

## ***Introduction***

THE IDEA OF A newsletter for Conservative artists wouldn't have occurred to me without the direct and possibly divine influence of Andrew Breitbart.

So let's talk about how I met Andrew for a minute.

I met Andrew Breitbart in November, 2010. At the time, I was a liberal and a blogger for *The Huffington Post*. I'd also written at DailyKos, had my anti-Republican videos featured on CNN and had worked on a number of projects for MoveOn. Andrew Breitbart was the most hated man by the Left and I discovered we had a mutual contact.

Okay! Most hated man! Let's talk!

So I contacted Breitbart we set up a time to talk. I knew all my friends hated his guts but I hadn't really researched him much before the interview. I got myself up to date on the Shirley Sherrod story and ACORN and James O'Keefe and everything else I could find about Breitbart. I learned he'd worked with Arianna Huffington and the idea for *The Huffington Post* actually came from him. Andrew was told that even though I was a liberal, I was honest and had reported on stories like the John Edwards scandal.

And I learned all my friends on the Left really, really hated his guts.

So I phoned him up for the interview and, much to my shock, I liked the guy. We talked for over two hours on that first phone call.

We were both about the same age and so we knew the same music. He had a bunch of kids making noise in the background, something I could empathize with. He talked about his inspirations being Hunter S. Thompson and Paul Krassner and 1980s David Letterman. We both hated censorship. He was smart, opinionated, and staggeringly open and honest with me.

In the course of that first call, Andrew told me about something called the Pigford settlement and how he thought it related to the media lynching he'd taken over Shirley Sherrod. He said, "Don't take my word on this. Look into it." He said he wanted someone who wasn't a Conservative to report on the story because he thought Pigford was a big deal and that it would get lost if labeled as just a 'Conservative' story.

So, I looked into it.

Two weeks later, I was working for Breitbart on the Pigford story. My family and I hit the road for three months, shooting interviews with lawyers, farmers and other people connected to the story of a multi-billion dollar fraud scheme.

I was Breitbart's token liberal.

As I worked on the story and uncovered the truth, something strange happened; I lost all my friends. Every liberal I knew hated the idea that I was working with Andrew. They weren't curious. They ignored me when I said that he hadn't put any restrictions on my investigation.

The idea that Breitbart actually just wanted to get to the truth didn't register with them. It didn't fit their stereotype. So they just abandoned or attacked me.

Andrew and I became very close in the 18 months I knew him, usually

speaking many times throughout the day and often late into the night. He didn't argue with me about politics. He liked having liberal friends he could spar with in a friendly way. As I worked with him on the story, I increasingly faced a choice between remaining on the Left or being honest. The reality of the scandal and the cover-up on the Pigford story was so ugly that I stopped calling myself a liberal after a few months.

For over a year, I just called myself an Independent. I wasn't a liberal. I didn't know what I was, really. The idea of being a Conservative had never occurred to me. It was foreign. I grew up in Massachusetts and then moved to Los Angeles when I turned eighteen. I could count the number of Conservatives I knew on one hand.

I kept working with Andrew on stories like Weinergate and The Occupy Wall Street movement. When *The Huffington Post* banned Andrew from the front page, I quit in protest. I became one of the main narrators of the film *Occupy Unmasked*.

Then we lost Andrew.

I knew about eight hours before the rest of the world. Our mutual friend Brandon Darby had called Andrew on the night of February 29<sup>th</sup> and the police had answered Andrew's phone. Brandon called Andrew's lifelong friend and business partner Larry Solov first and then Brandon phoned me, choking back tears.

"I think there's something wrong with our friend."

Something was wrong but since he didn't know details, all we could do was hope for the best. Maybe he'd collapsed and gone to hospital but was still alive. As the night wore on, there was no word from Larry and the best seemed increasingly unlikely.

Early in the morning of March 1<sup>st</sup>, my phone buzzed and it was an email from Andrew. I had a sudden pang of hope but quickly saw the email wasn't "Hey, I'm in the hospital." It was about another story we'd been discussing the night before, related to serial bomber Brett Kimberlin and the group of Democrat operatives connected with him. It wasn't the kind of thing you'd send if something had happened and we knew for sure that something had happened by then.

I called just in case and left a voicemail but Larry Solov phoned back a few minutes later to confirm the worst. Andrew Breitbart was gone.

In the hours after his death was announced, I watched the outpouring of so many people who felt his loss; some friends but many people on Twitter who'd never met him.

The unthinkable occurred to me. I realized that after months of friendship and work with Breitbart, I'd become a Conservative.

Andrew hadn't argued me into Conservatism. We never argued about politics, even when we'd disagreed. Instead, just by being himself, Andrew had influenced me. He inspired me. He let me make up my own mind.

After he left, I realized that if my friend Andrew was a Conservative — if *that guy* was a Conservative — I was, too. I made a commitment that day that I was going to continue to fight for his ideas and ideals. Our work wasn't finished.

Central to many of my discussions with Andrew was the idea that *culture matters*, especially the arts. I'd worked in TV, film, and publishing for thirty years when I met Andrew. My professional background and my passion is cutting edge digital technology and how it's used to create, distribute, market and sell art. Writing about politics was a new pursuit for me. I wanted to bring everything in background together but I didn't know how.

I knew I was going to start a new project right after the 2012 election. I just didn't know what it would be, though. I knew I needed to wait until I saw who won the election.

As you may have heard, President Obama won.

I saw so many Conservatives dejected about politics and I thought about Andrew. I thought about what we'd lost and what was missing.

I believe Conservatives lost the 2012 election because we weren't even *trying* to win the battle for culture, for art or even trying to reach out to people who are interested in those things. Andrew had warned Republicans about this for years. They didn't listen. They lost.

Then, the idea hit me about what needed to be done. The fight was for culture and I wanted to do what I could to help win it.

