



A conversation about the portrayals of people with disabilities in TV & film

PEOPLE FIRST



Edited transcript of a panel held Feb. 11, 2013
at the Writers Guild of America, West





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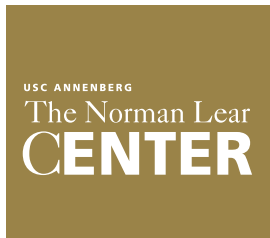
Real Disabilities,
Reel Stories

A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE PORTRAYALS OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN TV & FILM

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HOLLYWOOD, HEALTH & SOCIETY
USC ANNENBERG NORMAN LEAR CENTER



The Norman Lear Center

The Norman Lear Center is a nonpartisan research and public policy center that studies the social, political, economic and cultural impact of entertainment on the world. The Lear Center translates its findings into action through testimony, journalism, strategic research and innovative public outreach campaigns. On campus, from its base in the USC Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, the Lear Center builds bridges between schools and disciplines whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public. Through scholarship and research; through its conferences, public events and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and practice in the field.

For more information, visit www.learcenter.org



Hollywood, Health & Society

Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S), a program of the Norman Lear Center, provides entertainment industry professionals with accurate and timely information for storylines on health and climate change. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The California Endowment, the Grantham Foundation, ClimateWorks, Skoll Global Threats Fund, among others, HH&S recognizes the profound impact that entertainment media have on individual knowledge and behavior. HH&S supplies writers and producers with accurate health information through individual consultations, tip sheets, group briefings, a technical assistance hotline, panel discussions at the Writers Guild of America, West, a quarterly newsletter and web links to health information and public service announcements. The program also conducts extensive evaluations on the content and impact of TV health storylines.

For more information, visit www.usc.edu/hhs

➡ To watch a video of the full panel discussion, part of the HH&S outreach to writers, [click here](#).

Participants



BEN LEWIN was born in Poland and grew up in Australia with a childhood passion for photography and creative writing. After a brief career as a criminal lawyer, he studied at the British National Film School, and worked for TV networks in England, France, Australia and the U.S. in documentaries and drama. He has also written and directed three previous feature films, and won various awards. His most recent accomplishment is being the writer and director for the award-winning feature film, *The Sessions*, starring Oscar nominees John Hawkes and William H. Macy, and Oscar winner Helen Hunt. His portfolio is diverse and eclectic, including one wife and three children.



ANN NEVILLE-JAN (keynote) joined the University of Southern California's Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy in 1989. In the decades since, she has taught research, theory and clinical courses in occupational science, the occupational therapy professional program and the PhD program in occupational science. Her courses have included content necessary for mental health practice in occupational therapy, occupational science theory, and disability studies. Prior to her full time academic career she held positions as Director of Occupational Therapy at the Boston Veterans Administration Medical Center, as the Rehabilitation Coordinator for Psychiatric Services at the West Los Angeles Veterans Administration Medical Center and as the Education Coordinator at the Sepulveda Veterans Administration Medical Center. Dr. Neville-Jan is an expert in spina bifida, both as a consumer of services and as a research scientist. She has held positions with the American Occupational Therapy Association and has been invited to participate on panels of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation, the American Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine, and was a recent occupational therapy consultant to the NIH's National Center for Medical Rehabilitation Research.



ERIC GUGGENHEIM is a writer and co-producer of the critically acclaimed NBC-Universal Television drama *Parenthood*. He has scripted several memorable episodes over the show's four seasons and has been honored with multiple awards as a member of the show's writing staff. As a feature writer he has written scripts for Walt Disney Pictures, Warner Bros. and 20th Century Fox. His first on-screen credit was for the Walt Disney Pictures film *Miracle*. Additionally, he worked on the ABC Family miniseries *Fallen* and the FX Network made-for-cable film *44 Minutes*. He has also written one-hour drama pilots for USA Network, ABC Family and Lifetime and an untitled made-for-cable film for FX. He is a graduate of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.

Participants



MARGARET NAGLE wrote the HBO film, *Warm Springs*, which won the Emmy as Outstanding TV Movie of the Year. For this film, which starred Kenneth Branagh and Cynthia Nixon as Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, she received the Writer's Guild of America Award for Outstanding Long Form Original TV Movie, as well as Emmy, Humanitas and Pen Award nominations. It tells the story of FDR from the point of view of his disability. For her work as a writer on the first season of HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*, Margaret received a WGA Award for Outstanding New Series and an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Drama Series. Margaret also created and executive produced the Lifetime comedy-drama, *Side Order of Life*, about a woman living with cancer. Her screenplay for *The Good Lie* is about the journey of the Lost Boys and Girls of Sudan. It stars Academy Award winner Reese Witherspoon, and will begin shooting in March.



DAVID RADCLIFF is a member of the Writers Guild Committee for Writers with Disabilities and a graduate of the UCLA MFA Screenwriting Program, where he received the Jack Nicholson Award for Excellence in Screenwriting and the George Burns & Gracie Allen Fellowship for Comedic Writing. He has been a finalist for the Disney Writing Program, a semifinalist for the NBC Writers on the Verge Program, a quarterfinalist for the Nicholl Fellowship, and won the dramatic television writing prize at the 2012 Austin Film Festival. David is a former editor for *Ability Magazine*, a contributor to *Script Magazine*, and for two years has served as the production coordinator for the Media Access Awards, an industry-wide event honoring well-rounded portrayals of disability in film and television.



AUTI ANGEL grew up in a gang-infested neighborhood—a victim of child abuse and rape—and gravitated toward dance as a form of escape. In 1992, she was involved in a car accident that left her paralyzed, putting her dream of signing a recording contract on hold. After losing her mother to cancer a year later, she began to use marijuana and cocaine to deal with her loss, but eventually she overcame her demons and got back to dancing. Her dance troupe, Colours 'N' Motion, appears across the U.S., including a performance with hip-hop artist Ludacris on the Vibe Music Awards. She plans to take her pioneered craft, as the first hip-hop wheelchair dancer, to several platforms including the Paralympic Games. Determined to return to the music industry, she is recording her debut album alongside her husband and partner, Eric "Stretch Boogie" Rivera, and currently has a hit single on iTunes. While pursuing her dream as an artist and entertainer, Angel loves to give back. She's a life coach and motivational speaker, and is developing a non-profit organization titled "Save a Soul Foundation" to benefit at-risk youth. With her three best

Participants



friends on the docu-drama series **Push Girls** (Sundance Channel), Angel is shattering stereotypes and delivering a message of hope and triumph for the disabled community.

SANDRA DE CASTRO BUFFINGTON is director of Hollywood, Health & Society, a program of the USC Annenberg Norman Lear Center that leverages the power of the entertainment industry to improve the health and well-being of people worldwide. Sandra provides resources to leading scriptwriters and producers with the goal of improving the accuracy of health-related storylines on top television programs and films, resulting in more than 565 aired storylines over the span of three years. Funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The California Endowment, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Skoll Foundation, among others, the program recognizes the profound impact that entertainment media have on individual knowledge and behavior. For her work, Sandra was named one of the “100 Most Influential Hispanics” in America by Poder Magazine, and has received numerous other honors, including the USAID MAQ Outstanding Achievement Award. Her vasectomy campaign in Brazil won seven international advertising awards, including a Bronze Lion at Cannes and a Gold Medal at the London International Advertising Awards. She led Hollywood writers and producers on trips to South Africa and India in 2011, and helped launch the Storybus Tour series and Climate Change Initiative. In 2013, Sandra designed and launched a global network of centers for entertainment education in India and Nigeria, with the hub in L.A., to mainstream socially provocative cinema and television. She is a former associate faculty member at the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, and a past board member of the Pan American Health and Education Foundation. Currently, she serves on the boards of the Harvard Medical School Personal Genetics Education Project, Foundation for Conscious Evolution, Women@The Frontier, and Primary Purpose Productions.



MARTIN KAPLAN is the Norman Lear Center founding director and a former associate dean of the USC Annenberg School, and holds the Norman Lear Chair in Entertainment, Media and Society. A summa cum laude graduate of Harvard in molecular biology, a Marshall Scholar in English at Cambridge University, and a Stanford PhD in modern thought and literature, he was Vice President Walter Mondale’s chief speechwriter and deputy presidential campaign manager. He has been a Disney Studios vice president of motion picture production, a film and television writer and producer, a radio host, print columnist and blogger.

Marty Kaplan: Hello. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Marty Kaplan and I'm on the faculty at the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California. I am the Director of the Norman Lear Center, which is our host tonight, and there's another credit that I love saying right here, which is for a dozen years, a member of the Writers Guild. (Applause). Thank you, my pleasure, my dues, my pleasure. The Norman Lear Center is now entering its 14th year and if you don't know much about it, I would invite you to come to our website, which is learcenter.org.

What we do is study the impact of media and entertainment on society and also, shape the impact of media and entertainment on society. We do research and we do meddling, trying to find out the facts and intervene on behalf of society. In a couple of weeks, the judges for, for example, the Walter Cronkite Award are going to convene under the Lear Center's auspices to judge the more than 100 entries in the Cronkite Award for the best television coverage of politics. We study things like what's a better way to segment audiences than the way in Nielsen does it with demographics, with why should age and sex and zip code be the only way you look at audiences? We look at questions like how do you evaluate campaigns, like social media campaigns or documentary-based campaigns, to figure out if they actually make a difference, if people behave differently after they've experienced these campaigns. So those are couple of examples of what we do.

Tonight, what we do is on full display here through the work of one of the Lear Center's longest-standing programs, Hollywood Health & Society, and what Hollywood Health & Society does is it uses the power of entertainment in order to help make the world a bigger place, not on our own, but because of you, who want to wield your power responsibly. And so we are here to serve you as a resource when you want to do that.

