

The Eastern Script

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS



We've got some old and some new in this issue. For the old, I take a walk down memory lane to revisit the alternate reality of learning and doing script clearance work from when I began this job in 1990. How things have changed! The new piece comes from a voice just added to our staff who describes the experience of on-boarding at a script clearance company circa 2022.

Hired and trained entirely “via remote,” her experience differs profoundly from mine of thirty years ago. We also thought we'd talk a bit about a new type of client that has appeared at our (virtual) doorstep in the last year: audio books, looking for clearance reports.

Best wishes to all for a holiday season full of joy and free of ice on the roads; a year-end that is filled with satisfaction at all you accomplished; a new year that brings good health and fun. Thank you so much for being with us as we enter our 30th year of business.

Anne Marie Murphy
President



THE THIRTY-THREE YEAR VIEW

On a November day in 1990 in Burbank, California, I sat down for the first time at my desk in the back room at what was then one of only three businesses in the world that provided script clearance reports to film and television productions. From a stack of what I have likely memory-magnified to what looked like fifteen feature film scripts on one of my two employer's desks, I took the one on top. And so off I went, launched into the next thirty-three years of my professional life.

The training was simple: start reading and start typing, compose the report, send it to the client. Looking back, I am amazed at how little hand-holding I had. No one shadowed me during a trial period. There I sat at my TYPEWRITER with my LIQUID PAPER, trying my hand at risk assessment for movies-of-the-week, feature films, late night crime time tv episodes, etcetera. At my interview, I had been given a sample piece of script to assess; apparently that assessment was the training program. Next up: “sink or swim.”

The technology of the day, along with the little white bottle of Liquid Paper and the electric typewriter, included:

1. The fax machine



Probably about 15 inches wide, 12 inches deep, and 10 inches high. This was plugged into the wall for electric power and into a phone line for a modem to be able to connect elsewhere. Let's talk about the sound effects for this piece, that high-pitched scratchy shrieking of your fax machine extending its handshake to the recipient. Truly a sound of the times. Let's talk also about the thermal paper rolls that thing devoured. You could tell that the paper supply was near gone when the received pages came out of the machine and rolled onto the floor in the shape of an empty paper towel roll. Compiling an overnight fax transmission of a 30-page script received in that way was just a great way to start the day, in sunny southern California.

2. The UPS guy

He was the human equivalent of what we currently call a file attachment to an email. Once a day, (in the morning?) he would knock on the office suite door (was his name Carl?) with his free hand while in his other hand, he wrangled a stack of packages from around town and points beyond, each containing printed scripts being delivered to that stack on the desk I have already mentioned. My god, the wasted paper. And some of it was stiff colored stock as the scripts always had a cover page that was on something thicker and fancier. I collected a ton of those cover stock pages and sent them one year to my friend in the Peace Corps in Malawi, to use with her students there. Imagine her struggle to describe to them the original purpose of that pile of strong colorful American paper.

3. The database provider

Back in the late 1980s and 1990s, a company named the Dialog Corporation had gobbled up corporate licensing rights to many of the databases needed for this research. Trademark searching, business name searching, periodical title searching, etc... it all went through Dialog at that job. You dialed up by modem (“scree-ee-ee-ee-eetch”) then — no pressure — you sweated bullets as the databases charged you by the minute while you sat at the monitor grabbing details from the little green characters appearing there.

4. The call to the FCC



No speaker phone feature existed yet to ease the pain of this transaction. Any call signs needing to be checked in the U.S. (e.g. WIXB TV, WVLX-FM) for those all-important microphone cubes under the mouths of tv movie crusading journalists, all needed to be phoned in to the “Call Sign Desk” at the FCC. That phone was answered by a woman whose interest in her job, and the general public, had come to an end twenty years earlier. HELLO. You asked your question. HOLD ON, you were told. The phone that had been in her cold hand a moment earlier was then dropped to what might have been

the floor, given the length of the silence before the abrupt thunk of a landing. Footsteps could be heard. A long squeaky file cabinet drawer being opened. Then silence. Sometimes many minutes of silence. Much doodling at my desk. Perhaps I had even decided to turn a paper clip into some other piece of wire sculpture. More silence. Maybe ten minutes have passed (“is she making coffee?”). Suddenly the voice is back: THOSE ARE NO GOOD. Although it feels wrong to thank someone in these circumstances, that’s what you’d do next.

