

Go to the profile of Kate Hagen



Kate Hagen

Writer. Director of Community at @theblcklst. Spooky.

Dec 6, 2017

The Black List Interview: Yolanda Avery



Today, we talk to writer Yolanda Avery about how the past, present, and future have shaped her journey as a writer. Yolanda's script, *NANA'S SECRET RECIPE*, was discovered on the Black List website, and currently in production in Austin, Texas! *NANA'S SECRET RECIPE* is the ninth fully produced featured based on a script discovered via blckst.com!

The Past

What was the first film that had a major impact on your life?

CALAMITY JANE and STEEL MAGNOLIAS.

Was there a single film that made you want to be a screenwriter?

There was never a single film, but a long list of them that gave me the drive to be a part of the entertainment business, in the front or behind the camera. I just knew I wanted to be a part of this business.

How else did the decision to pursue that career evolve?

The decision was more guided by the universe. I had to go get that 9 to 5 job to support my family and put those dreams on hold, but never gave up. I waited until all my children were grown and doing their own thing before I started focusing on my goals. I just kept putting those desires and goals on my vision board to help motivate the objectives that I set for myself.

Most writers have to have “day jobs” in order to stay afloat. What was the strangest job you ever had before becoming a writer?

I do not think of it as a strange job, but one I never thought I would have to do. It was working from home as a customer service representative, helping answer questions for people with tax issues and an operator of the taxicab company. That was weird because I was giving directions and addressing issues for a state that I absolutely knew nothing about, and was not a resident. Let's just say I made an impact on that person's day. It was not good at all.

The Present

How do you find ideas and how do you choose which ones to work on?

The ideas are ones that are based on my experiences and people I have come across in my lifetime. Or sometimes situations that have made an impact in my life or something that I feel needs to be addressed and brought into the public view.

Walk us through a normal day of writing for you. Any special habits to keep the muse happy?

My normal day is being in a quiet setting with good energy vibrations surrounding me, my notebook, and plenty of coffee and tea.

Which films are keeping you inspired at the moment?

The films that keep me inspired are those that highlight females making power moves and social issues that need more attention. I love the feel-good films that bring attention to an issue and how one can overcome those issues for the good.

The Future

If you could make one film, with no restrictions in place, what would that film be?

Actually, I have that film in place right now, which is NANA'S SECRET RECIPE. This was my first film it allowed me to hit on many social issues such as addressing middle-aged actors, including all female leads, the LGBTQ community, and medical marijuana. I wrote this film about three years back, and the producer/director who contacted me via the Black List website loved the script just the way it was. They were excited to finally find a script that addresses all of the issues with a flair where it could be taken seriously without categorizing the script.

What would you be doing if you weren't a writer?

I probably would be in customer service at some sort of job that has to do with sales with consumers; a job that I have over 25 years of experience. Did that, do not want to do it again.

**Dinner with three of your favorite writers and/or filmmakers, dead or alive.
Who's coming to dinner?**

Francis Ford Coppola, Nancy Meyers, and Ava DuVernay.

Who picks up the check?

I will pick up the check, since all three are my dinner dates. I would be in awe of getting information from all of them. I mean, come on, the number one mobster movie of all times with female writers who can bring a script to the forefront. It is more like creating a Godmother of Sugar Mills, who wouldn't want to see that?

The Black List

How did you first hear about The Black List?

I read an article about the company promoting script contests from another website called Inktip. I thought I would check out the Black List website. I set up a user account and uploaded my script for some feedback. The work I listed had been out there on the website for about a year. I did not receive hardly any hits, but I did not get discouraged, I figured one day maybe I would get some feedback. Then a year later, I received one message requesting my script and the rest is history from that initial contact.

Since using The Black List, how has your career been impacted?

My career has taken off in many directions, and it has opened doors to all sorts of avenues. It is so exciting to see your dreams become reality every day.

My success came from the Black List website. Before I had become a member, I tried others that required payment for submission. Whenever I had the money to do it, I would pay for submission of my script. Let's just say I got a lot of rejections. The majority of them said "not interested," and "not what we are looking for."

