

# Off to Hollywood

The Peninsula  
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TED FINK / PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

A promising screenwriting career awaits Elaine Haygood (second from right), as she plans a move to Los Angeles. Also pictured (left to right) are friend JoAnne Homer, and sons Charles and Homer.

## East Palo Alto filmwriter gets her big break

**Tom Scanlon**  
PENINSULA TIMES TRIBUNE

The single mother who once complained of being stuck on Welfare Road is now riding the Hollywood Freeway, as the remarkable Elaine Haygood story grows ever more interesting.

At the end of last summer, this East Palo Alto single mother of two sat down and wrote a tearful letter to the prestigious American Film Institute. I am honored to be accepted, she wrote, but I simply cannot afford the childcare I would need to attend your school.

"I'm just another Welfare mother stuck in the system," she said at the time.

Haygood's luck changed dramatically when a wealthy Peninsula couple read of her situation in the Peninsula Times Tribune, and made an anonymous \$10,000 donation to fund care for Haygood's children. The Los Angeles film school said Haygood

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**Alex Rose**

still was welcome to scholarship money, and off she went.

Nine months later, Haygood has earned rave reviews from the school. She has won two more scholarships and is working on one of her scripts with a well-known producer.

"Elaine has written a preliminary first draft and she and I are going to be working on getting it to a stage where we can submit it to actors and directors," said Alex Rose, the executive producer of Michelle Pfeiffer's "Frankie and Johnny" and producer of Sally Field's "Norma Rae" and Goldie Hawn's "Overboard."

Haygood, 31, described her screenplay called "Iscaiot" as "a science-

fiction thriller, kind of like 'Blade Runner' meets 'The Howling,' and it has a strong feminist slant. What can I say? I'm a sexist pig — the four best parts are all women."

Rose, who said she is "developing ('Iscaiot') with the intention to produce it," met Haygood at the AFI, where Rose taught a class on filmmaking. "I think she's very talented and has a great future as a writer," Rose said of Haygood. "She uses an economy of words and she expresses herself clearly and she can write exciting scenes."

Rose was not the only AFI faculty member impressed by Haygood. June Roberts, the writer of Cher's

"Mermaids," had Haygood in a screenwriting class, and was fascinated by the young woman's cross-referencing of styles.

"I think the fact that she's self-taught, has a passion for science fiction and has really studied Shakespeare — the classic structure of a Shakespeare play combined with a fascination with horror movies and science fiction — has produced an unusual voice," said Roberts.

"I think she writes very strong and interesting characters and she really knows how to put a scene together," Roberts said, adding that Haygood, like most young writers, has room to improve. "She sometimes gets so fascinated with the subject matter that she forgets to tell the story — a common problem with people just starting out."

Jean Firstenberger, the director of the American Film Institute, said Haygood recently was awarded \$2,500 in scholarship money — \$1,000

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# **BREAK /** Screenwriter takes advantage of a chance to succeed

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from the Mary Pickford Foundation and \$1,500 for the Cort/Swedlin Award. "She obviously is a very talented woman and I think she took tremendous advantage of her year here," Firstenberger said of Haygood. "She didn't just go to her courses. She went to all the classes she could. That's the exciting thing."

The hardest thing about the school year was being away from her two children, Haygood said. While she was putting in 12- and 15-hour days at the AFI, friends on the Peninsula cared for her kids, Charles, who turns 5 on July

13, and 18-month-old John.

Haygood returned to the Peninsula this month, but only long enough to pack her children's belongings for what she hopes is a permanent move to Los Angeles. "I'm not leaving my kids behind anymore," Haygood said. "This was a crazy year without the kids. At times I felt I was transparent. I found I was very manic this year without the kids."

Haygood sees the past nine months as an investment in her children's future. In addition to the project on which she is working with Rose, Haygood had a "pitch meeting" scheduled at Universal Pictures for another original screenplay.

If she sells one of her scripts, Haygood will be headed toward her goal of becoming a writer-producer. Firstenberger cautions that the road to success in movies is a long one: "To 'make it,' you need three things: passion, patience and perseverance. It takes a long time to make it."

Now that she has her foot in the door, and is making all the right contacts, Haygood said there is no stopping her. "And I'll never forget the people who helped me out, whoever they are," she said.

Told about Haygood's extraordinary progress, one of the anonymous donors was thrilled. "Isn't it wonderful?" she said. "Isn't it wonderful that she was able to put to use what was given her?"