CHANCE ROAD

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ABSTRACT

Alex is a tenacious 8-year-old boy who grew up without a father, but that didn't stop him from inventing an imaginary father in his absence. He calls him "Chance Road," and envisions him as a motorcycle-riding hero-by-day/hero-by-night vigilante——the kind of dad who drags his electric motorcycle to the top of the CN Tower every night, so it can get struck by lightning and recharge. Alex knows that Chance isn't real, but that doesn't make him any less important to him. All Alex has of his real father is a single photograph of him on a road-trip to Gaspésie, at 18 years old, with his mother. A motorcycle is parked in background.

Alex's mother is getting married. It's the summer of 1999, and he and his mother have left their small town behind to move in with his future father-in-law——a blue collar carpenter. They're about to start a new chapter, when a figure from the past comes knocking at the door. Her name is Theresa, and she's a transgender woman who works in a seafood bar and restaurant. Alex doesn't know it yet, but this woman is his biological father. This is not just a story about a boy who finds out his dad is a woman. "Chance Road" is about projecting your hopes and dreams onto someone that does not exist. It's about growing up, and learning that your heroes are only human. It's about two people figuring out how to love each other for the first time.

Theresa didn't think she would make a good parent. That's the unsatisfactory explanation she gives Alex for why she left him as an infant. She also never owned a motorcycle. The bike pictured in the background of the Gaspésie road trip, belonged to someone else. So much of what Alex wanted in a father is nowhere to be found in the form of Theresa, and yet he finds in Theresa a growing companion——someone who fosters his imagination. She teaches him how to read and write, inspires him through art and theatre, and above all makes him feel loved. Alex

has to face the truth——that the woman he's come to know and love is more real than the imaginary father he never met at all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This feature screenplay is the culmination of my (extended) MFA at York University. My screenwriting professor Howard Wiseman used to say, “Find the red pepper jelly.” In the context of our graduate writing class, the red pepper jelly stood for attention to detail——finding complexity in a scene through an object or motif that highlights the emotional journey of your characters. In “Chance Road,” my red pepper jelly was Theresa’s pickled herring. Even though pickled herring had a larger presence in previous drafts of this script, its significance on my MFA journey has not been forgotten, nor have I forgotten the dedicated and insightful lessons my professor Howard Wiseman imparted to me from beginning to end.

“Chance Road” would not be possible without Howie. That is, “Chance Road” would be possible, but it wouldn’t be half of what it is today. After finishing Howie’s graduate writing course, I became a teacher’s assistant for first-year writing students at York. I felt myself repeating Howie’s words, applying my enthusiasm for his class to a younger generation of writers. I hope to carry this enthusiasm for the rest of my life, and apply it wherever necessary——in future films, or even in a classroom of my own. Howie has retired from his position at York, and is now starting his own hero’s journey. Wherever he goes, I hope he finds that red pepper jelly. Thank you, Howie.

My reader, Tereza Barta, seems to know where I’m going with my script before I know it myself. I was debating at one point whether “Chance Road” should be told through Theresa’s perspective. “This has to be Alex’s story,” she said to me early on, “it’s so much more interesting if it’s his story!” My first outline of this script was written in Alex’s POV, but I thought I needed to see it through Theresa’s eyes to get the full picture. Re-writing the script through her POV was

a valuable exercise that ultimately got me closer to the story I wanted to tell, but Tereza (Tereza Barta, not my character Theresa) was right from the beginning. “Chance Road” is Alex’s story, and Alex’s story alone. Tereza never shies away from giving an honest opinion, something I really treasure as a writer. Her dedication to this screenplay is palpable and real, and I’ve always felt I could count on her for the truth.

When I tell people I completed my graduate studies over Zoom, most react negatively. Although there are obstacles with remote learning, I felt blessed to have had such a supportive pandemic cohort. Despite never meeting in person for a year, we managed to get to know each other as filmmakers, and build a sense of community. Fellow filmmakers Roz Owens, Laura Gladwell and Lokchi Lam worked closely with me on “Chance Road,” pouring over my drafts with such mindful consideration.

My mother and father were my first readers, back in high school and college when I was writing plays. Likewise, I have been a first reader for my dad’s novels, starting with his 12th novel, “Last Night in Twisted River,” back in 2008. People ask me what it’s like to have John Irving as a father. Beyond the obvious——book tours in Europe, interviews when I was too young to be having interviews, and an Oscars party in 1999 for his film adaptation of “The Cider House Rules,” where I was mistaken for Haley Joel Osment from the “The Sixth Sense,” growing up with my dad meant hearing an electric typewriter whirring at all hours of the day——the “clack, clack, clack, DING!” from his keys. I grew up in a house filled with stories. My father read to me every night, “Charlotte’s Web,” “Stuart Little,” “My Father’s Dragon.” I grew up with two parents who praised my over-active imagination, and encouraged me to tell stories of my own; a privilege not everyone is granted in this world. My mother is an editor; in fact she was the Vice

President and Publisher for Seal Books before she met my father on his Canadian book tour in Toronto, 1986.

What I value most about my parents as first readers is that they always give their honest feedback. If something isn't working, they let me know. My father is a menace when it comes to orthographical and grammatical errors; he sees things that take me five passes to catch. My mother doesn't enjoy reading screenplays, but she has adapted to the unfamiliar format in order to appreciate my work. I received my father's feedback for "Chance Road" late one night while I was on the St. Clair streetcar heading home. "What is outstanding about CHANCE ROAD goes far beyond the actual and symbolic perfection of the title. The forward momentum of the story is itself a nonstop road trip, with an exciting succession of chances——or potentials for missed opportunities——along the way." Thank you both for being my first readers, from "Charlotte's Web," to "Chance Road."

What's my idea of a good weekend? Seeing a movie with my boyfriend at the Lightbox. Foreign, local, animated, documentary, narrative, old, new release——although Allen isn't a filmmaker himself, he appreciates the form of storytelling as much as I do. We're always excited to tell each other about a new band we discovered, or a book, or a movie we haven't seen before. While I was writing "Chance Road," I kept thinking to myself, "Is this something Allen and I would get excited about seeing at TIFF?" There was a lot of anticipation leading up to sharing "Chance Road," with him. I've been talking about it for 3 years; sending him the script felt like launching the James Webb Space Telescope. His response? "I cannot wait to see this movie!"

Thank you to all those who have taken me to the finish line. It's a bittersweet victory, knowing that this is just the weigh-in for the next race of trying to getting it made. I feel

optimistic, however, about the next incarnation of “Chance Road.” After years of passion, the trash can, and red pepper jelly, I am ready for the road trip ahead.

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ORIGIN STORY

Before and After

My mother and I were watching the summer storm from the second floor window of her master bedroom, when there was an Earth shattering CRACK. Blinding light filled the room. I must have screamed, but that's not a detail I can remember——I was only 8 years old. I grew up in a ski town in rural Vermont, halfway up a mountain. Our mountain had once been a white marble mine, amassing thousands of Italian immigrants in the late 19th century who knew how to handle Carrara marble. When I was a child, the deep, dark, abandoned mines were home to bats and mountain lions.

Immediately after the blast, it was evident that the tallest tree in our yard had been split down the middle. Shards of wood were scattered around the base of the tree, like shrapnel from a bomb. The tree itself was smoking. To a child, a first lightning strike feels like war. I thought about this event for years to come, and the more I thought about it, the more my fear turned into excitement and mystery. It's funny how children enjoy scary things, especially when that scary thing is behind them, and poses no immediate physical danger to them. "What if the house had been hit? What if we'd been outside? What if the lightning bolt woke up the bats and the mountain lions in their marble caves? What if the lightning bolt came from heaven?"

I believed in God. I went to church every Sunday——I loved church, which is an odd response for a child to have for a place full of adults where you have to sit still and be quiet. I was an altar boy, and my duties were to light candles, carry the cross, prepare the Eucharist and lead the processionals. The best part of the job, however, was wearing the red and white robes which swished and swayed around me like a dress. For me, church was theatre, and I loved being

such an integral part of the Sunday production. I liked having a job, having authority at a young age. I believed that if I didn't show up on Sunday, the show would be cancelled.

Our priest, Father John, rode a Harley-Davidson motorcycle. After church got out, we could hear Father John revving his engine and taking off through town, his white collar sticking out from underneath his helmet. I remember one sermon in particular where he described the feeling of the wind pushing against him while he rode his motorcycle——how he imagined that God could reach out and take hold of his gloved hand.

Father John's son used to babysit me. A handsome boy with bleach blonde hair and blue eyes, Wesley was 9 years older than me, and I loved him the way children love and adore older, cooler kids. I remember Wes as a kind and genuine young man who would most likely stay out of trouble. On October 11th, 2001, exactly one month after the terrorist attacks, Wesley was killed. It was a horrible prank gone wrong at a college-freshmen party in Florida. At 9 years old, it was hard enough to understand why people flew planes into the World Trade Center, and equally difficult to understand the circumstances around Wesley's death. All I knew was that now he was dead. This was confirmed when I saw him lying in his coffin at his wake. He was surrounded by his art——Wesley was a painter and a sculptor. He looked like he was asleep, in a tuxedo, in a box. Then it was my job to put on my swishy red and white robes, and lead his funeral procession through town, carrying the cross in front of his casket, all the way to his father's church, where his father would not be giving the sermon.

Wesley was the first death I'd experienced close to me, and like the summer lightning, I became obsessed with understanding it. I held on to the pamphlet from his funeral, the front of the pamphlet had a picture of Wes at his high school graduation, in a suit and tie. He was so

handsome. I took the pamphlet wherever I went. I talked to it, I even slept with it under my pillow. My mother must have taken it from me one night while I was sleeping, and hid it in a drawer. She must have thought it was unhealthy for a child to treat a funeral pamphlet like a stuffed animal. I remember waking up hysterical that I couldn't find it… no, not "it," "him." The pamphlet had become "him," a new him, a version of Wesley that was still alive, that I could hold in my hand, that took up space in the material world in the form of 4x10 square inch.

I've thought a lot about how kids manage grief. To a child, make-believe can feel as real as the real world. When something is missing from reality, it can be replaced in the world of make-believe. A person dies, but takes on a new life in child's play. When writing "Chance Road," I thought about loss and grief, and how an 8-year-old boy might react similarly to an absent parent. The idea of a photograph came to mind——the photograph of Alex's parents on the road trip to Gaspésie; how his absent father takes on a new life inside this frozen image, a mythical motorcycle-riding vigilante named, "Chance Road."

I can still remember Father John on his motorcycle. Even after his son died, he continued to come to church on his Harley Davidson; the same church where his 19-year-old son was laid to rest, where he would preach to us about God's love, God's plan——a plan that included the death of his child. But to Father John, Wesley hadn't really died. He was still alive in the Kingdom of Heaven, and waiting for his father to come back to him.

Most people who were alive at the turn of the century think of before 2001, and after 2001 as two separate realities. The events of that fall restructured the United States and its relationship with the rest of the world, initiating a 20-year "War on Terror." On a personal level, the child I was in the summer of 2001 was not the same child I was at the end of 2001. The

entirely unrelated events of September *and* October 11th broadened my perspective on loss and tragedy, and the adult world which I was soon to inhabit. From its inception, my intention with "Chance Road" was to magnify a single moment in a child's life——an event, a summer that separates a child's life into two separate hemispheres; before and after. Alex's story is a story of "before" and "after"——before he meets his biological father, and after he meets Theresa.

Speaking as a transgender woman, my life has always been distinguished by the "before" and the "after." On August 6, 2016 I began hormone replacement therapy, forever segmenting my worlds between "male" and "female." I relate to my character, Theresa, as a transgender woman, and I relate to Alex as a young boy coping with grief. "Chance Road," is loosely modelled my own childhood experiences of lighting, God and motorcycles. It is a creative examination of what it means to grow up, and start separating your life into "before" and "after."

THE THREE SCREENPLAYS

Love, the Mommy

In January of 2018, I arrived in Punta del Este, Uruguay to make a short film with an old colleague from the New York Film Academy. Ezequiel and I had been roommates in Brooklyn, working on indie and student films together. When I first met Ezequiel, I was a 22-year-old man. Now I was flying to South America as a 26-year-old transgender woman, to be an actress in Spanish language.

Punta del Este is a tourist town, and people from all over South America flock to beachside resorts in the summer months between December and February. The suburb of El Placer ("The Pleasure" in English) is extremely wealthy——a South American Hamptons, with opulent mansions and 5-star restaurants. However, the north-facing strip of "The Pleasure" is working class, and notorious for sex work. Driving through the semi-wooded areas, one can see girls waiting to meet their Johns by the side of the road. In Ezequiel's film, I played one of the working girls of "El Placer."

I am fluent in Spanish, but my accent is distinctly Castilian, a character trait that Ezequiel worked into the script. I had conflicting emotions with this role. We were shooting on location——me performing a solicitation through a car window, with girls down the street doing it for real. It felt so starkly performative. It felt like appropriation. I debated approaching the girls myself, and asking for their permission to "perform" on their turf, but as the actress I didn't feel it was my responsibility to make that decision——it was Ezequiel's. I only saw one trans girl (to my knowledge) working the streets of El Placer. If there was anyone I wanted to talk to most, it

was her. I wanted to get a sense of what her life was like, and make atonement for coming to her country to pretend to do what she does daily to survive.