So I found a website (Inktip) that had an article about different writing contests. It included a link to check out the contest, so I went there and as I was learning, I decided to review the Black List website too. The link had caught my attention because they were offering something that no other website offered: I could upload my script to allow industry members to give me feedback, that's something no one else was doing. All I had to do was set up a profile account.

Well, I did just that. The first few months went by and I noticed there was no response from anybody, not even a click. I did not get discouraged because I was used to the rejection. So a year went by, then one day I had almost decided to remove the script from the website because it was just not working out for me. I had exhausted all my resources and did not know what my next option would be.

The day I decided to remove it is when I got an email from a guy named Mehul Shah. On January 5, 2017 Mehul had sent me a message. It said: "Hi Yolanda. My name is Mehul Shah and I want to read your script THE BAKING CLUB CHRONICLES: NANA'S BAMMY SWEETS. If you could send it to me, I'm a producer looking for a fun film with an older cast." He provided me with his information so I could verify his references.

It took off from there—he sent me an email stating that he loved the script and wanted to make me an offer. Instead of selling the script, I told him I wanted to be a part of it. This was not just a script for me, it was my brand—becoming a writer and the start of my franchise. I fell in love with the name Bammy Sweets—this name was going to be my brand and my future. Here's what the script's about: after losing all their retirement savings in a Ponzi scheme, five grandmas band together to create a bakery serving pot desserts. Trying to recoup their pensions, they realize one of their own is struggling with cancer, and their quest for making money becomes more important and dangerous than ever. The local drug dealer, Kingpin Paint, discovers

what they are doing. Through it all, the nannies are bonded by their sisterhood and their desire to help their friend in need in this hilarious southern tale. Who could imagine old ladies getting in the dope business? No one would believe it, and the cool part about it is: they're getting away with it.

The whole reason why I chose Bammy Sweets is that it stands for two things: the first initial of each leading character, and "Bammy" is another term for marijuana. Not only would the film be a hit, but I also wanted to create a product that would make the audience say, "I want one of those cookies right now," and that is what we are doing. We will have a product line throughout the nation to put Bammy Sweets in stores—the line will consist of cookies and brownies, of course, without the marijuana. The product will support relaxation and sleep with premium hemp protein. They do not contain any THC and are not psychoactive, and will be legal in all 50 states.

So, you can see why I am so excited about this whole process. The production team has changed the name of the script to NANA'S SECRET RECIPE, which still reflects the issues that are written into the script. I wanted the work to allow the older generation to showcase their talents. Since Hollywood is having some difficulty assigning roles for women of senior age, I wanted to give them the option of showing that age does not matter, and that the older generation can do what the younger generation can too.

A lot of the storyline is based on social issues that either myself or people that I know have had to deal with. We wanted to get a message across without losing the essence of the movie. The best way to do that was to go back to the old school, like STEEL MAGNOLIAS. I would have loved to see those ladies in that film pull something off like that. The cast that was chosen for this film is amazing, and they are doing a fantastic job of achieving just what we were looking for and then some. The movie is currently being shot in Austin, Texas. Mehul Shah is the director, producer, and writer, Mansi Patelisis is also a producer, and I'm a writer on the film as well. I think the timing is perfect, especially with the talk going on about legalizing medical marijuana, gender equality, and other social issues that are now being addressed—we peaked at just the right time. I hope everyone enjoys [the film] just as much as we loved making it. If anyone is interested in following the process, please follow us on Facebook, and Bammy Sweets.

I would like to thank you, Black List, for giving me a voice to showcase my talent with your audience.

Any tips for writers interested in the site?

Patience, patience, is the number one key. You have to stick with it; do not give up on your dreams. Remember the key to succeeding is that you must invest in yourself first.

Thanks to Yolanda!

ScreenwritingFilmBlack List InterviewThe Black ListInterview

One clap, two clap, three clap, forty?

By clapping more or less, you can signal to us which stories really stand out.