

To Whom It May Concern,

When you designed the “Three Days In Cannes” opportunity, I am likely not the candidate you envisioned. I have never been to film school, and do not work in the arts or humanities. I’m a software engineer, a former Artificial Intelligence PhD at Stanford University, and the co-founder of a mid-sized technology startup in San Francisco. Exactly four days after Cannes 2018, I will turn 29 and become permanently ineligible for your program.

And yet, early this year I made a single resolution -- one that had nothing to do with the success of my company, my personal finances, or technical performance. It was to somehow, despite having no press credentials or viable reason to be admitted, attend the Cannes film festival. This is not an exaggeration or rhetorical device; it is my dream.

For the entirety of my adult life, film has been my lifeline. It has calmed me in times of stress and comforted me in times of sadness; it has brought cathartic tears, laughter, meditation, release. Film *widens* me: it’s a shortcut to empathy, a vessel for communicating lived-in experiences to those who might never, themselves, have lived them. I am an American male, but for two hours *Persepolis* gives me a window into the life of an Iranian girl, yearning; *Una mujer fantástica* a Chilean trans woman, fighting; *The Florida Project* a child living in a run-down hotel, overflowing with hope. I love film because it is somehow both universal and unyieldingly specific -- it bridges high and low, abstract and concrete. When Jesse and Celine meet on that train to Vienna, I feel the universal yearning of youth, the thrill of a lifetime of wistful hypotheticals collapsing into one specific, blonde and insisting. But I also remember being 24 and riding, alone, on that same train to Vienna. I remember the way the trees blurred in the periphery as the impossibly-ornate city tumbled into view; the creak of the dining cart, the whispered conversations in languages I couldn’t parse; and I remember how, in that moment, I could have fallen in love with anyone who looked me in the eye. So with *Lost In Translation* and Tokyo and longing, *Mustang* and Istanbul and escape, etc. Film not only recalls memories, it heightens and sanctifies them. Ordinary places become hallowed, conversations sacred, precious things. It makes my own specifics feel like universal truths; like a part of a conversation the world is having with itself.

And so, I’ve chased film with every ounce of my (diminishing) spare time. For about ten years, I’ve co-hosted a weekly film review podcast called The Spoiler Warning (<http://thespoilerwarning.com>): a friend and I watch one or more new releases in a given weekend, and spend roughly an hour unpacking them. We are nearing 500 episodes, which means I’ve recorded nearly a month of unbroken audio discussing film. I’ve also dabbled in film criticism, writing weekly reviews and posting hundreds to my personal website (<http://sdavidmiller.com>). Some of my favorite, recent write-ups include:

- Call Me By Your Name:
<http://sdavidmiller.com/octo/blog/2017/12/23/review-call-me-by-your-name/>
- The Shape Of Water:
<http://sdavidmiller.com/octo/blog/2017/12/11/review-the-shape-of-water/>

- Personal Shopper:
<http://sdavidmiller.com/octo/blog/2017/04/14/review-personal-shopper/>
- Manchester By The Sea:
<http://sdavidmiller.com/octo/blog/2016/12/26/review-manchester-by-the-sea/>
- Anomalisa: <http://sdavidmiller.com/octo/blog/2016/01/16/review-anomalisa/>

Balancing a 60-80 hour work week with creative pursuits isn't easy; but I believe art, like exercise or sleep, is a vital part of a life well-lived. It informs every aspect of my identity. It rejuvenates me. And I can think of nothing more rejuvenating than attending Cannes, at the epicentre of it all, surrounded by those who make cinema and those who adore it as much as I do.

I would be honored to be given this opportunity.

Sincerely,
Stephen Miller

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