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by

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**Learning that the Learning Never Stops:
The Writing (and re-writing) of *Mrs. Weeks***

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Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin

August, 2016

Abstract

Learning that the Learning Never Stops: The Writing (and re-writing) of *Mrs. Weeks*

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

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The following report outlines and explores the writing process of my feature screenplay *Mrs. Weeks* (working title). The report details the creation of the screenplay from the original spark of an idea through the original treatment, first draft and rewrite. It will discuss in detail both the writing process of *Mrs. Weeks* itself, as well as the process of rewriting and taking notes in general, and how the lessons learned in four semesters at UT contributed to this specific revised draft.

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Chapter 1: Why I hear Darryl from *Thelma & Louise* in My Head

Like most students who end up at UT's MFA Screenwriting program I grew up watching a lot of movies. But I didn't grow up thinking about that fact too much. I didn't even consider myself "a movie person" or my parents "movie people."

My parents divorced when I was quite young, and they were, and are, very different. My mother was an English teacher and my dad did something in Boston with stocks (still not sure what). But they both loved and love movies. To me, anything that *both* my parents did thus became something all parents and all families did—I assumed everyone watched films all weekend, and went to the movie theatre all the time. But still, they never talked about screenwriting or directors or how movies are made or anything. Movies just seemed to exist in our world, and they were something to be grateful for, like access to those oatmeal cookies with fake dairy sludge in the middle.

To be more specific, my father was the parent who took us to the movies. Before he married his second wife my older brother and I saw him every other weekend, and we would go, without fail, to at least one movie a weekend, sometimes even two. The first movie I remember seeing in theatres was *Snow White*, which was playing at a theatre a couple towns over from my mother's house, at a place called the Bijou. The Bijou played old movies (like *Snow White*) or movies that had been out of the theatre for months already. It was cheap (literally two dollars a ticket), the floor was sticky with soda no one ever cleaned up, and we went all the time. We went both because my Dad loves movies and also because he probably didn't really know what to do with us for forty-eight hours straight. I used to cover my ears whenever the movies started and the loud 20th Century Fox music came on, or the MGM tiger roared. I remember how I felt vaguely terrified by the noise and the darkness of the large theatre, but also thrilled because I knew it meant the movie

was starting. It should be noted that my dad seemed to lack any sort of filter as to what was appropriate or not to bring a child to. When I was four he took my brother and I to see *White Fang* and feeling terrified during that movie and crawling into his lap is one of my first memories.

My mother rarely took us to the movies, but she had an absolutely massive collection of VHS tapes at our home. Nowadays with Netflix and Apple having a good personal collection of movies has lost its meaning, but back then it was something that made my mom stand out as cool, and friends who came over always liked to look at our wooden chest filled with movies. I liked that we had our kid section in this massive old chest with all our Disney movies in their puffy white VHS covers. And then my mom had her section with her movies. Some of these were movies we could all watch together, and some were the ones I was definitely banned from (*Pulp Fiction*, *Ruthless People*). Then there were the ones I could watch with her if she was in a good mood, even though they were rated PG-13 (*When Harry Met Sally*) and occasionally R (*Thelma & Louise*). Neither of my parents were that strict about what we could watch when it came to movies. That being said, we had only one television at my mother's apartment, and we didn't have cable—just the basic channels: NBC, CBS, etc. I was never allowed to turn on the TV without asking permission first from my mother, and it would boggle my mind that at my friend's houses they could retreat to wherever they wanted and watch channels upon channels without *having to ask first*.

I bring all this up because I still often feel weird about screenwriting—both what it is or why I'm doing it, and frankly it all feels a bit fraudulent. To this day, I have friends that are more “movie people” than me, and they aren't trying to write screenplays. And though I have always written (or more accurately “wanted to write”) it took a long time for me to see film as the vehicle for that expression. It makes more sense to me now, because

I watched so many movies as a kid, and I was also the type who watched the same movie over and over again. I still do that. I think this had an even bigger impact on me than watching a ton of new stuff. My best friend Mari and I would watch *When Harry Met Sally*, *A League Of Their Own*, *Braveheart*, *Titanic* and *Pretty Woman* pretty much on a cycle for years of our childhood and I learned to absorb the rhythms of these movies, and the way the characters spoke. I find that when I write today I return over and over again to the rhythms of these films, whether subconsciously or not. I am always fascinated by why we return to certain films over and over, even though we know how they will end. I am always striving to create something that is entertaining enough and moving enough that someone would want to watch it more than once.

Chapter 2: Gail Collins and a Time Travel Rom-Com

At the beginning of the spring 2016 semester I knew that, as part of my MFA requirement, I would be completing a first draft of a project (either film or television) in the advanced screenwriting class. This project could either be feature film or a television pilot. As I had written two comedy television pilots the previous semester with Richard Lewis, I decided to focus on writing a movie. (I think one of the advantages of the UT screenwriting grad program is the flexibility they give us students in their second year to bounce between the two forms.) Thus, I knew that during winter break of 2015 I would need to be brainstorming ideas and loglines for this feature, and to go even beyond that—to have a loose outline of the structure of the film ready as I entered the following semester. My experience in the program so far had shown me that it is very unwise to blindly start writing a feature script without a strong story idea. One has to have an idea that can propel a script along for one hundred and twenty pages. I now know this was easier said than done.

Unfortunately, my brainstorming over break was not going well, and not for lack of effort. No matter how hard I tried I had only vague ideas: some sort of action-comedy about older women that get involved in crime? (Having grown up watching lots of Susan Sarandon movies this seemed like something I would enjoy...but what was the story? Who was this character and what was her motivation? I had no idea.) I remembered once reading an article in *Oprah Magazine* (yep) about a woman who said that if you write down 100 things you're looking for in a man and seal the envelope and put it away, the

man appears. For whatever reason, I thought (and still think...) there was a movie in this (guy finds girls' list, pranks her?) but I couldn't get anything clear going, and certainly not enough to sustain a film. As it's probably evident by now, I was a bit all over the place that winter break. But a few days before I headed back to Austin, I settled on the idea of a time travel romantic comedy. *Genius!*, I had thought. Turns out, not so much.

The first two weeks of class with Stuart Kelban were rough. The more effort I put into my script's outline the more I realized I had an unwieldy idea, and the reason that people in workshop got a glazed-over look in their eye during class when I tried to pitch them *How to Make an American Quilt* meets *Hot Tub Time Machine* with a dash of *When Harry Met Sally* is because that idea literally makes no sense. (Though I haven't completely given up on it...yet.) I thought I was stuck. And I was starting to panic a bit—this was my last semester at UT. The whole point of my *final* semester was to write my strongest script yet, the culmination of all I had learned about the craft and potentially something that could help me land a manager. (A girl's got to dream, right?) So I decided to distract myself from the fact that I lacked a clear story arc and/or idea by doing more research for the film. Because: research! You can never have too much of that!

I had checked some books out of the library, such as Beth Bailey's *From Front Porch to Backseat: Courtship in Twentieth Century America* hoping that by researching dating habits in the 20th century, I might also stumble upon a plot and characters. I was also reading Gail Collins' book, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present* for that same purpose. I have enjoyed Collins' writing (somehow both witty and easily digestible while also being extremely

informative) since discovering her op-eds in *The New York Times* during college. And it was while reading her book in late January of this year that I came across a small section in an early chapter about a woman named Lorena Weeks. Collins' description of not only Weeks' case and life impressed me, but more specifically it was her re-telling of Weeks' experience of weighing her typewriter at work after losing her initial case, and then refusing to pick it up, that caught my attention. (More on that later.) I dog-eared the page, but didn't think much more of it than that. I had a time-travel rom-com to write!

A week later in class, as the third draft of my film outline was being workshopped and actual pages of the feature were on the horizon, my professor very bluntly made it clear he did not think "I had a movie here." Thinking there was a) no way he'd let me switch movie ideas this far into the semester and b) not really sure if it was okay for me to write a movie about a real person's life if I didn't have the legal rights to it, I blurted out that I'd done some reading about this woman Lorena Weeks, who'd sued a company called Southern Bell in the 1960s and won an important sex discrimination case. Could I try to write a movie about her instead? Stuart said, sure switch your idea. So I was off to the races.

