

# **BUTTERFLY JUMP**

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## ABSTRACT

*Butterfly Jump* tells the story of a scrappy woman from the wrong side of the tracks who is a single parent determined to have her children fit into the upper crust. When her children are wrongfully removed from her care due to assumptions rooted more in class prejudices than fact, she must fight the system to get them back. In doing so, she undergoes a radical personal transformation.

I am looking at lower-class life and its intersection or clash with the upper crust; Connie Noseworthy is our protagonist whose story carries the heart of the film. Connie's actions may be viewed as unconscionable and simultaneously understandable.

Firmly rooted in a sense of place, its tone is realistic, gritty, suspenseful and intermittently funny. I hope to move the audience to tears of heartbreak as well as joy and laughter and in a story that ultimately bolsters humanity.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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# OVERVIEW

## Introduction

This document is written to provide context to the screenplay *Butterfly Jump*.

In it, I outline the origins of the story that inspired me to write it. I briefly describe my previous work and how this screenplay represented a departure for me. I discuss the creative process and some of the obstacles I faced in writing it. I then review the various tools and concepts made available to the screenwriter including: theme, characters, genre, tone, and concepts in plot structure. I discuss the ideas imbedded in the characters and story and some of the challenges faced in dealing with the subject matter. Lastly I take a look at the script from the point of view of a director, and offer a treatment of a director's vision.

*"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle"*

- Sun Tzu, The Art of War

*"A rose's rarest essence lives in the thorn."*

*"Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it."*

- Rumi

## **Origins**

This story is close to my heart for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it is about a single mother, which I am. More cogently, it is also loosely based on true events that happened to a friend.

One day late in December of 2011, I received a telephone call from a woman I'd known peripherally since my grade school days and who had recently come back into my life when we enrolled our daughters in the same school in their kindergarten year. I will call her Connie. Connie gravitated to me from day one at our children's school. She cited memories from our school days that I had forgotten. She explained to me that she had been held back in high school, and ended up in my graduating class in high school. That she was held back was clearly nothing to do with her intelligence that was razor sharp. I did not remember Connie from my childhood, but came to know her in adulthood.

In 2011, Connie and I had both enrolled our children in a private Catholic school in St. John's. The school is located in the heart of the city, a sprawling leafy campus with three stone buildings including a private hockey rink where the province's premier was known to play a weekly league game. It has a century-long reputation as the best Catholic boarding school for boys in Newfoundland. It was now a co-ed school and believed by many to provide the best education to be found in the city. The education was given in the Jesuitical tradition with a particular focus on social justice. There was a tuition and for those who could not afford it, a tuition assistance program. The school claims never to decline a student due to financial need. I managed to scrape the tuition together without applying for that assistance, although there were times I would have appreciated the help. The question crossed my mind whether recipients of that charity might at times be somehow treated differently within the school community. It was a rather conservative community that I sometimes felt at odds with. My reasons for sending my daughter there were the following: the school is a block away from my house in St. John's, her cousins were going there, I liked the focus on social justice, the reputation is top-notch, and my parents, who had been my main support since my daughter was born, were keenly in favour.

Although we were from very different worlds and lived different lives, Connie and I had one important thing in common that set us apart from most of the other parents in the culture of that private school where we'd enrolled our children: we were both single parents. And on that level, we shared something defining. In addition, from day one of kindergarten, our children became friends.

As a result, I saw more and more of Connie in various places: not just school but also fund-raising events, the children's Irish dancing classes, play-dates, birthday parties, and school family skates (where Connie never skated).

One December day I received a phone call from Connie. Her voice was hoarse and shaky. I'd never before known her to reveal fear, weakness or the remotest vulnerability. The first sentence out of her mouth was "I need your help." She spilled out a jumbled and painful story of her children being abruptly removed from her care by Child Youth and Family Services a few days before. The reason they cited was that they believed the children to be in danger of abuse from their father whom I had never seen. I knew he did not live with the family, and also knew him to be a distant and inconsistent presence in their lives. Connie told me she had been arrested for objecting and trying to stop the removal of her children. She had consequently spent a night in the lockup. She had since discovered her girls were now being kept in foster care in another town. She was scrambling to get money together to hire a lawyer in order to speed up their return home, and was calling to ask me to write a character reference for her legal case. She was also calling me because she needed a friend.

This shocking event was the seed for this screenplay. The story of this screenplay shifted multiple times over the course of creating it but the core themes have endured. It has always been about the uncovering and reconnecting to the wild force of the human spirit against adversity, the human need for acceptance and belonging, the destructive powers of shame and the



power of friendship and caring (most especially self-care) to heal wounds, overcome difficulties and rise again.

## **Previous Work**

My first exposure to storytelling on screen was from behind the camera, as an actress. I studied acting at National Theatre School for one year and worked for many years on stage and screen, performing in a number of films that were mostly shot in Newfoundland although there were a few shot in Ontario and Quebec, and one in Bangalore, India. I continue to work as an actress. During my 20s, I also did a Bachelor of Arts in English and French literature and during that time, I took some creative writing classes where I began writing short stories.

At a certain point, a passion for storytelling on film was ignited in me. I remember specifically when it happened. I had just met filmmaker Anne Marie Fleming who screened for me a film of hers that had just won an award at the Vancouver International Film Festival. It was called *You Take Care Now* and it was a personal narrative story, told in voice-over, that blended a series of experimental impressionistic animation techniques with live action. I was instantly excited by the new possibilities in storytelling that were revealed to me in that film.

Within a year, I had made my own first film – a short narrative that blended live action with a series of experimental animation techniques called *Come Into My Parlour*. *Come Into My Parlour* was a personal story about my feisty spinster great aunt, Auntie Anne, who had had a big influence on me in my childhood.

Auntie Anne lived in a basement apartment in my family's home, and she taught me, among many other things, how to drive, at the age of 14. In fact, I became my great Aunt's occasional personal driver from then on. As the fourth born of six children (four of them boys) and the first girl, it made good sense to her that I learn to drive early because "you can't let your brothers get ahead of you!"

The next film I wrote and directed was in a similar vein – a personal tale about my family that wove live action with a series of experimental animation techniques that verged into impressionism. It is called *When Ponds Freeze Over*. Similar to my first film, it was inspired by true events: a pond skating day when my father went through the ice and as I skated to try to save him, I also went through.

It told the story of a girl who goes through the ice while trying to save her father. As she struggles to get out of the icy water, she finds herself swimming in a world of family memories that had been forgotten. Described in one review as a "*dynastic fairy-tale*", it was critically acclaimed, winning many awards in Canada and internationally, including the TIFF John Spotton Award for Best Canadian Short film, Best Animated Film at The Vancouver Film Festival, Best Canadian Short at the Atlantic Film Festival, and a Genie Award for Best Short Film.

A stint at the Canadian Film Centre's Director's program followed, where I co-wrote and made a couple of more traditional narrative films and subsequently began directing television (both drama and documentary).

The next personal film I wrote and directed was produced by the National Film Board and was also inspired by true events of someone very close to me –

in this case, my younger sister who has suffered a life-threatening illness since childhood. This film was also a blend of live action and animation, called *The Sparky Book*. The story examines the isolation and anxiety experienced by sick children, and the particular brand of joyful courage and imagination many of them draw on particularly in their relationship with their pets to overcome their fears. It also explores the anguish of families, the drama of the operating room, and the unparalleled joy when a child's life is saved. Most of all, this story demonstrates how brave children can be when facing illness and the possibility of death.

