

30 Q & A FOR INTERVIEWS

- 1. Q. So it looks like Art for Growth is breaking new ground in the nonprofit sector.**

A: That's the goal. Usually, films produced by nonprofits are documentaries. But we are a narrative, feature film production company. And with most indie filmmakers focusing on self-expression and big studios focusing on big returns or profit, we need a player in the game that's willing to put excellence and purpose before profit.

- 2. Q: I understand that there is quite a history behind what brought about our current rating system for movies and television, which I found interesting, given today's demand for more family-friendly and uplifting content.**

A: It is interesting because though some may be aware of how the Golden Age of Hollywood was brought down due to its monopoly over the industry. I dare say most are unaware of the double collapse that took place, and we think the public should be informed because it is what led to the state of cinema and television today, which may also explain why more edifying content is needed.

- 3. Q: So, what exactly was taking place concurrently with the fall of that golden era?**

A: Well, there was the legal fall of the monopolies and the moral fall of the Hays Code. So here's what happened. Even in the early 1900's, the public was concerned about the influence of movies on young minds.

- 4. Q: That's right. That was when movies were taken from being shown by traveling carnivals to dark, crowded theaters called Nickelodeons. Is that right?**

A: Yes. Exactly. Public and religious leaders were in a panic, the film industry was unregulated, and freedom of speech was being thrown around, until the whole matter ended up before the Supreme Court.

- 5. Q: Didn't one of the concerns have to do with young people sitting in dark theaters, unsupervised, watching stories about crime, romance, and rebellion?**

A: It was. Can you imagine what those people would say or think about the content young people have access to today?

6. Q: All I can say is that there is a thin line between progress and decline. So, tell us about the Supreme Court ruling.

A: Well, they determined that cinema was a business conducted for profit, with significant power to influence viewers, so they classified movies as entertainment that needed to be regulated.

7. Q: So, they concluded that filmmaking was not an art form?

A: Yes. They deemed it to be a commercial product made for profit. I don't know if they needed to make that distinction to support their decision legally, but personally, whether something is an art form or not, its influence on the public should be the primary concern.

Which begs the question, has today's film industry considered its contribution to our nation's current health crisis, where one in five people are suffering from mental health illnesses (the majority from Gen Z)? Of course, there are several contributing factors, but I believe it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge that today's visual-audio programming and cinema are among them.

8. Q: In what way do you think the film industry has contributed to the crisis?

A: Walt Disney (the man, not the current studio) was quoted as saying, "Storytelling is the way to change the world. Movies can and do have tremendous influence in shaping young lives."

Actor Nicolas Cage is quoted as saying, "Movies have the ability to literally change people's minds."

American author and educator Neil Postman suggested that television shapes our understanding of the world and how it should be presented. He also warned that a focus on trivial entertainment risks cultural decline.

And philosopher and public intellectual Noam Chomsky is quoted as saying, "Control of the media equates to control of the mind."

Storytelling has been a source of escapism for centuries. The reading books' ship has sailed, for the most part. We may never see it return to us,

leaving us with visual-audio storytelling. But instead of offering a mental respite and a means of escape from the madness in the world, most of today's visual stories present you with all the ills, ugliness, and evil in the world, straight to whatever device you're watching.

I mean, it's entertaining, even intriguing, but it's certainly not uplifting, and it doesn't make us feel good about anything, which is unfortunate, because even younger generations know that we're living in precarious times. They could use an occasional break that's uplifting and positive. Since their heads are buried in screens and videos, visual storytelling is a good way to reach them.

9. Q: Absolutely. So what happened after the 1915 Supreme Court ruling?

A: Hollywood came up with the Hays Code, a censoring system for movies. They figured if they didn't come up with one, the government would do it for them. And it seemed to work. They made movies that not only gave the public what they liked but also told stories that helped America through some of its tough periods in history.

But the industry got carried away, became a monopoly, and ended up back in court.

