

Typical Biographies?

To become a lawyer is to go the direct way through a university's law faculty. But a screenwriter's career is barely institutionalised, which is best expressed by the biographies of nowadays' screenwriters.

William Goldman comes from a literature background. In his early twenties he wrote many short stories, without success. Later he wrote novels and a handful of plays that are responsible for three Broadway flops. Further, Cliff Robertson rejected Goldman's first screenplay in the mid sixties.

Lee Martin finished high school, started to work in business, and later went to night classes. He became an attorney but soon dropped out of that to be a full time writer of every sort of genres. People like Terry Porter and Jack Thompson sustained his first steps into the film industry.

After high school, Shirley Tallman worked as a flight attendant. Later she came into journalism, writing a newspaper column. Eventually she began writing novels and had success. Today she also writes screenplays, mostly in co-authorship with Nancy Hersage.

Quentin Tarantino started his professional career with some rather strange jobs and ended up in Video Archive where he spent five years, during which he got to know Roger Avary who came from a film academy. Both used to talk a lot about movies and, so, inspired producer John Langley, who hired them as production assistants. Working in Cinetel productions, they wrote their first screenplay, Reservoir Dogs.

The last in this row, Ben Affleck had his first acting experience in the age of eight when he first met a boy from his neighbourhood, Matt Damon. After having tried it with a college career, Affleck returned to acting, once again meeting Damon during the production of School Ties. Other rather unsatisfying roles followed and led Affleck and Damon to create their own parts, writing the screenplay for Good Will Hunting. Affleck's brother, Casey, introduced them to Gus Van Sant who established the connection to Miramax.

A screenwriting school's degree cannot guarantee the success of one's screenwriting. If you have finished some kind of higher education career, good for you, not necessarily for your job opportunities as a screenwriter. But four ingredients can fundamentally contribute to your success: contacts, creativity, structuring, and strength of will.

You don't have to burn your grades, but don't think they guarantee anything in this business. A literature background seems rather common though. And practical qualifications obtained during higher education are best shown in good samples of your work, not in official certificates.