The List

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The List

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for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

in Film and Animation

School of Film and Animation

College of Imaging Arts and Science

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Abstract

The List is a feature film script about Jacob, a dejected teen, during a cold spring break, decides to protect his friend Benny from his abusive father by exploring the city he once thought of as nothing but boring. This feature film script is a boy coming-of-age that incorporates elements of the hero’s journey. The characters deal with the real-world problems of single-parent families, peer pressure, bullying, and abuse while escaping into the world of experiencing their surroundings. It is a prevailing thought by teens that they are growing up in the most boring place. This story unveils that the world around everyone holds features, people, and adventures that are just waiting to be appreciated. Today’s culture has become one of where technology and our online social status outweighs our life experiences, i.e., as long as you document and share something cool you are cool, but are people genuinely experiencing life? This story explores and contrasts these virtual experiences versus real experiences. The characters start with the “need” to post everything but in the end, appreciate and feel real life. A significant theme The List tackles is the idea of being cool vs. being a good person and what that truly means. Overall, it is a story about a couple of boys Jacob and Benny that will learn about who they are, to be comfortable with who they are, and how to stand up for themselves.
Preface

The beauty of screenwriting is you can hide inside of your story. I find it horrifying to put myself on the surface and take an in-depth look as to why and how I wrote what I wrote. However, I do see the value of this analyzation and look forward to the results. For me, screenwriting is a joy. It is an escape from my everyday life that allows my imagination to roar. There are problem-solving challenges regularly that create mind and time puzzles on how to make a story flow. Screenwriting is a beautiful dance, balancing imagination, story arcs, dialogue, to entertain that I will continue to learn to master.

I first felt strongly to go into screenwriting when my son and I were watching NBC’s television series Heroes. At the end of each episode, I would theorize on what would happen next with my son. My storylines and plot points I felt were more interesting and entertaining than what continued in the series. It made me realize I had something to more to contribute to the entertainment world. It all boiled down to story. Without a good story, a film was soulless. It didn’t matter what a film is shot on, how spectacular the effects, or remarkable acting, if the story sucked the movie sucked. This realization was exciting to me and caused me to apply for my masters in screenwriting.

Throughout my graduate degree, every writing class invigorated more passion in me for storytelling. Learning to write natural dialogue, thinking out the arc of a feature film, and writing a television pilot while planning the entire series was eye-opening and fun. Upon finishing my thesis during my graduate career, I have written a television pilot, two feature films, and many shorts all of which I am proud.

This introduction is not to downplay the challenges and struggles of screenwriting. It can be a painful, lonely, and frustrating process, but it can be extremely gratifying. In the following
pages I will examine the evolution of the *The List*’s story from the origin to the most recent draft, many of the reasons behind my choices in the story, and in the end, examine some of what I feel needs improvement and what succeeds.
Origins

Over a year and a half for one project is a long time, and it is incredible how during that time an idea and a story can evolve. As a writer, years ago I started what I call my story Rolodex which is a Google document that contains story ideas that have popped into my head over time. When it came time to create a story for the class Writing the Feature, I went to my story Rolodex where I found:

Start out on a man in a meditative stare facing out the window eyes closed with pen in hand. Drawing starts, just scribbling then more and more detail gets added. Over time the drawing reveals itself to be a map.

That entry was followed up by a quote I created:

“Blessed are the curious for they shall have adventures.”

When I wrote this, I imagined this map would get into the hands of kids where they would go on a fantastical journey.

I feel that anytime you make any piece of art you should experiment and try something new. I had aspirations of trying to write a “hero’s journey” story. I also love coming of age films and thought these two could go together. In my studies and on my own I had read parts of Save the Cat by Blake Snyder (Snyder, 2005) and The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers by Christopher Vogler (Vogler, 1992). I find Snyder’s beat sheet a helpful guide and the elements of the hero’s journey laid out by Vogler are useful tools to implement plot.

When I took writing the feature, I developed The Map a little further debating if I should write this or another idea I had for that class. When mulling this idea over, more and more I enjoyed the thought of a coming of age film combined with a hero’s journey. I wanted this coming of age film to connect with youth but didn’t feel the fantastical nature of the original
ideas would help the story. I wanted the story to take place in modern day but held insecurities of youth that are timeless. So, a short synopsis was written, and I pitched this with another idea to the class. The synopsis read:

*Jacob a good-natured 17-year-old fast food worker on the cusp of being cool. Gets dumped for spring break as his girlfriend goes with the cool kids to Mexico. Jacob reconnects with Benny, and an old elementary school friend who seems like he never grew past the sixth grade. A vagrant that Jacob consistently feeds after his shift hands him a folded paper in return. Jacob enters his car sees it's a map and discards it. While driving Benny around looking for something to do, Benny discovers the map. Benny convinces a reluctant Jacob to see where it leads. They go on an adventure that leads them to face their fears and eventually become more like men.*

Both ideas were well received, and when the teacher asked me which I would prefer to do. I chose the other story because in my mind it was further developed. I did not know where this story would go once they began their journey, so I shelved it and let it grow in the back in my brain for a year.

Then came the thesis preparation class. Once again, I pitched two story ideas, but *The Map* had been blossoming in my mind and needed to be put down on paper. As I developed the story of *The Map* in thesis preparation class, it evolved into *The List*. I felt a boy given a list of great things to do in a city he hated would be a more believable story. So, all that remained of my story Rolodex entry was the seed of the idea that someone older with knowledge gives it away to a younger generation. That seed sprouted into *The List*. 
Thesis Preparation

The pitched idea was a start but needed to be developed much, much further. To create a story that is rich, I feel it needs layers of complexity, elaborate characters, and plenty of conflict. One of the beautiful things about the movies is “suspension of disbelief.” This to me is important to not to break in my audience’s mind. Therefore, as I push complexity and conflict, I wanted to make it as realistic as possible within the rules of the world I have created. During thesis preparation, I worked on developing my characters and thoroughly developing my outline that would be my map for The List.

To try and produce complex characters I created elaborate backstories some of which reveal themselves in one way or another in the movie. The main character of The List is Jacob Page. Jacob is a teenager that is on the outskirts of the cool crowd but is close to getting fully accepted, at the same time he hates much of that crowd and what they stand for. His father died when he was nine from cancer. His loving mother Kristen is a nurse that works on a rotating schedule of night and day hours. She raised Jacob to be a considerate person. They are at most middle-middle class. He was a good baseball player but quit soon after his Dad died. To get a car, Jacob is a tutor and got a job at a locally owned burger joint called Sully Burger. Jacob “lucked out” when he tutored Veronica, a popular cheerleader that he charmed. They started “going out,” and this has pushed his status closer to being part of the in-crowd. He gets teased by some of them while others accept him. This is the basis of Jacob’s character that I created to help me make decisions for him.

In my life, I have had a concerns of being cool. In junior high and much of high school, I wasn’t. Around the eleventh and twelfth grades, I was more accepted in all crowds. Although I was never in the in-crowd, I would be conflicted at times about not hanging out with someone
that might not be considered cool or up my status. I thought on top of the rejection of his girlfriend Veronica breaking up with him that putting him in a situation that would force the conflict of trying to be cool versus being a good person would be interesting. Enter Benny.

Benny is a chubby, quirky, outgoing, dancer, that looks young for his age. His mother divorced his abusive father when he was ten. It was not a good divorce, and his Mom moved them to the next city over. He visits his Dad on school breaks like the one that this story takes place. Benny is passionate about dance and goes to a performing arts school where he is one of the only boys. Being a chubby dancer and surrounded by girls, causes him not to have many friends. Benny doesn’t care much about what everyone else thinks unless they are his friends. He is a vegetarian because he thinks it’s inhumane to animals. Everything about Benny by most teens standards is not cool. That is why I pushed Jacob and Benny together. I wanted a true test of Jacob’s kindness and compassion while Benny’s attitude pushes Jacob to discover more about himself.

