



**A**ury's had many well-earned wonderful experiences,

from personal assistant to actor/writer John Leguizamo to writing for TV. Her first novel, **POP!**, has recently been published by Razorbill Books. She's currently working on a new Fox drama called "Wedding Album."

You wouldn't expect such a varied background from one so young. All these accomplishments certainly haven't dulled her exuberance for life and laughs. That's why we know you will thoroughly enjoy all that Aury has shared with us. Be prepared to learn and laugh.

**WOW:** Aury, you first realized the thrill of seeing your own words translated into a performance at Tufts. What can you tell us about 'Billy and Zelda's Last-Chance Dance' and the effect it had on your career?

**AURY:** It was amazing seeing the play develop during rehearsals, and of course there's nothing better than sitting in the middle of the audience during a performance. Writing usually involves sitting all alone at my desk, so it was a thrill to see people react to what I had written. (Especially since the play went over really well – I'm not sure I would have enjoyed it as much if they weren't applauding...) I'm a total laugh junkie – all I want is for people to think my writing is funny. (My friends won't read anything I've written while I'm in the room – because I stare at them the whole time, going "what part are you at? why aren't you laughing? You just smiled – what line did you just read?" I know it's annoying but I can't stop...) So doing live theater was great for this part of me.

**WOW, laughing:** But, that is an important part of you--the laugh seeker. However, we digress, after graduating from Tufts, you moved to New Orleans where you spent your evenings bartending and your days writing, what you call "really bad poetry" and collecting rejection slips. Then, one of your first big breaks was working as a personal assistant for actor/writer John Leguizamo for two years. How did working with John help you realize that you wanted to write screenplays?

**AURY:** Working for John was awesome. I knew going into it that I wanted to write scripts, but before he hired me, I'd never been on a movie set in my life. Being John's assistant was a fantastic introduction to the industry and the process of making movies. It was also amazing seeing the way John approached a script, both as an actor and a writer. I was really lucky, because he was incredibly generous about including me in all the various projects he was working on. I learned a ton about how scripts work, and about how to write comedy.

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**WOW:** Along the way, you've become quite the traveler. Born in PA, Tufts in MA and onto New Orleans, LA, but that wasn't enough for you--no, no, you had to head on into Mexico. What was it like living in Mexico and working on your screenplay?

**AURY:** I went to Mexico because I had written a script set there, and I thought I could make it more authentic if I had actually experienced what I was writing about. I spent half the time I was in Mexico hanging out at the beach and the other half collapsing from dysentery. In both cases, I didn't do a whole lot of writing. Eventually I ran out of money and had to go back to New York, and when I got there, I moved on to other projects. So on one hand, I probably would have gotten farther with that script if I'd stayed home and worked on it. On the other hand, I've used various experiences I had in Mexico in so many different things I've written, so it's ultimately been a huge benefit to my career. I think the lesson to take away is get all the life experiences you can, since they provide the fodder for your writing. (the other lesson, of course, is don't eat fish tacos from a roadside stand 150 miles inland in the middle of the summer...)

**WOW, grimacing and laughing:** Yuck! No fun learning that lesson. But, your work has required more than learning. You also had to 'pay your dues,' and you did that the first year as a producer's assistant. Why was it worth sticking it out? I'm referring to your following a dog around and eradicating any mishaps on the rugs in the office.

**AURY:** Like you said – it's paying your dues. Sure I had to do a lot of less-than-enviable tasks my first year on Sex and the City, but at the same time I was meeting the amazing people who wrote and produced the show, and also showing them that I was willing to pitch in and do whatever was asked of me to help make the production run smoothly. Every crew member on a show is important – whether they're Xeroxing

scripts or making coffee or doing any of a thousand other menial little jobs that need to get done. Everyone starts at the bottom – everyone has to “pay their dues”, and by doing your job well and quickly and cheerfully, you’re proving yourself as a team player to the people who are in a position to give you a job or a script assignment or a promotion. Producers are a lot more likely to help out someone who cleans up the dog pee without complaining...

**WOW:** So you did your time and it took five years from canine duty to seeing your name on a director’s chair. That must have been extremely exciting for you! Can you tell our readers what it was like when they asked you to write the script? Do you recall how you felt, what you thought/did as you laid eyes on your name?