I was only 2 years into my gender transition, and as a young transgender woman in Toronto, people often assumed I was a sex worker. It would happen most often in transit—— waiting for the bus, waiting for the streetcar, waiting for a taxi. There is something about being publicly trans and femme that signals to men, we are open for business. I even had a doctor who questioned whether or not I was a sex worker. When I said "no," she replied, "then I don't understand why you're doing this"… "this" supposedly being my medication.

I finally understood the real-world implications of the "trans sex worker" trope. People (particularly men) seem to associate the transgender female body with a rare commodity, an acquired taste that needs to be outsourced in high demand. Our bodies are anomalies, and therefore they do not belong to us, but to clients who wish to view our anomaly. As a young trans woman in the city, I felt as though a role had been thrust upon me that I didn't wish to fulfill.

I was brought back to an earlier conversation I'd had with Ezequiel, years before I transitioned, when we were still roommates in New York. "There's a saying in Argentina," he said to me late one night, drinking beer shirtless in our Brooklyn railroad style kitchen, "there are only two types of women, mothers and whores." I shook my head, disgusted. "And why do men need to separate who they love from who they sleep with? Why can't a Madonna be a Magdalena, too?" He laughed——"in Catholic countries, once a Magdalena always a Magdalena." It was clear to me what category I belonged to. Transgender women don't become mothers. In the summer of 2018, I felt a new kind of protest rising inside of me, one that manifested as a screenplay.

“Chance Road”——then titled, “Love, The Mommy”——tells the story of an 8-year-old boy named Alex who shares a basement apartment in the west end with his single mom. His mother, Theresa, is a transgender woman, a sex worker and a devout Catholic. She’s sparky, contradictory and lovably unique. Her spirituality instills in Alex a sense of mysticism around his own origin story, drawing parallels to Jesus Christ and his immaculate conception. Late at night Theresa tells Alex stories, embellishing his mystical origins——“I planted you like a seed in a bucket of water, and watched you grow, and grow, and grow! When you were ready to be born, I dumped you out into the garden,” she narrated to him before bed. Her pet name for him is “The Baby” and his pet name for her is “The Mommy.”

Their world shifts, however, when a figure from the past comes knocking at the door. Alex’s biological mother, Julia, returns to Toronto after an 8-year absence. A recovered addict, now clean and getting married, Julia wants to build a new relationship with her son Alex, which Theresa (Alex’s biological father) vehemently rejects. Alex starts to distrust Theresa, realizing that her “origin stories” haven’t given him the full truth. Theresa falls into drugs. The emotional trauma of her sex work starts to weigh on her, and Alex begins to depend more on his newfound biological mother, Julia.

At the end of the film, Theresa hits rock-bottom with a drug overdose. Julia gains custody of Alex, and moves out west with him to Vancouver. In his new life in Vancouver, Alex realizes that he’s lost the only mother he ever knew… even if that “mother” was in fact his biological father. He receives a letter from Theresa, assuring him that she will find him again. She signs it “Love, The Mommy.” Alex decides to run away from home, in a futile attempt to make his way back to Theresa. The last shot of the film is him running away.

I started writing “Love, The Mommy” shortly after my return from shooting in Uruguay, but then put it aside for other, better baked scripts. I only revisited “Love, The Mommy” when I began my MFA at York University, in 2020. “Love, the Mommy” took a dive into unexpected motherhood in society. I was searching for stories about trans mothers, couldn’t find one, and decided to make my own. I subverted the label of “Trans Magdalena” and created my very own Trans Madonna. I found personal catharsis with “Love, the Mommy.” Traversing the new landscape of misogyny as a trans woman, I found a silent way to upend the narrative that motherhood is inaccessible to sex objects. Yet this film was a tragedy. Theresa and Alex don’t get to live their happily-ever-after as mother and son. Theresa loses custody, instilling the narrative that trans women (particularly trans sex workers) cannot be mothers.

In “Love, The Mommy,” there is a young Mexican immigrant who lives across the street from Theresa and Alex named Carlitos Rey. He immediately takes an interest in Theresa, and develops a relationship with her son, Alex. He sells pills for a living, but he is an honest gentleman, and treats Theresa with respect——something she isn’t used to receiving as a trans sex worker. In “Love, The Mommy,” Alex latches on to Carlitos Rey as a father figure, which upsets Theresa tremendously. Theresa is so attached to her son, so committed to being a single mom, that she believes letting Carlitos Rey into her life will threaten the sanctity of their family of two. She doesn’t trust men, and who would blame her?

One night, Alex makes up his own bedtime story. It goes like this: his mother finds Carlitos Rey in the street, delirious with exhaustion. She takes him to Canada’s Wonderland to ride the Ferris wheel, and up on the wheel, Carlitos Rey falls asleep in her lap. The character of Carlitos Rey slowly evolved into who we now know as “Chance Road”——Alex’s imaginary dad.

The Ferris wheel montage has persisted through every draft of this script, and it plays a significant role in the final screenplay. Theresa tells Alex her own Chance Road story, late one night, after Julia's wedding. She tells Alex that his mother suffered from insomnia, and so one night, Chance Road decided to take her to Canada's Wonderland, to ride the Ferris wheel. Up on the wheel, Julia fell asleep in Chance's lap. It is later revealed that Theresa's "Chance Road story," isn't just a story. It really did happen, only it wasn't Chance Road who took Julia up on the wheel——it was Theresa.

Other characters in "Love, The Mommy" included Theresa's landlord Martin and his wife Tía Paula. Theresa had sex with Martin in exchange for cheaper rent, a thread which culminated in Martin's wife finding out, and throwing Theresa and Alex out onto the street. Julia was always either a newlywed or soon-to-be married to Eric. However, Eric's character underwent a major evolution. In "Love, The Mommy," Eric was a wealthy anesthesiologist. He was much older than Julia, and lived in a house in Rosedale. I wanted to emphasize the stark difference between Theresa's underground world, in the basement, and the world of Julia and Eric in the richest neighbourhood in the city. It was my colleague Laura Gladwell who suggested that this class disparity seemed unrealistic. It didn't seem possible that a well-off anesthesiologist could marry a small-town, working class, recovering addict like Julia. To Laura, this felt like a "statement" from the writer that came off as more performative than realistic.

It was my reader Tereza Barta who brought up the trans sex work trope. "Why make a trope when you could make something original?" This was the elephant in the room I had been avoiding since the start of my journey at York. My initial exploration of Theresa as a trans sex worker was instigated by misogynistic labels I'd imposed on myself as a 26-year-old newly

transitioned woman. I had categorized myself as a Magdalena, out of shame and resignation to what male society expected of me.

There is nothing shameful about engaging in sex work, and if Theresa was to be a sex worker, she had to have full agency. She had to be proud of who she was and how she made a living. Even so, falling into the trans-sex-work narrative felt unnecessarily tropic, and I was experiencing a cultural urgency to engage my audience with a new way of seeing trans women on the screen——one that didn't require trans women to commodify their bodies for men.

Another challenge I was facing with "Love, The Mommy" was POV. Howie felt that Theresa and Alex were fighting for protagonist. I couldn't figure out whether I was telling Alex's story or Theresa's. "Pick one of them, and make it theirs," Howie said to me. As a writer, I identified with both characters in very different ways, but I related to Theresa as a transgender woman, and I felt a strong desire to write a trans story. Tereza Barta was adamant that "Love, The Mommy" should be Alex's story, not Theresa's. I, however, thought there wouldn't be any harm in trying it out as Theresa's story. As a writer, my best friend is the trash can. So I decided to lay "Love, The Mommy" to rest, and go back to every writer's favourite place——square-one.

Chance Road: Theresa's Story

In order to make this film Theresa's story, I felt it was necessary to separate Theresa and Alex. Rather than have Alex grow up with Theresa, I decided to have him grow up with Julia. Now it was Theresa who left her son for a 9-year hiatus, not Julia. In essence, separating Alex and Theresa helped me distinguish whose story I was really telling. With the two of them living together, the waters were muddy. This film was now definitively Theresa's story——a story about a trans woman getting to know her son for the first time. I felt that Theresa's abandonment made her a more complex character——a protagonist dealing with regret and shame for having left her child; a character seeking atonement.

New Outline: Theresa is a 30-year-old transgender woman who works in a fish shop. She shares a basement apartment in the west end of Toronto with her roommate, Eli, who is also a trans woman. Theresa is a self-proclaimed "lone wolf." Her nihilism is evidenced by a book she wrote (which no one read) about a world where everyone wants to die. Theresa clings to a past life——the life she had with her ex and their only child, Alex. She frequently visits the house on Northcliffe Boulevard where they once lived in the basement. She resumes her seat on her usual bench across the street, and loses herself in regret and longing for a time when she felt "home." However, Theresa isn't the only one making frequent visits to the Northcliffe house. In a dramatic and serendipitous encounter, Theresa runs into her past——her ex-girlfriend Julia, the mother of her child, who also frequents Northcliffe Boulevard, only at night.

After 9 years apart, Julia reveals to Theresa that she is engaged, and that she and Alex have left their small town and moved in with her fiancé, Eric, in Mississauga. Julia tells Theresa

about their son, Alex, and Theresa agrees to meet Alex, on the condition that she not reveal who she is to him. “I want to be the one to tell him,” Julia insists to Theresa.

Julia agrees to let Theresa be a tutor for Alex, who is struggling to learn how to read. They tentatively form a relationship, but not without some roadblocks along the way. Theresa learns that Alex is an acolyte, and she is tasked with finding a suitable church for him to attend now that he’s moved to Mississauga. Alex is picky when it comes to churches——he wants singing and old architecture. Theresa takes him to St. James Cathedral Church in the East end, and Alex is mesmerized. He is soon hired as an acolyte by a kind female priest named Marnie.

Over the summer, Theresa learns more about her son——Alex has an imaginary biological father named “Chance Road,” who rides a motorcycle that runs on lightning. Theresa fosters his curious mind by discussing religion with him, as well as the mythical “Chance Road.” As each day passes, Theresa and Alex seem to know and love each other more and more.

Things comes to a head, however, at Julia and Eric’s wedding, where Julia’s mother confronts Theresa about her abusive past with her daughter. It is revealed that Theresa hit Julia in a drunken stupor, shortly after Alex was born. Convinced that she would never be a good parent, Theresa left Julia and Alex for good. However, in yet another late night encounter on Northcliffe Boulevard, Julia confesses to Theresa that she wasn’t the one who hit her… in fact, Julia injured herself in her own mental health crisis. Feeling betrayed, bewildered, and robbed of a relationship with her child, Theresa finally reveals to Alex who she is——his biological father. She takes him to Canada’s Wonderland, and it is up on the Ferris wheel that she breaks the news.

“Why did you leave me?” Alex asks her. “Because I didn’t think I’d be a good parent,” she replies woefully. Alex is dismayed, and Theresa is distraught that she might lose her son

again. Julia is angry with Theresa for breaking their promise, and Theresa is estranged from Alex and Julia once again. She falls back into her old patterns of nihilistic self-loathing. Theresa gets drunk and makes ill decisions, including sleeping with her roommate's boyfriend. She has visions of Chance Road, Alex's imaginary father, taunting her with what she will never be——a real father for Alex.

In a last ditch effort to get back into Alex and Julia's good graces, Theresa shows up unexpectedly to her son's 9th birthday party. It is clear that she is unwanted by everyone in attendance, including Alex. Julia and Theresa duke it out in the backyard while a thunderstorm looms above them… and then CRACK——a bolt of lightning hits Alex.

Alex ends up in the hospital, and Julia and Theresa put aside their issues to be together at his side. In a feat of bizarre otherworldly intervention, the lightning bolt superheats Alex's metal crucifix necklace, leaving a burn mark in the shape of the cross on his flesh, cementing Alex's belief in a higher power.

Julia ends up leaving Eric only a few months after their marriage. "Another failed relationship," she concedes to Theresa. The film ends with Theresa wishing Alex and Julia goodbye, as Julia has decided to move back to Welland with Alex. Theresa promises to come and visit them soon… but how soon? We don't know. Will she keep her promise? We don't know. Julia and Alex drive off, leaving Theresa alone. Theresa gets on her brand new motorcycle and takes off in the opposite direction.

* * *

In shifting POV from Alex to Theresa, the story changed dramatically. It became more grounded in who I am as a young trans woman now, opposed to who I was in 2018. I let go of

the sex-worker element entirely, and focused more on Theresa's interpersonal relationships with Julia, her son, and her roommate, Eli. Her roommate had a large role in this version, essentially acting as a symbol of Theresa's life before reconnecting with Julia and Alex. In this draft, Eli is a performance artist, and she puts up a play about a transgender female dictator named Boudica. In my final draft, it is Theresa who puts up this play, not Eli.

There were several other characters who came to the table in this draft, including Eli's boyfriend, Yusuf——a Turkish refugee. Julia's family played a larger role in this draft as well, especially her brother and sister James and Margot. Julia had a third sibling, Ethan, a vegan farm boy. She had a stepfather, Carlos, who Theresa was historically close to before she transitioned. Julia's family injected an element of chaotic comedy into the story. As this was Theresa's story, the roles of the adults were much larger, and the story itself was more "adult" in content. Ultimately, these characters took too much attention away from the nucleus of the story—— Theresa and Alex.