So I started the newsletter based on a simple idea; inspiration and information for Conservative culture warriors. One idea a day, delivered to your email inbox.

And so — here we are.

As we've had more and more people sign up for the newsletter, they missed the material that came before. Here it is, plus a little extra. Enjoy it and I say throughout the essays; get to work. There's a culture at stake.

Lee Stranahan  
Dallas, Texas  
Thanksgiving, 2012

**CHAPTER ONE**  
***IDEAS & INSPIRATION***

## ***Shout At The Left: I'm An Artist***

WHEN I ANNOUNCED I'D be launching this newsletter about Conservative art & artists, the reaction from the Left was predictable; that there was no such thing. They said that a 'Conservative artist' wasn't just as rare as unicorn but that it was actually an oxymoron. They said that artists COULDN'T be Conservative.

Literally. Could. Not. Be.

Unfortunately, many Conservatives seem to agree with that assessment. Some hear the word 'artist' and roll their eyes. This is to some extent understandable but that's part of our challenge, too.

By abandoning the world of art and culture to the Left, Conservatives have given up one of the most important and compelling rhetorical tools.

There's nothing about being an artist that is inherently anti-Conservative. That's a modern conceit that assumes that art must be nihilistic and that artists must be violently opposed to any and all of society's values.

I'm can't tell you how many times Andrew Breitbart talked to me about this nihilism being one of the central elements of the Left. In my own personal journey from Left to Right, I learned for myself how correct he was. The deliberate hatred and destruction of values – any values, values as such - is pervasive in our political and artistic culture. It's about tearing things down. It's about belittling achievement and success. Nowhere was this better personified in the last year than the Occupy Wall Street movement and it's ideological stepchild, the 2012 Obama presidential campaign.

In fact, conservatism provides fertile ground thematically because the issues it deals with are timeless. We toil the soil of enduring values. We provide real hope and inspiration. And we have history with us; for centuries, art was not about destruction. It was about uplift and beauty and skill.

This isn't to say that Conservative artist can't explore darkness or utilize the evocative power of noise and chaos. All techniques and forms should be open. Part of being an artist is pursuing a personal vision...and that's exactly what is at stake.

We can not and MUST not let the nihilist Left define who an artist is and declare what their beliefs should be.

The artistic stereotype needs to be challenged by example. We can't just argue this point in theory with abstract arguments. We need to produce art. We need to hold ourselves to a high standard; not just thematically but in terms of concept, craft and execution.

It's not enough to produce art that means well or is based on solid themes. The work needs to be good. Actually, argue the work Conservative artists has to be BETTER than average, in order to break through the cultural noise.

It's imperative that people who believe in values learn the artistic, business, technical and community building skills to produce a vibrant and thriving culture.

Say it with pride and purpose; I'm an artist.

Then, get to work.

## ***Two Steps To Success***

IF YOU WANT TO succeed commercially and creatively, you must do both of these:

***1) Start projects.***

***2) Finish them.***

It's that simple, which is to say - it's so difficult most people will never do either one.

And successful artists have almost always struggled mightily with one or both steps at points in their career.

Doing those two steps isn't a guarantee of success. There are no guarantees. But you have to do them both, over and over.

Now you know.

## ***Conservative Artists : Embrace Your Limitations***

### ***"EMBRACE YOUR LIMITATIONS."***

THAT'S common advice for artists because it's good advice.

- If you're a musician and the power goes out for a week - can you write and record an album in a tent with just your acoustic guitar and an iPhone?
- If you're a filmmaker and you ran out of gas on the way to the shoot plus your sound guy is drunk - can you make a powerful statement about terrorism in 30 seconds, with no words, in one shot?
- If you're a photographer - can you still create haunting images when your lens dropped to the ground and is cracked?

You get the idea.

You can beat your fists against the wall of your limitations until your hands are raw and bloody. You can scream and cry about how unfair your limitations are. You can use your limitations as an excuse. Nobody will blame you.

But...

But the magic happens when you stop resisting your limitations and start working with them.

It's not about denying the limitations. It's not about ignoring them. It's about literally embracing them and receiving them as the gifts that they are.

Because really; they are gifts. It's always the artist's choice whether to unwrap them or not.

This is especially important for Conservative artists. Remember what you're up against.

- Liberal artists have access to people, markets and money that you don't.
- No matter how well you execute your project, you're going to be attacked unfairly because of the message.
- The mainstream media is against you. At best, they will ignore you. At worst, they will relentlessly lie about you.

See what I did there? I just named some limitations.

**Now, what are you going to do about them?**

*Hint : Andrew Breitbart embraced those limitations in the world of politics and he left this world an accomplished hero.*



## ***The Starving Artist Myth***

DON'T LET THE "STARVING artist" myth become the excuse that stops you from doing better creative work.

We've all heard the cliché about starving artists and the corollary bit of conventional wisdom that goes with it, "Don't quit your day job." Don't let these bad ideas poison your creative dreams.

There are, of course, plenty of artists who make little or no money from their work. This is true about every field of human endeavor, however, not just art.

There are people who like tinkering with engines. That doesn't make them auto mechanics. Lots of people enjoy cooking. That doesn't make them restaurant owners. Enjoying golf doesn't make you a golf pro.

There are plenty of musicians, painters, writers and the like who enjoy creating art. Are they 'starving artists' if they aren't making money? Nope.

They are amateurs. As opposed to professionals.

The difference between amateurs and professionals is not necessarily skill. There are plenty of skilled amateurs in the world. Professionals treat what they are doing like a business.

Creative work has all the inherent difficulties of any entrepreneurial startup. It's uncertain, risky, and there is often a ramp-up period before profitability. It requires self discipline that is not taught in an educational system more geared to teaching people to follow instructions than acting independently. And like any business, there are going to be mistakes made along the way.

