

50 MPH: EPISODE 17

“THE PASSENGERS OF BUS 2525”

Transcript (01:52:36)



KRIS TAPLEY

This is *50 MPH*!

[INTRO MUSIC]

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Pop quiz, hotshot!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

There’s a bomb on a bus.

JEFF DANIELS (as “Harry Temple”)

You’re deeply nuts, you know that?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

Once the bus goes fifty miles an hour, the bomb is armed.

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

If it drops below fifty...

SANDRA BULLOCK (as “Annie”)

Stay on or get off?!

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

...it blows up.

ALAN RUCK (as “Stephens”)

Oh, darn.

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

You have a hair trigger aimed at your head. What do you do?

DENNIS HOPPER (as “Howard Payne”)

What do you do?!

KEANU REEVES (as “Jack Traven”)

What do you do?

KRIS TAPLEY

I’m your host, Kris Tapley, and you’re listening to an oral history of director Jan de Bont’s 1994 summer blockbuster, *Speed*, straight from the people who made it happen. Now, don’t forget to fasten your seatbelts. Let’s hit the road!

KRIS TAPLEY

Welcome back folks, and settle in, because it's going to be a party in here today. That was a nice breather with Nick de Semlyen last week and I hope you enjoyed it, because I think it's a breather you'll need. As you can tell, this is a long episode today. We are very shortly going to jump into the deep end of production on *Speed*, but before we get to all of that, let me take a moment to thank everyone for all the love these last four months. I hope this crazy journey is hitting the mark for you, and if indeed it is, and if you're so inclined, do drop us a five-star review. They go a long way. And thanks for the emails as well. Hit me up any time at kris – that's kris with a “k,” k-r-i-s at 50mphpodcast.com. Now, as we've plowed through the development of *Speed*, I think we've done a decent job of setting up the major players. We've got our director. We've got our stars. We've got our villain. But *Speed* is unusual in the action movie fray, for a number of reasons, but chief among them is the fact that it's an ensemble movie. And I think it's high time we met that ensemble. So, today, we're going to get to know the passengers of bus 2525. All of them. This particular element of the film actually represents the origin story of *50 MPH*. Let me explain. Nine years ago, on the occasion of the film's 20th anniversary in 2014, I was writing for a site called HitFix.com and I wanted to do something special for the movie. My first thought was a basic story with Jan de Bont and Keanu Reeves and Sandra Bullock looking back, but then I thought I would bite off a massive chunk and see if I could chew it. I decided track down all of the actors who were on that bus and write an oral history of the film from their perspective. Of the 18 people on the bus, not including Keanu and Sandra, two had already passed away. One I was not able to connect with at the time, though I have since. It was an awesome story and got a lot of love and traction and it stuck in the back of my mind as something I might revisit one day. And so, here we are, almost a decade later doing this every week. As I set about creating this podcast, I circled back to all of them again. So, I now have multiple interviews with some of these folks and you'll be hearing a mixture of them today. I just want to note, the two I never spoke with because they were no longer with us were Jim Mapp and Paula Montes. You will, however, hear about them from others today. Two others have passed away in the interim, Milton Quon and Simone Gad. You'll hear their voices today and I'm happy for that. So, let's dig in and start with our fearless director, Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

The people on the bus, it was really important how it's so mixed a group of people they were. They fit it so well. And I wanted to kind of sense that, you know, there was a lot of variety in cultures that you have in LA. I just didn't want it to be like going to Central Casting and give me, like, 15 generic bus passengers. I love that mixture of people because that, to me, is what LA is. It's a little bit of a cliché, a melting pot, but it is. It really is a melting pot.

KRIS TAPLEY

You're going to hear some glowing assessments of one Sandra Bullock today. Let's hear from her briefly, and remember, this is 10-year-old, crappy cell phone audio, but I think it's important to include this.

SANDRA BULLOCK

The reason that film worked was because of every face and actor you saw on that bus. Because there was not one false casting note in those people. The reason that film worked, I think, is because they genuinely reflected LA. That you genuinely felt that these people would find each other on a bus, and their level of acting. They were the ones that I really sold the premise and made the movie so good. It could have been so ridiculous with the outcome, but instead, it felt really real and gritty and fresh.

KRIS TAPLEY

And finally, before we start hearing from these folks, here is casting director Risa Bramon Garcia to really set up what the goal was here and what the challenges were in achieving it.

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

You know, the idea was to have this population of people who became, like, this bus family, which I loved, and that's another reason why I enjoy working with Jan. We had the same thing in *Twister*. It was, like, we're creating this family of people who invest in each other and who the audience can invest in. And, I mean, the people on the bus, not all of them, people like Simone Gad, for example. She was so specific and so great to her role. Every actor on that bus had to bring real character and life to the story, so, they had to be not only idiosyncratic and specific, you know, they had to be full-bodied humans with lots of stuff going on. And so, we cast up in a couple of places. Like, putting someone like Alan Ruck. Thank God he was in it. He was great. You know, he brought a lot to it. But we needed actors, and I remember the studio was saying, like, "Why do you need actors for this? Why don't you just have extras?" And it was, like, a big fight to explain once you establish these people on this bus, and that bus is closed, you can't take people away or add people. They are there for the duration, which also spoke to a challenge that came from the studio, because – this is so interesting, and I think it speaks to where we are, how far we've come and the new challenges we have – is that when they first saw the dailies of the people on the bus, I got the call that said, "OK, there's a bunch of people on the bus who are not attractive and they're all different ethnicities and, like, we need to change the people out on the bus." They wanted more

