

Love What You Love Podcast

Episode 56: Screenwriting with Denise Miotke

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Welcome to *Love What You Love*; I'm Julie Rose. I'm insatiably curious about people and the world around us, and absolutely in love with passion and unselfconscious enthusiasm. Every other week I geek out with someone about the thing that they love, and then I share it with you.

Welcome back! Or, Welcome! Just real quick up top, it would be amazing if you would rate and/or review *Love What You Love* on the podcasting platform or platforms of your choice. It just takes a minute or two and it helps me so, so much. And it helps other folks find the podcast and get more love in their life. Thank you so much for doing that. I really appreciate it.

With that out of the way, let's meet this week's guest. You know how when you've been friends with someone for a really long time and you see them getting into something they really love, and then you see them happy and it makes *you* happy? That's exactly how I feel about this week's guest.

Denise Miotke is a mom, a real estate agent, a reader for the Austin Film Festival, one of my oldest friends, and a screenwriter. I loved talking with her about her writing journey. She's wise, and she's funny, and you're absolutely going to love her. In this episode, we talk found family, fence disputes, Brontë inspiration, how poetry and screenwriting are linked, how all bad screenplays are very similar, authenticity, and so much more. So find out why Denise loves screenwriting and why you might learn to love it too.

Julie: Hello, Denise! Thank you so much for joining me today.

Denise: Thank you, Julie, for having me. I'm excited to be here.

Julie: I'm so excited to have you! So, we've known each other for a very long time... [laughs]

Denise: [laughs] Yes.

Julie: Since high school!

Denise: What! [laughs]

Julie: Which seems like ten lifetimes ago... [laughs]

Denise: At least.

Julie: At least, yeah. But you've always been interested in screenwriting, so I wanted to understand, like, when did you actually start writing scripts, and then what inspired you to get started in the first place?

Denise: Oh, that's a great question. As you know, a few years ago I tried to write a script because I love movies, and I love TV shows that are meaningful in some way, that do more than just entertain, that also make you laugh, or make you cry, or make you think. So I gave it a whirl, I gave it a try, and I wrote a screenplay with just, you know, referencing a few screenwriting books. And it was a hot mess, as they say. But it got me interested, like, "Oh..." Even though I made it through the script and it wasn't very good, it still made me think, "I want to try again. I want to learn more."

So I put that on the backburner while I was raising the kids, and then we ended up moving; and the kids, instead of me homeschooling them, were able to go to school, so I actually had time during the day all by myself. And I thought, "You know, I want to

try this again but I want to do it the right way." So I... For me anyway, that was taking a few classes. So, I took some classes at the UCLA extension, and then I thought, "Okay, now I get it. Now I get what I'm supposed to do, the mechanics of it." I had a couple of good teachers. That's really how I got started. So, I feel like I really got started about two years ago when I started taking the classes and getting a really good foundation.

Julie: Now, you've always been interested in movies, and TV, and things like that, so why screenwriting and not other kinds of writing?

Denise: When I was going to college, I really enjoyed reading all sorts of different fiction, but I didn't really enjoy writing it. I did enjoy poetry, and then when I started reading a few screenplays and then trying to write my own, that's kind of what got me excited about it. It felt like a crossroads between fiction and poetry because you have to pick your words carefully. You can't ramble on and on. And every word counts. So, that's kind of what I liked about it.

Julie: Can you tell me a little bit about this first screenplay that you wrote?

Denise: [laughs] Oh my lord. I had this genius idea... You know, it all has to start with an idea that you're excited about. And I love, love, love the books by the Brontë sisters, especially Emily Brontë. And I have done several trips to England and specifically to Haworth, England where the Brontë sisters lived, and it just really felt like I had quite an image of what their life was like and what they went through as writers. So, I really wanted to write about them.

And I wrote a screenplay that was... It had a few interesting moments in it, but it wasn't... It didn't have all the elements that a screenplay really needs to make it successful. So, I put that one on the backburner and have written several others since then, and I think someday I'll come back to it and rewrite it and make it what I always hoped it would be. [laughs]

Julie: Yeah, so what is it about the Brontës that draws you so much?

