

“I’m a confused person. I’ve always been a confused person,” Zach Morris said as I ask him to describe himself. We sat in his cramped dorm, barely fitting all of the equipment in the room. Around the room there are multiple copies of a screenplay called *In the Living Room with John Livingston* scattered everywhere, pictures of him and his family when he lived in Paraguay for the summer, a cigar box with love notes from his latest girlfriend, and of all things, a pipe. I question him about the odd pipe and he said, “I haven’t smoked it yet. But how cool is that! Get a picture of me with the pipe.”ⁱ Like all things in Zach’s world, the pipe is prop, an added element of drama to everyday life.

Zach, or Pancho as he is called by everyone else, is one of only twelve actors that made it into UCLA’s theatre program his freshman year. Out of over 6,000 applicants and tryouts, he had made it. Needless to say, he is amazingly talented. Even before the prestigious halls of UCLA’s McGowan Hall, he began making a mark on the theatre community. His senior year, he wrote, directed and acted in his own play called *Fake Plastic Trees*. He swept the competition, placing top three in every single category, winning first for best monologue and best original screenplay. Why does he want to pursue this? “I’ve never really seen another option,” he says. “Writing, acting, performing is the only thing I’ve really been good at.”ⁱⁱ

Whether from lack of other talents or a focused passion, Zach is obsessed with writing, acting, and directing, and his creativity is matched by ambition. Currently, he is the only freshman at UCLA to be approved to direct his own original screenplay. “I’m writing this play right now, to be performed in May. I mean it’s limited in its perception, because it is from my point of view, but it’s good. I’ve worked really hard and I want people to enjoy it. I mean, I do write them for a reason,”ⁱⁱⁱ he says. Though typically a bit dramatic, his ideas about theater art are profound for such a young person. “The amazing thing about writing is that I have an idea in my head, and I take that idea and represent it through a created story. Somebody will then take that piece of writing, interpret it, and perform it for an audience, which brings it into the world. The world then does what it wants with it. Just getting an idea out there like that is my goal.”^{iv}

In 2002, actors, producers, and directors in the United States held only 139,000 jobs, most of whom made only \$29,000 a year. Those with extra talent, ambition, or even luck made an average of \$200,000 a year.^v In such a make or break industry, I ask Zach whether recognition matters. He laughs knowingly, as though he’s letting me in on a funny secret. “Of course. I mean, of course. I want to say I’m doing it for the people all of the time, but there’s this evil little part of me that’s like its all for me!” As for what mark he wants to make on field, he shrugs and says, “I just want to continue telling stories.”^{vi}

With all of the potential careers that are more reliable, and in many ways more safe, I am curious how Zach is sure this dream is it. In a very un-theatric, un Zach, simple way, he just said it. “ Because... because it’s the only thing that really makes me want to get up out of bed in the morning.”^{vii}

ⁱ Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007

ⁱⁱ Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007

ⁱⁱⁱ Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007

^{iv} Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007

^v Bureau of Labor Statistics. “Actors, Producers, and Directors.”

CollegeGrad.com. 30 Mar. 2007 <<http://collegegrad.com/careers/proft23.shtml>>.

^{vi} Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007

^{vii} Morris, Zachary. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2007