attractive people and, without saying it, more white people. I said, “Has anybody ever taken a bus in Los Angeles?” Jan was furious because it wasn’t the concept that we had. The concept we had was for reality. Like, this should feel like real people on a bus, full of interesting characters, full of all different, you know, diversity, full of all different kinds of humans, you know, characters. That was the goal, and it was very, very carefully thought through, and then, for the studio to want, like, less of that, not only was that, like, inaccurate, but it’s quite the opposite now. Now the mandate is our casts need to reflect our world and be more diverse, and that’s the right thing to do. I think the ultimate reason why they gave up on it was because they had already shot a couple of days and we couldn’t go back. Like, once they saw people on the bus, it was a big reaction, but then they kept shooting, you know, while the reaction was happening, so, like, two or three days are in the can. That would mean going back and shoot – the cost of reshooting it all, they were grumpy and, you know, they went back to the place of, “Nobody is going to watch this movie anyway so who cares?” You know? Like, it was such a strange thing and I was like, “How are they saying this?” At the end of the day, it was not only correct, but it was necessary.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, and with that, let’s meet them. We might as well start with the driver, right? The character of Sam was played by Hawthorne James, a striking figure you might have seen in films like *The Five Heartbeats*, *Seven* and *Heaven’s Prisoners*. I’ll let him lead the way for everyone talking about the audition process, and again, you’re about to meet 16 new people. I’m going to guide you through it as best I can. Here’s Hawthorne James.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

The audition was no script, no nothing. I came in, Jan de Bont was there and one of the casting directors was there, and had me sit in front of them and they said, “Do an improv about you finding out you’re the bus driver and there’s a bomb on your bus.” And so, I just sat there and I did the improv of me, you know, finding out there was a bomb on the bus for maybe a minute and that was it. And Janny came over to me, and my hair was long, like in the film, and it was down that day. And he just touched my hair and he said, “Don’t cut your hair.” And I said, “Oh, OK,” and that was the end of it. And then about a month went by and I called my agent. I said, “Well, what’s happening with this movie, *Speed*?” And she called them up and they asked, “He hasn’t cut his hair yet, has he?” And I told her no and that was the end of that and another month or so goes by and same thing, “He hasn’t cut his hair, has he?” “Nope.” And then I get the call, they offered me a contract. And that’s how I got into *Speed*. Good hair and a good audition.

KRIS TAPLEY

I discovered while doing this, by the way, that some folks tend to call Jan “Janny.” Super cute. Alright, we’ll kind of make our way from the front of the bus all the way back. I’m sure the most recognizable face on that bus is Alan Ruck, who recently received a much-deserved Emmy nomination for his work in HBO’s *Succession*. Alan plays Stephens in the film, the tourist who finds himself getting more than he bargained for on this particular trip to Los Angeles. At the time, he was best-known for his role as

Cameron, opposite Matthew Broderick in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, but he's of course since gone on to star in lots of film and TV, including Jan's *Speed* follow-up *Twister* and a show I used to love, *Spin City*. Here's Alan's perspective.

ALAN RUCK

People say funny stuff to me, like, "How do you pick your projects?" And I'm like, "Usually, it's when I go in and I audition and they say, 'Yeah, we want you to do this part.'" Then, then, that's how I picked my project. It's not like people call up and say, "Hi, there's these seven movies we'd like you to consider and what would you like to do?" I mean, I'm not – I've never been at that level. So, a lot of people have kind of a skewed perception of how it really works for most actors. There have been some things I've worked on that I've known from the beginning, "This is – this is crap. But I need a job and I'm ill-equipped to do anything else in this world." So, you know. But I didn't feel that way about *Speed*. I thought it was a fun idea.

KRIS TAPLEY

Next up, the life of the party. Beth Grant is a very recognizable actor. She starred as Helen in the film, the woman who tries to get off the bus and gets blown away. You might have seen her in *Rain Man*, *A Time to Kill*, *Donnie Darko*, *No Country for Old Men* – I mean, go to her IMDb page and scope out her reel there. You'd be surprised how often she turns up. She's an Alabama girl, so, as a southern boy myself, I just love her. Here's Beth Grant.

BETH GRANT

When I first heard about it, I wasn't even going to audition for it. I said, "A bus? An action-adventure about a bus?" And Don Mancini, the guy that created *Child's Play*, Chucky, was a dear friend of mine, and he said, "Beth, I'm telling you, this is going to be huge." And he believed from the very beginning. I guess he had read the script. He said, "This is going to be huge. Get over there." My audition was at Fox, and he said, "Get over there."

KRIS TAPLEY

Beth goes way back with the late director Joel Schumacher, by the way. She starred in *Flatliners*, which Jan de Bont also shot – I guess there's a Bill Hader *Popstar* reference in there – and she would later star in *A Time to Kill*. Schumacher actually offered Beth a role in *The Client* as well, opposite Susan Sarandon, and she had to choose between that or *Speed*.

BETH GRANT

And the dates conflicted and I called and I said, "Can't you and Jan work this out? Y'all are friends. This is your DP!" And I begged him and he said that they would try, but it didn't work out. And I had to choose and so I chose *Speed*. I know I was going to be working with Anthony LaPaglia and I was like, "Ooooh." He was very hot at the time. I hated giving that up!

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, also up front in the bus there, right behind Sam – and also someone who appeared in *Flatliners*, funnily enough – was Natsuko Ohama. Like a few of these folks, Natsuko's role, Mrs. Kamino, was at one point a little bit bigger than what ended up on the screen. That's why you'll note some of these characters have actual names and others are bus passenger number this and that. Now, like a few of the actors in *Speed*, Natsuko is a theatrical actor, and there's a fun connection to Keanu Reeves that I'll get to in a bit. For now, here's Natsuko.