In the meantime, the moral infrastructure of filmmaking also came under legal attack when one foreign filmmaker, Roberto Rossellini, made a short about a woman getting pregnant by a stranger she believed to be a saint and then having his baby out of wedlock, whom she believed to be Holy.

10. Q: Wow, it wasn't even a feature film.

A: No, it was a short film. Rossellini's distributor hired Ephraim London, a lawyer and fierce civil liberties advocate, who took the case all the way to the Supreme Court by 1952. This was over thirty years after the previous ruling. This time, the Supreme Court ruled that the First Amendment protected movies and should be treated as a medium for the free communication of ideas. And so, in 1968, the Hays Code was dead and replaced by what we have today: the Motion Picture Association's rating system, or MPA.

11. Q: Do you agree with either Supreme Court ruling?

A: My opinion regarding the rulings is moot and has no bearing. However, I consider filmmaking an art form, but because of its power, filmmakers have a tremendous responsibility to give significant consideration to how their content or stories will affect the public. To quote a line from a movie, "With great power comes great responsibility. Filmmaking is powerful.

Our obligation to one another as human beings should far outweigh what we feel like doing or saying, whether in person, in a book, or in a visual story. We're taught from childhood that you can't just say and do whatever you want. We're supposed to consider the consequences, especially how it affects others.

Of course, my thinking would probably be considered idealistic by most. So, given the realities we live with, Art for Growth has thrown its hat in the ring.

12. Q: How do you believe Art for Growth can make a difference?

A: The team at Art for Growth believes that having a Narrative filmmaking entity that's willing to put excellence and purpose before profit, that writes stories based on what the public is calling for and needs. Stories created to inspire, motivate, and leave the viewer feeling better than when they sat down to watch are the kind of content that can make a difference.

For example, the project we're currently seeking funding for, titled *Stroke of Genius*, is powerful enough to ignite inward healing in its viewers, especially those who are living with wounds from child abuse and other trauma.

13. Q: What's *Stroke of Genius* about?

A: It's a story about how, after 18 years as the subject of a cognitive restoration study, a young man is mysteriously healed of chronic disabilities from childhood abuse and left with a genius IQ. The head of the study, driven by greed, plots to induce a relapse when the young man insists the phenomenon was a miracle from GOD.

It's captivating and resonating but not cheesy or preachy, and without moral compromise. It's a family-friendly drama with a very tasteful faith-based element. It will prove to be a beautiful work of art.

14. Q: I understand you have Emmy Award Winner Joann Hock on your production team.

A: Yes, and we are so grateful to have her as the project's co-director and cinematographer. We're thankful to have an entire team of seasoned industry pros for the project. Once we raise all we need to cover the film's budget, we're all set and ready to go.

15. Q: How can we learn more?

A: Visit artforgrowth.org. Visitors who don't mind a spoiler alert can listen to the audio synopsis of the story to get a good sense of the project's heart and feel.

There's also a short video demonstrating the film's log line.

But for those who appreciate a spoiler alert or prefer to know as little as possible about a film before seeing it, we also have a sizzle reel to ignite your curiosity. It won't show you what the film is about, but we hope that it will make you want to see it.

There's also a page showing all the ways to get involved.

We'll be launching a Crowdfunder on May 5th, but we need to establish committed supporters beforehand. So, please use the supporters pledge page to make a pledge now and receive a big token of our appreciation once you fulfill your commitment on the Crowdfunding platform in May.

16. Q: Share with us why we need a nonprofit film production company?

A: Well, with most indie filmmakers focusing on self-expression and big studios focusing on big returns or profit, we need a player in the game that's willing to put excellence and purpose before profit, that's able to write stories that inspire, motivate, and leave the viewer feeling good; the types of stories that much of the public is demanding.

17. Q: Several indie filmmakers are producing excellent, wholesome content with high production value. Some would say that the quality of faith-based content has come a long way.