One of the largest motifs in this early draft of "Chance Road" was God and the church. I made an effort to draw on my own history with Christianity, and played into themes of the "immaculate conception"——how Alex relates to Jesus Christ because Jesus also grew up with a father that no one else could see, or believe in. I wanted Alex to make a believer out of Theresa. His affect on her was more than emotional, but spiritual as well. He gave her a new faith, a faith in something bigger.

In this early draft of "Chance Road," Theresa had a dark backstory. Her father abused her, and her mother was in prison for murdering her father, in an attempt to protect Theresa. This violent upbringing was something that Theresa spoke openly about with Julia. Julia's family was

reticent about Theresa entering Alex's life, in part because of her traumatic past. It was easy for Theresa to convince herself that she would be an abusive parent, because she was abused herself. In essence, she abandoned Alex because she feared the kind of parent she would be.

The first draft of this script was over 180 pages long——my first indication that things weren't fitting into place. Howie suggested that I pair it down to 150 pages, and then take it from there. Even with 30+ pages removed, the film still read like a TV series. "It moves like a novel," Howie said to me, "which is good for a novel, but not so good for a screenplay." There were so many characters, so many threads that did, eventually, pull together in the end, but left me and my supervisory committee feeling breathless.

My reader, Tereza Barta, brought up another issue. The focus had shifted so dramatically to Julia and Theresa's relationship——it was overpowering Alex. "I am so much more interested in what's going on between Alex and Theresa, and frankly Theresa's drama with Julia is getting in the way," Tereza remarked. With so much backstory into Theresa's childhood, Julia's childhood, how they got together, why they broke up, we were losing the emotional urgency of the present——how Theresa is going to prove to Alex that she can be a good parent to him. It was clear that this draft was not my thesis screenplay, not yet.

I chalked up "Chance Road: Theresa's Story," as a crucial step towards finding my narrative function. I had a plot that I really enjoyed——a trans woman getting to know her 8-year-old son for the first time. I had found Chance Road, Alex's imaginary father on a motorcycle. After sitting with the 150 page script for a month, I decided to scrap it and go back to my familiar place——square one.

Chance Road: Alex's Story

I rewrote "Chance Road," from Alex's perspective, entirely. My intention was tell the same story with the same plot points, but make it Alex's version of events. It was going to be about an 8-year-old boy who finds his father… but he doesn't know it yet. I was thrilled at the idea of engaging with this dramatic irony——we the audience know more than the protagonist knows.

It was daunting, however, to traverse the mind of an 8-year-old boy. I don't have any children of my own, and I have very little contemporary reference for how young children are. I had my own childhood, at least, and I launched into a deep dive of my memories as a young boy growing up in Vermont. I meditated on my earliest fears, the things that excited me, the stories I used to make up in the woods and the bat caves around my house. I remembered my love for creating miniature cardboard houses, and my relationship with Father John, his motorcycle, his son, the funeral pamphlet that I slept with every night. I inserted my own voice into the voice of Alex.

I was referred to as a "slow learner." Like Alex, I struggled to read and write, and math was nearly impossible for me. It would take me twice as long to finish a test, and when I'd finally finish an assignment, after everyone had moved on to the next activity, my teacher would roll her eyes and say facetiously, "Look everyone, Everett *finally* finished!" This just added insult to injury. It was ironic that I couldn't read or write, because I was still very much invested in storytelling. I would draw pictures on giant rolls of paper, like an animated film. The rolls of paper would run the length of our house, depicting a beginning, middle and end——entire cities

rising and collapsing, people coming together and coming apart. I didn't have language, but I had a storyteller's imagination.

In the fall of 2001, after the events of September and October 11th, I unexpectedly figured out how to read and write. That fall, I wrote a 40-page story which won an award at my elementary school. It was a fantasy "novella" about two boys on an adventure through a magical realm. Like me, my fictional character Alex struggles to read and write, but that doesn't stop him from making up stories, like "Chance Road." In fact, Theresa teaches Alex to use his innate story-telling ability to motivate him to write. Rather than inundating him with dry flash-cards, she encourages him to write Chance Road from the heart. Drawing on my experiences from childhood, I re-wrote "Chance Road" from Alex's perspective.

I employed a framing device which I had experimented with in earlier drafts of "Love, The Mommy"——a time jump. This new version of Chance Road took place in 2001, but at the end of the film, we jump into the present day and see Alex as a grown man. The adult version of Alex drives a motorcycle, and lives in Gaspésie, Quebec with his wife, who has just given birth to their first child. The last scene of the film shows Alex with his newborn baby, reflecting on the relationship he had with Theresa, now that he's become a father himself.

Seeing Alex as a grown man at the end of the film seemed to bring the story full-circle. The consensus of my first readers, however, was clear——they didn't like the time jump. William Scoular, my dear friend and the theatre director at Saint Andrews College, told me, "We have to stay with the kid! Don't pull us out of that summer." Howie remarked that the ending felt like too much of a "self-contained chapter," too much family detail to digest at the end of the film. He suggested I watch Woody Allen's "Hannah and Her Sisters," where the very last line of the film

is simply… “I’m pregnant.” I decided to try writing “Chance Road,” without the time jump, fixing the entire story in 2001.

In this new draft, the September 11th attacks coincided with Alex mending his relationship with Theresa. However, Howie felt that including 9/11 in this script was too much. “The gravity of 9/11 takes away from the gravity of what’s happening with Theresa and Alex.” Although my own coming-of-age story is so indelibly intertwined with the terrorist attacks, I felt that Howie’s point was valid concerning the potency of the story I was trying to tell. I decided instead to set the film two years earlier, in 1999, losing the 9/11 thread altogether.

Another motif that fell into the background was the church, and the role of God. Tereza Barta felt that Alex’s obsession with God and Jesus didn’t feel realistic. I tried to make Alex’s relationship to St. James Cathedral more focused on the building itself resembling a castle, but even with these changes we were losing the impact of Alex’s relationship with Chance Road. Alex couldn’t have two obsessions, he needed one, and that singular obsession had to be with his imaginary father, Chance Road.

I didn’t lose religion altogether though, and instead made Theresa the churchgoer, similar to “Love, the Mommy.” In the new draft, she takes Alex to the St. James Cathedral and explains to him that her mother used to bring her to church every Sunday. By shining a light on Theresa’s past, specifically her relationship with her mother and the church, we get a glimmer of where she came from, and the kind of child she might have been at Alex’s age. Theresa gifts Alex her mother’s pewter crucifix. She tells him, “I know you already have an imaginary friend, but you might need God one day, when you're older. Someone to believe in.” Alex’s imaginary friend is Chance Road, but Theresa’s imaginary friend might be God, or something like God. Alex

understands the weight and significance of this necklace, just as Theresa understands the weight of her son's toy motorcycle in his hands.

What I love most about making "Chance Road" Alex's story is the dramatic irony——the fact that we the audience know more than our protagonist does. We know almost immediately after meeting Theresa that she is Alex's biological father, but it takes an hour of screen time for Alex to figure it out. We watch Alex get to know Theresa, develop a bond with her, clueless as to who she really is to him. Alex sees his family fighting at a distance——from the top of the stairs, or through the upstairs window. We know those fights are about Theresa, and whether or not Theresa should be in Alex's life, but Alex doesn't understand what they are about. This type of storytelling puts the audience in a superior position. There is no "big reveal" for the audience—— it's not "The Crying Game," where halfway through the film we learn that the female lead is a transgender woman. It's "JoJo Rabbit," where the audience knows more than Jojo does about the Nazi regime. As Howie said to me on a conference call over Zoom, "With this film, we're not waiting for the 'what,' we're waiting for the 'how.' " In "Oedipus Rex," how will Oedipus learn that he killed his father and married his mother? In "The Truman Show," how will Truman learn that his life is a reality TV show? In "Chance Road," how will Alex finally learn that Theresa is his biological father?

I knew from the beginning that I didn't want "Chance Road" to rely on a "trans reveal," a trope we've seen too many times before on screen, from "Jerry Springer" to "Ace Ventura." Alex knows that Theresa is a trans woman. She tells him herself, in a heartfelt conversation that feels real to my own experience of disclosure. Disclosing to someone that you are trans is a vulnerable enterprise, and even more so for someone like Theresa in 1999, when the world knew less about

what it meant to be a trans person. When Theresa confesses to Alex that she is his biological father, Alex's shock and dismay has nothing to do with her being trans. He already knows she's trans. His anguish has to do with the fact that she abandoned him as a baby, and that she isn't the father he always dreamed of——Chance Road.

I showcased a segment of my script at the Tranzac Club, Brunswick Ave., Toronto, in a staged reading with 3 actors and myself reading the role of Theresa. "Chance Road," was received well at the Tranzac, in front of an audience of roughly 30 to 40 people. My actors, Nicole Daley, Vivien Endicott-Douglas and Daniel Von Diergardt were a joy to work with. They imbued life into my characters and asked questions, which pushed me to understand the people I was writing better. I gave the role of Alex to Vivien, a 30-year-old woman, who had experience performing children's roles in theatre. Her mastery of Alex's voice and attitude was captivating, and shined a new understanding on who Alex could be as a person.

Howie congratulated me on my work with the reading, but reminded me that theatre isn't film. "The dialogue, it works for the stage, but I don't know if it will feel the same on screen." I ended up losing much of the dialogue from the Tranzac reading, particularly a fight between Julia and Eric, which Alex overhears from the top of the stairs. It felt performative, and performative can work in theatre——film is the business of showing, not telling.

Much of the fine-tuning that went into this final draft of "Chance Road" had to do with excising performative dialogue, reducing melodrama, solidifying Theresa's role as Alex's writing tutor, honing the scene direction towards Alex's POV, and general plot believability. One of the most significant changes made to this final draft of "Chance Road" was the final lightning strike at the end of the film. Lightning has always been a significant motif in this film, back when it

was “Love, the Mommy” in 2018. At the climax of “Love, the Mommy,” Theresa overdoses and gets rushed to the hospital in an ambulance. Paramedics use a defibrillator to jumpstart her heart with an electric current. We see the current running underneath her skin, harking back to Alex’s fear and obsession with lighting. In “Chance Road: Theresa’s Story,” Alex is struck by a bolt of lightning, which superheats his metal crucifix, burning the cross into his flesh, cementing his belief in a higher power. In the most recent iteration “Chance Road: Alex’s Story,” Theresa is the one who receives the lightning bolt, and is rushed to urgent care. This direct hit elicits a heartfelt reaction out of Alex. “I was afraid the lightning would hurt you,” Alex confesses to Theresa, several days later at her fish shop. “How could lightning hurt me? I’m Chance Road!” Theresa replies.

Lightning has always been a deus ex machina for “Chance Road,” a pivotal and climactic moment of reckoning where the characters put aside their anger and come together to protect one another. This film is a wheel of fortune——a chance strike, a chance encounter, a “Chance” father. What are the chances of getting struck by lighting? In this film, I wanted to give the impression that anything was possible. The story feels like a slowly approaching summer storm, and Alex’s fear and fascination with this pending electrical storm highlights his own dramatic irony. It foreshadows the moment when Alex will learn who Theresa really is to him.

Howie felt that the direct hit of lighting felt too melodramatic. He suggested that I remove the strike, just to see how I liked the film without it. In the revised ending, Theresa is standing outside in the rain after a massive argument with Julia. Alex is inside the house, watching Theresa from outside the kitchen window. The lightning bolt strikes close-by; blinding light fills the room, a resounding crack shakes the house. Alex jumps back frightened, but

immediately puts his fear aside, concerned for the safety and wellbeing of Theresa. He runs outside into the storm to grab Theresa and bring her indoors. Without a direct hit on Theresa, the lightning bolt feels more credible and less melodramatic. It still elicits a heartfelt and emotional reaction out of Alex, and still gives credible notion to Alex and Theresa's subsequent dialogue, "I was afraid the lightning would hurt you…" "How could lightning hurt me? I'm Chance Road!"

The development of this film spans 5 years, and what feels like 2 different lifetimes. The film I started holds little to no resemblance to the film I've written today, and yet there is a single constant——a transgender woman and her son. I owe my life to my mother, in more ways than one. We've always talked and listened to one another; on drives to and from school, and trips up north. Communication might seem like a small feat, but there are few people on Earth with whom a person can truly speak, and be heard in return. We feel each other's joy, each other's pain. There's a link, an invisible thread that binds us, for better or for worse. Sometimes, you don't want your mother to know you're afraid.

I remember a trip I took with my parents in the summer of 2016. It was 3 months before I started female hormone replacement therapy. I was still presenting as male, although I'd already begun laser hair removal on my beard. I was underweight, under-slept, my skin pale and pocked with acne from lasers and constant anxiety. We were in Munich, on the German leg of my dad's European book-tour for his newest novel, "Avenue of Mysteries." I was 24 years-old. My mom and I walked around Munich together while my dad attended interviews. It was a beautiful day, not a cloud in the sky——not too warm, and not too cold. The city was a Bavarian delight, quaint and delicate, but I could barely speak. "Act normal!" I said to myself. "Act happy! Be happy!

Show her you're happy!" and I really tried, but all trace of "human" left inside of me had sunk into the soles of my shoes.