5. Library

Remember books? The walls of that first gig were lined with them, floor to ceiling. Among them, there were at least two entire stacks that had nothing on them but phone books. For the two cities in which most of our stories were set — Los Angeles and New York City — one of the bosses ordered each of the three of us our own full sets of that city’s directories from the phone company. For New York City there were five books, one for each borough. For Los Angeles there were seven. If your story was set in L.A., you would look through each of those seven books and their two sections (alpha residential, alpha business) for potential invasion of privacy listings. Murphy’s Law was largely in effect here with the finding of a single conflicting listing in the last section of the last of the seven books you needed to consult. And so back to the drawing board you went, repeating the process with alternatives until some of them came out clean. The paper stock and ink in printed phone directories was similar to that of newspaper and newspaper ink; I was in the bathroom on a regular basis washing the ink of the names of the city of Los Angeles off my hands.

6. Rolodex



Not the kind that’s on your iPhone but the metal box on your desk with round knobs on either side of it that spun a couple of plastic wheels inside, on which little cards lived

that you could pull on and off to add information with your hand operating a pencil. Crazy old-time stuff, that rolodex. Mine was fat after two and half years at that job and had

some of the most bizarre entries you can imagine, from the direct line to the coroner in the Florida Keys to the number for the manager of a local historical society in the Yukon. Some of the people on that rolodex I called all the time. Some of them became friends.

Those were the things we did have. The thing we didn’t have was the internet. As I look at my list above I realize that the internet was what all of those six things became. The internet didn’t show up for me professionally until I went out on my own to do this work in the early 1990s and started looking at what was available online (at that time, not much). What can today be done in mere seconds at the FCC’s website at that time required a protracted and painful telephone call. We were on the phone all day. Not cell phones, of course; they were the kind of phone that had a base and a handset connected by a curly cable, the kind of phone that tied you to your desk. The phone does still ring here from time to time but that sound was long ago replaced almost completely by the incoming email box.

The concept of working from home was then something that might have only been seen in an episode of *The Jetsons*, perhaps in a scenario in which George sits at home at a makeshift space age table, face wrapped in an old-time bandage toothache-style, showing off to his wife Jane an “office talk box” tv screen with a robotic gizmo flying out of its back side bringing messages to the office for him. By 2022, that concept has become so real that our last two hires came on board after a bunch of emails and a phone interview. Because of the pandemic, I did not actually meet one of them for almost two years.

We here at Eastern Script head into the next of now many years of all of us working from home yet very connected to each other throughout the day by email and videoconference technology. I bring all of this to you for your consideration as we move into the year 2023, a number that sounds very sci-fi to me. This is a time of year that can be filled with looking back, a normal instinct before turning the page once again.

The fax machine: Photo by thinkstock_images on freepik.com

The call to the FCC: Photo by by azerbaijan_stockers on Freepik

Rolodex: boogaloo at Freeimages.com

NEW REQUESTS FOR AUDIO ONLY WORK



Photo by Soundtrap on Unsplash

This year at Eastern was the year of the audiobook. We had an influx of audio projects added into our regular rotation of film and tv work. So we decided to talk a little about them and how they fit in. We were also curious why we had started receiving these requests.

The boom in audiobooks and podcasts has kept the old-time radio format alive, in the digital era. Creators have more opportunities to collaborate and produce content. No longer confined to a single sound studio, producers can produce remotely. Additionally, the ability to distribute globally has created new and diverse audiences.

New technology and the ability to reach audiences far and wide means bigger exposure. And bigger exposure equals more risk. It is all the more important to flag potential issues in the content before you get into any trouble.

The clearance process is similar for any fictional project, be it book, film or audio project. Our main task is risk assessment. The format of our reports may change with the different types of projects, but our vetting process is the same.

Interestingly, the vetting process for projects today is similar to those observed 70 years ago. The proliferation of radio programming and printed material in the 1950s demanded new ways to assess risk. In the 1952 book *Risks & Rights*, Samuel Spring writes of the “new media” of the day: “copyright, though more important than ever, no longer forms the bulk of rights and risks in modern entertainment.” Copyright is still as important as ever as are the dangers of privacy invasion, trademarks, defamation etc.

