

# Interview (Part 6): Laura Kosann

[Scott Myers](#)

My interview with the writer who not only was named a 2021 Nicholl Fellowships in Screenwriting recipient, but also had **two scripts** make the 2021 annual Black List.

## AN IDEAL WOMAN

by  
Laura Kosann



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[#BlackList2021](#)

Laura Kosann made quite a splash in Hollywood in 2021. In [November](#), she was named a Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting winner for her original screenplay *An Ideal*

Woman. Then in [December](#), that script plus another screenplay Laura wrote (*From Little Acorns Grow*) were named to the annual Black List. If that weren't enough, the good news continued when in [April 2022](#), it was announced that Laura had been hired to adapt the female-driven comic book *Mercy Sparx* for MGM.

Laura was kind enough to carve out some time for us to talk about her background, the craft of screenwriting, and her screenplay *An Ideal Woman*.

Today in Part 6 of a 6-part series to run each day this week through today, Laura answers some screenwriting craft questions and offers advice for those writers trying to break into the business.

**Scott:** *Let me ask you a few craft questions here before we go. You talk about the process of immersing yourself in a story. Beyond buying all the Life magazines and listening to music, what does that mean? For The Ideal Woman, what were you doing to immerse yourself in there?*

**Laura:** *It's all I consume. I read everything from that time. I listen to music from that time. Photography is also huge for me. I look at photographs. Honestly, I've thought of a whole movie because of one photograph. From Little Acorns Grow started with a photograph.*

**Scott:** *You're not like Val Kilmer on the set of The Doors where he's telling everybody to refer to him as*

*the Lizard King all the time?*

**Laura:** *No, but I will say, I have to tell you that's so funny, because the other thing I love when I had that interview with Olivia Wilde, was when I described this part of my process to her. She said, "It's like method writing," like method acting. Where someone lives their character. Because I do live there, while I'm writing it, in a way. And it was such a cool observation on her part.*

**Scott:** *I was going to say, I doubt your dressed up like Laura Petrie from The Dick Van Dyke Show, serving up casseroles. Okay, next question: How do you come up with story ideas?*

**Laura:** *I really draw inspiration from everywhere. Observation. Photography. All different mediums of art. Books. Articles. Music is really big for me. The second I have an idea for a screenplay, I make a soundtrack for it. That's huge for me. I'll then take walks and listen to that soundtrack and I'm imagining scenes. Letting the plot unfold. It's just inspiration from a lot of different places...as you see from the deer thing. [laughs]*

**Scott:** *It sounds like that receptive writing thing where you're allowing that stimuli to filter into your conscious and subconscious nature. Okay, so you've got a story idea you want to pursue. Let's talk about your prep writing process. It doesn't sound like you're necessarily*

one of those people that has cards and lines them all up, super organized. How do you break your story?

**Laura:** I have a few weeks where I'm immersing myself in the world it's in. Consuming everything concerning that world. I'm starting to write scenes. I won't go into FinalDraft until I am totally ready. Sometimes I've literally written 40 pages of script in journals or on my iPhone notes app before I even start writing the script.

I definitely have a process where whatever I can map out, I do, in terms of the acts. I'll put something down on paper in terms of a progression. But it's very loose. I don't like to be married to it. I like to give myself the ability to freely let it evolve as I'm writing it.

And then at some point, I have this epiphany where I know I'm ready. And it's going to pour out of me. Usually, at that point, when I go to the script, I write it very quickly.

**Scott:** I resist the whole screenwriting guru thing where they got these paradigms, this needs to happen on that page and all that sort of thing. In my view, that's actually a disservice to what we do. Stories are organic. The characters are malleable. They've got their own intentions and free will.

