



Newly Minted

With Jan Wilson

Interview By: Denise Smith

ISM: How did you get your start in the entertainment industry?

JW: I've been writing since I was a little kid. I've always loved movies, but I always assumed I'd be a novelist, because as a kid it didn't really occur to me that someone has to WRITE movies. I think it was in high school when I decided that I could write a movie. I always had those scenes playing in my head anyway, I might as well write them down and shape them into a story that others would want to see.

However, it wasn't until I was in my mid 30s that I really decided to take it seriously. I wrote on spec. I lived out in the middle of the desert in New Mexico, and at this time there really wasn't any 'industry' in New Mexico, so I felt pretty isolated. Ironically, as I was living out in the middle of the scorching hot desert, I was writing a story about the siege of Leningrad, which takes place during a brutal Russian winter. It got some notice because it made the semifinals of the Nicholls Fellowship in 2000, and I think it was around then that I decided that I should move to LA and give the screenwriting career a serious go. I moved out to LA in 2002, and soon after I got here I worked as an office grunt in a production company. We made documentaries for Discovery. There really was no future there for me as a feature writer, so I just took office jobs while I wrote on spec night and weekends.

ISM: Please tell us how instrumental Inktip has been in your writing career?

JW: Inktip has been great for me. I put two scripts on there at different times, and in both cases I ended up making great connections with producers in the business. In the case of my script "Milo", it ended up with an option, and the movie is in preproduction now. My script "900 Days" ended up being read by a producer who really loved it, and though he couldn't make the movie due to many typical reasons (budget, bad timing, etc.), he kept in touch

with me, and when projects come up that he thinks I might be right for he calls me to see if I might be interested.

In fact, right now I'm working on a script with him that we are both excited about. Had I never put my script on Inktip I honestly don't think I would have ever crossed paths with him. He wasn't someone I would have queried because the films he'd done previously weren't at all like the script I had.

ISM: Your screenplay "Milo" was optioned in 2008 using the Inktip service. Could you tell us about the day you first received correspondence from Producer, Tobe Sexton regarding your screenplay?

JW: I put "Milo" on Inktip, and literally two days later I got a phone call from him. He said he and his producing partner read "Milo" and loved it. It was exactly what they were looking for, and they wanted to meet with me. A few days after that we met up at the The Grove and hit it off. Again, had it not been for Inktip I doubt I would have ever crossed paths with them.

ISM: Now could you tell us about the day you signed the option contract and became a professional writer?

JW: A few days after Tobe Sexton and his producing partner Kelly Farrell called me about "Milo", we met at The Grove to discuss the project. I liked them right away, and we sat talking for hours about the project. All three of us were excited, and I think we knew I would option the screenplay to them. They had the contracts with them, so I took them with me, and just for good measure I took them home and read them carefully and signed. It felt good to sign.

ISM: How involved in the process are you with the direction the production is going



for “Milo”?

JW: I’ve been unusually lucky. I think in that Kelly and Tobe are keeping me involved in all aspects of the project. They even asked if it would be alright if I be on set as we film. I’d be thrilled! They said, “We’re not writers and we KNOW that, we want you there just in case we need any little thing rewritten or added.” I know that’s unusual for a writer to be allowed on set even for a visit, let alone encouraged to be there every day. We all got along really great from the get-go, and I’m sure if we had NOT hit it off so well they wouldn’t have ever mentioned me being on set. I certainly didn’t expect it. Also, during preproduction they run everything by me to get my opinion. I get lots of update calls regarding how funding is going (or NOT going as the case may be). They’ve been really great about keeping me involved, because I know they certainly don’t have to, and it’s not the norm.

ISM: Are you currently represented, or seeking representation?

JW: I wouldn’t say no to an agent or manager, but for the past few years I’ve sort of stopped looking. I figure that if I’ve come this far without one, I’m doing okay. I am putting my energy into writing more screenplays. Thanks to Inktip, one no longer needs an agent to get their work read. One day I’ll hopefully get an agent or manager, but for now I’m doing pretty good on my own.

ISM: What tool do you use to write your screenplays?

JW: I love Movie Magic Screenwriter. It’s a great screenwriting software program, and I recommend it to all new writers. I find that it’s much more user-friendly than the other ones out there, even that “well-known one”. I also have some charts that I developed myself after years of reading screenwriting books and going to seminars. I think there are about six charts. They are done in a certain order, and if I stick to doing it that way the writing is much easier than just jumping into the script. I’m a great believer in outlining and lots of preliminary notes. People hate to hear this, or think I’m joking, but my scripts (the one that got the Nicholls and the one that was optioned, etc.) are pretty much first drafts, or perhaps a first draft with minor polishing. That’s because I do most of my rewriting in the outline and notes stage. I don’t understand people who say, “Yeah, this is a seventh draft, but I finally nailed it.” That’s so much work! I’m lazy...I’d rather redo my notes and outlines over and over until I get everything just right, and then the script practically writes itself. It’s a lot easier to redo an outline

than an entire script. Writers say, “Yes, but I like to just start writing and see where it takes me!” It takes you to the land of seven drafts! Besides, just because I have everything outlined doesn’t mean there aren’t still surprises along the way. Sometimes some new ideas will occur to me long after the outline phase, and it’s still no problem to explore it and see what happens.

ISM: Do you believe Hollywood needs more female writers?

JW: Only if they are great writers. Seriously, I don’t care much about the gender of writers. There are a lot of male AND female writers who are great, who don’t get read or produced because they don’t have an agent, or whatever. There are so many bad scripts floating around out there, it makes it harder for the good ones to get read. Rather than say that Hollywood does or doesn’t need female writers, I’d say Hollywood needs BETTER writers, both male and female.

ISM: You have worked as a production assistant for television series and movies. Do you have any upcoming TV movie or pilot scripts you are looking to pitch?

JW: I do have some scripts that I’m currently shopping around. I’d love to see my script about the siege of Leningrad made. It’s called “900 Days.” I have a website set up for people to explore the story. It’s based on real events, so there are photos and cool stuff on the website. It can be found at: www.900DaysTheMovie.com. I also have a website that pitches my other scripts, www.JanWilsonScreenwriter.com.

I WOULDN'T SAY NO TO AN AGENT OR MANAGER, BUT FOR THE PAST FEW YEARS I'VE SORT OF STOPPED LOOKING.

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