



Writer-director-producer Colleen Patrick's screenplay *The Director* was a quarter-finalist in this year's CineStory competition; last year her screenplay *The Lucky Penny* finished in the top 10% of Austin's Heart of the Film competition, and she was a finalist in the Disney script-writing competition with a "Frasier" script, *The Hero*.

Colleen's feature script *Into Thin Air* was optioned by Landis Productions (US) in 1998. Colleen is a former president and international liaison for the Seattle chapter of Women In Film.

Colleen's short film, which she wrote, directed and produced, *Life As Art* was an official 1997 Academy Award submission. She has written, produced and directed four short films, the most recent a pilot for the series, *Behind The Movie Screen*, a mockumentary associated with her feature, *The Director*. The pilot can be seen at <www.director3.com>.

She is currently in development as writer/director with her feature, *The Director*. Colleen is a successful on-camera acting coach who also successfully coaches writers. One of her writers was recently picked up by a major New York agent; 12 publishers are interested in the writer's book. Colleen will be writing the screenplay based on the book.

She is the author of two published books, *Mind Over Media*, (CHEF Publishing) and *The 100% Solution* (Meadow Brook Publications).

She has received awards for writing, directing and journalism. A former journalist, Colleen was featured in the 1985 *World Who's Who* of Women published from Cambridge, England.

Fear Of Failure

By Colleen Patrick

Success

An amazing amount of my coaching practice is spent dealing with the fear of failure and success experienced by the writers and actors with whom I work.

Some hit a "wall" as they begin to make some serious progress in their careers and sabotage themselves. Suddenly, as success begins to happen, they stop working at improving their craft and fall back on only what they know, which results in a shrinking personal and professional growth along with good work. They say they feel gripped by the "fear of failure."

Others suffer from the delusion that because they have begun to experience success they no longer need to keep investing in and learning their craft. They may also indulge in alcohol or drug abuse or living the "high life," spending more time socializing than working. These careers not only suffer, they usually disappear.

This tragic phenomenon is so common it's a cliché in the industry: one-hit scripts for writers, one-hit films or TV series for actors. These people believe they are so afraid of "failure" they cannot even touch a keyboard for fear they won't be able to create another script as good as their one-hit wonder.

Another interesting phenomenon is the writer who works fastidiously and forever on only one script, following a virtual paint-by-numbers "disguised" duplication of another successful screenplay. A few of them have actually been sold, produced and even found box office success.

But when the writer is asked to write another—original—good script, this writer finds him or herself paralyzed because s/he has not bothered to learn the craft of how to actually write—and write on demand.

This writer says s/he is choking on the fear of "failure," afraid they will be exposed for their lack of knowledge and ability to create fine, original work.

Still others sabotage themselves from the beginning. These writers try to be so perfect as they start their

artistic journey, they implode. The work of these writers normally turns out to be less than satisfactory because they don't give themselves the opportunity to fail by writing crap, which we all must do when we are starting to pursue any art form.

"Failure," that is, the willingness to try something that falls flat in the learning process, is part of the necessary exploration required to create a solid foundation on which to build, from which we can go on to improve. What was it Edison said? There is no such thing as failure—he simply had to make more than 6,000 attempts to create electricity before it actually happened?

But these writers somehow expect themselves to discover their own electricity without all those attempts, creating the perfect character, screenplay or book from the get-go, which is impossible. There's just not enough juice in their system from which to draw because they haven't filled their tank with enough information and choices to produce a rich tapestry, blending the story, characters, structure and imagery.

They don't seem to be able to allow themselves to start *where they actually are* in their abilities and knowledge, and then, take baby steps to learn ways to perfect their craft.

These writers tell me they want to write great scripts straight away because they are afraid of "failing" at their new pursuit if they don't.

Here's the mystifying part to me:

By not allowing themselves to "fail" by writing at their true level when they begin and then learn what they must in order to build a successful career, they fail.

Their work fails because they haven't taken the time and effort to find their true inner voice, or to make the best and highest use of words, structure and imagery.

They genuinely believe they are afraid of failure.

But, in fact, they are all too familiar with failure in the name of trying (sometimes too hard) to succeed.

In my experience, the real fear is that of success.

Failure is, in reality, very familiar to all these writers.

Success is the stranger.

(HOW TO) GET ACQUAINTED WITH SUCCESS

Method I

Studying writers who have been extremely successful, many as young adults, I notice one thing they have in common: at an early age, they formed the *habit* of writing, and writing in the discipline they liked best. For some it was journalism, for others the short story; and still others, poetry.