There were a handful of other short films made for the NFB which were documentary in style and which required a different approach to the filmmaking in place of a formal screenplay.

As it happens, in most of my early work, I told very personal stories in a style that broke the 4th wall, addressing the audience directly. As well, the storytelling relied heavily on a very visual and at times, experimental type of animation to access an emotional vein.

So when I set out to write the two screenplays that I wrote during my MFA tenure at York, although I had written and made a few films, I felt I was entering a new challenge. Now, I became interested in accessing this emotional intimacy through the practice of writing believable characters that are pulled through a series of cause and effect events. I would write a map to a screenplay that would convey emotions purely through the situations and events that occur, the moments, the dialogue, the difficult choices made by the characters. I would try to let the story speak for itself, and would not rely so heavily on voice-over direct

telling. I aimed to write a script that any director could bring to life. Borrowing from the words of English screenwriter Jimmy McGovern, I approached these screenplays with the following mantra: ‘simplicity of narrative and complexity of character.’ Unlike a thriller or action film such as the *Bourne Legacy* trilogy where the writing puts an emphasis on plot rather than character, these stories would be more appropriately described as ‘character driven’ stories, where the plot is driven through the lens of a protracted study of character. A perfect example of a film that achieves complexity of character and simplicity of narrative is *I, Daniel Blake*, by Ken Loach.

In my first year of my MFA, I completed a screenplay adaptation of the novel *February* by Lisa Moore. It tells the story of a woman who loses her husband in the Ocean Ranger oilrig disaster – an event every Newfoundlander over the age of 35 remembers. Indeed, almost everyone on the island of Newfoundland has a personal connection to someone who died in that tragedy.

And now, I am immensely relieved to report that I have completed a draft of *Butterfly Jump*. Although, like all my previous work, it is inspired by true events that occurred to people close to me, it is my first original screenplay told in a more conventional form of narrative. Both these screenplays remain works in progress that I will continue to massage; they will remain malleable until the day of picture-lock.

Both *February* and *Butterfly Jump* have been optioned to be produced. The screenplays are never perfect; there is always more room for improvement, which I will continue to do. I am attached as director for *Butterfly Jump*.

## Creative Process

I have piles of books on screenwriting on my desk and bedside. Many of them have been pored over with dog-eared sticky notes poking from the pages, marking passages of significance. Even more have not been read fully; and some, I confess, were never cracked open. I have been schooled on the many concepts around structure including Aristotle's *Poetics*, Joseph Campbell's *Hero's Journey*, Blake Snyder's beat sheet and the various permutations and incarnations all of which touch on the same general idea of the elements that make up a story. I've made my own charts and outlines, cross-checking one concept of the three act breakdown against another, and then against my own.

Each of these books agree more or less on the basic notion of story. There are three parts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. In every story a person – (or group of people) wants something and can't get it. In the process of trying to get it, while struggling against great odds, change occurs.

I found kernels of wonderful ideas in many of these books. I found discussions of tools, suggestions for process, insightful analysis of existing screenplays. Viki King (*How to Write a Screenplay in 21 Days*) for instance, offers an interesting tool for getting through the Act 2 desert. She also prescribes a map for what should be found on pages 1, 3, 10, 30, 45, 60, 75, 90 and 120. I spent considerable time looking at the events Viki King advised on this schema and this provided an interesting map for my concept of the structure of my story. Blake Snyder's beat sheet was another compelling frame-work that I looked at closely though I departed from it. In most cases, I ultimately found that these

prescriptions for plot structure were helpful only to a point and that in many cases, it was necessary to let go of the recipe in order to solve other problems that cropped up. So though these provided useful maps, they were useful to me as guides more so than finely tuned formulae.

Amnon Buchbinder's concept of the "chronicle" of the story was a consuming concept that was fruitful to me in many ways. It invited me to see my characters as living, breathing people. It also allowed me to comfortably release many story ideas from the screenplay itself, trusting that the existence of these events within the larger chronicle of my characters' stories off screen would be knit within the fabric of what is seen on screen.

Reading screenplays was another helpful endeavour – even screenplays of widely different genres. I read many screenwriters, and enjoyed the vastly different styles that can be found for instance in Woody Allen, William Goldman, Tony Gilroy, and Michael Arndt.

But of all the screenwriting reading I did in the course of writing this screenplay, I would say that the book that inspired the most powerful shift for me was a small and simple book by Steven Pressfield called *The War of Art*.

*"Ah but when we begin.*

*When we make a start.*

*When we conceive an enterprise and commit to it in the face of our fears,  
something wonderful happens."*<sup>1</sup>

- Steven Pressfield

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<sup>1</sup> *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield, 123.

I wrote this screenplay in fits and starts over the course of 4 years. To some degree the protraction of work schedule was justified by the fact that life and work got in the way of my progress. To a greater degree, my own inner obstacles got in the way. The biggest struggle I had with writing this screenplay was a particular brand of resistance: procrastination. Procrastination is a personal demon that has haunted me in my own creative pursuits and which I have gone to battle with. Without the demand of a firm deadline, I found it difficult to overcome my own resistance to doing the work. The resistance itself became a wall, an agonizing paralysis. The only release from this agony was to actually begin to do the work. The most difficult moments are the first ones, the moment of committing first to the seat, and then to the blinking cursor on the blank page. The only respite from this hell is work itself. With each word, sentence, paragraph, scene, the fear of facing the unknown dissipated and the entry into the imagined world of this story grew more enjoyable, more seductive.

Christopher Vogler's notion of the Writer's Journey as being reflected in the Hero's Journey began to take shape and make sense to me. When I fully immersed myself in the imagined world of the story, I crossed over into another world and would not return, would not be able to return until I found the elixir (a finished script) and so on. I began seeing Connie's journey in my own relationship to the work of writing this script. That is to say, I found the greatest freedom as a writer came to me when I consciously took the step to accept – not just accept, even embrace creating work that was 'not yet good enough'. Just as Connie needed to begin to shut down the voice that said "fat cow", I consciously

listened to, and began to question and object to the inner voice that said things like, “this is boring... it doesn’t matter.... Who cares if you ever get it done... it’s not going to matter...” etc. As Connie’s inner journey evolved in the story, my own attitude slowly transformed into something more positive and resilient. I consciously became more light-hearted, giving myself the permission, the invitation to fail. This idea became a daily mantra for me. It’s okay, better even, to write something that doesn’t work. Keep on failing. Just keep going.

*“There is indeed one element in human destiny that not blindness itself can controvert. Whatever else we are intended to do, we are not intended to succeed; failure is the fate allotted. Our business is to continue to fail in good spirits.”<sup>2</sup>*

- Robert Louis Stevenson

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<sup>2</sup> Power Screenwriting, Michael Chase Walker. 10.



## THE PITCH

Our loud, brash protagonist CONNIE is very overweight and a smoker. She's an irreverent, tough single parent with moxie. She has two daughters: who are her reason for living: SUE ANNE (aged 10) and ADINA (aged 6). The world is the port city of St. John's, NL, playing out between Connie's impoverished home located on the scrabbly side of the tracks, and a century old private Jesuit college set on a sprawling mature campus – replete with its own private indoor rink – located in the stately part of the old city. Connie's kids go to this school – (a fact she takes great pride in) - thanks to a tuition assistance program for people in financial need – (a fact she skulks to hide). So these kids from the wrong side of the tracks mingle with kids from a different milieu all the time. Connie is perennially on the outside - constantly trying to keep up.