Denise: Well, I think they're just fascinating people. They lived in the early to mid-1800s, and they were three sisters that lived out in a fairly rural area. They had factories that made needles and stuff like that. But they lived in this little town where their dad was a pastor and... [dog barking in the background] That's my dog you are blessed to hear right there.

Julie: [laughs]

Denise: So, they lived out, kind of, in the countryside in the North York Moors in a little town. And their dad always encouraged them to read, and write, and imagine, and he taught them a lot. So, they were different than your average woman who was very limited by her circumstances. They could become, like, a governess, or a wife and a mother, and maybe help in a shop, and that was kind of it. And all three of them had such wild, wonderful imaginations. They really dreamed up these other existences for these characters they came up with from the time they were little kids. It's fascinating too.

You can look online, especially at the Parsonage Museum. They had these tiny, tiny little books that they wrote as kids. They're like an inch or two tall and half an inch wide. They made these tiny little books that the characters in their imagination would read. They had whole worlds. They had wars; they had love interests. So from the time they were little they were making these little, tiny books. And in a time when a woman wasn't allowed to even be an author, here they were writing and eventually publishing,

even though, really, Charlotte was really the only one that saw any significance during her lifetime. Emily and her sister Anne both died before they could see anything come of their work.

So, I've just always been really inspired by their tenacity and their intelligence and creativity. It was like they had no choice; they had to write. It burned inside of them. It also helped them process what the world was like around them. They had several other sisters who all died from disease, and their poor brother Branwell that also died, but mostly because he drank himself to death. And so, I just found their ability to be creative and go for it... They really found publishers, they tried to self-publish books of poems, they kept trying over and over again to put their creativity out there. And if they had lived longer, they would have seen how the world really changed because of their writing.

I mean, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë is one of the first books of that kind. It's a gothic novel, it's got a protagonist that's cruel [laughs], and it also is a story that's told through different narrators' eyes. And at a time when novels were mostly told from beginning to end, her novel starts, kind of, at the end and goes, basically, through a flashback through it. So, I just find all their creativity so interesting, exciting, and I kind of hope that at the end of the day, wherever they are in the atmosphere, they do know how much their books mean to people and what their creativity did for women writers all around the world.

Julie: Taking control of your own creativity and you going for it as well is such a tribute to that inspiration.

Denise: It's neat... I don't know, I'm sure you have certain writers and artists too that, when you read their work there's something about it that just makes you feel like, "You know what? I can do it too. I have my own creative energy and my own ideas, and if I just don't give up I could do it too. I could put it out there." And we don't need to necessarily be known for our stuff. Of course it would be delightful, but if you are being creative and putting your thought, and your ideas, and your energy out there, that is special in itself. And I don't think that, for example, Emily Brontë's work is any less special because she doesn't know it, you know? She put it out there, and she did it her way, and it's changed the world because of it. That one little aspect of it.

There's this great book I just love that... This conversation makes me think of it. It's called *The War of Art*, not the art of war, but *The War of Art*. And it's not a very long book, but it's a great inspirational book for any kind of artist, anyone who wants to do something that takes gumption. It's an inspiring read, so I highly recommend it if you haven't read that one.

Julie: You wrote your first screenplay; you wrote a couple since then. Is it okay if I say the names?

Denise: Sure!

Julie: Okay. *Vigilante Nancy* and *A Breath of Fresh Eyre*, which is awesome. So, where did you get the inspiration for those?

Denise: For *Vigilante Nancy*, we moved to St. Louis, Missouri for a change in my husband's job, and I'd only ever lived on the West Coast. I'd never even been to the Midwest, so it was a change for me. And we had this funny experience... Unlike in California where the lot sizes are small, there's these great big lots that the houses are on here; there's

just a lot more land available here. And a lot of the houses don't have any fences in between them. So, when we moved here, we have these little dogs and we had to put a fence up. And my neighbors behind us... I would like to also say, most of the people in my neighborhood are super friendly; they wave to you when you walk by, that kind of thing. Not so much my neighbor behind me. [laughs]

And we got the permits from the city and everything to do it, and we were having the fence put in. And the neighbor called the police on us and said that we're... [laughs] I know. She was like, "They're putting a fence up between our things and they're putting it over our line." You have to also know a couple things. First of all, they already had a fence on their line, and their fence was technically over where it should be, so it was even encroaching on our lot. And the third thing is, our yard is huge. Our house sits on, like, a quarter or a third of an acre. It's a big lot. So, it just seemed so ridiculous.