NATSUKO OHAMA

I'm a terrible judge of material, especially in what works well or what would be popular or what's unusual. I admit to that. Like, if you give me the material, I can do it, but in terms of judging projects – and maybe you find that with other actors – we make weird choices. Because it's not really my thing. I'm not, like, a producer-director-writer person. So, my friends were kind of excited by the idea. Like I would just casually say, you know, "There's this thing." They would say, "That sounds really fun!" And I would go, "OK. OK. I guess so." They had never heard anything like that before. It was very unusual. So, it was like that. You know, I was sort of convinced out of other people's opinion, which I'm quite willing to take. You know, a lot of us actually had a theatrical background. You know, we came from the theater. And so, that's the kind of person that you get that's really willing to work as an ensemble and, you know, grateful to be in a film and, you know, we're really good at what we do. You know, we're working actors, really seriously sort of middle-class working actors that just supported each other, honestly.

KRIS TAPLEY

Speaking of theatrical actors, let's get to Carlos Carrasco, who plays Ortiz in the film. He's the guy Jack Traven calls "Gigantor" out of the blue. As you'll find, Carlos actually has a mixture of emotions about this movie. Here he is.

CARLOS CARRASCO

Thinking back about *Speed* and my participation in it is a complicated memory. It's also a bittersweet memory because when you're a character actor, you know, you work in the trenches for years and years and years and you don't often get a shot at getting out of the trenches. And when *Speed* first came along, I read it, I found it amazingly exciting. I thought it was an awesome page-turner, you know, and I went to the auditions and so forth. I had my meetings and then I got cast, and cast and negotiated and everything on the basis of the first script.

KRIS TAPLEY

Put a pin in that for now. Let's move on to David Kriegel, who played Terry. I don't even think you ever hear his name in the movie but he's the young guy with the super 1994 haircut. Here's David.

DAVID KRIEDEL

It just makes me chuckle. Every time that damn movie comes up it is, "Who the hell would have thought that when we were making this stupid movie on a bus that it would

become a cultural icon?" I don't know, I was pretty fortunate in my career to have some really unique experiences that transcended what most films do. The first movie I did was a movie called *Alive* and, you know, it's a similar thing where it was 15 young guys just starting out, literally trapped on a mountain for three months. You know, those guys are still my buddies, and that's not the experience that a lot of my friends have, and it's also those experiences that made it more OK for me when I decided to walk away from it, because I had had such great and unique experiences that I felt really fulfilled, and at that time it was, you know, the choices that I had to make were, you know, easy to make, because I didn't long for a lot in my career as an actor, and *Speed's* a big part of that.

KRIS TAPLEY

And then, the final sort named character was Ray, played by Daniel Villarreal. This is the guy who pulls out the gun and tells them to stop the bus because he thinks Jack is there to arrest him. Here's Daniel.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

I got the script through my agent and then I auditioned for it. And when I went in to read, I was a guy with a video camera going to USC. And then I ended up being, you know, the bad guy with the gun, you know? I remember, you know, going in a couple of times to read and then some time went by and then I got a call that, would I be interested in playing that other character, and I was, like, "Sure." But I definitely did not have any kinds of feelings about, like, changing characters or my lines or anything like that, you know? I was just glad to be a part of it.

KRIS TAPLEY

The USC student he auditioned for was actually Terry, by the way, and that aspect of the character would change dramatically. And the character of Ray would actually bubble up out of necessity. But I'll get to that in a minute as well. Let's move on to Bus Passenger #1, played by Simone Gad. This is the woman with the cat-eye glasses, very recognizable in the movie. I first spoke to Simone nine years ago and then again in February of 2021. Simone passed away basically three weeks after that last interview. She was more than an actor. She was also an artist and one of the most singular people I've ever met. Just a nice lady, very committed and a pleasure to speak to. Here's Simone Gad.

SIMONE GAD

Since I'm a very specific type as an actress, it's harder to get roles. I've always had a more difficult time with it in being a little different, or a lot different, you know, and eccentric. It's been a blessing and a curse, in a sense. That's why I've always had a dual career and I'm an exhibiting artist in museums and galleries. So, my agent called me and told me I had an audition for *Speed*, and so, I drove to 20th Century Fox and met Billy Hopkins, who was the original casting director, and he had me read a scene from the movie and do an improv as well. And then he gave me an adjustment, and during the reading and the improv, I started crying and he really liked it. Then three weeks later I got a call from my agent saying that I got a call back and had to go back.

And the callback audition was for Jan de Bont and Mark Gordon and Risa Bramon Garcia. So, I did an improv with all three of them and Jan de Bont told me he liked my glasses, which was really ironic because I've always worn vintage glasses. I'm very nearsighted and I can't wear contacts so I came to this realization many years ago that since I'm going to have to wear glasses I may as well wear what I want and what I like and what suits me, which is cat-eye glasses.

KRIS TAPLEY

Right on, Simone. Next up, Bus Passenger #2, played by Loretta Jean Crudup. This is the older Black lady sort in the middle of the bus with her husband, played by the late Jim Mapp. Loretta Jean is a trip. Big, beautiful personality, and rather than give you a quick sound bite I think I'll just let her talk to you for a bit and tell you her story. So, pull up a chair.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

I worked for the department of employment and I had worked there for – well when I retired, was 22 and a half years. And I got a call from my best friend; her name was Doris. She said, "Loretta, I don't know what this is all about but a friend of mine just called me looking for a Black grandmother," and I'm at my desk with two men sitting at my desk and I'm just listening and it had to have been quick. And she said, "I told her all about you," because I have a very outgoing – I'm very talkative, very outgoing and a comedian – person. It was Nancy Chavez, who was the most precious agent. She owned NCA, which is Nancy Chavez Associates. So, I called her. I said, "My name is Loretta," and she said, "Oooh! I've heard so much about you. I've got to meet you!" She said, "I'm in casting." Now, casting what? Casting a line to catch fish or what, you know? So, "I have an audition for you, Loretta. Can you come?" And so, I didn't know what auditions were, so I said yeah. So, she told me what they were, it was for a bank, and what to wear and to bring, so, where to go, so, we went there and I was chosen! And everything that she sent me to, in the beginning, bam, bam, the lottery, I was chosen. The commercial, bank, I was chosen. A music video with Chris Rock, I was chosen. Boy, I mean, I was hot! I didn't even know what I was doing, Kris!