A: And I would agree with them, and thank GOD for those filmmakers. But according to the National Religious Broadcasters, the Barna Group, and other industry analysis, 60% of American adults consume Christian media in some form. Other sources say there is a clear demand for more family-friendly and faith-based content. Yet in 2023, 592 films were released, 43 were faith-based, that's a ratio of 12.7 to 1. The void is even greater for television series. My point is that there are not enough producers or indie filmmakers creating the type of content that a large portion of Americans want to see.

18. Q: Out of the 43 faith-based films in 2023, how many do you think were quality movies? I ask because I love a good faith-based film, but based on my experience, most are either cheesy or preachy.

A: And that's the reputation that the small number of filmmakers who are dedicated to producing quality uplifting content are slowly turning around.

Like them, Art for Growth's primary objective is not only to produce more faith-based and family-friendly content, but also to create content that demonstrates true artistic craftsmanship, and definitely, nothing cheesy or preachy. We will not settle for content that doesn't resonate, entertain, or captivate viewers. And we have a writing style that allows us to do that, without moral compromise.

19. Q: One of the first texts you see on Art for Growth's home page is: "Not Another Cheesy or Preachy Movie." How important is that to your organization?

A: Very, because it's a big part of the problem as well as production value. Visual-audio-storytelling is an art form that requires a lot to pull it off, including a team of artist who know their craft.

Within the past twenty-five years, Art for Growth has produced 16 stage plays and about 27 short films, but that alone doesn't qualify us to produce a full-length movie for theatrical release or to ask viewers to pay to see it. We know our strengths; it's writing and directing.

We've always made it clear to the public that the content we've created in the past consists of student and community projects or youth productions. But for Stroke of Genius, we had to take the organization to the next level. To do that, we had to assemble a seasoned, industry-level professional team. And with GOD's help, we've done that. We've been so blessed to have Emmy Award Winner, Joanne Hock, as co-director, and cinematographer, Heather Breslin, as line producer, and even Brian Baugh as one of the project's Executive Producers to help with the distribution stage of the process, and those are just the heads of our production team.

20. Q: Tell us a little about you and your journey from youth services to feature film producer.

A: Serving younger generations is still the heart of the organization. But now, instead of producing content with and for youth one small group at a time, we can reach young people all over the country. The transition has taken Art for Growth from being a local to a national corporation.

The protagonists and several other main characters in the film are Gen Z. We believe Stroke of Genius will have a strong appeal to younger generations.

Art for Growth is the trade name for Songs with Meaning, Inc., so if anyone were to look us up with the IRS, they would find Songs with Meaning, dba Art for Growth. The organization has been around for over twenty years now. But, up until 2024, we've always been a small, volunteer-based organization. Partly because I don't like asking for money – period. I have an aversion to fundraising, so I structured the organization to do without it. Instead, we would give our time freely and raise whatever funds we needed through program fees and ticket sales. We've never needed much funding.

The whole fundraising thing is just one reason why I really believe the ALMIGHTY led us to produce Stroke of Genius. The thought of having to raise money for a feature film budget terrified me. I don't know a lot about

psychology, but I don't think human beings tend to walk towards what they're afraid of without some type of outside influence. I really struggled and tried to convince myself that I must have gotten my signals crossed, because we are a small organization.

Before COVID, we had a very successful youth arts program. It was licensed by the State, so once COVID hit, we had to close it down. The first thing I did was pray for guidance to discern if it was supposed to reopen. It was then that I remembered something I had completely forgotten. When we launched the program, the ALMIGHTY had pressed upon me that it would only be for seven years. Which, of course, led me to look at the calendar. It was seven years. If we had gone into 2020, we would have gone into the 8th year.

That's when doors began to open, along with signs that eventually compelled us, in 2024, to enter into the first stage of producing Stroke of Genius.

