

My Sundance Experience in Full

I will spare you the humblebrag.

It's too easy here: "I'm so honored to have had a film at the Sundance Film Festival." True? Of course. A huge honor? Absolutely. But I'm not ashamed to come right out and say it bold: I'm really proud!

Being a director of a film at Sundance is like going to a theme park where there are robots everywhere programmed with a singular goal: to make you feel special. Except they aren't robots. They are lovely people who adore films and actually do think you're special because you made one.

When you have a career in entertainment behind the camera, you accept and embrace certain realities, one of which is that it is the people in front of the camera who attract the fuss. This has advantages, by the way. If you have seen fame close up, it is actually quite exhausting. Think of when you are at a cocktail party and you are forced to make small talk with people you've never met. Being famous is having to do that with every single person on the planet every minute of your life. And the one time you don't do it to the other person's satisfaction, they will energetically tell everyone they know that you're a gigantic jerk. Repeatedly and forever. On the other hand, you get a lot of free stuff and you can have dinner wherever and whenever you like, even at places that aren't actually restaurants.

But I digress.

Sundance for a director is the one time in show business when you are the star. Canada Goose giving out a free jacket? Give it to the director. Robert Redford hosting a brunch? Directors only. It is, in a word, fun.

It Starts...

My Sundance experience started when John Cooper, the God of Sundance, saw our film at an industry screening in Los Angeles in late November. He subsequently told me that he was annoyed that someone made him go to a theater instead of sending him a disc (the poor man has to watch a dozen movies a day), and that he was dutifully going to the theater only to "check it off his list." But, thankfully, he enjoyed the film and called Trevor Groth, the Programming Director of Sundance, and told him that they had found their closing night film.

I got word the next day, and then an official email from John Cooper followed. It reminded me of getting that acceptance letter to my first choice of colleges: Cornell. Oh the unbridled joy I felt when "Big Red" accepted me to matriculate high above Cayuga's waters! (Editor's note: I got

rejected from Cornell.) Truth is, the Sundance email stands alone as the most exciting missive I have ever received.

Thursday Night...

The journey officially began on the first Thursday of the festival, 1/21, when our great Sundance Coordinator Jamie Heaslip told me that the film was chosen to be played for the volunteers of Sundance at “the Library,” a cool space which seats 400. I changed my plans so I could attend – they like the directors to introduce the film and answer questions afterwards.

I flew out Wednesday night with Eunice. By the way, for those who don’t know us well, “Eunice” is my wife’s actual name. Just because I’m a comedy writer, that does not give me the authority to give my wife a comedy name. She just happens to have one. One more reason we’re perfect for each other. (I do have lots of material on the name “Eunice,” but this isn’t the time or place. All right just one: it’s a little like when you’re playing scrabble and you end up with too many vowels. Ok, moving on...)

Though I had seen the film play well in front of three large audiences of 200, 200 and 300 in screenings in L.A., my stomach was in knots. This was a different state, a different crowd. Though nervous, I was also excited: the volunteers are real, non-industry people who love movies. When I introduced the film, I could feel the energy in the room – they were happy to be there, and seemed grateful that I had come.

The screening was an enormous hit. The volunteers loved the film, although maybe they were just happy to be sitting down -- how can I ever really know? A great thrill of that evening was that Megan Ferguson, who has fast become one of my favorite people, saw the movie for the first time (she plays “Peaches”). As a director you feel first and foremost a huge responsibility to the cast, and when she loved the film, I was elated.

Friday: Press Day #1...

The next day, Friday, I did press from 10 – 3 pm. Paul, Craig and Selena weren’t coming until the following weekend so I was on my own. Under the careful watch of our publicist Sara Serlen, the day began with makeup from the Mac sponsor to get me picture ready.



Makeup time. Not sure there is enough to take care of those high-altitude bags under my eyes.

There is something amusing when those who are not used to makeup are required to get makeup. In my case, there is always an unspoken awkwardness between makeup artist and client. I imagine our silent looks back and forth translating to -- Me: "This isn't really gonna help, is it?" Her: "Yeah, not a chance."

