

## Starting Out In TV Roundtable

Written by CUE Editors  
Tuesday, 24 July 2012 01:37

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With CUE members making their mark on a broader spectrum of the entertainment industry than ever, more and more are finding success and inspiration in scripted television. We sat down with a few recent alums who are in the early stages of exciting television careers to talk about how they chose television and how they went about breaking in.

**Scott Burkhardt** (Film '08) served as Staff Writer on the first season of *Smash* (NBC) where he wrote the episode "Hell on Earth."

**Grace Edwards** (Film '10) worked as writer's assistant for Comedy Central's *Ugly Americans* as well as the pilot for *Come Inside with Amy Schumer*.

**Jon Haller** (Film '09) works as Script Coordinator on the ABC show *Last Man Standing* starring Tim Allen. His episode "Ding Dong Ditch" aired as part of the show's first season.

**Berkley Johnson** (Film '05) is a writer for *New Girl* (FOX). He wrote three episodes in the first season: "Thanksgiving", "Landlord" (with Josh Malmuth), and "Fancyman II" (with Kim Rosenstock).

**Edward McGinty** (Film '06) is a researcher on HBO's *Boardwalk Empire* and plays one of the ward bosses on the show. He also co-founded CUE.

*Can you outline the route you took from graduation to your current position?*

**SB:** I was taking a class called TV as a Dramatic Medium in my second year at Columbia and one day Evangeline Morphos, our professor, came in and said Theresa Rebeck was shooting a pilot for CBS and needed an on-set assistant. I was supposed to go to Phoenix, AZ to visit my Dad for Spring Break but after interviewing with her and getting the job, I canceled that trip and worked with her on that for two weeks. After that, I worked with her part time for the next five or so years. She was supportive of me and liked my work so when *Smash* came around she offered me a writing job on the show.

**GE:** In 2009, I was chosen for the Comedy Central Summer School Writing Fellowship. This was a great program which put me in contact with writers from the Daily Show and Colbert, as well as Comedy Central's Digital and Development departments. I maintained contact with a few people including the head of Development at the time, Dan Powell. Dan left his staff position at Comedy to become an executive producer on *Ugly Americans*. After I graduated, I made sure Dan knew that I would love to work for the show. About 8 months later, something opened up and Dan contacted me to work as a production coordinator/writers' assistant on *Ugly*. I also recently worked on the Comedy Central pilot, *Come Inside with Amy Schumer* with him as a writers assistant. So, keeping in contact with people you've interned or worked for in the past is key.



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**JH:** I took Alan Kingsberg's TV writing class at Columbia where I learned how to write TV specs  
Alan recommended me for an internship to his friend Warren Leight, who was running the second season of In Treatment -  
Became an intern at In Treatment  
Made lots of coffee  
Their writer's assistant took another job and I took over because I made such great coffee  
Graduated Columbia  
Warren Leight's assistant Marygrace O'Shea (a phenomenal Columbia alum) recommended me for a gig at 30 Rock  
Worked as 30 Rock's writer's assistant for seasons four and five  
My girlfriend moved to Los Angeles while I stayed in New York  
Beat Tina Fey in bowling  
Drank lots of coffee  
Missed my girlfriend  
Got a job as writer's assistant on Jack Burditt's new show Last Man Standing in Los Angeles  
Moved to LA, bought a tiny car (Ferris the Yaris) and moved in with my girlfriend  
Became script coordinator  
Worked long hours, drank lots of coffee  
Got to write my own episode  
On hiatus now, just made a fresh cup of coffee.

**BJ:** In the summer of 2004, Columbia classmate (and, to give you a sense of time and place, vocal Iraq war proponent) Jennifer Grausman and I were walking through midtown scouting locations for my Directing 4 when I got a call saying I'd gotten a 6-week job on a show called B-Roll with John Henson. After that I was hired as an in-house writer at SpikeTV, thanks, in large part, to legendary Columbia funny-man Chris Carlson. Then it was off to MTV2's Stankervision – which, no matter how much the title might indicate otherwise, was NOT about webcam fisting. Then I made the classic Stankervision to Late Night with Conan O'Brien jump, thanks, in even larger part, to legendary Columbia funny-adjunct Chris Albers. Then there were 7 months of The Tonight Show, a gauzy meeting with Bill Carter to explain to me what happened, and Conan on TBS.

[For New Girl] I first met with Liz, Brett, and Dave in May of 2011. I don't remember too many details about the meeting – except that the nicknames I came up with for them at the time were "Blanket, Drinky, and Tats" – which, over a year later, still apply.

[Regarding how episodes are assigned:] If anyone out there knows how episodes were divvied up and assigned among the staff, I know a roomful of people who would love to speak with you. Regardless, somehow I ended up writing/co-writing 3 episodes: "Thanksgiving", "Landlord" with Josh Malmuth, and "Fancyman II" with Kim Rosenstock. Though in reality, everyone works on every episode. So while you generally end up with more of your time/life/stomach lining invested in "your" episodes – the truth is you put a lot of yourself into other people's episodes – and they put a lot into yours. I'm speaking obviously of the royal "you." I, personally, only work on things I get credit for. And sometimes not even then.

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