LOGLINE

The Screenwriter's eZine

In this issue:

Letter From the Editor

It's hard to believe that we'll soon be announcing the 2018 PAGE Awards Finalists – the big reveal comes on September 15th. Securing a spot in the Finals is an accomplishment that brings serious industry recognition, and the fortunate writers who win this year's awards may well find themselves catapulted to a whole new level in their careers. Here's wishing each and every one of our Semi-Finalists the very best of luck!

Win, lose or draw, the **LOGLINE** eZine is here to educate and inspire you. We share your hope that by honing your craft you'll write a better script tomorrow than you were capable of writing today. Each article found within these pages has something to offer the savvy screenwriter.

We begin with 2017 Silver Prize winner Joanne Lee explaining how to capitalize on a freelance opportunity in television. PAGE Judge Nick Oleksiw enlightens us on the primacy of premise in Hollywood. Script consultant Ray Morton lists the four elements that differentiate a screenplay from other forms of storytelling. Dr. Format, Dave Trottier, discusses the degree of directing on the page that is acceptable in a spec. Career coach Lee Jessup shares the insights of experts on what great characters have in common. As always, our friends from InkTip wrap things up with three "hot leads" for screen scribes. Hope you enjoy!

Happy reading,

John Evans

Latest News From the PAGE Awards

◆ The 2005 PAGE Gold Prize-winning action movie **Silencer**, by Sean Mick, is being released by Status Media and Cinedigm this month. Directed by Timothy Woodward Jr., **Silencer** is the story of a retired hitman who must reawaken his deadly skills to fight a one-man war against his former employer. The movie stars Johnny Messner, Danny Trejo, Tito Ortiz and Chuck Liddell.

◆ The baseball story **High & Outside**, by 2014 PAGE Bronze Prize winner Dan O'Dair, opens at the Chicago Film Center on September 7. Directed by Evald Johnson with Phil Donlon, Ernie Hudson and Geoffrey Lewis in the starring roles, the film tracks the journey of a minor league baseball player who refuses to believe that his career is over and takes desperate measures to keep his dream alive. The movie previously screened to rave reviews at the Raindance Film Festival, the Austin Film Festival and Cinequest.

◆ The romance **Running for Grace**, by 2006 Silver Prize winner Christian Parkes, premiered in theaters and was released on VOD on August 17. Set against the backdrop of the segregated coffee fields of 1920's Hawaii, this coming-of-age tale is the story of a young man who transcends the boundaries of race and class in pursuit of a forbidden love. The movie was directed by David L. Cunningham and the cast includes Matt Dillon, Jim Caviezel, Juliet Mills, Ryan Potter and Olivia Ritchie. Christian is represented by PAGE Judge Jeff Belkin at Zero Gravity Management.

◆ **The Orphan Dialogues**, by 2016 PAGE Gold Prize winner Andy Byrne, has been selected as part of a five-picture deal between Catapult Entertainment Group and Needle's Eye Productions. **The Orphan Dialogues** is the story of a psychologist whose personal struggles are compounded by the extraordinary abilities his clients possess, and the unique issues they face. As their sessions progress, he begins to discover that the deeper secret connecting them all could change the world as we know it. The movie will be directed by Kevin and Michael Goetz. Andy is represented by Catapult.

PAGE Awards Finalists Announced September 15, 2018

Congrats! You Landed a Freelance TV Episode. Now What?

by Joanne Lee

In early November, a friend texted me: "My friend who's a writers' assistant on the Disney show *Andi Mack* says they are looking for a person of color to write a freelance episode. It's a children's show, so send me your most PG sample." Honestly, besides the diversity part, I didn't think I was a good fit; most of my pilots contain the "c" word. But I had just finished adapting a novel about three generations of Cambodian women in one family, *The Immigrant Princess*, into a half-hour dramedy pilot on spec, and the story had similar themes to *Andi Mack*. So I forwarded my sample and logline and forgot all about it, never expecting to hear back.

Ten days later, I found out that the showrunner wanted me to write the freelance episode. I was shocked.

The longer you're in Hollywood, the more you will see that a lot of the industry works this way. People like to have some connection to the people they hire. So meet as many people as you can and leave the best impression you can. You never know when somebody is going to refer you for an amazing opportunity.