In the original outline of the story treatment of this story, I had a vagrant Elwood giving Jacob the list. This section is one of the most transformed parts of the story over time. Initially, I wanted Jacob’s “save the cat moment” (Snyder, 2005) (when the main character does something “nice” that gets the audience on his/her side) to be giving Elwood a bag of food after each time he leaves work. One-time Jacob complains to Elwood about their boring city, causing Elwood to make and give him the list. Jacob giving food every time he left work gave him too much compassion from the beginning of the story. Since Jacob was already staying late for a coworker it morphed into that he reluctantly gave the food to Elwood for that coworker who didn’t have time. Elwood’s character eventually evolved to Sully, the owner of the burger joint Jacob works. This character was to fall into the mentor role of Jacob’s hero’s journey.
In the hero’s journey, the hero rejects the call for adventure usually a couple of times. When Jacob first receives the list, he discards it in his car (refusing the call). Later, when Kristen insists on Jacob and Benny to hang out, Benny finds the list in the car and says they should do it. Originally, I had them start the list then, but that was only one refusal of the call making it too convenient and out of Jacob’s character. I wanted to make Jacob’s decision more active and significant. I took this opportunity to introduce real-world problems. The scenario grew to when Benny says they should do the list Jacob refuses again. When Jacob drops him off at his house, Benny insists he comes in. Jacob witnesses Benny’s father's verbal rage and gets kicked out of the house. Once he is out, he hears Benny get hit. This startles and shocks Jacob. He sleeps on it and then decides he will do the list with Benny to keep him away from his father. This change made a much more powerful story and called attention to a serious issue in society.

This is something I love about screenwriting, problems that come up and how you can find creative ways to solve them that makes your story more powerful. At times I have a problem of creating passive characters, where everything just happens to them, and they don’t make their own decisions. This solution created a situation for Jacob that he had to make a decision and become active in his own story.

I had my introduction, my turning point, but then what? What do they do on this adventure? Important things about journey films is the places visited and the people they meet. I have lived my whole life in Rochester, New York and have enjoyed this city very much. I spent many nights of my high school life searching out cool places and exploring every nook and cranny. It always amazes me when people said: “there is nothing to do here.” So, I thought back to my time exploring and experiences since then as to where these kids could venture.
A debate started in my head about whether to name the city Rochester, or a different city, or to make one up. The inspiration for many of the places in *The List* are locations in Rochester, but they are embellished. If I stated that it is Rochester I didn’t want people who know Rochester getting jolted from the story by things they know are not correct or wondering where that place is. Another primary consideration was the thought of selling the script. I wanted people to read this and think it could take place anywhere in the northern part of the United States not limiting to where it could be filmed. I decided to leave the city name out of the story.

In figuring out the places they would go brings us to the “fun and games” (Snyder, 2005) portion of the film as Blake Snyder would call it. It was enjoyable and challenging thinking of these because I didn’t want each place to become repetitive or just a series of montages. I wanted each visit to develop the boys. The people, places, and experiences would push them out of their comfort zones, expose them to new things, challenge their beliefs, and be okay with who they are.

Through one of the people I would have them meet, I wanted to add a layer of complexity to Jacob and Benny’s relationship. At one of their stops, they meet Catherine, a strong-willed, independent, adventurous, brave, fun-loving girl. She ends up joining them on their rest of the journey during which both Benny and Jacob fall for her. Catherine’s characteristics balance out the other two.

With Benny and Catherine’s ability to embrace having fun and other’s quirks, it pushes Jacob outside of his popular kid mentality, and he starts enjoying the uniqueness of individuals. Catherine’s bravery and willingness to stand up for others show’s Jacob how to be courageous. He utilizes this courage at their last stop on the list when it ends in a near-death experience for the group and Jacob has to jump into action to save them.
The climax of the story is when Benny goes home to face his abusive father and Jacob follows. It does not go well, but the boys are able to escape. With Jacob’s mom, they call the police which ends up in Roger’s arrest. I did not want this film to have a traditional “Hollywood ending” but I still wanted the boys to be okay. Instead I wanted an ending that was realistic for the narrative and to give a feeling that their lives and stories continued on. After the arrest, the next day Jacob and Benny silently drive back to the next city over to his Mom’s house. When Jacob and Benny say goodbye, they know they will always share something special even though it is unlikely they will stay in touch. The silent drive and the quiet goodbye I feel are realistic. Jacob and Benny wouldn’t become best friends a city over; they will not be text messaging each other nonstop. They will go on with their own lives more grown up and stronger people but apart from one another.
**Writing of the Script**

As I began the first semester of my Thesis, I worked on incorporating suggestions from my committee members into my treatment (Appendix, A.1). One of the main ones being changing the Elwood character from a homeless person to Jacob’s boss. I agreed with comments that to have the vagrant be the mentor came across as a little cliché. Then was born Sully of Sully burger.

I appreciated all the outlining and treatment work that I did to give me the roadmap for the story, but honestly, I couldn’t wait to start writing this piece and see it come to life. Writing the actual script allows me to escape my world for a little while and venture into my imagination. In hindsight, I could have done even more work on the front end to chart the course for our heroes but, the voices needed to come out to keep me inspired.

**Act One**

The way I wanted to begin this story like in a hero’s journey is to see Jacob in his “ordinary world.” By placing him in at Sully burger, it shows his interaction with his co-worker Molly. In their conversation, it reveals he is willing to stay late for another co-worker even though it puts him in danger of being late to pick up his high-maintenance girlfriend, Veronica. He then has to serve two of the affluent popular kids Ted and William showing his embarrassment and the teasing he endures being a middle-class kid that is dating a popular girl. Through the writing of the script, Ted became a much more important character evolving into the “beast” Jacob has to face in the end.

The treatment (Appendix A.1) for the film followed Jacob’s story the entire way through never letting the audience leave his side. After writing the first ten pages and thinking about the first meeting when Benny comes into Sully Burger, I realized that I wanted to develop Benny
more. I created the scene of Benny getting dropped off at his father’s house by his mother. After writing this, I felt it gave much more context to Benny’s motives, developed his character, as well as Roger’s. It also broke up the first act in an excellent way, bouncing between the two boy’s stories until they came together.

Writing for the Sully character was fun. I based it on a man I had met as I first started writing it. He is a jolly in spirit man who cares for everyone around him and wants to do good. His attitude was a good counterbalance to Jacobs negative and somewhat bitter attitude in those early scenes. The interaction when Jacob calls their city boring sparks Sully to do something to change his mind.

Jacob tries hard to please his girlfriend Veronica who is difficult to make happy. She is leaving the next day for spring break to go to Mexico with her friends. Veronica changes their plans to go to a party where her friends that are going to Mexico are at. At the party, I introduce Shane who has a positive attitude toward everyone. Shane’s outlook counters the interaction Jacob has with Ted at the party that is somewhat hostile, showing that not all of the in-crowd are jerks. Veronica during the party is infatuated by Aaron, a good-looking guy that will be traveling to Mexico with her group. She asks Jacob to give Aaron a ride home. This party with the combination of Veronica, Ted, and Aaron is to beat down Jacob to the final blow of Veronica breaking up with him at the end of the night, well mostly. She tells him to think about it as if he would come to realize it is the best thing for both of them (Figure 1).
EXT. VERONICA’S HOUSE – NIGHT

Jacob’s car sits in the driveway running. Jacob and Veronica sit in silence. Jacob turns to Veronica and leans in. Veronica stops him.

VERONICA
You know how I’m going to Mexico with everybody?

JACOB
Of course, yeah.

VERONICA
Well. I don’t know.

Beat.

VERONICA (CONT’D)
I’ve been thinking... I think we should take a break.

JACOB
Take a break?

VERONICA
Yeah while I’m away.

JACOB
While you’re away?

VERONICA
Yeah.

JACOB
That sounds kinda shitty.

VERONICA
Shitty?! It’s spring break Jacob. I am young and I don’t want to feel guilty having fun.