As I started to really work on the script I began to realize I felt a strong connection to Lorena. I had ever since I'd read those eight pages about her in Collins' book. It's hard to pin-point exactly why—we have very little in common on the surface. But I was deeply moved by her story and by her inner strength. And I've always been interested in feminism and women's rights, but in a way that is similar perhaps to Lorena. There's something very matter-of-fact about her approach to feminism—*why shouldn't*

women be able to push themselves and want more and have ambition? And I loved that she was a do-er. That part of her I don't one-hundred-percent relate to (my life is much more privileged and lazier than hers ever was!) but I think of it in the same way that my boyfriend, for example, looks up to and reveres certain professional athletes: they represent the best of what the human body can achieve with the right mix of talent, hard work and ambition. To me Lorena represented something incredibly powerful and inspiring about the strength of the human spirit, and the power of women in particular. She's a true role model—not someone who just talked about something (women's rights) but embodied it with her actions and choices. I figured if I was so moved by her and her story—and her commitment to both herself *and* her family—others would be, too. And I am also someone who has dealt with the sudden deaths of loved ones, and I have felt how their absence has shaped my life and my choices. I felt very inspired and moved by Lorena's connection to her late mother, and believed that I perhaps had some insight into how much it impacted her drive and her choice to take on what she did.

Chapter 3: The Treatment

My first assignment, having settled (finally!) on a clear idea, was to turn in a treatment. With just Collins' book (which included eight pages about Weeks' case and life) and the Wikipedia page on Lorena Weeks to go off of, I began to work on a treatment. I knew immediately I wanted to begin the movie in the past, when Lorena Weeks was nine years old. Weeks was nine when her father died in a sawmill accident. I was not sure of what the first scene would be exactly—at her father's funeral? The reception? Or maybe a few weeks after her father had passed?—but I knew it was important to me that I began with a scene of Lorena and her mother dealing with this new reality. My limited research, coupled with a gut feeling, had shown me that Weeks' mother had had a strong role in forming Lorena's personality and had likely led to her decision later in life to become entangled in a sex discrimination lawsuit.

I then began to make a list of "big events" I knew I wanted to (and likely needed to) include in the film. This technique—of sort of throwing down everything you think needs to go into your movie, all the big scenes or so-called “trailer moments”—is a technique we worked on a lot in Beau Thorne's Adaptation course, another required course for screenwriting MFA's at UT. Again, based only on preliminary research, I knew (or *thought* I knew) I wanted the film to include the following scenes, all of which actually happened in real life:

- Lorena beginning work at Southern Bell right after graduating high school;
- Lorena applying for the switchman's job;

- Lorena's application getting denied;
- Lorena contacting the EEOC to see if they thought discrimination had occurred;
- Lorena meeting with her Union and not getting support;
- Lorena deciding to sue Southern Bell;
- Lorena getting a union-appointed lawyer and meeting with him;
- Lorena losing in district court;
- Lorena returning to work after the loss;
- A frustrated Lorena weighing her typewriter in the mail room at Southern Bell, and then refusing to use it when she notices that it's over 30 pounds;
- Lorena getting suspended;
- Lorena being contacted by N.O.W.;
- Lorena first meeting with Sylvia Roberts, her N.O.W.-appointed lawyer; Sylvia and Lorena arguing their case; winning their case; Lorena still not being put on the job despite winning...

I worked hard on my treatment and was feeling pretty good about it when I presented it in class and to Stuart. I must have argued pretty convincingly that the film's natural midpoint was when Lorena and Sylvia team up, because this structure was more or less "approved." At the time, it made perfect sense. How could I *not* show, in detail, the fact that this woman, on her own, sued her company Southern Bell. I also felt that it was very important that the audience not feel rushed as they got to know Lorena. I kept circling back to one of my favorite films of all time, *A League of their Own*, and how the audience gets to know the characters of Kit and Dottie in that movie. I thought that the

treatment I devised in Stuart's class (albeit hastily) was putting me in a good position to write a strong first draft.

Chapter 4: I Love *The Real World* But Sometime Stuff Gets Too Real?

I have always struggled with the concept of making things less “life like” and more “like a story” when it comes to my writing. Probably one of the most important things I learned from graduate school was the concept of story itself, especially a *film* story, and it’s something I’m still learning. It doesn’t come naturally to me. My long-winded point is that I often want things in my movies and writing to be *too* life-life—time and time again I find myself butting up against this habit of mine. The problem is real life is often boring and tedious. (Also, I have never been good at telling stories at parties or to tables of people because I include too many details and trail off into unimportant moments.) It’s not that I don’t think I can get better, because I think I have, but more that it takes me a long time to find the beginning, middle and ends of things, or to remember that the most important part of a film story is its climax. (Is it though...? Some of my favorite scenes in some of my all-time favorite movies are when nothing that important is happening, like in *Apollo 13* when the actress playing Lovell’s mother says he could land a washing machine if he had to, or the scene in *A League of their Own* where we’re first introduced to the character of Jimmy Dugan as he’s walking and talking with Garry Marshall. Tom Hanks is an American hero.)

This pattern of thinking—that in order for a story to be good, it must contain “the most truth”—is one that trips me up often, and not just in screenwriting, but in my non-fiction writing as well. I feel that in order to accurately portray something I must include *everything*—every detail that occurred, and I must show exactly how things unfolded, and not skip any events. Logically, I know this makes little sense. Stories are about emotion and arc, and movies are their own kind of visual beast. But it’s something that definitely tripped me up while writing this first draft and in wrapping my head around the feedback

I got from my committee. For example, if—in real life—Lorena actually *did* call the EEOC by herself and they came to Wadley and investigated, how could I leave that out? That's what I happened, right, and if I'm trying to write a movie about something that really happened and to honor that, how could it not be in the movie?

On a similar note, I also tend to forget how *little* happens in most movies. When I recall my favorite films, and the ones that moved me the most as a young movie-goer, they seem so big and epic to me. Sometimes, yes, it's because they are. Movies like *Goodfellas* or *Forrest Gump* do contain a lot of story events. But a lot of movies carry much weight and emotion without being bogged down with endless time jumps or complications, and the more you re-watch the more you see that there's actually *less* happening than you remember. Third acts, especially, are often quite contained in a way I am still only now discovering. I bring up all this now because as I explore in later chapters the notes I got from my thesis committee and how I approached taking them, this automatic way of viewing storytelling I have was definitely challenged. And I know it's something that I'll be working on for a long time.

In short, I now view my first draft as part of figuring out how to tell the story of what really happened. It was as if I had to write a version of the movie where the audience could see what Lorena Weeks *actually* went through (even the very boring parts) before I could even conceive of writing a movie that changed much of that.

Chapter 5: The Rest of Spring Semester (aka The First Draft)

As I explained earlier in Chapter 2, I had a late start to this movie after spending almost an entire month of Stuart's workshop thinking I was writing a time-travelling romantic comedy. This meant that I had to hit the ground running on my first draft once I switched ideas, so that I could keep up with everyone and finish a draft by the end of the semester.

This was a good thing. I came to UT's grad program having never taken a screenwriting course in undergrad (or anywhere) before, and the only movie I'd written was the one to get into the program. This meant that during my first year I didn't have much experience with how first drafts work, or what their purpose is. (I thought...well, I don't know what I thought, but I just figured you write a movie, and then it's done?) Now, like all *real* things in life, first drafts have turned out to be a bit of a contradiction to me. They usually stink, and as a writer you know you're usually going to change a lot of the script, or most of it. That being said, you're still *writing a full movie*, and that takes a lot of time and effort, and it can be pretty hard to keep yourself motivated if you think basically everything you're writing may never see the light of day. Alas, like my favorite children's book as a kid, *We're Going On A Bear Hunt*, tells us, there's really no getting around the mud/caves/woods, etc. You have to go through it! The first draft has to be written, and though you may get lucky and write a great one, often times you won't. But until you have a first draft to work off, it's incredibly hard to know your movie, your characters or anything about the world you're trying to create.

Stuart was a good professor to have for this first draft. He seemed to think I "had something" with my idea (slight encouragement from Stuart is sort of equal to massive encouragement from any other human on earth) but he was very much communicative

about the fact that this was a first draft, and I just had to keep going. Often in workshops people feel the need to talk for the sake of talking, and I am just as guilty of that as anyone. Stuart would often respond to the criticisms I was getting from my classmates with “Yes, that’s an easy fix for her in the second draft, let’s move on.” I’d say about half the time he said this, I’d be thinking to myself “but I don’t *want* to change that” and thinking he (and my classmates) had no idea what they were talking about, but I was also grateful that he kept the draft moving forward.