Professionals don't just focus on the fun stuff. They deal with the mundane aspects of business such as marketing, sales, accounting, and product development. Amateurs don't want to deal with any of that stuff, which is exactly why they're amateurs. There's no commitment.

This is where the danger of "don't quit your day job" comes in.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* put forth the compelling proposition that it takes about 10,000 hours of work for someone to achieve mastery. When we talk about mastery, remember that we're not just talking about raw skills here. A guitarist may spend hours practicing, but until they have spent hours and hours developing a working business model they are still an amateur.

One of the problems with the "day job" mentality is that it stops you from making the progress that will allow you to becoming a professional. If you're spending 40 hours a week stacking boxes, that takes time away from the 10,000 hours Gladwell says you need to become a master of your art.

Even with hard work, is your success in art guaranteed? No, of course not but that's the same for every single business you can name. Every profession has people who do very well and others who don't. There are struggling doctors, lawyers, plumbers, middle managers, sous chefs, florists. But you never hear clichés about 'starving florists', do you?

Don't give yourself the excuse that you can't make money with art. That becomes a justification for not putting in the time and effort it would take to do

the hard, boring work of becoming a pro.

Feel free to being an amateur, if you want. There's nothing wrong with being a hobbyist. But if you really want to earn a living from your art, stop giving yourself the excuse that you might not succeed. Pay your dues and get down to business.

## ***People To Ignore***

WHILE YOU'RE TRYING TO do your work, you're going to hear a lot of opinions. Filtering all that noise will give you space to get things done.

Here's a list of people that you need to avoid listening to ...

- People who don't want you to make money from your art. They are poison to your success even if sometimes they are your fans.
- Anyone who tells you you can't succeed. *EXCEPTION: they are making practical and possibly painful suggestions as to how you CAN actually succeed. Learn to tell the difference.*
- Non-fans who criticize your work, just to hear themselves pontificate. This is easier said than done.
- Critics who are not fans of the genre or style that you work in. If you make horror films, don't listen to people who hate horror films. If you have a Christian Rock band, don't listen to people who hate Christians or Rock or Christian Rock.
- People who say "It can't be done!" but have never tried to do it themselves.
- Whoever that voice in your head is; you know, that voice that keeps saying all those awful things about you and your work.
- Your fans - when you're first trying to stretch yourself out in a new direction. Most of them won't get it at first. Ask Bob Dylan about this. They *may* turn out to be right. You could ask Dylan about that, too.

Interestingly enough, once you filter all those voices out, there aren't really that many left. Listen to those.

## ***Quotes To Get Past The Post Election Blues***

DID THE REELECTION OF Barack Obama leave you frustrated, angry, bewildered, depressed or indignant?

Good.

History shows that is exactly the atmosphere where mankind produces great art.

Do you worry about an America that is increasingly a culture of dependence?

Do you see a foreign policy that's capitulating to barbarians?

Do you see the nation on a path fraught with danger?

Tell that story. Paint a picture. Make a movie. Write a poem. Sing a song. Design a T-shirt. Every technique in the world is open to you; comedy, abstract art, music, fiction, fable, sculpture — from the strikingly simple to breathtakingly complex.

Here are five quotes that will hopefully inspire you to take that energy and turn it into something no one's ever seen before.

*"In the beginning, God created..." - First five words of the Bible*

*"Creativity is discontent translated into arts." - Eric Hoffer*

*"In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." - George Orwell*

*"Breitbart always said 'culture is upstream of politics' ... it's not selling out, it's infiltrating and influencing." - Sarah Palin*

*"The true artist plays mad with his soul, labors at the very lip of the volcano, but remembers and clings to his purpose, which is as strong as the dream. He is not*

*someone possessed, like Cassandra, but a passionate, easily tempted explorer who fully intends to get home again, like Odysseus.” - John Gardner*

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### ***TOOLS***

## ***The Tablet Revoution***

THE TABLET REVOLUTION NEEDS you!

Tablets can actually be a great way to create content (I'm writing this post on one, in fact) but that's not my focus here. In fact, you don't even need to own a tablet in order to benefit from the revolution taking place.

On or about December 25th, millions of your potential new fans will be opening the wrapping paper on a bright shiny piece of glass that they can hold in their hands while on the couch or in bed, on a subway or airplane seat, in a coffee shop or a classroom...and send you money with.

Stop and consider that for moment. All those tablets that will be sold this holiday season represent opportunities for people to pay you. That's because tablets are not just a replacement for traditional computers; they really are a revolution in the way people interact with the Internet.

When people accessed the Internet just through desktop or laptop computers, there was no built-in revenue model. This is a world where blogs blossomed, MySpace pages popped up and YouTube became a powerhouse.

The problem for many artists was that they found no way to monetize their art in that world. It was very easy to do a lot of work and never see a dime for it.

In fact, in the pre-tablet world you could actually create a backlash by charging for your work. There are any number of bloggers who learned the hard way that when they took their work and tried to put it behind a paywall or charged a subscription fee, their readers revolted. People didn't want to pay for something that they were able to get for free the day before.

The tablet revolution changes all that. It's almost like a whole new Internet where people are ready, willing and able to open up their purses and wallets and give you a little bit of money for content.

Then smart corporate giants like Apple and Amazon figured out that the key was to merge content sales and hardware devices. They built payment systems and online stores that made buying digital content easy and compelling. If you think about four of the major tablets on the marketplace today – the iPad, the Nexus 7, the Nook and the Kindle fire – they all have online sales systems built right into the system. In other words, the revenue model is baked into the device and the consumer loves it.

Those millions of tablets that will be sold this Christmas season are nothing without content. That's where you come in.

And you have a unique advantage. There's a market out there right now, starving for the kind of content that you can provide.

Yes, you.

You actually have an hidden strength over the big Hollywood studios and New York publishing houses that are churning out material. You're the person that can create the kind of content that Hollywood never will, strictly for political reasons.

