

## **2018 Mentor Meeting: Carl Hansen's 'Team Cultural Detritus' at Universal Studios**

As part of the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, the winning filmmakers are awarded mentorship meetings with active members of the entertainment industry. 'Check Mate' was awarded "Best Film" in the 2018 Easterseals Disability Film Challenge, and the winning team was treated to an exciting day at Universal Studios.

Here is creator Carl Hansen's take on his team's special day:

"I got to the Universal Studios Gate 2 just on time after navigating Los Angeles traffic from dropping my son off at preschool. The security guard told me where to park and I drove in. I apparently passed the parking lot where I was supposed to go and ended up going up a big hill that's used on the official Tram tours, oops. So I turned around and Jeff Cafuir, director of Community Investment at NBCUniversal, was waiting for me as I pulled in.

After exchanging hellos he walked me briskly to an executive building and we proceeded to the top floor reception desk, marked by "Universal Pictures" in large letters around the front. I promptly had to take a photo of the desk because my first paid job at the tender age of 14 was on the movie, "Housesitter" (starring Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn) which had been distributed by Universal Pictures - it felt very full-circle. We were then swiftly guided down to a very large conference room where I met Gesumino Rulli, manager of Global Talent Development & Inclusion, Caitlyn Halsey, manager of the Universal Pictures story department and Charlie Alderman from Focus Features.

It was a warm meeting with lots of advice and discussion about how to change the industry to be more inclusive and give people opportunities who haven't ordinarily gotten a chance in the past. Winning the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge has been such an honor and privilege - just to get into that room to discuss something as important as changing the way people view disabilities felt very transformational.

We then headed over to the commissary to commiserate over lunch with members of the Cultural Detritus cast from our winning film "Check Mate": Michael C. Vaccaro ("Zack"), who has been in every film the team has made over the past 14 years; Danny Gomez ("Chad"); and Shannon Dierex ("Rebecca") along with her mom, Theresa. We learned more about the diversity and inclusion initiatives of NBC/Universal and talked about the ways we can help disabled actors be seen more, imploring productions to not see the disability, but see the actor. 20% of the U.S. population has a disability and less than 3% are represented in Film & TV. That's utterly ridiculous to me and is ignoring a huge underutilized pool of amazing talent.

We then got on a small shuttle bus that was wheelchair accessible (so Danny could be comfortable) and it drove us through the backlot, past various sets from a Western town



to a little European village. Full disclosure, my butt sat in the same seat as Charlize Theron who played the Queen in the film :) It was super-cool!

Special thanks to Nic Novicki and the Easterseals Disability Film Challenge for making this happen for all of us. And many thanks to our gracious and giving hosts at NBC/Universal - it was really such a wonderful day and I look forward to seeing more diversity and inclusion in front of and behind the camera there.”

