

Listening Comprehension

INTERVIEW WITH A SCRIPTWRITER

Narrator: Cliff Dorfman is a film scriptwriter who has worked in the TV series *Entourage* and the film *Warrior*. He is also an actor and a film director. He started working in the early 1990s, and has not stopped since. Right now, he also teaches writing at UCLA (University of California in Los Angeles). In this interview, he talks to a reporter of *Filmmaker* magazine.

[Now listen to the interview.]

Reporter: We are here today with Cliff Dorfman, who is many things: actor, film director, scriptwriter, teacher... Today we want to talk to him about his writing. Good evening, Cliff.

Cliff Dorfman: Good evening!

Reporter: Let's start at the very beginning. What is the first story you ever wrote?

Cliff Dorfman: You'll be surprised... my first story was the beginning of a novel which I wrote when I was around 11 years old. I handwrote at least 50 pages on a notebook that I kept inside my desk drawer in my bedroom. Somehow, though, it got lost. I have no idea what happened to it.

Reporter: That's a pity! Growing up, what movies or stories inspired your creativity?

Cliff Dorfman: From early on it was Greek mythology. I was, and still am in a lot of ways, obsessed with it. Then I moved to classic literature (Shakespeare, Dickens, to name a couple) and then films, especially American films.

Reporter: What about modern literature? It doesn't inspire you?

Cliff Dorfman: I have to admit that I don't read anything "modern"...

Reporter: Imagine that you were not a well-known writer, how would you make directors and producers read your screenplay?

Cliff Dorfman: Well, I have never had any problems with that myself, so I don't really know what to say. However, some friends of mine have told me how they do it.

Reporter: So, how do they do it?

Cliff Dorfman: Well, according to them, you must follow the work of other writers and directors that you find interesting. Then get in touch with them through the Internet. In this digital age, it's easier than ever to contact people: e-mail, webpages, Facebook, Twitter... Once you've made contact, you can send them your script directly.

Reporter: What experiences from your life influence your characters?

Cliff Dorfman: Every single one. Every person I know, have ever known or even **run into** for an instant. Every experience I've ever had. My family. My friends. My relationships. Everything. I sit around public places and listen to other people's conversations. If they interest me, I sometimes record them or write down things they say.

Reporter: How emotionally involved are you with the characters you create?

Cliff Dorfman: Oh, they live with me the entire time I'm writing them. I can be out with friends, at a dinner, on a date and I'm sitting there thinking to myself, well, how would my character react now? They're all around me except when I sleep, fortunately!

Reporter: What is the most important aspect of building a great character?

Cliff Dorfman: Many things: life experience, including **weird** eating habits. Physical aspects are also extremely important. We are constantly doing things with our bodies that reflect the way that we feel and what we think.

Reporter: Do you write an outline before you actually start writing?

Cliff Dorfman: Sometimes. I don't particularly like doing it, but certain stories **demand** it.

Reporter: Now I'd like to ask you about your favourite films. What type of structure do these films usually have?

Cliff Dorfman: They completely vary. The structure in *Goodfellas* is one I love: instead of starting at the beginning and going until the end, it starts in the middle, and goes backwards and forwards. Very interesting. But the film I love the most, though, is *Pulp Fiction*. Brilliant...

Reporter: During the writing process, do you ever find that your characters start to speak for themselves?

Cliff Dorfman: Always. If they don't speak for themselves, then I'm sure I've done something wrong.

Reporter: Does dialogue come easily, or is it difficult for you?

Cliff Dorfman: No! None of it comes easily. It's all painful. Everything in writing a script is very, very hard.

Reporter: What about your daily routine when you're writing? Do you have one?

Cliff Dorfman: **Working out** is a huge part of it. I do boxing and yoga. I go to the gym, but I'm not very fond of jogging. Other things that also help are putting my phone away, turning it off and leaving it in another room.

Reporter: Have you ever experienced writer's block? That is, have you ever found yourself totally unable to write?

Cliff Dorfman: Oh yes! I think it happens to all writers, and it's really awful! You sit in front of the computer, hour after hour, and you don't write a single word. Very frustrating. Very depressing.

Reporter: And so, how did you overcome it?

Cliff Dorfman: Well, I have to admit that I've tried a lot of things: keeping a strict routine, meditation, writing on paper, using a notebook, working with colleagues. Finally, what worked for me was camping a few days alone in the woods. When I came back, I could write again.

Reporter: Interesting! Screenwriting is obviously a solitary job. How do you deal with it? Is it hard to be alone so much?

Cliff Dorfman: As a matter of fact, I like being alone and working alone, although it can get hard sometimes. When you work in an office, you can discuss things with people, or even get mad at them. When you work alone, you have to do all these things with yourself! But it's not really a problem for me.

Reporter: Well, I'm glad to hear that, Cliff. Thank you very much for the interview.

Cliff Dorfman: You're welcome!

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1. The first story that Cliff Dorfman ever wrote...

- ☐ was a whole novel.
- ☒ **was handwritten.**
- ☐ is still in a drawer.
- ☐ had less than 50 pages.

2. What was Cliff Dorfman NOT inspired by?

- ☐ Greek mythology.
- ☒ **Modern novels.**
- ☐ Shakespeare.
- ☐ American movies.

3. According to Cliff Dorfman, if you want your script to be read you must ...

- ☐ follow writers and directors everywhere.
- ☒ **contact writers and directors.**
- ☐ visit writers and directors.
- ☐ be active in Facebook and Twitter.

4. Which of the following statements is TRUE?

- ☐ Cliff Dorfman finds it extremely hard to write about characters.
- ☐ Cliff Dorfman never listens to other people talking outside his home.
- ☒ **Everything in Cliff Dorfman's life influences his characters.**
- ☐ Cliff Dorfman never goes out with friends during the writing process.

5. Cliff Dorfman's characters...

- ☐ all have strange eating habits.
- ☐ are constantly moving.
- ☒ **are part of his life.**
- ☐ appear in his dreams.

6. What does Cliff Dorfman say about the films he likes?

- ☒ **His favourite is *Pulp Fiction*.**
- ☐ They all follow a chronological order.
- ☐ They all have the same structure.
- ☐ His favourite is *Goodfellas*.

7. Which of the following is NOT part of Cliff Dorfman's routine?

- ☐ Yoga.
- ☐ Boxing.
- ☐ Going to the gym.
- ☒ **Jogging.**

8. How did Cliff Dorfman overcome writer's block?

- ☐ He stopped using a notebook.
- ☐ He tried many things, but nothing worked.
- ☒ **He spent a few days alone in the forest.**
- ☐ He went camping with his friends.