As I mentioned earlier, when Lorena was nine years old her father died in a sawmill accident. She was one of four siblings, and when her father died her already poor family became much poorer. And then, when she was eighteen, her beloved mother died. Lorena had two younger siblings who were still in middle school and high school, and she did not want her family getting split up or her siblings being forced to change schools on account of her mother’s death. She realized that in order to afford her own place she would have to work two jobs: a day shift and a night shift. She had already been working at Southern Bell for a few months before her mother died, and so Lorena asked to pick up a night shift instead. During the day she took a job at a local diner, and part of the reason she did that is because they gave her and her younger brother free meals. It was at this diner that she met Billy, her future husband.

In my first draft, I could see no way around *not* including this part of the story. Why wouldn’t I? It shows how impressive this woman was! I knew I wanted my first scene to be at the mechanic’s shop with Lorena and her mother. I thought it was very important for the audience to meet Lorena’s mother, and to see the sort of struggles she faced—not just because she was poor and a widow with four young children, but because she couldn’t get a fair shake even with the little money she had, due to living in a deeply sexist society. (Again, all things the real Lorena spoke about in interviews.) But after this scene showing

Lorena as a child, I felt I needed to show, on-screen, Lorena at eighteen, soon after her mother died and working these two jobs. I also felt that Billy was going to be an important part of the story. Lorena was always described by others, and described herself, as a family woman, and a woman who loved her husband very much. And I felt that Billy must have known a lot about her spirit when he married her—and the story of the movie is really about Lorena’s spirit. It all had to go on-screen! It had to!

So when I turned in my first fifteen pages to Stuart and the workshop, it contained these two significant time jumps: Lorena as a child, then Lorena as an eighteen-year-old meeting Billy, and then cutting to the present of the film—Lorena, a mother of three, at thirty-six years old. I got mixed feedback from my classmates. Some found the two time jumps jarring, whereas others liked the chemistry between Billy and Lorena as young adults and seeing how they first met. Stuart waved it all away with his hand saying something along the lines of “you’re getting to know your characters right now, so it’s all fine. But, yes, you’ll probably cut a lot of it. It doesn’t matter right now.”

Of course, he was right. Before we even get to the feedback I got from my thesis committee of Cindy and Beau, I was hearing from Stuart that much of my draft was about me getting to know these characters. It’s a cliché you hear about a lot—at least in screenwriting books, not, like, on the street—but it’s true. I had to know in my head how Lorena and Billy had met, and to know a lot about their relationship and its dynamic prior to her getting involved with the two lawsuits. So, the point is, all the writing I did about Lorena as an eighteen year-old was not for waste. (Or at least that’s what I’m telling myself now.) In conclusion, I knew more in writing this first draft than I did when I wrote the first draft of my movie last year—that it was just that: a draft. I felt a little lost in the weeds at times, or most of the time, but I also had a little bit more faith that even if I just got a couple

of good things out of this draft—a strong character, a cool sequence or two—it would be worth it.

Chapter 6: But Who's Actually in the Movie?

Another unique challenge that I came upon while writing the first draft (and that has definitely been echoed in the second) was figuring out *whom* to include as characters in the film. This is admittedly always a problem when one is writing a movie, but to return to something I wrote about in Chapter Four, I felt more pressure with this movie because it was based on a true story and thus there were certain people that the story *demand*ed be included. Lorena was obviously the movie's protagonist and rock star. (I mean, duh.) Her N.O.W. lawyer Sylvia Roberts was a key character (though in my first draft she had a different role than she does in this new draft.) Yet even in the first draft I had her appear in the First Act, so I must have known instinctively that she was *the* other major character, though I did not see the movie as a "buddy movie" quite yet. (Not sure if I still do.) The point is, there was no doubt that Sylvia *had* to be in the movie.

Billy, Lorena's husband, was another character that seemed like he needed to have a major role in the film. Not only because he was clearly shaping up to be the film's most major male role (I mean, you gotta have *some* roles for men) *and* because this was a movie about gender roles in both societies and in marriages, but because the real Lorena spoke about Billy so often in her interviews. In pursuing legal action against Southern Bell Lorena was impacting not just herself but her family. This was a built-in, clear narrative arc. How Billy, as a man in the South in the 1960s, would adjust to these events held a lot of dramatic potential.

So: Lorena, Sylvia and Billy. Those were my three most obvious main characters off-the-bat, and to that list I added two more: Lorena's mother, who I named Anne, and Marguerite Rawalt. As I said earlier, I believe pretty strongly that Lorena's mother is what inspired her to take the action she did against Southern Bell. That's not to say it was

something she did *consciously* to honor her mother, but rather that everything I read and heard about Lorena seemed to point toward the fact that her personality and view of the world was shaped primarily by her no-nonsense mother and what she had seen her mother suffer through. In my first draft, I saw the movie as a sort of love-story between them (if we're going with the whole "all movies are really love stories about two characters" thing) and I *still* sort of think that way. But it became clear, after that first draft was done, that the whole entire movie can't really be about an alive character and a dead one, especially if you're not writing *Ghost*. I needed something (and somebody) else to step into that role in the second draft and I think (and hope) my second draft is pointing me more in the right direction.

Which brings us to Marguerite Rawalt. Rawalt is a woman who very likely deserves her own movie. Unlike Lorena Weeks, Rawalt has had a book published about her and only her, and though certainly not a household name, Rawalt was a public figure on a much greater scale than Weeks ever was. I will not regurgitate her entire Wikipedia page here, but Rawalt was an impressive woman—a fixture in Washington, D.C.'s political and law circles and a life-long feminist. Raised in Texas, she started law school at a late age (thirty-five) at a time when *very* few women went to law school, got divorced and remarried without shame in an age when that was also unheard of, and became part of the Washington establishment, where she worked as a lawyer for the IRS for over thirty years. Rawalt worked to advance women's issues with many Presidents throughout her life, and was a founding and pivotal member of N.O.W. Fine, I'll say it: I have a total girl crush on Marguerite Rawalt.

As I read about Rawalt while I was writing my initial treatment in Stuart's class, I felt very strongly that she had to be in the movie. She was such a cool, bad-ass lady and she *was* Sylvia Roberts' mentor in real life. She also just *felt* like a movie character. (Stuart

initially thought I didn't need her in the movie, but I got him to come around.) And not to sound too feminist-y and crazy, but I feel like all the time there are male characters in movies that you could argue are just there "for color" and for the sheer cinematic joy they provide vs. perhaps their true necessity to the narrative. That being said, I think Rawalt *is* important to my narrative, but, no, I don't know if her role had or has to be as big as I've made it. Still—and I know my next draft has to hone on this even more—this is a movie about feminism. And Rawalt coming from a different generation than Sylvia and Lorena is important to that conversation. I also think having an older woman in the film is important, because you don't often have major characters in movies in their early seventies who aren't just playing "the old person."

So, as you can see, I went into this first draft with four characters I felt strongly about. The rest of the first draft felt like shooting fish in a barrel. (Correction: the opposite of that, I just looked it up.) I literally didn't know who to include.

I had and have a complex relationship with my mother, and find mother-daughter relationships pretty fascinating. I think most daughters try to distance themselves from their mothers at some point, no matter how cool or "normal" their moms are, and I wanted to explore one of Weeks' daughters in depth in the film, and how she reacted to her mother's legal battles and the issues of feminism and equal opportunity. So I created May. The real Weeks had said in an interview that her oldest daughter was a beauty queen and very popular, and because Lorena had *also* said that most people in town thought she was crazy for what she was doing and resented her, it didn't seem like a stretch to imagine that her teenage daughter would resent her, too, for her actions. I hate to remember how much fitting in meant to me in high school and it just felt natural to create friction with one of Lorena's children.

Another character who came naturally to me in the first draft and who I kept for my second was Lorena's co-worker Betty. This likely has nothing to do with Weeks or my research, and comes more from movies I loved as a child. Rosie O'Donnell was one of my favorite actresses growing up, and I loved her performances as, yes, "the friend", in *Sleepless in Seattle* and as Doris in *A League of their Own*. (Have I mentioned I like *A League of their Own*?) I also love Carrie Fisher's performance in *When Harry Met Sally* and the trope of "the friend" in general. This movie felt like it had the potential to be darker and more emotionally intense than other stuff I had written, and so I liked the prospect of a little comic relief for Lorena at work. I also like showing female friendship on-screen.

