

## POV

Three years ago Professor Nicholas Delbanco asked me if I'd give the Hopwood Lecture that year. I was very flattered, but I was in the middle of writing a screenplay. When I declined, Mr. Delbanco asked if I would give the lecture sometime soon. "Of course," I said quickly. But I hoped I wouldn't have to. I was dreading it.

It's true that I had delivered the commencement address here to the LS&A class of 1990. That was easier, even though there were sixteen thousand people in Crisler Arena. I knew every one would be feeling good. I had underestimated the number of graduates who would be stoned, but that only made it easier. I was like a bag of potato chips to those folks.

But the Hopwood Lecture is a different matter! It's a little intimidating. What could a screenwriter add to the tradition of the Hopwood Lecture?

Here are some examples of what you see when you look at Mr. Delbanco's book of collected Hopwood Lectures:

1961—Saul Bellow on "The Future of Fiction"

1933—Max Eastman on "Literature in the Age of Science"

1951—Mark Van Doren on "The Possible Importance of Poetry"

Norman Mailer, Alfred Kazin, Archibald MacLeish. . . . In 1974 W. D. Snodgrass ruminated on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at some length—it's quite wonderful to read—but from the looks of it, it must have taken two hours to deliver. In those days, I think, they must have given out the money *after* the lecture.

Then about a year ago, Mr. Delbanco asked again. I had no good excuse, so I agreed. And for a year I haven't known what to

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The Hopwood Lecture, The University of Michigan, April 20, 1999

talk about. To be the last Hopwood Lecturer of the century! I thought it would come to me. But it didn't come to me this whole last year, while I was writing and directing my new movie, which is called *Mumford*.

I should mention one other factor here. A few months before he called, I had been writing the screenplay for this new movie. I was adding a character, a psychiatrist in the small town of Mumford. Stumped for a name for the character, I did what I often do—let my eyes lazily scan the spines of the books on the shelves by my desk . . . I saw Nick's book of Hopwood Lectures and stole his last name for the shrink. You can see the character in the movie when it comes out in September. Please. Anyway, I felt I owed him one.

When I had finished that movie, finally, at the end of March, I sat down at my computer and focused.

From March 30th until April 13th, a week ago, I sat at my computer and tried to write this speech. I worked really hard. But it wouldn't come. I couldn't figure out what it should be. What tone should it have? Who was it aimed at?

I must tell you, my problems do not have to do with public speaking. I enjoy that. But what I like to do is Questions and Answers. I've often done that and I've never had to prepare. Q and A's play into all my strengths—glibness, superficiality, the appearance of wit—what I call my faux wit. In Q and A's I have a certain lighthearted breeziness that eludes me in my actual life. I just let the audience do the work—ask questions and set the agenda—then I go on and on, mesmerizing myself with my insightful, humorous responses.

I worry that I have a heavy step in life. I take things too seriously. I am envious and admiring of people who seem to tread more lightly, with more natural joy, through their days. I would like to be more like that. I would like to have a lighthearted breeziness in more of my life.

But when I read the Hopwood Lectures in Nick's book, which appropriately is called *Speaking of Writing*, I find that very few of the distinguished authors have a-light step. No matter how funny a few of these speeches are, almost none of them could be called lighthearted. When you read them in bulk, you understand that most authors spend so much time inside their heads—or as we used to say in West Virginia, "down in the mine"—away from the company or thoughts of others, away from social intercourse, that

they have become just a bit deranged. They go on and on about things that obviously weigh heavily on them but may not mean much to anyone else. I'm relieved to see that. Because even a screenwriter, that most collaborative sort of writer, spends entirely too much time alone, and goes a little crazy too.

Last week I did a newspaper interview about my visit to campus. And the writer mentioned that when Pauline Kael gave the Hopwood Lecture, she did a Q and A. I got very excited. But when we called to get a transcript, we were told that there is no record of the event and that Ms. Kael was asked to make a speech, said she would, then spoke for five minutes and opened the floor up to questions. This had been viewed as a most unhappy development for everyone but Pauline.

I didn't want to behave like Pauline. So, with some disappointment, I turned away from that particular scam and did the thing I find most difficult—I got to work.