So, she did that, and then a policeman came out and someone from the city came out, and they said, "She says that you're doing this," and I, fortunately, had my little plan here and I showed it to them, and I was like, "No, she's wrong." And they were, like... They were totally on my side. It was cute. They were like, "She's being crazy." [laughs] So, there was nothing done about it, but it got me so mad. I thought, "You haven't even said hi to me or anything. You can't even just come over and say, 'Hey, is this fence in the right place?' You just called the authorities."

I'm making this story so long, but the upshot is that it got me all worked up about it. I got all mad about it and I thought to myself, "She didn't meet me. She doesn't even know who I am. I could be..." You know, there's several people in my family who are ex-military. My dad was a Vietnam vet; my uncle, a Vietnam vet. My great uncle was a prisoner of war. All this kind of stuff. I thought, "If you catch my dad on a bad day, he'd have something to say," you know? And that's... And in that moment when I thought of, like, a woman version of my dad, that is the inspiration. Vigilante Nancy was born because I thought, "What if someone like that actually lived here and the wrong neighbor pissed her off?" [laughs]

So that's how it started. And then I started thinking about what kind of person, you know, a Vigilante Nancy would be and how, you know, I really saw her as a do-gooder, someone with a strong moral code, but someone who had lived a lifetime in the military and wasn't really good at making friends outside of that world. And so, that's when I started writing that, and it just kind of came together.

I'm also the adoptive mother of three children from Russian orphanages, so I'm very into the idea of making your own family and what is a found family. So, my stories often involve that thought of, "What does it really mean to be a family and how can you bring people into your life that are meaningful to you?" So, Nancy goes from, in the pilot episode, starting... being really alone and an outsider to, by the end of the first episode, she's being engaged by her neighbors to help with crime in their little town.

And by the end of the series, if I were to be able to write the series, she will actually really have a sense of family and friends that she's always wanted. That's kind of the goal of Nancy. So, that's where Nancy came from. I just love her so much. She feels so real to me.

Julie: Yeah, yeah. Does your backdoor neighbor show up in the script? [laughs]

Denise: [laughs] She does. She'll never know it, but yeah, she's in there. She's the snooty one who, kind of, picks on people and, you know...

Julie: It's a great maxim. Like, "Do not piss off a writer because they'll put you in their stuff."
[laughs]

Denise: It's so true! And what's so funny about that, thinking about the Brontë sisters, you know, Charlotte Brontë wrote the very famous *Jane Eyre*, and when that came out... they had to write them with male pseudonyms, so nobody really knew who wrote *Jane Eyre* for a while until Charlotte couldn't stand it anymore and said, "It was me!" The interesting thing about it is that her characters were so based off of real-life people that they knew that people recognized themselves or their neighbors. They recognized the mean people that ran the school, you know. It's fascinating, just what you said, "Be careful who you're mean to when you're around a writer."

Julie: Totally! Yeah, do not piss off a writer at all. [laughs] So now, *Vigilante Nancy* won a contest, right?

Denise: Yeah, I submitted that... Since I was writing that in one of my UCLA classes, I submitted it to the UCLA contest and it won second in the screenwriting contest, so that was exciting. And then it also won... It was a top-five finalist in this other one, SIP, Set In Philadelphia, even though it wasn't really set in Philadelphia. And it's been... It's gotten, you know, quarter-finalist and that kind of thing in a couple other contests that I've found. So, that's been really exciting, and more than anything it's been a boost to, like, "Yes, keep going."

And then the more recent one, the one I just recently finished called *A Breath of Fresh Eyre*, I'm putting that into a couple of contests to see how that goes. But it's very... It's more of an uplifting one. And I've found in a lot of the contests, the darker and more violent scripts, the sad and violent scripts often get the most attention. That's what I've been finding, so it's really exciting when I read, like, a comedy script or a sweet script that has made it up to the top of the pile. So yeah, that's... And it's hard because you've got so many different readers you don't know what's going to appeal. It's such a subjective thing. It's like art. Some painting I love, somebody else is going to think is the worst.

Julie: So your first screenplay, that was for a movie? And then these are for TV, right?