**AURY:** It was Halloween and we were on hiatus, when our executive producer called me up to ask if I wanted to write a script the following season (which started in February.) I was over the moon, of course, and said YES YES YES! Then I hung up the phone and instantly convinced myself I’d imagined the whole thing – I had wanted to write an episode for so long I was positive the phone call had been a hallucination. But I didn’t want to call him back, of course, because that would make me seem insane. So basically I spent the entire three months of hiatus panicking that it wasn’t true. (Happily, on our first day when we started up again in February, people came up to congratulate me, so I knew I hadn’t been dreaming.)

**WOW:** That’s so cool! Tell us why it was worth it. Aury, this is an important point because many of our readers are working extremely hard--not always at what they want to be doing, in order to achieve their dream. And, this should give them plenty to chew on.

**AURY:** It was one hundred percent worth it. Writing is the only thing I’ve ever wanted to do, and as tumultuous as it constantly is, I completely love it.

That said – before I ever actually had any success writing for television, I used to go to screenings, seminars, or whatever, and the

Famous Writer would always say at one point during the Q&A, “if there’s anything you can possibly do besides writing, do that instead.”

It used to make me furious – it seemed so negative and discouraging. But now that I’m actually working, I sort of agree. Writing, for TV in particular, is a really tough business. There’s constant revision, constant rejection, constant criticism. There’s no job security – your show can be cancelled at a moment’s notice. It’s competitive and frustrating and random. You spend a lot of time crying, and a lot of time getting drunk.

If there’s anything else in the world you’d be happy doing, by all means, go do it. You’ll probably have a better, easier, more successful life. For me, though, there *isn’t* anything else I could possibly do, and because of that, TV writing is a complete joy. Even the hard, heart-breaking, nausea-inducing parts are wonderful, because it’s being paid to do the thing I love best: write.

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since they provide the fodder for your writing.**

**WOW:** That deep-seated passion obviously makes it impossible for you to quit. But, along with that, you use your gift of focus. If I may quote, it has been said that you made it your mission to become one of the pantheon of “Sex and the City” writers. How would you describe the Wallington Formula for making something your mission?

**AURY:** Um – work hard, don’t let anyone hear you complaining, keep trying over and over and over and over until you actually sell something, and have fate intervene and give you a couple very lucky breaks.

**WOW:** There’s just no way around the hard work! We’re curious about something. We’re all familiar with the benefits of belonging to a writing group, how does a table read compare to sharing your material with fellow writers?

**AURY:** There's no similarity at all. Table reads are where the actors read the script aloud so the writers/producers/director/designers/etc. can pinpoint various aspects of the script that aren't working and need revision (I know I just made them sound grim – they're actually one of the most fun parts of production). But they're a step in the writing process.

I belonged to a writers group in New York for six years – we met once a month to read and critique each others work, offer support, exchange gossip, and drink beer. Everyone in the group was a working writer, and we all took the notes we gave and received seriously, but at the same time, the point of the group was as much about the social connection as it was about getting feedback on our work.

**WOW:** **Knowing you, there had to be many laughs. Besides the writers group, you also took advantage of entering a contest, how did that affect your career?**

**AURY:** The very first thing I ever had published was a story called "Day of the Dead", which won the 1999 MTV Write Stuff fiction contest and appeared in a book called "Pieces: a collection of new voices" (PocketBooks, 2000) It was the first professional validation of my writing I ever got. It also led to my meeting my agents, whom I completely worship.

**WOW:** **That's really encouraging, and just one more way for writers to get out their work out there. But it isn't always easy if a writer lacks direction. What would you say to aspiring eclectic writers that are looking for their genre or forte?**

**AURY:** I'm not sure I can offer any great advice to genre writers – my writing is pretty mainstream. I think mainstream writing tends to be a little more commercially viable, so if there's a way to make your work appeal to the broadest possible audience without sacrificing your artistic integrity, you'll probably have an easier time initially finding a publisher or producer.

**WOW:** **That's a good, reasonable approach. We'd love to hear about some of your writing growing pains, because we know**

**there's a happy ending. Did you ever want to quit? Why didn't you?**

**AURY:** I've never wanted to quit, because honestly I don't really have any other skills or talents besides writing, and if I couldn't make a living doing this, I don't know what my career options would be, since there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of money in lying on the couch watching DVDs, which is the only other thing I am consistently good at doing. I have quit projects, however – abandoned scripts after 50 pages or novels after 100. I think with that, it's really a matter of having a limited amount of creative energy and time, and a gigantic supply of ideas. If a script is not working, and repeated attempts to fix it don't help, then I'll either back-burner it and move on to something else for a little while, or else abandon the idea altogether.