Told in the social realism style of films such as *La Promesse* and *2 days 1 Night* by the Dardenne Brothers, with a bit of the entertainment value of films such as *Silver Linings Playbook* by David O'Russell, *Butterfly Jump* is a 'fish out of water' story of a stigmatized single mother determined to make a life for her children in this world. Problems arise when Connie's children are wrongfully removed from her care due to prejudice and assumptions made by people who have judged Connie based on how she looks and her social missteps, rather than on fact. In the course of fighting the system to win them back, she discovers that what she really has to change is herself. She takes action that results in a radical personal transformation.

When we first meet Connie, she lives on church food-bank handouts, collects welfare, drives her mother's cab under-the table – reporting no income biweekly to the welfare office, raids the school's unclaimed lost and found for treasures with access provided by the school janitor BOB, (who later becomes an ally). In this driven way, she manages to cobble together enough cash to keep her talented daughter Sue Anne in a costly figure skating program – also associated with the private school where the kids go. This is despite Connie's mother's warning: "You're trying to fit them into a world that is only going to spit them out." But Connie holds no prisoners when it comes to giving her kids a life she did not have and this is why we like her.

Connie may be the worst dressed mom at the rink, but Sue Anne is the best skater on the ice. Connie's currency is pride and she trades on it flauntingly. What Connie hides under her thick shell is the paralyzing fear of being rejected, judged as worthless, of being invisible and powerless – something many of us can relate to. And therein lies the contradiction of her character. She is in-your-face socially, yet buried under a leaden cloak of shame and self-loathing that is connected to a secret we learn well into the story. This self-loathing is seen in glimpses when she intermittently mutters to herself: "fat cow"... "you eedjit!"

Early in the story, a charity skating competition is announced. The prize is a skating scholarship and Sue Anne has it in the bag. Then, an introductory invitational event is announced – a parent-child skate for each contestant.

For Connie, putting her loathsome 'fat cow' self on the ice for the community's judgment is unthinkable. She refuses.

Sue Anne pleads with her mother and that drives Connie to locate and invite back into her life her estranged ne'er-do-well ex, a former hockey player, Brett.

Brett agrees to do the skate provided Connie fronts him some cash. This is an agreement that requires Connie to borrow her mother's car for a few more shifts. One of these is a fateful shift. She is spotted by the woman at the welfare office - the very woman who asks Connie to report on her employment and to whom, at times, Connie lies.

After missing a skating practice with Sue Anne, tensions are extra high when Brett next shows up at Connie's home. A domestic brawl ensues that spills out onto the front lawn for the neighbour to see. There is a shove, a trip and a fall. Brett is at the centre of the melee and Sue Anne comes away with one or two inadvertent bruises.

The next day, when Connie shows up at the school, she is confronted by two people from Social Services. She assumes she has been caught for the employment fraud and she responds the way she always has to authority: she panics and storms away. This arouses their suspicion, and a rash decision is taken at the head office to remove the children from Connie's care. Connie gets cornered in an office with the kids behind her. When the policeman twists her to gain access to the kids, Connie accidentally knocks over the second officer. Connie's children are removed, and Connie is wrongfully charged with

assault, put in handcuffs, thrown into the paddy wagon and taken to the lockup.

Connie is alone. Without her kids, she has no purpose, no worth whatsoever.

The skating competition is a distant memory.

And so begin the Kafkaesque machinations. Connie is forced into a quagmire of judgments, rulings, determinations, and roadblocks. She is accused of and punished for a crime she has not committed. The social services people reveal they have received an anonymous report of abuse and that she must prove the children will be safe before they can return.

Connie becomes obsessed with the source of the report. Was it the nosey neighbour Ali Aluwalya, who witnessed the brawl with Brett? Was it Miss Corbett, the teacher and skating coach who never liked Connie? A parent?

The first place Connie goes is church. Not for God, or guidance. She goes to track down her doctor – a devout woman, ex-nun – to ask for pills. Because, she says, she is cracking up. Dr. Nora tells her she does not need pills; she is not cracking up. What she needs, she says, is character references. Scanning the world for allies instead of enemies is Connie's first hurdle. Connie must confront the reality that she has no real friends. Dr. Nora provides her the first letter and she approaches the priest, Fr. Joe, for the second. She nudges Connie to seek and find people who will stick up for her.

Connie begins to confront the social stigma of what has occurred. The first school mom she approaches for a reference shuns her.

Connie must negotiate her way through Social Services and the Legal system - both of which seem to represent a collection of anonymous and incomprehensible forces beyond her control. The first hoop Connie is ordered to jump through is to undergo counselling. This is an order that Connie resents deeply especially since in her view, the Social Services people have got her all wrong. In her first counselling session, Connie takes a decision that turns the plot in a new direction. She decides that she will train to do the mother-daughter skate in order to compel Social Services to allow her more immediate access to her children.

So now, with the help of Bob, the custodian of the school who lets her into the rink and eventually with the help of Fiona, a school Mom who comes to recognize Connie's worth, Connie begins to train for the skating event.

The first steps for Connie are minute and barely surmountable. She cannot jog a full block without gagging. She white knuckles the boards of the rink, terror stricken to move on the icy surface. Bob throws her the end of his scarf and tells her to take baby steps towards him. She refuses to move unless he closes his eyes. This is how it goes. And with homage to ***Rocky***, slowly, gradually, we see this woman begin to find her glide.

While Connie navigates her way through the red tape of restoring her family, she clears out Brett's stuff from her basement and driveway, lets the light into her house, starts jogging, learns to skate again, quits smoking,

practices cross-overs and lunges. Finally, she starts to learn in the most rudimentary way – a rather complex skate jump known as the butterfly jump.

As she does, she expands her world and grows flexible and strong in surprising ways both physically and emotionally.

A court hearing occurs at the end of Act 2, where things do not look good for Connie. Word has gotten back to the judge of a fray that occurred between Connie and Brett on the occasion of a supervised visit to the kids the week earlier. Connie's plea for sole custody is stayed as a result, and the recommendations of the Social Services are heard. They recommend a delay of the return of the children to their mothers' home pending further counselling. When Connie hears that the foster parents have applied for conditional adoption pending a decision of the court, she passes out and hits the floor in a blackout faint.

She has two black eyes when the day of the skating event arrives. With these two black eyes, Connie must now face her biggest fear. She must be seen and judged on her physical prowess and grace by a community that Connie has never felt she belonged to, and which most likely were the very people who put her worth as a parent in question. The only consolation Connie holds now is the power of the surprise she will give her children when they learn that she has prepared to do the skate with Sue Anne.

Instead, that morning at the rink, Connie is affronted to see that the foster parents have come as well. This affront is followed by something more shocking. Without knowing Connie has trained, Sue Anne is over-the-moon

excited to share with Connie that she has trained with her foster mother who is a figure skater. She fully expects they will be the best mother-daughter couple on the ice.

The skate Connie trained for had its own set of risks: Connie would have to allow herself to be publicly judged; but she would fulfill her child's wishes, and her own need to be vulnerable. In so doing, she would thereby re-establish her inner worth.

