



Experts create that all-important person-to-person connection between author and reader. An expert's quotes help bring writing alive by adding humor, anecdotes, and opinion to nonfiction work. They deepen the voice and authority of the author, no matter what the subject.

When Hollywood Calls:

AN AUTHOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Mary E. Pearson

meg.beade@cbcbooks.org

When my literary agent, Rosemary Stimola, told me she sent my manuscript to a film agent, I was happy she was so enthusiastic about the story, but I really didn't expect anything to come of it. *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* was my fourth novel, and by then I knew such things were long shots. Still, I entertained some brief "what if" thoughts, crossed my fingers, and then promptly forgot about it. I had a new book I was working on, and I was still waiting for my editorial letter from my editor on *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*. My "book" wasn't even remotely a real book yet, so dreaming about a movie seemed far too premature.

Shortly after my agent sent the manuscript to this mysterious film agent, we received a response. He loved it and wanted to send it out to some interested parties. I have to admit, I was thrilled but at the

same time cautious. Hollywood was as foreign to me as the moon. I trusted Rosemary, but this guy was an unknown entity. Very soon I understood Rosemary's confidence in Jason Dravis, a partner in the well-established Monteiro Rose Dravis Agency. Jason had a very calm and practical demeanor that instilled confidence in me, as well.

According to Jason, several producers were interested in the manuscript, and he wanted me to interview them in a series of conference calls. I was frank and told Jason I had no clue what to say or ask (remember, foreign as the moon?) but he said he would be in on each call with me and guide me through. As it turned out, I had very little talking to do. All the producers we spoke with were well-prepared and told me what they liked about the manuscript,

and then shared their vision for a possible film. I admit I was gobstruck with each one—totally blown away that they had even contemplated so many possibilities at this early stage. I tried to take notes as they spoke, but after we ended each call and I debriefed with Jason, I found myself saying the same thing over and over: "I really like them!"

But there were differences in their visions for the film, and that is what made producer Julia Pistor stand out for me. She focused on the relationships of the characters. Yes, she mentioned the suspense and thriller possibilities for a film, but she wanted to make sure the complex family relationships were captured. I knew then that she was the right producer—if a film was ever actually made. But, like Jason Dravis, she had a lot of impressive credits to her name, and I thought if anyone could make it happen, she could.

Soon, Julia brought on director Brad Silberling, who had some impressive credits of his own, and she invited me to come to her house in Beverly Hills to meet him. Jason and Julia wanted to have a whole team together before the manuscript was taken to the studios. I was nervous but was immediately put at ease by Julia and Brad. They were down-to-earth and easy to talk to. I was starting to feel like I was on terra firma and not walking on the moon. Over lunch Brad shared his ideas for the film and asked me for insights into the characters. They even threw out possible names of actors and actresses! I pinched myself on the long drive home to San Diego, thinking this might actually happen.

They still wanted to have a screenwriter on board before they went to the studios, but then, just as they were talking to possible writers, a wrench was thrown into the plans: The Writers Guild of America went on strike. Negotiations of any kind came to a halt. So I tried to put it all out of my mind and focused on writing my new book. Then, a few months later, when it seemed that the strike was finally going to end, it was decided that Julia and Brad would go ahead and pitch the book to the studios. (If the publishing business doesn't prepare you for a rollercoaster ride packed with lots of patience, then nothing will.) Finally, at this stage I knew things might actually start happening,

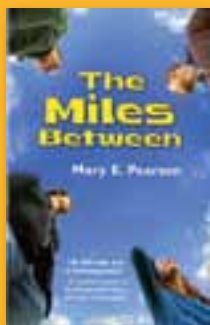
and I could barely concentrate on buttering my toast, much less working on my current book. I received daily updates from Jason on which studio the manuscript was going to next, whom we were waiting on, who was out of town but wanted to see it, and all the impossible complications that you could ever imagine as the manuscript was taken to various studios. Several were interested, and I was suddenly nervous it was all going to unravel. This was clearly not my world. I was grateful Jason was handling it—and so calmly, too. Negotiations finally came down to two studios, and the process lasted over what felt like the longest week in history. By this point I was often getting hourly updates from Jason—and Rosemary as well! When an offer from Fox 2000 was finally accepted I felt like I had run a marathon. And the book wasn't even published yet—I still had *that* marathon to run!

In the coming months, contracts were signed, and a writer was hired. Dana Stevens, a talented writer in the industry, e-mailed me with questions as she prepared to dig into writing the script. Even though it was fictional, she still wanted to know the science behind the novel so she could understand my thought processes. Soon we met for lunch to discuss more aspects of the book. She asked about my inspirations for various scenes and what I thought was the heartbeat of the story. She told me

that writing a script is a delicate process as she tries to maintain the original vision of the book, while adapting it so it will work on the big screen. I knew there would have to be changes. A film is a completely different animal from a book and requires different treatment.

One of those changes will be expanding the roles of the adults in the story so that the film has wider appeal across ages. Another change is that Jenna will now be eighteen, and Ethan will be twenty-one. Instead of being in high school, they will be in a GED program. This change was made so that the pool of high-profile actors to play Ethan's part would be increased, and also to intensify the romance between Ethan and Jenna. Many of the changes like this are practical in nature and don't really affect the bones of the story. I understand that the setting will also change slightly, moving from Southern to Northern California for filming purposes. I'm excited to see these changes, but of course I do hope the essence remains intact—or the heartbeat, as Dana called it. The first draft of the script is finished, and the final is set to be done next month. By the time this article appears, I'm hoping the film will be in production.

And now as I wait for this next milestone, I will, of course, be working on my next book—and maybe indulging in a bit of daydreaming about possible actors.



Links

Monteiro Rose Dravis Agency:
<www.monteiro-rose.com>

The Adoration of Jenna Fox:
<www.whoisjennafox.com>

Mary E. Pearson:
<www.marypearson.com>