KRIS TAPLEY

I just didn't think I would do any better justice setting her and her story up than that. Now, here is Loretta Jean recalling the audition for *Speed*.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

Jim, who played my husband, they said, "Jim, can you wait and audition with Loretta Jean?" And he said yes. So, there was about seven men sitting on a floor and they had us up on, like, a shoeshine stand with two seats. And we got up there with their direction and he said, "This is what I want you to do." That was the big boss. And he said, "I want you to pretend that you're getting ready to die and you're on your way to visit grandchildren and this is your final, final time, hours together, and I want you to go ahead and talk." And we looked at each other and I start talking. He was very quiet. I basically pushed him to talk, Jim. He was a very quiet person and I pushed everything out of him. And I said, "You know, I love you. We've been married for so long." I'm just

kind of ad-libbing. I don't even know if these are the words, Kris. But I said, you know, "If this is the way we're going to go, we're together. I love you." And then he pushed something out to me: "I love you." And we're hugging. I'm hugging him. I'm touching and rubbing his face and I'm doing this, I'm doing it, and then pretty soon he said, "Cut!" And he said, "Thank you." And that was it. And the next thing I knew, Nancy was calling me to let me know I got it!

KRIS TAPLEY

I mean, come on. She's awesome. Then there was a sort of gaggle of girlfriends at the very back of the bus. The first is Sherri Villanueva, and she was credited as Bus Passenger #3, as opposed to Additional Bus Passenger number such and such. There's actually a reason for that. As she'll explain later in the episode, she originally had a line of dialogue and that stipulated the contract she had, but that line was ultimately cut. Anyway, here is Sherri, this is the one that I wasn't able to connect with at the time when I wrote that 20th anniversary story. Thanks to Facebook, we finally connected.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

I was just out of school and I went and I – it was the first audition I ever got. I didn't know anything about it. They didn't send us sides. They just said it's going to be like a reading. We're just going to – they'll just tell us what to do when we get there. And when I got there, I could overhear them, like, auditioning for the elevator part, and when I went in there, they said, "We're going to do something different." It was two of the producers and it was Maggie Murphy, she was one of the ADs, and they just had me do an impromptu, improv audition on the bus. I think they just wanted to see, like, my range or something, because they gave me the scenario of a homeless woman on the bus and she stole my purse and then "take it from there." That was it. And then the lady from the agency, she called me and said I got it and I needed to show up at 20th Century Fox the next day for a wardrobe fitting. And I was, like, so surprised. Like, "Oh my God! I'm so happy!"

KRIS TAPLEY

Next up we have Marylou Lim. Marylou has gone on to become a costumer in the business, which she'll discuss. But here's her memory of landing the role of Additional Bus Passenger #8 in *Speed*.

MARYLOU LIM

Basically, you call in the hotline, and I just heard the hotline asking for, you know, an audition for a young girl. I think it was more they wanted the ethnicity, too. Girls of ethnicity. So, I went to the audition and they were like, "Oh, you know, pretend you're on a bus with some friends on your way to school and/or a friend's house and all of a sudden, something is going on the bus and just let out a couple of screams," and blah, blah, blah. So, I was like, "OK. This sounds really odd, but alright." And that was it, you know? And the very next day I get the phone call from the casting agency that I had booked it and I was excited about that, not really knowing that it was an actual full movie, you know, with Keanu Reeves.

KRIS TAPLEY

Rounding out that trio of girlfriends back there was Carmen Williams, Additional Bus Passenger #4. Here's what she remembers of the audition.

CARMEN WILLIAMS

I think they were looking for some reactions, like being really scared, showing some fear and a little – I don't know what I said but I know I had some dialogue as well. It wasn't that I had to study for any lines. It was some improvisation stuff I had to do. I think they were really looking for a personality, and through that audition they hired me. I was just really flabbergasted. I was like, "Wow. I'm going to be on TV?" You know, I'm someone, at that time, I was new out here. I was from Missouri, Kansas City, Missouri. Farms, cows, chickens and things like that. Totally not a city girl. Kind of like a country girl, growing up very sheltered and protected, didn't go to parties, didn't see anything. So, here I am working on a movie?

KRIS TAPLEY

OK, this next guy, I don't have a ton of material with him because our interview was short and sweet, but after all, when I interviewed him nine years ago, he was already 100 years old. I don't know how many people realize that there was a tenured Disney animator on that bus, but artist Milton Quon, who plays Additional Bus Passenger #2, worked on cinema classics like *Fantasia* and *Dumbo*. Later in life, he would do extra work on stuff like *Speed*. He passed away in 2019 at the age of 105, and what can you say to that other than well done? Here's what Milton recalled of his *Speed* audition when we spoke.

MILTON QUON

The thing I remember, too, is that there were a lot of people, Chinese men like me, trying out for the part. I was waiting in line at the casting place. I had just turned 80 at that time, I think. We were all sitting there waiting our turn. Then finally it came to be my turn and what they told you to do is, you know, there's a bus – a runaway bus or something, and you're going to run up to the driver and say somebody's next to the bus and threatening the passengers, or something like that. And so, I went up there and made up the words. "There's somebody out there!" Blah, blah, blah. And so, then I was sketching the next day at Santa Monica airport, and then when I got home – I sketched practically every day in those days – and so, when I got home, my wife was waiting at the curb and she said, "You got the part!" I said, "Oh yeah?" So, they had to go down to Screen Actors – SAG – and pay \$1,200 or something, because you had to become a union member in order to participate.

