



Learning from the Masters

AN INTERVIEW WITH SCREENWRITER PAUL HAGGIS

QUIZ & SUGGESTED EXERCISES

*(RECOMMENDED FOR HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE STUDENTS)*

*“You can’t get a thick skin, because you won’t be able to feel what you need to feel in order to write. You have to feel every inch of failure and have the confidence to move on.”*

*Paul Haggis*

## EXCERPT FROM PAUL HAGGIS'S INTERVIEW:

**MIKE DE LUCA:** *Where do you find the most inspiration? What inspires you to sit down and start thinking of stories?*

**PAUL HAGGIS:** I'm interested in so many things. As long as at the center there's some great human dilemma, some question I do not have the answer for, and something that scares me. If I'm really comfortable with a project, I just don't want to do it, it's of no interest to me. Only if I'm pretty sure that I can actually fail at it do I want to attempt it....

**DE LUCA:** *How important is discipline to your work habits? Do you have a routine or a goal for each day?*

**HAGGIS:** Guilt drives me. I know I have to write every day. During the story period, it's much harder, it's much more fluid.... When I start to write, I give myself a goal of five pages a day. I don't stop until I get that done, whether it's taken me two hours or twelve. Sometimes if I get rolling I can write more, I can write ten pages.

**DE LUCA:** *But that's your minimum? You find that routine helps you get through the process?*

**HAGGIS:** It makes you push. Because otherwise, you'd come to the tough part two pages in and you'd go, I'm gonna give up. You have to push through. Because with every scene you come to, you know that the last scene was easy to write, but this scene is impossible. And you get through that, and you see the next scene, and you say, that *last* one was easy to write, but *this* one's impossible. Every single scene is usually like that.

**DE LUCA:** *The new one is the impossible one?*

**HAGGIS:** Always, impossible. And then the characters start talking to you.

## QUIZ:

As you watch the interview, see if you can answer the following questions.

1. Where is Paul Haggis from?
2. What was his job before becoming a professional writer?
3. What one thing does he say he learned at military school?
4. Name a sitcom Haggis wrote for early in his career.
5. What was his involvement with “Walker, Texas Ranger?”
6. Why is he now called Hollywood’s “Prince of Darkness?”
7. Does Haggis believe in creating an outline before writing a script?
8. Does he suggest writing what you think studios are looking to buy?
9. Does he think it’s a good idea to write a minimum number of pages per day?
10. What does he mean by saying “write into the problems” in a script?
11. How does Haggis deal with the challenge of writing about people or cultures he doesn’t know about?
12. What character in “Crash” was inspired by a piece of hate mail?
13. What was his response to seeing “Crash” with a large audience for the first time?
14. Were “Crash” and “Million Dollar Baby” original screenplays or adaptations?
15. What actors did the writer originally envision for the lead roles in “Million Dollar Baby?”

### Bonus question:

16. What is “Red Hot?”

## SUGGESTED EXERCISES

1. Paul Haggis says his challenge with any script is to find what he’s “trying to say” with it. He describes this as “writing from the gut.” What does this mean to you? How might a writer make any script, of any genre, feel personal?
2. Paul Haggis describes how a real-life carjacking led him to write the script for “Crash.” Is there an incident in your own life that could be the jumping-off point for a story, be it comedy, tragedy or anywhere in between? Describe the incident and what type of story it might inspire.
3. Haggis says he constructed the story for “Crash” in part by creating a character and imagining the worst thing that could happen to him or her, and then the worst thing after that, and so on. Create a character yourself, in a few brief strokes. What is the most dramatic thing, good or bad, you can imagine happening to that character? Can you think of a subsequent plot development that could top that one? What about one after that?
4. Haggis built a story around an everyday object: a watch. Now it’s your turn. Pick a common object and build a story around it. Where is it from? Who owned it? What significance has it had, and to whom?

TO ORDER THIS AND ANY OF THE OTHER 26 DVDS IN  
THE DIALOGUE SERIES PLEASE VISIT

[WWW.THEDIALOGUESERIES.COM](http://WWW.THEDIALOGUESERIES.COM)

And enter code **STU2008** to **SAVE 15%**