You're on this list because you're part of the Conservative counterculture,

right? You know firsthand how difficult it can be to find art that you can get behind 100%. You know what it's like to love the music but hate the lyrics. You know what it's like to laugh at the jokes then cringe at the politics. You know what it's like to see 100 movies that make businessmen the villain for every one brave enough to make the bad guy an actual terrorist.

There are millions of people out there just like you. They need your e-books, your music, your films, your apps, your games, your interactive digital magazines of the future and whatnot. If you can get your work out there and make sure it's darn good, they are ready to pay money for it.

There's a great opportunity and the clock is ticking. It's about 45 days until Christmas. That is definitely enough time to write a short e-book or write and record a few song songs or create a trailer for your next film. The tablets are coming and it's time for you to step up. Ready? Go!



## ***Adobe's Creative Cloud***

A FEW MONTHS AGO, Adobe - the makers of world famous tools like Photoshop, Illustrator and After Effects - introduced a new way to use their products with something called Adobe Creative Cloud. Previously, if you wanted the full suite of Adobe products you would have had to spend over \$2000 for the package. Of course, dedicated professionals and companies plunked down their cash. The Adobe tools became the industry standard in applications from photography to web design to video production to digital publishing to graphic design. Meanwhile, people without thousands to spend were out of luck.

Adobe Creative Cloud is a radical new way to get access to these tools. Instead of spending thousand dollars to buy the software, users could subscribe to the software for around \$50 a month. This is an absolutely incredible deal and I thought it was going to revolutionize the creative industry by making the professional tools accessible to more people than ever. It's a perfect example of the power of the free market and innovation to make tools available to a wider audience.

But I noticed something strange when I began talking to people. I realized that Adobe Creative Cloud had something of a marketing problem; people just didn't get it.

Whenever I talk to people about Creative Cloud they seem to have a number of misconceptions about how it works and what you get. This is natural because 'subscription software' is a new business model for most people.

So here's the bottom line on the Adobe Creative Cloud; it's the real deal.

This is one of those cases where something may sound too good to be true and it actually IS that good. There's no catch, no trickery, nothing weird.

You get the full versions of all of Adobe's major creative software applications. Yes, they are actually installed right on your computer, not just 'on the cloud.' In other words, you can still work without an internet connection. In fact, the software only needs to check in once every few weeks to make sure your license is up-to-date.

What can you do with Adobe Creative Cloud? The bigger question for creative people really is: what CAN'T you do? There is video editing, visual effects, color correction, audio editing and effects, photo editing and organization, web design, application development, illustration, print design, and more.

Don't think you need all those tools? No problem. Remember, we're only talking about an investment of \$50 a month. The Creative Cloud suite would be a great investment even if you only used a couple of the applications from time to time. Moreover, you choose what gets installed on your computer so you don't need to overload your system with software you aren't going to use.

However, it's a nice feeling knowing that you can have access to all software any time should you suddenly need it. For instance, you may not think you're going to do video editing or web design today but if the need arises, just install

the programs you want and you're ready to rock.

Not only do you get all the powerful software, but there are number of bonuses that on their own make the package completely worthwhile. For instance, you get access to a huge library of web fonts that can make your sites come to life with innovative typography. You also get gigabytes of online storage space to store project or share them with clients. You even get space to host a website and a digital publishing suite.

Another huge advantage is that each Creative Cloud subscription lets you run the software on two different computers. Even better, one can be a Windows machine and one can be a Mac or any combination thereof. There are also no restrictions that keep the two machines from running the same piece of software at the same time so run one on your laptop and another on a desktop or however you want to roll.

This is such a tremendous value that I bought a second subscription as a gift for my older son, who has subsequently started his own business and uses the Adobe tools as the basis for it. There's even a discount for student versions that make the Creative Cloud about \$35 a month.

In an uncertain economy, Adobe Creative Cloud plus an affordable computer allow anyone to start a creative business without going into debt. Any \$400 laptop should be able to run the Creative Cloud applications with ease and the system you already have will probably work quite well. It levels the playing field for startup businesses.

It's often a marketing cliché that "all you need to add is your creativity" but that is literally true here. This is an absolutely no compromises, professional suite of industry-standard software plus extra goodies like the Digital publishing suite and web fonts, all at one very affordable monthly price.

Just add your creativity. Really.

Learn more about Adobe Creative Cloud at <https://creative.adobe.com>

## *Scriviner*

WHEN IT COMES FOR tools for creating art, it sometimes seems like the writers are outside the toyshop looking in on all of the awesome software that other artists get to work with.

Photographers have an exciting toolset to play around with programs like the Adobe Photoshop or Lightroom. Video editors get to use Final Cut Pro X or Sony Vegas with a plethora of cool plug-ins effects to pick from. Musicians have Ableton Live or Propellerhead's Reason to jam out and compose songs with the side benefit of intense graphic user interfaces.

Writers? We get Microsoft flippin' Word.

Well, not so fast. Although it may not be as sexy as an image editing or visual effects program, there's a tool I've been using to write recently that I'm actually very excited about. Meet one of my new favorite tools; the writing software Scrivener from a company called Literature and Latte.

I'll admit that part of the thrill of Scrivener is the potential financial payoff it offers to authors. If you're a writer who wants to make money, keep reading.

Scrivener is a word processor designed to help you research, write, edit and publish longer pieces. This isn't for writing love letters or mocking up a flyer for the local bake sale. Scrivener is about novels and research papers and short stories and non-fiction books and even screenplays.

Wait. Did I mention money earlier?

I did, because Scrivener is the best writing tool I've found that allows you to monetize your writing by giving you an affordable, easy workflow to create e-books for popular tablets or readers like Amazon's Kindle, the Apple iPad line or the Barnes & Noble Nook.