I grew up in a house where writing was seen as a legitimate undertaking. That was a blessing. My father died when I was fourteen. After he was gone my mother started saying that he had wanted to be a playwright when he was studying at Brown and that not writing was one of many frustrations in his short life. There was no evidence of this, no writing, no old plays. But here, I think, the mythology was more important than the fact. Maybe, I thought, it was in my genes.

My mother too was a writer in her youth. She said she had studied with Sinclair Lewis at the University of Wisconsin before she had to drop out and help support her family during the war. I've always believed this, but last week I decided to just do a little checking. I looked up Sinclair Lewis on the Internet and found myself on the Sinclair Lewis Homepage, which put me in reach of the Sinclair Lewis Society. I zipped off an E-missive to Professor Sally Parry at Illinois State, and she replied that indeed Lewis had taught at Wisconsin around 1940. I was delighted to hear my mother's story was possible. But here was the best part, from my point of view—according to Lewis's biographer, he taught only five sessions, then quit, saying the students had learned everything they could from him. I like this because it proves that Lewis, like certain other writers I know, was either incredibly lazy, or irascible, or easily bored. My mother says he was kicked out for living with an undergraduate girl. I like that too.

In the fifties, my mother sold some stories to what were called

"confession magazines." After that, she did not continue her writing. But to this day she sees herself as a writer. She believed in writing and she preached the religion. She taught me that everything in life could be transmuted into art, that everything was grist for the mill, though I wasn't sure what grist was or what kind of mill you take it to.

My mother never learned to drive and therefore we spent a lot of time on both city and Greyhound buses. I can't remember a time when I rode with her that she didn't engage the nearest stranger in conversation, drawing from them, usually, quite a bit of their personal history or current troubles. When I would question her about it, she'd say, "Oh, I'll use it all someday in a story. People just love to talk, you know, if someone will just listen."

"But it embarrasses me," I'd say.

"That's silly," she'd laugh. "It's what writers have to do."

"I don't like it," I'd grumble.

"Why, Larry," she'd say, "it's all grist for the mill."

While I was growing up in West Virginia, my mother occupied herself with another activity. Here's how it went:

She would send away for self-help books, and get them in the mail on a ten-day free trial basis. Titles like *Think and Grow Rich*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *Three Weeks to a Happier Life*, *Twenty-two Minutes to Total Success* . . . that kind of thing. I remember one was called *You Are Not the Target*, which she used to quote to me in the middle of our horrendous fights, in order to explain that it wasn't really me she was yelling at. (*Think and Grow Rich* is a classic in this field, written by a man named Napoleon Hill. His name carried as much weight in our house as Ernest Hemingway or Harold Robbins. Harold Robbins was my mother's favorite example of someone who had gotten rich writing, without any talent.)

My mother did not keep any of these mail-order books. We had, after all, very little money. (Obviously . . . I don't think rich people were sending away for books like that.) What she would do is copy out huge sections of the books on her typewriter (there was no Xerox then), typing away faster than I have ever seen anyone type. Reams and reams of material, whole chapters at a time. And then, when she had mined them for all they were worth, she'd send them back to the publishers.

She said that this was all just research for the ultimate, all-en-

compassing self-help book she herself was going to write. This was going to be the mother of all self-help books . . . by my mother.

Even as a very young person, someone who didn't understand much of the world, this behavior seemed strange to me. I'll admit, right here, that there have been many times when I've thought my mother's conduct was neither rational nor productive. (I would say, in fact, that we've had our troubles . . . in the same way that in Ireland the Catholics and the Protestants have had theirs.)

But looking back on it now, I wonder if maybe I owe her everything. Whether by nature or nurture, I became a writer.

I remember watching her at work in the little room she used as her study. Every surface was stacked high with her typed pages and visiting books, magazine clippings and yellowing newspapers, plus helter-skelter heaps of family documents—insurance policies, tax forms, wills and bills. She sat in the valley between these mountains of non-fileable, non-discardable material at her huge Royal typewriter. Her fingers blurred across the keyboard so fast I expected them to turn to butter like the tigers in my favorite children's story. Copying some new book, just out of its cardboard mailer. Copying and copying.