Denise: Yeah, these ones are half-hour, like, comedy pilots. Although, *Vigilante Nancy*, I would say, is more of a dark comedy. And then I have another screenplay that's a feature-length one that I'm working on a rewrite on. It's more of a Vietnam... It's kind of got a lot of the experiences of my dad as inspiration when he was stationed on the island of Guam during the Vietnam War. So, that's been one I've been working off and on that I have a good first draft that I'm ready to, kind of, dive in and go, "What's missing? What's the element I need to bring to the table to make this come alive?"

Julie: What's the difference in writing TV scripts versus movie scripts? Besides the obvious, you know, length and things like that. Is there a mindset difference?

Denise: Yeah, there kind of is, in a way. The length, obviously, like you said, when you're writing the TV pilot, it's 30-40 pages for a comedy and then, like, 60 pages for a drama. And then for a feature, you've got to do 90-110 usually for that. And with a feature, you really want it to wrap up by the end. You want a beginning, a middle, and a definite

end, even if you have some, kind of, little surprise that makes people think, "Oh, there could be a sequel." You still want it to be a whole, you know?

And then with a TV pilot, you're kind of imagining the first part of something that's going to have at least 8 or 10 episodes. So, the pilot episode... I kind of think about it as you're setting up the world for what's going to happen for the rest of the series. So, it has to be a self-contained episode. It has to have a beginning, middle, and an end for the pilot. But it also has to have enough little treats and tidbits laid throughout so that you're wondering, "What's going to happen in episode 2 and what's going to be the overall arc by episode 10? How's this character going to change?"

And depending also on the kind of show you're doing, sometimes, like if you have a procedural show, like a *CSI: Miami* or something, the character really doesn't ever change. The character is the character. So, I'm all about growth and change, so I want to see my character change from the beginning to the end, and I want there to be a journey that we go on with them.

Julie: Yeah. Now, do you have the full seasons, kind of, sketched out for both those shows?

Denise: I do, loosely. I do, like, with some basics, important points I would want to hit for each of those. Especially with *Vigilante Nancy* because I spent so much time thinking about her. With the *Breath of Fresh Eyre*, that one is a reimagining of Jane Eyre, really, if she was different than what Charlotte Brontë had intended. And she decides to make her own choices, and we have little flashes to Charlotte as the writer going, "What the heck? Jane can't be making this decision. This is not how I write her!" So, with that one, I basically am following the storyline of Jane Eyre and, kind of, trying to twist it up and turn it on its head. So, that's kind of the goal for that one.

Julie: I love it. So, what's the first thing that comes to you in terms of inspiration when you start something new? Is it the concept, do you hear some dialogue, or do you see a scene? Or is it different for every one that you write?

Denise: That's such a good question. For me, it's always about the character. It's always about what a character is going through or thinking of, and then the idea comes from there. "What's going on in this character's life that's making her do this, or feel this way, or need a change?" So, that's the first thing that I do. And then I'll write down a couple of ideas about that, a couple of scene ideas, and if it starts to get kind of exciting to me, then I know I've got something. There's been so many times I get all excited about an idea, and then I'll sit down and type or write some ideas out, and then it's just like, after three sentences there's nothing. [laughs] I'm like, "Well, that's not what I want to spend my time on then." [laughs]

Julie: Because there's always going to be more.

Denise: Exactly. And my next thing I do, then, is I've developed this little outline that I do with, like, 10 different points with Act 1, Act 2, Act 3. And if I can fill out each of these ideas with a good story idea, then I know I could start writing the script. But I start with the outline, and that's something I never used to do until I took classes because I was like, "Oh, I can't be tied down!" [laughs] "Creation comes from nowhere and you just have to write!"

Well, for me, I've realized that if I can start with the outline, it's so much more exciting to me because then I know the roadmap of where I want to go with this character. And if it changes along the way, fine. But at least I have the end in mind as I'm writing the

beginning. And it all just starts to come together for me if I can write a good outline. If I can only get halfway through an outline, I put it aside and try a different idea.

Julie: How many drafts do you go through when you're working on a script?

Denise: I find that I rewrite as I go along. An ideal day for me is I get up, get my cup of tea, and I sit in front of my laptop, and I have looked at my outline, and then I read what I just wrote the day before, and then I just continue on. I'm kind of... sometimes I'm kind of rewriting as I go. When I wake up the next day, if I re-read what I have written the day before, I go, "Oh boy, that doesn't make any sense. Let's work on that now."