The rest of the first draft included a hodgepodge of characters, many of whom didn't make it to the second draft, such as Sylvia's father or May's boyfriend. (And, as you'll see, the second draft includes *a lot* of new characters.) Even as I was writing the first draft I had a sense that some of these characters were disposable, or that I wasn't quite sure what their narrative function was. But to return to Chapter 5 and my new outlook on first drafts, I tried to just let it go a little. As I reached the third act of my first draft and realized that I had totally lost track of certain characters, I knew that that would mean cutting later on, but to just keep going. I also knew that some notes I had taken down as I was writing (such as "Southern Bell lawyer—name??") were probably pointing to something—I needed an actual character to represent the Southern Bell legal team in my second draft.

The truth is, I am a weirdo who hates the idea of anything being "manufactured" but the more I learn how much effort goes into getting a good draft of a film out, the more I now know how important it is to not only know your characters well before you write them, but know their function for your protagonist's journey. It still feels a little hoaxy and forced to me, and I don't think initial brainstorming should be driven by this, but some lessons I learned from this particular first draft were: watch out for repetitive characters;

think more clearly about the need for an antagonist; and pay closer attention to supporting characters' arcs. I do not think my second draft is all the way there in terms of correcting these flaws from my first draft, but I do think strides were made.

Chapter 7: Research

This movie is the third movie I've written, after the one I wrote to get into UT, and then the comedy I wrote my first year under the instruction of Stuart and Beau. It's also the first movie I've ever written based on true events and the first time I've worked on something that required actual research—not just the “Oh this movie will be better if I know more about x,y,z” type of research, but the kind where I literally could not imagine, let alone write, certain scenes in the movie until I had done research on certain topics. In this chapter I will provide a brief overview of the type of research I did while prepping for and writing both drafts.

Even at the point where I was still just working on my treatment last February, I knew I needed more than just Gail Collins' book and a Wikipedia page on Lorena as the backbone of my research. (As of today, there has been no one book written about either just Lorena Weeks or her case.) As mentioned earlier, I was lucky enough to find on YouTube an interview with Lorena Weeks from 2010 (conducted by the University of Georgia), as well as an excerpt from the PBS documentary *Makers* that briefly covered her case. So my next step was to head to UT's main library on campus (the PCL) and to check out as many books as I could relating to the subject. Though I looked at many books over a few separate visits, I ultimately left with: *Be Somebody: An Autobiography of Marguerite Rawalt* by Judith Paterson; *Moving the Mountain* by Flora Davis and *Women in American Law: The Struggle Toward Equality from the New Deal to the Present* by Judith Baer. My research needs at that point had boiled down into the following categories: learning more about N.O.W. and the Feminist Movement of the 1960s; researching the legal aspects of the case (what is the difference between a case in district court vs. an appeal, for example); and learning more about how a phone company such as Southern Bell operated in the late

1960s. As the whole film turns around Lorena wanting this switchman position and then being denied, I definitely needed (and still need!) to research more about what the position actually entailed on a day-to-day basis; it was interesting to me how little information about this there was in both Collins' book and on the web, and reaching out to some UT Engineering professors wasn't fruitful. This lack of knowledge about Southern Bell and its day-to-day operations in the late '60s remains one of the biggest holes in my research to date, even after my second draft.

Initially, the legal aspects of the story jumped to the forefront as the pressing need for me to get more information on. In the first half of my first draft, I knew I was going to need to write scenes with Lorena talking to her initial Union-appointed lawyer and then showing his argument in district court, and I knew (and continue to know...) next to nothing about how American Law is practiced. Even basic things such as: *did Lorena argue before just a judge in her initial case, or was there a jury? Did this trial last one day or a month?* were unknown to me. I reached out to a family I babysit for and they put me in touch with a friend of theirs that is an appellate lawyer. This lawyer gave me some very helpful information about how appeals work at the federal level: that they are verbal arguments only and usually in front of a panel of three judges, and that no new evidence is introduced during an appeal. She also had some great insight into how to dramatize the appeal (which compared to district cases are sort of inherently non-dramatic, and certainly not what we expect from the "typical" court scenes in films, where audiences are trained to expect the pivotal witness or piece of evidence to be the showpiece of the scene.) This lawyer recommended I play up the tension in the ways that judges question lawyers from each side (essentially trying to trip them up mid-argument) and focus on how important verbal dexterity is in these cases. She also added that I should be aware of the intimidation factor that a building like the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans holds, where

Roberts argued this appeal. (The lawyer I was speaking to had been there, which was very cool!) She concluded by encouraging me to get my hands on the actual legal documents and judge's decisions in each case. Soon after, I made an appointment at the UT law library with a librarian there.

My visit to the UT library was not the amazing breeze I had hoped it to be! A bit lazily, perhaps, I had daydreamed I would walk in there and be able to easily get my hands on all the decisions each judge had made regarding the cases—and maybe even stumble upon some transcripts, while I was at it. However, the only documents the librarian could easily find for me was a judge's ruling on how much money Sylvia Roberts should have gotten after she'd won the appeal on Weeks' behalf—and yes this was a case I hadn't even been aware of! (The fact that there are cases even *after* a case is won about this sort of thing seems so exhausting to me!) The library had recently switched to a new system to view microfilm, and for over an hour the librarian and I tried to pull up paperwork related to the cases, but we could not find them. The librarian recommended I track down the original district court in Georgia Lorena filed her initial case at, and ask them for the original paperwork, while also letting me know that this could take awhile, and that she was unsure if that court had any obligation to provide me with it. I left the library feeling blessed I was not in law school.

Thankfully it was an assignment for an elective I was taking last spring (American Cultural History with Dr. Janet Davis) that made me re-look at something that had turned up much earlier in my initial Google search: the Lorena Weeks archives, which are housed at the University of Georgia, Athens. When I had originally scanned this archive page back at the beginning of the semester, I had thought to myself: "Well, I'm certainly not going to be traveling to Athens, Georgia to look at this stuff!" and it had slipped out of my mind. But, as I continued to write the script it became clear to me that the lack of information I

had about the actual legal arguments Sylvia Roberts was making (or why exactly Lorena had lost in District Court) was a huge hindrance to my story. I do not like writing in my notes for an entire scene: “Roberts makes amazing appeal, wins” and not having any idea other than that on where to start, nor do I think a reader wants to read that scene! Not to mention, it really *did* happen, so it’s not supposed to be made up! I wanted to accurately portray these parts of Lorena’s and Sylvia’s lives, or at least to know with certainty what happened before I “Hollywood”-ized them. It felt like one thing to dramatize the tension and stress Weeks must have felt at home and with her friends at church, but a non-lawyer completely fabricating the legal aspects of this woman’s journey was not going to fly.

It happened that when I reached the part of my first draft where Lorena and Sylvia team-up and head down to New Orleans for the appeal was right around the time I was beginning to pull together my presentation for my history elective course. (Which I might add was full of PhD students!) Frustrated by the lack of information I had regarding the impact N.O.W. had on Lorena’s case, and mindful that I was about to present to a room full of people and wanted to accurately portray that I had done my due diligence research-wise, I once again found myself returning to the University of Georgia’s archive page. This time when I scanned their holdings of Weeks’ papers I was overcome with the realization that I absolutely had to get my hands on this stuff! In reality, when I had looked earlier, I hadn’t even begun writing my first draft yet and the idea of reading actual letters Weeks had written to Roberts, for example, probably wasn’t so exciting to me as it felt now. I got in touch with the library, and at the cost of fifty-five dollars, they sent me copies of Weeks’ archive, which contain, among other things, Weeks original complaint to her Union, and letters between Roberts, Weeks and Rawalt regarding the case. Though the archive only lists each folder heading and not the exact contents, I am feeling hopeful that these primary documents are going to be very insightful.

Lastly, my research also included watching movies and documentaries (and even listening to music) that could help me both learn about the time period and place, and also about how similar cinematic stories about legal battles have been structured. (These films are included in the Appendix.)