The pages would fly out of the machine like the mops in *Fantasia*, multiplying and swirling wildly in the air. It seemed crazy, yes, but also magical. And even though I knew that wasn't writing going on there, it was something very close to it. It smelled like writing. I loved the way the typewriter chattered, like a machine gun, and I liked the way her translucent, onionskin paper would fill with thick black typescript. I knew I didn't want to copy books for a living. But I liked all the rest of it.

Early in 1963, my brother and I rode a bus for ninety blocks down Miami Beach to see David Lean's film *Lawrence of Arabia* on the Lincoln Road Mall. When we arrived at the theatre, we were told we were welcome to go in, but the movie had started two minutes earlier. My brother refused to enter. He said this movie was too good to "come in in the middle." As I endured that long wait, I thought my brother was crazy, but I worshipped him. We loitered in the streets for six hours so we could see the movie properly at the evening show, right from the start. When it began, I realized that my brother had been right.

There was not a wasted second in more than three hours of film. The first images of the movie were as important as the last. Each frame had been painstakingly composed to create an enor-

mous, seamless tapestry. When we came out of the theatre into the balmy Florida evening, I knew that I had to make movies. But I had no idea how to go about it.

The idea that movies were written had never been considered in the town where we lived. In West Virginia in the fifties, nobody thought much about how movies were made. It was assumed they just happened, and the actors made up the dialogue. My brother, home from Harvard, taught me otherwise. I began to think perhaps writing could be the path to the movies for me.

When it came time to apply to college in 1966, a friend told me that the University of Michigan had the richest college writing contest in the country. The great playwright Arthur Miller had won the award, and it helped pay his way through school. Also, incredibly, his playwriting teacher, a man named Kenneth Rowe, was still teaching there. I had no money myself and I determined to follow in Miller's footsteps.

I was so overwhelmed by the size of the place my freshman year, I could barely get myself to class, much less write something for the contest. But a year later, getting myself to classes didn't seem terribly important. What mattered was this—I had talked my way into Kenneth Rowe's drama class and was writing all the time. All the time, that is, when I wasn't going to the movies. I entered the Hopwood contest in both fiction and drama.

I don't want to spend much time telling you this next thing, so I'll assume everybody can quickly understand just how unformed a person can feel at nineteen years old. It was true that I was passionate about writing. But I had no idea if that was just a fantasy my mother had created in my mind. My classmates at Morgantown High thought I was a pretty good writer, but I had a feeling their critical standards weren't too rigorous.

When I received the letter telling me that I had won Hopwood Awards in both fiction and drama, my life changed forever. It was the first sign the real world, the outside world, the big-time world, had given me that this was not just a hopeless dream. Confirmation, validation, encouragement. And money. I was working two jobs at that time and borrowing to pay for school. This Hopwood money seemed enormous to me. It *was* enormous.

It's odd how simple it is. You get this award that says someone thinks you're for real. And that's all you need to hear. Even though I had many discouraging years after that, there was never a day after I received that letter that I doubted I would be able to

make my way as a writer. For that, I will be eternally grateful to the Hopwood Awards.

By the time I was a junior, I was taking perhaps my third class with Kenneth Rowe. He was a sweet, gentle, reserved man, a great teacher . . . by 1969 very slow and fragile, in his fortieth year of teaching at Michigan. He was very tolerant of me, for he had figured out very quickly what I was up to. After writing plays for about a year, I began applying everything he was teaching me to my real pursuit, which was writing for film.

Writing screenplays is a weird kind of writing. It doesn't look like any other kind of writing. The form is unique and rigid. Contained within it are paragraphs of prose description that might be mistaken for fiction. And bursts of neatly spaced dialogue that might be mistaken for drama. There are big, heavy, capitalized headings that could be mistaken for girders holding up the script. These slug lines, as they're called, give you the time and place of the scenes:

#### INT. RACKHAM AUDITORIUM—DAY

But it's not prose or theatre or structural engineering. It's screenwriting. Which means it's a little bit of all those things. At its worst, it's a miserable waste of everybody's time and talent. But at its best . . . well, at its best, it could be mistaken for poetry. Let me give you an example:

