

Observing the Pitch

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In L.A., pitches are the fast sell given to any potentially interested/useful party.

If a screenwriter finds themselves in line with a producer at Starbucks, a fast, polished pitch is a handy thing to have. Who knows where it may lead.

In teaching screenwriting, it seems to me that a pitch becomes compelling when a student finds their 'passion'. Way over-used, I know. But I've watched many students stand there nervously murmuring words, even great sentences, without stirring myself or the audience. And then, when we ask questions to draw them out, they stumble onto what excites them about the story – and they in turn excite us.

The questions that help find this excitement are:

Why did you write THIS story?

How did you find this character?

What do you know about this subject?

What's the key scene for you? Not necessarily the climax or the fight scene, but the one you just love? That you had to write?

I've watched many an uncertain student answer one of these, and suddenly hook the entire class.

“When I held my son in my arms for the first time, I knew I had to tell this story.”

“There was this old, wonderful barbershop on the corner of the neighborhood. And inside ... “

“My father and uncle were longshoremen. And the day came when they took me out with them.”

In watching this transformation, I realized that it was the emotion – that passion that made you really write this story in the first place – that needs to be shared. Spark us with that spark that first flamed inside of you.

And – and here's the teacher in me – practice.

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