JACOB
We’ve only been boyfriend girlfriend for like three weeks and you want to take a break?

VERONICA
It’s been fun but we are kinda very different you know? And maybe it’d be different if you came down. And maybe we’d be back together when I come back.

(MORE)
These scenes of Jacob’s intermix with those of Benny getting torn down verbally by his father. I hoped to create grounded scenarios for both of these characters to get the audience rooting for something better for them and to want to go on this journey with them.

The following day Veronica makes it official by text that they are broken up, putting Jacob in a horrible mood. At work is when Benny strolls into Sully Burger. Jacob unsuccessfully tries not to get noticed by him. Benny and Jacob’s exchange is awkward as they kind of catch up. Benny wants to hang out, Jacob is polite and takes his number with no intention of calling him. I wanted this scene to show in a way that Jacob was no better than the popular kids in how he

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VERONICA (CONT’D)
I kinda want to see where things will go with Aaroe. I don’t know.

JACOB
(frustrated)
Aaggh.

Jacob looks forward out the front window.

VERONICA
I just know I don’t want to hold back from the best time of my life.

JACOB
(you got to be kidding me)
Really?

VERONICA
Yeah.

Beat.

VERONICA (CONT’D)
Think about it. I’ll text you tomorrow. Well, I gotta go.

She leans over and gives him a peck on the cheek.

VERONICA (CONT’D)
Have a fun break.

She leaves and shuts the door.

JACOB
Thanks.

---

Figure 1: An excerpt from The List
treated Benny. The following scene Sully gives Jacob a list of amazing things that their city has to offer which Jacob discards in his car.

I needed a way to force Benny and Jacob together. Benny calls the house phone that Kristen answers. Jacob refuses to talk, Kristen makes up an excuse for Jacob but invites Benny to dinner. I used the dinner scene to reveal more of Benny’s carefree “I’m my own person” personality, and his willingness to ask the questions that are on his mind (Figure 2). This takes Kristen and Jacob off guard but is refreshing. Kristen tells the boys to go out and do something together after dinner.

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KRISTEN (CONT’D)
So your Mom is on a cruise huh?

BENNY
Yeah with her new boyfriend.

KRISTEN
Do you like him?

BENNY
He’s fine. You know the usual. Crazy about her, tolerates me. He doesn’t bother me much. And that’s cool.

KRISTEN
Oh good. Good.

Jacob comes back into the room and sits at the table.

BENNY
Do you have a boyfriend?

Kristen looks at Jacob quickly then to her food.

KRISTEN
No. Haven’t had much time for dating. Nursing has horrible hours.

JACOB
Wow. How’d we get here?

BENNY
Your Mom was asking about my Mom’s new boyfriend so I asked your Mom if she’s dating anyone.

JACOB
Oh.

Beat.

JACOB (CONT’D)
Yeah Ma. You should get out there. It’s ‘bout time.

KRISTEN
Thanks kid.

Kristen picks up the salad and passes it to Benny.

KRISTEN (CONT’D)
Salad?

---

Figure 2: An excerpt from The List
Jacob not wanting to do anything with Benny spends most of their time together just driving around. Benny talks passionately about music, Jacob is semi-interested forgetting how much he liked indie music before he was trying to be with the in-crowd. Benny finds the list and suggests they do it, but Jacob refuses, referring to it as “stupid.” During the driving, I wanted to create a shared experience that would bond these boys to get them a little closer. Jacob is busy trying to fix something wrong with his car and nearly gets them into an accident. Benny cracks a joke that lightens the situation which Jacob appreciates. This event lowers Jacob’s defenses, and they head to a diner where Benny asks hard questions about Jacob’s dad passing away. It is something that Jacob has never talked about with anyone. This begins to open him up to Benny.

When Jacob goes to drop off Benny at Roger’s house, Benny insists he comes in to grab some music. While inside Roger yells and insults Benny and tells Jacob to get out. Jacob stands outside stunned, through the front door he hears Roger hit Benny and the thud of him falling to the floor. Jacob backs away to get into his car and takes off. The next morning, in his car, a sleepless Jacob debates, looks at the list, then decides to get Benny. “Break into Two” (Snyder, 2005) as Blake would call it, where “the main character makes a choice, and the journey begins.”

**Act Two**

In act two we begin “the fun and games” (Snyder, 2005) part of the story where Jacob and Benny make their stops on the list. I thought it was also important to include in the fun and games section steps of the Hero’s Journey. In the Hero’s Journey, act two includes: “tests, allies, enemies,” “approach” (where setbacks occur), and the “ordeal” (a major hurdle like a near-death experience). During this section, I needed to strengthen Benny and Jacob’s relationship then test it, have them learn and grow.
The first stops were for fun moments to strengthen Jacob and Benny’s relationship. One of which was at “Song Sanctuary” a church converted to a record store. Benny has Jacob listen to some music in headphones that makes his experience in the store more magical, where he notices things that he wouldn’t normally. At “Sunset Spot #1” the boys have to sneak on to the rooftop of an apartment complex. This pushes Jacob and Benny to be a little brave in getting up there and pushing through a fire door (test). As they sit and watch the sunset Benny thanks Jacob for coming to get him to do the list. Before Jacob can respond, four college kids barge on to the roof to catch the sunset. These guys are care-free friendly guys that are a mix of personalities that get along well (allies). They sit with Jacob and Benny and watch the sunset. They pass a joint down and include Jacob and Benny in smoking it. There is a little non-verbal debate whether or not they should smoke it but they are on this journey, and they begin to accept whatever comes their way. After the sun sets, the college kids hand out beers and put on music. They begin a dance party where one-person dances in the middle of the circle of boys. Jacob finds it odd and is embarrassed for the dancers. Benny is into it and gets pulled into the middle. Benny shines, and the college kids join in on his dance. Jacob walks away to the edge and stares out at the city lights refusing to join in (approach/setback). I used the college characters to show genuine acceptance of Benny of what Jacob could do but refuses because of the awkwardness of him. They continue to their next stop of “black-light bowling” with the college kids and end up sleeping at their apartment.

The next day Jacob and Benny go to an abandoned subway tunnel covered in incredible graffiti. They nervously walk into the darkness again testing their bravery (test). They walk to the end of the tunnel that exits at the top of a massive waterfall in the middle of the city. Here Benny again being himself yells “woohoo” with his arms in the air, enjoying the rush of being so close
to something so amazing. Again, Jacob is embarrassed for him. Benny pushes Jacob to scream. He humors him and gives a weak “woohoo.” Benny not satisfied and coaches him to close his eyes and feel the power of the waterfall. He feels the energy fill him up shoots his arms up in a “V” and screams letting out the excitement he feels. I wanted this moment of Benny helping Jacob to shed a layer of what he uses to protect himself from feeling.

At an eccentric bookstore, Jacob and Benny find costumes and dress up. Benny grabs a top hat and cane and starts to dance to a tune he whistles. Jacob usually would be embarrassed by this but isn’t fazed, instead he sends a selfie of himself in a wizard costume to his Mom. The bookstore owner’s daughter Catherine (allies), self-confident, free-spirited beautiful girl that jumps in and dances with Benny. The sight of a beautiful girl reverts Jacob. Embarrassed, he takes off his costume and jealously watches them dance (approach/setback). Benny invites Catherine to do the list with them. Jacob doesn’t like the addition although he is attracted to her.

Jacob, Benny, and Catherine go to a conservatory in a rough part of the city. The conservatory has a magical sense that they have entered another world. Inside they meet Marigold, a 60-year-old gardener that works there (allies). She gives them a fantastical “story-tour” where she makes them the characters of the story. During the tour, Jacob begins to fall for Catherine, and they catch each other’s eyes. As they approach their car after the conservatory they witness a mugging (test). The boys are frozen while Catherine yells at the mugger and runs to aid the victim which scares off him off. The boys are in awe of Catherine’s courage.