Robert Bolt's screenplay for *Lawrence of Arabia*\* is among the greatest ever written. It's a true story about a British military officer, T. E. Lawrence, who was obsessed with the desert and the Bedouin people who lived there. He became a hero for his leadership of those forces during World War I. Lawrence was an outsider in his native England and an outsider among the Arabs, whom he dearly loved. The film concerns his efforts to figure out his identity against the stirring backdrop of desert warfare. It is full of wonderful scenes, but the one that haunts me is this, in the middle of the film—

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\*Note: Michael Wilson, a blacklisted screenwriter, was the first writer on the project. His claim to shared credit was upheld in 1963 by the British Screen Writers' Guild, but the Writers Guild of America continues to list the matter as "open." See "Who Wrote *Lawrence of Arabia*?" by Joel Hodson in *the Journal* (of the Writers Guild of America, West), vol. 8, no. 3 (March 1995).

Lawrence has led an Arab force in an unexpected victory over the Turks at Aqaba. But now, in this scene, having crossed the Sinai desert with just two faithful boy servants, he emerges on foot. His crossing has cost the life of one of the boys. The surviving boy coaxes the nearly catatonic Lawrence up onto their single camel. Three tracking shots bring them to desolate civilization, signalled first by barbed wire, then by the bombed-out ruins of an outpost. The only sounds: the wind, the banging of doors, a whisper of musical score.

The boy runs ahead through the rubble, then returns excitedly to Lawrence. But Lawrence sits on the camel, his face and robes so caked with dust that he appears finally to have become one with the desert, to have become, as he hoped, a Bedouin. But the transformation seems to have sapped the last life from him.

The frightened boy throws water in Lawrence's face, washing away half his Arab countenance. His white English skin forms the other half of the mask.

Gently, he tells the boy, "It's all right."

They move through the ruins and we cut ahead. As they approach another banging door, we hear the largest sound . . . the horn of a ship? Here in the desert? Lawrence and the boy come through the door and stop. After a beat, we see what they see—there is a steamship plowing through the sand dunes, a mirage-like clash of Lawrence's two worlds.

Lawrence and the boy appear over a rise. The great music swells. We cut to their point of view—the Suez Canal, steamship now in the distance. Lawrence and the boy stare at the sight. Then a long shot of a lone motorcyclist riding along the opposite shore of the canal. The boy starts yelling at the cyclist, a British soldier. We cut to a medium shot of the soldier as he stops, cups his hand to his mouth and shouts at them. What he shouts is this: "Who . . . are . . . you?"

Finally, only now, do we cut to a close shot of Lawrence's face. And once again, over his face, do we hear the shouted question which has been at the center of this epic film since its first frame. A question which Lawrence does not know how to answer.

"Who . . . are . . . you?"

And that's what great screenwriting is about.

When you've finished writing a poem or a short story or an essay, you have the thing in your hand. Good, bad, or indifferent, you have done the job and created the thing. But in screenwrit-

ing, when you're done, what you've created is the plan for a movie.

It's your best idea of what should be shown, in what order and from what point of view. What the characters should say, when and where they should say it and who should be around while they're saying it.

Screenwriters often compare themselves to architects. They create the plans, but someone else has to construct the building. It's not an empowering attitude. John Gregory Dunne once wrote, "Wanting to be a screenwriter is like wanting to be a co-pilot."

While there can scarcely be any form of writing that doesn't employ an implicit or unspoken point of view, in screenwriting Point Of View—POV in capital letters—is an explicit, mechanical direction, as explicit as "insert scalpel between second and third ribs" or "this file cannot be opened because its application could not be found."

One of the delights of screenwriting is that the writer and then the filmmaker can jump the POV around (and usually do) with enormous freedom and never lose the audience, which has been trained since the beginning of cinema to quickly and easily accept the shifts.

For the screenwriter it means the story can be told from any and all angles imaginable: the leading character's . . . the waiter's serving his lunch . . . the sandwich on his plate . . . the bird outside the window. When I was making my first film, *Body Heat*, twenty years ago, there was a pivotal moment when the lead couple commit to their life-changing, nefarious scheme. I wanted the camera to start very low, looking up at their passionate embrace (and the office ceiling above them), to rise up past their faces and continue up, up through where we knew the ceiling should be, tilting down to hold their frantic grappling in view the whole time.