Here's how the freelance writing process worked…

A few weeks after I got the assignment, I went into the writers' room and met the showrunner and other writers. I have to tell you, nothing beats being in a writers' room as an actual writer. Nothing. It's the best feeling in the world. The showrunner took me through all the story beats of my episode (which were already written on the board in preparation for my arrival), so that I could go off and write the outline. I asked a few non-obvious character and plot questions (e.g., "How does this character feel about what's happening in this scene?") and kept it short and sweet.

A few days later, once my outline was ready, I sent it to the writers' assistant, who read it quickly and gave me notes based on his deep knowledge of the show. For example, I used a certain word (not the "c" word, of course) and he told me that the showrunner doesn't like that word; it's just her personal preference. So I made sure to change it. Not every person in his position would have been so generous and helpful, and I am forever indebted to him for helping make the process so easy and smooth.

I incorporated his notes, re-read my outline for typos, and then emailed it to the showrunner. Once I hit "Send," I took a deep breath. I had made my deadline, and I just prayed that my outline wasn't total garbage.

The showrunner emailed me three days later with a revised outline, complimented me on my work, and told me I was a hit in the room. She explained the changes she had made and told me to go to draft. I re-watched episodes of the show and wrote the draft over the holidays, while I was traveling. After obsessing a **lot**, I emailed it to the showrunner. A few days later, she sent me the kindest email thanking me for all my hard work and telling me that my draft had actually exceeded her expectations.

About two weeks later I went into the writers' room to watch the table read, listen to the network's post-table-read notes, and be there for the rewrite. Seven months after that, I watched the produced episode of the show on TV with my two dogs. (They were not impressed and fell asleep a few minutes into the episode.)

Here are the most valuable lessons I took away from this phenomenal experience:

Make your deadlines. No exceptions. You are a professional writer; act like it. Treat this as an interview for a regular spot in the room. If you do a great enough job, the showrunner can consider you if and when there is an opening, especially since they already know what you're capable of.

Be open and helpful and generous to everyone. You never know where a great opportunity will come from. Thank everybody who helped you get the opportunity and everybody who helped you throughout the process – especially the writers' assistant and script coordinator. They are invaluable to the process and may be running their own shows one day. After the table read and rewrite, I emailed the whole writers' room to thank them for the opportunity and told them what a pleasure it was meeting and working with all of them. I gave special shout-outs to the writers' assistant and script coordinator for going above and beyond. I also took my friend who referred me and the writers' assistant out to a fancy dinner afterwards.

Keep in touch. I was lucky enough to meet professional writers working on a successful show, and I kept in touch with one who offered to help. We now email regularly and meet for dinner every few months.

Be prepared for your episode to be significantly rewritten by the showrunner and/or writing staff. You are not in the writers' room with them every day, and you have no idea what character or story changes have happened since you wrote your draft, or what the network has asked them to change. It is not personal. It happens to most writers, "baby" and "senior" alike. And even though the final episode I watched had changed a lot since I wrote my draft, nothing beats seeing your name up on the screen after the words "Written by." It's truly a dream come true, tangible proof of all your hard work, and the best encouragement to keep going on this crazy writing journey.
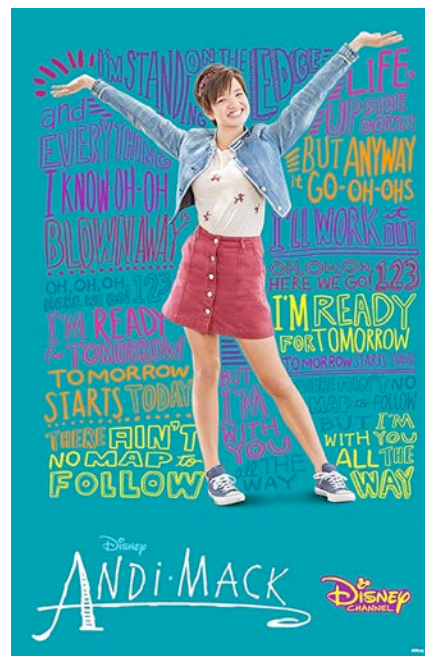
Joanne Lee won the 2017 PAGE Silver Prize for her TV Comedy Pilot *Killing It*. She was raised on Long Island by South Korean immigrant parents, went to Harvard, worked for Goldman Sachs in London, attended Wharton Business School, and helped run a NYC-based nonprofit organization. She then did digital media business development for ABC News, A+E Networks, and POPSUGAR. She is repped by APA.