That night Jacob has to work, so Benny and Catherine go out and do a couple of items on the list. This makes Jacob insanely jealous, but he avoids admitting it. Benny, not wanting Jacob miss out, takes Catherine to places on the list that he and Jacob had already been. Benny and Catherine have conversations about past relationships revealing that Benny has never had a
girlfriend, Jacob’s last girlfriend was mean, and Catherine’s previous boyfriend was a jerk. Benny and Catherine send Jacob pictures to his phone asking him to join them when he is out. He also gets a text from Shane letting him know there is a party going on at his place. At the end of his shift, he drives to Shane’s house. As he parks, he gets another text from Benny to join them (test). He debates about it, but he is bitter about them spending time together without him, so he tells them that he is going to Shane’s party instead (approach/setback). This is a test that Jacob fails, letting his jealousy prevent him from joining his friends and in a way not protecting Benny from going back to Roger’s house.

At the party Shane welcomes Jacob, introducing him to Henry (allies) who also was dumped by a girl recently. They commiserate by getting drunk together. Catherine irritated that Jacob decided to go to the party is determined to find him. Jacob is smashed and is sitting on a couch when Ted arrives (enemy). Ted antagonizes Jacob and throws an apple at him but misses hitting the seat next to him (test). Jacob decides to leave, but as he passes Ted, he gives him the middle finger infuriating him. Jacob, too drunk to unlock his car to go, gets confronted by Ted who is ready to fight him. Right before anything happens Catherine steps between them. This stalls the situation until Shane gets out there to stop the whole thing. This more or less is Jacob’s darkest moment: letting Benny and Catherine down, getting too drunk, and not being able to stand up for himself (approach/setback).

Catherine and Benny take Jacob to the bookstore where they sleep for the night. In the morning Catherine and Benny chat about her parents while Jacob wakes up with his hangover. That day they go on a five-part quest on the list. They hike through a forest where Jacob gets to show off his nature skills he learned from his Dad. The hike gave Jacob a little time to get to know Catherine more and further fall for her. On a rock, the three sit and watch the sunset. There
Jacob and Catherine look at each other and smile. Jacob puts his hand on hers and holds it while the sun disappears. Later that night in a cave where they have set up camp they start a fire to keep warm. They smoke some marijuana and talk about their childhood, revealing they all had their own way to escape their reality. Catherine has Benny put on music and he does a dance that impresses Catherine. Jacob’s jealousy flares up again, and he lashes out at Benny shutting him down (approach/setback). Catherine gets up and dances and gets Benny up with her. They then pull Jacob up, getting him to do the one thing that he had found most embarrassing, to dance (test).

The next morning, the three teens hike to the final part of the quest. It is a cave down in a valley south of a dam. Before entering, they hear a man screaming at them from across the way. They think he is just saying “hi” and a little crazy. Inside the cave they find a natural ice pyramid created from a hole in the roof. While they are playing on the ice pyramid water starts splashing into the cave because the dam is releasing the river (ordeal). As the cave fills up Jacob creates a way for them to climb the ice. As they climb, the list falls into the water and disappears. Once they get to the top, Jacob tries chopping the ice with his pocket knife that his father gave him. He stabs the ice until from the other side, chopping begins. It is firefighters called by the crazy man across the way. A hole big enough is chopped and Benny and Catherine are pulled out in a harness. As Jacob goes to put on the harness he slips and falls in the water, dropping his father’s knife. As he swims in the freezing water, he catches the harness and gets pulled up through the hole. I wanted the list to be lost so that Jacob now has to choose to be with Benny without the excuse of the list. The dropping of the knife is to symbolize Jacob letting go of the bitterness and self-pity he has as a result of his father dying.
Act Three

In the third act, I follow less of Snyder’s beat sheet and the hero’s journey. There can be comparisons to hero’s journey “The Road Back” and “Resurrection” (Appendix, A.2) or Snyder’s “All Is Lost”, “Dark Night of the Soul”, “Break into Three” and “Finale” (Appendix, A.3) but these are less literal comparisons than earlier ones, and I am choosing not to stretch to fit these molds. The exception is the hero’s journey “Return with The Elixir” where the hero returns home a changed man. As I had learned in classes, these frameworks are guidelines that are helpful but are not rules.

Once Jacob, Benny, and Catherine had been pulled to safety their parents were called to take them home, splitting the three of them up. I used this moment to bring the characters back to reality and remind the audience of what their lives are like with their parents. Jacob’s phone is waterlogged from the cave so he could not contact anyone. Choosing this is to make Jacob more active. Now he would have to go physically to see anyone. The next day he goes to the bookstore where he finds Catherine. They go to a park’s playground to talk while they sit on the swings. The park is built like a pirate ship. I chose the park to be unique to show that they can continue the list even though it is gone. Jacob tells Catherine about Benny’s abusive Dad. Jacob feels terrible for getting everyone into a near death experience and for Benny having to go back with his Dad. Catherine reassures Jacob that he did everything right and then they kiss. They decide to go to get Benny. After they pick up Benny, the three of them go to Sully Burger for some food, where they run into Henry who invites them to an end of break party.

At the party, Veronica and her friends have returned from their Mexico trip, and she tries to talk to Jacob alone. He isn’t interested in leaving his friends, and Catherine helps shoo her away. Benny notices the romance between Jacob and Catherine and is annoyed by it. He goes to
get a beer. In the kitchen, Benny gets picked on by Ted who puts him in a headlock. Benny tackles him to the ground to get him off of him. The commotion brings Jacob and Catherine in. Ted verbally goes after Jacob and then Catherine to which Jacob punches him. Catherine puts her arms around Jacob. Seeing this Benny takes off angry and ready to face his Dad. Jacob finds out and follows. When Benny confronts his father, he unsuccessfully tries to tackle Roger as he did to Ted. Roger throws him against the wall. When Jacob arrives, he jumps on Roger’s back. Roger throws Jacob across the room. When he turns back to Benny, Benny punches him in the throat immobilizing him. Jacob grabs Benny, and they run away in Jacob’s car. At Jacob’s house with Kristen, they call the police. Roger shows up and struggles with an officer which results in his arrest.

The next day Jacob drives Benny back silently. They are changed and know it is the end of their adventure together. In the hero’s journey, this is called “return with the elixir” where the heroes are changed and life as they knew it would never be the same. When they say goodbye, they don’t fill it with empty promises. Jacob goes back into his car and drives off. He puts in a CD of Benny’s music as a way to keep the memories alive.
Additional Innerworkings

The aspect and importance of social media and how it affects Jacob’s life starts out strong. In the first scene at Sully Burger Ted takes an embarrassing picture of Jacob working and posts it on his social media accounts. The post gets back to him from his girlfriend Veronica. When he picks up Veronica for their night out, she is constantly texting and posting a Snapchat of an upset selfie because Jacob was late. After Veronica breaks up with him, he sees pictures of her and Aaron at the airport on his feed which makes him upset. When Jacob and Benny start the list Jacob posts about the “best hot dog,” and they take pictures and post about the converted church record store. At the “sunset spot #1”. Benny asks if he can tag Jacob in the picture he took of the sunset. Jacob refuses, saying that it seems too romantic of a shot but really because he was embarrassed to be tagged in Benny’s social media. Once they do the abandoned subway tunnel and waterfall they are so immersed in the experience they forget to take any pictures. After that their phones are out less and less and their awareness of their surroundings are more and more.

Staring out while thinking is something I incorporated into moments throughout the script. Examples being, Benny looking out the car window the first time he and Jacob are driving around, Jacob looking out at the city at night on the top of the apartment building, and Catherine in the car ride to the five-part nature quest. I feel these moments of silence and contemplation show there is something more profound going on inside of them and they are more complicated than the audience would ever know.