Scrivener does not work quite like traditional word processors in some ways, so it does take a little getting up to speed to understand the pure power of the program. The best way to learn is through an introductory video that Literature And Latte has created that shows the features. I would highly recommend looking at it for a deeper overview and what I'm going to give you here.

Scrivener's power starts with its ability to help you research and plan. There are outlining and "cork board" modes that are designed to lay out a roadmap for longer works. The cork board gives you a very convenient index card view that allows you to flip the cards over to put more general information. You can also reorder your work by moving these index cards around.

When you're researching a project, just keeping track of everything can be a pain. Scrivener comes to the rescue here as well. No more searching around your computer to find text files or even searching through your web browser's history to find that webpage you desperately need to look at right now and can't find anymore. You can store all of that stuff inside a Scrivener document. This comes in handy for both pre-story research and when you're footnoting on a nonfiction piece. Scrivener also allows you to save text files that don't actually end up in your book or article, such as character biographies or information

about locations.

When you're writing, Scrivener give you a "focus mode" that allows you to see just words and no distracting interface elements. I have eyesight problems and I'm able to crank up the zoom so it's easier for me to see what I am typing.

Scrivener lets you easily edit and reorder sections of your work, and not just in obvious ways like chapters. It also has the ability to link a few parts together and show them to you all at once in something called the Scrivenings mode. This lets you move sections of your book around, even at a subchapter level.

When you're ready for output, Scrivener is there for old school print publishing but it has a built-in workflow for publishing e-books directly to either the Kindle or EPUB format. (EPUB is the format used for Apple iBooks.) When you are ready to publish an e-book, you just set up a few parameters for your export and in just a few seconds you have generated a fully formatted e-book, complete with an interactive table of contents and ready for upload to Amazon , Apple, Barnes & Noble or anywhere else

Best of all, Scrivener is very affordable. Versions for the Mac or PC are under \$50 and if you still aren't sure, you can download a 30 day free trial.

If you are even remotely interested in doing a book publishing or any long form writing, I cannot possibly recommend Scrivener enough. It's an incredible writing and publishing tool that will aid you at every step of the process, from preparing for your first draft to the final edition for sale online.

And yes, this book you're reading was output with Scrivener.

More more information visit : <http://www.literatureandlatte.com>

## ***Celtx***

SOMETIMES A PRODUCT REVIEW needs to be lengthy and detailed because there's a big investment at stake. In this case, I can save us both a lot of time.

Celtx is great software for writing screenplays and scripts for everything from stage plays to short films to features. It also includes features that make pre-production easier, including storyboarding and script breakdown.

And the version of Celtx that you'd run on your desktop or laptop computer is free. Nope, no catch. It's actually, totally free.

I really could end the review right there, couldn't I?

Screenwriters need a tool like Celtx because when it comes to scriptwriting, proper formatting is crucial. There's a specific way scripts are laid out to clearly show scene transitions, time of day, action and dialogue. These formatting choices aren't optional. If your script isn't formatted properly, it will instantly look unprofessional.

Celtx handles all this formatting. There are other programs like the industry standard Final Draft that do the same work but Final Draft costs over \$100. You really aren't giving up anything in terms of writing functionality by using Celtx; all the tools are there to create perfectly formatted scripts.

And price aside, Celtx actually does more for the indie filmmaker than Final Draft does. Celtx actually helps out with some of the pre-production organizational tasks; everything from contact lists to a calendar. (No, it doesn't do budgeting.)

You also have the ability to store your scripts 'on the cloud', which gives you instant access to them between computers.

If you use a mobile device such as a tablet or smart phone and want to pay a little money for Celtx apps, you can even write and sync scripts using your iPhone, iPad or Android device. These apps also sync your scripts so anytime inspiration strikes, you can add a brilliant bit of dialogue or a sudden plot twist to your opus. I love this feature and I've used to write scenes on my iPad before hitting the hay. Other apps (also paid) let you give 'sides' to your actors, scout locations and more.

If you want to get into screenwriting, there's absolutely no excuse not to get Celtx.

For more info visit <http://www.Celtx.com>

## ***USB Keyboard Controllers***

IF YOU WANT AN example of what a blessing technology has become to creativity, look no further than the basic musical task of recording a piano sound.

Of course, the piano is a mainstay of every type of music from classical to rock to jazz to country to gospel to blues. Just a few years ago, however, recording a piano was a gargantuan task. Back in the day, you needed to start with the piano itself and the good ones cost tens of thousands of dollars and are the size of a couple of refrigerators. Then you needed a great acoustic space, which recording studios in New York, Los Angeles and Nashville spent literally millions of dollars to create. You also needed expensive microphones and recording gear. And all that equipment wasn't enough because you also needed to learn techniques such as crossing the microphones in order to get a good stereo sound.

Today anybody – and that includes you – can record absolutely amazing, state-of-the-art piano sounds right on the computer that you're probably using to read this. The digital recording revolution hit a few years ago and today anyone willing to plunk down just a few hundred dollars can take part in it. Moreover, everything I just said about recording a piano also applies to drums and string sections and guitars and anything else you can imagine.

An entire world of sound is at your disposal and this is important even for non-musicians. I do a lot of video production and I often create the music myself and I am not a talented musician. So let's talk about how you can take the first steps and starting to set up your own recording studio that exists on your laptop or desktop, in a spare bedroom or office or anywhere you like.

This issue I'll give you an Introduction to Keyboard Controllers that hook up to your computer. There are a variety of affordable options available today that will work in conjunction with whatever software you use. It's an investment that even the non-musically talented can easily justify.

Let's take a look at three different USB based keyboard controllers that use the familiar black-and-white keys of the piano, so you get an idea of your options. All three hook up to your computer with a simple USB cable. USB is the same standard that used to hook up modern printers and it is ubiquitous on modern desktop and laptop computers. Mac and Windows-based PCs all use USB. A USB controller makes connecting to the computer an extremely simple one cord affair; the computer even provides power.

