

Surrounded by Strangers

A new screenplay by Jim Sturdivant

Based on a True Story



Dixie Mafia kingpin "Blackie" Polan
& bodyguards, ca. 1950

Log Line: The son of a Dixie Mafia kingpin faces a moment of truth when he is forced to choose between his father's life and his father's advice.

WGA Registration # 1478787



Jason Polan Surrounded by Strangers

Synopsis: Growing up the son of a Dixie Mafia kingpin, Jason Lee Polan lived a life of confusing signs and contradictory signals. His father spoke little and what he did say was terse and often crude. Small gestures showed he cared for his sons but he intentionally kept them at arm's length.

When a turf war puts his family at risk, Blackie Polan takes his youngest son, 7-yr old Jason, to live a for a time with the family of his African-American maid on the shores of primeval Caddo Lake. In the arms of this family, Jason finds more love and affection, freedom and fun than he ever felt in his own home. He learns how to swim, what snakes to avoid, which grasshoppers make the best catfish bait. He gathers with the family in the evenings, listens to blues on the old Victrola, feasts on wild berries and whipped cream, feels like he belongs.

Back in Dallas, Kansas City is trying to move in, raiding Blackie's loan sharking store fronts, intimidating customers, burning businesses, targeting Blackie for assignation and attempting to kidnap his children. Lost revenues bring pressure from Blackie's boss. Blackie almost takes a bullet before putting his rival in the Trinity River.

Jason returns to school and reports to the class "What I Did This Summer." In 1947, a white boy staying with a black family was unheard of. His teacher

chastises him for lying. His peers ridicule him. He finds himself an outsider, the target of bullies. He retreats within, longs for his "other" family.

Blackie recovers his business with a vengeance, breaking bones to get cash flowing -- but now, when his victim has a family, he gets soft, gives them breaks. Revenue decrease. His men start to lose respect. His boss gets menacing.

One night Jason overhears his father threatening a customer on the phone. The next day Jason goes to school, gives a quarter to another boy and says, "That's a loan. You pay me 50¢ on Friday or I will beat you up." As a juvenile loan shark, Jason finds new respect - until his father gets a call from Jason's high school principal. Blackie comes down hard on Jason. Jason leaves home without saying goodbye, returns to Caddo Lake, has to work in a chicken plant, loses his innocence.

A call from his dying father sends Jason back to Dallas. At the funeral, Blackie's boss approaches Jason. Meeting in Memphis, Jason finds his black "brother," Caleb, working for the boss in debt-slavery. The boss offers Jason his father's position, shows him huge stacks of cash as an incentive. Jason is torn, his father's life or the chicken plant? In the morning, Jason and the cash are gone.

Jason flees to the one place he feels secure - and knows the high-rolling boss will never look, Caddo Lake. With the whole family celebrating, the camera pulls back to an aerial shot until the house disappears into the trees. Fade out.

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