

Mentee Profile/**Renuka Jeyapalan**



Renuka Jeyapalan is an independent filmmaker, graduate of the Canadian Film Centre's Director's Lab, and winner of the 2010 Kodak New Vision Mentorship. As part of the mentorship, Renuka attended the 2010 Toronto International Film Festival and began development on her first feature film, *How To Go To A Wedding Alone*, with esteemed director Catherine Hardwicke (*Twilight*, *Thirteen*).



Congratulations on being the 2010 winner of the Kodak New Vision Mentorship! What was the highlight of the experience for you?

One of the highlights for me was my first meeting with Laurie May, Co-President and Co-Founder of Maple Pictures. Her passion, focus and drive to support films and filmmakers are not only inspiring but infectious! During our first meeting, we talked about my feature film project as a real possibility. After spending years working on my screenplay—as just an idea in my head—being able to finally discuss casting, distribution, and marketing with Laurie and to think about it as a tangible and achievable reality was incredible.

The mentorship with Catherine Hardwicke was going to happen via Skype, but you decided to go to LA to meet her in person. What influenced your decision and was it worth it?

Meeting Catherine in person was definitely worth it—an invaluable experience. She invited me to her house and even gave me a tour of her neighbourhood. For those two hours, she was completely focused on me and my project. It just wouldn't have been as personal over Skype. The opportunity to be mentored by her was so great that I wanted to make the most out of it. I think that's one of the most important lessons I've learned from this mentorship experience: always make the most out of every opportunity.

You also met with fellow Canadians working in the film industry in LA. What insights came out of those meetings?

I met with Alyson Richards (Producer, The Nightingale Company) and Megan Martin (screenwriter/director). They were very open and candid and gave me a better sense of what life in LA was like and how the mentality in the film industry differs from Canada.

Where is *How to Go to a Wedding Alone* now?

I recently completed a new draft of the screenplay and the next step is to find a distributor and secure financing for the development/packaging stage. My producers, Borga Dorter and Jordan Barker at Gearshift Films, will be pitching the script at Cannes this May, and we're excited to gauge interest for the project in the international market.

Why do you think mentorship is important to the screen-based media industry?

There's no clear and set path in pursuing a career in film and television. You have to make your own way and carve out your own name. But the most valuable and inspiring advice can emerge out of hearing and learning from other people's experiences. For me, this is why mentorship is so important.

I hear you're getting ready to leave your day-job of six years to focus solely on film. Congratulations! How did that decision come about?

Receiving the mentorship was an important part in my decision. Until then, I'd been writing on my own and working independently, but the mentorship made me feel like I was part of a film community again. I had a very intense day job working on a Trading Floor at an Investment Bank. I met and worked with some amazing and inspiring people who are incredible in their field. I actually had a day job that I loved. But feeling the support and encouragement of the film community got me thinking. It made me appreciate what I was missing and where I wanted to be. It was a realization that I didn't expect—another benefit that came out of the mentorship.