After my boyish good looks rocketed from a 3 to a 4, (scale is 1-10, people – always 1-10), Sara and I began traipsing up and down Main Street to dozens of different press outlets. Oh, wait! I forgot – before all that, Canada Goose gave me that super cool jacket I told you about:



The warmest and coolest garment I own. (Not counting the Greenwich Skating Club hat – my son’s hockey team. Go Wings!]

I wore this jacket nonstop at Sundance, and then for three days solid in L.A., where, if I’m honest, it was kind of too warm for the jacket. But the patch says “Sundance” so guess what? I’m wearing it!

Free Vaseline...

Then the real fun began. Every place we went had free stuff. Now, I’ve been involved in show business at the Late Show for a couple of decades so none of this is exactly new to me. And yet, somehow I turned into an utter rube. Me: “Sara, why are they selling Eddie Bauer jackets in this room that I’m about do an interview in?” Sara: “They’re free. Take as many as you want.”

My favorite sponsor experience was Vaseline, and here you can gain real insight into human psychology. Philosophers, economists, politicians, psychologists and deep thinkers everywhere should all devote real time dissecting and analyzing the following two words: Free Vaseline. This is a fascinating concept. Like most people, I can afford to go to the local CVS and buy my own Vaseline. And yet, when you’re staring at free Vaseline, what do you do? Yup. “Load it

up, Sara!” Every possible moisturizing combination whooshed into the carry bag. My skin will be hydrated for decades.

And then, it happened:

While I was waiting to do my interview, a kind and officious gentleman approached and said, “Have you had your hands massaged?” Here you have a choice. You can feel self-conscious, realize that you have no right to a hand massage, and effectively swim upstream against the experience of being queen for the day. Or, you can look that fine gentleman square in the eyes and, without let or hindrance, confidently say the words, “No, sir, I have not.”

And should you choose the latter, as I did, you will find yourself within mere moments reclining on a massage table with a rather attractive masseuse massaging your hands with Vaseline. And for the first 10 seconds you will enjoy it ironically, and thereafter you will enjoy it actually, and wonder in all frankness how you ever made it this far in your life without having your hands massaged professionally. Oh, I can see how celebrities become insane: if you’re not careful luxuries become necessities in an instant.

The rest of the press day was relatively uneventful. Fun to keep running into celebrities on the same loop: I saw Craig Robinson a bunch. I don’t know him and kind of wanted to introduce myself, but chickened out. I did talk to Judd Apatow and Adam Scott, both who I have known cursorily over the years.

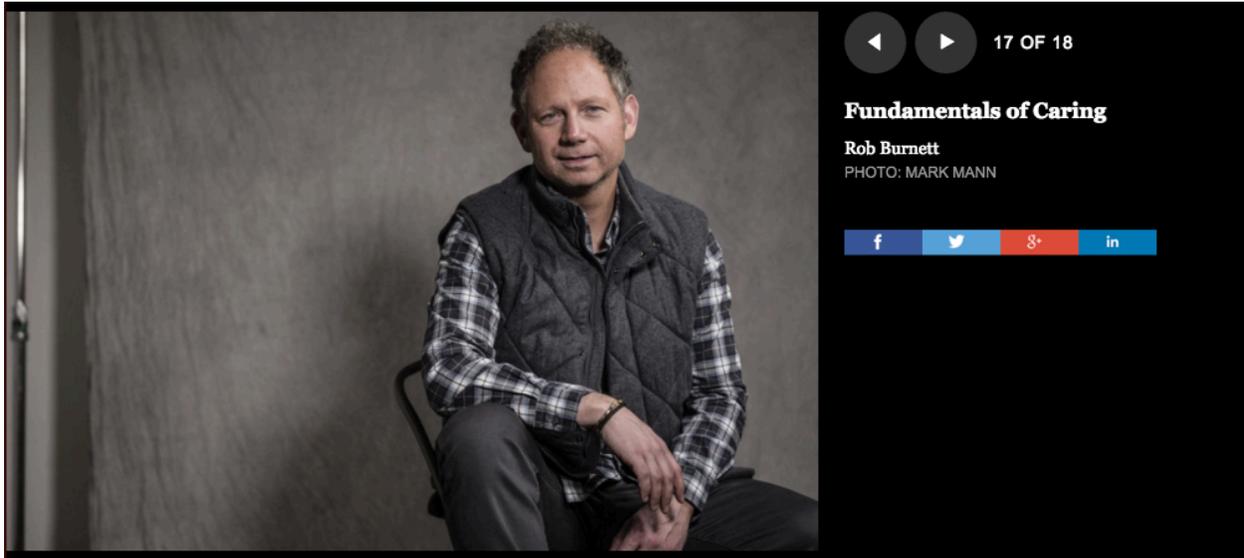
The film got lots of really nice press because of our sale (along with Tallulah!) to Netflix. Here are two of many:

THE WRAP - JANUARY 23, 2016: Rob Burnett Interview, "'The Fundamentals of Caring' Director on Netflix Deal: 'Offer Was Too Good to Turn Down'" by Itay Hod
<https://www.thewrap.com/the-fundamentals-of-caring-director-on-netflix-deal-offer-was-too-good-to-turn-down/>

<http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/sundance-how-netflix-is-spending-857104>

I’ve been getting a lot of questions about what the Netflix deal means for the release of the film. In a nutshell, Netflix bought the SVOD (Subscription Video on Demand) rights to the movie. This is the last window, so it is unusual to sell this first. Part of the world being turned on its head. We are negotiating currently with several theatrical distributors and my best guess is that the movie hits theaters in late summer. It would then be available on Netflix ninety days thereafter. I will keep you all posted.

As for all the press photos, they are mostly ridiculous, but I thought this one for “Deadline” was at least tolerable:



Yes, I am going for a very calculated “cool director look” here. And yes, I also know I’m not pulling it off, so just save your comments. (I may have been relying too heavily on the quilted vest.)

And these two publicity shots taken during shooting, are both what I call “TADS,” which stands for “Typical A**hole Director Shots.”



Every director has a few TADS. And they all say the same thing: “Oooh! Look at me directing!”



I'm completely bluffing in this picture. No idea what a viewfinder does, just hoping someone will take a cool picture of me. I think Rudd snapped this.

Friday Eunice and I saw two movie premieres, both at the fabulous Eccles Theater. The first was *Swiss Army Man*, aka, "the farting Daniel Radcliffe corpse movie" directed by "The Daniels." The second was *Weiner Dog*, directed by the legendary indie director Todd Solondz. I couldn't help but focus on the grandeur of the Eccles – 1270 seats, giant screen, and the best sound and picture I have ever seen in a movie theater. The idea that we would be having our premiere in this theater as the closing night film the following Friday was heart-poundingly exciting.

At Sundance the directors introduce the film. I was keen on watching what these men would do on that front. The Daniels went with some kind of audience exercise routine (I knew this was nothing I could ever pull off) and Todd Solondz has so much street cred that he was barely audible and that was just fine (also nothing that would work for me). I left there wondering what the right intro to our film would be.

Saturday was an enormous highlight of the week: the Robert Redford-hosted brunch at the Sundance Institute. The hour drive is so beautiful that it feels like we all need to sit down and invent some new words. I snapped this out the window, but I could have taken a thousand more:



En route to the Sundance Institute for Robert Redford's Director's Brunch. Ugly!