I love music, and throughout the script I have put in many opportunities for it to be featured. I only named a few artists or songs in the writing so that it can be adapted to the current time the film is made and in consideration of what can be licensed. This film can play a soundtrack for this generation like American Graffiti or Dazed, and Confused did.
Presentation

As part of a thesis script presentation, it is required to screen a portion of a script reading. Normally it is a table read, but I had been craving to make a short film. I figured that from where Jacob got the list to when he decides to do the list with Benny could stand alone as a short film. So, I began pre-production, getting crew together, and auditioning actors. I soon realized that doing a complete film in such a short amount of time was too much to undertake and well beyond what was required. A prominent benefit of doing this was examining that portion of the script and looking at where it could be more efficient and more accessible to produce. Those changes made their way to the final draft of the feature script. Some were dialogue, but the main difference is during the scene when Jacob drops off Benny for the first time and goes into Roger’s house. The earlier version (Figure, 3) of the script had Roger interacting with Jacob asking him who the hell he was and kicking him out. In the final version (Figure, 4), Roger doesn’t know Jacob is in the house and goes straight to Benny’s room yelling at him and hits him. Jacob hears this through the walls of the house and sneaks out. Once he is in his car the blinds in the living room window go up with Roger’s face in it. I felt this version made it Jacob’s decision to abandon Benny. He was not thrown out, he left. I also wanted to tone down Roger’s aggressiveness toward others, feeling it was borderline unbelievable. Roger’s heading popping in the window added a little more excitement, making Jacob think he was in danger.
INT. ROGER'S HOUSE – LIVING ROOM – CONTINUOUS

The front door enters right into the living room. Benny kicks off his shoes and runs to his room. Jacob waits on the doormat and looks around the disheveled room.

ROGER (O.S.)

Benny!

Jacob taken aback by the shout.

ROGER (O.S.) (CONT’D)

Benny!

BENNY (O.S.)

Yeah!

ROGER

Where the fuck...

Roger enters the living room.

ROGER (CONT’D)

(to Jacob)

Who the fuck are you?

Benny enters the room and walks over to Jacob to hand him the USB drive.

BENNY

It’s Jacob he played baseball with me, remember?

ROGER

What the hell is he doing in my house?

Roger starts charging toward the boys.

ROGER (CONT’D)

And where the hell have you been?

Roger grabs Benny by the coat. Jacob is a deer in head lights watching this.

BENNY

With Jacob. I left a note.

ROGER

Where’s your bike?

BENNY

At Jacob’s. I’ll get it tomorrow Dad.
Roger looks at Jacob.

    ROGER
    Get out!

Jacob backs up into the door. Quickly fumbles the knob opens the door and leaves.

EXT. ROGER'S HOUSE – CONTINUOUS

Jacob goes down the front two steps and then turns back at the house.

    ROGER (O.S.)
    You little pussy! You don’t show me any respect.

SMACK. Jacob winces.

    BENNY
    Dad, what do you mean--?

    ROGER
    You don’t talk to me like that in front of anyone. What the hell did you give him? Was it mine?

Hollow Thud of a body punch. Then a Thud of Benny hitting the floor. Jacob shocked. Benny CRIES. Jacob unsurely walks to his car. Jacob closes his eyes.

Figure 3: An excerpt from The List early draft
INT. ROGER'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The front door enters right into the living room. Benny kicks off his shoes and runs to his room. Jacob waits on the doormat and looks around the disheveled room.

ROGER (O.S.)

Benny!

Jacob taken aback by the shout.

ROGER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

Benny!

BENNY (O.S.)

Yeah!

Roger stomps from the kitchen through the living room without seeing Jacob and disappears into the hallway

ROGER (O.S.)

Where the fuck have you been!

BENNY (O.S.)

With Jacob. I left you a note!

SMACK. Jacob winces.

ROGER (O.S.)

And where's your bike?

BENNY (O.S.)

At Jacob’s. I’ll get it tomorrow Dad.

Jacob backs up into the door. Quickly fumbles the knob and opens the door.

ROGER (O.S.)

You fat little faggot!

Hollow THUD of a body punch. Then a THUD of Benny hitting the floor. Jacob shocked. Benny CRIES. Jacob leaves quickly and closes the door behind him.

EXT. ROGER'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jacob starts walking backward unsurely toward the car looking at the door. Jacob turns and hurries to get in his car, closes the door and immediately locks it.
He closes his eyes, takes a breath then opens them and looks to the house window with the light on, the blinds get pulled to the side, and Roger’s face looks out. Jacob fumbles his keys and starts his car. Rapidly pulls out of the driveway. The house door opens.

Figure 4: An excerpt from The List latest draft

In the presentation I still wanted the script to be in more context than just a table read. So, I decided to film three scenes in a studio. I had cast a narrator that would read the essential scene descriptions but had the actors do actions rather than have the actions read. This combined with, filming from multiple angles and shooting on basic sets with props gave the final piece a feeling that is a cross between theater and film (Appendix A.4).

At the screening, I read the synopsis of the film and explained where in the film the scenes the audience were about to watch takes place in the story. The viewing garnered an overall positive reaction. One professor commented that he could watch the entire film in this style of filming. Another professor who had read the entire script said that the script was a cross between Perks of a Wallflower and Ferris Bueller’s Day Off. I enjoyed this comparison, one because I like both of those movies, but also because I try to incorporate real-life humor in my scripts and had done so in The List. Although there are many serious moments and topics I am glad this had shown through. I received many compliments on my presentation which I appreciated, but it is hard for critical feedback to come without people reading the entire script.
The Changes to Make

In this section, I will go over where I feel the script is flawed and what I plan on addressing in the next draft as well as what I feel works.

Even before I had finished my first draft of my script, I realized it was going to be too long. In discussion with my Thesis Advisor, we talked about what I could cut out of the third act. I decided to rework a considerable portion of the ending. In comparison to the treatment submitted for approval (Appendix, A.1), it changed quite a bit. I removed the continuation of the list after the ice cave fiasco, running into Sully at a magic shop, and seeing a band in a club where they get into a scuffle with Catherine’s ex-boyfriend. I did add the confrontation of Ted at Henry’s party in the end as somewhat of a replacement of the scuffle. Ted had become more of a nemesis throughout the writing of the script, and I needed to resolve that part of the story. The removal of all those parts was a good solution to taking out a big chunk of the script without sacrificing many story elements I wanted to accomplish during that section. With the removal of those scenes as well as reworking my second draft the script still was much too long. In the end, it was one hundred and thirty-six pages. Ideally, it would be one hundred and five pages. In writing the synopsis for my thesis presentation at screenings, I started realizing there are places where elements can be combined.

There are things I will need to sacrifice on the next draft of The List which I will continue to debate on where I will cut. One big issue is Catherine enters the story too late. Another is Jacob and Benny should get together sooner. I will have to whittle away from the establishing of my characters and other parts of the first act. The reason my intro to the midpoint is so long is that I wanted the audience to genuinely get to know the characters before they go on the journey with them. I didn’t want to just start with Veronica breaking up with Jacob which is something I
may have to do, but I think it is essential to establish where Jacob stands in the class system of high school as well. I also wanted to solidify Jacob and Benny’s relationship before introducing Catherine to make it unstable.

From feedback from my committee and others, I realize that another place to cut down is in the conservatory. Marigold’s story is long. I will have to find ways to cut it down without sacrificing its guts. The point of this section is that I wanted Jacob, Benny, and Catherine to feel like and act like children. Listening to a story with amazement like kindergarteners and then playing. I felt it held a welcome difference to the reality that surrounds them and the fact that they are entering adulthood. It will be a challenge to cut this down while achieving that contrast but I look forward to doing that.

A point of feedback that surprised me was readers were continually wondering where this took place. My decision to leave the city nameless was a detriment in the reader's eyes. People need to ground themselves in a location even if it is made up. I will continue to debate what city it takes place in, but I will name the city even if it is a fictional one.