But if I think about it as a whole draft, I probably go through, like, four or five drafts before I feel like, "Yeah, that feels like I could show that to someone outside of the two people that I show my really rough drafts to." [laughs]

Julie: Who are your inspirations for screenwriting? Are there specific writers or specific scripts that you think are just the best?

Denise: No... I can't say that there's any specifically... I will say that I do turn to different screenwriting books from time to time for a little bit of inspiration, but mostly I read as many different screenplays as I can get my hands on. The good, the bad, and the ugly. They're all food for thought. And for the past several years, I was a script reader for the Austin Film Festival, and that was really fun. I didn't do it this last year but I'd done it several years before. I read so many bad scripts.

Julie: Oh no! [laughs]

Denise: There were so many bad ones, and then there were some that were just like, "This is amazing! Why isn't somebody representing this writer or making this into a film right now?" And it just goes to show how hard it is to break into the industry. But reading all different kinds of scripts has been a wonderful inspiration because it makes you... It just makes you want to keep on trying, and I just learn from each one.

One of the nice things about the Austin Film Festival is that they make you not just read it and then say, "Pass or Not Pass." You have to write a little summary of what worked and what didn't work. That was invaluable for me because it made me really think, "Well, what is it that works about this and what is it that isn't?" And it gives me fresh eyes when I look at my own writing because of it.

Julie: For the ones that you say were just, like, "Ooh, this is not good..." I mean, are they... Is it a Tolstoy quote where all happy families are happy in the same way...? I don't know, we'll save that part. But I mean, were they all bad in the same way, or were they all bad in infinitely different ways?

Denise: It's such a good question because there definitely were many similarities over and over again, which is what got me to the point where I wanted to take some classes, because I was reading before I took classes and I started seeing some of the same problems over and over again. And a lot of them were... There were ones like the person didn't take the time to even learn the basics of the craft, like how you format it properly. Or there were just so many spelling errors you can't even get over it.

There were some like that, but most of them were... I think I could boil it down to this: Nothing really happened. Like, it was just someone writing about their idea of what it was like to move in with a new roommate, or... Just nothing happened. And there was no character growth or development, there was nothing good or bad. It was just

boring. And I thought, "You know, there's plenty of times I'm writing stuff that is meaningful to me, but is it going to be meaningful to anybody else?" It's like, "What's going to stand out to someone who has no idea about this particular place, or person, or time?" So, I think that's probably the biggest thing, that there was no character development, character growth, there was no character arc where he started one way and ended another, and then something interesting happened during those pages in between.

Julie: So, the ones that were really good, that got your eye, were they good in similar ways or completely different ways?

Denise: A lot of differences, I would say. Some people are just great at dialogue where it's just so funny, or each character has a really different way of speaking so it's really easy to tell the characters apart. And then some people, the *idea* is so fascinating. Some weird time travel thing that... I mean, we've seen plenty of time travel movies but this person thought of it in a different way. And so, I think those things, where something in the plot intersects with something the protagonist is going through, that has deeper meaning than, "Oh, there's an asteroid coming to Earth, let's blow it up," you know. There's something else going on too with the characters besides just the plot of the movie itself.

And then by the end of it, you know, if I... This is the thing. If by the end of the script, you care about what happens to the characters, you know... If you get to the end and you're like, "Oh, that's a shame. They all died," or whatever. But if you're biting your nails going, "No, no! Don't go into that room!" Then it's like, "That was successful." What that writer did was successful. It got me to feel something. It got me to think in a different way.

Julie: So what, in your opinion then, is the best screenplay ever written?

Denise: Oh, lordy! I don't know! [laughs]

Julie: For you, maybe. What's the screenplay you love most?

Denise: Oh my gosh... Oh, well, I loved the movie too, one that I read recently was *Knives Out*. Have you seen that movie?

Julie: I haven't...

Denise: Oh my gosh, it's pretty fun. It's got a lot. It's not only a fun murder mystery, but the characters are unique, and interesting, and they have foibles, and they are not always great. I really enjoyed that, and I also enjoyed reading the script for *1917*, the war movie. That was beautifully written and very moving.

