

Friends of the Subway 1.
Debra

Thank you Steven, you have always been someone I am glad to follow. Thank you members of the scripter committee, thanks to Naomi who leads us so well, thank you Dean Quinlan for your commitment to the libraries and for me, this lovely honor. I would like to thank my wife and friend for life Debra for showing up, my three boys and my daughter in law, all who are more important than anything I could ever help to create.

I would like to first offer my congratulations to the artists that we are celebrating tonight. Author Walter Kirn, Sheldon Turner and the supremely talented writer and director Jason Reitman for "Up In The Air," their look into the heart of loneliness and the American condition, for Sapphire, the author of "Push" and Gregory Fletcher for "Precious," bringing us the pain of the forgotten amongst us, and how triumph is measured in self-respect, Neil Blomkamp and Teri Tatchell for "District 9" from the screenplay for the short film "Alive in Joburg," that shows us strangers in a strange land who are as human as we are alien...Scott Cooper and author Thomas Cobb for their "Crazy Heart," letting us see how we all take refuge in our weaknesses and how difficult the truth about ourselves is to come by, the great booklover, novelist and screenwriter Nic Hornby and author Lin Barber for "An Education," where dreams are as fragile as the lives they long to escape...Good job one and all.

I had been asked to include a book in your gift bags that inspired me...and there were shelves full, but I chose "Moby Dick" because it is not only as most writers would tell you the greatest novel in our language, it is not only an adventure story, an educational book, but a philosophy book, a book of poetry, a book of sorrow, and a spiritual book about man's fate. It is also to me one of the great cinematic works, a film on its own, a film Melville had running inside his fertile head, that was as only I believe films can be, as big as a whale, bigger than life. I remember quite well sitting alone in a Brooklyn library in Bedford Stuyvesant when I was thirteen and couldn't get a date no matter how much I begged or schemed or whined, just a kid who's nose was too big for his face and who weighed like 115lbs and nobody knew you weren't out on a date if you hid out in the library. Where I discovered Moby Dick, reading until they started flickering the lights and sending us home. Where my mother would ask me, did you see anybody tonight. And I'd tell her I shouldn't talk about it because it would hurt the girl's feelings. The library was my home away from home. And there I would go every day to find some other treasure to light a young man's imagination from Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson and Faulkner and Kill a Mockingbird and Catcher in the Rye. That secret place where there were no sisters or brothers to plague you, no parents hawking moral lessons, no mirrors to make you look at your pimply self, there was just you and the book...and endless shelves with nothing but possiblites...and now, too many years later, like newspapers and movie screens everything is shrinking and disappearing to be reborn and wrapped and packaged by people named Google...and so I hope we are able to keep the lights on for some while longer with a hard backed chair and an aisle you haven't been down before.

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This award is surprising because I was nominated twice before once for Forrest Gump and once for Benjamin Button and both times I suffered ignominious defeats to far inferior work who's name escapes me. So I come humbled by being less than meets the eye. My work is the product of collaboration with writers well and less known from Nick Evans and Winston Groom to the towering F. Scott Fitzgerald. I tried along with some other writers that helped to inform my words, such as Michael Mann and Tony Kushner and the esteemed Robin Swicord, all of us with a common thread, what sits us all down to write whether Fitzgerald or Roth, Philip or Eric, the idea that words matter. What brings us all here. This confluence of personalities and imaginations coming together to create something that speaks in some hopefully articulate way about what we need to say, even if nobody particularly wants to hear it. I recently had a dream. I dreamt that I had been sent a text message which was made up of numbers and letters that I couldn't decipher, that were symbolic of something I couldn't understand. For days I tried to decipher the meaning of "x34lcu8ft" and who might have sent this. I came to understand it was a dream about the frustration in the work I was doing, an adaptation of a book called "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close," by Johnathan Foer I had been working on for nearly three years, that I was struggling to find as is always a writer's struggle, simply, just to say the right words. Words, being only symbols. Like an indecipherable text. The struggle to adequately use those symbols to convey in braille as it were what you intend to say about a feeling or a thought or a sound or smell or a concept. And there are those that make us weak in the knees from their ability to write those words, their descriptions and understandings of things that are as pure as the purest symbol...as graceful as the most subtle of musical notes and as earthshattering as the most profound idea or the most intense experience...all just with the use of words. And what we do, those of us who adapt the words into other words so they can be seen and felt in a film, these writers who can articulate it in such a way the words become pictures of words, and done with such skill as the writers here who have captured the essence, the core, the kindred soul of another's words and translated them for us through the eyes and mouths of still others and it comes to something that makes you wobble when you leave...and maybe even go back and see where the original words come from...well, using probably far too many words, that's an adaptation...a writer by any other name. So that's why we're here, or at least that's why I'm here, even though the food's not too bad, to say hats off to all of you who do this to such a high degree. And since I am on my last legs for these things where I have begun to forget what I once did, although never forgetting why I did it, there are those who are just finding their voices we will be blessed to hear, and I can't wait to hear them...Oh, and I figured out the dream, the text...the symbols put together, decoded, was the word, "zatvilized"...which I looked up and it didn't mean a Goddamn thing.

Oh, and one final thought. J.D. Salinger, as you know passed away a week ago...he would never let his work become a movie. Just for the fun of it I adapted a scene from "Catcher In The Rye. When I was done, I hadn't changed a word of what he had written, because it was perfect. Some things just are.

~~Thanks for being~~ Thanks for being.