Sidney Sheldon: Keep Turning the Pages

Chantale Williams

Full Sail University

Sidney Sheldon: Keep Turning the Pages

Sidney Sheldon is one of the world’s most renowned screenwriters and novelists. In his life his twenty-eight number one best-selling novels have sold over three hundred million copies, created over two hundred television scripts, twenty-five movies and six Broadway plays. (Hofler) He is also the only author to win an Oscar, a Tony, an Emmy. (Pincus-Roth) None of that would have come about if Sidney had not heeded the advice of his father, Otto and turned the page of life.

At the age of seventeen, Sidney Sheldon tried to commit suicide. Fed up with the bleakness of his life he took a handful of sleeping pills and a bottle of bourbon to his bedroom only to be interrupted by his father.

Sidney always wanted to be a writer and his father reminded him of his goal by not closing the book too soon, Sheldon (2005) “You don’t know what can happen tomorrow. Life is like a novel, isn’t it? It’s filled with suspense. You have no idea what’s going to happen until you turn the page.” (p. 80)

With this in mind, Sidney redirected his focus, wondering if he could be closing the book too soon. After all he had dreams and aspirations of being a writer, of being someone of importance. According to Greene (2012) in order to achieve creative activity, setbacks and failure need to take place. Years of experimentation and a high level of focus are needed as well. (p. 179) Sheldon exhibited these characteristics when his short stories were rejected time and time again from *Story* magazine, *Collier’s* and *The Saturday Evening Post*. (p. 80)

Despite numerous family moves, I think this was one reason Sidney was able to retain some form of flexibility, the world around him was always new and different. He was always the new kid on the block and always faced with the unfamiliar in his life. His father was a traveling salesman always looking for the next great deal, while his mother was the more stable figure, providing comfort and protection. Despite these challenges Sidney graduated high school. With no money for college Sidney worked two jobs, one as a hang boy, receiving coats and hats from the coatcheck girl and hanging them on the corresponding number in the closet of a hotel, as well as one day a week in a drugstore. Through a set of circumstance Sidney was awarded a scholarship to Northwestern University. It was there that his world seemed to open up and life took on greater meaning for him.

He did his best to absorb all that campus life had to offer, by taking the maximum number of classes and Latin, tried out for the debate team and became the first freshman in history to make the team and worked on the school paper.

With this new opportunity, Sheldon was driven to do and learn as much as possible and yet he continued to feel unfilled. I found a lot of similarities between Sheldon learning as much as he could and Mozart creating as much as he could in a small time span.

For a while things were going were going well. Sidney was doing well in his studies, allowing his mind to relax and expand with the absorption of all the knowledge he could possibly hold. He came alive when interviewing minor celebrities for the school paper, and he was enjoying a newfound freedom on the debate team. Then he overheard a conversation between his parents one night where his mother was proposing taking on a night job.

As she was already working a full-time job, six days a week as a clerk, Sidney was not going to have his mother working nights as well. So he dropped out of school to find another job and help his family. The world was bleak and gray again.

Greene speaks about Masters reaching a certain point in their creative process where the project feels stale and stagnant. (p. 199) and how stepping away from a project will provide the needed insight. Sidney, at several times in his young life, stepped away from what he truly wanted to do in lieu of helping to sustain his family. Yet at each of these turning aways, he would find some opportunity that would bring him back to his first love.

One opportunity came in the form of him handing his song *My Silent Self* to the music leader Phil Levant in the Bismarck hotel. While this song did not get published, it did receive a lot of airtime and it ignited Sidney to write more songs. promoting his to take a trip to New York. There he got a job as an usher and eventually met a man name Max Rich. The night before he was supposed to meet with him, Sidney succumbed to his emotions boarded a bus and went back to Chicago.

One of the emotional pitfalls Sidney Sheldon may have faced was grandiosity. Not to the point that his ego was so huge that he thought he was above the criticism, but he would daydream about being CEO of a company before he even completed his first day of work. This was something that often happened with Sidney, he would begin a new job and automatically think of how wealthy he would become. Truthfully it was hard to really find an emotional pitfall that worked for Sidney Sheldon, because he was so driven. He did not have a need for approval to continue his work. He kept working even when it was rejected.

He did not really display impatience and had an attitude of ‘I am going to work at these horrible jobs until my big break comes.’ Even when faced with impossible deadlines such as reading a four hundred page novel and writing a thirty page synopsis with a two page summary and comments in an eight hour period, he faced it with a plan, which worked.

He also was not inflexible because he had a willingness to break the rules and was not afraid to use his own voice and experiences. Mostly Sidney Sheldon’s emotional pitfalls came from the fact that he was bipolar. A lot of the doubt and fears he experienced were from the manic lows that this illness created. He would feel happy when he was rejected and sometimes on the verge of greatness when things would have gone so much better, depression and doubt would descend over him and he would talk himself out of life changing meetings as he did with Max Rich. (p. 886)

Santiago Calatrava would be the person that I would relate Sidney Sheldon to. Calatrava worked within the confines of what people wanted in his architectural career until he could use his own voice and vision. Sidney Sheldon did the same with his writing. He worked with the perimeters set by others whether it was a play, musical or a movie script until he was able to produce his own original work.

Sheldon also had no problem collaborating with other writers and songwriters to get the job done even to the point of overextending himself because he was that passionate about his work and getting his name out there. Both men did this until they built names of their own.

I truly believe that Sidney Sheldon enjoyed the creative process. That he looked forward to

research, often traveling to the places, and dining in restaurants he placed in his novels. He

sought realism for his novels and was not afraid to take the time to achieve it.

He never became complacent or inflexible which is death to the creative process. Instead

he chose to embrace the natural rhythm of his life and the world around, creating memorable

characters and books that I could not wait to read.

Sidney Sheldon, born Sidney Schechtel on February 11, 1917 in Chicago, Illinois would

have indubitably closed the book on his life way too soon had he committed suicide at the age of seventeen. Sidney may have suffered setbacks and challenges because of the Depression and the War, but he keep turning the pages of his life. He never settled for being a drugstore clerk or a hang boy. Instead he kept forging forward until he reached his ultimate goal of a bestselling author. Sidney Sheldon is truly a Master of the Game.

References

Greene, R. Mastery. *Penguin Books*, 11/2012. VitalBook file

Hofler, R. (2006). The Other Side of Make Believe. *Variety* 402(1)*.* B1-B2. Retrieved 15 February 2015 http://web.a.ebscohost.com.oclc.fullsail.edu:81/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=52b5062f-bbca-49fd-a860-80875eae83e6%40sessionmgr4005&hid=4104

Pincus-Roth, Z. (2006). Three Billion Dollars, and Counting, Sums up the Scribe. *Variety*, *402*(1), B1-B4. Retrieved 12 February 2015. http://web.a.ebscohost.com.oclc.fullsail.edu:81/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=2&sid=52b5062f-bbca-49fd-a860-80875eae83e6%40sessionmgr4005&hid=4104

Sheldon, S. The Other Side of Me. New York: *Warner Books*, 2005. Web.

Sheldon, S. "Getting to Know Sidney Sheldon." *Welcome to SidneySheldon.com: The Official Website of the World's Master Storyteller*. Hachete Book Group, 2007. Web. Retrieved 12 February 2015. http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/features/sidneysheldon/sheldon\_bio.html