We stopped at a pedestrian light, and she suddenly turned to me. "Tell me what's going on." She said. "I want to know." I waited a minute, and then I replied in a catatonic din, "Nothing is going on. This is a beautiful day. The sun is shining. I can't really say much because my brain is broken, and my heart is broken, and everything inside of me is broken. I can't be a man, and I can't seem to be much of a woman either. I'm manically depressed, and I will probably never be normal again, but that's that, and this is Munich, and Munich is really beautiful." My mother suddenly burst into tears on the sidewalk. The pedestrian light started blinking, and people began to dodge and cross beside us. She couldn't stop crying. "I don't know what to do!" she cried out. "I'm so scared, I'm so worried, and I don't know what to do." I took her by the arm and helped her cross the street while she sobbed. When we got to the other side, I said, "I don't know what to do either, but I love you."

"Chance Road" is an ode to parenthood, and all its trials and tribulations. My relationship with my parents has shaped my idea of what loving another person can look like. In a world that imposes tropic expectations on what trans women can and cannot be, "Chance Road" gives hope to those of us seeking a family of our own. May we all find what we are looking for.

FILM

I grew up during the Disney Renaissance. My parents had VHS tapes of "The Little Mermaid" (1989), "Beauty and the Beast" (1992), "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1995), "Hercules" (1997), "Anastasia" (1997), and "Mulan" (1998)——these films were my lifeblood as a child. Howard Ashman and Alan Menken's contribution to Disney was unprecedented and profound, a legacy that cemented an era of innovation for Disney. We talked about Ashman's employment of the "I want…" song in Howie's graduate writing class, how Disney films in the 1990's took on a format that looked and sounded like musical theatre. In musical theatre, the "I want…" song is usually the second number, the first being the audience's introduction to the world. The second song, is usually a private soliloquy in which the protagonists clearly state their their hopes and dreams; what they are missing. It's "Part of Your World" in "The Little Mermaid," "I Can Go the Distance" in "Hercules," "Reflection" in "Mulan." Alan Boubil's musical "Les Misérables" opens with "At the End of the Day," introducing the audience to the harsh conditions of pre-revolution France. The second song, Fantine's, "I Dreamed a Dream," details a destitute sex worker's longing for love and happier times.

Everyone can relate to an "I want…" song, not just because we want things, but because what we want isn't necessarily what we need. This complexity is what makes storytelling interesting, especially to Disney-Renaissance children, who were still learning the difference between "want" and "need." In a child's mind, want *is* need. Even as young as five, children identify with characters on screen who yearn, who long for, who desire change in their lives without knowing what that change looks like. With respect to "Chance Road," I felt it was important to give Alex his own "I want…" song in "Chance Road." We have to understand right

away that he wants to know who his real father is. His desire has to be wholehearted and palpable. The film opens with him playing on the floor of his bedroom. He's imagining Chance Road on his motorcycle, swerving between cardboard boxes, and simultaneously he is telling the world that Chance Road *is* his father, and he *will* find him——someday.

The first film I saw that made me want to be a filmmaker was Alejandro Amenábar's "The Others" (2001). I was mesmerized by the dark mood of the film, the toxic relationship between the mother (Nicole Kidman) and her two children. The reveal that they are all ghosts struck me so profoundly, and made me want to write stories with twists and turns that no one expects. A twist to a writer is the unexpected ingredient that takes a simple dish to the next level.

At twelve, I was deeply moved by Marc Forster's "Finding Neverland" (2004). "Finding Neverland" tells the story of J.M. Barrie (Johnny Depp) and the family that inspired him to write "Peter Pan." I was drawn in by the magical realism of the film——the beautiful interplay between the imagined world of Neverland, and the grey reality of 19th-century London. Kate Winslet's death scene brought me to tears. Their mother is too sick to go see "Peter Pan," and so J.M. Barrie brings the production of "Peter Pan" to her house. The performance ends with the mother (Kate Winslet) stepping into the play herself——into the imaginary world of Neverland, with fairies, Indians and pirates. She leaves her family behind, and disappears into this make-believe landscape. Then Forster fades to her funeral.

This film cemented the notion that writing keeps us young. Imagination is the last bastion of the child, hiding within the adult. I knew at 12 years old that I never wanted to lose that spark; that link to childhood. My fascination with magical realism has prevailed to this day, and much of my work, including "Chance Road," interweaves fantasy within reality.

Guillermo del Toro's "Pan's Labyrinth" (2006) has been an inspiration for most of my work. During the Spanish Civil War, an 11-year-old girl ventures into the forest and a mystical faun tells her that she is the rightful heiress to the throne of a fairy kingdom. One of the first concrete examples of dramatic irony that I can remember, Ophelia is unaware of the adult chaos and suffering all around her——that her country is in peril at the hands of her stepfather; a fascist general. The brutality of the Spanish Civil War is reflected in Ophelia's dark and harrowing journey towards becoming a fairy princess, filled with blood, bugs and a child-eating demon.

Guillermo del Toro doesn't believe that animation is just for kids. At a talk-back for his epic stop-motion masterpiece adaptation of "Pinocchio" (2022), he stated that children shouldn't be sheltered from adult storytelling——that they are equipped to handle the darker and symbolic elements of life. He firmly posited that "Pinocchio" is not a children's film, although it is inclusive to children. Likewise, "Pan's Labyrinth" explored childhood fantasy in an adult way.

I was deeply inspired by Guillermo del Toro's use of magical realism, and his portrayal of children on screen. This inspiration, in part, drove me to learn Spanish and eventually study Hispanic Literature and Hispanic Golden Age Theatre at the University of Barcelona. I built my own childhood magical realism in "Chance Road," drawing on lightning and motorcycles, in a way that excites Alex but also terrifies him.

Other inspiring adult films that touch on childhood and coming of age, are "Empire of the Sun" Stephen Spielberg (1987), "The Florida Project" Sean Baker (2017), "Capernaum" Nadine Labaki (2018), "Room" Lenny Abrahamson (2015), "The Tin Drum" Volker Schlöndorff (1979), "My Life as a Dog" Lasse Hollström (1985), "Spirited Away" Hayao Miyazaki (2001), and

“Amarcord” Federico Fellini (1973). Each of these films has molded my understanding of the child’s gaze into the adult world.

I first fell in love with Pedro Almodóvar while I was living in Spain. My then-boyfriend rode a Vespa, as did many Spaniards and Catalans. My first time on a motorcycle was with him, driving to his parents house in the suburbs of Badalona. It was in his parents apartment, while they were away visiting friends in Granada, that Álex put on “All About my Mother” (1999). He knew every word of it. The film left such a lasting impression on me, from the performances by Penélope Cruz, Antonia San Juan and Cecilia Roth, to that haunting Afro-pop soundtrack by Ismael Lô that permeates the story. A single mother witnesses the tragedy of her only son’s death, when he crosses the street chasing after a famous actress. Manuela travels to Barcelona to reconnect with her deceased son’s father, who is now a transgender woman, a sex worker named Lola. Antonia San Juan also plays a transgender woman, a friend of Lola’s and Manuela’s, who is a sex worker herself. Apart from sex work and transgender issues, the film deals with HIV and religion in such a poignant way, through Penelope Cruz’s portrayal of Rosa, an HIV+ nun who cares for women. I was still years away from transitioning myself, but seeing “All About My Mother” solidified my desire and intent to create my own queer stories one day.

“Bad Education” (2004) isn’t just a thrilling story within a story, it showcases a masterful performance by Gael García Bernal as a sensual, vindictive trans woman. “Matador,” (1986), “Law of Desire” (1987), “Volver” (2006), “The Skin I Live In” (2011), “Julieta” (2016) and “Parallel Mothers” (2021) are other Almodóvar films that inspire and inform my own screenwriting.

Hailing from our own side of the Atlantic, Xavier Dolan isn't just one of my favourite directors of all time, his film "Laurence Anyways" (2012) is potentially my favourite trans film of all time. Suzanne Clément's performance is stunning, raw and deep, and her co-star Melvil Poupaud matches her in every possible way. "Laurence Anyways" takes place between the 1980's and 1990's, in Montreal, Quebec. It tells the story of a loving straight couple, Fred and Laurence, whose relationship is put to the test when Laurence reveals to his girlfriend that he wants to be a woman. What's so tragic about "Laurence Anyways," goes deeper than how difficult it was to be openly trans in Quebec in the 1980's. It is a story of loss——losing your partner piece by piece, while they change before your eyes. It's about yearning for someone who no longer exists (or never existed at all). From Laurence's perspective, it shows her struggle with having to choose between the woman she loves and the woman she wants to be. Like Alex's relationship to his imaginary father, Chance Road, the fantasy must crumble. Chance Road doesn't exist, and Alex has to learn to live with Theresa instead.

Other trans films that have inspired my journey with "Chance Road" include "A Fantastic Woman" Sebastián Lelio (2017), "Joyland" Saim Sadiq (2022), "Something You Said Last Night" Luis De Filippis (2023), "Tangerine" Sean Baker (2015), and the documentary film on trans representation in media by Sam Feder, "Disclosure" (2020). I worked on "Disclosure" as a remote transcriber back in the winter of 2016, before I transitioned. Sam Feder sent me hours of interviews with trans writers and actors such as Jen Richards, Julia Serrano and Laverne Cox. Their words taught me so much about trans representation on screen, and ultimately helped me find my own voice as a trans woman, and a creator of trans content.

"Chance Road," is a coming-of-age story with a transgender theme. Most trans coming-of-age stories focus on "transition" itself; the journey from one gender to another against the backdrop of growing up. "Chance Road" is different in that Theresa's transition is in the past, while her son's transition (from boyhood to adulthood) is just beginning. I never wanted to make "Chance Road" about transition itself, but rather trans adjacent. This is a story about a young boy growing to love his biological father. His biological father just happens to be trans.

ART

My mother received her masters degree in English Literature from the University of Toronto in 1979. She wrote her thesis on William Blake's mythology, specifically "The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love & Jealousy in the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man." My mother moved to the United States for my father, but she kept her apartment in Toronto. Whenever we visited Toronto, we would stay in her pre-war, walk-up apartment at Spadina Road and St. Clair West. I slept on a pull-out couch in the living room, surrounded by her framed posters of William Blake's etchings, most memorably "Plate 9" from "The Book of Urizen" (1794), depicting Los, naked on his knees, screaming in terror. Engraved above the image, "Los howl'd in a dismal stupor, groaning! Gnashing! Groaning! Till the wrenching apart was healed."

The image frightened and intrigued me——like the lightning, like death, and bats and mountain lions in marble carves. I would wonder how the frightened man got to where he was; on his knees, screaming into the fiery void. What led him there? At times, he didn't look frightened at all, but maybe elated, like he had discovered something so incredible, so awesome and powerful that he'd ceased to be human.

There were other posters of Blake's etchings in my mother's apartment, including a monotype of Isaac Newton, titled "Newton" (1795), sitting naked on a boulder at the bottom of the sea. There was a poster of the Blake's "Nebuchadnezzar" (1795-1805), the tyrant Babylonian king who lost his mind and was reduced to an animal. Most impressionable to me, however, was Blake's "Elohim Creating Adam" (1795-1805), which hung above the pullout couch in the living room, across from the screaming Los. God hovers above Adam's naked body. Dark, feathered

wings jettison from God's back, his white hair and beard levitating away from his face, as if he were electrically charged. God rests a hand across Adam's cheek——Adam, whose arms are outstretched across the barren rock, his mouth agape in stunned panic as life fills him. Waves lap against the shore; a snake coils itself around Adam's muscular leg.

Before I knew who Elohim and Adam were, I felt their intimacy, their urgency——how they were both afraid and in awe of what was happening to them (life). Like a woman giving birth, the gruesome pain gives way to something beautiful. This is what I felt when looking at Blake's "Elohim Creating Adam." The image stayed with me, and found its way into "Chance Road." Like my own mother, Theresa has a poster of "Elohim Creating Adam," hanging on her bedroom wall. Alex is mesmerized by the image, and eventually she gives the poster to him, so he can hang it in his bedroom. This painting has always been a part of this film, back when it was "Love, The Mommy" in 2018. The story of "Elohim Creating Adam" is, in its own right, a story of unexpected motherhood——a male God giving birth to a son.

According to Kay Parkhurst and Roger R. Easson, "The Book of Urizen" is a history of error. Blake believed that in order to understand "spirituality," we have to first name and codify what spirituality is *not.* "The Book of Urizen" is a book of error, narrated by The Eternals, who relate the story of how Urizen (error) came into existence. Urizen was an eternal himself, but he separated himself from the other eternals as a voice of reason. He pitied them, and offered them logic to correct their "spontaneous lawlessness." In doing so, Urizen formed adversity and dualism. Urizen organized a strict body and a worldview around himself——the notion that what exists can either be seen, smelled, tasted, heard or felt, and all that does not fall within those five categories does not exist. Through his desperate organization of law, Urizen closed himself off

from divinity and fell. “Urizen is the god who falls, the god of the fall, and the god who perpetuates that fall through his ‘net of religion.’ He is the god of error, the body of error, which is the book of error——The Book of Urizen; Easson & Easson” p. 70.