They studied words and how to structure them in the most effective way that would convey what they wanted to say, whether it was an article, poetry or a short story.

Writers with backgrounds in journalism also find their disciplined habit of writing daily about all sorts of subjects has helped them immensely. There's no opportunity to *wait* for "inspiration." Their inspiration is forced by meeting a looming, daily deadline, which feels like a matter of life or death when they're in the trenches of producing a fair and accurate account of something that just happened minutes or hours ago.

You can do this as an exercise. After you see something happen—it can be quite mundane from real life or something you've seen on TV—describe it in readable, engrossing detail, including quotes. Does your vocabulary stand up to the task? Does your imagery vividly convey not only what happened, but also the emotional essence in which it happened?

All these forms are great to explore because they require a keen vocabulary, an exceptional knowledge of structure and the most effective, economical use of words.

Because these writers worked with the urgency of having something to say, they did not let their heartfelt story get blocked by writing format "shoulds," "should nots," or screenwriting tales that impose "*this* to happen by page 33."

From this point, they expanded their basic storytelling talents and craft into other, more expanded realms—such as novels, nonfiction books and articles, screenplays and plays.

I also find that successful writers tend to be able to write in several mediums—William Goldman is a best-selling author (novelist and nonfiction) and screenwriter. Maya Angelou is an accomplished poet, screenwriter, playwright, nonfiction book writer and novelist. Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote magnificent poetry,

One more thing: almost all had mentors and teachers to help them create that blueprint and encourage them to follow through.

Would making such a step-by-step blueprint help you develop your craft? Is there a place where you might find a teacher, coach or mentor to shepherd you along the way?

Community colleges, writing groups and on-



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Actor Tim Quigley. Photos by Colleen Patrick.

short stories, novels, plays and screenplays.

The list of multi-faceted writers in love with their craft of molding stories through words is very, very long.

What we have to remember is that for every page the successful writer has published or produced, there are thousands of pages that we shall never see because they were the "failures" these writers allowed themselves to practice on their way to their ultimate success.

So for all these writers, becoming successful is a step by step process of learning words and how to use them most effectively in the discipline(s) they love most, making a habit of writing daily, then spreading their creative wings from there.

It's as if they made a blueprint of the baby steps they had to take and pursued them until they could successfully run their personal marathon!

line screenwriting groups might be some places to start. The WGA (Writers Guild of America) provides a free online mentoring service to aspiring screenwriters at <<http://www.wga.org>>.

The Internet is rife with networking opportunities. Many online screenwriting newsgroups have generous and successful members who help one another through the unknown and low times, as well as celebrate in times of success.

It's all meant to help encourage writers to pursue and improve their craft before, during and after success hits, in order to financially maintain a viable writing career.

Method II

I thought about successful writers I have known personally, interviewed, or heard speak. Many came from less than perfect cir-

But I Do My Best Work When I'm Messed Up!

This is a myth, but too many artists believe it and it sabotages their success.

Writers tend to be people with, at best, painful backgrounds, and at worst, shockingly dysfunctional personal histories.

Even for those of us who are brilliant, who have been successful in other disciplines and professions, the idea of being a genuinely successful writer can give us brain freeze.

I think that is because writing is so close to our souls, how we experience our inner selves that some get that personal psychological web tangled with the work instead of simply using the experience as a tool in the creative process—separating the angst from the job of writing.

It's what we must do when we're hired to do any "ordinary" job. Leave the problems at home, show up and do the work or lose the job. In many ways, for the career writer, it is an "ordinary job," we just write for a living.

Others work under the illusion that they are more creative when they are doing drugs or abusing alcohol. In fact, there might be a brief creative "kick" with the introduction of "upper" drugs and alcohol (which is a depressant).

But that chemically induced "kick" is very short lived and the continued, abuse of either or both results in the loss of effective creative energy and clarity. The writer who is in his or her career for the long haul must learn how to create that inner "kick" or high organically, not chemically.

Otherwise, too often, these writers end up with that old familiar experience of failure.

A Canadian study conducted over several years was made of great Canadian artists who suffer from bouts of serious depression (from several causes) or who are bipolar.

The question: does the depressed/bipolar artist create more *effectively* than the non-depressed, well-adjusted artist? Or, another way of questioning might ask: are they more creative when they are out of their illness?

