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Second Novel by Newman '06 Headed to Big Screen

May 8, 2023

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Best-selling author and Illinois Wesleyan alumna Torri “T.J.” Newman '06 recently found her upcoming novel caught in a bidding war for film rights between top producers like Nicole Kidman, M. Night Shyamalan and Steven Spielberg.

With the book set to be released on May 30, *Drowning: The Rescue of Flight 1421* is a thriller about a plane that crashes and sinks into the ocean with passengers enclosed in the cabin and the rescue mission that ensues. Ultimately it was Warner Bros. who secured rights to bring *Drowning* to the big screen with a \$1.5 million deal and an additional \$1.5 million on the first day of production.

Newman will also serve as executive producer for the film.

“It’s been a huge honor and a huge learning experience. In a novel, you have 10 pages to write a scene. In a screenplay, you have one page. Executing that kind of compression well is extremely difficult and I’ve loved the challenge of it,” she said.

Newman is no stranger to movie deals. Her debut book *Falling* is about a kidnapper who demands a pilot crash a plane full of passengers to save his family.

Released in 2021 and narrated by actor Steven Weber on audiobook, [the novel also caught the eyes of Hollywood producers](#) after it reached a top spot on the New York Times bestsellers list. Universal Pictures purchased rights to the film adaptation for \$1.5 million, among bids from Jason Bateman and Matt Reeves.

Still, Newman said the experience with her latest novel has been surreal.

“I’ve now been on a Zoom call with Oscar-winning actress Nicole Kidman. Steven Spielberg has read my book. I mean, these are things my brain can barely make sense of. It’s a dream come true,” said Newman. “I’ve gotten a taste of what it’s like to be in the room and I want to keep putting out work that warrants an invitation back.”

Newman’s inspiration for her suspenseful stories comes from her experience as a former flight attendant. [She wrote *Falling* aboard red-eye flights while passengers slept](#). She recalls the moment where the idea for *Drowning* was born, while on a flight from Hawaii to Los Angeles.

“I remember standing in the galley, looking out the small porthole window in the door and looking out at nothing,” she said, describing a black expanse of water with no light. “That sudden awareness of how isolated we were really freaked me out. I knew somewhere in that feeling, that primal fear, were the roots of a really great story.”

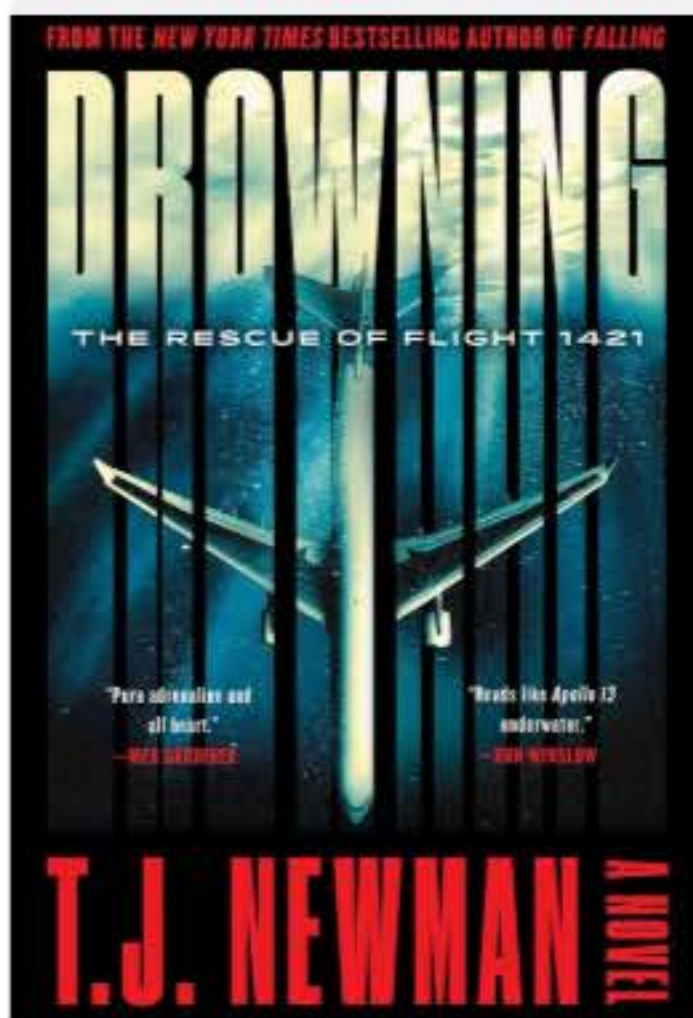
Being part of the book-to-film adaptation process is fascinating, said Newman, especially when it comes to understanding why content has to be trimmed or altered for film.

“I think the most important part of the adaptation, and what I hope to see preserved here, is the spirit of the story and the world it portrays. The details of how that is brought about are malleable,” she said.

Newman says her knack for storytelling was bolstered by her time at Illinois Wesleyan, where she studied theatre arts.

“I put my degree in musical theatre to use all the time, whether it’s in an interview I do or in the creative discovery of the wants and needs of a character I’m writing,” she said.

Newman will complete a two-week national tour for the release of *Drowning: The Rescue of Flight 1421* — including a stop at the shop Exile in Bookville in Chicago on June 6. Visit www.tjnewmanauthor.com for tour details or to pre-order the book.



A new novel titled *Drowning: The Rescue of Flight 1421* by Torri “T.J.” Newman '06 will release on May 30. Warner Bros. has purchased film rights to the book and Newman will serve as executive producer for the film.

By Julia Perez