

Keep Praying: Miracles Are Happening in Hollywood

Editors Note: Larry Thompson is the Epiphany Prize-winning executive producer of Amish Grace. Along with producing, Thompson is a personal manager and has managed more than 200 artists, many of which are Hollywood A-listers. In the following story, Thompson recounts his personal journey, and how God changed his life through one movie.

At midnight, in a Mississippi delta town, at the crossroads of highways 61 and 49, Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil to learn to play a guitar. So in that little Clarksdale, Mississippi, delta town, according to legend, the blues was born. And, so was I.

As a kid, I used to think that story was so cool. My mother wasn't as impressed as I was. She said: "Larry, there's nothing in this town for you. I don't want you working your whole life standing on your feet in a grocery store like your dad. You got to grow up; you got to get educated; and, you got to get out of here. This town is nothing but a graveyard with streetlights. You know, I've been reading in Photoplay magazine about these movie stars that are out in Hollywood. Now, they're important. I want you to grow up, get educated, go to Hollywood and meet these important movie stars. In fact, I went to Memphis, and I went to Goldsmith's, and I bought a red dress, and I put in a box, and I put it under the bed. I'm not going to wear that red dress until you invite me to California to meet all those important people, and you get to produce one of those great movies and tell a great story."

Well if that's not a chicken bone in your throat, or a monkey on your back.

I graduated law school at Ole Miss, and my dad gave me \$700. I

had a black Oldsmobile with maroon interior. I put all my clothes on a rack in my car and drove three days. I got off at 10 o'clock at night at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, next to the Capitol Records building. It was pouring down raining, and I just started crying because I finally came home. That's what I was going to do with my life. It just so happens that my mother encouraged me, but I loved the arts, too, and that's what I wanted to do.

Well more than 45 years later, 26 movies, 250 stars I've represented, and a lot of great things have happened to me. I realized that along the way in order to achieve all of this and in order to become "important" and to meet "important" people ... well, I didn't sell my soul to the devil, but I did dance with him quite often.

I wasn't proud of it, but I was in a town that in order to survive, let alone succeed, you find yourself slowly, slowly making little compromises that you don't even know you're making. I guess the only time I ever really knew I was making them was when I would talk to my sister, who still lived in Clarksdale, or my brother. When I would meet with them and see them I would realize that while I still had a lot of my accent, I had lost my innocence along the way.

It wasn't until about three years ago where, in my continued rush, my life had changed a bit. I had a wife, and now an 11-year-old daughter and an 8-year-old son. I finally had time for people other than me. You know, I was so busy being important that I didn't have time for a family, so I was late in life before I took a wife, and now I have a family, which changed my sort of directions.

I made a movie called *Amish Grace* about a schoolhouse shooting in the Amish country in Pennsylvania. It's about forgiveness: how the Amish forgave the killer and showed compassion. It's how forgiveness can transcend tragedy.

I was interested in the story, because it was Amish, and it was about forgiveness. We developed the script and at first the network didn't want to make it because it was too dark, and they said they wouldn't make.

So two years go by, and I keep begging, and the network eventually says, "Ok but it will have to be low budget because we don't believe in it."

So we started out to make this movie on no money. Again, I was into this movie because of the story and the forgiveness. I was developing many different movies. I am not in the faith-based movie business: I am in the movie business, but this was a story that I liked.

We couldn't get the right cast. It was just difficult. Then suddenly, I got a call from couple of agents who had read the script, and then suddenly there were some names suggested. We started to get a cast that was really bigger than what we probably deserved to have for a movie with our budget.

Then, we had what we call a read through, in which all the actors who had been hired came to a room to read the script for the first time. The reading started and about 15 minutes into this reading, and everybody in the room could tell you the same thing, and it was like there was a presence that came into the room.

Where suddenly the story was unfolding in a way I had never seen. Everyone was affected by what they were saying and what they were reading. The story started to come to life in the room. The story revealed itself in the room, and the actors were crying, and everybody was emotional. By the time the reading was over, we just sat there and stared at each other like "what just happened?" It was the beginning of that feeling every day for the shooting of that movie. It was almost like I had worked hard to get the movie up and ready to go and then suddenly someone said, "Move over this isn't your

movie.”

The hardest part of that movie was getting out of the way, because every day on that set something beautiful happened that transcended another movie into a story ... a story that was meant to be told. Everybody who worked on the movie felt it every single day, all through the shooting, all through the post, through every aspect of making the movie. That movie had a life of its own.

Its message revealed itself and the network, after they saw the movie, were touched by it and loved it, but were afraid of it. Was it a “dark story?” Would it make money? It’s about forgiveness, who really cares? They were not going to give it a very big marketing budget. The poor little stepchild had everything against it. We got a company to come in and do a little faith-based marketing for us, Grace Hill Media, and they did a wonderful job. The aired the movie on Palm Sunday night on *Lifetime*, and it became the most watched and highest-rated movie in the history of *Lifetime Movie Network*.

Still to this day it holds the record for the highest rating and most-watched movie that they have aired. Against all odds this movie not only played that night, but continues to be played all over the world and touches people everywhere. I get calls from churches who want to play the movie, and they want their congregations to understand about forgiveness. So it has a life of its own, and it is out there, you know?

Amish Grace got made not by me. Maybe through me, if I didn’t get in the way too much, but I think God had a hand in that movie.

You know what? When I was developing the script, I didn’t see it. I mean intellectually I could see it, but I didn’t feel it. In the making of the movie and in the reenactment of it, I remember one day on the set I saw it in the cameras we were shooting a moment of forgiveness that was so powerful, and I

thought, “Oh, that’s what the movie is about. Oh, that’s what drew me to this movie.” I didn’t even know what drew me to this movie until I was making it, you know? Maybe it was a lesson that I needed to learn. I don’t know. I do know that some very unusual, spiritual, wonderful things surrounded the making of that movie and the impact that it has had on the world.

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