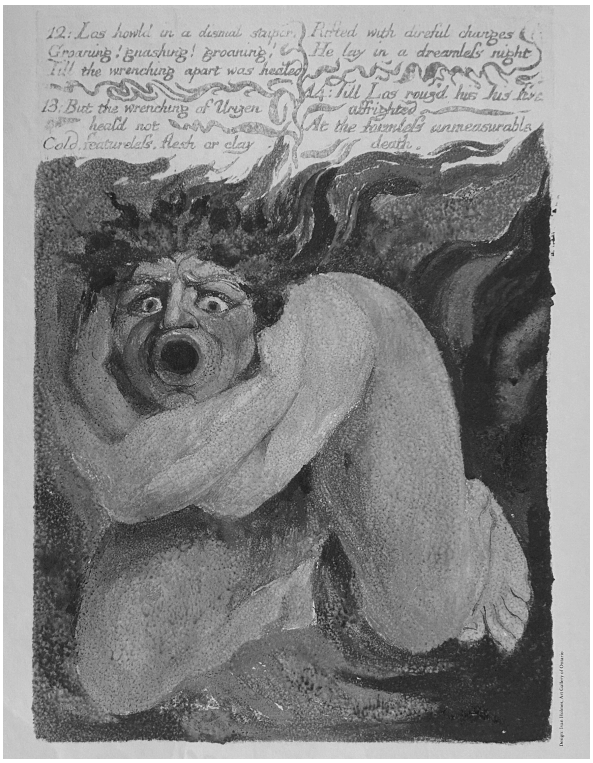
“The Book of Urizen” is depicted in nine chapters, each chapter representing the gestational cycle of a fetus. In late 18th-century England, scientists believed that the human fetus was folded microscopically inside the “ovarium.” A man’s semen would rouse the “ovarium,” and from it a microscopic embryo would fall, and grow exponentially. Urizen's entire development takes place inside the “black globe” (the womb), which Urizen refuses to leave, cementing the notion that his “net of religion” is unwavering, and he sees no further need for enlightenment.

Other characters appear in “The Book of Urizen,” among them are Los, Enitharmon, and their child, Orc. According to Kay Parkhurst and Roger R. Easson, Los was once a part of Urizen, “one entity in eternity, neither hermaphroditic nor androgynous, but contrary forms.” The Eternals narrate Los’ painful and frightening separation from Urizen. This is the etching that hung in my mother’s apartment——Plate 9, Los on his knees, grieving the loss of his twin.

“As the stars are apart from the Earth, Los wept, howling around the dark demon, and cursing his lot, for in anguish Urizen was rent from his side, and a fathomless void for his feet, and intense fires for his dwelling…” Plate 8, “Los howl’d in a dismal stupor, groaning! Gnashing! Groaning! Till the wrenching apart was healed. But the wrenching of Urizen heal’d not,” Plate 9.

There is something prophetic in my relationship with Los——that I spent my childhood wondering how he ended up in his fiery hell, only to learn that he is grieving his separation from

Urizen, his "family." I created a character who uses his own mythology to comprehend the loss of his father. Alex's separation from Theresa gives him prophecies, the prophecy of Chance Road, and Chance Road's eventual return, but it is a false prophecy. In "The Book of Urizen," Los becomes a prophet, a conduit between The Eternals and Urizen——between God and Man. However, Los can only see the "black globe" from his particular vantage point, making his prophecies also false. Like Urizen, Theresa's story is a book of errors. The abandonment of her son was self-fulfilled, just as Urizen's fall from eternity was self-fulfilled. The fall of Theresa is something I have been manifesting from draft to draft. Blake managed to find his way into "Chance Road," long before I even read "The Book of Urizen" and found parallels. The significance of William Blake's work on my writing is seemingly lifelong, multigenerational, and multifaceted. I hope to read more of his poetry and find further inspiration on future projects.



"Los howld in a dismal stupor," from "The Book of Urizen," 1794-96; Relief etching, colour-printed, with pen and watercolour, 15.8 x 11.0 cm.

LITERATURE

My father never knew his father. Throughout his childhood, he would hear bits and pieces of the man who left him, who abandoned him as an infant. My father was born March 2nd 1942, in Exeter, New Hampshire. He was born into an old New England family. The Winslow girls were Daughters of the American Revolution, our oldest American ancestor being Edward Winslow, who arrived in Plymouth on the Mayflower, in 1620. My grandmother, Frances Winslow, was a nurse. An early advocate for abortion rights and gay liberation, Frankie was an angry woman——something my father admired, especially when her anger was geared towards social justice.

My grandmother got pregnant in the summer of 1941 in Marblehead, Massachusetts. She was working as an army nurse, when she met John Wallace Blunt——a pilot in training. They had a shotgun wedding in the fall of ’41, just months before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the U.S. declared war on Japan. Blunt shipped out to the Pacific theatre, and Frankie kept their correspondence in a box in the attic——letters from his time overseas. Blunt was shot down over Burma, and trekked through the jungle for 30 days, contracting malaria and dysentery.

According to my grandmother, the war ended and Blunt vanished without a trace. My father would ask Frankie about his biological father, to which she would reply, “When you’re older.” If he asked one too many times, he received, “Don’t ask me again.” The general consensus in the Winslow family was that Blunt was a cad——a good-for-nothing bachelor. My father convinced himself at a young age that his own negative attributes must be Blunt traits; genetic evidence that he was just as troublesome and unpredictable as his mystery father.

My dad wrestled throughout high school and college. His two passions in life, writing and wrestling, couldn't appear more separate to the outside observer, but my dad found many parallels. "Writing is re-writing. If you can't re-write, then you can't write. Like writing, wrestling is an exercise in repetition… drilling a single move, over and over again, until it's perfect." My dad used to imagine that his father would come to his wrestling matches. Before every match, he would scan the stadium, waiting to find a face that looked like his. "Maybe he doesn't want to meet me face to face, but a wrestling match could be anonymous enough," my dad thought.

My father became a national bestselling author with the publication of "The World According to Garp," in 1978. Like my father, Garp grows up without a father of his own. His mother, Jenny Fields, is a nurse who impregnates herself with the semen of a dying airforce pilot. Jenny's choice to have a child on her own sets her apart from her conservative contemporaries. Garp details his male sexual urgency through his writing. At the same time, Jenny publishes her own book, "A Sexual Suspect," examining misogyny and sexual violence against women. Jenny becomes an advocate for women, and a martyr among radical feminists——particularly the Ellen Jamesians, who chop off their tongues in solidarity with an 11-year-old girl who was raped.

Roberta Muldoon, a transsexual woman and ex-football player, is a friend of both Jenny and Garp. "Roberta is arguably the most *normal* character in Garp," my father often says. While Jenny and Garp stand in moral and sexual opposition to one another, Roberta crosses the aisle and sees truth and validity in both of them. Ironically, Jenny is killed by a man who hates women, and Garp is killed by a woman who hates men.

My father resolved that if his dad wanted to contact him, he would have done so after the publication of Garp. “I made myself known, and that was enough.” After the birth of his first son, my grandmother surprised my dad with the box of Blunt’s letters from the war. “Since you’re a father now, you should know some things about yours,” she told him. He read his father’s letters to Frankie, begging her to let him see his son, “Johnny.” We will never know how my grandmother responded, but a meeting never happened. What was clear to my dad was that his mother didn’t want Blunt in her life.

Without answers for who John Wallace Blunt was, my dad was left to his imagination. “The Cider House Rules,” “A Prayer for Owen Meany,” “Until I Find You,” and “In One Person,” are all novels that centralize orphanhood, and unanswered origins. “A Widow for One Year,” is unique in that it details an absent mother, rather than an absent father. The only book of my father’s with a female protagonist, “A Widow for One Year,” tells the story of Ruth Cole in three phases of her life, starting in 1958, then moving to 1990, and finally 1995. Part I details Marion’s exit, Ruth’s mother. Marion and Ted had two sons before Ruth, who were tragically killed in a road accident. Traumatized by the loss of her sons, Marion resolves that she cannot bear the thought of losing another child. She’d rather leave Ruth, and give her a chance at a happy life, than force her daughter to bear the weight of her pain.

Although Ruth never knew her brothers, the halls of her house are filled with their black and white photographs. At 4 years old, she knows the story behind each photograph, where it was taken, and who took it. Her brothers have developed a mythical status in her mind, and she demands that her father tell her “Timmy and Tommy stories” every night before bed. Her father, Ted Cole, is a children’s author, a drunk and an adulterer. Clearly the loss of his children did not

leave him unscathed. Marion has an affair with Ted's 17-year-old assistant, Eddie. "You look like Tommy," she tells him, somehow justifying her desire to be close to him.

When Marion leaves, she takes the black and white pictures of her dead sons with her. Ruth's loss of her mother is intensified by the loss of these photographs. For Ruth, her bothers live inside these pictures, and when they are gone so are they.

"A Widow for One Year" was an inspirational novel to me. It is heartbreaking, romantic, and filled with family history that feels real to my own life. In the novel, Ruth's father writes a children's book titled "The Door in the Floor," about a mother and son who live in a cabin, alone, on an island, full of mystical things. The only rule she gives to her little boy——"Never, ever, under any circumstances, open the door in the floor!" The little boy becomes obsessed with the trap door in the floor of their cabin——so much so, his curiosity gets the best of him. This story comes from my own family history——an abandoned cabin at our family cottage in Georgian Bay, with a trap door in the floor, that inspired so much of my early imagination. I would beg my father to tell me door in the floor stories, and they always began with the same premise—— "Whatever you do, Everett, don't open the door in the floor!" This very door in the floor inspired my own short film, "Johnny on the Moon," my thesis film at the New York Film Academy, about two young men who escape into the Canadian wilderness and encounter a trap door in the floor of their cabin.

I was on set for the filming of Todd Williams' adaptation of "A Widow for One Year," titled "The Door in the Floor" (2004). I'll never forget meeting Jeff Bridges and Kim Basinger, who played Ted and Marion Cole. I attended a cast party, and spent most of my time with Elle Fanning, who was only 4 years old at the time——I was 11. This film shaped my world at 12

years-old, and opened my eyes to what filmmaking could be. Living so close to the story, and so close to the filmmaking process, I felt inspired on so many levels. “The Door in the Floor,” is one of those movies I try to watch every year, just to see if I can find some new kind of truth with each viewing.

In 2001, my father was interviewed for “Sunday Morning” on CBS. During the interview, he explained that his birth name was John Wallace Blunt Jr., after his biological father who he never met. He was later renamed John Irving at 6 years-old, once his mother remarried. Several weeks later, my dad was writing in his office. He was working on his most recent novel, “Until I Find You,” about a son searching for his long lost father. He received a phone call, and passed it on to his assistant. Minutes later, his assistant came into his office. “You’re going to want to take this,” she said.

His name was Chris Blunt, a VP in an investment firm in New York. “Mr. Irving, I think I’m your brother,” he said. At 63 years-old, my dad learned that John Blunt had 4 more children with 3 wives. He passed away in 1995; my dad never got to meet him. Chris came with his family to visit us in the summer of 2002. I met my cousins, who were my age, and we spent 4 days together in a scene that felt straight out of a movie. Chris showed me photographs of my grandfather, and the resemblance between him and my dad was almost too much to bear. The visit was especially hard on Chris, who saw so much of his father in my dad. My father would move his hands a certain way, and Chris would spontaneously break down. “Dad used to do that!”

We later met my dad’s other siblings, Miles and Bonnie, though the fourth sibling (also named John Wallace Blunt Jr.) did not want to meet us. My dad’s newfound sister, Bonnie,

confided, “I’m pretty sure my dad came to Exeter to see you wrestle.” Bonnie distinctly remembers traveling to Exeter as a teenager, with her mother and father. “My mom was so angry,” she said. “She didn’t want to be in Exeter.” They stayed in a hotel in town, while my grandfather went out during the day. “He’s here to see your brother wrestle,” Bonnie’s mother told her. “What brother?” she asked.

“It was the devious-cruising Rachel, that in her retracting search after her missing children, only found another orphan.” This is last line of Herman Melville’s, “Moby-Dick.” My father has the last part of this sentence, “only found another orphan,” tattooed to his forearm. My dad knows how it feels to be an orphan, but he also knows what it means to have a good father. My dad’s stepfather, Colin, was a good father to my dad. At 6 years old, my dad felt rescued by Colin, not just as someone who would remove the stigma of being fatherless, but as a person who advocated for his upbringing and education.

I myself know what it means to have a good father, a father who tells stories and lets me explore myself creatively. I watched my father find his family. I bore witness to that reunion—— to 63 years of questions finally answered. It was easy not knowing my biological grandfather, until we met the people who knew him, and loved him. Then it was hard. It was hard to learn what could have been, what might have been, had we found each other sooner. There has been much speculation in our family, as to whether or not John Blunt knew who my father was. “He must have known,” Bonnie said. “He knew your name was changed to Irving.” Chris, on the other hand, feels differently. “If he knew who you were, he wouldn’t have been able to keep it a secret.” We’ll never know for sure. We just know John Blunt went to his son’s wrestling matches.