One of my underlying themes is to put down the phone and enjoy the world around you. I established this well in the beginning but feel I focused on the overall story and other themes more. In future drafts, I will include a additional moments regarding this, but more so it taking place in their environment. For instance, when Jacob and Catherine go get Benny, and they go to Sully Burger, I will incorporate everyone around them in their phones or distracted by them while the three of them are present in their conversation with each other. I do want to embrace the beauty of the technology as well; playing music off their phones anywhere and taking pictures as a memory of a great experience.
At the first party, Jacob and Ted have an interaction, and Jacob smartly talks to Ted, which riles him up even more. In hindsight to show more change in Jacob, I should have him cower and avoid Ted. This will make the difference in Jacob more profound when he stands up to him at the end of the script.

The return of Sully is something I believe should happen in the third act. He plays such an influential role by giving Jacob the list and instigating this adventure. It will be an interesting scene with Jacob now changed more bold and brave. I want Sully to know notice the change and point it out. It will also be an appealing task to write Sully’s reaction to finding out that the cave nearly killed them. Sully is such a nice guy he would feel horrible.

There is a part of the ending where I am conflicted. I have developed Catherine to be a powerful character with bold and brave tendencies. When Jacob leaves her at the party to go after Benny, it is inconsistent with her character traits to not go with him. The reason I chose to have Jacob go alone is that I wanted Jacob and Benny to start the journey together and to end it together. I may have to let go of this reasoning but before I do, I will see if I can come up with a solution on why Catherine cannot go.

There are many elements of this draft that I am proud of. One is I feel the characters voices ring true and are a primary strength of this piece. A professor that had read the script said “I think what drives The List are the voices of your characters which are crystalline.” Another is I have created powerful moments throughout this piece. With hearing abuse happen in another room, to a rooftop dance party, to just starring out a car window, are times that will stand out in an audience’s mind. I think many of these moments will create significant emotions of fear, anger, sadness, excitement, and joy. The transmission of emotion is one of the reasons I love film. Although the script is too long, it does flow nicely from one scene to the next making the
story gracefully reveal itself. Creating a story that flows and makes sense is an arduous task, and I was happy to hear from the people who read it that it was an easy read. Overall, I am most proud of the fact it is a complete story, of course, with flaws, but none the less it is solid.
In Reflection

Making *The List* was a true test of my abilities as a writer. It achieves my goal of combining a coming of age story with a hero’s journey while generating powerful moments and vivid characters. It has given me insights into my strengths and weaknesses, the importance of outlining, and the value of getting feedback throughout the process of writing. My plan for *The List* is to do one or two more drafts to shorten and strengthen it. I then plan to send it out to festivals and friends in the industry to get one last round of feedback. If the feedback is positive, I will work on selling the script or self-producing it. I would consider starting the self-production with a proof of concept short film to place on the festival circuit and to send to potential investors. For the most part, *The List* can be made on a low budget and can be breakout roles for young actors. I feel that this is a story that can connect with a lot of people across age ranges and I will continue to put in the effort to make it reach a broad audience.
Appendix

A.1 Thesis Proposal

The List

(working title)

Screenwriting Proposal

Joe Bellavia

Thesis Proposal
for MFA in Film and Animation
School of Film and Animation
Rochester Institute of Technology, Rochester, New York
April, 2017

Approved for Submission by:

_______________________________________
Malcolm Spaull, Thesis Chair
The List

Log line
During a boring February break, a dejected teen protects his awkward friend from an abusive father by taking him on a journey exploring gems of a city they thought they hated.

Rationale
The List is a boy coming-of-age feature film that will incorporate elements of the hero’s journey. In The List, the characters deal with real-world problems of single-parent families, peer pressure, bullying, and abuse while escaping into the world of experiencing their surroundings. It is a common thought by teens that they are growing up in the most boring place in the world. This film will try to unveil that the world around everyone holds features and adventures that are just waiting to be appreciated. Today’s culture has become one of where technology and our online social status outweighs our life experiences, i.e., as long as you document and share something cool you are cool but are people really experiencing life? In this film, I would like to explore and contrast these virtual experiences versus real experiences. The characters will start with the “need” to post everything but will in the end just experience them and feel real life. A theme The List will also tackle is the idea of being cool vs. being a good person and what that truly means. Overall, it will be a film about a couple of boys Jacob and Benny that will learn about who they are, to be comfortable with who they are, and how to stand up for themselves.

I have been able to capture elements of real life in my past films and scripts by connecting to audiences with specifics of life experiences and humor. This film, though a drama will contain some very humorous moments. Life is funny and awkward and those moments are truthful and relatable.

This film has indie appeal, can be shot for a low-budget and has excellent roles that up-and-coming actors will desire.
Treatment

Jacob, a deep down good-hearted 16-year-old fast food worker, is on the fringe of the cool kids. He shows two sides of himself at work. One, where trying to impress “cool” teens that come into order by making fun of a coworker, the teens, in turn, make fun of Jacob for working there. The other side is a kind one, he stays late for a coworker of his, while she was taking care of her sick kids. As a result, he receives some harsh texts from his girlfriend, Veronica. When his co-worker arrives, she lets him know that Earle the owner wants to talk with him. Earle is an eccentric 70-year-old that has a sweet smile, but the sparkle in his eyes gives the impression that he is not all there. Earle thanks him for staying late and gives him a five-dollar bill as a bonus telling him to go someplace “marvelous.” Jacob rolls his eyes, picks up the bill, thanks him, and gets up to go. Earle with a big smile grabs his arm and sits him back down. He asks Jacob which fantastic place will he use his cash. Annoyed, Jacob says he hates this city and comments how Earle could retire and go anywhere why does he stick around. Earle says there are amazing places you just have to know where to look. Jacob dismisses the comment and tells him he’s late picking up his girlfriend and can’t stay and chat. Earle gives him quick advice on women and says “five-dollars in flowers wouldn’t hurt the cause” with a wink.

At his girlfriend Veronica’s elegant house, she rushes outside as he opens the beat up car door for her and goes to kiss her. She avoids it commenting that he smells like a greasy diner. On the drive to go a movie, she changes their plans because of a text she gets. Instead, she wants to go to a party where her friends she is going with to Mexico for February recess are. Veronica then digs into him on why he isn’t going to Mexico. He lies and tells her his Mom won’t let him because one of her friends was kidnapped down there, instead of the fact that he can’t afford it.

The party is full of snobby rich kids in an upscale house. Veronica flirts with
Aaron, a typical jock as Jacob looks on slowly sipping his beer. Jacob tries to talk to a couple of the teens but gets snubbed. When Veronica goes to get another drink, Aaron comes over and questions Jacob on how he got a girl like Veronica. Jacob explains how she fell for him when he tutored her in Spanish. Aaron tries to get Jacob to teach him how to order a rum and coke in Spanish. Jacob slyly teaches him how to order a male prostitute. At the end of the party, Veronica asks Jacob if they could give Aaron a ride. In the car, Veronica and Aaron talk about how drunk they are going to get in Mexico and how much fun they’ll have. Aaron practices the Spanish line that Jacob taught him; Veronica doesn’t catch it. After they drop off Aaron, Veronica awkwardly explains that they should have a break during the break and she wants to see where things might go with Aaron. Jacob resists the idea, but Veronica says to think about it.

Jacob gets home slightly before his widowed mom Kristen does from her night nursing shift. She looks at her sad looking son, and asks him what’s wrong? He shrugs her off. She then asks him how many beers has he had? He answers just one. Kristen seems ok with it. She then opens a beer and sits down next to Jacob. Takes a sip and hands it to him. He takes a sip and passes it back. They sit together on the couch in silence. She wraps her arm around her son. Jacob reveals that Veronica is trying to break up with him. Kristen says how she didn’t like her anyway. She comforts Jacob. She mentions that his old friend Benny from 6th grade called he is in town for February break. Suggests that he hang out with him to get his mind off of Veronica.

The next day at Jacob’s work, Benny 15, shows up. Benny is chubby, quirky and looks like he could still be in 6th grade. He is joyous to see Jacob. Jacob is embarrassed by Benny. Jacob makes fun of him to his other teen co-worker. Benny shrugs it off and tells Jacob they should hang out. Jacob dismisses the invite.