21. Q: So, share more about Stroke of Genius.

A: It's a story about how, after 18 years as the subject of a cognitive restoration study, a young man is mysteriously healed of chronic disabilities from childhood abuse and left with a genius IQ. The head of the study, driven by greed, plots to induce a relapse when the young man insists the phenomenon was a miracle from GOD.

The movie will prove to be a captivating, entertaining work of art. The story has the potential to ignite inward healing for its viewers, especially those living with child abuse and other types of trauma.

22. Q: That's interesting. It sounds like it's tackling the controversy and debates happening now over GOD and Science.

A: Absolutely, but it also broaches the subject of child abuse in a way that moves past victimhood to showcase the profound strength found in the face of adversity, and it celebrates the voice and extraordinary resilience of individuals living with disabilities. There's also an amazing, memorable redemption story that serves as one of the film's subplots.

23. Q: So what can we do to help make the complete production and release of Stroke of Genius a reality?

A: Right now, we're in the first of five stages of production, and that's the stage that requires raising the funds needed to green-light the other stages. It's also the stage where many projects go to die.

So, it's important to me personally that any potential supporter or viewer understands that Stroke of Genius is based on an award-winning screenplay, so the proof of concept has already been established. And we certainly have the professionals needed to turn this story into an amazing, cinematic experience. We're doing, and will continue to do, all that is required of us and more.

The story has a beautiful racial diversity, we believe viewers will find refreshing. The script has earned accolades in both faith-based and secular competitions, thereby showing its ability to be enjoyed and appreciated by many.

So, the only thing that can stand in the way is a lack of support. Because, like most things in this world, it comes down to the money.

24. Q: The influence of storytelling starts in childhood, doesn't it?

A: Yes, it does. Storytelling has been a source of escapism for centuries. I mean, the reading ship has sailed for the most part, leaving us with visual-audio storytelling. But instead of offering a mental respite and a means of escape from all the madness in the world, most of today's visual stories present you with all the ills, ugliness, and evil in the world, straight to whatever device you're watching. It's entertaining, but it's certainly not uplifting, and doesn't make us feel good about anything.

So, it's important to understand that Stroke of Genius is not just about the release of an excellent, uplifting movie. That's just one of a threefold purpose. If everything goes as planned, the film's reputation will enable Art for Growth to mentor and support other writers through our screenwriter-to-producer transition lab, thereby building a pipeline of inspiring content. That, of course, would allow us to fulfill our goal of being a welcome addition to the quality, edifying content that other dedicated indie filmmakers produce.

But one of the reasons Stroke of Genius is being used as the catalyst for that achievement is that, **as a screenwriter, I've received a lot of guidance and advice over the years from college teachers and others. But we want** to be in a position to guide and mentor new writers through a journey we've actually taken. The production and release of Stroke of Genius will allow us to do that.

And then there's the final purpose: to support other nonprofit community partners with a portion of the film's theatrical proceeds. We hope to connect with up to 100 community partners across 10 states we've selected. We're limiting it to 100 to avoid diluting the proceeds we plan to distribute. There's more info about community partnerships for nonprofits on our website.

We genuinely believe that our Heavenly FATHER intends to do a great deal of good through this project.

So, visit artforgrowth.org, learn what you can about the project, and definitely listen to the audio synopsis. You can listen while you drive, wash dishes, wherever. **And if, after learning more about it, you decide** you would like to see the movie made, get involved.

We'll be launching a Crowdfunder on May 5th, 2026, but we need to establish committed supporters well in advance. So, the site is set up to allow supporters to pledge their support now and receive a big token of our appreciation once they fulfill their pledge on the Crowdfunding platform in May.

25. Q. Why don't we have more uplifting movies or television choices?

A: Well, as you know, there are Hollywood or big studios, and then there are independent filmmakers. The good news is, there are a handful of independent filmmakers who do an excellent job of telling edifying, family-friendly, and faith-based stories.