Even when you do outline, I tell my students, too, "OK, you got the outline? Great. Now, set it aside. When you write the draft, go from a feeling place. Sit there and be

*with the characters. Let them dictate what goes on in each scene.” That receptive writing thing.*

*It does remind me, though. It’s pretty funny. I remember reading an interview with one of the most prominent contemporary screenwriters Steve Zaillian and he said — I’m paraphrasing — “Whenever I go into a bookstore and I pass by the screenwriting section, and I see all those ‘how to’ books, I immediately turn the other way. I don’t want to know any of that stuff. I don’t want any of that information to get in the way of my process.” As I said, every writer is different. There’s no one right way to do it.*

**Laura:** *I was talking to a screenwriter who said that. When I was being self-effacing about having not gone to school for this. They were like, “Oh, I wish I could unlearn all of that.” It was interesting. I was like...”OK, well, that’s good to know.”*

**Scott:** *How about characters? How do you go about developing them? Is it more that receptive writing, where they emerge, you’re immersing yourself in their lives, and they start to come alive? How does that work?*

**Laura:** *As I’m immersing myself in them in those first few weeks, I really get to know them in my head. They take on this life of their own. I’m not necessarily sitting there writing character descriptions. I just come to*

*know them through thinking about them. Asking questions about them. Questions are big.*

*Then I'll find I'll start to read certain articles or listen to certain music that reminds me of them. And as I write a script I am constantly going through it and re-writing and polishing over and over. And by doing that I am getting to know the characters also. Reading their lines and thinking about whether what they're saying is authentic to them. Does it sound like them? You start to get to know your story so well that when a character says something out of character, it jumps out at you immediately. Sticks out like a sore thumb.*

*Reading aloud is something I'll do as well. I'll say a lot of lines to myself before I put them in the script.*

**Scott:** *Again, that's sort of magical thing where it's like the characters exist. They know the story better than we do, because it is their story, right?*

**Laura:** *Yes. Completely.*

**Scott:** *You're thinking about rewriting, reminding me, there's a quote from Diablo Cody. We mentioned it earlier with her script Juno. She said, "I'm like a cat. I'm constantly grooming and regrooming." She goes through the material over and over and over and over again.*

**Laura:** *Yes. I think when people ask, "how many*

drafts?" It's tough to say. It's not that I have one draft, it's just that every day I am "grooming and re-grooming" as Diablo Cody says. That is so spot on, on her part. Also, not in a boastful way but in an immersive way — I really do fall in love with these stories. So I just love re-reading them and polishing them. My warm-up in the morning many times is reading the script through, getting into that world, before I start on the new pages.

**Scott:** One final question: What advice can you offer aspiring screenwriters in terms of how to learn the craft and break into the business?

**Laura:** Ah — I should have figured you're going to ask me that. I guess in my experience, I would still say that for your first thing, really try to come from a very real, raw, emotional place. Do not think about what's in the market, what gets made, what needs to get made.

I have found that what gets people's attention is the script where you are truly laying your heart out on the table. Those are the ones that, for me, always get the most attention, because people just know when it's a deeply personal. And I don't mean personal in the sense that this story happened to you. I just mean that — for whatever reason — you know this story inside and out and it is the one you want to tell. It's the story that, if you do not tell it, you will not sleep at night. I honestly think that should be peoples' first story.

*This doesn't mean it's the one that's going to get made right away, get bought right away. It means it's the one that will grab the attention of representation. Or of a producer who you should work with on something else, etc.*

*And to that end, I think it's frustrating for new writers sometimes when people tell them "write what you know, write what happened to you." I do not think that is accurate at all, personally. Because I think you can fall in love with a topic, or a book, or a period of time that you don't know that much about. But for some, personal reason, it resonates with you so much that you ache. And then you dig. And then you find a story that's true and real and raw for you that you have to put on paper. Suddenly, it's become personal. People will feel that.*

*So, in my opinion it shouldn't feel like you can only write from experience. Or what you know, literally. If something is moving you, keeping you up at night, figure out why and go with it. Ask questions.*

*I don't know if that's good advice, but that would probably be my two biggest pieces of advice.*

For Part 1 of the interview, go [here](#).

For Part 2, go [here](#).

For Part 3, go [here](#).



For Part 4, go [here](#).

For Part 5, go [here](#).

Laura is repped by CAA and Heroes and Villains Entertainment.

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