfied with the Conservatory and considered dropping out , but he changed his mind after being offered the chance to produce a script of his own devising . He was given permission to use the school 's full campus for film sets ; he converted the school 's disused stables into a series of sets and lived there . He began work on a script titled Gardenback , based on his painting of a hunched figure with vegetation growing from its back . Gardenback was a surrealist script about adultery , featuring a continually growing insect that represented one man 's lust for his neighbor . The script would have resulted in a roughly 45 @-@ minute @-@ long film , which the AFI felt was too long for such a figurative , nonlinear script .

In its place , Lynch presented Eraserhead , which he had developed based on a daydream of a man 's head being taken to a pencil factory by a small boy . Several board members at the AFI were still opposed to producing such a surrealist work , but they were persuaded when dean Frank Daniel threatened to resign if it was vetoed . Eraserhead 's script is thought to have been inspired by Lynch 's fear of fatherhood ; Jennifer had been born with " severely clubbed feet " , requiring extensive corrective surgery as a child . Jennifer has claimed that her own unexpected conception and birth defects were the basis for the film 's themes .

Pre @-@ production work for Eraserhead began in 1971 . However , the staff at the AFI had underestimated the project 's scale ? they had initially green @-@ lit Eraserhead after viewing a twenty @-@ one page screenplay , assuming that the film industry 's usual ratio of one minute of film per scripted page would reduce the film to approximately twenty minutes . This misunderstanding , coupled with Lynch 's own meticulous direction , caused the film to remain in production for a number of years . In an extreme example of this labored schedule , one scene in the film begins with Jack Nance 's character opening a door ? a full year would pass before he was filmed entering the room . Buoyed with regular donations from Fisk and his wife Sissy Spacek , production continued for several years . Additional funds were provided by Nance and his wife , actress Catherine Coulson , who worked as a waitress and donated her income , and by Lynch himself , who delivered newspapers throughout the film 's principal photography .

During one of the many lulls in filming , Lynch was able to produce the short film The Amputee , taking advantage of the AFI 's wish to test new film stock before committing to bulk purchases . The short piece starred Coulson , who continued working with Lynch as a technician on Eraserhead . Eraserhead 's production crew was very small , composed of Lynch ; sound designer Alan Splet ; cinematographer Herb Cardwell , who left during production and was replaced with Frederick Elmes ; production manager and prop technician Doreen Small ; and Coulson , who worked in a variety of roles . Lynch began his interest in Transcendental Meditation during the film 's production , adopting a vegetarian diet and giving up smoking and alcohol consumption .

= = After Eraserhead = =

Eraserhead premièred at the Filmex film festival in Los Angeles , on March 19 , 1977 . On its opening night , the film was attended by 25 people . The second evening had 24 viewers . Ben Barenholtz , head of distributor Libra Films International , persuaded local theater Cinema Village to run the film as a midnight feature , where it continued for a year . After this , it ran for ninety @-@ nine weeks at New York 's Waverly Cinema , had a year @-@ long midnight run at San Francisco 's Roxie Theater from 1978 to 1979 , and achieved a three @-@ year tenure at Los Angeles ' Nuart Theatre between 1978 and 1981 . The film has grossed \$ 7 @,@ 000 @,@ 000 in the United States as of 2012 . Following the release of Eraserhead , Lynch tried to find funding for his next project , Ronnie Rocket , a film " about electricity and a three @-@ foot guy with red hair " .

Lynch met film producer Stuart Cornfeld during this time . Cornfeld had enjoyed Eraserhead and was interested in producing Ronnie Rocket ; he worked for Mel Brooks and Brooksfilm at the time , and when the two realized that Ronnie Rocket was unlikely to find sufficient financing , Lynch asked to see some already @-@ written scripts to work from for his next film . Cornfeld found four scripts he felt might interest Lynch , but on hearing the name of the first , Lynch decided his next project would be The Elephant Man .