KRIS TAPLEY

Milton did a number of sketches and watercolors while he was waiting behind the scenes on *Speed*, by the way, and I'll be sure to share them at our website. My appreciation to his daughter, Sherrill, for those. Moving on for now, we're in the home stretch, on introductions anyway. Let's hear from Sonia Jackson, who played Additional Bus Passenger #3. This was the businesswoman with a briefcase toward the middle of

the bus. Sonia has a ton of credits. Just go look her up. Most recently she had couple appearances on the series *Obi-Wan Kenobi*. Here's Sonia.

SONIA JACKSON

He wanted individuals that were strong in improv so that he could utilize people in whatever way he needed to. And he wanted a lot of people to be able to move from one place to another in terms of the type of thought you were having or how you were feeling about something, and so, mostly, he wanted to be able to have actors on the bus that would be able to do almost anything at any point in time. So, that was what I was hired for.

KRIS TAPLEY

Two more. Next up is Loyda Ramos, Additional Bus Passenger #6. Loyda had worked on television shows like *Cagney & Lacey* and *Knot's Landing*, as well as movies like *Three Amigos*. She's a lot of fun. Here's what Loyda recalls.

LOYDA RAMOS

I remember meeting with Jan and he's, like – I don't think I read for a particular role. He was like, "I'm putting an eclectic group of people together," you know? And so, I thought, "Well, I got a shot. I'm a minority, first of all," you know? So, you know, he was charming and we just had a good chat and he said, "I don't have any lines for you, but I will." Because I'm, like, "I don't want to do extra work," and he said "No, you know, it won't be that." So, it was really funny because I kept waiting for my lines when I got on set and they weren't coming, and they weren't coming, and then they came and they got cut! So, I was just, like, "Thanks for nothing!" You know? But it was still great just as far as, you know, having a gig. I think the gig was – it was long. I remember by the end people were just, like, "I want off."

KRIS TAPLEY

And finally, we'll wrap it up with Julia Vera, Additional Bus Passenger #7. She also had a thing or two to say about lines, which will make a good segue to the next section. Here's Julia.

JULIA VERA

It was a casting call and you get sides. I had very little to say because I'm supposed to be unable to speak English. And so, there was another gentleman, Carlos Carrasco, and so we had a couple of scenes that we did, but they were taken out. Everything that I did was taken out. And they left me one word. When he's talking about the big gap on the freeway and he's saying, you know, "Everybody hunker down," or whatever he says, and I go, "Que dice?" Like, "What is he saying?" Everybody gets a kick out of that. People for the longest time would look at me and say, "Que dice?" Yeah, I'm supposed to be a cleaning lady, you know, a housekeeper or something like that.

KRIS TAPLEY

OK, let's catch our breath. Take a sip of water. Stretch. Like I said, you literally just met 16 new people. And again, Jim Mapp, who sat next to Loretta Jean, and Paula Montes,

who sat in the very last seat of the bus, both passed away years ago. Now, you might have detected some feelings from some folks in there. You remember our episode about the big rewrite? It started with Paul Attanasio beefing up some of these roles and making other various changes that pissed everyone off. Then Joss Whedon came in and drastically overhauled his work. Well, I gather that the script everyone here read when they agreed to take on their roles was the Attanasio draft. So, you can imagine their reaction when they sat down, with production imminent, to read through the shooting draft. Let's get into it. Here's David Kriegel.

DAVID KRIEGEL

What's always interesting about that movie is the movie on screen that was such a big success was not at all the movie on paper that was initially pitched to us young, up-and-coming actors who were all going to be, you know, in this action summer movie. You know, we all had roles that were integral to the plotline, and the roles were basically crystalized into their most base forms so that you had this bus filled with archetypical characters that people could relate to.

KRIS TAPLEY

Casting director Risa Bramon Garcia.

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

Now, he had big ideas for the people on the bus and everybody was supposed to have a backstory and they were supposed to do all these things. There was a lot of promises made, and I know that there were people who were frustrated or disappointed, because I would get the calls from their agents or managers going, "So, they're sitting around for days and days and days on the bus like an extra. They're doing nothing, so this is a waste." And I would just say, "They're not getting paid like an extra. And they're being shot and they're featured and I'm seeing it in the dailies, and so you're just going to have to trust that they're part of the tapestry of this film in a very significant way." But it was hard for them.

KRIS TAPLEY

Simone Gad.

SIMONE GAD

I was hired as a principal actress from the very beginning. I played a librarian, yeah. Several of us were hired as principal union actors from the very beginning. Yeah, we were supposed to have bigger roles and I don't know what happened.

KRIS TAPLEY

Carlos Carrasco.

CARLOS CARRASCO

Actually, I come from a history of, like, activism. I lived in New York for 15 years before I ever moved to Los Angeles, so by the time I ever got to LA, I was already a middle-aged character actor, and, you know, the opportunities and the potential for breaking

through to the higher levels are far more limited. And then on top of that, you toss the whole business about being an ethnic actor. So, when I got that role, I was just beyond thrilled, because it was a substantial role. It was a showcase role. It was a positive ethnic role-model role. It was a hero role. I have a long history of playing bad guys and, you know, beating up the old lady and getting the drugs across the border and stuff like that. And I just thought, “Wow, this is great. This is going to be fabulous, and also holds the potential of elevating several careers to the next level.” And that’s the head that I went into that project with. And then about a week and a half or maybe not even that long – by about the third or fourth session that we got the cast together, you know, we all showed up and they said, “Hey, very exciting day today. Today we’re going to read our new rewrites and it’s just thrilling. It’s going to be very exciting. Here are the new scripts. And everybody, let’s buckle down and read.” And so, we did, and I remember sitting in that room and pages turning and pages turning and pages turning and looking around the table and just really feeling all of the air going out of the room. Like a tire slowly, slowly leaking out all its air. Because what had started out as an ensemble piece disappeared. And all of our parts on the bus disappeared.