And before I introduce our host and moderator and sherpa for the evening, what I'd like to do is—can you guys come in for a second? Yes. There are people who work so hard to make an event possible. There are so many moving pieces in the program during the year when it's not. Sandra is going to thank them as well, but I want to be sure to

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– SANDRA DE CASTRO BUFFINGTON, HH&S DIRECTOR

thank everyone here from the Lear Center staff, from the Hollywood Health & Society staff at the Lear Center for making Sandra and me look so good. So please thank them here and there. (Applause).

So Sandra is the Director of the Hollywood Health & Society Program. She and her colleagues have worked very hard to put on this amazing panel. Everything I know and have heard about them suggest we are going to have a sensational evening, so please join me in welcoming Sandra de Castro Buffington. (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Good evening, everyone, and thank you for being here with us tonight. We're so excited about this panel and Hollywood Health & Society is delighted to co-host this panel with the

Writers With Disabilities Committee and the Diversity Department of the Writers Guild of America West. We're here tonight—and I'm going to name some very special people in just a moment—but we're here tonight to celebrate and encourage accurate portrayals of people with disabilities in television and film. The most powerful portrayals allow us to see the human spirit triumph over the obstacles life throws at us. When truth is reflected in these storylines, we see characters become more compassionate, more understanding and more human.

I would like to give a special thanks to Kim Myers of the Diversity Department. (Applause). There she is—and to Alison Dale, Tery Lopez and Alan Rucker of the Disabilities Committee—(Applause)—and to Kate Folb at Hollywood Health & Society, and the entire Hollywood Health & Society team, as well as the Lear Center team. (Applause). And I'd like to ask Alan Rucker to say a few words.

Alan Rucker: Hi, welcome. My name is Alan Rucker. I'm the Chair of the Writers with Disabilities Committee here at the Guild. First of all, thank you all for coming. You're filling almost every seat. I guess we should have had some seat-fillers up here. I just wanted to tell you about our committee, especially if you're a writer in the guild, and are abled or disabled. The committee has been around for a long time. The last couple of years, we've been very active. We have a film series, a sporadic film series, so please come to that when you notice it. We have a mentor program where young writers with disabilities work with other, more established writers, to develop scripts. We hold panels like this and we also serve as a resource, very much like Sandra's group, for people who are writing stories who want to know what it is really liked to have CP or paralysis or any other disability.

So please feel free through the diverse city office to call us and ask us questions, or ask for our help, because we'd like to give it out and if you write, I have one idea. Put a character with a disability in your next script. I don't care what it is. It could be someone in the background, the librarian, whatever it is. It's just that there are 56 million people with disabilities in this country and that's like one out of every five or six, and a scant few of them show up on television, and that is really what this is all about. So thank you. Sandra, take over.

Photographs by Steve Cohn



(Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you, Alan. (Applause). So we're here this evening because television and film can be powerful forces in elevating human consciousness. They can be mighty allies in transporting viewers into a story that helps them lose track of time, forget their surroundings, come to see characters as beloved family or friends, and in this state, which in the scientific literature is called transportation, which is a measure of an engrossment, we have much higher knowledge gains, attitude changes and even changes in behavior. Stories can transmit accurate information and can counter stigma without any finger-wagging and by watching stories created by writers here tonight, viewers can gain strength and see themselves succeeding against the odds.

Hollywood Health & Society has been working with the entertainment industry for 12 years, connecting writers and producers to health experts and to real stories of real people for

Members of the panel (from left): Ben Lewin, Margarit Nagle, Ann Neville-Jan, Sandra de Castro Buffington, David Radcliffe, Auti Angel and Eric Guggenheim.

their scripts. So we're so pleased to bring together this extraordinary panel of experts who have succeeded in telling sensitive and powerful stories about people with disabilities, often inspired by their own unique circumstances. I am certain that tonight's program will inspire every one of us in the room.

And now, I'd like to start by introducing our keynote speaker, Dr. Ann Neville-Jan. Dr. Neville-Jan is an Associate Professor of Occupational Therapy at the University of Southern California. She specializes in mental health practice, in occupational therapy, occupational science theory and disability studies. Prior to joining USC, she served as Director of Occupational Therapy at the Boston VA Medical Center. Dr. Neville-Jan is an expert in spina bifida, both as a consumer of services and as a research scientist. In fact, she recently worked with us at Hollywood Health & Society and "Private Practice" on a storyline about spina bifida. And so with that, I will turn it over to Dr. Neville-Jan. (Applause).

Dr. Ann Neville-Jan: Thank you. So I'd just like to start with saying thank you, WGA Writers with Disabilities Committee and Hollywood Health & Society for inviting me here. The theme of tonight's panel is real disabilities, real stories, and I am honored to be here among so many writers and actors who have brought to film stories about disability. Tonight I will share with you several real stories from my research conducted with a colleague at USC. We set out to study the everyday life experiences of adults who have spina bifida. Unique to my story is that I am both a researcher and a research participant with spina bifida. This double identity puts me in a position to get the real story because I know what it's like to be in our study participants' shoes and you'll see the significance of shoes as I go on.

A note about our research—it is qualitative, meaning that we were not interested in numbers and statistics, but the narratives that are typically hidden in the numbers. We interviewed people about their experiences growing up with spina bifida and we hunted for the details within these narratives. An unanticipated theme arose in our interviews with women who had spina bifida about how shoes mattered substantially in their everyday lives.



Several women provided us with compelling narratives about a topic thus far unexplored in the medical and social science literature—the impact on one's identity of wearing orthopedic shoes. As in other aspects of our data, stories about shoes were sometimes accompanied by some form of "It's a little thing," a phrase that often marked expressions of the experience that mattered. Sometimes these little things can have huge ramifications for a person's identity and can exclude them from participation.

Let me now tell you about Camille, one of our research participants and her struggle for independence. We interviewed Camille at her home, a single-family house in a middle class neighborhood. She was married, had two teenage children and worked as a professional in a medical field. She brought up the topic of shoes as a problem she faced growing up. Her concerns began during adolescence. She spoke angrily as she recalled the following. "I hated Easter. I hated it because everybody got dressed up, and I couldn't wear any dressy shoes, and I hated it; I despised it." I think she really disliked

HH&S Director Sandra de Castro Buffington introduces the panel members for "People First: Real Disabilities, Real Stories."

it (Laughter). “I despised it and I would try and wear them and they would hurt and I couldn’t walk. Going to Mass and walking up to Communion, I was always feeling very self-conscious and that’s when I started to get depressed. It was that transition from eighth grade to high school.”

Camille struggled with foot infections due to a lack of sensation. She described being on crutches several times during high school. Using crutches actually made her feel normal. She commented “Because my bad foot was bandaged, I only had to wear one shoe. I could wear whatever I wanted and I didn’t feel self-conscious. Other students would ask me if I had a skiing accident and I would lie and say yes. That was more cool than saying I had spina bifida and going into a detailed explanation.”

Camille grew up in a small town and after she had bladder surgery, for the first time in her life, she was able to leave home and go to college. Prior to this, she had worn diapers and was too afraid to go far from home lest someone find out about her incontinence. Her foot infection healed and for two years of college, she was free from infections. She told us that she wore all kinds of shoes.

However, one evening upon checking her foot, she saw that it was extremely bruised. She surmised that unbeknownst to her, someone must have accidentally stepped on her foot. After a few days, the bruising turned into an open wound that wouldn’t heal. This was Camille’s first experience of managing medical issues on her own. Her orthopedic surgeon recommended that she be fitted with space shoes.

She recalled “I went to pick them up and I was shocked; they were horrible. The outer part showed every detail of my deformed foot. I was really pissed off and depressed. My psychiatrist wanted me to bring them to therapy thinking that if we talked about them, maybe I would wear them. I left his office and threw them away in the nearest trash can.” She said to us “That was 30 years ago and I can still picture that trash can in New York City on 87th Street and Park Avenue.” By the way, Camille told us that those shoes cost her over \$300.

Because she refused to wear space shoes, she was labeled as non-compliant. She described that she became more and more depressed as her wound would not heal. She said “I felt guilty placing so much importance on appearance. It wasn’t supposed to matter, but it did.” Her parents wanted her to return home so they could take care of her. She thought this would be a sign of failure and refused. She told us that she continued to wear her own shoes.

Her therapist felt that he had no choice but to admit her to a psychiatric unit. Camille stated “I agreed to go to the hospital. I

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– ANN NEVILLE-JAN, USC PROFESSOR AND SPINA BIFIDA EXPERT

didn’t know what else to do. I wouldn’t go back home. The first day in the hospital, I woke up and defiantly put on my shoes. When the staff realized that I was walking around in the shoes that were not recommended, they took them away from me, locked them in the nurses’ station, and put me on suicide watch. They thought I was being self destructive by wearing my shoes. I just wanted someone to understand.” In her struggle for independence, she demonstrated extreme resistance to having her identity be stigmatized by wearing orthopedic shoes.

A number of our other participants told similar and compelling stories. However, the following participant’s narrative presents a striking contrast to the experiences of Camille and the other women in

the steady. Barbara, a young woman in her early 20s with spina bifida had foot impairments, but selecting fashionable shoes had not been a problem for her. In fact, she told us that she particularly liked wearing boots with high heels.

Unlike the other women in our study, Barbara's scoliosis resulted in extremely short stature. We conducted our second interview with her at a restaurant over dinner. As we were walking from the parking lot to the entrance of the restaurant, we commented on her boots. Barbara wore light brown leather boots with at least two-inch heels and pointy toes. They were very stylish. While her boots her taller, she still stood only about 4 feet tall.