Connie must now choose between two unthinkable options: to publicly concede her hard-fought-for role as Sue Anne's parent and defer to the foster mother for the skate, or to assert her role as Sue Anne's mother for the skate. The first would honour Sue Anne's expressed wishes, but would require Connie to approach the skate competition judges and reveal that her children are in foster care. The second option would override Sue Anne's needs and put faith in her own ability not just to pull off the skate she has trained for, but to be worthy of her daughter's love even if she fails.

Connie's story carries the heart of the film. Connie confronts the many demons within and without in the struggle to regain her family. This amounts to a struggle for acceptance, self-respect and self-love in a harsh and condemning world. Ultimately, what Connie reaches for is a life governed not just by what is weighing her down but by the possibilities that can set her free.

## KEY ELEMENTS

### Theme

*“The Beginning is the most important part of the work.”*

- Plato<sup>3</sup>

*“When I finally discover what I am writing about I tape it to my typewriter”.*

- Arthur Miller<sup>4</sup>

I aimed to create a story that overflows with life and that works on many levels – as a look into poor economic and social conditions in St. John’s, as a parable of the self-fulfilling nature of oppression, and as a journey of self-discovery that allows us to experience a genuine sense of character growth. I also aimed to establish a unique tone in my approach to this theme by finding humour in the characters and situations of an otherwise dramatically rooted story.

Elements of my story are Kafkaesque. As in a lot of Kafka’s work, the main protagonist in *Butterfly Jump* is accused and then punished for a crime that was not committed. She then becomes an innocent victim of systems beyond her control. She is forced to negotiate her way through a Social Services and then legal system. Of course, Kafka’s endings are much darker and this story is distinct from Kafka’s stories in its very different conclusion. This ending delivers a tone more akin to the lightness that we find in the end of the Andrea Arnold’s

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<sup>3</sup> Power Screenwriting, Michael Chase Walker. 31.

<sup>4</sup> Power Screenwriting, Michael Chase Walker. 24.



short film *Wasp* – we are still in a world of struggle but lifted with a sense of hope and joy.

Connie's primary struggle has its root in the conflict between values of self-love and self-loathing, shame and pride, inclusion and banishment.

I was interested in training the eye not just on the fight Connie wages with her exterior antagonists but also on the matches that take place within. This film deals with both authentic pride and the shame that comes from generational poverty — and it traces the weird border between the two. Connie learns that self-respect is not the same thing as braggadocio. In fact, it shares roots with humility and is essential for true happiness.

### **The broad thematic categories:**

#### **Joy amidst the pain and the chaos**

I see a movie that is full of people that talk and shout and beg and rage and accuse and negotiate and justify and cheat and condemn and judge and weep. People misconstrue and get in one another's way and judge and con each other but also scramble to make loving gestures in an effort to win and save each other. Connie loses everything and can't go on. But she must, and she does. She finds to her surprise that there is joy amidst the rubble.

## **Self-love ~ The Spiritual Dimension**

*“When you are content to simply be yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you.”*

— Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching

*“Respect yourself and others will respect you.”*

— Confucius, Sayings of Confucius

Part of Connie's quest involves an unarticulated struggle with the spiritual dimension of her psyche. She seeks safety, dignity, and love. Unconsciously, she seeks liberation from her own self-loathing that imprisons her. Part of this struggle plays out in a complex relationship with something akin to religious practice, in Connie's case: Christianity. Connie is a foul-mouthed, rough-neck churchgoer, and as she searches for refuge in her harsh world, it is the face of Jesus that is summoned.

Connie is by no means evangelical, nor is she a blind believer in most of the tenets of any one religion. Though she turns to one at times of need, she does not revere priests. She despises the power of the pope, has had three children out of wedlock, (one given up in her teenage years) and she doesn't question same-sex relationships or the right to abort a fetus. In short, if she is a Catholic, she is a rebellious one. Yet, Connie sends her children to a Catholic school and says she does so because she takes refuge in the tenet “the last shall be first.” She also sees the church community as fulfilling her need for family. This relationship to religion is not born of some societal sense of obligation or

even a child-like notion of earning passage to an afterlife. This is a genuine and dynamic part of her character.

Connie garners strength, maybe even vindication from the gospel messages of justice for the oppressed. She is drawn to the stories of a man who fought for the rights of the poor, who fought against society as it was, who was angry with religious and privileged people, who healed the ostracized. On Christmas morning when feelings of failure might pervade her thoughts - failure at not having a husband, a 'normal' family, status or wealth, Connie goes to church and feels she is standing among equals. She and her children belong to humanity. Whether fantasy, fairytale or faith, over time, in her loneliness and anxiety, Connie has come to view the figure of Jesus as her friend.

This element of Connie's character interests me for a few reasons. One is that Connie's quest takes her on a spiritual (or inner) journey. Her children go to a private, (therefore mostly privileged and upper class) Catholic school. She pays for it with a charitable bursary she receives and money scraped together through under-the-table employment. It is in the same tradition as the schools where Connie grew up; a school in which a typical spiritual exercise might be an invitation to stand in front of the cross of Jesus and ask, "What have I done to crucify you?" Or it might be an invitation to look at the crucified people of our world and ask them the same question: What do I need to do to relieve your suffering?

Because of her poverty and her class, Connie and her children stand out against the general affluence in the private school that is their chosen 'public

society'. It's a school that claims to be open to everyone regardless of financial situation. Yet, Connie somehow doesn't fit in. Connie is convinced that someone in the school system (likely her daughter's teacher, Miss Corbett) has judged her as a bad parent and Connie feels that judgment was rooted in her class ranking. The question is raised: has she been judged as being a questionable parent because of all the ways in which she doesn't measure up with the rest - mostly to do with privilege of class and money? If so, this flies in the face of all the teachings of the gospel, which the school preaches. There is that irony – which does not escape Connie.

Either way, Connie is forced throughout this story to wrangle with many core values about her faith that may formerly have been taken for granted. One is the notion of forgiveness, of turning the other cheek; Connie is put in a position where she would prefer to take an eye for an eye. Another is the notion of asking forgiveness, or somewhat different but related, forgiving oneself.

Connie's journey takes her through a cast of characters who in the gospel might have been the outcasts. She consorts with the petty criminals, the unemployed, the ne'er-do wells, the E.I. con artists, and more. Though perhaps unsavoury, these people emerge as having their own set of rules, and functioning in a world that delivers its own balance of justice.

But more than that is the question of inner transcendence. This opens the door for a departure from Connie's formal 'faith' – her thoughts or convictions – to another kind of spiritual experience. This is an experience that Connie attains

through her actions and physical transformation in training for the figure skating event.

Part of Connie's journey is that she comes to be 'in' her body again. She frees her mind from its self-defeating thoughts; she embraces, even begins to love once again, her body. This brings Connie a new kind of hope. In the beginning of the story, though she flaunts a certain irreverent confidence, deep down she feels outside of the world of privilege and happiness. At the end of the film, she has gained entrance with feelings of worthiness, and acceptance. This affords her the ability to care for others, and more importantly, to love herself.

