

Writing Advice from Jas Lonnquist

It's imperative to be curious, creative, disciplined, able to pitch, willing to rewrite, and good at working collaboratively. There are times you should be prepared to talk and times you should be prepared to listen--it pays to know the difference.

For writers having a hard time breaking in, here are some strategies to consider:

1. Find satisfaction in telling the story, not just selling the story, or you may break your heart before you break into the industry.
2. Enter contests. I got my first agent when my screenplay GONE BUT NOT FORGIVEN was a Nicholl finalist. When LOW ROAD won the 2006 UCLA Extension Screenwriting Competition, I got dozens of calls from agents, managers, and producers requesting the script. (Thanks, again!!)
3. Writers (me included) dread selling, but you can't afford to wait for a Knight in Shining Armani to ride in and sell your work for you. Truth is, everything I've sold, I sold myself. Even with an agent or manager, you need to play an active role.
4. Try to break in at the highest level if that's your dream, but at the same time, think in terms of stepping stones. For me, magazine work led to videos which led to TV and film assignments. There are abundant opportunities out there to build your portfolio, gain experience, and get in the game. Some are thankless and low-paying, but it's been my experience that work generates more work.
5. Try to maintain a balanced portfolio of projects to avoid stretches of unemployment. Remember that old parable about filling a box with bowling balls, golf balls, marbles, and sand? A full box will keep you interesting--and well-fed.
6. Take classes and workshops to increase your skills, make contacts, and keep up your enthusiasm.
7. Don't let writing be your only passion. It's too easy to get unbalanced and discouraged. Family, music, travel, hiking, camping, kayaking, skiing, reading, and volunteer work are all things that energize me. And I can't imagine life without a spiritual perspective.