Neil Gaiman’s ‘Make Good Art’ speech.
In May 2012, bestselling author Neil Gaiman stood at a podium at Philadelphia’s University of the Arts to deliver the commencement address. For the next nineteen minutes he shared his thoughts about creativity, bravery, and strength; he encouraged the students before him to break rules and think outside the box. Most of all, he urged the fledgling painters, musicians, writers, and dreamers to MAKE GOOD ART. This book, designed by renowned graphic artist Chip Kidd, contains the full text of Gaiman’s inspiring speech. Whether bestowed upon a young artist beginning his or her creative journey, or given as a token of gratitude to an admired mentor, or acquired as a gift to oneself, this volume is a fitting offering for anyone who strives to MAKE GOOD ART.
NOW
WHAT
This speech was originally delivered to the University of the Arts Class of 2012, and you can watch me saying it at http://vimeo.com/42372767
Also by Neil Gaiman

For Adults

Stories (edited with Al Sarrantonio)
Fragile Things
Anansi Boys
American Gods
Stardust
Smoke and Mirrors
Neverwhere
Good Omens (with Terry Pratchett)

For All Ages

The Graveyard Book (illustrated by Dave McKean)
M Is for Magic
Coraline (illustrated by Dave McKean)
Odd and the Frost Giants (illustrated by Brett Helquist)
Crazy Hair (illustrated by Dave McKean)
Blueberry Girl (illustrated by Charles Vess)
The Dangerous Alphabet (illustrated by Chris Grimly)
The Day I Swapped My Dad for Two Goldfish (illustrated by Dave McKean)
The Wolves in the Walls (illustrated by Dave McKean)

MAKE GOOD ART

THE SPEECH
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Something that worked for me was imagining that where I wanted to be—an author, primarily of fiction, making good books, making good comics, and supporting myself through my words—was a mountain.

A distant mountain.

My goal.
And I knew that as long as I kept walking towards the mountain I would be all right. And when I truly was not sure what to do, I could stop, and think about whether it was taking me towards or away from the mountain. I said no to editorial jobs on magazines, proper jobs that would have paid proper money, because I knew that, attractive though they were, for me they would have been walking away from the mountain. And if those job offers had come along earlier I might have taken them, because they still would have been closer to the mountain than I was at the time.
The things I’ve done that worked the best were the things I was the least certain about, the stories where I was sure they would either work, or more likely be the kinds of embarrassing failures people would gather together and talk about until the end of time. They always had that in common: looking back at them, people explain why they were inevitable successes. While I was doing them,

I HAD NO IDEA.

I STILL DON’T.

And where would be the fun in making something you knew was going to work?
And sometimes the things I did really didn’t work.

There are stories of mine that have never been reprinted. Some of them never even left the house.

But I learned as much from them as I did from the things that worked.
I will pass on some secret freelancer knowledge. Secret knowledge is always good. And it is useful for anyone who ever plans to create art for other people, to enter a freelance world of any kind. I learned it in comics, but it applies to other fields too. And it’s this:

People get hired because, somehow, they get hired. In my case I did something which these days would be easy to check, and would get me into trouble, and when I started out, in those pre-Internet days, seemed like a sensible career strategy: when I was asked by editors who I’d worked for, I lied. I listed a handful of magazines that sounded likely, and I sounded confident, and I got jobs. I then made it a point of honour to have written something for each of the magazines I’d listed to get that first job, so that I hadn’t actually lied, I’d just been chronologically challenged . . .

You get work however you get work.
People keep working, in a freelance world,

and more and more of today’s world is freelance,

because
And you don’t have to be as good as the others if you’re on time and it’s always a pleasure to hear from you.
When I agreed to give this address, I started trying to think what the best advice I’d been given over the years was.

Chip Kidd is a graphic designer and writer in New York City. He tries to make good art, but mostly just makes mistakes. Whether or not any of them are interesting, amazing, glorious, or fantastic is anyone’s guess.
“THIS IS REALLY GREAT. YOU SHOULD ENJOY IT.”
—S. K.
Husband runs off with a politician?

Leg crushed and then eaten by a mutated boa constrictor?

IRS on your trail?

Cat exploded?

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