Chapter 8: Thesis Meeting #1 and Initial Thoughts

I have to admit I was feeling pretty good about my first draft going into my thesis meeting in late May. I don't know if because our last semester caused everyone in workshop to sort of loosen up and be kinder, or if it was because we were all over-tired, but I thought things were on a good track. I wasn't quite sure *what* the feedback would be of course, but, structurally at least, I had gone into the meeting feeling like I'd done a pretty good job.

So it kind of stunk when I left the initial thesis meeting with my committee members feeling overwhelmed. That being said “feeling overwhelmed” is how I feel 90% of the time, and I did have a fractured shoulder and was in the middle of moving back to Boston, but still—it hadn't gone as well as I had hoped. It was not that they weren't enthusiastic about my idea or the film's potential, because they were, but their feedback was pretty broad in scope and seemed to imply I needed to make some *major* structural changes and character changes to my movie. I, of course, wrote down everything they said, and, per usual, thought to myself: “*No, no, I'll probably do none of these. These highly skilled professional writers who've sold numerous scripts, have agents and have written probably a combined fifty more movies than me total...they probably just don't get what I'm trying to do here.*” Self-delusion is a hell of a drug.

In all seriousness, I was taken aback by what Cindy and Beau's feedback seemed to imply, even if they weren't saying this outright. I had a good main character and topic, and an interesting time period and setting to deal with, but that was about the extent of what was worth “keeping.” The biggest disconnect that was tripping me up was that I felt that my first draft was a reflection of *what* really happened to Lorena Weeks—but what really happened to her didn't seem super important to them. In my warped Caroline brain

this frustrated me. Lorena Weeks really *had* sued Southern Bell on her own and didn't we as the audience need to see her apply for that job, and not get her application looked at? Didn't we need to see her, on her *own*, contact the EEOC, and be told by the EEOC she should sue but that she'd be on her own, and then see her make that tough decision? How was that not a *perfect* Act One break? Come on, it was! And how was teaming up with N.O.W. not a perfect midpoint? It represented a huge shift in the story and in my protagonist Lorena's life, and wasn't that what midpoints were born to do? And don't get me started on the Third Act! In reality, Lorena had won her appeal, but winning decisions at federal appeals are never delivered the day of to the members of each side. Appeals take months to be decided before judges release their written decision. But Cindy and Beau were not into how I'd depicted the reality of the fact that even *after* Weeks won, it took years for Southern Bell to install her in the role of switchman and give her her back pay. Subtext: my first draft felt like a documentary, and I was trying to write a movie, wasn't I? Had I ever seen *Argo*? Did I not know that movies "based on" true events were mostly not? (I did not.)

Below is a list of some of the feedback I got from that initial meeting:

- Sylvia and Lorena should not get along. They are getting along in the first draft *way* too easily. I should play up the differences between the white collar and blue collar world.
- The movie should really be about Lorena and Sylvia and their relationship—that's what the movie is about and right now them not meeting until the midpoint is not working. It's boring because we know they're going to work together so why wait that long to see them team up?

- I was plotting the movie like a mystery in the first draft but the movie is not a mystery. Or at least the trial is not the mystery. Make Lorena the mystery. Make Sylvia our way into Lorena.
- Open in a district court scene, or get to the appeal *much* faster.
- Cut around in time, maybe, like in *Slumdog Millionaire*?
- Make it feel like it takes place in the South more, the sense of place is not strong enough in the first draft. Same thing with the fact that this was a Baptist community. What does that mean to my story and to Lorena?
- Make it feel more like it takes place in the time period it does—the late 1960s. What was going on in terms of the Vietnam War or race relations? And what was the role of women like in that era? It's not coming through enough.
- Don't make everyone so polite. The low points aren't low enough. Amp up the drama and the conflict.
- The climax of the movie should be Lorena winning her appeal.

After the initial meeting, I told myself I needed to take some time before I even dived into the feedback to figure out what I would take and what I would leave. But somewhere in the back of my head, I actually thought I might not take a lot of the feedback. I didn't feel this in a confident way, or even feel good about feeling it, but I felt it, I'll be honest. I kept returning to my stubborn need to show some of the reality of what actually happened. Because Sylvia and Lorena *did* get along in real life. And they were both from the South, too. How could I change that? Was it okay to change something like that—to make two women who did get along not get along for the sake of entertainment?

Two weeks after that meeting, when I was back in Boston, I decided to get serious about my re-write. I re-opened the feedback notes after a nice break from the script, sat down at the library and got prepared to outline my new film. What followed was about two weeks of hell, not in the literal sense, of course, but in the screenwriting sense, so, I mean drinking a lot of smoothies and feeling bad for myself. I was incredibly frustrated. I kept trying to fight to keep the structure I had, and then I'd relent and say to myself "hmm, maybe they *were* right." I'd then switch to a new word document and try outlining with a totally new structure, this time creating a version of the movie where the Act 1 break was where Lorena and Sylvia met up and decided to work together on the appeal. In this "new" version, I was taking all their notes: Lorena and Sylvia would not get along; Sylvia would be not Southern and much more blue-blood; and the midpoint would be when Lorena finds out the appeal has been delayed and almost quits the case, but then finally she and Sylvia will have a break-through and bond.

The problem was this felt like mostly all Cindy and Beau's ideas, and not mine. I felt like I could (and I can) take notes well, but often I feel like I have no in-between. Beau taught us to think of taking "the note behind the note" but I tend to think: you either note or you don't. And that is no way to think. It's too black or white, and pretty immature of me. Was there some middle ground I wasn't seeing?

I started to see that Cindy and Beau were definitely right about the fact that my Act One break should be Sylvia and Lorena teaming up. What I didn't agree on was how the movie would start. I wanted to keep the opening scene with Lorena and her mom, but then what would I cut to? I didn't feel like I could then cut to a courtroom. And I felt this for many reasons. First of all, I find those movies extremely boring. *North Country*, a movie I studied for this film, did this technique and I was not a fan at all. I always knew that though this movie was about a real legal case it was more about this character of Lorena, and her

mother and her family and her life. It wasn't going to be *A Civil Action*. I also felt (and maybe this is why it didn't work for me in *North Country*) that when you cut to a character in a courtroom without knowing who they are, or why they're there, it feels a little manipulative. You could argue it probes the audience's curiosity, which is a key part of storytelling, but I just don't like it. Also, lawsuits are boring. But they become less boring if you care about the character and have *some* context of why they're there, I think.

I realized that in this second draft I wanted the audience to meet Lorena as she was: a wife and mother and a typist, who perhaps had tried to put some of the trauma of her childhood behind her. But if my new Act One break was Lorena deciding to allow NOW to represent her in her appeal *and* I wanted her to not be involved in any lawsuit when the film opened, I had a lot of ground to cover in thirty pages. I had to introduce the audience to Lorena and her extremely conservative world at work and church, show her not getting the switchman job, show her deciding to sue because of that, and then show her losing in district court. Just to make sure I wasn't being too rash, I toyed around with multiple outlines that opened with Lorena losing in district court, but I just couldn't go forward with them—I didn't want to watch that version of the movie and I didn't want to deal with flashbacks throughout the film like in *North Country*. (I fully realize as I type this that a third draft of this movie could likely include everything I just said I don't want to do.) So in this second draft, after keeping the original opening scene of Lorena as a child, I decided to then open with Lorena realizing her application for switchman wasn't looked at and trying to pretend she's fine with it. But, after seeing the EEOC poster in her breakroom (a thing that really happened and a moment I always liked—a small moment that turned out to be life changing), Lorena goes to her Union head—although this time it's at work, and I now moved that moment up from around page thirty to page eleven. I then do a time jump from her argument with Caleb (a new character that was not in the first draft) to Caleb

testifying in District Court. I also took the note from my committee that we needed to get to Lorena losing that case pretty quickly, and that her relationship with that initial lawyer, Donald, was not nearly as important to the narrative as it had been in my first draft. So though in my first draft Lorena deciding to sue initially was a big deal, in this new draft her initial case isn't as much of a big deal at all. Taking the note, I tried to paint it as more of a lark, something that hadn't caused too much disturbance among the town or in her office, and it is only when Lorena decides to not give up, and to fight back with N.O.W., that she really begins to make a sacrifice and the story takes off.