Why Concept Is King, Now More Than Ever

by Nick Oleksiw

Yes, the saying is true: ideas are a dime a dozen. But a really strong idea? Now those are a much rarer breed. Too often I see aspiring writers pitching their heart out on an idea they're clearly excited and passionate about, but it just isn't there yet. This happened a few weeks ago when I attended a pitchfest where writers from all over the country flew in to Hollywood for a weekend and started hitting me with their best pitches. One guy had a show about bikini detectives solving cases (hmm), while another woman pitched me a comedy about a guy who had a bionic penis with a mind of its own. Sadly, I am not kidding.

Thankfully, there were also more familiar ideas involving hitmen, spies, werewolves, zombies, aliens, or some combination of the above. The problem, however? These ideas failed to have anything exciting or unique about them. They were, in fact, simply generic versions of stories we've seen time and time again. *"A hitman on the run from his former bosses." "A raging war between vampires and zombies." "It's **Twilight Zone** meets **Black Mirror**!"* Uh, aren't those shows the same thing?

Unfortunately, most writers fail to realize that it's their concept or premise that needs to scream fresh and unique – otherwise their script runs the risk of being dead on arrival. Yes, the actual craft of screenwriting is extremely important. And yes, learning plot, character, structure, and story are all essential in creating that bulletproof spec. But no one in Hollywood is going to care – much less open your script to read it – if they don't see potential in your core idea.

Consider the very successful horror movie **A Quiet Place**. Its logline on IMDb: "In a post-apocalyptic world, a family is forced to live in silence while hiding from monsters with ultra-sensitive hearing." Granted, many of us have seen the trailer and know that this was a masterful production. But I can tell you with absolute certainty that, years back, this was a project that had execs talking about it on concept alone – all because it was such a fun and simple idea!

Who remembers **Don't Breathe**? A bunch of thieves suddenly find themselves trapped in a blind man's home and must find a way out before this supremely well-adapted war veteran hunts them down. Think of how effective the trailer was. But again, the reason it worked so well was because the core idea was there. It was simple. It was fun. It had a terrific hook.

Now some of you may be saying "Hey! I'm not into horror! I like comedy!" Well, no worries, my friends, because "high concept" applies to most all types of movies – funny ones included. Two hit comedies released in 2018 exemplify this perfectly: **Game Night** and **Blockers**. In **Blockers**, a group of parents discover their daughters' prom-night pact to lose their virginity and must suddenly spring into action to stop them from sealing the deal. In **Game Night**, a group of friends who regularly convene for game nights are interrupted by a major case of mistaken identity, then must figure out how to stay alive. What an amazing idea for a movie! I remember seeing the trailer and thinking, "Of course!"

These are the kinds of ideas that execs across town salivate over. Your logline needs to be simple and yet create an amazing trailer in someone's head. When

you're pitching an idea, you want to elicit that "Oh, cool…" with eyes widening reaction. Anything less may require going back to the drawing board to see if elements need to be tweaked or added.

Years ago – back when I first got the screenwriting itch – I read **Save the Cat!** by Blake Snyder. Blake's philosophy was that "high concept" ideas are the easiest way to get people excited about reading your script. Boy, was I glad to have come across that book, as Blake provided insight from the market's perspective on what it takes to really get a reader hooked. Personally, I think that **Save the Cat!** is essential reading for every emerging screenwriter.

So why is concept more important now than ever? In today's world, virtually everything is IP driven. Every best-selling book, comic, article, blog, podcast – they're all being snatched up by producers, studios, and financiers around town. Everyone wants that big, fun story that people are currently reading, watching, or listening to. Hollywood is either going the comic book/tentpole route (think superhero movies) or the smaller genre route, like Blumhouse horror films and Screen Gems thrillers. Mid-budget movies have been eroding for some time now, which means studios are taking fewer chances on those kinds of projects.

What does this mean for writers trying to break in?