My father's work has inspired and informed so much of my own storytelling. Most formative to me were "A Widow for One Year" and "In One Person"——the story of a 17-year-old bisexual boy in the early 1960's, who falls in love with a transsexual librarian. This formative relationship stays with him throughout his life. Billy Abbot goes on to have many great loves, both men and women. He survives the AIDS epidemic, and returns to his former high school as a drama teacher, in debt to his first love, Miss Frost. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Billy narrates, "We are formed by what we desire. In less than a minute of excited, secretive longing, I desired to become a writer and to have sex with Miss Frost——not necessarily in that order."

Like Theresa and Alex in "Chance Road," Miss Frost sparks a love of storytelling in Billy——a lifelong gift. Likewise, Theresa gives Alex her own lifelong gift; the gift of words and writing, of expressing himself creatively. I adapted "In One Person" into a 30-minute, one-act play, which was performed at Saint Andrews College in May of 2019, under the direction of William Scoular. I played Miss Frost myself, alongside 17-year-old SAC student, Blake Phillips. I didn't know how the students would react to seeing a play about a transsexual librarian. To my surprise, Blake and I were met with a standing ovation from 150 teenage boys in uniform, and were awarded Best Play of the year.

Billy Abbot has a mystery father of his own. His uptight New England family refers to him disparagingly as "Code Boy," as he was a cryptographer based in Italy during the war. All Billy's mother has to say about the Code Boy is that she saw him "kissing someone else." Billy only knows one story about his biological father, which he remembers hearing when he was in bed, delirious with fever. He doesn't know who told him this story, but as the story goes, the Code Boy was on a transport ship to Italy during a massive Atlantic storm. The ship pitched from

side to side, and the Code Boy went to the communal latrine to relieve himself. He sat at the far end of the latrine, while another boy sat on the opposite end, reading "Madame Bouvary." When the ship pitched once more, the bookworm lost grip of the toilet and skipped by the seat of his ass across the toilet bowls, smacking into the Code Boy. He lost grip of his book, and it flew out the porthole into the raging waves below. "Don't worry," the Code Boy told the seat skipper, "I can tell you how it ends." "Please don't!" the man replied, "I have to read it for myself."

Later in life, Billy meets his father for the first time in Madrid, to discover that his father is a gay man and a drag queen. The Code Boy confirms that he was the one who told Billy the Madame Bouvary story, and that the seat skipper became his longtime lover. It's true, Billy's mother caught the Code Boy kissing someone else, but that someone else was another man.

It's one thing to be inspired by queer literature, but my father's work is more than just an inspiration. It's family folklore. "Chance Road," not only draws on my greatest literary inspiration, but it draws on my own family history. We truly make use of the expression, "art imitates life, and life imitates art." Alex is shaped by what he desires——to meet Chance Road. When his fiction becomes reality, he has to learn to live with the loss he's suffered his whole life, and find kinship in a new relationship with Theresa. When Billy Abbot finds out that Miss Frost is a transsexual, he confronts her late at night in the library. She tells him, "My dear boy, please don't put a label on me——don't make me a category before you get to know me!"

I hope "Chance Road" pushes people to see past labels. Western society's ideal, heteronormative nuclear family is no longer the "default." Resistance to queer family structures has to be met with de-categorization and visibility. We've always been your family members, even when we weren't visible.

MOTIFS

Tiny Houses

I had a fascination with dollhouses when I was child. My mother gave me a Playmobile Victorian dollhouse for Christmas, which I adored, and decorated meticulously. I also enjoyed making miniature houses of my own, out of cardboard——manifest turrets and towers, archways and gables. When someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I'd say, "I want to be an architect." As exciting as it was to design small buildings, the most intriguing aspect of the process was imagining *who* could live inside of them. I suppose that's why I became a writer instead of an architect, because a house is a vehicle for complex and dynamic interpersonal relationships.

After Wesley died, I decided to construct a miniature replica of our church for his father, Father John, the motorcycle-riding priest. I used refuse boxes, hot glue and acrylic paint to carefully construct the exterior of the church. My mother even bought me multicoloured transparent plastic sheets to cut out stained glass windows. I presented the replica to Father John at our house in Vermont, one night after dinner. I remember he couldn't speak. He would try to say something, and then stop himself, emotion catching in his throat. That cardboard replica still stands on a shelf in the entryway of Zion Episcopal Church in Manchester, Vermont, with my handwritten plaque underneath, "In memory of Wes."

Miniature cardboard houses have played a major role in my work as a filmmaker. During my year-long intensive at the New York Film Academy, I was known as "tiny house boy," because most of my films contained a little house, hidden somewhere.

I shot my thesis film with NYFA, “Johnny on the Moon,” in the summer of 2015, at my family cottage in Georgian Bay, in the infamous abandoned cabin with the trap door in the floor. The story——two young men escape into the Canadian wilderness in July of 1969, to indulge in romance and sever themselves from reality. Johnny and Max remark upon the first moon landing and what happens after you die, in a hazy summer love. However, Johnny warns Max that he must never open the door in the floor. His reasons are illusive and nonsensical, but Max abides to Johnny’s wishes. “I promise, I won’t open the door in the floor.” However, as time passes, Max begins to see and hear strange things in the woods, including an old man with a canoe paddle. He begins to question where he and Johnny are, and why they can’t open the door in the floor.

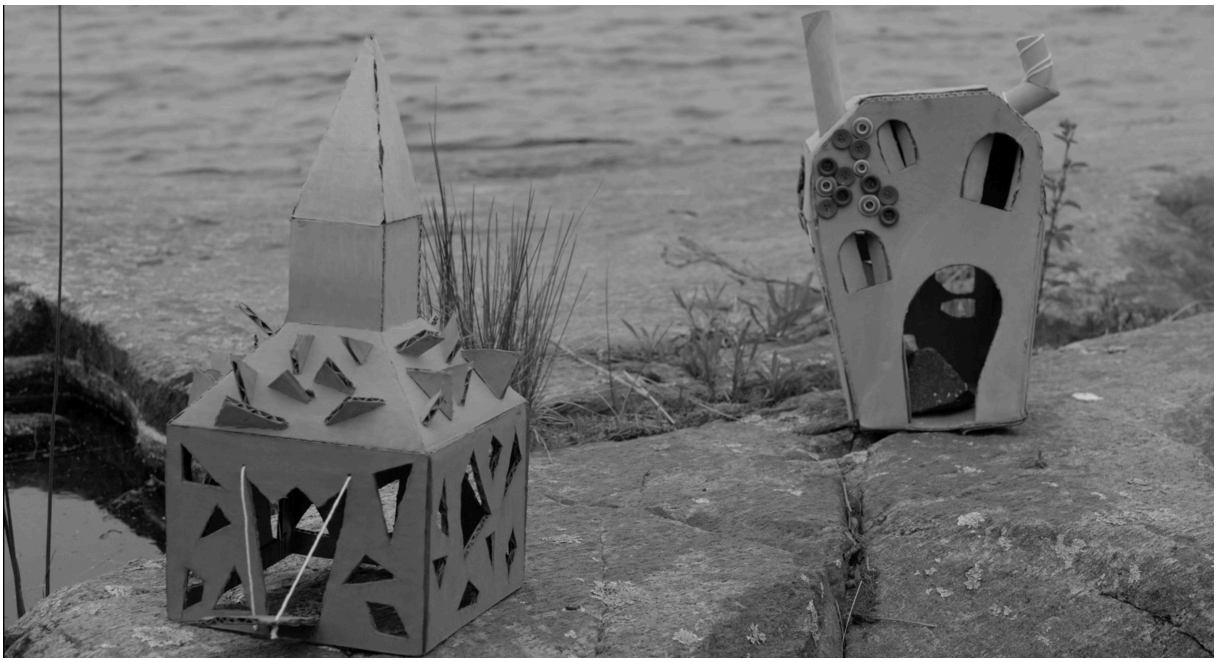
I wrote, directed and co-starred as Johnny, one year before starting my gender transition. Johnny is like a child, indulging in his most natural and primal instincts. He is depicted in a flowing dress, surrounded by miniature cardboard houses. Whereas Max is more grounded and logical, Johnny is ethereal and other-worldly. “Teach me how to play pretend,” Max begs of Johnny. He envies Johnny for his innocence, his make-believe world, but Johnny is shielding himself from the truth——that they both died in the Vietnam War, and now exist somewhere in purgatory, or maybe on the moon?

Like Johnny, writers never really grow up. We go from playing with tiny houses to writing screenplays. I use miniature houses to access childhood; childhood memories, and childhood innocence. Tiny houses also appeared in my first feature screenplay, “Melissa of the Bathtub” (2015), about two people who fall in love with the same street performer in Barcelona. When this street performer goes missing, they band together on a motorcycle trip across Spain to find her. Eduardo is in his early 20’s, works in telecommunications, living with his mother.

Melissa is a motorcycle-riding transgender American ex-pat and installation artist who professes her love to the street performer publicly. Cerasi (the street performer) depicts herself as a Jewess burning at the stake during the Spanish Inquisition, in the Plaça del Sol. When Cerasi goes missing, Melissa and Eduardo become unlikely companions and travel to Granada where they think they might find her, at a medieval role-play and music festival. A major part of Melissa's installations are her miniature houses, made from recycled materials. Most of my queer characters in film are seen engaging with miniature houses, a reflection of my own queerness towards the art form.

The set of my short film, "El Secreto del Amor Eterno," was created entirely out of painted cardboard. Shot in Barcelona in 2017, the set itself is a life-sized miniature house. My co-director Álex Bermejo was inspired by German Expressionism. I put my own media to use, cardboard and paint, to create an expressionistic world with tools that are familiar to me.

"Chance Road" opens with Alex constructing a cardboard city in his bedroom, out of his moving boxes. He uses his toy motorcycle to reenact his mythological father, Chance Road, driving through the downtown hub. This miniature city is a meta story; the story-within-the-story, and a microcosm of what Alex is experiencing in his own brand-new life in Toronto. Alex uses the trauma and displacement of "home" to create a new home for himself out of cardboard, on his bedroom floor. Thus, the deployment of tiny houses continues, through characters searching for make-believe, hoping to find who they are looking for.



Tiny houses in "Johnny on the Moon" (2015). Dir. Eva Everett Irving.



Tiny houses in "El Secreto del Amor Eterno" (2017). Co-Dir. Eva Everett Irving

Not only was the door in the floor a point of inspiration for me as a child, but the family history behind the cabin itself continues to be an inspiration to me as an artist. In the summer of 1938, my grandfather built the one-room cabin with the help of his mother's then-boyfriend, and his childhood best friend, Doug Bain. My grandfather and Doug were 16 years-old and incredibly close. They both attended Upper Canada College, and lived within a short distance of each other, Doug on Lonsdale Road, my grandfather on Oriole Parkway. They took winter trips together to the remote cabin, where they would snowshoe, ice fish, and collect firewood for the wood-burning stove. There was a lot of speculation about my grandfather's intimate relationship to Doug Bain. In an era of hyper-masculinity and fear of "sexual perversion," people were "relieved" when my grandfather finally settled down and married my grandmother, assuaging fears of the unimaginable.

I have photographs of my grandfather and Doug Bain on one of their infamous teenage winter trips to the cabin. Doug is reclining in bed, wrapped in a warm white sweater. He's carving something, or maybe peeling a potato. Hanging beside him is a woman's dress. I have resisted the urge to let my imagination get too far ahead of me, but I have often wondered what two men would want with a dress on a winter camping trip? Perhaps it was my great grandmother's, and the dress was simply left there from the summer. Maybe she came with them one winter, but it's hard to believe she would.

Both Doug and my grandfather shipped out to Europe to fight for the allied forces during World War II. My grandfather joined the Merchant Marines, and freighted weapons and ammunition to Murmansk. Doug Bain was stationed with the Royal Canadian Airforce, battling

in the sky over Germany. Doug's plane was shot down over Cologne, and his remains were buried at a Canadian Military cemetery close to Antwerp. My grandfather named his first born son after Doug. Inscribed in my grandfather's handwriting, near a window in their now-abandoned cabin with the door in the floor, reads, "In memory of Doug Bain, lost over Cologne, May of 1942. We love you."

What is a haunted temple? Haunted places are perceived in popular culture as occult and demonic——a ghost stays behind and makes the place they inhabit a living nightmare. In the popular digest, a haunted house is nothing more than the anthropomorphization of trauma. The house manifests the trauma into a character, a character that can be defeated. By defeating the character of the house, you defeat the trauma. Containing trauma inside a building is a brilliant maneuver of compartmentalization. If only it were so easy to manifest our own traumas inside physical objects that can be destroyed. Haunted houses require ghosts——spirits who have died and moved into another realm, but why do ghosts need to be dead? What happens to places that are haunted by the living?

When we ascribe importance to a house (a place) that place becomes haunted by us. Its walls become imbued with the meaning we ascribe to them. Obsession turns into possession. What is a place of worship other than a site of mass obsession? We charge places——houses, apartments, Churches and Temples with our imagination, and the living become the ghosts. I think about my old apartment in Brooklyn——139 Starr Street, apartment 2L. The place where I struggled with gender identity and manic depression, alongside two roommates, one of which became my best friend, and the other who I was in love with. There is a story there, and not necessarily a negative story, but a story of finding myself and prevailing in the face of adversity.

Starr Street is not a demonic force, but a temple for the living. For a writer, where there is a story there is an obsession. My grandfather's abandoned cabin with the door in the floor is not haunted by the ghost of Doug Bain, or my grandfather. It's haunted by me.