At the end of his shift in the back, he is taking off his apron. Earle walks into the kitchen. Jacob tries to sneak out the back. Earle sees him and calls him over. Merrily, Earle pulls out an envelope. Earle begins to express how he’s been here for years and
have been lucky to truly experience this city and create many memories. In the envelope is a list of his favorite spots. Jacob half thanks him. When he gets in his car, Jacob discards it in the cup holders by the gear shifter. He receives a text from Veronica saying “Hope you thought about it and realized it’s a good idea that we are just friends now. Have a great break!”

Kristen is cooking dinner when the phone rings. She says “Hi Benny.” This sets Jacob off mouthing “not home” to his mom shaking his head no. She says that Jacob is in the shower but that he should come over and join them for dinner.

At dinner, Benny excitedly explains how he is now in the next city over going to the school of the arts for dance. His mom is on a cruise with her new boyfriend, so he is spending his “court ordered” time with his dad. Kristen tells the boys to go out on the town for the night.

Benny raves about a band Jacob has never heard of while they randomly drive around looking for something to do. Surprised that Jacob’s car can’t play off their phones Benny looks for some CD’s Jacob has in his old car and discovers Earle’s list. Jacob jokes that it’s probably just a list of senior centers and places to get an AARP discount. Benny tries to convince a reluctant Jacob to take a look at the list. Jacob refuses, instead they have a pretty lame night just driving around and grabbing some food without much conversation.

When Jacob drops off Benny, Benny convinces Jacob to come in to grab a CD of the band he was talking about earlier. In the house, Benny’s father Roger is in a rage about Benny being out all night. Roger punches Benny in the gut. Benny doubles over in pain. Jacob, in shock, stares on as Roger yells at Jacob, and throws him out of his house.

The next day Jacob gets in his car and sees Elwood’s list. He opens the
envelope. He pulls up to Benny's house. He convinces Benny they are going to do everything on the list and not come back to this house for the rest of break. Benny reluctantly agrees.

First on the list is “Best Hot Dog.” The boys go to a hot dog stand to purchase dogs that are hidden under toppings. They walk to a park to eat it. They sit in a comfortable silence as they watch pigeons approach. Their faces express how much they enjoy the food.

In a cathedral renovated into a record store, they walk through the aisles in awe. They flip through vinyl. At a listening booth, Benny puts on a record that Jacob listens to in headphones. Jacob gets into the music. A couple of alternative girls smile at them as they pass. Jacob straightens up.

In the car again they go into the glove compartment and grab a flashlight. Benny with the flashlight and Jacob using his phone, they walk through an abandoned subway tunnel and look at exquisite graffiti. On the way out of the tunnel, a homeless man asks for money. Jacob ignores him, but Benny digs into his pockets and gives the bum a couple of bucks.

Next on the list is “Sunset spot #1”. They wait till someone enters an apartment building then follow them in. They take the elevator to the top floor and take the stairs to the roof. They stare at the emergency exit to the roof and debate. They look at the list. It says the roof is never alarmed. They agree to push it open together. They count down then run through the door and enter into a beautiful scene of the city skyline with the sun beginning to set behind it. They sit on a ledge and watch. The door swings open startling them. A group of goofy college kids enters onto the roof. The outgoing buzzed college kids bond with Benny and Jacob. They give the teens some beers as the night sets in then share a joint. They ask how Jacob and Benny found this place. The boys explain the list. The College Kids are stoked and tell them to pick out the next spot.
The College Kids, Benny, and Jacob are all at black light bowling. Benny and Jacob are stoned and enjoying themselves. The next morning, Jacob and Benny wake up on the floor and couch of the College Kid’s apartment. While the College Kids are sleeping, they write them a note of thanks and list some of the spots from Earle’s list for them. As Jacob and Benny scan the list, they see a diner on it. At a retro diner, the boys have breakfast and reminisce about the night before and debate what to do next.

They enter a bookstore that has tons of nooks and crannies. It has a magical sense to it and even has a dragon’s head on the wall. There is a section of hats from every century and every fantasy book. They try on a bunch of hats and become characters for each hat they wear. Benny puts on a top hat and grabs a cane; he does a few tap dance steps. An attractive worker Catherine, 17, who works behind the counter notices and giggles to herself. She comes over to them and compliments Benny’s moves. She puts on a 20’s flapper hat and grabs his hand they do a little swing dance that ends in a dip. Benny invites her to join them after her shift. She gives it a thought, then agrees to.

Jacob, Benny, Catherine travel to a tougher part of town where they hunt down a door with an elaborate plant carved into the wood. The door is unlocked, and they enter a long hallway lined with white Christmas lights that lead to a very bright opening. As they exit the hallway, it opens up into an amazing conservatory. A quirky gardener asks them for a dollar donation which they each give. The gardener then gives them a tour thru each room relaying a plant mythological fantasy story that they all laugh at, at first, but by the end are fascinated. After their tour, they play like little kids reenacting the story they heard. Catherine catches Jacob’s eye. She notices and smiles.

The trio exit to the street where they witness a woman being mugged. Catherine nudges them to do something about it, but the boys just stand there frozen. Catherine yells at the mugger and starts to call 911. The mugger runs off with the woman’s purse.
They all go over and help the woman up and try to comfort her till help arrives.

They all stop by Jacobs house, and he grabs a bunch of blankets and supplies. Including a camping knife from Jacob’s late father that from the look on Jacob’s face has sentimental value. Catherine looks through the pictures and decorations of the house taking it all in, while Benny lays on a couch expressing his admiration of Catherine’s bravery when the mugging happened.

The three of them drive in the car playing Benny’s CD enjoying themselves singing along and learning about each other until they park at the edge of a winter forest. They put on extra winter gear and begin a hike. They cross over small frozen waterfalls and exit the forest to bluffs (wind shaped cliffs) that cut the sky like unique spears. They hike their way down to the shore of a great lake. They try to skip rocks over the icy water. They look at the map on the list and continue along the shore. They sit on a large rock together (at “Sunset spot #2”) and watch the sunset over the lake. They retreat into a cave and start a fire. As they all become better friends, a deeper romantic connection develops between Catherine and Jacob. Benny sees this and blasts some music from his phone. Catherine gets up and changes the music then starts dancing, hypnotizing the boys. The next song comes on, and she forces the boys to dance with her. Benny willing, Jacob reluctant but does and enjoys himself. Benny then searches for a song on his phone and plays it. He begins to dance a routine. At first, they are embarrassed for him, then impressed by him. When he finishes, Catherine compliments Benny on it profusely. Jacob, a little jealous of Catherine’s affection towards Benny, also compliments him but asks if it’s hard being so good he must get teased a lot. The comment makes Benny sad which causes Catherine to give him more attention.

The next day they hike to their next spot the “Natural Phenomena” on the list. They climb down a wall just south of a dam to a cave. As they are about to enter, somebody from across the way is yelling at them and frantically waving their hands.
None of them can tell what the person is saying, they wave back and go into the cave. In the large cave, water has dripped from a hole in the ceiling and slowly froze into an incredible pyramid sculpture. The three of them play on it, running up and sliding down. They hear a strange sound and then water splashes around the mouth of the cave. They look and see the dam is releasing water. It begins to fill the cave. They start freaking out. They run up the sides of the ice pyramid. They make it to a ledge in the ice where they are safe at for the moment. The water makes it more slippery and is rising. They are near the hole in the ceiling, but it is iced over. They chip away at it with Jacob’s knife. They begin to get through as someone starts chopping at the other side. The fire department. The firemen finish chopping through the ice and pull out Catherine then Benny. While reaching for a hand, Jacob slips and falls into the freezing water. The knife disappears. The firemen drop a rope to him while they try to make the hole bigger, so one of the fighters can fit through. Jacob reaches the rope, and they pull him out.