Well, if you're not a bestselling author, a journalist breaking a crazy story (Google "Monopoly FBI Hollywood"), or a creator of a talked-about podcast, it means you need to come in guns blazing with an idea so good that interns, assistants and executives at the production company or studio you're pitching it to can't say no. They have to read it immediately.

Earlier this year, as I was launching my own production company, I read this logline for a script: "Two window washers, 60 floors up, witness a murder and must suddenly play cat and mouse with the killer if they want to survive." I was immediately hooked, read the script that night, hopped on the phone with the writer within a couple days and optioned it. This is a project I'm now producing.

Whatever genre you're writing, please remember that your idea is the most important thing and comes before anything else. Think of movie mash-ups. New combinations of ideas. Fresh takes that feel timely. Write what excites you, and what we haven't seen before. Remember, the goal is to make sure your logline is so juicy that when you pitch it to a stranger in an elevator their eyes light up and they say, "Whoa…cool."

Nick Oleksiw is an independent producer running his own production company, Mischief Entertainment. He recently set up the thriller *Suspension*, with Steven C. Miller directing. Nick is currently producing the comedy *The Last Karpinskis*, starring Adam Pally; executive producing *Project Sapphire*, a true-story thriller being written by U.K. scribe Paul Webb; and developing a handful of TV projects. Previously, Nick ran development for Reel FX.

The Four Elements All Screen Stories Share

by Ray Morton

Ray Morton is a writer and script consultant. He was a senior writer for *Script* **and is currently the author of** *Scriptmag.com*'s *Meet the Reader* **column.**

Ray's recent books *A Quick Guide to Screenwriting* **and** *A Quick Guide to Television Writing* **are available in stores and online. He analyzes scripts for producers and individual writers, and he is available for private consultation.**

You may contact Ray at *ray@raymorton.com* **and follow him on Twitter @RayMorton1.**

Cinema is a visual/audio medium. There are only four elements you can use to tell a screen story: images, action, sound effects, and dialogue. Viewers can only experience what they see on the screen or what they hear coming out of the speakers. They can see images of people, places, and objects; they can watch moving images of action – both small bits of personal behavior and large, kinetic chunks (fights, chases, stunts and so on); they can hear noises and music; and they can listen to what the people on screen are saying to one another.

That's it – there are no other options. Therefore, these are the only elements that screenwriters can employ to tell their tales. Fortunately, these elements are wide-ranging and, with the assistance of technology, there is no limit to the amount or types of people, places, things (including imaginary ones), and action that can be photographed, or sounds that can be recorded.

This being the case, try to avoid writing what's internal. Don't tell us what your characters are thinking, feeling, realizing, deciding, or remembering. Instead, externalize it. For example, instead of writing in description that a character is angry, devise and describe an image or an action that demonstrates that anger (e.g., the character can slam a door, kick a chair, or something similar). Instead of telling us what a character is thinking about, have that character tell someone what's on his mind. All of this may seem elementary and obvious, but you would be surprised at how many writers both amateur and experienced make this very basic mistake, and how frequently they make it.

Likewise, all exposition should be externalized. Exposition is the background information the audience needs in order to understand and follow the story. Many writers include this information in description but fail to transform it into images, actions, or sounds that will communicate it to viewers. The simplest way to externalize exposition is to transform it into dialogue, but expository dialogue is often clunky or dull, so it's a good idea to find other methods of externalizing exposition. Some obvious (and overused) expository devices are flashbacks and cut-aways. It can be difficult to deliver exposition through imagery, but if you can find a way to do this it is much more effective and satisfying for the viewer.

One of my favorite pieces of visual exposition comes from ***Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade***. To let us know that an airship our protagonist is traveling in is turning around, the film presents an image of shadows cast by cups on a table reversing direction.

Time changes should also be externalized. In some scripts, time changes are written into the text ("Later that morning, Joe walks to work"). In others, temporal alterations are incorporated into the scene headings (INT. BEDROOM – AN HOUR LATER or EXT. CITY HALL – ONE YEAR LATER, etc.) None of this will come across to viewers unless you hand out copies of your screenplay in the theater. Effective visual solutions include supered titles, pictures of clocks showing different times, and so on. And dialogue can be a solution to this problem as well.