Chapter 9: Mid-June and The Shawshank Redemption

This summer, on the weekend of June 18th, I went to my good friend Mary Adair's parents' house. (Her first name is Mary Adair, like Mary Kate. Her full name is Mary Adair McGrath.) The McGraths are probably one of the coolest families I know. It's hard to describe them. They are like part Wes Anderson movie, part Ann Beattie novel, part Ramona Quimby, part the feeling you have reading a book in a hammock at 4p.m. on a perfect summer day, add lots of delicious food, usually too much wine and place it all in a gigantic old wooden house that is equal parts stunning, dusty, love-filled and creepy. Mary Adair is probably my closest friend with married parents. I'm not sure what this means, but it seems worth including. I really enjoy being with her family and sort of want them to adopt me. They are inclusive, unassuming and just as weird as anyone else.

Anyway, her parents are both lawyers, but the good kind and her house is filled with books. More books than any house I've ever been. They have an actual library in their home—well it's just a room, but it's dedicated to having books in it, and not just, like, on the walls in silly shelves, but there are books on shelves and carts in the middle of the room, and books standing in stacks everywhere. And there are also a ton of books in every *other* room in the house beside the library, too. Have I mentioned there's a lot of books in her house?

So anyway, on the Saturday I was there I discovered a copy of *The Shawshank Redemption* script in one of these random rooms in their house that wasn't a library. It was the Newmarket "Shooting Script" version. I have a couple of these and they're great. But this copy was extra special because it included not only two great introductions to the script by Stephen King and Frank Darabont, but the shooting script had not been edited *at all*. It was literally the script they shot, which is not the case for many of these scripts you can

buy, even the ones who say they are “the shooting scripts.” And then, in the back of the book, there’s an entire section where Darabont goes through every single scene in the script and talks about why (or why not) it was cut or changed from what we now see in the final version of the film. I found it deeply fascinating, and encouraging. So often, you read finished screenplays (or watch movies) having no idea how the author possibly got to that version they got to. And here was a shooting script, probably a tenth draft or what not, and still *so* much was cut or changed after it was shot.

Like most Americans I had seen *The Shawshank Redemption* before and remembered loving it. But as I read that book over the long and lazy weekend, I realized I hadn’t sat down and watched the movie from end to end in a long time. It’s always on TV, but I’d forgotten about the emotional power of the film. And also, I was curious. Why is *it* such an enduring and important movie to so many people? So that Monday, after the weekend away at Mary Adair’s, I rented it on Apple itunes and watched it. (After it was over, I realized it was on Netflix and felt very stupid for paying the \$3.99 to rent it—fine, I charged it to my boyfriend’s account— but that’s another story. Always check Netflix people.)

So, yeah, it’s a pretty great movie. And it’s a movie about friendship. Watching it reminded me to not be afraid to try to make my movie emotional, and to *really* take seriously Cindy and Beau’s note to focus the movie on Lorena and Sylvia and what they mean to each other. It also reminded me that movies are visual (duh) but that I needed to think more about that and making more memorable scenes, and more memorable characters that were there for a reason. And I needed an antagonist, like the Warden. I needed to create more emotional ups and downs throughout the film, too, just like how in *Shawshank* moments of extreme darkness (like Andy’s prison rape experiences) are contrasted with

beautiful moments, like when Andy defies orders, locks up the guard and plays the opera record for the whole prison to hear.

Discovering that script at the McGraths' house and then re-watching the film so soon after gave me the boost I needed to admit I basically had to start over with my script. (The Cleveland Cavaliers NBA Finals win was also sort of helpful.) And if I was going to make the movie about Lorena and Sylvia I needed to think of Sylvia in a whole new way. Reading and watching Shawshank reminded me to think of why I love movies in the first place. Characters and emotions and memorable scenes. I needed a lot more of those in my new draft.

Chapter 10: Now What?

I feel excited about this new draft of the script, though with a grain of salt. I felt excited about the last one. And I still have major research holes. I cannot for the life of me figure out how phone companies worked in the late 1960s or what exactly Lorena was trying to do as a switchman, and that obviously has to change with my next draft. That's my number one priority right now. I also feel like I need to figure out how to show what they're doing as switchman in an early scene in the film so that audience doesn't feel left out of this struggle.

I also think I've come far in setting up the world, too, compared to the last draft, but not far enough. I tend to always be worried about not being subtle, but I know that can go too far in the opposite direction. But I return again to a movie like *A League Of Their Own*. That movie took place during World War II a time of grave concern, where so many people were fighting and dying, but the movie doesn't feel—at least at first—overly in your face about this fact. Yet, both as a child and now, I was so very emotionally impacted by the scene in the locker room where Betty discovers her husband George has been killed in action, and by the relief our protagonist Dottie feels at knowing it's not her husband. I guess my point is even when things feel bad and dark people are still people. And when I ask my mom what she remembers from being a teenager during the Vietnam War, her recollections aren't as tied to the news as sometimes I feel movies make people's lives out to be. People are usually stressed out about their families, their children, their jobs, their day-to-day. Even as I write this I feel terrified that Donald Trump could be President or that a truck driven by a terrorist could mow me down when I'm in London next month, but I also simultaneously am worried about where I'm going to get pizza tonight, and if I need to get an eyebrow wax before the wedding I have to go to this weekend and why it is that

my mother sends me such long text messages. So, moving forward, I think I need to dive deeper into the issues of feminism and race relations and the Vietnam War but I don't want the movie to get too bogged down by that either, if this makes sense.

In conclusion, I so am very grateful for both my time at UT and for having Cindy and Beau on my committee, and for the insightful and extremely important notes they gave me at our thesis meeting in late May. I am learning, slowly but surely, how arduous the process of screenwriting is, but how fun it is to make big leaps with each draft. I'm learning that I need to get better at thinking more cinematically before I begin first drafts, and to not be so defensive when taking notes. It's a life-long process, becoming a screenwriter, but I like to think I'm headed in the right direction.

Appendix A: Movies Watched for Research

- Coal Miner's Daughter
- Steel Magnolias
- The People vs. Larry Flynt
- Erin Brockovich
- Norma Rae
- Places of the Heart
- The Shawshank Redemption
- The Sixties (documentary)

Appendix B: Original Treatment (created for workshop on 2/22/16)

Act One

All this opening stuff is TBD, not 100% sure how I'm going to handle young Lorena, but I definitely want to establish when her dad died and the type of woman her mother Ann was.

We open on Lorena at age nine, it's winter. She's alone with her mother ANN who's in a black dress, helping Lorena with hers. They are going to Lorena's father's funeral; he died in a sawmill accident. Ann tells Lorena they are going to be fine. She needs Lorena to help her take care of the baby (revealing her 10 month old brother on the floor), and Ann will take care of Lorena and her other siblings, and their Dad will watch them in heaven, and God will watch their Dad. For Lorena, there are a lot of steps. Ann tells her daughter not to worry about all the people crying. It's gonna be okay.

Summer now. Lorena is waiting in the car at a mechanic's with her siblings (4 kids total including Lorena), baby brother in her lap. They are watching Ann scream at a mechanic who she's just caught trying to make her pay extra to get the car fixed. The men laugh at her for getting so riled up ("I feel bad for your husband." "Yeah, I do too!") Ann gets back in the car, cursing under her breath. She's not going to be able to afford their damn car anymore. Ann briefly perks up when she tells Lorena that men are stupid—not all men, not her daddy—but a lot of them are, and she'd rather lose her car than pay more than she has too. Lorena asks her mom if the new job she just got (helping out at a store on Saturdays) will help. Ann smiles at her daughter.

Cut to Lorena, now 18, interviewing for a night position at the Southern Bell company. Why does she want the night position? Because she needs to be home during the day. Got kids? Not exactly. She has a nine year old brother and a 15 year old sister. Her mom just died last week; brain hemorrhage. The interviewer gives her sympathies. Lorena has the job.

Lorena waitresses for a few hours in the early evening before heading to her overnight shift so her 9 year brother can get a good home cooked meal. Quick scenes of her on buses; the crazy routine of her life.

At the diner WILLIAM WEEKS, electrician, (yep, same last name) catches her eye. She doesn't have time for him. He keeps calling. And calling. William to Lorena "I've never met anyone like you." There is a serious spark.