The recently released results from a report on CBC-TV show that artists cannot create as effectively when they are in their depressed or mentally unstable state. That they, in fact, do their greatest work when they are OUT of their depressed state (either naturally or through the use of medication such as anti-depressants), even if the work is based on their experience or images that came from that period of depression.

Some of the artists involved in the study were interviewed in the report, and they all agreed—they had the illusion that they were so much more creative in a mentally altered state, but discovered just the opposite thanks to the process of the study.

The results of the study suggest that artists known to suffer acute mental illness such as Van Gogh probably created their finest work when they were able to surface from periods of intense melancholy and despair. This is possibly why he used such bright colors when he painted—perhaps he was feeling brief freedom from his darkest hell of illness.

cumstances (some from outright poverty and had a sketchy education), but through it all they, like the previously mentioned successful writers, they made writing a daily habit.

But another habit must accompany the necessary daily writing routine in order to be financially successful enough to *sustain* a writing career. It's the next "baby step" to overcome the fear of *selling* your work.

Now, if you are a screenwriter who does not care about making money or creating a sustainable career from your writing, good for you. You are already successful on your own terms because you are doing what you love, the way you want to do it. So you can skip this section. But, for everyone else who would love to write for a living, this is for you.

To attain this type of success—to be the 'sold and produced writer', you must acquire another habit, which is to *take action daily to market and sell your script*. Now, of course it won't happen without step one—a good screenplay.

But Step II requires that you gain and maintain the habit of identifying places to market your work and figure out ways to get the producers and production companies to read your work.

Chapter and verse on this process is in successful multi-award winning screenwriter Max Adams' (<www.seemaxrun.com>) new book, *The Screenwriter's Survival Guide*, as well as other screenwriting marketing resources on the Internet.

But simply having the information does not spell success.

Making a habit of doing something **every day** to get your work read by people who can buy and produce your script is what will make your career able to come to financial life.

Write letters, make calls, network, ask for help and guidance from online screenwriting groups to which you belong. If you don't already belong to one, join one.

SCREENTALK's website, <www.screentalk.org>, has a number of links that can provide good leads for more information about networking, marketing and selling your script.

The habits of follow up and follow through keep a professional writer in business.

If you don't already have your own personal blueprint of a marketing and script-selling plan, I suggest you make one. Again, you can take baby steps to make this happen until it becomes such a habit you virtually take this activity for granted.

At first talking to producers and the powers that be, might be intimidating. After a while, you'll understand that we are all people, and understand how to talk with them most effectively.

Again, it is the habit of simply doing the work, that will alleviate any angst regarding

the fear of failure or success.

Another way to see it: you are your own business. You are the manufacturer, the CEO, the sales rep. Once you have a deal on board, you can have an attorney or agent actually execute the contract.

But enterprising contacts and sales must be done with or without a manager or agent. Agents love clients who put themselves and their work out there.

While this might seem like the antithesis of a writer's mentality because the writer works in solitude or with a partner, living in worlds created by their minds, marketing the work is still a crucial part of the screenwriter's career.

But—the good news is that the more systematic and habitual these efforts become for you, the more successful the writer. You can't become too emotionally involved with the outcome of your marketing and selling efforts—just keep working on it and, sooner or later, as you improve your skills, the right deal will come.

If you don't think somehow you are "worthy" of success, that's something you must address with your therapist, because you will sabotage yourself, fearing this success.

Adams' advised mantra for writers who might experience this angst: If this is meant for me, I will gratefully accept it.

I've repeated this many times when great opportunities have appeared recently, and it really works!

Method III

Take the stress out of creating.

Adams' motto is "Write like God."

By that she means, 'let your mind reach into the ether and let the wisdom of the universe and ages pass through you, onto your pages'... from the heavens right into your script.

This concept works for many accomplished writers, because they don't feel the burden of creating is completely on their shoulders. Those who feel the weight of being the sole source of creation, often crumble under its stress.

You can make that a habit, too!

In short, stick with the work. With the craft. With learning. Reading the work of those you admire—and figuring out what makes their techniques so successful. Follow through on the tasks of writing daily, of researching contacts, of actually contacting them, of pitching and selling your scripts as if they are on your mundane "to do" list next to empty the garbage, do the laundry and take the dog for a walk.

Write your blueprint!

Write your "to do" list!

Now get out there and have fun doing it! ■

www.screentalk.org