My cameraman, an older veteran of many Hollywood movies, objected. Exasperated by the discussion, he finally said, "But whose point of view is it?" I didn't know exactly, but I answered immediately, with authority, the way threatened beginners often do—"God. It's God's POV, obviously."

If you're lucky enough to make your own movies, the second level of fun comes when you figure out how you will physically, technically, literally get into each designated point of view. That's where you have the energetic company of your crew, skilled crafts-

people who only want to help you figure it out. And it can be exhilarating.

The truth is almost everything about making movies is exhilarating, except for getting up very early in the morning and, sometimes, the finished product.

Even when you're writing or making a bad movie, you almost never think that. As each problem gets solved, each detail finished and delivered, there's a continual sense of triumph. That's why filmmakers are always so shocked when people hate their movie. Personally, I want to shout at the movie critic, or callous, overheard, amateur critic—"But don't you think I wrote that one scene great? Wasn't that a marvelous solution? Didn't you gasp at the surprise of that line of dialogue, the wit of that staging? Don't you realize how hard it was to get the trucks into that location? I mean . . . cut me some slack here!"

Ever since I was playing guard on the sixth grade basketball team at Edgington Lane Elementary School, I've been outraged by this fact of life—my accomplishments are limited by my abilities. Since I've made a life in the movies, I'm amazed that people aren't more sympathetic to the fact that my achievements have been somewhat limited by my talent.

If you write screenplays, you become a jack of many trades, but perhaps, master of none. It requires a combination of skills that aren't necessarily related. Among them:

- a sense of structure and narrative;
- a visual approach to the world—the story should be told, wherever possible, in images rather than words . . . and yet, you must have . . .
- a certain talent with dialogue, either naturalistic or stylized, but in either case with the goal of creating something that can sound true to the audience;
- finally, a sense of character: can you add anything to the general understanding of things, that complex web of motivation and passion, purpose and reflex? Do you have the imaginative generosity to create real, flawed characters and engage an audience in their adventures?

When I'm asked how I start a screenplay—with a story? a setting? an image I want to photograph?—I always give it a moment, hoping the answer has changed . . . but it never has. I always start

with character. There's some behavior, some peculiarity, some way of thinking or talking or *proceeding*, that I want to explore.

Sometimes it's frustrating. Sometimes Hollywood movies seem stupidly resistant to the fascinating unpredictability of human beings. It's considered bad for business. A writer I know was in a meeting once with a studio executive who said with exasperation, "These characters are way too complicated for a movie this expensive."

The truth is, one of the strengths of American movies is that they have been, for the most part, about action first . . . then character, as revealed through action. My favorite movies work that way. When the actions the characters take perfectly elucidate their personalities, that's when movies are at their best.

When your strengths are in character, rather than story, you always feel a little out of the stream of American film. I was talking once to a screenwriter named Alvin Sargent, who wrote *Julia* and many other terrific movies. We were commiserating, agreeing that for us inspiration always arrived in the form of character, never story. He said, "Here's what it will say on my tombstone—'Finally, a plot!'"

I think the thing that has made screenwriting so irresistible to me is its ability to do anything. It is, in some ways, the freest, most unbounded writing. And the kind of writing most appealing to a control freak. You, the screenwriter and filmmaker, decide every image you will use to tell your story, every picture your audience will see, every sound they will hear. You control it all, every piece of the puzzle. (You have no control how each viewer receives that information, what button it pushes in their own memory bank, what connotations it holds for them. But you do get to impose the stimuli you wish on them . . . in a dark, cool place, where your light is the only light, where they sit, receptive, with others who share their anticipation and high hopes.)

A novelist allows each reader to decide exactly what the people and places look like, supplying only as much information as he chooses. A playwright and his director try to focus the attention of the audience on that slice of the stage that is most important at that moment. A poet hopes his words will lift the reader into the same airstream that inspired the poem.