KRIS TAPLEY

Beth Grant.

BETH GRANT

There was a shared terror, I would say, that, “Oh my God, where are our parts?” I wanted to quit. I was the hero in the first draft. When I signed on, first of all, it never occurred to me that we would be shooting on a live freeway, ever. I thought they would use CGI. I mean, I was very naïve, I guess, but that’s what I thought. I thought we would shoot at the studio, you know, it would be green screen stuff. So, that was a shock. But anyway, we – it was the Friday before we started shooting on Tuesday. It was Labor Day weekend, and as far as I knew we did not yet have Sandy’s part. We didn’t have our Annie yet. I had actually been rooting for a friend of mine to get the part, because it was written that she was a stand-up comedian and that she had had a show the night before and I had just gotten engaged and I went to her show and I had a little dog on the bus.

CARLOS CARRASCO

Essentially, we were just raked out of the script and, you know, became, like, all these people in the back of the bus screaming and yelling. And for me, personally, when I saw what was left – yes, there’s that initial actor reaction of, like, “Oh, how many lines do I have?” You know? But for me it was a little deeper than that because I think my part after the rewrite was down to about five lines, three of which I found offensive, because this hero character had been sort of reverted to, you know, the stereotype guy and, you know, bad language again and just, like, you know, like another big, lumbering, Latino idiot. And I thought, “Well, good God, that’s not what I was looking forward to doing.”

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

We probably made some mistakes in, OK, here’s the stereotype guy, the gangbanger guy or the guy who’s dangerous. I know they were frustrated with it, but I know that Jan

was open to having conversations about it. But again, I knew this only by getting calls from their reps or from the actors if I knew the actors to say, “This is not OK.”

KRIS TAPLEY

Regarding all of that, here's Hawthorne James providing some context about something that would actually reverberate through the rewrite.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

Originally, the bus driver had a heart attack when he found out that they had a bomb on the bus, and he died on the bus. Well, when I got the script, I told them, “No, I don’t want to do this.” As a matter of fact, I actually turned the script down twice. I turned the film down twice and they came back and they offered me more money and stuff like that. Immediately what I thought of was Redd Foxx in Sanford & Son. “Oh, lordy, here I is. I having a heart attack.” You know, “Here I come, Elizabeth.” And that was something that bothered me, because being the only Black man on the bus with a major role – you’ve got Sandra, who is heroic, and you have Keanu, who is heroic, and the Latino guy who’s being heroic, and here you have the Black man who’s scared to death and dies. I said, “Nah, that ain’t going to work for me. I can’t do that.” And they changed the script. They rewrote it so that the bus driver got shot. Well, that cost me two weeks’ worth of salary, because if I had had the heart attack, I’d have still been on the bus and I’d have had an extra two weeks of salary. But that doesn’t matter to me. It’s about the integrity of who I am as a Black man, because film and television represents, goes around the world, and people think they know who you are by film and television. I couldn’t do it.

KRIS TAPLEY

So, that did two notable things. Here's what it meant for Beth and her character.

BETH GRANT

And I’m the one that gave him CPR, and then, when the flatbed comes by to try to rescue him, I volunteer to be the first one off, to sort of test the waters. That’s how brave I am. So, I go from a total hero, a hero’s death, to the whiny coward that you can’t wait to see die.

KRIS TAPLEY

And here's what it meant for Carlos.

CARLOS CARRASCO

I continue to dislike the moment where, for no conceivable reason, Ortiz decides to tackle the kid with the gun. I remember when I read that – because that was part of the rewrite – and I remember reading that and going, “Oh, no. That’s, like, a stupid thing to do.” I mean, that kind of demeans the whole character or lessens him, takes away from him. Especially when originally, you know, you had seen that it was a hero guy, a thinking guy, smart. To me, literally, that is one of those – you know, the classic actor-director conflict, you know, it’s like, “Well, my character wouldn’t do that!” But, you know,

I didn't have the real estate, you know, to face off with Jan and go, "Well, my character wouldn't do that."

KRIS TAPLEY

So, you start to see how this was a domino effect and how it all led to the need for someone to have a gun on that bus. Well, there are fair feelings about that as well. And again, different interviews across different years, so bear with me on the audio.

CARLOS CARRASCO

When they did the rewrite, they brought Danny on board. Good for Danny. He got to be in a big hit movie. But they brought him on as the gang-banger from East LA, you know, "Hey, stop the bus, mang. I'm going to shoot you. Stop the bus." You know, it's like, "Yeah, OK, fine." You know, "Blame it on the Latinos." You know, stuff like that.

KRIS TAPLEY

Getting back to those various backstory elements, here's Hawthorne James again.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

In the original script, it's like, my character had a scene or two in the bus yard, which was all cut out. I mean, it was all background about who the major characters on the bus were. And, yeah, you know, it would have been nice to have that, you know? But ultimately you realize it's not necessary.

KRIS TAPLEY

And back to David Kriegel.