The parents are called by the firemen. Catherine’s hippy parents arrive and take her away. Kristen then arrives for Jacob and asks to take Benny home. They notify her that Roger is on his way. When Roger arrives, he causes a scene berating Benny, and roughing him into the car.

Since Jacob’s phone was ruined in the water, he goes to back to the bookstore to try and find Catherine. He convinces the owner to give him her number. On the swing set of a jungle gym shaped like a pirate ship Catherine and Jacob talk. Jacob explains that he was trying to keep Benny away from his dad. Upon hearing this Catherine is convinced that they should rescue Benny. Jacob hesitates and makes excuses that Benny probably wouldn’t want them to because Jacob is enjoying this alone time with Catherine. She persuades him with a sweet kiss on his cheek.

Jacob throws rocks at Benny’s window till he answers. Roger is at work so Benny now with a bruised face is reluctant to leave. Once again, Catherine sways Benny to join them.
They enter a Magic Store where they see Earle sitting on a stool on the customer side of the counter talking to the owner. Earle notices them and becomes overjoyed proclaiming that they are exploring his list. The Owner proceeds to tell them what a wonderful magician Earle was at one time. He convinces a resistant Earle to put on a show. There is a small stage in the corner of the shop backed by red velvet curtains. The three teens sit cross-legged on the floor in front of the stage while the owner sits on a stool behind them. Earle enters the stage from behind the curtains like a different person. He begins the show and puts the audience in a state of awe. A family and a few more people enter the shop and join the spectators. At the end of the show, everyone claps abundantly causing a tear to form in Earle’s eye. Benny buys a magic trick from the owner. Then they walk out with Earle. Jacob confesses to Earle that at first, he thought that the list was going to be dumb and apologizes. Earle stops him says the fact that they are doing his list and enjoying it makes him feel like he still has something to contribute and walks off.

One of the last places on the list is an underground concert venue. Catherine said she’s heard of it and always wanted to go. They walk through the door they get their under-age Xs on their hands. The three teens dance together in a pit of the crowd to some heavy rock. In-between bands, they get some water. Catherine runs into Noel, an ex-boyfriend of hers that looks tough and older. As the next band begins to play Noel grabs her by the wrist and pulls her in close to say something she struggles and pulls away. Jacob and Benny stand straight and get defensive. Noel teases them and her. He grabs her again then Jacob gets in-between them. Noel punches Jacob. Benny tackles Noel. Once Noel is on the ground, Benny is on top with his knees on Noel’s shoulders. Benny punches Noel’s face twice then Noel throws him off and sits up. Jacob comes charging, jumps in the air, fist pulled back. In mid-air, he is caught by bouncers.

The three of them sit on a curb behind the club. Catherine in-between the silent boys, Jacob holding his red cheek and Benny with tears streaming. She puts her arms
around them and calls them her heroes. Then the back door of the club gets kicked open startling the trio. It's the goofy College Kids from the rooftop. They celebrate seeing Benny and Jacob again telling them that this was the last stop on the list they gave them. The College Kids asked if they went to the magic shop. Benny does his trick he bought. The College Kids invite them to a party.

After a couple of drinks at the party, Benny sees the romance between Jacob and Catherine and gets jealous. He goes home to his Dad. Veronica’s group shows up at the party, back from their trip, sunburned and not liking each other. Veronica notices Catherine with Jacob and is jealous. She tries to get Jacob back to no avail. Jacob works up the courage to kiss Catherine then leaves to go after Benny.

At home, Benny tries to stand up to his father only find he doesn't tackle as easy as Noel. Benny gets thrown across the room as Jacob arrives. Jacob tries to hold Roger back stalling him for a second then Jacob gets thrown into a wall. Benny again tries to tackle his father this time Roger doubles over a little, while he does Jacob hits him with a lamp. The two boys run to Benny’s room and lock the door. Roger begins to kick it in as the boys escape out the window.

Sometime later, outside of Jacob’s house, Roger knocks on the door insisting on seeing Benny. A police officer opens the door. The boys are in the living room with Kristen getting questioned by a social worker and a police officer. Roger belligerent tries to force himself into the house. When an officer tries to hold him back, Roger elbows him in the face trying to get by. The officer from the living room comes to assist and is able to restrain Roger and gets him into cuffs.

The next morning Jacob drives as Benny stares out the window in silence. They pull up to Benny’s mom’s townhouse. Outside the car, Jacob helps unload a couple of bags. They awkwardly stand there. Benny puts out his hand to shake. Jacob pulls him into a hug and tells him to dance his fucking heart out. Jacob gets back into his car and
watches Benny walk to the door that his opened by his mother. She embraces him. Jacob starts the car and drives off.

**Vision**

I would like to create in this film a full range of emotions. Moments that are truly dramatic, laugh out loud funny, cringingly suspenseful, and glowing with joy. There is a beauty in growing up, but it is not always a pretty one I would like to make a film that makes the best of the bad while celebrating the good. I hope that this film can open the minds of future generations to explore and experience while allowing older generations to reminisce, reflect and hopefully better understand the next. There are realities that the around us that we ignore, like the poor, and abused. This film will not likely solve them but show that they are still a reality and give a take on dealing with them and potentially be a conversation starter.

**Budget**

Reflects “worst-case scenario” in anticipated costs if I did shoot a scene from the script (as opposed to shooting a reading).

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A.2 Final stages of the Hero’s Journey (Bronzite, n.d.)

Excerpt from *The Hero's Journey - Mythic Structure of Joseph Campbell's Monomyth* (Bronzite)

11. Resurrection

This is the climax in which the Hero must have his final and most dangerous encounter with death. The final battle also represents something far greater than the Hero's own existence with its outcome having far-reaching consequences to his Ordinary World and the lives of those he left behind.

If he fails, others will suffer and this not only places more weight upon his shoulders but in a movie, grips the audience so that they too feel part of the conflict and share the Hero's hopes, fears and trepidation. Ultimately the Hero will succeed, destroy his enemy and emerge from battle cleansed and reborn.

12. Return With The Elixir

This is the final stage of the Hero's journey in which he returns home to his Ordinary World a changed man. He will have grown as a person, learned many things, faced many terrible dangers and even death but now looks forward to the start of a new life. His return may bring fresh hope to those he left behind, a direct solution to their problems or perhaps a new perspective for everyone to consider.

The final reward that he obtains may be literal or metaphoric. It could be a cause for celebration, self-realization or an end to strife, but whatever it is it represents three things: change, success and proof of his journey. The return home also signals the need for resolution for the story's other key players. The Hero's doubters will be ostracized, his enemies punished and his allies rewarded. Ultimately the Hero will return to where he started but things will clearly never be the same again.
A.3 Final Steps of Blake Snyder’s Beat sheet (Stout, n.d.)

Excerpt from *Blake Snyder’s Beat Sheet* (Stout, n.d.)

**All is Lost** – The opposite moment from the Midpoint: “awful”/“great”. The moment that the main character realizes they’ve lost everything they gained, or everything they now have has no meaning. The initial goal now looks even more impossible than before. And here, something or someone dies. It can be physical or emotional, but the death of something old makes way for something new to be born.

**Dark Night of the Soul** – The main character hits bottom, and wallows in hopelessness. The *Why hast thou forsaken me, Lord?* moment. Mourning the loss of what has “died” – the dream, the goal, the mentor character, the love of your life, etc. But, you must fall completely before you can pick yourself back up and try again.

**Break Into Three (Choosing Act Three)** – Thanks to a fresh idea, new inspiration, or last-minute Thematic advice from the B Story (usually the love interest), the main character chooses to try again.

**Finale** – This time around, the main character incorporates the Theme – the nugget of truth that now makes sense to them – into their fight for the goal because they have experience from the A Story and context from the B Story. Act Three is about Synthesis!
A.4 Screenshots from *The List* reading

The following are screen shots from *The List* reading. Produced spring semester thesis year. Shot on the Sony FS7 by Jacob Mallin.
References