When we entered the restaurant, the maître'd standing behind his podium asked "How many?" Mary, my co-researcher, replied "Three for dinner." He had a questioning look on his face and then he came out from behind his podium where he noticed Barbara. He said "Oh, I'm sorry, but we don't have our children's menu available yet." Almost immediately, he realized that Barbara was not a child and proceeded to seat us. It was a very uncomfortable moment.

Later in the evening, Barbara commented on this incident and how people frequently stared and made comments about her short stature. She said "Now that I work, it happens every day and sometimes like the people who work with me, they just kind of laugh about it, and not laugh like at me, but just kind of, you know, say to the customers, 'Okay, thanks for coming by,' and kind of kick them out and make them order their food faster, or they just say 'That person will help you over there' and they are really good at it."

Stigma management occurs in public life when an individual with a visible impairment encounters strangers. Barbara's coworkers participated with her to manage the public's reaction to her short stature and they were very good at it. Barbara was able to make choices regarding her shoes, but her stylish boots were not sufficient to allow her to pass or appear normal.

One final story: A few years ago, I presented research findings about



Ann Neville-Jan, a spina bifida expert who's a member of USC's Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, delivers keynote remarks.

shoes at a medical conference. After hearing the stories from our women research participants, several surgeons in the audience indicated that finding fashionable shoes was a major problem for their patients who had spina bifida. One surgeon lamented "Yes, many of my patients with spina bifida tell me similar stories and I thought long and hard about this issue and feel there was only one solution." What is that?

Audience Member: Go barefoot.

Dr. Ann Neville-Jan: Go barefoot? No. Anybody want to venture — foot amputation.

Audience Member: I've thought about it.

Dr. Ann Neville-Jan: What? The audience was stunned. The surgeon continued, "I really mean this. One of my patients needed an amputation because of a foot infection. She was very happy with

the shoes she could wear on her prosthetic foot.” While this seems an extreme solution, even women without foot impairments are choosing surgery as a means to wear fashionable shoes.

A 2003 New York Times article described this practice. It stated “With vanity always in fashion, and shoes reaching iconic cultural status, women are having parts of their toes lopped off to fit into the latest Manolo Blahniks or Jimmy Choos. Cheerful how-to stories about these operations have appeared in women’s magazines, major newspapers and on television news programs. The article also drew attention to the risks of such procedures, sometimes resulting in permanent disability.

The stories our research participants told us about managing appearances in everyday life highlighted how the personal practice of dressing—for example, wearing fashionable shoes—was important for their personal and social identity. By sharing these stories tonight, I hope that they can have a real effect on attitudes about disability. Thank you. (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you, Dr. Neville-Jan. That was amazing. We’re going to come back to you at the end for Q-and-A. Now I’d like to introduce our distinguished panelists. Please hold your applause until I’ve introduced all of them. I’m very pleased to introduce Ben Lewin, the writer and director of the award-winning feature film “The Sessions” starring Oscar nominees John Hawkes and William H. Macy and Oscar winner Helen Hunt. Ben was born in Poland and grew up in Australia with a passion for creative writing and photography. After a brief career as a criminal lawyer, he studied at the British National Film School and worked for television networks in England, France, Australia and the U.S. Ben has also written and directed three previous feature films and won awards from the Australian Film Institute and the Australian Writers Guild.

Next, I’d like to introduce Eric Guggenheim, writer and co-producer of the critically acclaimed NBC series “Parenthood.” Eric has scripted memorable episodes over the show’s four seasons and has been honored with multiple awards as a member of the show’s writing staff. As a feature writer, he has written scripts for Walt Disney Pictures,

Warner Brothers and 20th Century Fox. His first onscreen credit was for the Walt Disney Pictures’ film “Miracle.” Additionally, he worked on the ABC family miniseries “Fallen” and the FX Network film “44 Minutes,” among many others.

Next, I am very pleased to introduce Margaret Nagle. Margaret wrote the HBO film “Warm Springs,” which won the Emmy as Outstanding TV Movie of the Year. This film portrays Franklin Roosevelt and the challenges and triumphs he faced living with the effects of polio. Margaret received the Writers Guild of America award for Outstanding Long-Form Original TV Movie, as well as Emmy, Humanitas and PEN Award nominations. She also worked on the first season of

“I’ve had a half a life—or a great part of my life was dedicated to denial and I guess that in the course of making this film, I feel I’ve reached a point of acceptance. And I think that’s an interesting journey for a lot of disabled people and I don’t think everyone shares it, but it’s certainly been something that I’ve been through.”

– BEN LEWIN, WRITER/DIRECTOR FOR “THE SESSIONS”

HBO’s “Boardwalk Empire,” for which she received a WGA award for Outstanding New Series and an Emmy nomination for Outstanding Drama Series. Margaret also created and executive produced the Lifetime comedy-drama “Side Order of Life” about a woman living with cancer, and her screenplay, “The Good Lie” about the journey of the lost boys and girls of Sudan, stars Reese Witherspoon and will begin shooting in March.

Dr. Ann Neville-Jan: Wonderful.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: And next, I would like to introduce

David Radcliff. David is a member of the Writers Guild Committee for Writers with Disabilities and a graduate of the UCLA MFA Screenwriting Program where he received the Jack Nicholson Award for Excellence in Screenwriting and the George Burns and Gracie Allen Fellowship for Comedic Writing.

He has been a finalist for the Disney Writing Program, a quarter-finalist for the Nicholl Fellowship and won the Dramatic Television Writing prize at the 2012 Austin Film Festival. David is a former editor for Ability Magazine, a contributor to Script Magazine, and for two years has served as the Production Coordinator for the Media Access Awards, an industry-wide event honoring well rounded portrayals of disability in film and television.

And last, but definitely not least, I would like to introduce Auti Angel. Auti grew up in a gang-infested neighborhood where she fell victim to child abuse and rape. She used dance as an escape and in 1992, she danced with LL Cool J on the Grammy Awards.

Auti Angel: Say what? (Laughter).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: But a serious car accident changed her life forever. The doctor said that she would never walk or dance again. Little did they know, today, Auti’s dance troupe, Colors in Motion, performs across the nation. She danced for Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa and rocked the stage with Ludacris on the Vibe Music Awards—

Auti Angel: In my wheelchair.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: —in her wheelchair.

Auti Angel: What? (Laughter).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Auti Angel is currently spreading awareness and shattering stereotypes for the disabled community. She’s delivering a message of hope, empowerment and triumph, along with her three best friends on the docudrama series, “Push Girls,”



airing on the Sundance Channel.

Now please join me in welcoming our amazing panelists. (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: So now we’re going to year from our panelists in order of the introductions and we’re going to start by hearing from Ben Lewin after we see a short clip from his amazing film “The Sessions.”

(Video clip commences)

Cheryl: [Alar] tells me you’re a poet. What it’s like to be a poet?

Mark: It’s a way of living inside your own head, which is where I spend most of my time.

Cheryl: But not today. Nice shirt, by the way.

Members of the audience listen to panel speakers discuss portrayals of people with disabilities in popular TV shows and film.

Mark: Thank you.

Cheryl: So I'm going to ask you some basic questions, okay?

Mark: Sure.

Cheryl: Explain to me, so that I really understand, exactly what the iron lung is for.

Mark: Oh, it keeps me breathing. I could spend a few hours outside with my portable respirator depending on how I feel, but I work and sleep in the iron lung.

Cheryl: And how do you feel right now?

Mark: Out of my league.

Cheryl: (Laughs.) And how's your breathing?

Mark: Ah, fine; in fact, better than usual.

Cheryl: That's great. Shall we get undressed?

Mark: Sure.

Cheryl: Picture yourself as a six-year-old boy at the beach. Can you do that?

Mark: Yes, Very easily.

Cheryl: Describe some of your feelings.

Mark: I feel exhilarated, running along the Atlantic Ocean. I feel the wind, wet sand between my toes.

Cheryl: Do you really feel like him?

Mark: Yes, I really feel like him.

Cheryl: And can you really picture him?

Mark: I don't understand what you mean. I said I could feel like him. Of course, I could picture him.

Cheryl: From the outside; I mean as an adult, as you are now, looking at him with his crew cut, with his little face.

Mark: Yes.

Cheryl: And are you mad at him? Do you blame him for getting polio? Was it his fault?

“There is, I think, this whole impulse on the part of disabled people—and I'm exaggerating just to make the point—to be normal. And there's that whole stage of life where normalcy is the goal and concealment is part of the process.”

– BEN LEWIN

(Video clip ends)

(Applause)

Ben Lewin: Look, I've got a lot to say, but I don't know quite what to say, but something that just came up before has kind of sparked an import in my head, that comment about the skiing accident. The problem for me is separating the filmmaking experience and the disability experience, not only separating, but also joining them. I've had a half a life—or a great part of my life was dedicated to denial and I guess that in the course of making this film, I feel I've reached a point of acceptance. And I think that's an interesting journey for a lot of disabled people and I don't think everyone shares it, but it's certainly been something that I've been through.

My first film on the subject of disability—I mean, for most of my working life, I thought that’s the last thing I ever want to make a movie about, and I think this was part of the experience of denial, but the first time I embraced it was because a friend of mine had fallen out of her wheelchair. She also had polio; we had been to the same special school together, and she wore a plaster cast on her leg for nine weeks. And for those nine weeks, people asked her the same question —“Skiing accident?” to which she replied yes.

And she found that guys would hit on her and that the entire public perception was quite different if people didn’t think it was permanent. The idea that it was a skiing accident and a temporary thing really gave her a completely new persona and I think that together with one’s desire to wear fashionable shoes, there is, I think, this whole impulse on the part of disabled people—and I’m exaggerating just to make the point—to be normal. And there’s that whole stage of life where normalcy is the goal and concealment is part of the process.