### **A drama of the classes**

In the capitalist (free) world, the distribution of wealth is such that a very small portion of the population owns and continues to gain wealth while most of the world's population continues to grow poorer. Connie would be in the bottom 5% of earners. She is not at the very bottom of the rung. She has her home, and a family, and in fact she is well integrated into society. She is a survivor.

Moreover, Connie chooses not to work at this time in her life. She does so at her own peril because being out of work and with barely enough income to make ends meet does not leave her with much security. It will only grow harder to enter the work force as she gets older, but she's made this choice in order to be available to her children, which she is.

With her own brand of irreverence, Connie is determined that her children will fit into a more privileged class. Her mother warns prophetically that she will be spit out, and indeed, she is. She is judged by a world of a higher class than

her own, and immense suffering is brought to her family as a result of this judgment. She then looks to that world first for support, and for acceptance.

### **A story about family**

As much as this story is about class, poverty and self-actualization, it is also a story about love, and about family. In particular, the film shows a family pulling together in the face of tough blows in order to save each other. I'm interested in pushing the definition of 'family'. Connie's family is more than the 'nuclear' family of the 50's. It is defined less by bloodlines than by the bonds cast by shared experience. It is perhaps better described as 'tribal'. But it becomes the core value of her existence. It is what makes and breaks her.

In addition, the story is to some degree about Sue Anne and Adina experiencing the good graces of a foster family who can offer them all that wealth can buy.

In the bigger 'chronicle' of her life (Way of the Screenwriter, Amnon Buchbinder), Connie wants to break free of the generational cycles of poverty and anger. Connie realizes she is turning into her mother. She loves her mother; her mother is her closest - perhaps only - friend at the outset. Her mother raised three children alone, and she also worked all her life. These are things Connie respects. And it is what she sees for herself. Connie isn't working during the course of this story but she hopes to work at some point. But her mother toiled and slaved and is poor and profoundly unhealthy, held down by a mantle of challenges. Connie does not want that for her children. Connie wants her children to have a better life than either she or her mother.

## Summary of Theme

If asked to boil the theme down to one core sentence, it would be well represented in the following Rumi quote:

*“Your task is not to seek for love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it.”*

-Rumi

## Characters:

### Connie – the Protagonist/Heroine

*“Every disturbance, from the outbreak of World War to a child’s temper tantrum, is caused by a restriction of consciousness.”*

- Joseph Campbell

My overall goal was complexity of character as described in the Jimmy McGovern quote earlier. Michael Hauge and Christopher Vogler, in their interview on YouTube,<sup>5</sup> tell us that our heroine must have suffered some wound at the beginning of the story – some unhealed source of pain. As a result of suffering this wound, she has an ongoing fear.

We know that Connie has suffered some kind of banishment at the opening of the story. She behaves as though she is cloaked in shame and somehow ostracized from society. She skulks in the alleyway smoking alone and behaves abrasively around the other mothers so as to confidently affirm

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GmwMiehlpY>

her status as outsider. What exactly happened to Connie to cause her this wound? This is something that is not named immediately, but as the story unfolds, a number of things become clear. She grew up on the wrong side of the tracks with a single mother whom she was ashamed of and a father who abandoned the family. These were the extenuating circumstances of her childhood.

And then we learn the secret of shame. As a teenager, she became pregnant and gave up a child for adoption. Not only has Connie grown up believing the world sees her coming and turns away, she has carried the additional wound of a rupture from her natural self as mother of that child that was given away. Out of that wound grows the fear that she will be subjected to the same kind of shame, loss, pain and rejection again – and so she has built an impenetrable shell of abrasiveness to protect herself.

This is the reason she ‘refuses the call’ to participate in the parent skate event with Sue Anne. It is also the reason she believes there is no one to turn to other than her mother when her children are first removed. She believes deep inside that they are right, she is indeed not worthy of being a mother. The mere thought that she could get close to someone like Bob or Fiona is terrifying because getting close to anyone risks feeling that pain again.

It took me a long time to arrive at the wound of the lost child. I struggled to grasp Connie’s inner sense of shame and worthlessness as I worked through the drafts. The question of Connie’s hidden wound was asked again and again. As I worked through the various drafts, I came to understand her



character arc to deliver a change that reconnects her to her natural power and self. It was in reading Women Who Run with the Wolves that it came to me that Connie's deepest wound is a rupture with her natural self and that the secret of having given away a child for adoption would be a justifiable – and universally grasped - cause for such a rupture.

Clarissa Pinkola Estés tells us that “the modern woman is a blur of activity”<sup>6</sup> and this is who Connie is when we first meet her.

At the opening, Connie has a limited awareness about her situation. The journey she takes is about raising her consciousness.

The Warrior archetype is also present in Connie. At the beginning of the story, it is overly dominating her psychology since her developmental task in the beginning is a defensive one: that of proving herself to the world and more importantly, to herself. Her impulse is more competitive – to prove that she is the ‘best’.

Carol Pearson says of the Warrior archetype: “Warrior consciousness includes self-defence, a willingness and an ability to fight when we are being attacked.”...“It has to do with healthy boundaries, so that we know where we end and other people begin, and an ability to assert ourselves.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Women Who Run With the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estés. 2.

<sup>7</sup> The Hero Within, Six Archetypes We Live By, Carol Pearson, 104.

## The Antagonists

If this story knows its victims (**Connie** and **her kids**), who are the villains? At first glance, these might be found in Connie's ne'er-do-well husband **Brett**, or the teacher and coach, **Miss Corbett**, whom we assume was the source of the report to Social Services, or in the society's systems (Social Services and Legal) that Connie must navigate. But as the story progresses, a more complex obstacle and antagonist emerges. Connie's journey delivers to her a discovery that unfolds as the theme of the story: Connie discovers her true task is to seek and find the barriers within **herself** that have been built against love.

## Surrounding Cast

My approach to the cast of characters was to first write from instinct, and then to weed out where I noticed I was repeating myself in terms of character types, traits, and roles performed within the plot. To this end, I found Joseph Campbell's character archetypes for the Hero's Journey an interesting tool.<sup>8</sup> To review these archetypes: these are: Hero, Mentor, Ally, Trickster, Guardian, Herald, Shape-shifter, and Shadow.<sup>9</sup>

**Glenda** is Connie's **ally**. Though she challenges Connie at important turns, she accompanies Connie and offers consistent loyalty and help throughout her journey.

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<sup>8</sup> <https://mythcreants.com/blog/the-eight-character-archetypes-of-the-heros-journey/>

<sup>9</sup> The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers, 3rd Edition, by [Christopher Vogler](#).

**Larry** fulfills the role of **mentor**. He describes to Connie how the ‘new world’ operates, provides her with rules and instruction, and gives her the tools to navigate the systems. He also functions on another plane to Connie – which is something that chafes Connie in the beginning of their relationship. Though he is a lawyer, he cares more about poetry than law, forcing a new perspective into Connie’s world.

**Dierdre** and **Sr. Dr. Nora** also act as **mentors** to Connie. They listen and offer guidance.

**Adina**, among other things, acts as the **herald**. She announces to both Connie and Sue Anne the need for change at crucial points in their stories.

**Brett** is Connie’s **shadow**. Though he has his reasons, he is mostly a villain in Connie’s story. He creates threat and conflict and gives Connie something to struggle against.

Similarly, **Miss Corbett** is also a **shadow** to Connie.