So, a script that can make me feel something is what I want. I don't mind if I end up in a puddle of tears or if I end up with a bellyache from laughing, but if it can make me feel something, then I feel like, "You know what? That was an hour well spent."

Julie: So for you, what is an hour well spent in your writing? When you're done writing for the day, does it just... does it matter because you wrote, or is there something you were trying to get out of each writing session?

Denise: This is a hard one too. Anybody that has any kind of distraction, whether it's a pet, or a child, or a spouse, or anything that can interrupt. If I can get, like, two hours of noninterrupted time to write, that is, like, the best day. [laughs] Because you kind of... After a certain amount of time, like, you get into the flow of it. And I don't often find

I'm really stuck with writer's block because I'm not sitting down at my computer all the time. I'm busy cooking a meal, or doing laundry, or walking the dogs.

So, when I'm sitting down and writing, I've generally got some ideas to at least work with, and then I just pour it all out without really editing it. I don't worry about if it's the right dialogue or the right scene description. I just write what comes to me and then I worry about editing later. So, I give myself permission to just write as many pages as I possibly can. So, that's a good hour, when I can just get a few pages in and I just feel like, "Yeah, I got that out of my brain and onto the page."

Julie: So, is interruptions the most difficult part of writing for you?

Denise: Yes, it is. It really is. And you know what's another interruption is looking at my phone or looking at my email, and my email turns into, "Oh, I'm going down the rabbit hole of something." But I love technology because... I mean, if you saw my search history, you would be horrified. If I'm thinking about some story that has... Like, in the beginning when I was first thinking of *Vigilante Nancy*, I thought she might be a killer. So, I was looking up stuff like "how to bury a body in your backyard," you know. I was just looking up stuff that... not good.

And she turned into a good vigilante. She turned into someone who's... She's helping and she's not... So, I love this whole internet thing where we can look up anything, but sometimes it does lead me down and path, and then I go, "Oh, it's been 15 minutes and now I'm looking up how to make donuts or something," and it doesn't have anything to do with my story anymore. We can be our own worst enemy.

I think what's worse than getting distracted, for me, than by the computer, or phone, or whatever, is just my own fears, really, you know? Like, stopping myself before I ever get started. Like, I loved your first interview that you did with that plein air painter, Michael Chamberlain. I just loved his perspective on being an artist and just finding what worked for him, getting out there, and going for it, and practicing.

He had this cute thing where he was like, "Yeah, I look back on my first paintings and go 'Yeesh!'" But at the time, he was like, "I'm a genius! This is fantastic!" So, there has to be the right balance between thinking you're a genius and still being able to grow. He's obviously done that, so my thing is, you know, I get to a certain point and then I'm like, "Nobody likes this so this is just garbage." And that's just not always the case. It's just that you've got to keep writing, and growing, and wait until something speaks to someone, you know? But not giving up, boy, that's a challenge, isn't it?

Julie: It's so hard because it's so subjective. Like you said, it's like what resonates with one person isn't going to... It's hard not to get discouraged and give up.

Denise: It is. But you know, what else is life for, you know? What is the point if we aren't doing something that we love? And isn't that what your whole podcast is about? *Love What You Love*, I love that title. When we do what we love, we're being our best self and we're putting our energy out into the universe. And we might be like Emily Brontë where we don't ever see the ripple effect of what we've done. And for me, that's okay. I'm okay with that. Of course, my goal is to be able to earn a living off of this, that's like, *mwah!*, love it, you know?

But if I don't and I just end up writing screenplays that I love and that make me laugh or cry, I will still feel like I've been a success, you know? So, sometimes I just have to remind myself when the world comes at you and says, "This is what you have to do,

this is what success means," I have to put it out and go, "No, I know what success means to me and I'm okay if I'm an audience of one."

Julie: Yeah, like you said, it's the energy that you're putting out, it's the being-your-authentic-self that matters. Everything else is gravy.

Denise: Because here's the thing: What is the point? You know? What is the point of our life if we are just doing what we're told to do and miserable? Why?? So, I might not have everything I want to have, but if I'm being my best self, and being creative, and being loving and helping my family, and all these different things that are meaningful to me, well, that's how I want to live and I've just got to keep reminding myself sometimes when the chips are down or when struggles in a variety of forms come up. That's my pep talk to myself. [laughs]

Julie: Yeah. [laughs] You always have really wise words, though. I'm not surprised at all. You do.

