

An Interview with a Screenwriter

Part 1: Getting to know fourteen-year-old screenwriter, Celeste Davis. By: Christie Yao.

"A lot of people believe that when you die, you go to either Heaven or Hell. Purgatory was thought up by the Catholic Church. Some time later, God thought that it was such a brilliant concept that she actually created it. But in a different image. This sure feels like Hell. She no longer watches over us. She doesn't care to see what we're doing or thinking. Our prayers are the only ones unheard, unanswered... We live the same way here as we did back home, except we are dead. And alone."

-- Celeste Davis

Meet Celeste Davis. She is the fourteen-year-old writer of the screenplay, PURGATORY HOUSE. At the age of eleven, Celeste was matched with Cindy Baer through the Big Sister of Los Angeles program. With Cindy's encouragement and help, the full extent of her dream is now being realized. Her story is being made into an independent film. PURGATORY HOUSE is an uncensored look at a teenage girl's life through the eyes of Silver Strand, who lives in a far away place, doomed to watch the lives of her family and friends on a giant television set for all of eternity. PURGATORY HOUSE is a story that mirrors much of Celeste's own life. It's a story about the hardships and consequences of growing up in today's society. It's a story about the sense of belonging and feeling wanted. Recently I had the opportunity to interview Celeste.

Q: Your screenplay is based on a true story, your own life. Without giving away too much of the movie what can you tell us about your life and yourself.

A: My life is complicated, just like other teenagers. A lot of the movie is just the stuff that goes on today in society that really stings kids. Like the fact that no matter where you go in school, there are drugs. And you can tell that everyone puts on a different face for other people. No one is happy, and they try to escape through drugs. All my life I've been around people with addictions and seen the down side of it. In PURGATORY HOUSE we overcome our obstacles even though we have so much to deal with.

Q: Was it difficult to be honest with yourself and objective when writing about something so personal?

A: In the beginning the ideas flowed, and I was uncensored because I never thought that my story would be produced.

Q: Why did you choose to write a screenplay (rather than a short story or novel)?

A: That's just how it came out. It naturally came out of me as dialogue, and that makes a screenplay...

Q: What was the hardest part of writing a screenplay?

A: Finishing it! It's easy to have an idea to write it down. If your' idea is interesting, it's also easy to elaborate on it. But then you realize that even though it's fun that it's also takes lots of discipline. I am lucky that my "Big Sister" pushed me to finish it. It was really hard.

Q: What kind of personal characteristics or skills do successful screenwriters possess?

A: We are not afraid to be blunt. I'm being honest in this movie. That's what gets people to listen. Writers are also very hard thinkers. Nothing passes us that we don't get into deep thought about. It's annoying, but it can also be a blessing.

Q: What are the factors that motivate you to write?

A: I write when I feel lonely or hopeless, singled out, or discouraged. Writing feels therapeutic. I feel real when I am writing. I can say whatever I want to say, and it will be accepted. You have to watch what you say when you talk to someone, but when you are writing you can say anything and be accepted. It's like the camera. They say, "the camera loves you". When you write, the paper loves you.

Q: It's been a long road from the conception of your story to the process of having it made into a movie. What was the greatest obstacle you had to overcome?

A: So far, it's been the way that things are flying at me: unbelievable things. They show up and you never thought that this would happen to you. Though, I think the greatest obstacles are yet to come.

Q: Do you have any advice for all the young aspiring screenwriters out there?

A: This is important. People, even your closest friends, are going to tell you that you are crazy. You may have this fabulous idea for a screenplay and tell them, and expect them to be excited, and they might not be. That doesn't mean that your idea isn't brilliant. Another thing is, if you do know someone who supports you with your project don't take it for granted. Just his or her support will help you so much, especially if no one else seems to believe in you. Once that one person believes in you, more people will. Also, never lie to yourself. If you have an idea and you are afraid that most people won't like it, and will be offended, don't hold back. Be true to yourself.

Q: What are your plans for the future?

A: My plans for the future are to graduate high school, or to try to get into an art school. I would like to go to college for writing, and as crazy as it sounds, I want to work in a coffee house for a couple of years. I want my life to be fun and don't want one job my whole life. I don't want to settle down right away.

Christie, a student, living in Toronto, Canada, enjoys writing short stories and poems, and interviewing famous people.