

Eliminate Your Inner Censor

When I was in the 9th grade, my compositions were lauded by my wonderful English teacher, who read many of them to the class. I lowered myself in my chair and did not give eye contact to the teacher while he read my story. As most teenagers are highly embarrassed about baring their soul “to the world,” or in this case, to my 30 classmates, I knew that they would not be clapping for my great accomplishment: An A on my composition.

Maybe they only got a C or maybe they failed because they didn't write anything at all. As for me, the writing part was like drinking a cup of Cappuchino. It was effortless. All of my writing had always been effortless. I was the worst student in school and actually contemplated running away for most of my academic years because I loathed the concept of going to school. So ironically, for me, the A was not deserved because I didn't have to work at it. If it had been an A in Biology, a class I hated with a passion even stronger than showing up to school, then it would have been deserved.

So there I was, sitting in my 9th grade class, with my classmates hating me or being jealous of me, or just plain bored with the fact that they themselves had to sit in their worst ever class. For English class was one of the most hated, but required classes in all of high school. How could I ever tell my classmates that I didn't deserve the A because I didn't have to work at it? They would hate me even more because then I would be telling them that I had a gift, but that I was too stupid or dense to appreciate that gift.

“The Road Not Travelled” spoke to me that year more than ever. My English teacher announced to the class that the reason he had chosen my composition to read above all of the others was that I had been honest in my writing and it had shone through

with every sentence. Whatever was in my brain had transferred to the paper without censorship. That tiny little voice that issues warnings: Don't tell the truth. The truth won't look so good. Lie about your family life. It sucks, but don't tell the world about it. Lie about how you like to sweat when you dance because nobody wants to admit that they sweat. The idea is to look "cool," man, cool dude. Especially if you're a teenager. Cool and cynical.

And so, now – with writing a screenplay, which is writing about characters in whose mind you must climb and in whose skin you must live and in whose brain and heart you must think and feel – It's the honesty that shines through to your audience. Characters who are fake have fake motivations; get into fake predicaments; have a plot line that is predictable, and an audience that goes, "Get me outta here."

Take the road not travelled. If it's the honest road, take it. When you are creating characters and crafting a story for film, t.v., novel, or stage, your honesty as a writer, without censorship of that little voice will shine through. It's the first thing that should be on your mind when you sit down in front of your computer to write: I'm going to tell the truth. Whether I get an A or this screenplay never makes it past my trash file, I'm going to tell the truth. Amen!