The brunch had probably a hundred directors there, and I only knew a couple of people that I had met at a reception in New York. I looked for Sian Heder, who directed the amazing "Tallulah" and who coincidentally married a childhood friend of mine, the great Dave Newsom. I also looked for my new German friend Nicolette Krebitz, who directed the movie "Wild," which I have yet to see. I met Nicolette and her producer on one of the Sundance shuttles, and then again getting our Canada Goose jackets. Unbeknownst to me, she is an enormously famous actress in Germany. There is something amusing when a really famous person is suddenly *not* famous. And something inherently funny when the producer said to me, "She's really famous" – which is a sentence that by its own definition doesn't really make sense. And yet, even as just another soul riding the shuttle, there was something undeniably cool about Nicolette Krebitz. You could somehow tell she was special.

Unable to find them, I joined a random table of other directors. This is most of the fun of Sundance -- you are surrounded by other filmmakers from all over the world.

Robert Redford spoke eloquently about the history of Sundance. It is a place born out of the purest of intentions: a guy wanting to give back. I get the sense that it has grown beyond what he could have ever imagined, but I think the original purity of the place still exists. He wanted to build a community of filmmakers and despite all the ballyhoo, that is exactly what he did. When he was done speaking, we all descended on him like jackals. I didn't want to bother him, but I couldn't help myself. He is one of only a handful of celebrities who never did the Late Show, and I have admired him forever.

So, there's this:



Me and Bob. (And by “Bob” I of course mean “Mr. Redford.”)

And this:



Our 45-second conversation was lovely – he was extraordinarily nice and encouraging, and even seemed to know about our film. My expression in this photograph couldn't be more embarrassing. The unwritten caption: “Oh my God! I'm talking with Robert Redford!” Sometimes the cool thing is to NOT be cool, right? (Just say “right,” okay?)

My One Undeniable Skill...

We unfortunately needed to leave Sundance to get home to be with the kids, but our flight home on Sunday was canceled because of snow. Delta rescheduled us on a three-flight 15-hour extravaganza on Monday, which was not going to work. So, after the Redford director's brunch on Saturday, Eunice and I drove to the Salt Lake airport and flew to Chicago. We landed at 9:00 p.m., got in a rental car at 9:15 p.m., and pulled into our house in Greenwich at 10:30 a.m.

Yes, driving at night is my thing. I drove until about 6:30 a.m. Eun took over for a couple of key hours after that. We've been married 26 years now, and we still love a road trip together. Good sign we're going the distance.

Paul and Selena and Craig...

We returned to Sundance the following Thursday, joined by tons of friends, now all five Burnetts, our investors, and the cast. Paul and Craig flew with us from New York. We all gathered at one of the hotel bars at The Montage. Selena came in from Dallas and joined us a little later. She had an awful cold and I was touched that she came out to support the film.

Let's cover the Paul and Selena of it all here, since it is the question I am asked most. What are they like?

On Paul, the Super Bowl ad pretty much had it right -- everybody loves him. His on-screen talents speak for themselves. He is hilarious, but also able to deliver on nuanced drama. So few can do this well. Tom Hanks comes to mind. But what is often missed is how much Paul contributes off camera. He has great instincts, great ideas -- he is a terrific writer in his own right. I was extremely lucky to have him around and he taught me stuff about filmmaking without even realizing it.

On a personal level, he somehow reminds me of one of my high school friends. He's so down-to-earth that you have to keep reminding yourself just how accomplished he is. Everyone thinks that Paul Rudd would be a great best friend. Everybody is right.

On Selena -- where to start? I have said in interviews the unique way she came into the project. A meeting was set between me and her by her manager. The interesting aspect: I wasn't told with whom I would be meeting. I was told only that it was a famous actress, one who had many movie offers in front of her, and that mine was the only movie she wanted to do.

When I opened the door to my office, there stood Selena Gomez. I had known her only from her singing appearances on the Late Show. My kids had watched her in "Wizards of Waverly Place." My first impression of her standing there by herself was that for all the glammed up

photos of her, for all the fans, for all the *giganticness* of her, she really was just a kid. She wasn't much older than my own daughters. She kind of seemed like one of their friends.