Haunted temples have a special place in my work, from "Johnny on the Moon," which was shot in the cabin itself, to my most recent short film, "Homewreckers" (2022), produced with York University under the guidance of Don McKellar. A dispassionate young couple inherit an exquisite Bavarian chalet. Tess wants to tear down the house and rebuild something more modern. Her fiancé, Boyd, is indifferent. They invite an old friend to dinner, and it becomes apparent that Tess is having an affair with him. When mysterious letters appear at the house, divulging in their adulterous affairs, tensions rise. At the end of the film, Tess finds one final letter on the dashboard of her car. "Please, don't tear me down," it reads, suggesting that the house itself has been writing the letters in order to orchestrate its survival.

When I was writing "Homewreckers," I kept returning to the line from Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream"——"Lord, what fools these mortals be!" For the majority of the film, we think these three characters have the power. It's not until the end that the house reveals itself as the fourth character; the puppeteer. The Bavarian chalet in Uxbridge, Ontario, belonged to the grandparents of my friend co-star. From the moment I saw it, I knew there was a story there. I wrote "Homewreckers" for that house.

There are haunted temples in "Chance Road" as well. In an earlier draft, Theresa's relationship to the house on Northcliffe Boulevard——the place where she lived with Julia and her newborn son——is one of obsession. She regularly sits on a bench outside the house, losing herself in nostalgia, reminiscing on what could have been. Theresa is the living ghost of

Northcliffe Boulevard. That house is her temple. When “Chance Road” was Theresa’s story, the film revolved around Theresa’s ghost “moving on” to the afterlife——leaving Northcliffe behind, and forming a new relationship with her son that isn’t predicated on the past. Theresa’s journey was to learn to live in the present, and appreciate who Alex is now rather than focus on what what lost.

Although Northcliffe Boulevard is removed from the current iteration of “Chance Road,” there remains a haunted temple——a Ferris wheel. Alex makes up Chance Road stories, and catalogues them in his journal. However, one night Theresa decides to tell Alex a Chance Road story of her own. The dramatic irony is that Alex doesn’t know that this story is true.

“Once upon a time, your mother was nocturnal,” she says. “So one night, when she was lying in bed, awake, Chance Road decided to take her on a road trip.” She tells Alex that Chance Road drove his mother to Canada’s Wonderland. He took her up on the Ferris wheel. “So she could see high above the amusement park!” she adds, emphatically. “The car rocked back and forth, back and forth, and eventually, it lulled her to sleep. And your mother collapsed into Chance’s arms and slept through the whole ride.” Alex is dubious that his mother could fall asleep on a Ferris Wheel, but Theresa assures him, “There are worse wheels to fall asleep on, Alex. At least you don't need to drive a Ferris wheel. There's no destination, and whether you go up or down is left entirely up to fate. It's the perfect place to fall asleep, actually, and let life pass you by.”

By telling this story to Alex, Theresa creates a folklore around Alex’s mystery father. The Ferris wheel becomes a haunted temple, possessed by both Theresa and Alex for very different reasons. For Alex, the wheel symbolizes his motorcycle-riding father, ever in motion. For

Theresa, the wheel harkens back to a time when she was in love, before Alex came into the world, before she left her family.

True to the mythology, Theresa takes Alex up on the Ferris Wheel at Canada's Wonderland. It is on the Ferris Wheel that Theresa reveals to Alex who she is. "Chance Road didn't take your mom up in the Ferris wheel——I did, because we were in love. Alex, I'm your biological father." As the wheel descends back to Earth, Alex is left to contend with the new reality——that Chance Road doesn't exist, and the person he's been longing for his entire life abandoned him. Alex doesn't know it yet, but this moment will stay with him for the rest of his life. If the wheel wasn't already haunted, it's certainly haunted now. An indelible mark has been left on that wheel, permanently linking Theresa and Alex to that wheel. The mythology of Chance Road suddenly becomes the real-life mythology of Theresa and Alex.

This is why I tell stories——to find the haunted temples for my characters. There is nothing more beautiful to me, more cinematic to me, than putting people in places that mean something to them. I want to tell the story of how a place finds meaning, how a place leaves an indelible mark on a person. "We would hide our deer from the Mounties, under the door in the floor," my grandfather told me. "That's why we built it. Throw a rug over the door, and no one has to know how many deer you shot." It's simple enough; a trap door to hide deer, and yet that door in that floor took on a new life, a new purpose——a gateway into another world, a haunted temple, possessed by family folklore.



Johnny and Max lie next to the door in the floor, "Johnny on the Moon" (2015). Dir. Eva Everett Irving



Tess doesn't like the antlers, "Homewreckers" (2022). Dir. Eva Everett Irving

Motorcycles: El Polvo del Camino

The mythology of Chance Road as a motorcycle-riding, lightning-bearing vigilante has evolved over the years, from a malicious figure, to an absent father, to a hero of the night. His mode of transportation, however, has remained a constant. Motorcycles have always held a special place in my work as a writer. My childhood motorcycle-riding priest, Father John, is not directly responsible for this literary motif. Instead, my fixation on motorcycles began in Spain.

When I was 20 years-old, I moved to Spain to study abroad at the University of Barcelona. I took lectures in Hispanic Literature, and Spanish Golden Age Theatre, immersing myself in Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca. These texts offered me a window into Spain at the height of its global empire——an era of melancholy, where depression was a privilege afforded to the rich, and nothing was sexier than getting lost in your own garden labyrinth. I was pleasantly surprised to find that 17th-century Spanish is much closer to contemporary Spanish than 17th-century English is to contemporary English. I became fluent quickly, thinking and dreaming in Spanish. I fell in love with everything I saw and touched. There is nothing quite as thrilling as being a foreigner abroad, with foreign words in your mouth, especially when you're 20 and 21 years old.

There are motorcycles everywhere. I'm not exaggerating when I say that motorcycles make up 30% of life in Barcelona. From scooters to mopeds, cruisers and sport bikes, the constant drone of exhaust permeates the city. I shared a 19th-century apartment complex in the Eixample district with 5 Europeans. Like most of Spain, our windows weren't winterized or soundproofed, and seemingly hadn't been updated since the late 1800's, when the Eixample was constructed, under the false hope that the neatly distributed barrio would become the world's first

egalitarian “utopia.” Utopia, it was not. Every motorbike that whirred by made me feel as though I was living on a drag-race tarmac. It was increasingly difficult to sleep. The sudden, violent machinery made me bolt upright in bed at 3:00am, panic in my chest. “Just another motorcycle,” I’d have to remind myself. I resorted to melatonin——one tablet, then two, then three, until wake and sleep blurred into one state of semiconsciousness. The motorcycles droned on.

I met my boyfriend-to-be at a gay night club called Arena Madre. It was one of those institutions with loud techno music, Red Bull vodkas, and smokey darkrooms for all kinds of illicit and shameful behaviour. Álex confessed later on that he selected me for my cowboy boots. “I knew you were American. They were a dead giveaway” (Álex had a thing for foreigners). I on the other hand selected Álex for his motorcycle. I wasn’t going to leave Spain without riding on the back of one, especially because they were responsible for the permanent dark circles under my eyes. Álex had a snazzy little Vespa, with a cream-coloured leather seat. It was our ongoing joke that the only reason we were together was because of my cowboy boots and his motorcycle.

At 29 years old, Álex lived with his parents in the suburb of Badalona, just 30 minutes from downtown Barcelona. I became very familiar with this ride, on the back of his Vespa, the air rushing past us at hyper speed. We drove directly underneath the Torre Agbar (now Glòries), which we affectionately referred to as “la gran polla de Barcelona” (the big cock of Barcelona). It was hypnotic, the drone of the engine so close and urgent. I felt movement, I felt change, I felt myself hurtling towards my future. The motorcycle reminded me of what was ahead, and rushing towards me.

In his memoir “The Motorcycle Diaries,” Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara commemorates “el polvo del camino” (the dust of the road) as the recipe and key ingredient for adventure. In the

early 1950's, long before he became a Marxist revolutionary, the 23-year-old Argentinian left his studies as a medical student and embarked on a motorcycle trip with his friend, Alberto Granado, across the South American continent. They named their beat-up, dilapidated vehicle "La Poderosa" (the Mighty One), an unlucky or perhaps *very* lucky chunk of metal that broke down at every juncture, and eventually died, after which el Che and Alberto dragged the cadaver that was their motorcycle on foot.

"Vimos el futuro con impaciente alegría" (we saw the future with impatient joy), Guevara writes. He speaks about their fortunes and misfortunes in Entendámonos——"our coin flew high, flipped over and over; sometimes it was heads, and other times tails." They slept in the open air, on the beach, on street corners, in abandoned sheds, hospitals and fire stations. They found their way into a local paper that referred to them as "two Argentine leprosy experts traveling South America by motorcycle." They used this fame to gain free hospitality, food and numerous tune-ups to their sickly bike. Guevara recalls one night when he felt ill. "I approached the window, and expelled into the dark void, all of my pain." He woke up the next morning to find that he had vomited on a rack of drying peaches, harvested by their gracious host. "Volamos de allí!" he writes (we flew out of there).

Guevara's motorcycle trip wasn't just a series of chaotic hooliganism. It gave el Che a window into the real-life injustices of disenfranchised people across Latin America, and awakened in him a desire to uplift the voices of the proletariat against American Imperialism. It was this trip that cemented el Che's philosophy, and positioned him as a leading figure for the future.

My own "motorcycle diary" in Spain, was not nearly as ambitious or politically emblazoned as that of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, but the "polvo del camino" (the dust of the road) inspired me as a writer and a storyteller. The first short story I wrote in Barcelona was called "El Cadavedor"——a contemporary, queer twist on Mary Shelley's "Frankenstein." A 20-year-old, gay American tourist visits Barcelona during the 1992 Olympics. After a hook-up encounter gone wrong, he is left brutally beaten on the side of the road. An older man finds him and takes him home on his motorcycle to tend to his wounds. Our protagonist (who has no name) refers to his motorcycle-riding saviour as "his gentleman," but he quickly notices strange attributes——the gentleman's pale, almost green hued and hairless skin, textured skin, skin that looks quilted, as though it were stitched together rather than one cohesive element. The gentleman has a makeshift garden labyrinth in his living room, structured by ivy wrapped around metal trellises. "You can see that I've hung several mirrors on the inside, to give the effect that the labyrinth extends for all eternity," the gentleman explains, calmly and quietly. His voice is "off" or is it just "different?" Maybe it's an unplaceable accent, or maybe it's the sound of two vocal chords that don't quite fit together, neatly inside the throat. They part ways, and the gentleman quickly vanishes into the past.

20 years later, our American protagonist returns to Barcelona under very different circumstances——as a junior reporter of a local Spanish serial killer citizens are calling "El Cadavedor" (the cadaver-ist). His nickname is denoted by victim's body parts which he excises with surgical precision and leaves around the city as "tokens." Our protagonist has no proof to backup his rising suspicion, but he has a creeping feeling that his motorcycle-riding "gentleman" from 20 years ago, might know something about El Cadavedor. He just needs to find him.

Álex and I went on a road trip to Granada, to visit his family in the south, and get a taste of Andalusia, mixed with the dust of the road. I had grown increasingly interested in Sephardic music, and the history of the Jews in Spain. Granada was the last stronghold of Muslim and Jewish Spain——the architecture of Al-Andalus ever present in neighbourhoods such as el Albaicín, and the infamous Alhambra palace. Jews flourished under Islamic rule. After Isabel and Ferdinad conquered Granada in 1492, they began the expulsion the Jews that same year, the Spanish Inquisition, a 400-year-long persecution of the Jewish people and their descendants. At the same time, on the other side of the ocean, Columbus thought he found a new route to "India."

We stayed in the apartment of Álex's great aunt, a 90-year-old Spanish woman who had never learned to read. In the days of Franco, women were discouraged from receiving any education beyond child rearing and domestic chores. Although I was years away from transitioning, his aunt gifted me a dress of hers——a black lace funeral gown from the 1960's. "The only funeral I have left to attend is my own, and I don't care what I wear," she said to me. My time spent in Granada, its history and the dust of the road inspired my first road-trip movie, "Melissa of the Bathtub" (2015), about two people in love with the same street performer. When Cerasi goes missing, Melissa and Eduardo traverse Spain in a motorcycle to find her at a medieval music festival.

I cannot separate motorcycles from my life in Spain. Exposed, vulnerable and dangerous, motorcycles aren't just designed for speed, they are designed to make you *feel* speed. When you're riding a motorcycle, speed isn't just symptom of motion, it becomes a proper noun, a person at your side, a voice that hurtles you towards your destiny——a future that might be frightening and uncertain.

Chance Road is in motion, and tragically moving further and further away from his son. Alex knows that his biological father has left him behind, and this abandonment is personified through Chance Road's motorcycle. How will Alex ever catch up to a man who's constantly on the move? My short story, "El Cadavedor," also features a young man looking for someone on the move, as well as "Melissa of the Bathtub." Losing someone is easy. Finding them again is a more arduous task, and requires a loud vehicle designed for speed and destiny. While Alex wonders where Chance Road is driving to, Theresa stands beside him, gently reminding him that she is close, even if Chance Road is not. Through her actions, Theresa lets Alex know that she's not driving off without him again.