Another trend is advertising spending. The number of podcasts available has been growing and the Covid-19 pandemic increased the rate of listeners. As media budgets shifted to audio work, advertisers followed suit. Forbes magazine reported that podcast ad spending was \$800 million in 2020 and predicted to be a whopping \$1.7 billion by 2024 (Brad Adgate, Forbes, 2021). Advertisers will likely want a list of references in shows they sponsor while consideration of contractual obligations, i.e., product placement and sponsorship will also be a factor.

Finally, we’d like to thank our clients for sending us audio work this year. We love branching out and diversifying the types of projects we work on. Here’s to more for 2023.



Photo by Tessa Rampersad on Unsplash

NEW STAFF FEATURE – WHAT’S IT LIKE TO LEARN THIS JOB?



Photo by Marissa Daeger on Unsplash

Summer 2022 was a busy time at Eastern Script. We had new, interesting projects pouring in and as the summer rolled on, we realized we needed a new hire to address the needs of our clients. Training for this job can take a while, with so much to learn and remember. It takes a detail oriented and observant person to be successful.

So it is our pleasure to introduce the newest member of our team, Chantal Saville.

Chantal is a graduate of the University of Toronto and has many years experience as publisher, editor, ghost writer, among other things. Her experience made her the perfect candidate for her position at Eastern Script.

She has been with us a few months already, learning the processes of script clearance and title searching, and is in a good position to shed some light on what it’s like to learn this job. So let’s ask her!

ES: Please provide a brief introduction to yourself:

CS: Where to begin? I have had quite a few jobs over the years, but they all had one thing in common: they were all about research and putting together deliverables for an end client. Way back, I was an injury claims adjuster, where I had to decide whether the claim was valid and covered. After that, I was a business / process analyst, which is essentially about working with people to see whether a system or process designed for them in fact works for them. Then I went on to owning my own business, which included a newspaper and several magazines. That was very similar, because it required attention to detail to ensure no mistakes in print, and to deliver a consistently good read, every month. Finally, as a ghost writer and contact creator, there was an obligation on my part to make sure that what I was writing was as accurate as possible, even though it was vetted before being published. You can see the commonalities in these roles, which all required skills focused on accuracy, attention to detail, and understanding of what the result needed to be.

ES: What are your first impressions of the work?

CS: I love it! And I can’t say that about all the jobs I’ve had in the past. For one thing, I’m a movie and television buff. I love going to the movies and immersing myself in a story. I subscribe to just about every streaming service there is! So, to find a role—which I didn’t even know existed prior to applying—that utilizes all my existing skills AND is in an industry that I admire? I couldn’t ask for more.

ES: What has been the most challenging aspect of the learning process?

CS: I think worrying about making mistakes is the most daunting aspect. The challenge is to trust in the training and in yourself. That said, trying to keep all the instructions needed to do the work in my head was a real concern, at the beginning. I took furious notes during my training sessions, to be sure I had something to refer to. As time has gone on, I’ve realized that Anne Marie Murphy has put in place efficient processes that make it easier to not have to keep

all the instructions in your head. Also, knowing that each report is peer reviewed before going out to the client is comforting! An extra layer of experience to guide you to a solid finished deliverable.

ES: What has surprised you about learning this job?

CS: Considering I didn't even know the role existed or was needed before I saw the ad for the job? Everything. I had to Google what it was! As to what has surprised me, I am astonished at the intensity of the work. You need to be able to concentrate fully to ensure accuracy, to make sure all the bases of a search are covered. There's a tendency to look at a search and wonder if you've captured everything relevant, to second guess your work. But like every role, that's normal at the beginning. I'm happy that the onboarding process was smooth and detailed: I never felt like I was in over my head, or that I was being "thrown to the wolves" as it were, which really helps boost your confidence.

ES: What has been your favorite part of the job so far?

CS: I think working with the other team members: everyone has been super supportive and helpful, always ready to answer a question. It's rare to see such a cohesive team, particularly given that we are all spread out, geographically. There is an ease in the communication and collaboration that makes it a very welcoming environment to work in. I accept that I will make mistakes and the fact that every other team member is open about the reality that mistakes happen makes it easier to feel free to "try".

ES: What films or tv series would you love to work on if you got the chance?