And I felt that finally discovering Mark O’Brien’s story was a kind of liberation from this to a point where, if anything, the message of the film contained of the idea of acceptance. I think that one reviewer kind of hit the nail on the head when they said that I gave the most important line to the most irrelevant character and that was the bathhouse attendant played by Rhea Perlman, who made the offhand remark “This is your body.” And I think that really kind of sort of summed up the connection between me and the movie, which for a great part of the process, I had struggled to prevent.

I think that my first reaction to the story of Mark O’Brien, and his desire to have sex and to find out what that was all about, was very suspicious. I thought this is really too close to the way I felt in my own experience and I felt I had to get away from all of that in order to approach the subject as a filmmaker. And I think that I did succeed in doing that and finding that universal note about the movie, but at the same time, every movie is personal and I think that it was also a process of embracing the personal about this movie that enabled me to just go for it and not really worry about all the crap that is laid on



you when you’re normally making a film.

I mean, the beautiful experience of this particular film is there were no grownups in the room. We were entirely under the radar and not for a moment did I, during the initial part of the process, during the making of the film, ever confront the reality that this was an untenable subject matter. And I think that the journey we’ve gone through in actually making the untenable to some extent tenable has been a fascinating one for me, to say the very least.

Initially, I said “This was not made for the disabled community,” whatever that is. I said “This is just made for the filmmaking audience.” However, the process of getting it out there and my involvement in it, revealed to me that this had a very special impact on the disabled community, whatever that is, and that I had, whether intentionally or incidentally, said things which resonated with people who had a common bond—call it overcoming obstacles, call it whatever you like, the will to survive—and I think that it still

Ben Lewin (left), writer and director for the Academy Award-nominated film “The Sessions,” talks about the movie as Eric Guggenheim listens.

continues to be an educational experience in that it has brought me to a point of a sense of kinship, which I've spent the first part of my life doing my best to deny.

And I'm intrigued to be able to talk, perhaps for the first time in my life, with other people who maybe have felt the opposite, or felt the same, and to stop avoiding the experience of disability, but finally accepting, this is my body. I think that's pretty much it. (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: So Ben, I'm going to ask one follow-up question. I will do that of each of the panelists, and I'm just wondering, now that you've had this incredibly successful movie, do you think it is expected of you that you will write characters with disabilities in your next project?

Ben Lewin: I don't think it's expected of me, but I'm finding myself doing it anyway.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Interesting.

Ben Lewin: I feel I might have—I'm doing a job for Fox Searchlight, which is a rewrite of a story called "The Necklace" about a bunch of women sharing an expensive diamond necklace, and one of them is a therapist, and I thought, "Well, put a therapist in a wheelchair." And I find now that I'm kind of doing it automatically in the same way that you'll make one character Latino, or one character this, or one character that.

It really is just part of the whole sense of having a tapestry, a mixed tapestry, where the subject matter allows it and I no longer really hesitate before I do it. "Oh, will people think it's gratuitous or a bit of do-goodery or something like that?" I think we're probably now at the point where it's no big deal writing in a handicapped character.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you. Now we're going to hear from Eric Guggenheim and we're going to start with a clip from "Parenthood."

(Video clip commences)

Child: We'll take Gabe.

Child: We'll take Jessica

Child: Um, Alyssa.

Child: Sigmund.

Child: Carlos.

"I'm just wondering, now that you've had this incredibly successful movie, do you think it is expected of you that you will write characters with disabilities in your next project?"

– SANDRA DE CASTRO BUFFINGTON'S QUESTION TO BEN LEWIN

Child: We'll take Ricky.

Max: Wait. No, this doesn't make any sense. I'm better than all these people. Why aren't you picking me?

Teacher: Max, why don't you play on Alan's team?

Child: No, we're all full.

Max: I'm just not going to play.

Teacher: I'm sorry, Max, but you have to play.

Max: Well, Micah doesn't have to play. Why can't I just sit out with him?

Teacher: Max, Micah isn't plying because Micah has a disability.

Max: Oh, well, I have a disability too. Yeah, I have Asperger's.

Adam: Hey, Max, can you turn that off, please? I just want to talk to you for one minute.

Max: Can I have one more level?

Adam: No, I want you to just pause it for a second.

Max: It's paused.

Adam: Thank you. Did you have fun playing basketball with Uncle Crosby and Grandpa Zeek today?

Max: Yeah.

Adam: Good. Well, you were really great at the passing when you were focused. I just want you to remember that when you go to PE class tomorrow.

Max: Please don't make me play.

Adam: Max, I just want you to try, that's all, just try. Your mother and I want to see you have fun playing basketball again. That's all this is.

Max: Well, I can't have fun if I'm playing with those losers.

Adam: All right, Max, we don't call other kids losers, okay?

Max: Why not? They call me a loser.

Adam: Who calls you a loser?

Max: Gabriel, Michael, Raphael, Victor, Carlos, Luis—

Adam: Okay, all right. Max, listen to me. You're not a loser, okay?



You're awesome, you're an amazing kid—

Max: —Gabe, Kevin—

Adam: —with a super jump shot, all right? Hey! Max, you're not a loser, all right? Those kids are losers.

Max: But wait, you just said it's not okay to call someone a loser.

Adam: Yeah, I know I did.

Max: First you said it's not okay to call people losers and now you're calling them losers.

Adam: I know, I'm sorry, Max, sorry.

Max: So since they are losers, I shouldn't—it's not fun to play with them, so just let me skip for one day, one day.

Eric Guggenheim, writer and co-producer for "Parenthood," tells audience about the inspiration behind the storylines concerning the character Max Braverman on the NBC series.

Adam: Okay, pal, just one day.

Max: One day.

Adam: Okay?

Max: One day.

Adam: I know, you're not saying it.

Kristina: You shouldn't have called those kids losers.

Adam: I know.

Kristina: They're not losers.

Adam: I know.

Kristina: They're jackasses.

(Sounds of basketball practice).

Max: Wait, you can't put that there you're going to miss the zombie.

Micah: Oh, okay.

Max: I'm not supposed to tell other people when they're doing something wrong. I'm very sorry, Micah

Micah: It's okay, I was going to miss the zombie.

Max: Do you want to try mine, even though it's my favorite game in the whole world?

Micah: Here, let's trade.

Max: Okay, press down on an A if you want to start a new game

Micah: Okay. Press start and then A.

Max: Yeah, I've played that (inaudible).

(Music plays).

Max: I should try to say something funny now, but I'm not really sure how to do that.

Micah: That's okay. I don't like to [laugh] that much.

Max: Me either.

"We had been told often that a kid like Max has a finite amount of time to make friends that he will be able to carry with them through high school and through life . . . "

– ERIC GUGGENHEIM, WRITER/CO-PRODUCER FOR "PARENTHOOD"

Micah: I've always been kind of a serious kid.

Max: I like being serious too.

Micah: Cool.

Max: Cool.

Female: Hi.

Male: Hi.

Max: The video game I was telling you about is this way.

Micah: That's so cool.

Micah's father: There you go.

Kristina: Hi, Micah.

Adam: Hi, Micah. I'm Max's dad, Adam.

Micah: Nice to meet you, Adam.

Kristina: I'm Kristina.

Micah's mother: How are you?

Micah's father: How are you doing?

Adam: I'm Adam, nice to meet you. Come on in.

Kristina: I'm Kristina, nice to meet you.

Micah's mother: We are so thrilled that Max invited Micah over here today.

Adam: Well, good, we're happy to have him here.

Micah's father: I see we have just a couple of things to go over with you guys, just special instructions. I went ahead and I wrote them down for you.

Micah's mother: Micah has spina bifida, so he needs a little extra help. It's not just the chair, there's a couple more things.

Micah's father: Yeah.

Micah's mother: We're so sorry, we know it's a lot to ask.

Micah's father: And again, I've got to say how grateful we are that Micah has got a friend.

Micah's mother: He's never had a friend before.



Micah's father: That's all right, sweetie; that's okay.

Adam: Well, we are really happy that Micah is here and that Max has got a new friend, too.

Kristina: They'll be fine.

Adam: Yeah. So don't worry about him, we got him.

Micah's mother: Okay.

(Video clip ends)

(Applause)

Eric Guggenheim: It's kind of funny, but that story was from late in the third season, like one of our—I think last four episodes, but we had actually been talking about doing it since the very beginning of the

Eric Guggenheim of "Parenthood" discusses storylines that focused on mainstreaming the character of Max, who has Asperger's.

first season, and I think there were a couple of things that conspired against us. Number one, we've got like 15 regular characters on the show and only like 43 minutes a week to tell their stories, so that was one thing that held it up.

Another thing is we discovered pretty early on writing the show that even the simplest stories like making a friend, as soon as you involve Max, they become much more complicated and difficult to tell. And I don't like mean that in a bad way; it's just that, well, I'm sorry, it's just—they're difficult to tell, and I should probably just—I've been asked to talk about how we go about writing "Parenthood," and so basically, I think the best way to do that is just tell you how we arrived at that story.

Basically, at the end of season two, we decided Max was going to be mainstreamed. In other words, he would go to a public school. Now, he had been in a school for kids on the spectrum, but because he wasn't being challenged academically, the decision was made to put him in public school. So when we started working on the third season, we kind of already knew that Max's journey would largely be about him and his parents trying to find their way in that school.

So we knew that he would face obstacles along the way, but we knew that we wanted him to have a win at the end of the season and that win would be making a friend. And interestingly, our approach to that part of the story was kind of shaped by four things. First off, up until Micah, Max's only relationships were with family members, all of whom were understanding of Max's limitations as far as empathy goes, as far as considering the needs of another person. So the idea of Max attempting to have a relationship with someone outside of his immediate orbit was very appealing to us.