**Woody** is a **trickster**. His function in the plot is that he communicates Connie’s journey to Adina, who in turn conveys what is needed to Sue Anne but he offers fun and humour to the story. He also challenges the status quo notion of ‘family’ and ‘parenting’. He is a young boy seemingly in the care and guard of Larry and this circumstance is never explained. As such, his presence offers another perspective and open-ended questions on ideas around parenting and protection of children.

**Bob** is alternately a **guardian** and a **mentor**. He questions and warns Connie before she contacts Brett. Though he ultimately assists, he questions

her again before she begins to skate. But then he sharpens her skates (her 'tool'), playing the role of **mentor**. He also has an important exchange with her on subject of pride and friendship at the Act 2 turning point. Before her final climactic moment, he offers her the skates again.

**Fiona** is an **ally** with shades of the **shape-shifter** because she at first suspects Connie and remains more closely allied with **Dr. Leslie Middleton** who refuses to give Connie a reference letter. But later, she is part of Connie's posse.

## Genre

John Truby says genre is the single most important question a screenwriter can ask herself. Truby offers the good news on the search for genre below:

*"...each genre is a complex story system where all the crucial elements exist under the surface in the structure. Each genre has a unique hero, desire line and opponent, asks a key question, uses a specialized storytelling strategy and expresses a highly detailed set of themes. Most importantly, each genre has anywhere from 8-15 unique story beats that must be in your script or your script will fail. What's more, you have to twist each story beat, write each in an original way so your script stands above all the others in your form."*<sup>10</sup>

**What is the genre of Butterfly Jump?** I found the answer to the question of genre deceptively tough to pin down. I began by viewing *Butterfly Jump* as social "fish out of water" drama, with elements of a love story and also comedic

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<sup>10</sup> <http://johntrubyscreenwriting.blogspot.ca/2009/07/secrets-of-genre.html>

elements. Eventually, I came to view it as having a mythic foundation.

Social drama is the most obvious genre description for *Butterfly Jump*, given the storyline of downtrodden heroine who is attacked by the larger forces of society, and who fights back valiantly. Given that it a story of a mother's relationship to her children, it also borrows from the genre of maternal melodrama, epitomized by the classic 1937 film starring Barbara Stanwyck, *Stella Dallas*. I wanted to write a story with all the realism and tension in the tradition of films I admire tremendously like *La Promesse* and *L'Enfant* by the Dardenne brothers or *Wasp* by Andrea Arnold. *I, Daniel Blake* (by Ken Loach) is another film that swept me away with its simplicity of narrative and complexity of character. It was a feat of expert storytelling that such tension could be built and sustained for several sequences around one man's struggle with the mysteries of computer technology, for instance. Nevertheless, I feared falling into the trap of monotony that can be seen in even some great films that fall into the social drama category. (*Two Days, One Night*, and *Lady-Bird* are examples of films that, although critically acclaimed, I find verge slightly into a one-note territory that I hoped to avoid.)

My interest was not so much a film that is a sordid study of poverty and pathology but rather a story that treads the tricky line between creating believable characters in realistically oppressive circumstances and believably igniting in their story a flame of hope, faith, joy or redemption.

As I progressed more in the writing of the script, I found myself appreciating and aiming for the heightened moments of joy that can be

achieved within the funny moments in stories that are nevertheless rooted in social realism – as seen in films like *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Ladybird* (Greta Gerwig's), *Silver Linings Playbook*, *Holy Smoke*, and *I, Tonya*. I sought to achieve these heightened moments of reality in my story. I aimed to find a way through the primordial muck and darkness of Connie's predicament, and to find a believable development of her character and story that arrives at an exhilarating dance of liberation. Is this comedy? Not exactly. More apropos might be the phrase: 'drama with comedic elements'.

I also recognized at play the Odyssey-like myth structure in which the hero/heroine must get back home. And I found the application of Joseph Campbell's mythic structure of the hero's journey to be very helpful. Like Dorothy, or Ulysses, Connie's disempowerment as a mother entails an ostracizing from her 'home' as she knows it. She strives to restore that 'home'. The difference is that in Connie's story, the myth structure is turned on its head by the fact that Connie's 'home' remains. It's the soul of the home that she loses access to. In Connie's story, 'home' is redefined more as 'family'. Also, the size of this story does not compare to the more standard 'epic' size of classic myths, *The Wizard of Oz* included. Nevertheless, looking at the mythic structure of the hero's journey gave me tools to view Connie's journey back to 'home' as heroic, and inspiring – both qualities of myth.

In summary, while the first and most dominant genre is social realism, this screenplay departs somewhat, aiming for a hybrid of social realism with comedic elements, as well as mythic elements.

## **Tone**

This is a story that overflows with life and that works on many levels – as a look into class at work in St. John's, as a parable of the self-fulfilling nature of love, and as a journey of self-discovery that allows us to experience an authentic transformation of human spirit.

Firmly rooted in a sense of place, its tone is realistic, gritty, heartfelt, dramatic and at the most unexpected moments, kind, joyous and arrestingly funny.

## STRUCTURE

As mentioned, I recognized in this story Joseph Campbell's mythic structure of the hero's journey. In particular, the Odyssey-like myth structure in which the heroine must get back home plays out for Connie. Like Dorothy trying to get back to Kansas, or Ulysses (Odysseus) trying to return to Penelope on Ithaca after fighting Troy, Connie's disempowerment as a mother entails an ostracizing from her 'home' which is what she aims to restore – although for Connie, 'home' is a spiritual state of being a mother – something that is removed from her agency – and then restored with far greater power and breadth than she had formerly imagined. In Connie's story, 'home' is redefined as 'family'. Nevertheless, looking at Campbell's mythic structure of the hero's journey gave me valuable tools to view Connie's journey back to 'home'. 'Big' is of course relative. And relative to the mythic film *Gladiator* for instance, Connie's journey is small. Nevertheless, her journey is heroic, and inspiring.

### Structural Breakdown

#### Act 1

**Ordinary World** – Here we see the heroine in her normal environment but there are seeds of change. Maybe there is some consciousness about change that needs to happen.

**Call to Adventure (inciting incident)** – The Heroine must undertake a challenge. Here we see more awareness that change needs to happen. Connie is forced to address the challenge.



**Refusal of the Call** – Connie doesn't want to do the skate. Connie expresses fear and resistance to change. She shows strength and we see emotion here.

**Meeting the Mentor (authority)** – Glenda warns Connie against trying to fit into a world that will spit her out. Connie takes a defensive stance against the world and ignores the warning.

**Crossing the Threshold** - The kids are taken and Connie goes to jail. Connie's life is turned upside-down.

## **Act 2**

**Tests, Allies, Enemies** - Connie begins to scramble for help in her new reality. Connie goes to church where Sr. Dr. Nora pushes her to search for friends who can give her character references. She also must begin to gather funds and seek legal help, which brings Larry (and Woody) into the story. She begins to learn the rules of the new world.

**Approach to Inmost Cave** – This is the sequence surrounding the meeting with Frances at Family and Child Services. Frances represents an Enemy who puts Connie through her first test.

**Ordeal** – The mainspring of the story. This section begins when Connie is asked to meet with a therapist as a way of meeting the requirements of Child Youth and Family Services to get her children back. Connie resists this, but she eventually takes the necessary steps to transform her home and her life. In this scene, she is challenged to look at what she can change and start working there, and this is where she begins to take the decision to do the parent-skate that

she refused at the inciting incident in Act 1. Henceforth, she begins the second part of the story where she trains for the skate. The taste of death in this beat is essential. Connie must swallow her pride and face her fear of rejection. Here she commits to her journey into the underworld.