But it's a tiny number compared to those who don't, or who focus on other genres. And for most of the latter, the focus is self-expression. I mean, indie filmmakers would like to make money, but self-expression, I believe, is the primary motivation. Sometimes what's expressed is good, sometimes not so much, which is why many investors have been burned on independent films, making it harder for independents to raise funding.

But, for Hollywood, or the big studio conglomerates, it's just the opposite. It's all about the business of show. Making successful movies is a fast way to earn a big fat return on investment, and it's the business goal of big studios to make big money with as little risk as possible, which is why they keep cloning what's worked in the past. Superhero franchises for movies and crime-mystery-police series for television. It's just business for the execs; it's all about profit.

Which brings me to what we believe is the core of the problem, and one of the reasons why we need a player in the game that's a nonprofit narrative film production entity, not just because of the lack of edifying content, but because of how the public is being deprived of something it needs.

26. Q: You think people need movies and television?

A: Not exactly. But be it true or fiction, it appears that human beings need stories. And, I say that because storytelling has been a source of escapism for centuries.

In fact, film producers during what was called the golden age of Hollywood provided the public with the types of movies it needed to help the country through difficult times, such as the Great Depression and World War II. They did this either because they viewed show business from a more psychological perspective or because of censorship restrictions. In either case, they took on the responsibility of protecting and inspiring viewers through the content they released to the public.

So, let's look at today. Even younger generations know that we're living in precarious times. And though there are several contributors to our nation's current public health crisis, where one in five people are suffering from mental health illnesses (the majority from Gen Z), I believe it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge that today's visual-audio programming and cinema is one of those contributors.

27. Q: So what type of difference do you think a nonprofit film production company could make?

A: Walt Disney (the man, not the current studio) was quoted as saying, "Storytelling is the way to change the world. Movies can and do have tremendous influence in shaping young lives."

Actor Nicolas Cage is quoted as saying, "Movies have the ability to literally change people's minds."

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For example, the project we're currently seeking funding for, titled *Stroke of Genius*, is powerful enough to ignite inward healing in its viewers, especially those who are living with wounds from child abuse and other trauma.

28. Q: Is *Stroke of Genius* a full-length film?

A: It is. What makes Art for Growth unique as a film production company is that we're committed to the production of narrative feature films. Most nonprofits that make films produce documentaries.

The project has a beautiful racial diversity, we think viewers will find refreshing.

We plan to release *Stroke of Genius* in theaters, so we're really counting on the support of those who believe that a wider selection of uplifting movies and television could offer a much-needed benefit and respite from all the stories that consistently remind us of how messed up things are.

29. Q: I understand the project's co-producer and cinematographer is an Emmy Award Winner.

A: Yes, Joann Hock. She is the writer and director of When We Last Spoke. She also directed Disgarded Things, Trinity Goodheart, Ultimate Legacy, and many other projects that fans of faith-based and family content would recognize. We are incredibly blessed to have her. We also have Brian Baugh on board as an Executive Producer, who will help us open doors to distribution. Brian is one of my favorite directors of family-friendly content. He has been an incredible mentor for me. We also have Heather Breslin as line producer, and so far, we've been able to attach Karen Abercrombie as part of our cast. We are very Grateful to have seasoned, accomplished industry pros as the heads of our production team. We're all set and ready to go. But like most indie projects, we've come to the most challenging part of the production process, and that's raising the funds needed for the film's budget.

30. Q: Is writing family and faith-based content more challenging than writing for other genres?

A: Yes. Especially faith-based content. The line a writer has to walk to avoid moral compromise and cheesy, preachy content is an art in itself. Many writers interested in family-friendly, faith-based stories struggle with that, and there are talented writers out there who are afraid to try because of that challenge.

And you know what? When you get right down to it, a shortage of writers who can pull it off is another big reason why we don't have more uplifting content. It all starts with the story. But we could hold an entire interview about the challenges, disrespect, and pitfalls that screenwriters have to endure.