Second, we had been told often that a kid like Max has a finite amount of time to make friends that he will be able to carry with them through high school and through life, and that's because as kids get older and differences become more apparent, it becomes much harder for a kid like Max to make friends. So just the idea of him trying to make a friend had enormous stakes. Third, we had been wanting to tell the

story for the longest time about Max playing the Asperger's card as a way to get out of doing something, and this seemed like a really good opportunity to do that.

And then finally, way back in the beginning of season one, we met with a lot of people within the autism community, including the mother of a teenage boy with Asperger's, and she told us about a public school friend of hers son's who had been badly burned in a fire, but interestingly, her son didn't really notice or judge how this other boy looked and that was something that she attributed to him having

"Another thing is, we discovered pretty early on writing the show that even the simplest stories like making a friend, as soon as you involve Max, they become much more complicated and difficult to tell. And I don't like mean that in a bad way."

– ERIC GUGGENHEIM

Asperger's. He just did not see physical differences and we thought that was fascinating and worth exploring.

So all these things went into the creation of that story, which like all of our stories, we wrote together as a group with Jason Katims, our boss, and the creator of the show, leading the way. We figured out each step of the story, what would happen in each scene, the attitudes of each character involved, and then once that story was blended together with the other stories in that episode, and the episode as a whole signed off on by Jason, the job of actually writing the episode was given to Monica Belestsky, our fellow writer, who as always, did a wonderful job. And it was also from there vetted by our consultant and then given to NBC, which was, as always very supportive, and the result was what you just saw.

And then fortunately, this past season, we were able to build on that

relationship between Max and Micah, and even challenge it a little, and hopefully, we'll come back next season and continue to tell that story. I think that's about it.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Fantastic, thank you. (Applause). So Eric, how do you avoid making the disability the story?

Eric Guggenheim: That's a really good question. We tend to come out—a lot of the Max stories, I think the best ones are the ones that are kind of universal. Like we had done one story, just to use an example, in the second season and it was just Adam, played by Peter Krause, trying to make a connection with Max. And I have a daughter; she's young, she's six years old, and I'm constantly asking her at the end of the day when she's come home from school, "What happened at school?" And she is just not very forthcoming.

So for me just as a parent, I am constantly trying to make connections with my child and for Adam, we did a story where he is just trying to connect with Max, trying to find something that they can share together. And like I said, once you involve Max in these stories that should be pretty simple, they become much more complicated and challenging, but I think we start at a place of—like the example that I used.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Fantastic, thank you. And now we're going to turn it over to Margaret Nagle and she's going to set up the clip for "Warm Springs."

(Video clip commences)

Male: We've come so far, boss. The page is right out of Cousin Teddy's playbook. We're on the road to the White House.

Franklin Roosevelt: Franklin Roosevelt, happy to meet you!

(Crowd noises)

Male: Why don't you take a nap before dinner?



Franklin Roosevelt: Yes, dear.

(Music plays)

Male: He has infantile paralysis—polio. I suspect he will be paralyzed from the waist down.

Female: Now that politics is out of the question—

Eleanor Roosevelt: This doesn't change anything.

Female: It changes everything, Eleanor.

Franklin Roosevelt: Don't talk to me as if I were a child.

Female: How am I supposed to talk to you?

Franklin Roosevelt: Like I was!

Writer Margaret Nagle discusses how she came to write "Warm Springs," an HBO movie that depicts Franklin Roosevelt's early struggle with polio.

Male: This life, where is it getting you?

Franklin Roosevelt: For one thing, no one gets to see me and I don't get to see them. I feel useless. Eleanor, I feel so useless.

Eleanor Roosevelt: No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Franklin Roosevelt: There's a resort in rural Georgia. He claims that only recently, crippled boys swim in the waters and can walk again.

Male: I can't quite picture you in the backwoods of Georgia.

Franklin Roosevelt: Well where do you picture me, Louis?

Male: 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Male: Oh, oh, Hello, hello, Mr. [Lawless]!

Male: Welcome to Warm Springs, Mr. Roosevelt.

Eleanor Roosevelt: Tell me again, Franklin, why are we here?

Franklin Roosevelt: I need something new.

Helena Mahoney: Mahoney, Helena Mahoney, I'm the physical therapist.

Franklin Roosevelt: I can't even stand.

Helena Mahoney: Franklin, I can't help you out of a hole if I climb in with you.

Male: We have some new guests.

Male: Mr. Roosevelt?

Franklin Roosevelt: I want to be left alone.

Male: Do you know what it took for most of them to get here?

Franklin Roosevelt: That's not my concern!

Male: You're afraid of these people. You don't want to be around them because then that would make you one of them, Mr. Roosevelt.

Female: Mother of God!

Male: Sorry about this, but the conductor wouldn't let me ride in the passenger car with my (inaudible).

"I wanted to out [FDR] . . . as our disabled president. And I have a disabled brother, so it felt personal to me; and I also felt that history, so much was covered up about his disability and it was time to get everybody talking."

– MARGARET NAGLE, WRITER OF HBO MOVIE "WARM SPRINGS"

Female: You could have killed that boy.

Male: He had polio.

Franklin Roosevelt: Don't dismiss me because I sit in this chair.

Male: Franklin, lock you in that baggage car seat, are you (inaudible).

(Music plays)

Franklin Roosevelt: But I'm standing; I'm standing.

Eleanor Roosevelt: This place could be filled to capacity year round with polios.

Female: You fell down.

Franklin Roosevelt: I can't drive a car.

Male: Hot damn, you got hand controls.

Franklin Roosevelt: There's a real need for a place like this.

Female: He wants to use his entire trust fund to buy that leper colony.

Male: Whoa, there!

Franklin Roosevelt: This will be the first polio rehabilitation center in the world.

Male: Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Franklin Delano Roosevelt! (Cheering).

Franklin Roosevelt: I am proud, more than you'll ever know, to be a part of this community. It is a real community based not on birthright or privilege, but on compassion. (Cheering).

Female: Good luck, Franklin.

Franklin Roosevelt: I'm throwing myself to the wolves.

Female: If they bite, you can come back here.

Franklin Roosevelt: I'll always come back here. (Cheering).

Female: Mrs. Roosevelt, do you think polio has affected your husband's mind?

Eleanor Roosevelt: Yes, I do.

(Music plays)

(Video clip concludes)



(Applause)

Margaret Nagle: So I wrote that as a spec because I tried to sell it as a producer and people said “No one wants to hear that story,” so that made me a writer. That’s how I became a writer, and I sort of—it was very much—I have a real interest in the media and how things are portrayed and how the truth is told and how the truth isn’t told. And I thought such a huge part of who this man was, was his disability, and what made him the man that he was in many ways because he hadn’t been much before that.

And this sort of hidden moment in his life—I wanted to out him as a disabled man, as our disabled president. And I have a disabled brother, so it felt personal to me and I also felt that history, so much was covered up about his disability and it was time to get everybody talking. People didn’t have to be afraid of the subject matter, it was okay, and the more I researched this, it just became a passion project of mine; and the more people kept turning me down, the more I was

FDR’s disability “was such a huge part of who this man was,” said Nagle. The writer says early reaction to her script was: “No one wants to hear that story.”

like, all right, now I'm really pissed off.

And Franklin Roosevelt was a bad ass and he was a bad ass when he sat in that chair and he brought all those people together, and really the education that Franklin Roosevelt got from being disabled was he had to sit in a chair and he had to think, and he couldn't run away from things, which was the kind of man that he had been before.

And as Eleanor said, it caused him to get bigger every day, sitting in that chair. Once he got over the depression and once he got over the realization that—it's like Ben was talking about—this is who I am. Oh, this is who I am now; this is me.

And once he sort of took that on at Warm Springs, for several years, it was like he spent eight years out of the public eye and then decided to run for president. I just thought that was amazing. So anyway, that was just something and then since then, I've always put characters with disabilities of some kind—I just wrote a pilot with an Iraq war vet who is missing an arm. I'm always going like "This person has something to tell me" or "It's interesting, it's dramatic. These are obstacles that are unique but they're also obstacles that are incredibly universal." I mean, "The Sessions" just was the greatest movie; I love that movie and I'm such a fan of "The Sessions." (Applause).

These are important stories and one of the things about—you talk about the media, and I find that there's this—with the people in charge, age-wise, and people who are younger in the business now, there's a real generational skip where like people of a certain age are uncomfortable with lots of characters with disabilities, and then younger people who are used to things being mainstreamed, they're like "Oh, yeah, it's great." So if I go in with a younger executive, I am much more inclined to get a yes than with an older executive, and I found there's this real generational discussion that hasn't—I feel like we're at a real moment of people—

I speak a lot at college campuses and I was speaking on this panel at Columbia-Barnard and the professor there sort of thought I was a pain in the ass, and Jezebel was there, the feminist columnist, and she

was like "Margaret Nagle is a bad ass," and I was like, they think I am a bad ass, but I'm a pain in the ass, and I think it has to do with like their perception of truth and what you're willing to accept and things you're willing to lay out on the table and talk about. And so anyway, so I wanted to talk about this because I felt it needed to be in there for the record so—

Sandra de Castro Buffington: That's fantastic. (Applause). So Margaret, what do you feel that you personally learned from writing this movie?

Margaret Nagle: I learned that Eleanor Roosevelt is the most amazing person and so—I learned about Louis Howe, I learned about other

"The education that Franklin Roosevelt got from being disabled was he had to sit in a chair and he had to think, and he couldn't run away from things, which was the kind of man that he had been before."