This is the **Midpoint** of the story.

**Reward (Seizing the Sword)** – The Reward is the payback for facing her biggest fears and doing what was difficult for her to do. Connie builds on her friendship with Bob and begins to establish a friendship with Fiona. Also Larry and Dierdre continue to help, and finally a stranger in a restaurant tells her she is a wonderful mother.

**The Road Back**- Here, there is a decision to complete the journey. We see Connie make a decision that she will let Elizabeth (the foster mother) do the skate that Connie trained to do. She is sacrificing her own needs here for her child's.

### **Act 3**

**Resurrection** – This is an ordeal where death or tragedy or failure is possible. This is the final exam. And this is the moment where Connie must face her fears again and go to court. Connie is required to transform once again.

**Return with the Elixir** - Connie is able to do the Butterfly Jump. This is the idea of coming back home with something to share with everyone else. Connie brings back the message to the people. Her message is: we need to love,

accept and be ourselves. She has realized a new love for herself.<sup>11</sup>

The diagram of the mythic journey is polarized; it can be seen in two parts. There is the journey of the outer world and the journey of the underworld (or inner world) where the heroine has to go, and the audience goes with her. This applies to Connie's inner journey that leads to her own empowerment.

Like the seasons of the year, the 'Hero's Journey' might be seen as unfolding in four movements; Separation, Descent, Initiation, (dying to your original idea of yourself; old concepts don't work anymore; a period of rebooting) and then finally, Return.

These four movements work as a framework for Connie's story. Separation is Act 1 where the skating event is announced and Connie refuses the call, choosing instead to bring Brett back into her life to do the parent skate. She crosses the threshold to the second movement – Descent – when the children are removed from her care and she is arrested. Initiation takes place at the midpoint, when she decides she will train for the skate and bring Sue Anne back to perform with her. Return begins at the top of Act 3, when she faces both the court hearing and the skating event.

These movements apply to my own journey through the writing of this screenplay. The movements in my own writing were:

1. Deciding upon and researching the subject matter and general story line (Separation). The embarking on a particular story involves a commitment to a specific world. You are isolating yourself, narrowing your

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.scriptmag.com/features/craft-features/genre-craft-features/craft-choosing-movie-genres-the-secret-to-your-screenwriting-success>

choices, leaving behind the wide world of any other possibility.

2. Creating the outline and beat-sheet involved a commitment into the imagined world of the story. (Descent).

3. Writing a complete draft was Initiation to the craft of a screenwriter. This stage also includes, more importantly re-writing – which involves dying to original ideas of the story and allowing the story and characters to begin to take the lead. (Initiation).

4. The Return is the final push to completion. This includes incorporating notes, finalizing the delivery draft etc. The Return has notes of victory as it brings the relief and rewards of having arrived at your destination.

## NOTES ON SUBJECT MATTER

### On Beauty

It is a universally accepted truth that society has relegated the vision of ideal woman to fit certain moods, mannerisms, and shapes. Women who allow this definition of ideal to govern their sense of self-worth are no longer free.

To think of oneself as ugly, or to be thought of as ugly or unacceptable because one is outside the current standards of beauty is deeply wounding to the natural joy that belongs to each person. Connie lives under this shadow.

But there is a burden far greater that weighs heavily on Connie's physical self. Connie's personal low evaluation of her body and physical self is deeply related to the wounds of her past. Like shrapnel wounds in victims of war, tiny scraps from past trauma have remained and caused deeper inflammation. Because this trauma was connected to shame, and the story has been kept secret, the pain has gone unacknowledged, and has been ignored and neglected over time.

*"The problem of secret stories surrounded in shame is that they cut a woman off from her instinctive nature."*<sup>12</sup>

Connie is at war in the mind and the body. The rage she harbours is the fallout of the trauma she experienced. Yet, by harbouring rage— instead of

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<sup>12</sup> Women Who Run with the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estés.405.

questing for solutions to it, what caused it, what she can do with it, she has sealed herself into a room full of it.

*“The way to change a tragic drama back into a heroic one is to open the secret, speak of it to someone, write another ending, examine ones part in it and ones attributes in enduring it.”<sup>13</sup>*

## **On Connie’s Physical Transformation**

When we first meet her, Connie carries her body around as though it is a dumbbell that she has been sentenced to carry for life. It is the wounds of the past that have confined her beauty and value of her body to something less than its rightful spirit and force. Her body is little more than a beast of burden.

In systems of bodywork such as Feldenkrais, Ayurveda, Five Rhythms, and others, the body is understood as a living record of life – life given, life taken, life hoped for, life healed. Equally so, it is seen as having two kinds of strength, the strength of muscles and the invincible strength of soul. Mindfulness, free expression and mastery of the body are believed to connect us more deeply to the psyche or soul. These energy practices are thought of as soul journeys.

But how does this relate to Connie’s story? Practitioners believe that ‘by moving the body, releasing the heart, and freeing the mind, one can connect to the essence of the soul, the source of inspiration in which an individual has

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<sup>13</sup> Women Who Run with the Wolves, Clarissa Pinkola Estés. 406

unlimited possibility and potential.’<sup>14</sup> This is the butterfly jump Connie reaches for in her story.

Writing a story about a plus-sized protagonist, particularly a female one, comes with its challenges. A recent storm of controversy cropped up in the media when the television series *Insatiable* came under criticism for fatphobia. Despite changing attitudes towards body size and body positivity, characters that are fat continue to be used predominantly as a comedic device. In addition, traditionally actresses that were not fat were generally cast in these roles, all of which proliferates the discrimination. “Fat suits were hyper-present in ‘90s and early 2000s entertainment (*Shallow Hal*, *Madea*, *Big Momma’s House*, *Friends*, and *America’s Sweethearts* all featured fat-suited characters whose main purpose was to serve as a fat joke). “<sup>15</sup> As discussed, body-size is not Connie’s prison, or at least not her primary prison. But certainly her regard for the value of her body can be seen as a manifestation of her suffering and need for change. And society’s attitude towards plus-sized people cannot be dismissed as a contributor to this attitude. Nevertheless, the change that Connie pursues is not about transforming her body but about transforming her relationship to it, her sense of power, freedom and presence within it.

The resistance to stories about fat people is extensive. I was recently strongly discouraged by an established senior television writer and teacher who claimed that it would be pointless to write a television show written for a plus-sized protagonist because it would be impossible to sell. If the prevalence of

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<sup>14</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5Rhythms>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.instyle.com/news/insatiable-netflix-fat-suit-blackface>

interesting leading roles for women is wanting, the preponderance of leading roles for plus-sized women is exponentially more so. The trickle-down impact is that plus-sized actresses are less celebrated, less known, and therefore, much harder to find. This makes it extremely challenging to cast leading roles for plus-sized actresses.

## **On Child Abuse and Child Protection**

It is and should be every person's duty to report a child who is reasonably suspected to be abused. However, the reality is that a child can be removed from the care of his or her parent with much less evidence than would be required for a conviction in court. This is due to the fact that the Child Protection Act puts the onus for protection of the child in the hands of government.