We talked for two hours and amazingly – impossibly – I found her to be completely unaffected by her fame and stature in the world. She seems to be a rare person who has bountiful natural gifts, but refuses to rely on them. She eschews an easy life of fame and stardom, and instead chooses to work and work and work to improve herself. She has a preternatural understanding that fame without accomplishment is empty.

I saw someone somewhere comment that I probably put Selena Gomez in the movie because she was Selena Gomez. That could not be further from the truth. The film was financed before Selena came on board, and truth be told, she auditioned for the movie several times. She got the part because she nailed the auditions. End of story. And then went on to nail the film. She earned it all. If anything, she had to work harder than a lesser known actress to get the part.

In one of the Q&As I did in Salt Lake, I said that the best way for me to sum up my feelings for Selena is in relation to my daughters. I have vigilantly kept my kids away from show business for all the obvious reasons, but I found myself eager for my daughters to spend as much time around Selena as possible. (Another rarified example of this is Julie Bowen from “Ed” and now “Modern Family.”) Selena is a natural role model for young women – effortlessly managing a complicated life without ever losing her focus. She was lovely to my daughters – she and Sydney went to Soul Cycle together; she and Lucy went to the movies. Sydney said, “She seems like one of my sorority sisters. I keep forgetting it's Selena Gomez.” Lucy said similar things. That is a testament to the gal.

Craig Roberts is a gem in full. We ended up spending a lot of time together in Atlanta, which I took as a victory because it's hard to get him out of his room. He is a truly authentic person, and a great writer/director in his own right. We considered some 250 people for his role and boy did we get lucky with him. I knew what Paul would bring as Ben, but could never be sure what the actor for Trevor would give us. The two of them together make the film. Period.

Premiere Day...

The Friday of our premiere the cast and I spent a couple hours in the Acura Lounge doing a series of interviews. I did several with Paul, which is easy and fun. I particularly enjoyed the one where we got into an argument about grammar. (Follow up: we're both right.)

<http://uproxx.com/movies/paul-rudd-fundamentals-of-caring-sundance/>

(Oh and hate to nitpick, but somehow the writer writing the word “imbrued” instead of “imbued” inside one of my quotes makes me look like an idiot. Oh, well...)

When you take press pictures with your cast, you are signing up for being the least photogenic in the bunch, but I am happy to have the photos nonetheless. This one was taken after one of our group interviews:



Talented Cast. Fun and nice cast. (By the way, I will give you a thousand dollars if you can find a picture with Craig Roberts smiling. I love that guy!)

Another great picture taken during the day was of Charlie and Selena. This prompted every one of his friends to tell him they hate him.



My two buddies. The tall one is my son Charlie.

One of my absolute favorite pictures taken on set of Charlie shows just how much he's changed in under a year. This was taken toward the end of shooting in Trevor's house.



Charlie and I laughing during a take at the very end of the shoot. This picture is taken just 11 months before the previous one with him and Selena. How can this be the same person? He was so tiny! Now he's bigger than me! Stop, nature! Stop!

The Red Carpet...

Our premiere was at 6:30 at the Eccles. We loaded into cars and headed over to the theater, where we were met by a wall of people outside and a packed press line on the red carpet. Very exciting.



Paul, Craig and I answering questions on the way to the premiere.

And of course you feel a little ridiculous because it all feels so important, but deep down you're thinking, "It's just a movie, people!" And then if you're honest, even deeper down you're thinking, "This is awesome!"



Selena stuck it out despite a brutal cold.