CS: Hmm. That's a tough one. If I could go back in time? The West Wing would be a dream. I'm absolutely a master of the « walk and talk » and the Sorkin dialogue would have been unbelievable to dive into. I'm a news junkie too so the politics would have been right up my alley. And Outlander, because who doesn't love a Highlander sporting a kilt and some crazy time travel?



Photo by Anton Scherbakov on Unsplash

RECENT PROJECTS

GRAY – “AGC Television, the TV unit of Stuart Ford’s independent content studio AGC Studios, and Lionsgate have teamed on espionage thriller series “Gray,” based on an original concept by best-selling novelist David Baldacci. Patricia Clarkson (“Six Feet Under,” “Sharp Objects”) and Nathalie Emmanuel (“Game of Thrones,” “Fast & Furious” franchise) are attached to star.”

By Nick Vivarelli, Variety, [variety.com/2021/tv/news/patricia-clarkson-nathalie-emmanuel-gray-agc-lionsgate-1235090089/](https://www.variety.com/2021/tv/news/patricia-clarkson-nathalie-emmanuel-gray-agc-lionsgate-1235090089/)

HUMANE – “Caitlin Cronenberg, daughter of iconic movie director David Cronenberg, is making her directorial feature debut with Humane, a thriller scripted by Michael Sparaga, who is also producing. Humane is a Canada-Belgium co-production between Sparaga’s Victory Man Productions and Frakas Productions, which co-produced 2021 Palme d’Or winner Titane. The thriller chronicles the events at a family dinner, held after an environmental collapse where the world lost 20 percent of its population, when a father’s plan to enlist in the government’s new euthanasia program goes horribly wrong.”

By Etan Vlessing, Hollywood Reporter, www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-news/david-cronenberg-caitlin-cronenberg-directorial-debut-humane-1235060909/

KEEPER OF THE CUP STARRING WILLIAM SHATNER AND DAN AYKROYD. – “Keeper of the Cup is a raucous road trip comedy that follows Charlie, Marcel and Brad, 3 maturity delayed Toronto Maple Leaf fans, who have had enough of the bad luck that has followed the Leafs since 1967, when Charlie and Brad’s dad played for the Leafs and the last time the Leafs won the Stanley Cup. After yet another heart-breaking loss in game seven of the playoffs the guys take matters into their own hands.”

watch.plex.tv/movie/keeper-of-the-cup

MACY MURDOCH – “Shaftesbury announced today that production is now underway on Macy Murdoch (8x11), a new CBC Gem original tween series that follows the adventures of Detective William Murdoch’s time-travelling

great-great-great- granddaughter. A spinoff of Shaftesbury and CBC’s hit long-running drama Murdoch Mysteries based on novels written by Maureen Jennings.”

By CBC, www.cbc.ca/mediacentre/press-release/production-begins-on-new-tween-murdoch-mysteries-spinoff-macy-murdoch-for-c

MASHOPOLIS – “Twin Cities Public Television is doubling down on its adventures in animation. Just four months after the premiere of “Hero Elementary,” then the most ambitious project in TPT’s history, the St. Paul-based station has announced plans to create “Mashopolis,” a cartoon series aimed at kids ages 5 to 8 who will strengthen their cognitive skills by living vicariously through animated characters building their Paradise City.”

By Neal Justin, Star Tribune, www.startribune.com/with-4-6m-grant-tpt-begins-work-on-new-animated-series-mashopolis/572600282/

NBEXIT – “New sitcom to be set in Miramichi. Show is creation of freelance TV producer and part-time mayor Adam Lordon and comedian James Mullinger. The premise is that a Brit from London, who had to flee because of a Brexit scandal, lands in a fictionalized version of Miramichi, called Riversville.”

By Jennifer Sweet, CBC News, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/miramichi-sitcom-1.6516899

SLASHER: RIPPER (SEASON 5) – “Slasher, which airs on Shudder, has also set Will & Grace’s Eric McCormack as lead on its latest installment, Slasher: Ripper. The series, which has been renewed for its fifth season, is heading back in time to the late 19th century — there’s a killer stalking the mean streets, but instead of targeting the poor and downtrodden like Jack the Ripper, The Widow is meting out justice against the rich and powerful.”

By Peter White, Deadline, deadline.com/2022/02/creepshow-kin-bloodlands-slasher-renewed-at-amc-networks-eric-mccormack-1234930306/