

Introduction: My name is Sedrick Lakpa. I'm a graduate of Emory University class of 2007. I studied Film Studies and now I work in the film industry as a set dresser, so I help decorate sets on movies and television shows. I also am a filmmaker and I'm the owner and creator of United Storytellers. And our first initiative is called *Preservation by Film*, which seeks to tell the stories of historic spaces and people, and we're focusing on Atlanta stories primarily.

Question 1: Can you tell us a little bit about your journey (and where your headspace was at) from your Emory graduation to your current role?

Response: The journey was a little rough considering when I graduated, the economic situation in the country...it was a complete downfall. So it was really tough getting a foot in and trying to find my way because I was really passionate about film and Georgia hadn't become the mecca of filmmaking it is now. And it was really hard to sort of get my foot in and make contacts with people and get jobs. It was a lot of working for free and cold calling people, which was tough, and a lot of reflection to see if this was even the right path for me because, obviously, the business isn't booming as thousands of people were laid off across the country during the recession. I was really headstrong in that I still wanted to work in film, like I felt film was a very strong medium to tell stories to really influence people. And I still wanted to do it, even though there didn't seem to be a direct path. And I had to kind of decide on whether I wanted to stay in Atlanta, which was a small town that didn't have much film going on, or I wanted to take a leap and move to a city like LA, where I didn't know many people, and try to navigate finding a place to live, finding a place to work. And that sort of uncertainty was a little too scary. So I decided to stay here and at least build up a network of experience and people before I would try to move out there. Which, in doing that here, I ended up not having to move out to LA and really I've just...been working in Atlanta since 2007.

The uncertainty I had to navigate was there weren't many job opportunities, there weren't a ton of films filming and people needing help. If they did need help, it was usually for free and it was a much smaller project. So having to navigate that and staying at my mom's house to figure out, *Alright, so I'm gonna go work on this film for free. How am I going to get gas to get there? They're shooting 30 minutes to an hour away. Is this what I want to be doing for three to four weeks?* I mean, I remember interning on a film for six weeks without pay. It was a great learning experience, but it was hard to sort of give your time and energy, 10 to 12 hour days, and then at the end of the film, I was like, *Well, is there a job out of this?* And they were like, *I don't know.* And you just sort of kind of go on faith so I had to supplement my time there. I was also doing smaller jobs at Emory. So I was a videographer at Emory for certain functions. Through networking with people I went to Emory with, I was a videographer for Teach for America, in which we drive to the Mississippi Delta or DC and film in schools—elementary schools and middle schools. And then I would take that footage and edit it and submit it to Teach for America for their promotional video and stuff like that. But those jobs were like, *Alright, there's two weeks to work.* And then like two months, three months nothing. *Here's a week of work.* And then two months nothing. So I've kind of had to really navigate this uncertainty of learning how to budget and balance and save during the good times and not spend too much when, you know, I did make money so that I could survive.

For me, working on that film and working hard on it, I caught the eye of someone who worked in set dressing, I sort of learned what the position and that department did. And I was like, *Yeah, I mean, for creating the look of the film under the direction of a decorator and a production designer. That sounds cool.* So I really kind of just fell into it because I wanted to make films and I was like, *Well, I guess I am making films.* Depending on the project, and depending on who you work for, you get the

freedom to create or sometimes you're just waiting for them to make a decision so you can do your job. Those experiences really kind of fueled and fed my creativity. And some, like I said, some films it's that way and then some films, you're not given that much liberty because the person who's given charge of decorating it really wants it to be their vision. And so they want to direct you to help create their vision, while in some other films, they encourage a sort of collaborative experience and creativity with working with them. So it just depends on who you work for. And like I said, I really sort of just fell into it. And I've been doing it, you know, for the past 12 years, 13 years now.

Question 2: What does creativity/creative exploration/living a creative life mean to you?

Response: Creativity and creative exploration means to me the freedom to explore your creative nature. But as a creative, we are often trying to balance that freedom with reality. And sometimes the reality and the freedoms don't align or allow. But sometimes they also fuel being able to be creative in a time box, in a certain period of time. *Alright, so I know I have to go work this other job or I'm working on this film, but I want to do my film on the weekends.* And so it's like, you sort of have to balance and juggle this, your creative nature with time and reality and life and allowing that to fuel it, frame it. And sometimes you can kind of get disillusioned along the way, because you're pouring your time and effort into working on someone else's creative vision and you haven't worked on yours. And I've definitely felt that way many times. And I have to realize I really just have to force myself to take time to do that. You know, even if it's just a little bit, like taking little steps, just sort of do these little tiny bits of creativity. No matter how good it is or, you know, how you don't feel confident about it. You really just have to be forgiving yourself in that. And allow yourself to explore. And you'll be surprised at what you're able to create and what you're able to be a part of. And nurture those sorts of connections when you are helping someone out on a smaller project and how that can be reciprocal. Or just be fun for you to be able to not necessarily have it tied to a financial goal.

Question 3: What advice do you have for your younger self?

Response: I know now that I can be creative and create art, especially through film, while not always having all the pieces together. Back then, I felt like I needed to be so prepared and have everything all put together and things of that nature. And sometimes... I know now sometimes you can just go and create, you know, let it all out. And you'd be surprised how those pieces come together for you as you explore your creativity through a project that you've become passionate about. And that's really something that I've learned over the time and that I have really honed down. It's like, *Alright, let's create, let's get something out.* And back then I was like, *Alright, so I need to make sure everything is written. I need to make sure I have everything prepared for everyone.* And that's still true because I don't want to waste people's time when I do ask for help on projects. But sometimes you can get bogged down in those details and you never get started. Just flow with it. Just go out, let's do it. Now that the situation or circumstances have changed, let's still push through and let's create something because sometimes those restraints or changes can really fuel your creativity and you'd be surprised what you create from that.