The three different units I'll be discussing have different strengths. One is a full-size keyboard with 88 semi-weighted keys, which means it plays more like the piano. The second controller is high tech unit with a slew of buttons; it's smaller but still has full-sized keys but they are plastic and feel more like an organ than a piano. The third is a completely portable controller with smaller keys you can pop in your laptop bag.

One thing to note about these controllers is that they make no sounds on

their own. You won't hear a thing except the sounds of your fingers hitting the keys unless you hook them up to a computer with the right software. Also, these controllers can be used to play any instrument sound your computer and software will make, not just traditionally keyboard controlled instruments like piano or organ. I will often lay down a drum track by hitting the black-and-white keys in using the appropriate piece of drums software.

#### [M-Audio Keystation 88ES Midi Controller](#)

Of the three united listed here, this controller is one that feels and plays most like a real piano but it's extremely affordable at around two hundred dollars. It's also a fairly no-frills unit; it's got a couple of sliders to control things like volume, a pitch bend and modulation wheel and inputs on the back for things like a sustain foot pedal. Having a controller of this size at this price is great because it gives you the ability to play the full range of piano or other sounds. The keyboard is long but it's also light enough that I keep it in a corner of my office and then pull it over by my computer when I want to play. It's straightforward and a real joy to play.

#### [M-Audio Axiom 25 Advanced 25-Key USB MIDI Controller, 2nd Gen](#)

If you want something more sci-fi, this powerful keyboard controller has 25 keys full sized plastic keys although versions with 49 and 61 keys are also available. This unit features a knobs, transport controls, a built in status screen and even drum percussion pads, all of which make this unit a great way to control your music software. You have the flexibility to control sounds or even the mix the audio levels on your recordings. This is an especially great unit if you going to do a lot of and don't have the need to play with two hands. All of this means a little more set-up, so be ready to call on your inner nerd.

#### [Akai Pro LPK25 Laptop Performance Keyboard](#)

The third controller is a small unit that will literally fit in your laptop bag so you can record wherever the inspiration strikes. The smaller keys get you pretty far away from real 'piano style' playability but that might not be your goal and beside, but all modern music software has the ability to easily edit out any mistakes after you've record. The ability to bring this unit anywhere with you and the low price (under \$50) make this a very compelling computer accessory to own.

So there's a quick look at three different styles of keyboard controllers you can use to build your own computer based music project studio. These units are far from the only ones out there so start exploring your options and making some noise.

*(Note : all links are Amazon affiliate links.)*

## CHAPTER THREE

### *EXCERPTS FROM PERMISSION TO QUIT*

#### *About Permission To Quit*

**PERMISSION TO QUIT** IS my upcoming book about how, when and why to quite your day job and focus on doing work that really matters to you and the world.

I sent an excerpt of *The French Fry Guy* out to newsletter subscribers but I thought I'd include a bit more so you have some context for the ideas.

Enjoy.



## ***The Best Job I Ever Quit***

TRUE STORY: I QUIT the best job I've ever had.

This book isn't about quitting some horrible job you hated. You don't need permission for that. Quitting horrible jobs that you hate is a real no-brainer, isn't it? You don't need a book for that any more than you need a book called *Permission To Remove A Pair Of Pliers Dangling From Your Nose*. It hurts, so you do it quickly. No reading required.

This book is about the tough call. It's about why you should quit your job, even if it's a great job and even if you really need the job and all the security you currently think it provides you.

I did it. For close to five years, I had my dream job.

I was a graphic artist for the nationally syndicated TV show *Access Hollywood*, an entertainment news show that taped at the NBC studios in Burbank, California. You know those little graphics that flash on your TV for a couple of seconds that say something like *Britney's Baby Bump!* or *Angelina's Heartbreak?*

Yeah. I made those. You're welcome.

When I got the job, it couldn't have come at a better time. I was desperate and I thought I needed a normal job type job. It was 2003 and my life was at a low point. I'd been working freelance for about twenty years and I'd recently parted ways with my main client: a company that provided about 95% of my income. I'd had a few very difficult months and the wear was beginning to show.

Things were bad. Bills were piling up. The stress also brought my wife Lauren and I close to point of splitting up, even though we had two young children together. My whole world was coming apart and I thought that the culprit was my two decades of freelance work. A dependable, steady gig seemed like it would be the answer to a prayer.

For a couple of months, it was brutal; we were literally living day to day. So much was at stake including my family's future.

We were driving around the Pacific Northwest, thinking we might relocate there. I scrambled every day to make sure we had enough money for a hotel that night. I was doing tutoring somewhere up in Portland, Oregon and during a break in our training session, I checked a computer bulletin board and saw the answer to my prayers — a dream job.

Ironically, the *Access Hollywood* job was one that I'd helped someone else get about a year before. I had coached a former student of mine on exactly how to get the gig and sure enough, he'd gotten it. Now, he'd left to go work at one of the other big entertainment news shows and there was an opening.

I threw the family back in of our minivan and immediately drove down to Los Angeles to go through the process of applying for the job. There were other applicants but I had three things working in my favor; I was well qualified for the job, I'd known the department head for years, and most important -- I wanted it

more than anyone else. Boy, did I want it. I knew that not getting that job might be the end for my family.

After a couple of agonizing weeks, I got the job. Soon, I was making six figures a year and had a great benefits package including dental and matching on my 401k. I worked with smart, creative people on a daily basis doing work that I enjoyed.

There were also other huge perks. We got an apartment just a quarter mile from NBC, so I had no commute. I could go eat lunch at home every day. NBC was very child friendly and my kids would spend some afternoons playing in my office or having Jay Leno joke around with them in the hallway downstairs. Seeing which car Jay drove to work each day from his massive collection was also fun. My favorite: the fire engine. He had a real, honest to goodness, old fashioned fire engine.