But a filmmaker *demands* that you accept his version of these characters, their appearance and inflections, their clothes and body language. He directs your attention to whatever detail, no

matter how small, he wants you to notice. He focuses your attention on whomever he wishes during the scene, perhaps on a listener across the room, far from the nominal action, perhaps on the ticking time bomb in the basement, or across town or across the continent.

While I believe that screenwriting at its best can reach the highest level of writing, one of the great things about it is . . . no one ever expects it to. It's always a pleasant surprise when a movie is well-written. Even good movies have luxuriated in their low-rent status. A movie is a diversion, an entertainment. It is, after all, "just a movie."

Abraham Polonsky, a screenwriter who was blacklisted in the fifties after writing the scripts for *Body and Soul* and *Force of Evil*, and then came back to write some more good movies, said recently, "For me, movies are irrevocably and richly rooted in kitsch, in childhood, in storytelling, in the rubbish of paperbacks and sitting under street lights. . . ."

I find that idea liberating and inspiring. My experience is that high art often starts in low places. I know those words conjure up for me some of what makes movies so sexy and exciting.

Screenwriting may be the most fun of all writing, and almost everybody thinks they can do it. (In Los Angeles it's hard to find anyone who hasn't given it a try.) Here's how it works:

#### INT. RACKHAM AUDITORIUM—DAY

LAWRENCE KASDAN addresses a restless audience at the Hopwood Awards presentation. His wife, son and in-laws are seated among the crowd of Hopwood winners, professors, and interested parties. Some people have simply wandered into the cozy auditorium looking for a place to sleep. They seem annoyed by the drone emanating from the podium.

Cut to CLOSE ON one of these fellows, SMITTY, as he is wakened by the MODEST LAUGHTER one of Kasdan's comments provokes.

SMITTY  
[muttering to himself]

Who the hell is this guy? What's he going on about? And what's wrong with his voice?

Cut to Kasdan at the podium. There is a *lighthearted breeziness* to his delivery. He seems relaxed, smiling as he talks, apparently having a good time. Picking up his speech in the middle—

LAWRENCE KASDAN

. . . From March 30th to April 13th, I sat at my computer and tried to write this speech . . .

His voice becomes distant and echoey as we PUSH IN TIGHTER on his face and come around the side of his head. There is a drop of sweat slowly rolling down his neck from behind his ear toward his Armani shirt collar. The muscles in his neck are tight. We begin to hear HIS THOUGHTS VOICE-OVER, while his actual speech continues under—

LAWRENCE KASDAN (VO)

I don't think this is going very well. I shouldn't tell them how hard it was to come up with this. They're going to wonder, how hard could it be to come up with crap like this?

INT. KASDAN'S OFFICE (LOS ANGELES)—NIGHT

The calendar on the wall shows it's April 11th. Kasdan sits in front of his computer, but he is not writing. His feet are up on the desk and he has turned his chair so that he can watch the Los Angeles Lakers play the Seattle Supersonics on the television across the room. Cut back to:

INT. RACKHAM AUDITORIUM—DAY

LAWRENCE KASDAN (VO )

I should have let Meg read this first. She would have stopped me. . . .

Kasdan turns his head slightly and we RACK FOCUS from his sweaty neck to the portion of the audience visible beyond him,

then PUSH PAST HIS NOSE toward a tighter shot of his wife, MEG KASDAN. We hear her thoughts VOICE-OVER.

MEG KASDAN (VO)

This is so embarrassing. I bet they don't ask a screenwriter to do this again any day soon. Why didn't he let me read his speech, like I usually do?

Her thoughts FADE as we PAN TO HER LEFT to find Kasdan's son, JON, sitting beside his mother. We hear his thoughts—

JON KASDAN (VO)

Wow, I really feel for Dad. I guess these people aren't as stoned as those kids at commencement. . . . Man, that girl in the third row is a real fox. Maybe I should have gone to school here instead of NYU. . . . I wonder what time I'll get back to Manhattan tonight. . . .

We hear some more of Kasdan's actual speech over Jon's face, then SMASH CUT TO an EXTREME CLOSE-UP of Lawrence Kasdan's mouth. It's apparent that, out of vanity, he's had some bonding work done on his two front teeth. His speech continues—

LAWRENCE KASDAN

. . . My mother too was a writer in her youth. She said she had studied with Sinclair Lewis at the University of Wisconsin . . .

