

CHERIEN DABIS: It took me five years to get my first movie made. The film is called *Enrica*. It's the story of a Palestinian single mother who immigrates to the US with her teenage son and has to start life anew in rural Illinois. The journey started at Columbia University, where I did my graduate work, and I started writing a feature screenplay there my first year.

Ultimately, after writing a draft of that, I realized that I was telling the story from the wrong point of view. And so I shelved the script. I decided I wasn't interested in it anymore, I put it away, and I thought I don't know how to crack the story yet, let me go to it later. So I worked on a few other projects and my second year at Columbia, I kind of found a way into it.

I decided that I was going to tell it from another character's point of view, and I found that was the sort of more dramatic way to tell the story. And so I went back in, I started rewriting the script, and I finished it by the end of my second year at Columbia. And when I graduated from Columbia, I actually had to feature screenplays, my first feature screenplay being one of them.

And I started really looking for a producer at that point. I was also, at the same time, making short work, and that was also very important. And I made a short film that was somewhat of a graduate thesis film that got a lot of-- film festival play, and that was the film that ultimately got me enough attention as a director that I was able to catch the eye of some producers.

And from that point forward, it took about two more years for us to raise the financing. So when you're getting ready to make your first film, I would urge you to do a lot of research about what programs are out there that support emerging filmmakers, there are a lot of them. You can go up at the Sundance institute, Tribeca Film Festival and Tribeca Institute, the Berlin Film Festival has a talent campus. Cannes has a residency program, Nantucket has a screenwriter's colony and screenplay competition.

There are a lot of resources out there for emerging filmmakers, and they're all great ways for you get your work out there, to get it read and seen by people who can give you great advice if nothing else-- or great notes on your script, which is also incredibly helpful. Be prepared to do a lot of rewriting. It's shocking how much you will have to rewrite your script. In fact, I think that I made every written my first screenplay 25 times.

So the sooner you're willing to accept that, the less painful it will be. I would also urge you to be incredibly patient, because it takes a lot of time. It's a long process, and there are a lot of no's along the way. All you need is one yes. Keep in mind also that no does not mean no, it just means not now. I'm Cherien Dabis, and I'm a writer/director.