Now seventeen years have passed. (Super on-screen will tell us.) Lorena gets up in the morning, Will in the bed. They're clearly married. At breakfast are their three teenage children, MAY (16), GARY (14) and NANCY (13)...May will be the most pivotal to our story. Lorena heads into work, on a bus still, still at the same company, Southern Bell. We see her arrive at work, lift a typewriter from the floor and up onto the desk. She is a clerk. She begins to type.

Paychecks are handed out. Lorena looks at hers on the bus. Shakes her head.

That night after their kids are asleep Lorena and Will discuss their finances. They want all of their kids to be able to go to college, something neither of them did. The Weeks' own their small plot of land but their house is a piece of shit. They want to build a better house, Will especially. Lorena says they can't. And probably never will be able to; she just doesn't make enough money.

Lorena sees a job opening at work soon after for a switchman's position. Talks to a co-worker about it: it's more money (almost twice as much), company policy is for more seniority, and she's subbed in before for the current switchman during emergencies. The new job would also shorten her commute. She applies. She is confident, and she's feeling pretty good.

She tells Will about her application at dinner. He doesn't ask too many questions. But he likes the idea of more money.

Lorena hears some buzz at the office. She is told she is not getting the job (INCITING INCIDENT); a co-worker named JERRY is. Lorena is pretty tall and strong, Jerry is only an inch or so taller. When she goes to speak to figure out why she hasn't got the job, her boss GEORGE says women can't have the switchman's job. Lorena says why not. The boss doesn't elaborate much further, says he likes her, but it's just not a woman's job. Some men are laughing at her.

Lorena then decides she'll go to the Union that she is part of (willingly). Another man DONALD (head of union) is more rude than George. He's like "you don't need that job, you're not the breadwinner. We give those jobs to the breadwinners." Lorena's like "I pay my union dues Donald, hear me out. Also what if I was the breadwinner." Sorry, Lorena.

Lorena stares up at the ceiling at night as Will sleeps.

Next day during a coffee break Lorena finds herself staring at the EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) poster up on the wall. Walks up to it and reads it closely. Sees something about "write to FDR, JR" (head of commission). Lorena's like FDR, jr? huh?

We see Lorena at home working on her letter. Will catches her. What are you doing, Butch? (True fact: Will's nickname for his wife was Butch. It's unclear to me at what point he gave her this nickname: pre or post lawsuit: can't tell which version I like better. Also "true fact" is a new saying I made up.) What *is* she doing? She doesn't know. Will seems apprehensive, not in a dick-ish way, he's just confused. She was told she can't have the job. The *union* said she can't, and to give up. Now she's writing to Washington, D.C.? May walks in on the argument. Is told nothing is going on.

Lorena receives a letter in the mail from the EEOC! She is so excited. They are interested in her complaint and are going to send a man named KEITH MCDONALD to investigate.

McDonald comes, pokes around, says he says no reason that a woman can't do the job. Telephone company still refuses, who is this D.C. chump?

As he's leaving in the parking lot McDonald tells Weeks that the only option she has at this point is to go to trial, and to be honest, she probably won't win. They gave it the 'ol college try, but no one cares about "women's issues." To be honest, the EEOC didn't even want to send him. Most of the people think the EEOC isn't really about women, it's about race. Lorena asks him, well what if I don't want to give up? "If I have to go all the way to chief justice Warren and sit on his doorstep, I'll do it." Well, talk to your union then; they have to provide you with a lawyer. Good luck, Mrs. Weeks.

Act Two

REEL 3: Lorena sues Southern Bell and loses

Lorena goes back to Donald (union head); says she wants to sue Southern Bell. The Union needs to provide her with a lawyer. Donald slurps from his coffee and smirks at her.

Lorena meets with her Union Lawyer ROBERT DUNHAM. Um, THIS is her lawyer; he's disheveled, has very little clue about what a switchman is, not to mention the 14th Amendment. He has no passion for Lorena's case, he's just showing up to work. Mostly he keeps asking her if she's sure she wants to do this. She may lose her job if they lose. Not to mention what people will think in general.

At home Will says he said someone saw her out with another man in the middle of the day. She explains what is going on. She's going to sue Southern Bell. Will is upset. Who cares about a better job, she could lose the job she has now!

Dunham tells Lorena they are going to need Bell workers to testify about how the switchman job works to bolster their case. (Actually Lorena gets this info out of him; he's not being very helpful.) Lorena gauges that she'll need co-workers to testify but she doesn't want any of them getting in trouble at work, so they'll subpoena them.

Lorena hand delivers the subpoena to her male co-workers at lunch. Tense scene. But many of the men like and respect Lorena and promise to tell the truth. Jerry (the guy who got the job) is not as nice. She tries to make it clear she's not trying to steal his job, fair is fair. Jerry just stares at her.

Lorena in church with her family. The preacher is saying stuff about women's roles in the bible and women knowing their places. Lorena stares ahead.

A SERIES OF SCENES IN COURT. NOT SURE HOW MANY SCENES/HOW MANY DAYS THIS WILL COVER.

In court, the Bell company presents photo of the position that seem to be doctored. Lorena is trying to tell her lawyer that what they're showing isn't how it works but Robert is like "I don't know, I don't work there." As tension rises the Southern Bell lawyers finally bring up the Georgia Law that women shouldn't lift over 30 pounds at work. Lots of repetition of this 30 pound thing. The Judge agrees. Lorena loses the case. (Not to mention no one from her family is there.)

In the parking lot the Union lawyer is like "sorry, you lost. Hope you don't lose your job."

At home Lorena is crying. Will comes in. He understand she's upset, but it's too much. The kids are upset, people have been talking. It's all finally over. Can't she just let it be over? She says she can. It's over.

REEL 4: Lorena gets suspended; losing support at work.

Back at work the next day, there are definitely snickers and whispers as Lorena walks to her seat.

Lorena stares at the typewriter on the floor for good long time. Asks her coworker/friend LOUANNE "there's a scale down in receiving right?" There is. We watch Lorena pick her typewriter up and start marching.

Lorena puts the typewriter on the scale. A few MEN are looking at her. She looks down. 34 pounds. Has one of them come over. Does that say 34 pounds? It does.

Different day. Lorena at her desk, working, writing with a pencil. Typewriter not seen. Her boss George and another man approach, say they've just realized that all her reports, which should be typed, have been handwritten. This is a problem. Does she know what's going on? Lorena says yes actually, there is a problem. She points to the typewriter. She can't lift it. See, it's over 30 pounds. That's against the law. Actually all the women in the office who've lifted their typewriters onto their desks that morning are breaking it. Workers are staring at her; some of the women seem interested. Boss is like "come with me"

Lorena waiting for the bus, looking a little crazy.

Will comes home, finds her shooting at birds in the backyard. What is going on? She tells him she got suspended (with pay)*. How can this be happening. They start to argue. The kids come outside. Will says "everything is fine." But May won't go back inside. She is being rude about Lorena; Lorena is rude back. May finally goes inside. Lorena starts to cry more. Will is like "I've never seen you like this. I thought you said this craziness was over!" Lorena goes on a little rant, it's not fair! Will's like, who said life is fair for people like us? Lorena is like you. don't. understand. Will's like, yep, I guess I don't.

Back at church. Preacher saying same stuff, definitely looking at Lorena. She gets so flustered she gets up in the middle of it. Waits outside in the parking lot.

After church in the parking lot PREACHER and his WIFE approach. Preacher mentions he heard about the case, thinks the right thing happened. Gives Lorena a pointed look. His wife stares at Lorena, expressionless.

Lorena at home, doing laundry, repairing things around the house, looking like a bad-ass. A sad one. We see her praying a little bit. (Maybe it's a little bit of a different season to show some time has passed.) Neighbor comes by. Knows she's on suspended leave. "You better go back before they just fire you." Thanks Laurie, bye.

Cut away to a bad-ass looking 72 year old woman MARGUERITE RAWALT reading *The Washington Post*, there's an article about Week's case, how she lost. Marguerite stares at it, picks up phone. "Hi, Betty, I think I've found something."

Lorena at home again. Maybe trying to read something? Seems at wit's end. Maybe about to pour a drink in the middle of the day PHONE RINGS

Cut to Marguerite, different outfit (it's a different day), on the phone. (Potentially in a hotel room with other N.O.W. founders like Betty Friedan, Shirley Chisholm.)