The last scene in "Chance Road" is significant for Alex's character. Theresa spends her earnings on a brand new motorcycle, and takes Alex out for a spin in the parking lot. In a sense, Alex and Theresa are starting their own "road movie." They resign themselves to the "dust of the road" and hurtle towards their uncertain futures. Theresa isn't leaving Alex behind again, and Alex is finally headed forward on a new path, a path that will lead him towards adulthood.

Before Ernesto 'Che' Guevara takes off on his motorcycle trip with Alberto, he visits his girlfriend Chichina. She gifts him a gold chain, and he leaves her a newborn puppy, which he names "Come Back" in English. Come Back stands as a reminder to Chichina that Che will return. He will come back to her, once he has completed his trip. Guevara contemplates his journey. "I am not me; at least I'm not the same 'me' inside. That aimless wandering through 'Capital America' has changed me more than I thought it would." Just as Che is not the same "Che" when he comes back to Chichina, Theresa is not the same person when she comes back to

Alex. It us up to Theresa to prove to Alex that she has changed for the better. On the next journey, she won't be leaving him behind.



A dusty road in Dalt del la Vila——Badalona, Spain,
"El Secreto del Amor Eterno" (2017). Co-Dir. Eva Everett Irving



Granada, Spain——August, 2014. I was 22 years old.

THEMES

Reality vs. Illusion

In my studies of Hispanic Literature, I was most inspired by the work of Calderón de la Barca, specifically his play from 1636, "La Vida es Sueño" (Life is a Dream). A Polish prince named Segismundo has been imprisoned in a tower since birth by his own father. His father, Basilio, incarcerated his son based on a prophecy that he would grow up to be a tyrannical king. Basilio decides to put Segismundo to the test. He grants him one single day in court, as prince. If he is gracious, he will be allowed to stay. If he is violent and tyrannical, then he will be sent back to his tower, drugged, and convinced that his day in court was a dream. He is released from the tower and told that he is actually a prince. Manic and despondent, Segismundo throws a servant out the window and accosts a princess. Effectively he is drugged, brought back to the tower, and convinced that his single day in court, as a prince, was a dream.

"¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí. ¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión, una sombra, una ficción, y el mayor bien es pequeño; que toda la vida es sueño," (What is life? A frenzy. What is life? An illusion, a shadow, a fiction, and best of all short; for all of life is a dream). Segismundo's monologue, after which the play is named, highlights the human predicament of reality vs. illusion. How do we know that what we see is "real?" Whose reality are we living in? Whose rules are we following? What notions and mythologies do we grip to tightly? Like lost souls in a storm, afraid of coming to terms with the truth——that which we perceive to be "true" is simply something someone told to us, and we chose to believe.

When I returned to the United States, I began working on my first two-act play, "The Drift." Based on my grandfather's lived experience during World War II, "The Drift" tells the

story of two young merchant marines on a wounded battleship, drifting through the Atlantic Ocean for 30 days. John Elman and Allan Waters form a close bond, finding solace in each other as they drift aimlessly across the waves. Elman is anxious and suffers from narcolepsy. One of his nervous ticks is speaking backwards. The other boys on the ship make fun of him ceaselessly, and claim that he "barks like a mad dog." He's also a man of faith, and staunchly wary of demons. "My mother and I are agents of God, fighting against the pandemonium." On the other hand, Allan Waters plays solitaire. He keeps to himself and mainly listens to Elman, protective of him. Waters is masculine, quiet, and ruminating. "I like your voice," he says to Elman. "Tell me more, preferably forwards."

Things take a dark turn when Waters starts to exhibit possessive feelings towards Elman, specifically around Elman's sudden narcoleptic episodes. "You drift away from me, that's what you do! I watch you leave the room without even moving your feet! Where the fuck do you go, Elman?!" Stranded on the waves, things turn desperate and dangerous as both men start to lose sight of reality. Elman's pious mother appears to both of them, and plays a significant role in deterring their fate drifting at sea.

My grandfather's battleship was torpedoed in the summer of 1942, while shuttling ammunition to Murmansk. He was only 19 years-old. All souls were pronounced dead; however, his battleship remained afloat and drifted through the ocean for 32 days until they were found and rescued by a British ship. I was deeply inspired by his story, and the psychological toll of drifting——slowly losing hope, waiting to be saved or sunk. "The Drift" is a psychological horror that examines the tenuous relationship between reality and illusion; how quickly the material world erodes away when peril is imminent. "The Drift" was performed at Sarah Lawrence

College from December 3rd to 7th, 2013, and received an Award of Excellence from the Sarah Lawrence theatre department.

Magical realism inspires much of my work. I find the subtle fantasy of reality much more intriguing than pure fantasy or pure reality. Like "The Drift," "Chance Road" centres around a character who is stuck between reality and illusion. On the one hand, Alex knows that Chance Road isn't real; and on the other hand, Alex chooses to believe in Chance Road to protect himself from coming to terms with reality——that his father abandoned him. Like Elman's mother in "The Drift," Chance Road is an ethereal figure whose purpose is to protect Alex from the truth.

"The truth is ugly!" Johnny cries out to Max, at the end of my thesis film, "Johnny on the Moon" (2015). The door in the floor that Johnny is afraid to open is an allegory for tough truths——truths that hurt, but have to be revealed eventually. In "Chance Road," Alex is hurt by the truth, the truth that his father abandoned him, and the truth that the father he wanted to have (a motorcycle-riding vigilante) doesn't exist. Instead, he gets Theresa.

In "Johnny on the Moon," Max is the voice of reason, the "reality" to Johnny's "illusion." "Teach me how to play pretend?" Max implores of Johnny at the beginning of the film. "Pretend is a game that chooses you," Johnny replies, showing Max that we don't get to choose our dreams, or our nightmares. They choose us. As a writer, I feel as though pretend is a game that chose me. I don't choose to play make-believe; make-believe simply happens to me.

Even if Chance Road isn't real, Alex uses Chance to make sense of his reality. Without Chance Road, Alex would be fatherless. Instead, he has an imaginary father who replaces the void——an illusion that brings substance to reality. Likewise, Theresa has her own relationship with make-believe. She confides in Alex, "I stopped believing in God long ago, but it's nice to know that I have a friend, somewhere, if I ever need one." Within the structure of Theresa's

reality, she finds space for the illusion, the make-believe, the myth that gives her life reason and purpose.

Calderón del la Barca's "La Vida es Sueño" concludes with Poland learning of the imprisoned prince, and freeing him from his shackles. Segismundo finds his solid ground and becomes king. Even if life *is* a dream, it is still *his* dream to be had, and Segismundo has agency within the illusion of life. Alex learns to live with the reality of who his biological father is, but Theresa tells him to never let go of the dream. She gives him journals and encourages him to write Chance Road stories. Just because Chance isn't real, doesn't mean he's not worthy of having an imaginary life on the page. I have to remind myself that Alex and Theresa are not real either. They are simply characters I invented and put down on paper. Sometimes they feel real to me, as though I just have to keep looking, and eventually I will find them. Film is a fantasy we subscribe to, a suspension of reality for one and a half hours, or however long the film lasts, transporting us out of our "reality" into an adjacent illusion. Filmmaking is the process of taking life and making it into a dream.



Waters (Edunn Levy) plays solitaire. Elman (Max Hegley) wets himself during a narcoleptic episode, "The Drift," December 5, 2013



Waters (Levy) murders the Captain. "This whole waiting, and drifting, and fixing shit that isn't gonna fix, is so old!" "The Drift," December 5, 2013

Chance vs. Destiny

Theresa puts on a one-woman show titled "Boudica," about a transgender dictator in the United States. "What's a dictator?" Alex asks Theresa, while they paint a cardboard mural of dystopian America together. "A dictator is the logical choice after anarchy," Theresa replies. Her satirical two-act play exposes the underbelly of fascist America, and the fragility of U.S. democracy. It's place in "Chance Road" is to shine a light on Theresa's adult concerns, juxtaposed with Alex's innocence. Theresa may not realize it yet, but as a parent she worries about the planet her son will inherit. Against the backdrop of real-world contemporary politics, the dictator story is nothing new, and nothing that hasn't already happened before. Are humans destined to be autocratic? Or is there a chance for an equitable, egalitarian future?

For as long as I have been working on "Chance Road," I have also been developing the concept of "Boudica." To access Theresa's play more acutely, I decided to write it myself. Like Theresa's play, my work started as a one-woman show, but eventually morphed into a cast of five characters——"Boudica: The Rise and Fall of America's First (or maybe second) Dictator." Set in the near future, five grifters rise in rank from deepfake content creators, to the highest seat in the land——the presidency. A two-act, satirical dark comedy, "Boudica" is an examination of ecofascism and autocracy in the age of TikTok, fake news and glowing screens.

We are first introduced to the character of Boudica (then Angela) at 25 years old. She's a young and hopeful barista/aspiring actress, getting blackmailed into a mystery job with Apple Intelligence. A child TikTok star, Angela is an exhibitionist, destined to be in front of camera. At the end of the play, Boudica's secretary of defence tells her, "You only exist when someone's looking in your direction. If we all turned our backs, I think you'd blow away." Boudica responds, "There is only Boudica. If Boudica is gone, so is your name; so is your history. Do not

forsake Boudica. Boudica isn't a man or a woman. Boudica is God. Do not turn your back on God."

The five fictional characters depicted in "Boudica" exhibit unrelenting racism, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia and homophobia (to be expected of genocidal war criminals). As an American expat, I feel a significant urgency to make theatre representative of what the United States faces in the 21st century. I wish not to embolden bigotry, but rather shine a light on the fire spreading across my nation. "Boudica" is a wake-up call to our global humanitarian crisis. Above all, I want "Boudica" to make us laugh, and then cry. How do I write a play about five people who commit crimes against humanity, and still make them funny, relatable and human? What does it mean for an audience to feel affection for evil people? Is there evil, dormant and waiting, inside us all?

At the end of the play, Boudica is exposed as a transgender woman. Although her biological sex is never confirmed, the Secretary of State (Camille) uses this scandal to bribe Secretary of Defence (Frank) to assassinate Boudica. The destiny of a dictator is short, and Boudica says so herself. "The people love us today, but will they love us tomorrow? Will they love us when we take away their protests? When we take away their vote? Eventually, they will get bored of Boudica, and they will break into this office, and they will hang all of us in a neat line on the National Mall, and sooner than you think." Empires rise and fall, and as quickly as power is gained, it can be taken away. The inevitability of demise is both tragic and comforting. We may be destined for authoritarianism, but we are also destined to rebel——destined to fight back. Like the Ferris wheel in "Chance Road," Boudica's rise and fall is predetermined and fixed——what goes up, must go down. So is the ebb and flow, the swinging pendulum of

geopolitical history. History repeats itself. The predictability of the universe is assuring, and yet so much of our individual lived experience feels like chance.

In writing "Boudica," I discovered that chance is infuriating. The gruesome notion that life is a coincidence, a series of happenstances propelling us, stumbling forward into the next whim——this is so tragic. If our lives are shaped by chance, then we are all screenwriters writing a film with no outline, no blueprint, and no definitive ending. What are the chances that our story will turn out any good? Chance is heartbreaking. A father can either stay, leave his family and then come back, or leave for good. As the creator of Alex's destiny, I can grant Alex his happy ending, but from Alex's perspective the return of his father is "chance" personified.

In the case of chance vs. destiny, I don't have an answer. I don't expect to find one in my lifetime. All I can do is write a film called "Chance Road" and work my hardest to get it made. Whether or not this story comes to life on the screen, is unpredictable. I plan on submitting "Chance Road" to Telefilm's Talent to Watch program. I am currently debating whether to submit through the Festival Selection stream, or filmmaker Apply-Direct stream. My short film, "Homewreckers," which screened at Fantasia Festival, Inside Out and Vancouver Short Film Festival, allows me to qualify for the Festival Selection stream. Filmmaking is a collaborative effort, and I hope to build a team of creators who best represent the intention of "Chance Road."

I booked my first gig in a writer's room in Los Angeles, in April of 2023. Two days before I started work, the WGA strike shut down the room. The last year has been in limbo——auditions at a standstill, union projects frozen in amber. The release of my show on AMC+, "Orphan Black: Echoes," was postponed to an undetermined date in 2024. As a writer and an actress, it feels like I'm floating in purgatory——that tenuous and ambiguous space between "yes" and "no," where nothing is certain or promised. It is at times like these that I despise

chance the most. I wonder if some definitive proof of destiny would be better——to know that life's failures are predetermined and set in stone. As infuriating as chance is, at least chance is unbiased and egalitarian; it's just the luck of the draw.

The future of "Chance Road" is uncertain. After the longest industry strike since 1988, it is an interesting time to come up as a screenwriter. There are many questions left to be answered. Would I direct "Chance Road" myself? Would I play the role of Theresa? What production company or companies could be interested in a project like mine? I have written, acted and directed all of my short films. Should this trend persist with my first feature film? I look forward to answering these questions, and building my materials to give "Chance Road" the life it deserves. As we all know, a film doesn't exist until it's on screen. I want "Chance Road" to exist. Whether or not I believe in chance or destiny, I do believe in this film, and I hope I can convince the world to believe in it as well.

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