Denise: You're sweet. Well, how about you, Julie? How do you find yourself? How do you get your inspiration going when you feel like things have been tough or you just don't feel inspired?

Julie: Yeah, part of it is just doing it. Especially early on doing the podcast, I'd be really nervous, or I'd be like, "This isn't working... I'm not excited right now." But as soon as I sat down and did an interview, I'd be like, "This is awesome!" And it was like writing books. Sit down, just keep doing it.

Denise: That's so true. There's something to be said for discipline in having kind of a set schedule to a certain degree where you're like, "Well, I don't necessarily feel very excited, but I'm going to sit here and I'm going to do this little job I've given myself anyway." And then the thing that blossoms out of it is you kind of find inspiration along the way.

Julie: If someone is listening to our chat and they wanted to get started in screenwriting, how would you recommend they get started?

Denise: Oh goodness, gracious. I think the very first thing... If you've never done any screenwriting at all, I would get yourself a couple of screenwriting books, and read through them, and see if any of them speak to you. And you know, give that a try first. There's so many good screenwriting books. I was just reading one that I'm only partway through that's called *The Hero Succeeds* by Kam Miller. There's another one I liked called *How Not to Write a Screenplay*, [laughs] by Denny Flinn. And so, I would probably pick up a book and see if any of that speaks to you.

And then if it does, I would... what worked for me is I would try taking a class. I really, really enjoyed the UCLA extension classes because I was here in Missouri and I took it online, so I didn't have to be anywhere. Oh my gosh, one teacher in particular I really loved. If you can take a class from Jim Staahl, he was really, really helpful in getting going. So, that's where I'd start.

The other thing that I did a lot, a lot, a lot was I read screenplays. And you can find so many screenplays online. Just find your favorite movie, think of your favorite movie, and just look up online that movie+screenplay+PDF. And you will... I mean, it's amazing. You'll find so many screenplays, and you can sit down, and read through it, and then go back and watch it, and see how it comes together. It's fascinating.

You'll see, like, the writer will put some little thing in the scene description, it'll be a sentence or two, and the director and the actors are the ones that brought it to life. It's an economy of words for the screenplay. It's an idea on the screenplay that's brought to life by a group of people. So, I've done that several times where I'll find a script, and read it, and then see the movie, or vice versa. That's, I think, a really wonderful way to learn how to introduce characters, how a scene flows from one to the next, and the idea of a setup and a payoff. Those are key elements that I look for.

Julie: Denise, thank you. It's always such a joy to talk to you, but this has been so special. Thank you so much.

Denise: Oh, Julie. What a pleasure it was. I love talking to you, and of course you've got me talking about my favorite thing, screenplays! [laughs]

Julie: Yay! It worked! [laughs]

Denise: Thank you so much.

Julie: Thank you.

You can find Denise on Instagram [@ScriptByDenise](#). I'll include a link in the show notes as well as links to the books she referenced in our chat. As always, I'll include links to Denise's favorite nonprofits and mine too. Huge thanks to Denise for sharing her passion with us today.

Just a reminder that you can find this podcast on Instagram [@LoveWhatYouLovePod](#), on Twitter, [@WhatYouLovePod](#), and the website is [LoveWhatYouLovePod.com](#).

All of the transcripts for *Love What You Love* are available for everyone on the website. Thanks to Emily White, transcription magician and proprietress of The Wordary. If you need transcripts, reach out to her at Emily@TheWordary.com. The music for *Love What You Love* is called "Inspiring Hope" by Pink-Sounds. A link to that artist is included in the show notes.

As always, thank you so, so much for listening. Let's hang out again soon.

Links:

Find Denise on [Instagram](#)

Related Links:

[Austin Film Fest](#)

[Bronte Parsonage Museum](#)

[The Hero Succeeds: The Character-Driven Guide to Writing Your TV Pilot](#) by Kam Miller

[The War of Art: Winning the Inner Creative Battle](#) by Steven Pressfield

[UCLA Extension](#)

Denise's Favorite Nonprofit:

[Best Friends Animal Society](#)

My Favorite Nonprofits:

[Humane Society of Silicon Valley](#)

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