Yep, good times.

It was the best job I've ever had.

I'm darn glad I quit.

## Cogs

TO UNDERSTAND WHY YOU need to leave your job you need to understand what a job really is.

A job is a cog.

More specifically, a job is just a cog that has a person inside of it. Each cog is an interchangeable part of a big machine. The machine is the store or shop or office or company and that machine needs some cogs to keep it running. If you're in a job right now, you're inside one of those cogs.

The key thing about the cogs is that they are interchangeable. Cogs are replaceable. They have to be. You can't have the entire machine shut down forever when one part is removed. You need to be able to pop one cog out and put another one in its place.

Factories have line worker cogs and supervisor cogs. Restaurants have cook cogs and server cogs and dishwasher cogs and manager cogs. Offices have sales cogs and receptionist cogs and middle manager cogs and that guy who sits by the copy machine and nobody is sure what he does cogs.

No cog is irreplaceable. Of course, every person who fills up the cog is an individual and some do their jobs better than others but that doesn't change the bottom line; the person in the cog may change but the cog remains the same.

If your favorite barista quits working at your favorite coffee shop, they will be replaced by a new barista by the very next shift. Maybe the new one will be a bit better or a bit worse but the whole business is actually designed to run just fine whether any individual barista is there or not.

The business isn't based on individuals. It can't be.

In order to create a consistent product or service, you can't have too much individuality. When the customer orders a mocha cappuccino, it needs to be pretty much the exact same mocha cappuccino that they ordered yesterday no matter who made it. It needs to be the same tomorrow, too.

In the grand scheme of the business machine, that favorite barista of yours is just a cog and life goes on without them. They don't matter. They can't matter.

And if you have a job, you don't matter either.

Gulp. Ouch.

This is a really hard pill for many of us to swallow because most of us have heard over and over again since childhood that we're each a special flower. We want to believe it. We want to think that we're important and that we matter and that our hard work makes a big difference.

Nope.

Wait, cheer up. It *is* more complex than that. We'll talk more about this later, but actually you *are* quite a special flower and you are super important and you really do matter and you can make a big, huge, amazing difference in the world. Just not in a job.

In a job, you're a cog.

We struggle with this reality because it's all pretty desperately sad, right? It's

depressing to think that we're so easily replaceable so we need to block it out of our heads or else we'd never go to work.

So as we shuffle off to our jobs each morning and slip into our cogs and either do our best at our jobs or we fake doing our best and hope we fool everyone and don't get fired. We strain and blink and hope to make the cog we're inside invisible to our own eyes, all so we feel a little less expendable.

Occasionally, we get slapped in the face by reality. We fall victim to a complaining customer or office politics or a suddenly announced round of layoffs and there it is; the cold, unvarnished truth. We are forced to realize that as far as the company is concerned, we're little more than the job description written on the outside of the cog we inhabit.

Is it really that harshly mechanical? We're just cogs to company? It can't be. What about the human element? What about the ineffable things like a friendly hello and a warm smile?

Actually, those ineffables are just part of a job description, too. A friendly hello is part of what's expected at some companies. In theory, it's expected at all companies but that's theory for you. In practice, most companies don't enforce the 'treat your customers well' rule. You know from your own experience as a consumer. You've been to stores where it looks like every single person who works there is so angry that they could punch a kitten. You've also been to stores where the cogs actually seem to make eye contact, connect with you and seem to generally give two flying flips about you.

Generally speaking, those decisions are made at a corporate level. Some companies want nice, smart cogs and other just want any warm body to fill up the cog. Either way, the individual matters a lot less than the corporate culture. Sorry.

Shall we curse the cog masters? Shall we curse the whole system? Shall we shake our fists at the sky and curse the whole stinking world that strips human beings of their individuality and forces them to be part of mechanized existence.

No, we shan't. All that fist shaking won't help you a bit. Nobody is forcing you to have a job. You can actually do your thing, you know. Blaming the system is just a cop-out. It's a way of feeling sorry for yourself and not doing a darn thing about it. Leave that drama to Liberal Arts majors.

Rather than whining, put yourself in the place of the cog master for just a second. Pretend you're not a worker, but an entrepreneur.

If you own a business of any size, you need cogs. Your job is to create a structure that is cog ready, complete with recipes, employee manuals, best practices and all the other accoutrements that tone down individuality and create consistency.

As a business owner, another thing you need to do is have as few cogs as possible, right? Because those cogs cost money.

Now, stop pretending you're a business owner and focus on the reality of a job again. You are a cog with a target on your back.

Stop wincing. Once you start to see yourself as your company sees you, it puts things in perspective. It's nothing personal. I'm pretty sure most of the other cogs like you just fine.

But let's add one other element to the mix, namely -- robots!

More and more, these 'job' cogs are being replaced by actual cogs; machines that can do the function just as well as people. We all know about how robotics have revolutionized the assembly line. Even perceived customer service jobs have been replaced by computers and gizmos. If you have taken a plane trip lately, you probably had your ticket dispensed from a machine...unless you printed it at home on your computer. Nearly the only human interaction you probably had from the time you stepped out of your vehicle and into the airport was that TSA screener guy — and that may have gotten a little too interactive, if you know what I mean.

We all know that bank tellers are going the way of gas station attendants. Even my local fast food restaurant allows me to bypass talking to the distracted dude in the headset behind the counter and just place my order via a giant touchscreen. (I won't name the fast food restaurant but it involves a Box with someone named Jack in it.)

