



Joelle Sellner

August 26th, 2012 Laura

What is your name and current occupation?

Joelle Sellner, freelance animation writer.

What are the crazier jobs you had before getting into animation?

When I was 15, I worked on the assembly line at a sweater factory. I didn't realize I was illegal child labor, I just thought I had an awesome job where I could buy cheap sweaters. I also worked the night shift at a financial printer on Wall Street where I ordered "dinner" for investment bankers at 3 AM.

What are some of your favorite projects you're proud to have been a part of?

This year I had the opportunity to write an episode of BEN 10: OMNIVERSE, Cartoon Network's reboot of the franchise. Everyone involved is so incredibly talented it was an honor to be included. Since most of my writing has been action for boys, I loved writing comedy for girls on Mattel's MONSTER HIGH webisodes. I also was a writer/story editor on the upcoming SAMURAI! DAYCARE web series for Smosh's Shut Up! Cartoons channel on YouTube. We all worked hard to make it the first WGA-covered animated series created for the web. And as the only girl on staff, I was proud to write the grossest, most offensive jokes.

How did you become interested in animation?

As far back as I can remember, I watched cartoons. I watched them while I was getting ready for school. Then I'd come home and watch them until dinner. If the cable channels had been around then, I probably would've stayed up all night watching them. Now I stay up all night writing them. And I still watch an unhealthy amount of TV.

Where are you from and how did you get into the animation business?

I grew up in the outer boroughs of New York City— Flushing, Queens. Flushing was some Dutch name the settlers gave it that had nothing to do with indoor plumbing. When I graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, I moved back to New York and wanted to be a TV writer. So I took a film class at NYU where the instructor told me that "any idiot can write for TV." That was incentive enough to move to LA, where I started working as an advertising copywriter (talk about crazy jobs) and started writing spec scripts. My writing partner at the time knew the story editor on MARY-KATE AND ASHLEY IN ACTION, an animated series starring the Olsen Twins. She gave us a shot and we worked on a few more shows together until I went solo.

What's a typical day like for you with regards to your job?

Since I'm freelance, I get to work from home and enjoy a flexible schedule – or as the elderly man across the street says: "lazy woman that never works and should get a job filing papers." Even though it looks like I sit around eating Bon Bons, I actually keep quite busy and try to structure my day. I start the morning by going to the gym, then I send out emails and do other things related to getting my next job(s). After lunch I start my first stretch of writing, and if there are no looming deadlines I'll go to a networking event in the early evening. At night, I have my longer stretch of writing and worrying why my emails pleading for work are (mostly) going unanswered.

What part of your job do you like best? Why?

I always love to watch the finished product for the first time. Unbelievably talented people draw and animate the characters, produce the show and give my words a



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voice. It blows me away to think these words and thoughts I typed up by myself in my little home office are now being broadcast around the world.

What part of your job do you like least? Why?

Pitching. I love to work on original ideas, but I never know what the execs are looking for. Sometimes I do a ton of work on something I'm excited about, only to hear "We have something exactly like that in development."

What kind of technology do you work with on a daily basis?

I'm fairly low-tech. I have my PC, Word and screenwriting software – usually some version of Final Draft. If I'm breaking a story, I kick it old school and write on a legal pad with a pen.

What is the most difficult part for you about being in the business?

As a freelancer, I always have to ask people for work. Since many friends are story editors in charge of hiring writers, I force myself to ask the dreaded question that puts them in an awkward position. I feel like I should just wear a huge button everywhere I go that says "Ask me how I can write your show." But the upside is when friends do hire me, I get to work with people I already like.

In your travels, have you had any brushes with animation greatness?

I consider everyone who hires me to be great. I've actually been lucky to work for some brilliant story editors and producers: Charlotte Fullerton, Stan Berkowitz, David Slack, Duane Capizzi, Chris Yost, Brandon Sawyer, Audu Paden, Adam Beechen and others.

Describe a tough situation you had in life.

My mother passed away when I was 16, leaving me with no family or guardian. I was very fortunate to have a lot of help from my friends and their families. Compared to that, there aren't any career obstacles I can't handle.

Any side projects you're working on that you'd like to share details of?

I'm currently writing my first graphic novel, featuring a kickass female heroine.

Any unusual talents or hobbies like tying a cherry stem with your tongue or metallurgy?

Hobbies: I collect snow globes. Talents: Bargain shopping. I once found a shirt at Barney's for four dollars.

Is there any advice you can give for an aspiring animation student or artist trying to break into the business?

I can only speak for the writers. If you don't get the response you want from your scripts, keep writing. And don't let anyone tell you what you can or cannot do, especially if you're a woman. If you want to write action animation or comics, as long as you do it well someone will believe in you.

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