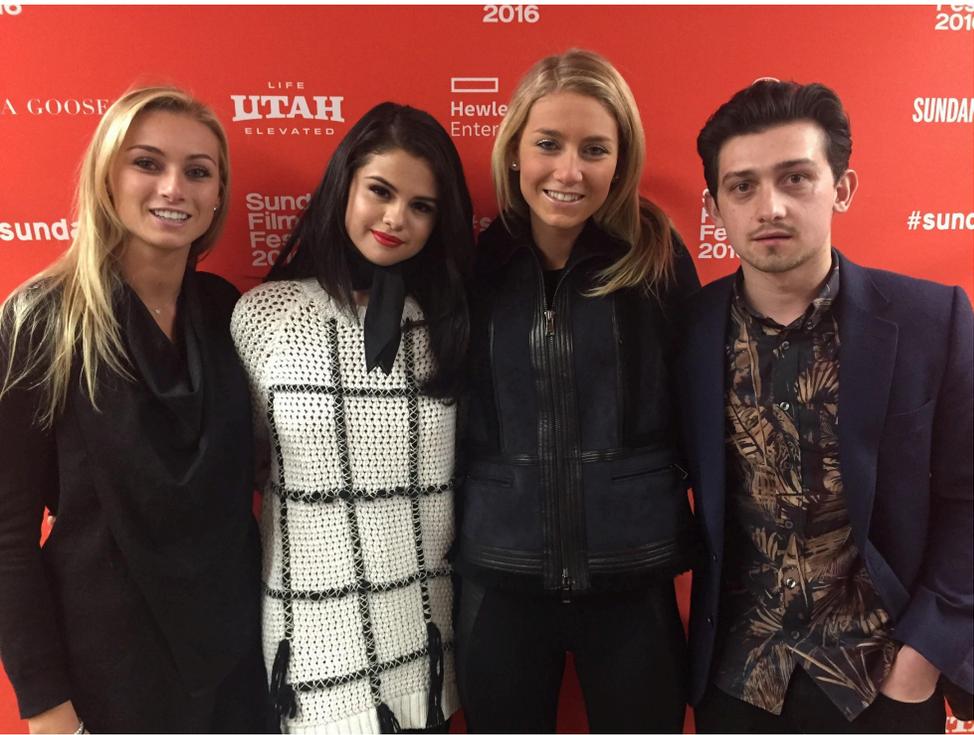
Sydney and Lucy with Selena on the red carpet.



Selena is so sweet with them. And here's a simple fact of life: Be sweet to my girls and I will love you forever.



Lucy with our crack producer Donna Gigliotti. (Pretty sure Lucy likes Donna more than me, which I'm still getting used to.)



Question: Is Craig smiling? Answer: No.



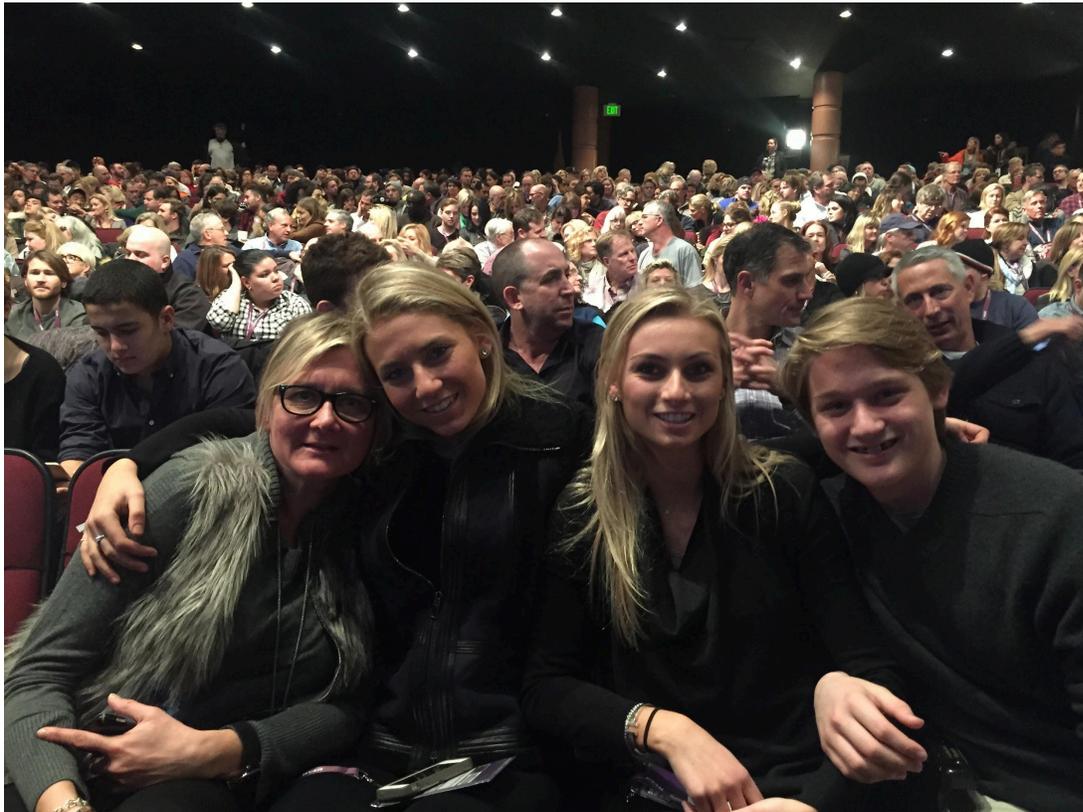
Here I am with the God of Sundance: John Cooper. It would be so easy for John Cooper and Trevor Groth to be intimidating and mean. But instead they're friendly and nice. Right when you feel like you need their support, they somehow magically appear and give it to you.