Indeed, the incidence of parents or families who have been wrongfully accused of abuse is startling. In my research, I found one study that revealed statistics on the outcome of 62,803 cases of reports of abuse. The statistics revealed that in only a very small proportion of the reported cases of the study was it ultimately determined that the parents had abused their children.<sup>16</sup> In fact, in this particular study, it was in less than 13% of the cases where children were removed in which the subsequent investigation determined that the abuse or neglect had occurred and the perpetrator was identified. And of that 13%, more than half were dismissed upon appeal.

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<sup>16</sup> IPT: Volume 5, 1993, *Child Abuse: Guilty Until Proven Innocent or Legalized Governmental Child Abuse*, p1. [http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume5/j5\\_2\\_6.htm](http://www.ipt-forensics.com/journal/volume5/j5_2_6.htm)



There have been many insightful inquiries into the trauma caused to such families and there are case studies that outline the devastating damage that can occur to a family that goes through this.

A feature noted in all case studies that I read is that once accused, it seems that any action the accused party takes is interpreted to be the act of a guilty conscience. In this story, Connie's immediate reaction is panic. She refuses to speak which contributes to raised alert on the part of the authorities. This dynamic follows her throughout the story.

### **Female Characters and the Heroine's Journey**

There is little debate about the paucity of complex female characters in film and television. Again and again, we see female characters that are used as a device to further the character or story of the male protagonist in the plot. Having pursued a career as an actress, I am more sensitive than the average person to the dearth of compelling female roles written for screen. Very recently, a casting breakdown for a successful and high-budget television show made for Discovery and Netflix was sent to me that vividly depicts this problem in gender representation. There were ten speaking roles on the list, 8 of them were for male actors and 2 for females. The male characters were a variety of ages and stations in life and society, and each character was given two or three lines of substantial 'character breakdown' description. The female roles were both described in the same way as follows: *between 20 and 30, prostitutes, may require nudity and sexual content.*

The year 2019 will be the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women being declared 'persons' under Canadian law. And certainly, emancipation of women has advanced considerably in the ensuing years since this legal recognition. Nevertheless, sadly, the paucity of rich and compelling female characters continues to be the accepted norm in our film and television viewing. Even in the good screenplays and television scripts, we generally see more men on screen than women, or more complexity and action in the male characters than in the female characters.

I see my goal and responsibility as a female screenwriter to write scripts with complex leading roles for women. This was perhaps my primary interest in the telling of this story, and will continue to be a defining goal in the future.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT: VISUAL TREATMENT

The 'in media res' opening is action packed. We struggle to keep up with Connie who herself struggles to keep up with the circumstances of her life which often feel barely within her control. She takes us on a tour in her cab and we are submerged in her world, exploding in an instant onto the street, cutting quickly to stay abreast of her survival instincts at play. We follow her on her urban tour, from the front seat of her cab, or from room to room in her house, as she plows in and out of motivated or natural light.

We will sense different rhythms driving the action at different chapters of the story. The rhythm in the first act is chaotic. Act 2 brings staccato and lyrical rhythms. Act 3 has flow and finally, stillness.

There will be a naturalism at times reminiscent of the humanity seen in the films of the Dardenne brothers, such as *L'Enfant* but with a greater variety of shot plans and more modulated pacing of editing. This lends itself to more stylized and character-drive dramas with generous doses of comedy such as Ben Falcone's *Tammy*, or David O. Russell's *Silver Linings Playbook*. Depictions of our protagonist will progress from claustrophobic tight shots to wide inclusive panoramas as our cast of characters expands and our protagonist finds within herself the strength to secure her position within her world.

Even in the most dramatic moments, the absurdly funny can bubble up. For instance, when the police and women from Social Services corner Connie, panicked and grasping at straws for how to regain her power, she suddenly

flashes on the bright idea to demand to see IDs. Her delivery is so commanding that the younger women instantly shed all their authority and nervously comply. For an absurdly fleeting moment that shocks even Connie; Connie upends the power dynamics like a judo flip. A moment later, she is handcuffed and the officer falls rump first into an empty box on the floor.

In the scene where Connie cleans out her house, removing any trace of Brett, we begin to see her transcend the primordial muck and chaos of her life. This is told in a visual play of light. A crowded basement is expanded, made larger, and then, as the shelves are cleared, the darkness is pierced with rays of a setting sun through the window. Connie has started letting in the light. In the following sequence, she begins to jog as the moon rises, her feet shuffling through the swirls of dusty snow that snake close to the asphalt, turning the streets of St. John's into a blue-lit wintry desert.

The preceding sequence is Connie's first meeting with the therapist where, again, we have characteristic moments of humour, but also equal doses of tension. The humour will play even as tension builds to the moment where Connie snaps the pencil. By the end of this scene, Connie discovers a new possibility for herself and is able to breathe fully- for the first time it seems. This moment marks the beginning of her inner journey – or descent into the inner world. The final scene of the sequence, as she hangs out of the passenger window breathing, is punctuated by a single travelling shot of birds looping in the sky.

The inner journey is mirrored in nature, and in the imagery.

At this point, the chaotic energy that Connie has been chasing starts to transform into something internal and although remote, within her control. It is achievable. Now Connie herself becomes the focus of our eye and of the camera. Now, there will be more attention trained on Connie during longer tracking shots that will cut into the kinetic energy of the visual plan. We pay more attention to Connie's body, energy, and mastery of movements.

Connie's personal transformation takes her from a leaden, stuck, angry state, to one of movement, joy, flow, and for an instant in the climax, stillness and weightlessness, even if it ends in a comical messiness – all reflected in the composition, pacing and choreography of camera movements.

The art design will be stripped down, realistic, and authentic.

The chaotic detritus in the homes of Connie and Glenda stands in contrast to the merchant-class Victorian grandeur of Leslie Middleton's home. The ice rink is an overriding metaphor for the transformation that occurs: unwelcoming and dank upon first impression, its true value and elegance unfolds in the way our characters interact with it. We see our protagonist struggle to, and finally attain her personal freedom on its ice surface. The offices of the Family Services and court systems are nightmarishly detached, maze-like, and oppressive. They are Kafkaesque.

All these interior locations are located within the roughhewn north Atlantic landscape and climate of St. John's – seemingly bleak and unforgiving in certain lights, but nevertheless, much like Connie herself, powerfully stunning despite – or perhaps more true, as a result of this uncompromising ruggedness.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Writing *Butterfly Jump* was a life-altering experience for me. First and foremost, I went to battle with, and ultimately acquired and learned tools to conquer the biggest obstacle I face in the pursuit of my creative goals: the demon of procrastination. I know I will confront this demon again and again, but I also know that the war can be won, that the journey entails a crossing of a threshold into an unknown world, but that the return with the elixir of completion brings an unparalleled joy that cannot be experienced unless this threshold is crossed, step by tiny step. I've learned tools to move through this journey and I will hold closely the ways I have learned to move forward.

I set out to write a story that ultimately engages the audience more fully and more passionately in the act of living. It is my goal to make this film. I will continue to refine and polish the story that has been carved out. The valuable feedback from the defense committee will be taken into the next drafts. Further revisions will occur in production in collaboration with actors, art department, producers, and other key crew personnel. And of course, the ultimate shaping of the story elements will happen in the editing room.

With a full heart, I look forward.

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