**Work hard,  
don't let anyone hear you complaining.**

**WOW:** We appreciate that you enjoy sharing what you've learned. We checked out [\*Seven Steps to a Successful Spec Script\*](#) and the good information writers can access. You obviously put a lot of yourself into this. Tell us a little about it, and how would you compare *Seven Steps* to your TV/movie scripts and writing your novel?

**AURY:** The exercise in *Seven Steps* (watching the first half of a show and writing the ending yourself) was something I used to do in college with old episodes of "The Odd Couple," just to teach myself about story structure.

I teach a TV writing class at [mediabistro.com](http://mediabistro.com) in Los Angeles, and used to do the exercise with the class, so I wrote it up for *Writer's Digest* (where the article originally appeared.)

There's no comparison between writing a how-to article and writing fiction or scripts. But lots of people ask me for advice on writing for TV,

so it's handy having it all written out already...

**WOW:** Things seem to have fallen in place for you, your successes in writing for television and the theatre, what made you decide to write your novel, "POP!"?

**AURY, her eyes open wide as she grins:** Oh, I love fiction. I read everything I can get my hands on. My mom is a bookseller and I grew up surrounded by books and reading constantly. Having a novel published was one of my life goals – it's really amazing to have it happen!

**WOW:** So, what is the major difference between writing a script and a novel?

**AURY:** The biggest difference for me is the pacing. In scripts you have very little room to tell the story, so you need to get going as fast as possible and make sure that every single line advances the story and reveals character.

In novels, you have a little more room, so you can dig deeper, get more descriptive, give more detail and description, where in a script you're counting on the actors and designers to provide a lot of that for you.

**WOW:** ...Aury, you grew up in the Judy Blume generation, where her books inspired and helped teenage girls deal with real-life issues, that were often left unsaid in the home. Now, twenty-years later, the current climate seems to be regressing... why do you think this is?

**AURY:** I'm not sure what you mean by regressing. I think contemporary books are every bit as provocative and inspiring and helpful as the books of past generations. There are certainly more young adult novels being published currently, and admittedly, many of them are geared more towards light entertainment than thought-provoking education. But there are also tons and tons of YA books published each year that are wildly smart and original, that teenagers can identify with and be inspired by and adore.

I love Judy Blume, and Robert Cormier, Paula Danzinger, Ellen Conford, and all those writers whom I grew up reading. But I also love

Meg Cabot, Sarah Dessen, Louise Rennison, Kristen Kemp, Ellen Emerson White, Anne Brashares, David Levithan, Rachel Cohn, and dozens of other contemporary YA writers whose books are every bit as literary, memorable, valid, and fun as their predecessors.

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**WOW:** Since Young Adult novel writing and Adult fiction are quite different in content. We must ask, how much time did you spend in the editing room with your novel, POP!?

**AURY:** I did three major rewrites, based on notes from my editor, but I also tend to rewrite myself constantly as I go, so I probably did maybe fifty or so revisions total.

**WOW:** Aury, this was great. Our last question for you is a fun one. Since this issue's theme is Authors' Staircase, what would your fantasy staircase look like and where would it lead?

**AURY:** The steps wouldn't be too steep, so my dog, Tuesday\*, could navigate them easily. It would have snacks placed strategically every few steps (nachos or French fries, ideally), and would be warm and quiet and clam. It would lead from my dining room (where I do all of my writing) to the front porch of a cozy house on a secluded beach in France, where Patrick Dempsey is waiting for me, a cold beer in one hand, an Emmy for Best Comedy in the other...

\*Tuesday is her two year old rescue dog,. In Aury's words "he's mostly a whippet, but definitely has a bunch of other breeds in him too. He's a sweet, goofy boy, and likes chasing crickets, eating tuna fish and vanilla ice cream, and chewing the caps off plastic water bottles."

**WOW's concluding comments:** Aury, you have not only been wonderful to share so much with us; but we want to assure you that you received some great laughs, as well. (Uh, all in the right places!)

And we wanted to let everyone know that Aury would love for you to visit her website. (You have to read her Oct 28 blog entry!)

Aury's website:

[www.aurywallington.com](http://www.aurywallington.com)

Aury' blog [Warning label should read: Caution: You'll fall in love with her dog (Tuesday) and, NO! YOU CAN'T HAVE HIM!]

<http://aurywallington.com/blog.htm>