The Premiere...

The Eccles is big and beautiful. You have no excuses in that theater: 1270 movie-lovers paying to see your movie, the biggest, most gorgeous screen you'll ever play on, and all with perfect sound and perfect picture. You can point to nothing if things don't go well.



N
The Eccles seats 1270. All people who love movies.



Four Burnetts rooting on Dad. I think Eun is appropriately terrified for me in this photo.

The premiere itself was dreamlike in all ways. A big blur, fraught with nerves, but ultimately, I have to say, one of the highlights of my career. John Cooper gave me the nicest of introductions. And then the film played huge. Big laughs all the way through, some tears at the right moments, and a standing ovation.

One small memorable highlight for me that I just have to mention occurred right after I was done with my introduction. I made my way to my seat and without a word, my oldest daughter, Sydney, got up and switched seats with Lucy, letting Lucy sit next to me. This was a selfless act that I will never ever forget. Lucy has the big interest in film and directing. Sydney decided that her sister should sit next to me for the premiere. Of all the things I was proud of that night, this was right at the top.

Selena unfortunately had to catch a flight and couldn't stay for the Q & A, but here are the rest of us on stage after the movie:



The Q&A was fun – a lot of goodwill in the room. And of course Paul and Craig were hilarious.

Someone from the crowd recorded it and posted the intro and the entire Q&A.. This is long, but if you want a taste of the night, you can sample a couple minutes here:

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/rZn98PJBzI0>

The very best part for me was when I introduced Case Levenson – the real life Trevor – and he got a standing ovation that went on and on. Very moving. And another touching moment for me was being hugged by Case’s mom backstage. She said she adored the film and our portrayal of Case. This meant the world to me.

And the super cool Jonathan Evison (the author of the *The Revised Fundamentals of Caregiving*) was also a peach throughout. It’s only natural for an author to dislike an adaptation, but Jonathan loved the movie. That’s more a testament to his generosity than the movie itself. None of this happens without him. I highly recommend you read the book. He writes beautifully.

The After-Party...

An app called Sodu sponsored a party for the film at the Acura Lounge after the premiere. I mostly remember being suddenly ravenous because I had been too nervous to eat during the day. Friends and hugs everywhere, but I was mostly focused on the lamb chops. Thankfully, no photos of me stuffing my face. Here is a friendlier image:



Me and my Gals at the after party. They used to be the size of my thumb. Now they’re fancy ladies. What up with that?

Exhausted, a bunch of us ended up back at The Montage where we all ordered cheeseburgers (19 of them)? Again, no pictures, but the perfect end to the perfect night. (Cheeseburgers are pretty much the perfect end to any night, aren't they?)

Saturday: The Eccles Redux...