The MUSIC GROWS LOUDER as Kasdan's speech fades into the distance. We cut to A SERIES OF SHOTS :

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN CAMPUS, 1941. Sinclair Lewis comes running down a grassy slope, cuts through some bushes and winds up on a pathway, where a PRETTY UNDERGRADUATE GIRL waits for him. They embrace, then hurry off. A moment later, Lawrence Kasdan's mother, SYLVIA, in her early twenties, comes hurrying up from the other direction, short story clutched in hand, looking for Lewis. She stops, frustrated, moving into a

MEDIUM SHOT. Suddenly her image MORPHS into an older version of herself, as we cut to—

WHEELING, W. VA., 1956. Lawrence Kasdan's mother is listening to the Mailman, who is obviously telling her some intimate detail of his life. She nods sympathetically, her arms full of newly delivered mail-order books. Cut to—

HER OFFICE, stacks of papers everywhere. She props a new book up next to her big Royal typewriter and begins to type. The CAMERA DRIFTS OFF her, over the stacks of paper to the doorway where it arrives at the same time as LITTLE LARRY KASDAN, seven years old, sweaty and dirty, holding a basketball. He leans against the doorjamb and watches his mother with wondering eyes. The typewriter's CHATTER RISES to drown out the MUSIC; it sounds like a machine gun.

LITTLE LARRY'S POV: Between the mountains of paper, he can just barely see his mother pounding away at a furious pace. But she's disappearing fast in a *whirlwind of onionskin typing paper*. It swirls magically around her, rising up and growing in density until Larry's mother is completely obscured . . . and disappears. [Note: **Special effect to be done by Industrial Light and Magic.**] We begin to hear Kasdan's Hopwood speech again and we are back—

INT. RACKHAM AUDITORIUM—DAY

CLOSE ON NICHOLAS DELBANCO watching Kasdan on the stage.

LAWRENCE KASDAN

. . . When I'm asked how I start a screenplay . . .

We hear Delbano's thoughts VOICE-OVER—

PROF. DELBANCO (VO)

He used my last name in his new movie without even asking me! I wonder if I can sue him?

We FLASH PAN down the row to where this year's winner of the Kasdan Award sits clutching his envelope—

KASDAN AWARD WINNER (VO)

Why doesn't he talk about the money? How can you talk about screenwriting and not talk about the money?

Cut to an ANGLE from behind Kasdan on the stage to include the audience.

LAWRENCE KASDAN

. . . Finally, I'd just like to say . . .

On the word "Finally" a noticeable wave of relief sweeps across the entire audience. We begin a series of VERY QUICK CUTS—

MEG KASDAN (VO)

Thank god!

JON KASDAN (VO)

All right!

PROF. DELBANCO (VO)

I'm definitely suing him.

KASDAN AWARD WINNER (VO)

Maybe I could get a discount fare to Vegas this weekend and turn this into some real money.

And last, we cut to CLOSE ON Smitty, from the first scene, VOICE-OVER.

SMITTY (VO)

Finally . . . it's about time! Now maybe I can get some sleep—

He is interrupted by the echoey VOICE-OVER of Lawrence Kasdan.

LAWRENCE KASDAN (VO)

Hey! Who asked you? You don't like it, I'll cut you out of this scene.

SMITTY (VO)  
(freaked out, looking around)

Who is this? Is this Freddy Krueger? How'd you get in my thoughts?

LAWRENCE KASDAN (VO)

This is my script. So long, sucker. . . .

*Smitty vanishes from his seat. Only ONE STUDENT near the back notices, and looks on in mystification. (The role of the Student is played as a favor to me by Leonardo DiCaprio.)*

Cut back to Lawrence Kasdan at the podium, *feeling good now*. The Hopwood Lecture is finally behind him, and he can get back to procrastinating on his next script. But what he says is—

LAWRENCE KASDAN

So you see, that's how it's done. It looks easy and it pays well. No wonder so many people want to do it. The truth is, it's the world's best job. Thank you for appearing in my screenplay. And thank you very much for having me here. Goodbye.

FADE OUT.