It's important to understand that literary style doesn't work in a screenplay. Long, lovingly composed descriptive passages telling us how the morning sun reflects on the small church nestled in the loving bosom of a bucolic valley are a complete waste of page space, because none of this overkill can be translated into pictures or sound. All this sort of description will produce is a shot of a church in a meadow in the morning, so it's best to just write that in the script and move on. And don't bother with similes or metaphors or any of those other literary devices that Mrs. Johnson taught you in AP English. Such things cannot be photographed. Just write what the character says and does and leave it at that. Your job as a screenwriter is to tell a story, not to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Finally, don't tell us what things are not. A popular screenwriting trope among young writers is to tell is that "Fred is 30, but he looks 50," or "Katie is usually calm, cool, and collected, but when we meet her she is uncharacteristically frantic." As I've said, audiences only know what you show them. If you show them someone who looks 50 onscreen, they'll assume that the character is 50. If you introduce a character behaving in a frenzied and harried manner, they can't know she's usually calm, cool, and collected.

When sitting down to write a movie, you must train yourself to compose exclusively in pictures and in sound. If you don't, you may produce an interesting piece of writing, but you will not produce a screenplay. If you do write purely with pictures and sound, you just might create great cinema.

Write for the Reader, Not the Camera

by Dave Trottier

READER'S QUESTION:

In the recent script I sent you, I wrote a beautiful scene crafted just the way I envisioned it being shot. You recommended that I omit the camera directions and focus more on character and the key moments of the scene. But aren't movies visual? I know how I want the scene to be shot.

DAVE'S ANSWER:

I hear this from many writers after I point out in a script evaluation that a scene is loaded with camera directions, or there might be a better way to present the material to a reader. Odds are, the scene won't be shot the way you envision it, anyway. After your spec script is converted into a shooting script, the production manager and others will try to find locations that fit their budget, and the location or set they choose may not exactly match what you had in mind, which could result in changes to the scene. The budget may not allow for certain shots, or for multiple camera set-ups that involve changing its position and the lighting. In addition, the director will want to block the scene. Finally, actors may add their two cents. Keep in mind that it takes many collaborators to make a movie.

Sometimes what is written on paper doesn't exactly translate to the silver screen. For example, the thematic pier scene in **Little Miss Sunshine** was originally written for Dwayne and Frank to float in the ocean, adding the symbolism of a baptism when a wave crashes over them, but the scene didn't work when they tried to shoot it that way. Thus, in the finished product, the scene takes place on a pier. The essence of the scene remains unchanged; it still achieves what the writer intended, but not in the way the writer envisioned.

It's important to understand that the spec script is not an exact blueprint for the eventual movie, but more of a guide to creating it. A spec's main purpose is to emotionally involve a reader who can recommend it to producers, agents and talent. Present enough specific detail that the reader can "see" the action, "feel" the emotion, and "get" the scene, but don't try to direct with technical details or through other means.

READER'S QUESTION:

Why the 120-page limit? Plenty of produced scripts are over 120 pages.

DAVE'S ANSWER:

Dances with Wolves was a spec that was well over 120 pages, breaking the "sacred" rule. Of course, the writer's friend was Kevin Costner, who both starred in the movie and directed it.

We often talk about the differences between a spec script and a shooting script in terms of formatting — yes, a shooting script numbers its scenes, and so on. But there are other non-formatting differences. The spec is written to inspire people to see your story the way you do, and to make them want to buy it. The shooting script contains directions for the shoot, at least to some degree, but it doesn't have to impress potential buyers.

Most shooting scripts are the result of development deals where a studio or production company hires and pays a writer to write the script. Most movies that you see in theaters are produced from such development deals. Because the "developed" script is usually written in-house by an established writer, many conventions for writing a spec become less important. For example, sometimes these scripts are over 120 pages, mention a number of specific songs to use, have sketchy formatting, or contain lots of camera and editing directions. If William Goldman uses a lot of CUT TOs, that's fine — he has nothing to prove.

The spec writer, however, has a lot to prove. Just because Aaron Sorkin can get away with an opening scene that is eight pages of "talking heads" (in **The Social Network**) doesn't mean you can. Or maybe you can; that's the decision you have to make. But I highly recommend you limit your spec to 120 pages or less. Actually, 110 pages would be even better.