– MARGARET NAGLE

people that came into the situation because part of what happens—like my brother became disabled, so it became a whole shift in my family and everyone that knew him before and after and grandparents and siblings, and so there's a whole—disability is something we all deal with, and we all must deal with. So part of the story was not so much about how he dealt with it, but it was getting everybody else to deal with it. And I think there's a story there that needs to come out more as well.

So I think that it was all the moving parts that made his life and also we cast all disabled actors. There was a huge—we had all those people on the pool. Everybody you saw there is (inaudible)—they're disabled, and it taught me that in anything that I make or produce

from now on, don't be—go for it, let's have it, let's put everybody in there, because it was no big deal. And it was interesting to watch the crew and everyone kind of go, "Well, this is very easy to use disabled actors on location in the middle of the woods," and it was actually quite easy. It was easy; it was no big deal. So it's like you're kind of having to help everybody else get with the program.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: And adjust?

Margaret Nagle: Yes, and adjust, and chill, calm down, calm down, calm down, its fine.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: It's so interesting, thank you. (Applause). So now we're going to hear from David Radcliff. David, there's no clip, just your photo.

David Radcliff: Yes, no clip. I'm going to sing—

Unidentified Speaker: (Inaudible) (Laughter).

David Radcliff: Thank you very much. Your money is on its way. (Laughter). I was in a skiing accident on a mountain called cerebral palsy. (Laughter). I don't recommend it; it's a rough ride, but I was always—I watched a lot of television and a lot of films as a kid and I went to film school and I continually wrote all the time. And part of what attracted me to writing was that I was under the—I realize now—naïve impression that if you are a good writer, then you are only evaluate by what is on the page.

I didn't think about salesmanship in a room; I didn't think about initial impressions when I walk through a door, at least not in respect to the profession that I wanted. So I thought, well, this is a job that people are encouraging me towards because they're saying that my work is good, and you are welcome to read it and I would love for you to read it. (Laughter). But it was also a conduit for self-expression and for figuring myself out and for trying to find my place in the world, as I think is true for any writer.



I think that I'm still struck to this day by how incremental the changes have been in terms of how disability is represented and I think there's a sort of tacit assumption that you can say things about a disability group that you can't say about other minority groups. It's uncomfortable to say it about other minority groups. For example, "People with disabilities just want to live independently," and if we said that about anybody else, it would be really awkward. (Laughter).

I was watching one of those entertainment magazines—I think it was "Extra" or one of those shows and one of the hosts—and these things are scripted, so somebody wrote this down and gave it to him, and he read it and he felt comfortable with it. He said "I think "Glee" is doing such a fantastic job of humanizing people with disabilities." (Laughter). And I thought well, shit, what was I before he saw "Glee?" (Laughter).

Unidentified speaker: I love you.

David Radcliffe, a member of the Writers Guild Committee for Writers With Disabilities, told the audience that more needs to be done in terms of how disability is represented in the media.

David Radcliff: And what was—

Unidentified speaker: I love you.

David Radcliff: And what was interesting is that—and we should feel free to talk about these things. The host of the show was a black male and if anybody said “I think that show, “The Cosby Show,” did a fantastic job of humanizing black people”—off the television. So I think there’s a balance to be struck between being really aware of the stories you tell and the words that you use, but I also don’t want to be one of those militant people that’s like “I am the person with a disability; I’m not disabled.” Once we go down that rabbit hole, then nobody’s happy and everybody feels uncomfortable.

And I think that the purpose of media, if it’s used appropriately and intelligently, is to make people comfortable without them even really knowing that they are getting more comfortable. The function of “The Cosby Show,” the reason—besides the wonderful writing and the performances—that show wasn’t special because the family was black; it was special because that was a family who happened to be black. They didn’t talk about their blackness—at least I must have missed that episode if it happened. (Laughter).

But I feel like with disability, even today, even on shows that are celebrated for their depictions of disability, the disability is at the forefront of that character’s purpose, so if I’m in a scene on my crutches—I’m not an actor, so please don’t put me in anything. If I’m in a scene on my crutches, like I can’t just be going to get a cup of coffee at Starbucks because we don’t do that. We don’t go to movies, we don’t go on dates, we don’t get coffee. We have to have a back story that says “My life was traumatic and I really need this coffee.” And sometimes you really do feel that way.

But that’s not—I think we are several stages behind the representation, and I think some of that has to do with who’s in the writers rooms. And the reason that these events are so important to me, and not just to me, but to anyone who knows anyone with a disability, is that everybody’s got their minds attuned to this, and as

I’ve said to many people, “I am part of the only minority group that you can join at any time.” (Laughter). Nobody falls out of a window on becomes gay or— (Laughter).

So if we get comfortable with it now before we get old and cranky and wonder why our hearing is going and how do we communicate with our friends and God, this club is so noisy, and I can’t walk up these stairs, why do we wait 60 years before we start thinking about this stuff because I’m already well ahead of you guys. I’m just waiting for everybody to catch up. So, thanks. (Laughter).

“I feel like with disability, even today, even on shows that are celebrated for their depictions of disability, the disability is at the forefront of that character’s purpose.”

– DAVID RADCLIFFE, WRITERS GUILD COMMITTEE FOR WRITERS WITH DISABILITIES

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you. (Applause). So what do you consider one of the biggest misconceptions that people—and that include writers—have about people with disabilities?

David Radcliff: Oh, I—

Unidentified speaker: That we can’t have sex.

David Radcliff: —think—

Unidentified speaker: I’m sorry.

David Radcliff: I think that it has to do with the notion of—well, I wrote a word down because earlier, Mr. Lewin, who I respect beyond all measure, was talking about acceptance and tolerance and I think that—and this is going to come out wrong—but I think that what

we're really after—and I don't intend to speak for everyone—is kind of indifference so that it gets to the point so you don't have to have panels like this so that you sit down and talk about a specific topic because it's so culturally integrated and it's such a non-issue.

And I know that there was a show on TV called “Dark Angel” with Jessica Alba and that was the first time I had seen, a.), Jessica Alba, which was a nice moment—(Laughter)—but somebody with a disability as a central character. She got involved in this relationship with a guy who had been paralyzed in the pilot episode and then by the second season, they cured him because God knows, that's all that we're interested in is just rid of this thing.

And so what does that tell people who don't have disabilities? It means you are not enough, that somebody with a disability is not enough; it has to be changed. And I think even in respect to “Glee,” the idea that the first episode, the first showcase episode, of the kid in the wheelchair, was, “God, I wish I could walk and dance and jump around.” And I think again, if you replace that with any other minority—if that were a black kid dreaming of being white or a gay kid dreaming of being straight, nobody would be supporting that.

But there's this sort of tacit acceptance of that being—that is the end goal, and that happens with the writers room. It doesn't—I'm sure that they have wonderful writers and they have writers of all different ethnicities in races and sexual orientations, but I guarantee you there was nobody in the room who actually thought, hey, why is this something that—

Unidentified speaker: Has to be fixed?

David Radcliffe: —fundamentally has to be fixed? So that is—and also, not everything we do is inspirational. I do a lot of not-inspirational things. I hate those stories that are like news at 11:00, “The inspirational story of a woman with spina bifida who pumps her own gasoline.” (Laughter). Just move past it; there are plenty of other interesting stories that are universal and powerful so—



Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you. (Applause). And last, but not least, we have the amazing Auti Angel and we're going to see a clip of her work.

(Video clip commences)

Female: Los Angeles is a big city, but somehow by fate, we found each other.

Female: Somebody has a birthday coming up.

Angela Rockwood: You might think you know me, another Hollywood girl having lunch with her friends. This is Tiphany, Mia, Auti and I'm Angela. I'm a push girl and this is how we roll.

(Music plays)

Tiphany Adams: Within seconds, my whole life changed. I was

David Radcliffe discusses his experiences as a person with a disability while another panel member, Auti Angel, listens. “I would argue that there is no more diverse group of people than people with disabilities.”

paralyzed from the neck down. I was hit in a head-on vehicle collision. I was just growing into myself. The doctor said “You’ll never walk or dance again.” They pronounced everyone dead on the scene, including myself.

Female: I didn’t have an accident. For me, it was like my own body turned on me.

Female: I didn’t ever think it have a close friend in a wheelchair. Once we found each other, we formed this bond. I think the hardest thing about being in a wheelchair is other people’s perceptions.

Female: We may be defined, but we are not confined, by our wheelchairs.

Female: Auti is married to this beautiful man, Eric.

Auti Angel: And my biological clock is ticking, right?

Male: Are we going to have a baby now?

Auti Angel: I found my soulmate.

Female: I miss you, babe.

Male: In some ways, I think the accident saved your life.

Female: I’m proud of you and I love you.

Mia Schaikewitz: Today, I’m going to try to swim for the first time in 17 years. I’ve been wanting to do this for so long, but I keep hesitating because I was afraid I was going to lose my enjoyment from it. If I lost my enjoyment from it, I’d feel like getting paralyzed took something away from me. If my challenge was to be in a wheelchair for life, that I wouldn’t make it a hindrance and keep me from doing things I wanted to do. I said why am I not even trying? The Paralympics has no age limit; I need to try this, because it could be something. Putting my feet in the water was weird because I couldn’t feel it and I didn’t know

if it was going to be cold or hot. I think I’m afraid of feeling weak and feeling limited and feeling trapped.

(Splashing sound)

I didn’t know if I would make it, but once I did, I was really happy. It was like, okay, this is doable. I knew it that moment that I was back and I was like “I can do this and I can compete. Whoo!”

Female: Having this strong friendship with the girls is everything. I just feel like they’re all my sisters.

