

## 19 December 1983

I woke up in a sweat on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1983. No, I wasn't worried about last-minute Christmas shopping. No, I wasn't in a panic over the math exam I had to write that morning.

Math was easy.

I rushed off to school, eager to get through the last day before the holiday break. I breezed through the exam. I thought about handing it in and walking out as soon as I was done, but I realized what an opportunity this was: a quiet classroom, lots of scrap paper at my disposal, and at least 3 hours to spare until the geography exam.

I started feverishly writing down the dream I had woken up from. In the dream, I had gone to the movies, see, because Two of a Kind had just been released that weekend, and I was obsessed – obsessed – with Two of a Kind, because finally, FINALLY, Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta were reunited on the big screen, and I had gobbled up all the teen magazines and all those stories breathlessly teasing about The Love Scene, and I loved how they could pose for the cover of People Magazine with Travolta nibbling on Olivia's ear, and how they could sit for Entertainment Tonight and hold hands and giggle and flirt outrageously and coyly say they were just friends, but in the same breath joke that they had almost run off and gotten married when they met doing Grease, and were Matt Lattanzi and Marilu Henner really okay with this? – but what really mattered was that finally, FINALLY, after 5 years, I was going to see them together on the big screen again.

But then, the movie in the dream was not Two of a Kind, see, and it starred Olivia Newton-John and John Travolta, but it was a COMPLETELY DIFFERENT movie, and when I woke up, I remembered every. single. thing. about. it.

As I used every last piece of scrap paper left over from my math exam, I thought I saw a few students shooting me some sideways glances as they left the classroom, maybe perplexed that I was still there – math was easy – or perhaps wondering what I was writing so intensely. Nobody ever wrote algebra with such flourish.

I had no idea how to write a script. But that day, in a math classroom, I decided what I wanted to do in life. I was going to be a screenwriter.

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When I was 3, my love affair with the Montreal Canadiens began.

From then on, as soon as I was old enough to grasp what a career was, I had wanted to be a sports journalist. This was confirmed by my growing knowledge of baseball as the Expos became legitimate contenders, and only validated further when the Montreal Manic joined the North American Soccer League. By the time Chris Evert turned my teenage world topsy-turvy, it was a no-brainer.

But now, at 14, I had discovered my true calling. Forget sports. Screenwriting.

When I was 7, I had written a short story entitled “Le chapeau du magicien”, about a world-famous magician whose hat holds all the secrets to his amazing tricks. It was a one-pager and didn’t have a jaw-dropping story arc, but it did have a beginning, a middle, and an end (in that order). In fact, I dare say that the hat was my first McGuffin.

Clearly I had an early taste for storytelling.

I spent the summer of ’84 avidly typing out what I was sure would be the next Olivia & Travolta blockbuster, a breezy romantic comedy cleverly titled Me And You. My best friend Katrina and I managed to come up with a catchy chorus for the theme song called “Let Me Love You”, which would be, natch, Olivia’s next #1 hit.

My brand new electric typewriter was sure getting a workout! Thank god – well, Soeur Thérèse, anyway – for my flawless QWERTY technique. That typing class was the saving grace that made the other useless home ec classes – cooking and sewing – almost worth it.

Sadly, it turns out neither the song nor the script had much of a beginning, nor frankly, much of an ending. (I must have woken up before the movie was over!)

I boldly decided to send the script to Olivia anyway, via her fan club. A few weeks later, I got a nice autographed photo in the mail. This was no major accomplishment; sending any letter to the Olivia fan club got anybody an autographed photo.

But I was undaunted. My next endeavour the following year was called Winner Take All. Of course, it featured two impossibly beautiful leads in the Olivia / Travolta mold, and the premise was very similar to How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days (2003). I was clearly ahead of my time. But I realized I probably needed some mentoring so I mailed my script to CBC Montreal with a “To whom it may concern” letter.

Within a couple of weeks, a lovely jovial man named Malcolm Charlton called me up. I know it sounds arrogant to say I wasn’t surprised, but I wasn’t. By this point, I was 17. Things always came easily to me. I had enough hubris to think that stuff was just SUPPOSED to happen for me. That anything I wanted to accomplish just required a plan and its execution.

Mr. Charlton was a producer in children’s television at the time, back when the CBC had not yet been decimated. We met a few times over several months. Winner Take All was not at all the kind of property he was looking to acquire for the children’s TV department at the CBC, and yet he took me under his wing and graciously spent time giving me some pointers, showing me how scripts were supposed to be written, and how they should look.

He even wrote a letter on my behalf when I approached Tennis Canada in 1987 about a new script idea I was developing, called Centre Court. It was very similar in premise to Wimbledon (2004). I was clearly ahead of my time.

Lo and behold, Tennis Canada granted me press credentials for the Player's Challenge that year, both for the men's tournament in Montreal and the women's event in Toronto, so that I may sit in the press room, soak in some atmosphere, and get close to Chris Evert.

Things always came easily to me.

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FLASH FORWARD.

I did not write How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days (2003).

I did not write Wimbledon (2004).

I fell in love with film studies in CEGEP but my handful of attempts to develop screenplays as an adult – both in French and English – were thwarted by funding agencies, lack of time, or fear of failure. I still have the hubris to think it's not for lack of talent, but I've never been as bold an adult as I was a teenager.

Writing is a vehicle. Writing is a way to justify spending even more time thinking about the things I love.

I still spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about Chris Evert.

I still spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about Olivia Newton-John.

Could it be that there's still time to fulfill the promise I made to myself in that math classroom on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1983?

Go ahead – ask me about my latest screenplay. It's the story of a young female sports journalist covering the exploits of a legendary female tennis champion, with a beautiful pop diva in a pivotal role.

It's called Love Means Nothing, and it may or may not be autobiographical.