People can and do argue back and forth about the personal and geopolitical implications of this phenomenon. Unions try to stop it and people who oppose Unions try to stop the Unions from stopping it. Mobs take to the streets in protest over the loss of jobs and other mobs question the hygiene and personal grooming habits of the first mob and wonder whether that might be the source of Mob #1's employment problem. This book isn't the time or place to delve deeply into the political ramifications of increased mechanization and automation. It happens. It's going to keep happening. There are less jobs. Let's leave it at that.

You get all this, right? You understand how the world works and you don't expect the coffee shop to shut down when the barista quits. You grok that as businesses get more efficient, they downsize employees. You get all that but it's hard to apply to yourself, right? Me, too. It's hard. Here's a reminder.

**When you leave, the company will be just fine without you.**

And that right there is reason enough for you to quit your job. Because you're more than a cog. You're better than that.

When I left *Access Hollywood*, the company didn't skip a beat. I didn't get a single email from anyone saying, "*Hey, Lee, I really miss the special touch you brought to creating graphics that identified Paris Hilton.*"

Today? Right now? I don't have a cog job. And my family is together and we even have more kids. Oh, so many kids.

Today, I'm back to doing work that goes beyond a 'job.'

I create things that would not exist if I didn't come up with them and I get e-mails and comments from people telling me that the work I'm doing makes a difference.

That's so much better. You'll see, once you start doing it every day.

You were not born to be a cog but you'll only start to really learn that once you pop yourself out of the machine and roll away.

## *The French Fry Guy*

DIG, IF YOU WILL, a picture; you live in a small town and you work at the local fast food joint. Your job is to make the French fries.

Forty hours a week, you're standing by the fry machine, dropping baskets of neatly cut frozen potatoes into vats of hot oil. When the machine beeps at you, you pull the basket of fries out and hang it on a hook. After an appropriate amount of grease has drizzled off, you toss the fries into the warmer and splash some sea salt over them. When someone orders fries, you scoop the salty carb sticks into a little paper sack and hustle them off to the next cog in the fast food process.

Five days a week for eight hours a day, this is your whole existence. You return home at night smelling like seasoned grease and your arms are freckled with new splatter burns. Sure enough, though, every Friday they give you a paycheck and that allows you to pay your bills.

You are known to the other people at the restaurant as the French Fry Guy. They mean it affectionately. Even if you're a woman, they still call you the French Fry Guy.

Deep inside, however, you harbor a secret. You aren't really the French Fry Guy. In your heart of hearts, you rock.

Your secret identity is Weekend Rock Star. You have a band. You write songs that have depth, complexity and catchy hooks. Your ballad (Sometimes I Feel So Salty & Greasy) has been known to make entire biker gangs weep openly during your frequent roadhouse gigs.

Your small but adoring fan base has no clue that you're French Fry Guy five days out of seven. You're happy to keep it that way.

One fateful day, you get an email from the manager of the Biggest Band In The World. Their drummer heard about your band from one of his biker friends and went to check you out a couple of weeks ago.

"He was bloody blown away, mate," says the manager. This is incredibly high praise because the manager isn't even British.

You've dreamt of a big break for years and now it's here. The band wants you to open up for them at Madison Effing Square Garden to kick off a worldwide tour this coming Tuesday night.

You rush to work to share the good news with your fellow employees. Your rock and roll fantasy has come true and it's time to celebrate. You're one life-changing gig from changing your life.

Something unexpected happens at work, though. Nobody else is excited. There's some staring and blinking but not much else. Then the Manager clears his throat.

"Okay, that's nice about the Madison Square Garden thing but that's your shift, right? I mean; you work Tuesdays. Right?"

Burger Guy and Soft Drink Lady eye each other nervously before blurting out simultaneously, "I'm not going to work that fry machine!"

The Manager glares at you, “Did you get someone to cover your shift? While you’re off playing tambourine or whatever have you given any thought to your job? If you aren’t here, who is going to make the French fries?”

Such is the life of a cog.

They need you to make the French fries and that’s all they need from you. They have no interest in anything outside of your role as the maker of the fries in a style of preparation commonly referred to as French. They have their own roles as cogs in the machine of business, too. They have bills to pay and you rocking out in New York City doesn’t help them make rent.

If they could pressure you into forgetting about that life changing gig and just standing by the fry machine as usual come next Friday, they would. It works out better for them in short run. The fries will get made, just like always.

Thus endeth the story and it applies to you and your job, whether you make fries, are a high priced corporate attorney or work the midnight shift at the Happy Ending House of Massage. The people at your job don’t want you to move on because it’s going to make their job harder, possibly for a whole week or two.

You can’t let other cogs run your life. You can’t let the machine tell you what to do. All the machine knows that it needs to keep running. It has its own agenda entirely. This works out well when people walk in and want French fries but works out badly for you and your dreams.

Of course, this is fiction. That once-in-a-lifetime break is highly unlikely to happen while you’re back there burning your arms making fries.

You have to leave and when you finally decide to, don’t expect support or smiles. Expect someone to ask you who’s going to fill your shift and try to have a good answer.

This reality leads to a bit of practical advice when you're considering leaving a job — **keep your flipping mouth shut.**

Not to sound too mercenary about it but you’d be wise to not tell your current job that you’re going to leave until the last possible second. The second you say “I’m thinking of leaving in a couple of months” could be the second before they show you to the door, right then and there. Plenty of companies get rid of people as soon as they mention they are thinking of quitting and for pretty good reasons.

I’m not suggesting you be dishonest. I’m suggesting that a lot of things can happen between the time you get the idea you’re leaving in your head and you’re really actually ready to head out the door. Who knows? Maybe something will happen and you'll have a good reason to stay.

If you want to find out that the company isn't really your friend and you aren't really all one big happy family, ignore this advice.

### ***About The Newsletter***

*Our culture is the most important front. And the three most important pillars of that culture are Hollywood and pop culture, along with education and the media. Those three are absolutely controlled by the left.*

*- Andrew Breitbart*

*Not for long...*

*- Lee Stranahan*

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