Saturday we had a second screening at the Eccles at 12:15. The film again played huge. (I think I might be starting to sound like Donald Trump. "Huuuuge.") Craig and I did the Q&A. Craig has an amazing knack of answering questions with a single word and then bravely not expounding. Someone in the audience asked him what he would be doing next after all of this. And Craig said, "Retiring." And they laughed. And they waited for more. But Craig just stared at them without a smile. And then of course they exploded with laughter again.

Sunday: Two of my Favorite Things of All...

I have always felt lucky to be in show business. That feeling never truly goes away: when I am writing, casting, shooting, editing -- doing anything relating to making a movie or TV show -- there is a part of me that is giddy, that can't believe I am lucky enough to get to do any of this. One of the great things about a job laced with such intensity is that sometimes deep friendships form. For me, one of those is with the star of my old show "Ed," Tom Cavanagh.

Every human who knows Tom Cavanagh loves Tom Cavanagh, so in that regard, I'm just one of many. Over the years since "Ed," Tom has become a family member to me. I would do anything for this guy, and he has shown time and time again that he would do anything for me. So, while juggling a wife, four young (and very adorable) kids, and a full time very demanding gig as one of the stars of *The Flash*, Tom Cavanagh got on a plane at 5 a.m. in Vancouver and flew to Salt Lake to see the last screening of the movie.

He did this for one simple reason: Tom Cavanagh behaves the way all humans should behave.



Tom and I spotting each other on Sunday morning in Salt Lake City before the movie's final screening at The Grand Theater. Tremendous.

The screening at the Grand – an 1100 seater – also went embarrassingly well. (Screw it: it was huuuuuuuge!) The theater is nice, not as technically sound as the Eccles, but it makes up for it for one simple reason: The Grand has popcorn. Just watching your movie with that buttery, salty smell in the air is a thrill. Tom and I were joined by a Greenwich friend of mine, one of my hockey buddies, Roger Paradiso.

I invited Roger to Sundance because his 14-year-old son Cameron loves movies. The two of them had a blast devouring every film they could get into in Park City. I am quite sure I will be working for Cameron Paradiso one day – that is, if he will hire me. As it turned out, Roger had some business in Salt Lake, so in addition to seeing our premiere at the Eccles, he joined me and Tom at The Grand. And this leads me to my last favorite thing of the week.

It's a little better if you know Roger – some of you reading this do – but to sum him up: he is a very kind, very unassuming guy. He's a super successful businessman, but it took me about eight years to learn that. He'll never say a thing about himself.

Here's a visual:



Roger Paradiso: Businessman.

During the Q&A at The Grand – this one was just me by myself on stage – the conversation turned to “Ed.” I couldn't resist:

“Ladies and gentlemen, all the way from Vancouver, Canada, he took time out of his busy schedule as one of the stars of The Flash, he flew in just to be with me today...TOM CAVANAGH!”

The place went wild. Tom dutifully stood up and waved. And then came an ending even better than cheeseburgers:

“And right next to him, my friend ROGER PARADISO! He has nothing to do with the movie! He's just a businessman! Stand up and take a bow Roger!”

And he did. And 1100 people applauded wildly. And I had accidentally stumbled upon the absolutely perfect end to the absolutely perfect week: Roger Paradiso receiving a rousing ovation from 1100 strangers in a giant theater in Salt Lake City.

And lastly...

The Director's Guild of America allows a director to take a possessive credit on a movie. "A film by..." and then the director's name. It is optional. I understand the credit and I respect it, but I have never felt right taking it. I've said this before, and I'll say it again: Making a movie is like painting a giant billboard with a 100-foot brush held by a hundred people. It is an art form that has collaboration baked deep inside its DNA.

So, too, the Sundance experience. Without friends and loved ones present, there is no context. Without you all, it becomes the proverbial tree falling silently in a forest. So thank you to all who attended, and to all of you who rooted us on from afar.

I appreciate it and you more than you can possibly understand.

Rob