DAVID KRIEGEL

It was more – probably more of an ensemble as the original script, where everyone sort of came onboard this bus and, you know, gradually they found out about their different talents or backgrounds and used them collectively to sort of solve this problem. And I think, you know, a movie gets too dissipated if there's too many things going on, and so they started kind of focusing it down more and more. I mean, I don't know, what, I was 24 and getting paid to sit on a bus all day and be a part of a giant movie. You'd have to be an idiot to complain about that shit.

CARLOS CARRASCO

All I'm saying is when I first read the script – I'm going to give you a reference. You know a movie – have you ever seen a movie called *Lifeboat*? The original script, to me, read like *Lifeboat*. And I thought, "OK, wow, that's what we're going to do. We're going to do *Lifeboat* on a bus." And then that's not what we did. And it was very distressing for everybody, because everybody just sort of was confronted with this decision of, like, "Oh, oh we got cast as principles and now we're all extras. What does that mean? What do you do?" I spoke to my agent. I said, "This is very upsetting. I don't know what to do. Never mind the reduction in the role and everything, but now it's reverted to the kind of stereotype that I was looking forward to not playing." And I seriously, seriously contemplated leaving the project. My agent said, "Well, is there anybody that you can

discuss this with? Is there anybody you can voice these concerns?" I said, "Who? I mean, I don't know anybody. I'm just, you know, the new guy signed on." I also was new to Los Angeles at that point. I had only been here about two years or so. So, I did the next best thing. I went in and I spoke to the director, Jan, and I told him, you know, I said, "Listen, I'm upset, and I don't really know if I want to spend a couple of months just on something that I've lost my belief in terms of what it portrays and what it shows for my people." And he was very sympathetic. And in that conversation, he said, "Look, all I can tell you is that we're going to be shooting with many, many cameras, multiple cameras, and I give you my word that I will do everything that I can to fix it." And I said, "Well, I don't know you but, you know, you strike me as a man of your word and I guess I'm just going to have to take you up on that."

BETH GRANT

When I wanted to quit, he said, "Don't quit. I'm going to shoot this like a European film and we're going to get reactions, facial, lots of close-ups, lots of reactions. It's going to be ground in reality. All the costumes, everything is going to be browns, dark greens, you know, muted colors, because we've got this big, blue bus. All of the acting is going to be very real and all of the colors of the people on the bus." Because he wanted – that was his thing. Make it super-real. Obviously, Jan had a lot going on, and he said, "Please, don't do this. You'll see. I'm going to get a lot of coverage." He said, "We just had too many heroes. We needed a coward." And he compared me to Richard Chamberlain in *The Towering Inferno*. And I said, "OK. OK." Because I just – I'm a person, I do what I say I'm going to do. I'm not someone that – I've been fired, but I don't usually quit!

KRIS TAPLEY

And here, again, is Jan de Bont.

JAN DE BONT

And I really told them, "Listen, I mean, it's a lot of sitting on the bus, but, you know, it's very important and meaningful that you're there." Because all the characters have a role to play. Reactions are as important as the dialogue. The right expression can create such a different level of presence, a different level of danger and excitement. Action movies, there is always a danger of too much dialogue. And Frankenheimer, also, was really good at that. Whole scenes, five, six minutes, eight minutes, no dialogue at all, but there was a lot of story to see.

KRIS TAPLEY

OK, let's branch out a bit. Here is Sherri Villanueva.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

See, I didn't know. I thought I got a part. And then, as it turned out, I didn't have a part. And then it turned out I was a featured extra on there. Then, I can't remember who told us. One of the ADs said, "Well, you are going to get a part, but we just don't know when and where yet." So, we were always kind of, like, on standby, like, "OK." So, I finally did get a part and I remember Jan came up to me and he said, you know, "I'm going to

have you do a scene where you're crying right before you go over the gap." So, he did, and I was so excited because it finally came. I was, like, wondering, like, what? When? And so – and I was like, "OK, what do you want me to do? What do you want me to say?" And he said, "I want you to say, 'I want to go home.'" He goes, "I want you to cry and I want you to say that you want to go home." So, I did. And then, when it did finally premiere, I was there and, no part. It got cut out!

KRIS TAPLEY

And Marylou Lim.

MARYLOU LIM

I think it was only, like, \$175 a day, if that. Maybe \$100? It was pennies compared to what – because I know now, being a costumer, I know what background people are getting paid versus a featured and versus a stunt guy. So, I think, as an actor, once you get a line, they give you your own contract. So, that's what happened with the two that got the lines. Sherri, I think, got the line, and Loretta.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's hear from Julia Vera again.

JULIA VERA

I didn't know enough to stand up for myself, because that was my first big movie. But when I had those speaking lines, I should have insisted on getting paid as a supporting actress. Well, it turns out that they put me only as a featured, but with no lines, like, as if you had no lines. Even though with my last word, I didn't know they were going to leave that in the movie until I saw the movie. It said, "Que dice?" Then I thought, "Wow, I should have charged for that." I did say something to the script lady, and the script lady said, "Yes, I made a note of that." So, they kind of, they just, to save a couple of dollars, they dismissed it.

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

Some of them wouldn't have done it if they knew what they were getting into. It's like the same as the Twister cast, who sat around for months waiting for tornados in the Midwest. A lot of those people would not have done it, you know, had they known that. Although, looking back, once the movie is successful, it's like, "Oh, no, no, no. I'm thrilled to be a part of it and I'm thrilled that I actually got paid for it and that it's on their resume and that I'm part of the history of that," you know? But, in the moment, people signed up for something they didn't really expect, I'm sure.

KRIS TAPLEY

And here is Sonia Jackson.

SONIA JACKSON

To me, you just never know what's going to end up on the screen and what's not. I never thought it was going to be a bigger role. I had hoped, and they had said that might

happen, but, no. You know, when they say stuff and it's not on paper, I just have found that it's best sometimes to wait until it's on paper before you get attached to something.

