

Check Out Joelle Sellner's Story



Today we'd like to introduce you to Joelle Sellner

Hi Joelle , so excited to have you on the platform. So before we get into questions about your work-life, maybe you can bring our readers up to speed on your story and how you got to where you are today?

I always wanted to be a writer. Whether I was writing plays for my friends in elementary school, articles for my high school newspaper, or skits for comedy troupe in college, I was passionate about telling stories. But while I dreamed of writing for film and TV, I had no idea how to pursue this as a career. After I moved back home to New York after graduation, I worked as a copywriter in an ad agency. I was excited about being paid to write.

At first, I really loved advertising. I wrote print ads, radio spots, websites and TV commercials. I worked with artists, directed voice actors, and went to set. I won some awards and I made some great friends. But something was missing for me creatively, and I had no interest in corporate politics. I decided to move to LA and took some TV writing classes at night, while working very long days. Eventually, I was hired to write some freelance TV animation episodes. When my advertising job ended, I had a difficult decision to make. I could remain in a stable career, or pursue writing full-time despite having few contacts and no guarantee of future employment. It was a terrifying decision, but I knew that I needed to try. You miss all the shots you don't take, or something like that.

I'm sure it wasn't obstacle-free, but would you say the journey has been fairly smooth so far?

My biggest obstacle was that writing full-time in advertising meant that I had hardly any time to do anything other than write full-time in advertising. To make the transition into TV writing I would need a variety of new writing samples and a robust network of industry contacts. When I parted ways with my job I had neither. And to make matters worse, I was an introvert and it wasn't easy for me to meet people, even online. I worried that I had made a terrible decision, and maybe I should look for another advertising job before the gap in my resume became a problem.

I decided to put all this free time to good use. I joined a writing group to help me get my new samples in shape. I wrote my first spec screenplay and it was...awful. But with some helpful notes and encouragement from other writers, I kept on rewriting until it was... less awful. My new industry contacts introduced me to people who would eventually hire me. I pushed myself to meet more people, and I eventually started to enjoy going to mixers, conventions, and parties. And that terrible screenplay? After what seemed like a million drafts, it landed me my first paid screenwriting job.

Appreciate you sharing that. What else should we know about what you do?

I started out writing for kids animation, writing freelance episodes for shows for Cartoon Network, Marvel and Mattel. Writing for a show called Secret Saturdays helped me get hired to write a Secret Saturdays story for DC Comics. I now had comic book credits that led to writing graphic novel versions of Saved by the Bell and Punky Brewster, as well as some original properties. It was around this time I also started writing for video games, which has been incredibly fun.

While I definitely have a nerdy side, I've also been a big rom com fan. I sold a pitch to a production company, then worked with them on several TV movies. This led me to write Paris, Wine and Romance for Hallmark, and the holiday movie Saving Christmas Spirit which aired on AMC+.

I'm currently hoping to adapt my YA graphic novel Werewoofs into an animated film or TV series, and I have several films in development. I never really know what's next for me, which can be both exciting and scary.

We're always looking for the lessons that can be learned in any situation, including tragic ones like the Covid-19 crisis. Are there any lessons you've learned that you can share?

When I left my advertising career to write full-time, I felt like I was starting over at zero. As I continued to work in entertainment, I realized that my former career provided me with an excellent foundation for almost any medium I wanted to explore. When I wrote my first comic book (for DC comics!), I discovered that writing dialogue and describing visuals was similar to the storyboards I created for TV commercials. Pitching ads to our clients helped me pitch ideas to executives. Working with art directors on ad campaigns helped me think visually when writing for animation. Feedback from clients made it easier to take notes from studios and production companies. Before I changed careers, I used to regret that I didn't start pursuing an entertainment career right after graduation. Now I realize that I learned so much from my first few jobs, and there's no such thing as wasted experience.

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