The above "reality checks" are **not** intended to discourage, but to give you a competitive advantage. I'm rooting for you, so keep writing.
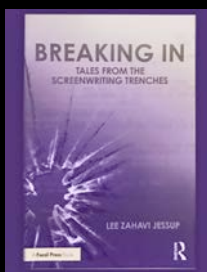
How to Write Better Characters

by Lee Jessup

What makes for a great character in a screenplay? Tawnya Bhattacharya, working television writer and owner of Script Anatomy, provided some practical tips. "A well-developed, three-dimensional character with a strong goal. We should immediately be able to "get" who that person is, visualize them, and hear their voice in our head when they speak."

Popular consultant Danny Manus told me, "What makes a great character is knowing why it has to be **that** character in **that** story. If there's a deeper connection between your character and the situation they are brought into – some emotional/ironic/meaningful connection, your character will feel ingrained into the world of your story. What makes for a great character is when they have an equally compelling, or entertaining external goal **and** internal goal."

Jen Grisanti, who teaches the uber-popular 10-week Storywise Teleseminar, shared, "I believe what makes for a great character is a flawed and complex character where we can feel the central conflict that is fueling the pursuit of their goals. I want to understand the wound that drives the character, and the flaw that gets in the way. The character should be active. I love when I feel both the strength and the vulnerability of a character."

Hayley McKenzie, former BBC executive and now a leading script consultant, said, "A great character feels truthful and interests us. They don't have to be likable, but they do have to compel us to want to know what they'll do next."

Talented writer and seasoned industry reader Andrew Hilton weighs in with this. "It's simple, really – we need to care about them and/or find them fascinating. Obviously, the more original the character, the better. Take the recent ***Baby Driver***. There's nothing original about a getaway driver taking one last job so he can run away with the girl. However, the concept of an orphan with savant-like driving skills, who constantly listens to music to drown out his tinnitus, makes the entire movie."

My other favorite industry reader, Rob Ripley, said this: "The best characters are the ones who have contradictions that are relevant to the story. They're interesting because they're in conflict. For example, a lawyer who has profound respect for justice and the rule of law, but spends her nights as a secret vigilante, makes me want to know who she is and why she is who she is – she will almost always be in deep conflict."

Lastly, my good friend Ruth Atkinson, who works with Film Independent's Project Involve, told me this about what makes for a great character in a screenplay: "Authenticity. Depth. Originality. I love characters who make unexpected (but authentic) choices. It's also key that they take action that is connected to their behavior and belief system. I often read characters who do things that aren't in alignment with who they are. They do things because the writer needs them to, not because it's true for their character."

For me, a great character is one who is familiar and unique all at once. Conflict and wound are key to a substantive, meaningful character; they provide the depth and complexity that should then feed into and inform their choices, in order to make the story a meaningful journey. Here are a few things you might want to leave out of character introductions:

- Comparison to other seminal characters. Don't describe your character as Walter White, as Al Bundy, as Scully. In all likelihood, readers will find themselves spending much of the read comparing your character to the one you compared it with, and deciding for themselves whether that comparison holds up. It usually doesn't.

- Steer clear of describing your characters by appearance only. Tell us about their character, not about their appearance. If you call out a physical trait, be sure that it's integral to the story and to who they are.

- Don't leave out age range. I expect to read a 20-year-old character much differently than I would a 60-year-old character. Don't leave me guessing or trying to figure out who this character is that I'm reading about.

Of course, different tips and suggestions will resonate with different writers. You by no means have to take all of them or figure out how to incorporate every suggestion made in this blog post into your characters or character introductions. But take just one or two and hopefully your character work will become stronger and stronger!

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2. Enter your email address.
3. Copy/paste the corresponding code. You'll then be able to submit your work directly to InkTip's producers.
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We are looking for completed, feature-length horror and/or psychological thriller scripts with stories taking place in three or fewer locations and requiring little to no FX.

Budget won't exceed $500K. Non-WGA writers only.

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Budget TBD. Both WGA and non-WGA writers okay.

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Company C: Seeking Inspirational Scripts

We are looking for family-friendly scripts with an inspirational message. We're open to dramas or dramedies, as well as faith-based material and true stories, as long as it is appropriate for all ages and contains a positive, uplifting message.

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