

Moving Goalposts

By Jason Filiatrault

There was a time, when I was a young and hopeful screenwriter — in other words, when I was a fool — that I thought success meant getting a screen credit.

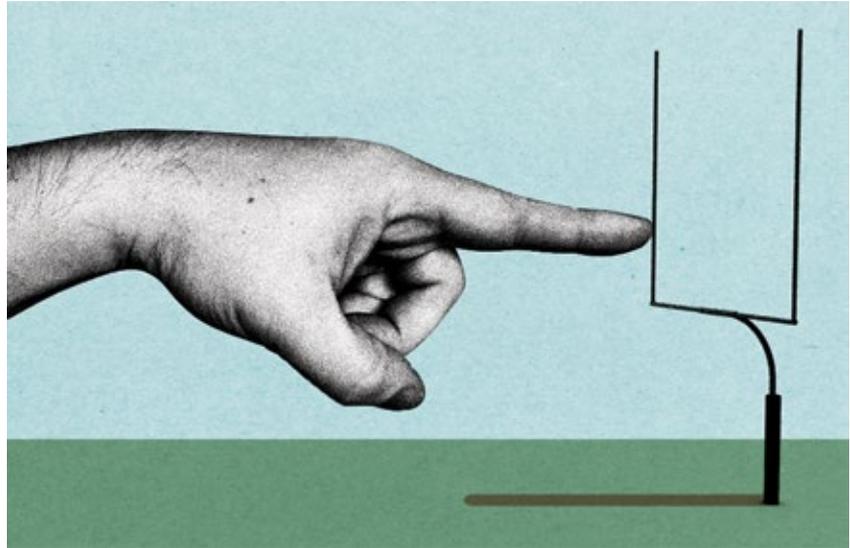
Like I said, I was a fool.

And as the years passed and I slowly (very slowly, because I was in Calgary) crawled toward that credit, I remember anticipating the feeling it would bring. As if I would be standing on a mountain looking down at the years of my struggle stretching back to the horizon. Which is as far from reality as that last sentence was to a decent metaphor.

The truth was something very different, for which I was unprepared. Because, what I realized and have come to appreciate, is that there is no success in screenwriting. There's no raising your arms like Rocky Balboa, no Star Wars medal ceremony, no... whatever happened to Harry Potter at the end of his movie — probably an owl high-fives him, I can't remember. Point is, there are no touchdowns in our industry, there's only the exhausting view of a goalpost moving farther downfield.

Did you get optioned? No one cares, go get development financing. Did you get some money to write a draft? Doesn't matter, you need a broadcast license. Did you cast a lead actor? Fine, but are they a star? Oh, they were in a movie at Sundance? Tough shit, come back when you actually get to production. Is your series going to camera? Who cares, what's the budget? Your animated show got a pick-up? Fart sound, how many episodes? Did you say you write features? That's adorable, here's a cookie.

But wait! Did you actually get something on camera and then



actually edit it and it didn't burst into flames? Big deal, get a theatrical release and we'll talk. Except we won't talk, because even if you find a distributor and by some miracle they actually tell people about your film, and even if people see it, which they won't because it's only playing one day on one screen on the edge of town in a multiplex that usually only plays kids movies and yours is about an elderly couple addicted to heroin or something... even if all that happens, you still have to do it all over again forever. And if you don't, you're a failure.

Notice we haven't even come near to approaching the question of whether or not the script you wrote was any good, which it probably wasn't. I just mean statistically speaking, I don't mean you specifically — whoever you are, I don't know. Kelly maybe? Hi, Kelly. What I mean is that simply making film and TV is hard enough, forget about making it into anything other people might actually want to watch. Again, not you, Kelly — you're great.

The point, this rather long and meandering point, is that I wish someone had told me early on that there is no "victory" in screenwriting. There is no finish line to cross and nothing you ever do will be as good as the next thing or good enough to satisfy that need in you to reach beyond.

And the sick thing is. I like it that way. It feels right. It's how I know I'm doing a job and not just goofing around having fun like a dummy.

So sure, it's annoying and I hate that making one movie doesn't feel like a victory because some part of me knows that making the second is the real victory, but it won't be either... and so on and so forth. So maybe let's all stop measuring our success in the steps we take along the path to nowhere. Let's appreciate the writing and love the people we meet and the experiences we share. And let's give up on treating each script like it's our only hope. There will be many losses and many wins and you'll never get to enjoy a single damn one of them.

I'm sorry. You're welcome. ■