MIDPOINT "Hi is this Lorena Weeks?" This is Marguerite Rawalt. Marguerite is calling on behalf of N.O.W. in D.C. Does Lorena know what N.O.W. is? She does not. Lorena feels like it's a crank call. NOW wants to assign a lawyer to your case. Lorena is like "I don't have any money for a lawyer." Marguerite is like "we'll pay for it all." Marguerite (a lawyer) says she thinks they can really win on appeal. Can Lorena commit to the long haul though? She needs to be sure. Lorena is silent. Marguerite says "I know you have a family and I have a husband, too-well had, he just passed. If you need to talk to him, talk to him. You can call me back later?" Lorena pretends to pause to go talk to Will, "he is enthusiastic" Marguerite says great. They're going to put a woman named Sylvia Roberts on the case. She's a lawyer from Baton Rouge. She and I are going to head to Wadley soon to meet with you." Lorena hangs up. Dances around the living room.

Will comes home: "Anything happen today?" "Nope."

REEL 5:

Lorena and SYLVIA ROBERTS meet for the first time, in secret. They are almost exactly the same age, but are very different women. Sylvia is very petite, the daughter of a professor, studied comparative law in Paris, wears lipstick and cute scarves. Meeting starts out awkward. Lorena just can't relax around this woman. Meeting ends poorly. Lorena feels like she made a bad decision to think this could happen. She says thank you and bye to Sylvia.*

Marguerite shows up at Lorena's house. Will is like, "who's this?" Lorena makes up some story about her being a church lady or something. Will makes some comment that in her sharp suit Marguerite doesn't look like a church lady.

Also nice wheels. Well, Marguerite needs Lorena to come with her. May is watching all this.

Marguerite is like “you told me you were committed.” They get in the car. Sylvia is the back seat! Lorena is like “where are we going?”

The three women talk at a motel. Marguerite tells bad-ass stories about Eleanor Roosevelt, etc. Lorena realizes she is part of something big, and that these women are her allies.

Now it’s just Lorena and Sylvia, at Lorena’s house (M left town for another cool feminist thing; she *is* the head legal counsel for NOW after all.) Talking about the case. Lorena goes through what happened with the Union lawyer. Tells the typewriter story. Sylvia is like “That’s good. That’s really good.” Sylvia has Lorena pick some things up in the house to demonstrate. Lorena’s looking at Sylvia. Sylvia’s like “what?” Lorena is like “well you should pick up the 30 pound things. You’re a tiny lady. It looks even better than when I do.” Lorena walks over and lifts the TV (or whatever.) She’s like, “you should have been a lawyer.” Car door slams. It’s Will, home early from work! SHOOT.v

Comes in. Who’s this? Sees all the legal papers everywhere. A lawyer? What in the hell is N.O.W? Sylvia is trying to explain diplomatically. Will is being a bit rude; who are these uppity lawyers coming into our house, ruining everything? Lorena steps in. Don’t speak to her that way. It was *my* decision. I want to do this and I’m doing this, and we’re going to win! Lorena excuses herself and leaves. Will is like “I don’t understand why you are doing this. There are going to be reporters, more people at Church are going to turn: they’re already wondering why you’ve stopped coming. He storms out of the house. I’m don’t want to be known as Lorena Week’s husband anymore!

Some sort of initial Court scene with Lorena and Sylvia. Bell has hired new FANCY SCARY LAWYERS from NYC. Sylvia isn’t intimidated.

Press outside the court.

May is moody at breakfast; Lorena has been in the paper and she’s resentful. I don’t want you coming to the mother-daughter dance with me. Will actually stands up for his wife, which kind of shocks Lorena. May storms out to go to school. Lorena and Will alone in kitchen before he goes to work. She tries to connect with him. He’s just tired, he goes to work.

Some sort of run-in with the mean Union boss guy in town? Something that intimidates Lorena. He’s like, “where do you think you’re gonna go once you lost this case?” Also maybe the Preacher is there too. It’s sort of the worst run in Lorena could have with assholes and she’s having it. She feels like SHIT.

Reel 6:

Day of mother-daughter dance (or whatever the event is.) Maybe Lorena shows up at the high school. May is with her boyfriend. Mouthing off and being the worst. Lorena has had. She rips into May, gives some bad-ass speech about

May's grandfather and how if he had any final thoughts before A SAWMILL ATE HIM ALIVE it was probably that his kids would be okay because his wife was a badass-and you know what, they were BARELY okay. And what the hell does May think would happen if something ever happened to *her* father? May is all mad and stuff but as Lorena marches away you can see that she is deeply affected.

Maybe Lorena calls Sylvia on the phone. Something to show their friendship from afar.

Lorena is at home alone. Jerry shows up (guy who got the job she didn't as switchman.) Lorena is scared at first but he tells her he just came by because he thinks she should win-he knows she can do it-and there's room for both of them. He says everyone knows how long she's worked for Bell and what a hard worker she is. It's strange that they're even having this conversation isn't it. It is. He leaves.

BIG IMPORTANT SCENE before judge when Sylvia is awesome and lifts stuff and does great; we feel like "they're gonna win."

SOME OTHER SCENE.

Morning of judge's announcement. Will is out of the house fast, work thing. Lorena tries to not act that hurt. She's still in a bit of stand-off with May.

The judge get ready to read his verdict. We see that Will is in the courthouse listening. The original decision has been overturned! Marguerite is also there for the verdict, Sylvia and her and Lorena celebrate. The language used is badass and this will be precedent setting. Will smiles, he is happy for her, but still he slips away unnoticed from the press.

Sylvia and Marguerite and Lorena have a celebratory lunch but then have to get going. As they leave Lorena is like "so it's all over? I just go to work now?" Sylvia is like "well, yes show up tomorrow. It might take a little bit, but they'll get it sorted out. You call me if there's any problems. They exchange hugs and then Lorena is left alone. It's a weird moment. Like she should be happier.

ACT THREE

Lorena gets ready for work in the morning. Will brings her coffee.

Lorena goes into work. People DEFINITELY staring. Told to sit in the lobby. She does. She waits and waits and waits. She waits all day.

Lorena returns home. Is asked how work was. Can see on everyone's faces that they're burnt out. She lies, it's good.

Another day more waiting.

Another day, more waiting. Finally she complains. Some new GUY appears. Right this way.

Taken to a desk. Given busy work.

Doing the busy work.

Has the nerve to ask someone what is going on. She won her case for christ sake. He says it's out of his jurisdiction. He's put in a phone call to someone and she just has to wait. "What about the back-pay and the Switchman's job?" These things take awhile, red tape. But just keep doing this busy work, she wouldn't want to be reported for bad behavior would she? UH WTF.

Another day, same shit.

At home Lorena is quiet. Sitting, drinking. May comes up to her. They have a moment where Meg apologizes. In a teen way.

That night in bed, Will asks her what's wrong. He thought she'd be happy now. She spills the beans. She says she feels at her wits end. It's almost worse than when her mom died, it's like nothing makes any sense. She thought it was over, that they won but it doesn't matter, she wasted all that time for nothing. Will tells her he was there in the courtroom. This makes her happy. They have sex, for the first time since Lorena became a feminist! JK JK. Afterwards, Will is like what does Sylvia say? She says she said to be patient but that was months ago and she hasn't returned the last couple calls. She's busy, new cases. Will is like, "well, make her know you need her attention again." He passes out.

Lorena can't sleep. Gets up, takes Will's car, starts driving. She's going to Baton Rouge!

Drives through the night.

Gets there in the late morning, cracked out but hey this woman worked a night shift. Startles Sylvia in her office. "I don't want to win, I don't want be in the newspaper. I just want to work. I want my husband, who works hard, to live in a nicer house, and I want my shit-brained ungrateful children to go to college. I'm worn down."

Let's go.

Sylvia drives back as Lorena sleeps.

That night Sylvia sleeps over the Week's house. Whole family has dinner together. May asks Sylvia lots of questions about college and law school and Paris.

Next day they go to the judge in Macon. He writes whatever kind of order makes it that effective immediately Lorena will get \$31K in backpay and that job. Like she's getting it tomorrow.

CLIMAX: Sylvia goes into work with her powerful piece of paper. She is issued her check and shown to her new job.

Reel 8: Happy Reel 8 things. Lorena flips off the mechanic who screwed her mom over. They build their house.

Appendix C: Photos of the real-life Weeks, Roberts and Rawalt



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