“I had a different perspective because I was so-called able bodied, and now I’m so-called disabled. It’s what we like to label things and hopefully, one day, we’ll come to a place where we won’t have labels, we won’t have black, white, brown, disabled.”
 – AUTI ANGEL, CO-STAR OF DOCU-DRAMA SERIES “PUSH GIRLS”

Female: We’re honest with each other and we tell it like it is.

Female: It means that I have somebody I can go to, somebody I can count on.

Female: We are so strong individually, so together, that just makes it even more dynamite.

(Music plays)

(Video clip ends)

(Applause)

Auti Angel: Hello. I feel so weird because we are—first of all, I want

to commend everybody on this panel for your accomplishments. You guys are so inspirational to me and I'm just so honored and blessed to be a part of this panel, to be able to shed some light and say "Look, finally, we have a show out there where it's talking about real situations." I understand what you're talking about when it's like, oh, not the whole inspirational thing, ooh, la, la."

I think—see, I had a different perspective because I was so-called able bodied, and now I'm so-called disabled. It's what we like to label things and hopefully, one day, we'll come to a place where we won't have labels, we won't have black, white, brown, disabled. And even I would like to change that word to say that we're differently abled because disabled means that we're not able to do something and I know I could do a lot more things than a lot of able-bodied people. So I just happen to do it in a different way—skydiving.

Let's face real issues when we're putting these things together. We are all blessed with gifts. I had a car accident, so just a brief description, and I was J. Lo before J. Lo —no, literally, I don't know why people laugh at that. (Laughter). I was about to sign a record deal in two weeks, life was going great, 22 years old, and then I got into a hit-and-run car accident on the freeway that left me paralyzed from the waist down, snapped my back in half, severed my spinal cord. My real disability was my upbringing, being biracial. My mother is white; my father is brown, Latin, so I was never Latin enough for my Latin family and never white enough for my white family, so let's talk about labels here.

I think if we, as writers, and using this media platform to say let's just start writing about the human experience instead of the labels, we will get a lot further in this world together and make this world a better place. And it will also be able to break stereotypes that have been put on us through the old media, and I say old media because it's like I'm sure that African Americans and the blacks in the world can say, "Wow, all they want to do is focus on how we were slaves, and we come up out of that—oh, wow, overcoming." That is something overcoming, but let's shed the stereotypes and just write about human experience.



Like me, it was like my disability was also just my experience in life of being raped, being a woman and being raped, being sodomized—not a pleasant experience. I mean, that was a lot worse than being put in a wheelchair, let me put it that way, and I am just so blessed that God has blessed me with this platform to be real. I was an actor—not was—I'm an actress, dancer, singer, rapper—yes, I rap.

And coming into this industry, I had to redefine who I was, and reinvent who I was, and noticed "Wow, okay, it was hard enough trying to get"—because, remember I was talking about I wasn't white enough and I wasn't Latin enough for my own family. Then I jump into the hip-hop game and I wasn't black enough, but I had some soul, which got me forward because I knew who I was. And as long as we know who we are and we were born to be, nothing can stop us. Nothing can stop us from changing perception in this world, stop us from getting all these accolades, but using that as a platform to make a difference.

And that's why I also commend you guys for all that you have done so

Auti Angel, a co-star of the docu-drama series "Push Girls," told the audience that she was on the verge of signing a record contract when a car accident left her paralyzed from the waist down.

far for us in this media industry. I just encourage you all to continue to focus on the human experience and not the labels because we are people first. (Applause). Yeah? Good enough? What you see is what you get on “Push Girls.” It’s not scripted, although sometimes, the directors will be like “Shift a different direction.” Like when I was crying and saying “The doctors say I’ll never walk and never dance again,” they used that line as I was crying in front of a picture, but they didn’t show the part that I was talking about is losing my mother a year after my car accident. That’s why I was crying.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Do you want to do a little performance for us?

Auti Angel: Yeah, if they want it.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: I’d love it, yes. (Applause).

Auti Angel: 40 seconds of freestyle just for you. (Laughter).

(Music plays)

(Applause)

Audience: (Cheers) Whoo!

Auti Angel: Try and do that on two feet! (Laughter).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Well, that was amazing. I have goosebumps, thank you.

Auti Angel: Thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Let’s open it up for Q&A. we don’t have that much time left, but we’d love to take some of your questions. And do we have a microphone that’s floating? Okay. Let’s have somebody run it, thank you.

Audience member: Hi, thanks for this panel. It’s very, very

informative and it’s opening my mind up. I love it; thank you. I have a question. I have been working on a series that’s set in World War II and one of our principal characters is in a wheelchair and there’s a couple of things. One is, first of all, I’m interested in looking at the kinds of therapies that were available at the time because there’s an arc to this character and he is a World War I veteran that was disabled who went into a funk. And like he’s starting to explore his life in 1943 and what kind of physical—like what was the state of physical therapy at that time and how do I research this? I mean, I’ve looked on Google and that kind of thing, but are there resources available for that? And

“And as long as we know who we are and we were born to be, nothing can stop us. Nothing can stop us from changing perception in this world, stop us from getting all these accolades, but using that as a platform to make a difference.”

– **AUTI ANGEL**

secondly, it’s interesting too, just to what David was saying earlier about how kind of the end story is that he walks again, and I really—thank you for bringing that up. And I just wanted to know kind of what other people thought of that because I really don’t think that’s the interesting story to tell even in 1942. I know they did it on “Downton Abbey,” but I think we can do better, so thank you.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you.

Dr. Ann Neville-Jan: About the second point, the idea of cure, actually today, it’s interesting in that spina bifida may—you can detect spina bifida early and there may not be people who have spina bifida anymore, although I think it’s a complex issue where it’s environmental, and so I think there will be. But people—like I told someone on a plane—I was sitting next to her and I said I had

spina bifida and she goes “You do? I didn’t think anybody had that anymore” because of all the hype on in-utero detection. The first point, there was occupational therapy and physical therapy both during—we kind of grew up as a profession through the wars, both I and II, and there are some resources I can send to you if you would like but so—

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Yes, so any writer here—and please contact Hollywood Health & Society on any question related to health or medicine or treatments in any era and we will find an expert to connect you to. Okay. I’m going to pass the mic to someone else. Here we go.

Audience member: Thank you. How are you guys doing?”

Unidentified speaker: Good.

Audience member: First, I would just like to thank Eric because I know he’s a part of the “Parenthood” team, “For One More Weekend with You.” You guys wrote in an amputee and I was able to play that and I was very grateful that you guys wrote that in there. (Applause). My question, I guess, for whoever can answer it, is my problem is that I can’t get casting directors to see me and it makes sense; I get it. But then my other thought is should I try to contact the writers because we all use IMDb, so we’re able to see what’s in pre-production and what’s working. I’ve also heard don’t contact writers.

And I don’t want to put thoughts in anybody’s heads, but just the opportunity and since casting doesn’t get it, I guess what’s the best way—is it bad to contact you guys or do casting directors take initiative to contact you guys when they get somebody in there? Like, “Oh, you’re doing this Army role; I have this amputee in my catalog. Would you guys see him?” I don’t know how that works, I guess.

Ben Lewin: I don’t know if this comment is useful, but my casting director, Ronnie Yeskel, was honored with a Media Access Award for her work with disabled actors and I would be shocked if she didn’t welcome your approach. So start with her.



Unidentified speaker: Can I just say something?

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Give her the mic.

Unidentified speaker: There are so many casting directors that are so willing to meet and create opportunity for people with disabilities that you should not think that they’re not on your side. There is Pam Dixon, Ronnie Yeskel, the people from “Glee.” There are many, many casting directors that take—that are honored to meet and to create opportunities for people with disabilities, so don’t cut yourself short, and that is the truth. (Applause).

Pam Dixon: I just wanted to—

Unidentified speaker: Could I—

Pam Dixon: —say something because I just have been head of the Casting Society for six years.

Audience member poses a question to the panel: How does an actor with a disability get noticed by casting directors?

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Give her the mic.

Pam Dixon: I'm Pam Dixon, actually. (Applause). And I'm sitting here. I don't agree with that at all. I mean, we can't create the characters; we can suggest. The writers create what we cast, but at the same point, I have to say my experience as being head of the Casting Society for six years, I have never found that to be true. So I don't know if you had a bad experience or if you have a feeling that you are afraid to contact people. If you do, I think that you should—you can see me afterwards and I will give you ways of how you have access to casting people because I don't think that's really true. So you can come see me and I'll help you. Okay? Thank you. (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: This gentleman over here, please.

Audience member: And the only thing I was going to make a comment on was about his comment, which is I wonder if the reason why you feel that is because the idea that you're looking for someone who is disabled or not, which means that you've already decided what that character should look like, which gets to what David is saying upfront, which is really talking about creating the human story and not creating the disabled story, because if you're creating the human story, every single character on the screen that looks like him, could be him, regardless of if he has an arm or not.

Unidentified speaker: Right.

Audience member: And that's one of the reasons why I—I mean, this is Black History Month, but the reason why African Americans really love ABC's "Scandal" is because there's an African American person on the screen, but that's not the story. I don't even think they've ever said she's a black woman in the entire time and this is going into the second season. That's what we want, that kind of story. We're never looking for the story that says, "Oh, I'm black, and I went through slavery and I want to"—that's not the story. We want the story where "We are who we are today in 2013, not where we were 50 years ago."

David Radcliffe: And there is some measure of power, I guess, that

sits with the writer in terms of you can write it into the line—I mean, of the character description, he rolls in in a wheelchair and then decide this is—I would love to see—I'm actually trying to work on one—a story of a guy in a wheelchair who is just an unmitigated dick—(Laughter)—like Larry David in a wheelchair. (Laughter). But the problem is that you get into this zone where it's like are we laughing at him because he's in a wheelchair or are we laughing at him because he's an asshole? And it's like it can kind of be both. I mean, people are complex people. I laugh it myself every seven minutes just because I do stupid things.

