

How has your background influenced your filmmaking? (2,000 word limit)

I've always been obsessed with visual storytelling. At eight years old, I loved staying up all night, gulping down bowls of Cap'n Crunch, and watching whatever came on cable between midnight and 6am. I memorized every shot of *The Hunger* and I recorded episodes of *Cheers* and *Hill Street Blues* (and oh, how I loved *Miami Vice*). I rewound the battered VHS tape over and over, ingesting every frame, until my brain was so immersed in cinematic language, that my dreams became shot sequences. During the day, I drew tiny squares across a piece of paper and filled them with the stories I saw in my head.

Years later, after spending my youth acting in the theater, I finally found my home behind the camera. I realized those early squares were storyboards, and I translated them into my first film: *Boys and Dogs and Kids Are Weird*. It won an award from WIFTA and did well on the festival circuit.

Yet, night after night, when I shut my eyes and imagined A DIRECTOR, I could only see a Spielberg-Jesus looking dude-- white guy, black-rimmed glasses, crumpled t-shirt, scruffy little beard- definitely not me, quirky Carrie Schrader, equal parts Hitchcock and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. But, being the determined rebel I was, I thought, 'If Hollywood isn't ready for me, I'll find a back door'.

So I started to write scripts and found a wonderful mentor in Stewart Stern (*Rebel Without A Cause*). Years of acting and directing in front of a live audience taught me a great deal about how to translate a script and work with actors in order to find authentic, unexpected moments. I channelled that knowledge into my filmmaking and continued to do well in LGBTQ festivals and other "alternative" venues. Year after year, I'd get applications to Columbia and NYU, but in my mind that Jesus-Spielburg director dude still reigned, so I'd throw them away, convinced I could never get in. I felt that as a female (and LAWD, a lesbian!) I had to work a hundred times harder to prove myself. So I made several more shorts, winning a spot in the OUTFEST screenwriting lab and the IFP program in NYC.

It wasn't until I tackled a 30-minute Super 8 short, called *Phoenix*, that I realized sneaking through the back door wasn't working anymore. The film was never finished. The story was there, but I didn't have the professional training as a director to make it work. I took those crumply applications out of the trash and applied.

Film school isn't for everyone, but Columbia University was like eating the most delicious, totally satisfying meal after being alone in the desert for years. I was so hungry for it, I sucked up every little detail. I received honors the first year with my short, *Under*, and after graduation, directed a short by Ethan Coen and produced my own web series. I wasn't able to save *Phoenix* but that 'failure' led me to learn many of the invaluable tools I still use today.

I breakdown a script the old-fashioned Elia Kazan *Streetcar Named Desire* way so that I know every heartbeat of each character, and I arm myself with the tools I need to give my actors something meaty and real to do. I usually do several drafts of storyboards, because I know that the first two or three ideas will be tinged with cliché, and it's my job to dig deeper. I rehearse and practice camera sketches, even if I can't have an actual rehearsal; I'll use actor pals for scene work, rocks for floor plans, or Barbie dolls for blocking, all to get the beats just right.

This kind of preparation gives me the structure I need to take risks, because I have to be able to jump into the dark unknown in order to find fresh, thrilling, tender moments.

Given my history, you might be wondering why I don't have more current narrative directing samples. Well, after New York, I followed the work down to Atlanta, Georgia, and eventually began making a living directing commercials and reality tv. Soon after, a female DP who I respected asked me to help write and direct a feature-length documentary about the women who started the Ladies Professional Golf Association. I said no, at first, because I'm *not* a documentary filmmaker, and who wants to watch an hour and half movie about golf? But then I met the incredibly brave pioneers behind the story of the LPGA-- underdogs with intense rivalries, dynamic personalities, and a timeline with plenty of room for conflict, humor, and redemption.

The three-year-long process of making *The Founders* may have taken me away from my path as a film and tv director, but it was a story I had to tell. These women's struggles to do what they loved despite the odds inspires people who face similar challenges today, and mirrors my path as a female writer/director who's always standing just a little outside of the ropes. Making the documentary challenged me to find innovative, unexpected way to tell a story and reaffirmed my love for narrative. This led me to develop two pilots: *The Grind*, which had early

interest from HBO and has since been revamped, and a modern take on the Alfred Hitchcock show.

One fact still remains, I want to use my voice, hone the skills I already have, and continue to learn about the craft of directing so I can create unique, compelling screen stories like those HBO has pioneered. However, I need a mentor or mentors to help take me inside those ropes. Programs like HBO Access provide a much-needed oasis of hope for women and minorities like me. Thank you. For the first time in my life, when I close my eyes, a new image appears-- she's blurry, kind of a mix between me and Ava DuVernay, still fuzzy but she *is* there! This program can help pull that picture into focus by giving me, and others like me, a seat behind the camera.

Despite outgrowing the Cap'n Crunch, my love for and obsession with visual storytelling- the most universal language of all - still keeps me up at night, happily arranging and rearranging those little blocks of drama into stories that entertain and delight.