

Reel West Editor's Advice for Freelance Writers

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I had the opportunity recently to interview Ian Caddell, a prolific film reviewer and the editor of *Reel West* magazine. He gave me a lot of good advice for surviving as a freelance writer. Ian is a very busy man, but he was gracious enough to grant me, a lowly Douglas College student, a half-hour telephone interview.

I first wanted to establish if Caddell saw himself as a film critic—he doesn't, despite writing over 5,000 movie reviews—before moving into how this *Reel West* editor got into writing about film.

Caddell began his career while still a student at Simon Fraser University (SFU) in the late 1970s, writing articles and acting as an editor for SFU's student newspaper, *The Peak*. Over the course of several semesters he wrote many articles, several of which were movie reviews. It was on the basis of those movie reviews that he got his first post-graduation job for the Famous Players chain, acting as their public relations agent for Western Canada.

Caddell then moved to Newfoundland for a time, where he became a film critic for the *Newfoundland Herald*. He quickly gained the status of a minor celebrity there due to his movie reviews. He was often invited to visit small towns and villages, and was even given excellent service or snubbed completely at restaurants or shops based on whether he praised or panned a given movie. After his experience as a film critic in Newfoundland, he left the *Herald* with a distaste for movie reviews. What he didn't realize at the time was that his experiences were relatively unique due to the *Newfoundland Herald's* status in that province as the most widely read weekly magazine since its founding in 1946, mostly because it held a monopoly on news there until 1974.

After moving back to Vancouver in the mid-80s, Caddell began submitting articles and reviews to the *Georgia Straight* and soon had his own "Hollywood North" column, in which he discussed Vancouver's film industry. In turn, this column—having given him the status of expert on the Vancouver film scene—drew the attention of the *Hollywood Reporter* and later the *Daily Variety*, the two most influential trade papers in the American film industry. While employed by these papers he was paid to go to film festivals all around the world—such as Cannes—to watch and review movies for a living. By 1989 he was hired on as the editor at *Reel West* magazine and has held that position ever since.

Being the editor of *Reel West* magazine, published six times a year, has allowed Caddell to continue freelancing. He has written for more than 80 publications worldwide and writes about 500 printed articles per year. Caddell now knows most of the players in the film industry and has become the go-to-guy on the Vancouver film industry scene. He is regularly invited to write about film due to this expertise, and even acted as a commentator for CTV after the Academy Awards. His philosophy on freelancing is to never turn down work and to remain extremely organized.

Caddell's advice for beginning freelancers is this: Find your niche. If you're interested in a particular subject, find out how much of a need there is for it, how many aspects you can write about it, and who will publish it.

Entertainment (as well as books and music) is a good subject since there is always something to write about, whether it be films and television, celebrities, or industry happenings. Caddell had once considered being a sports writer, but he concluded that it was only possible to do so

if he had a steady job due to the seasonal aspects of that field. Restaurant reviews are also limited since the subject matter is very localized, lacking the universality of film, books, and music.

Finally, Caddell stresses the importance of time management and organization. Figure out how much you need to make and how much time you have for writing, then decide whether it pays off to devote a certain block of time to a given task. He also plans out his time carefully and knows what he needs to get done in a day, a week, and sometimes even several weeks in advance, especially since much of his work involves lining up interviews and meeting deadlines.

Despite all the terrific advice that Caddell gave me, it was one suggestion he gave me early on in the interview that stuck with me long afterwards: If you're a student planning to be a writer, get involved with your student newspaper. Instead of just thinking about submitting that article or letter to the editor that you've been working out in your mind, take the time to sit down, write out what you have to say, and submit it. Then do it again.

Managing Editor's Note: Word up, Ian Caddell. You really hit the nail on the head with that last suggestion.