So some of that does rest with the writing and it rests with the daily

"Most of the power, I would say, sits with casting because it shouldn't be the case that we should have to say 'The boyfriend is somebody in a wheelchair' or 'The doctor is somebody on crutches' or whatever. That should just kind of be part of the experience."

– DAVID RADCLIFFE

experiences you have with people, and Margaret's experience with her brother has obviously informed her work, but it also—most of the power, I would say, sits with casting because it shouldn't be the case that we should have to say "The boyfriend is somebody in a wheelchair" or "The doctor is somebody on crutches" or whatever. That should just kind of be part of the experience and that's true in every profession, and I mention that to people and they are surprised. There are doctors in wheelchairs? Well, how do they do that? Well, wouldn't that be an interesting story to watch on television?

Unidentified speaker: It sounds like Laura Innes' character on "ER." They never talked about why she walked with those crutches.

Unidentified speaker: Right.

Margaret Nagle: And I also would say like when I've had shows, I would always say to the casting director, "I don't—bring me any type." I cast you and never, ever talk about your hand, right? Like it wouldn't even be part of the story because that's just a part of who you are, or like I'll never forgets getting so—I used to be an actress and I got so mad at the guy who cast "ER" one day. And I was there auditioning and I said "All my doctors are Asian; why are there no Asian doctors on "ER" ever? Like what's wrong with this hospital? Like it so bizarre to me." (Laughter). And I'm always a pain in the ass, whatever, but it just makes me insane.

But I think the Writers Guild—this is something that could be done—could go to writers rooms and just remind writers to be more open and color-blind in their casting and also to be saying to their casting directors for their shows—because like when I was running a show, it was like "Who is that casting director going to put in front of me?" I'd come sit down in a chair and I would spend a couple of hours and it would just be—he would pick out who I would see and then I would say "Okay. I want," da da da. And I would have to be reminded, in the grind of doing a show, when you're on that schedule, you've got to see other people. You have to open it up and your casting director—so it's a two prong—it's almost like SAG needs to remind the casting directors, but I feel like writers in writers rooms need to be reminded too of all the possibilities.

Auti Angel: That's like me being a dancer and seeing all these dance films come out and saying how come—my agent, I actually let go of my agent because they didn't send me. I said "Do you see all these films coming out? I told you to send me and I will book it, I promise you. You see what just happened?" I think that they were afraid they might get served.

Margaret Nagle: I know, and I had a whole disabled dance troupe in "Warm Springs" and they sang and danced in their wheelchairs.

Auti Angel: See? Amazing.



Margaret Nagle: I didn't even know that existed, but the casting director told me and I was like, "Oh, my God, we have to like do it." So it's like casting directors and writers have to like actually work together to open that up.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Okay, let's take one more.

Audience member: Hi, hi. I also went through UCLA's Film Program and my question or thought whatever, is for you, David. Right out of college, one of my closest friends from UCLA moved in with my husband and me and we were all housemates and we lived together for about four years, and in the middle of that, he was paralyzed in an auto accident. So I saw the before for many years, and the after, and one of the most refreshing—he had such a great sense of humor, has such a great sense of humor—and the first thing he said is "Well, thank God, I'm a phone salesman. It's not going to affect me."

David Radcliff: Yeah.

HH&S Director Sandra de Castro Buffington and "Push Girls" co-star Auti Angel get together at the end of the evening.

Audience member: So my question is—I mean, I know all these awards you got, oh, so very well, so I know you’re a great writer.

David Radcliff: Right.

Audience member: I say to you first, they’re redoing “Ironside.”

David Radcliff: I noticed that; I’m paying attention. (Laughter).

Audience member: But I just wonder about—because as a woman, I have 20 strikes against me, trying to go up for staffing season for the first time too, so I mean, it’s just like there are so many prejudices. I’m just wondering about talking a little bit more about your staffing experiences because logically speaking, sitting at a writers’ table should be perfect, not a problem.

David Radcliff: I like the way you think. (Laughter). First of all, being a finalist or getting an award, I’m very cautious not to make it seem like I am owed something because I have a disability and I have stories to share. So that’s not—I recognize it’s tough work and getting an award or being recognized is fuel in the tank, but it doesn’t guarantee anything. But I would argue that there is no more diverse group of people than people with disabilities anywhere, and yet, diversity hiring practices at networks focus on race, gender, to a lesser extent, sexuality, I guess, but disabilities is not—in the eyes of diversity programs, I am a boring, white, straight male from Nebraska. So this does nothing to help me, but it does create—

Unidentified speaker: If you fall out of a window, you could (inaudible)? (Laughter).

David Radcliff: But it does carry with that experiences that I would not have had if I didn’t have a disability. I was in consideration for a program, and part of that program was a mixer in which you stand for three hours, and I didn’t think I had to think “Should I bring my crutches or my wheelchair for this one?” I didn’t know was going to be a three-hour standing and that was very hard on my legs and you’re trying to carry a drink and make a good impression and talking to executives.

And so when I got to the next stage and they said “What do you bring into the room that other writers might not,” I said “Well, for one thing, we look at things a little bit differently and, for example”—and as I was saying this example, I was like “Take these words back right now because you’re not getting in this thing,” but I used to be very reticent about speaking about disability. And now I feel like you almost have an obligation, and not in like every story I write has disability in it, but if I’m not willing to talk about who I am and how my experience is different from, but also similar to everybody else’s, then I’m not much of a writer.

Audience member: Well, I think it’s also—my friend Mike didn’t change at all and I love that about him. He so awesome, but people changed how they looked at him. I mean, I watched it. People stare, people act

“I used to be very reticent about speaking about disability. And now I feel like you almost have an obligation, and not in like every story I write has disability in it, but if I’m not willing to talk about who I am and how my experience is different from, but also similar to everybody else’s, then I’m not much of a writer.”

– DAVID RADCLIFFE

weird, and it just—knowing him the way I did, it just really hurt—

David Radcliff: Yeah.

Audience member: —just being there.

David Radcliff: You just triggered something that I wanted to make sure that I brought up.

Unidentified speaker: Uh-oh. (Laughter).

David Radcliff: Just the other day, I was headed towards the door. I was in my wheelchair. My Facebook friends already know about this experience. (Laughter). And there was a guy headed the opposite direction and he said to me “Can I push you to the door?” And I thought, well, he’s going the other way, so that’s like out of his way, it doesn’t make a lot of sense, and I said “No thanks.”

And then he says, “I know, I know, you just want to be independent.” Is there anything more condescending than that? (Laughter). Would we say that about anyone else in any sort of minority group? “Oh, you just want to be independent.” Just by saying it outright, you are already diminishing me and now, I feel like I have an obligation to make you feel better about yourself by letting you turn around and push me to the door, and that’s not my job. (Laughter).

Audience member: You should have said that to him.

David Radcliff: No, I can’t, because then it’s like, “Wow, that guy was a dick. That guy in the wheelchair is such an asshole.” (Laughter). So I’m always very aware of like whether I want to or not, I’m representing something larger than myself, and if I had the opportunity to do that in television, I would be thrilled, but it’s not—these doors just don’t—

Unidentified speaker: And I don’t know if they’ve been to the Disability Committee yet, but Glen [Massaro] and Alfredo [Barrios], Jr., are going around and they’re trying to make the members of the Writers Guild—we can’t do a whole lot about network executives; they are their own animal—but we can impress upon other members of the Writers Guild to be more inclusive of women, of people with disabilities, of minorities, of whoever, because it does bring different voices to the table and especially in a writers’ room, that should be very important.

David Radcliff: Absolutely.

Unidentified speaker: If you have a writers’ room of eight white men from Nebraska or whatever—



David Radcliff: That sounds like a thrilling show.

Unidentified speaker: (Laughter). Yes, that’s the voice you’re going to get, and I (inaudible).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: (Inaudible) comment. Okay. We need to pass the mic. We’re going to take one last comment and then we need to close. We’re a little over time here.

Audience member: Eric, I was wondering, you mentioned that you had the idea for that storyline from the very beginning of the show.

Eric Guggenheim: Yes.

Audience member: And as it progressed and you finally decided you were going to do it, I’m wondering if it came up, or it what point it came up, that it was looking like it was going to be—his friend was going to be also someone with a disability, and because of that, did

Eric Guggenheim of “Parenthood” meets with audience member following the panel.

you then decide, no, no, we can't do that or how that evolved and why you eventually decided to go with it in that direction?

Eric Guggenheim: Well, like I said, we had met with the mother of a teenage boy who had Asperger's and he had a friend in high school who had been disfigured in a fire, and the boy with Asperger's didn't really see the physical difference and we thought that was incredibly fascinating. So we made the decision to—we didn't immediately hit on, okay, he's going to be a boy with spina bifida, but we knew that we wanted the character of Micah to be different physically and for Max to kind of be blinded to that.

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Okay. We're going to have to close now, but please stay after and come up and talk to our panelists. Let's give them a big round of applause. (Applause). And let's pass the mic. We have a closing comment here.

Kim Myers: This was an exceptional panel. Thank you all so much, and thank you, Sandra, for joining forces with us to do this. I'm Kim Myers, the Director of Diversity, which definitely includes disability at the Writers Guild, and I did leave my cards out there. So if any of you want to get in touch with someone from the Writers with Disabilities Committee, you can do it through me. My cards are out there. And of course, you can use Hollywood Health & Society as a resource as well. So thank you all (Applause).

Sandra de Castro Buffington: Thank you, all. Thanks for joining us. (Applause).



Scriptwriter Margaret Nagle (left) meets with audience members at the close of "People First" panel.