DAVID KRIEGEL

And listen, when I stand up on that bus and go, "So, you know, if you've got a family and I don't," I mean, that's just stupid. But for some reason it works and people remember it. You know, I think they found a way to cut to the shortest, almost soundbites of these stereotypes of humanity so that everyone could sort of be, like, "Oh I get that. I get that." And they moved on and you ate another handful of popcorn and, you know, a bus jumped across an opening in a freeway and a bad guy tried to blow us up and Keanu went on a skateboard at 80 miles an hour. I mean, you know, what's not fun about that?

CARLOS CARRASCO

When I did see the finished product I thought, "Well, OK." Because one thing that we all quickly learned, because there were so many cameras going all the time, is that, you know, just to be in it in every single take. There's never a time when you're thinking, "Oh, no, the camera isn't on me, so I can relax," you know? So, everybody was always on it, which actually provided him with a lot of coverage to mix and match with. And also, you know, there was a little bit of freedom of improvisation during the shooting, so, you know, every now and then one of the original lines snuck back in or whatever.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

I think everybody got their little moment in the sun. Everybody has that little special thing in there.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's let the producer, Mark Gordon, have the final say on all this backstory stuff.

MARK GORDON

There was no reason to tell their story, because we don't care. I mean, we care about them as a collective, not as individuals. And there's funny stuff. I mean, with very few lines, that group of actors, as an ensemble, were fucking amazing.

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, I want to go back to Beth Grant before we dip out of this section of acrimony and discontent, because she has this great story of being at that first read-through of the rewrite where not only was everyone confronted with their slashed parts, but they also finally met the actress who would play Annie.

BETH GRANT

And so, we go in Friday and we've got this new script, and I'd had great envy of Sandy, because we went to the same university, East Carolina University. And I had been in *Rain Man* and I had done, you know, a lot of stage and this and that, and she comes along, you know, this extraordinarily beautiful dancer, and she got on her own sitcom, and around that time they did an alumni booklet. And I had a perfectly nice picture and a

little article about me, but she got the center spread! So, I was like, “Ugh. After all these years in the trenches and then here she comes.” And then this friend of mine that I had done several press interviews with in North Carolina said, “Oh, have you met Sandra Bullock?” And I said, “No!” I don’t know if I said it like that, but that’s what I was thinking. And he said, “Oh, you’re going to love her. You two would get along. Let me give you her phone number. Y’all have got to get together. She thinks the world of you.” And I said, “Well, she doesn’t know me!” You know, but, by reputation or whatever. But I had the chip on my shoulder because I was envious of her and jealous of her for getting all that attention, and I’m hoping my friend gets the part. Jennifer Grey, that’s who I was rooting for. Jennifer Grey. So, we’re sitting there and we’re looking at this script, I’m looking at this script, and I say, “Where the hell is my part?” And then we’re waiting, we’re waiting, and then in comes Sandra Bullock, and I go, “Oh my God, it’s that woman from East Carolina!” And then she turns and she looks at me and she smiles that gorgeous smile, and I fell in love on the spot. It’s still uncanny to me. Very few people can win your heart that easily, especially when I had something on it, you know? Two things. I had my own jealousy and then I also had been rooting for Jennifer, so. But she sat down, we started talking about some teachers, professors that we had, and she did a great impersonation of one of our teachers. I was just in love. I was high as a kite, to meet her and to know that I’d be working with her.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alright, I think the suggestion box, as it were, is nice and packed and everyone has been heard. But we have our roles. It’s time to start building them a little bit through wardrobe and, in Hawthorne’s case, set decoration. Funnily enough, a lot of this was informed by their own life and style. Here’s Hawthorne.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

They came to me and they asked me about personal pictures that I would have as the bus driver on my bus, so I gave them two pictures of my stepdaughters. So, my stepdaughters are actually in the movie. You can see them above the visor. And there are a couple of times when they show them pretty good. And I gave them a picture of my dog, but we never get to see my dog. Yeah, I’m disappointed with that, because I really wanted to see Big Bear in the movie. But my stepdaughters are there. Matter of fact, two weeks ago, I talked to one of them and I asked, “Your children actually know that you were in a big-budget action movie, right?” And she said, “Oh yeah, they know. They see the pictures.” The pictures of them – Cara and Alana – as kids, and they’re on the visor of the bus.

KRIS TAPLEY

Back to Marylou Lim, who, remember, is a costumer in the business now.

MARYLOU LIM

I had no interest in costume design. I only had interest in fashion, though. I always wanted to be a fashion designer. So, therefore, I did dabble in that thought, but didn’t really know much about costume at that time, other than the shows I had done previously and I had seen the costume department and whatnot, but never really

thought about joining the union and working as a costumer or a costume designer. But it was on the bus when I started to notice, you know, the whole continuity effort, that we're, you know – we're wearing these clothes for a matter of two months, but in the movie, it all takes place in literally, you know, one day. So, just the thought of, like, "Oh my God, we're going to have to wear these costumes the whole entire movie. How boring. It's going to get stinky," and then I get, "Oh, they have multiples," so they had at least about 10 multiples of the dress that I wore and the shorts. And the Chuck Taylors were something that, when I went into the fitting, the costume designer asked, "Oh, are those – you know, do you like Chuck Taylors?" Because I was wearing them in the fitting. And I'm like, "Yeah, I love it," and she was like, "Oh, OK, we'll get you a couple of those for the show. Let's do that." So, you know, in essence, I added to my costume for the movie, you know, unknowingly.

KRIS TAPLEY

Here's Milton Quon with a similar story.

MILTON QUON

They looked at me and said, "Well, that looks like a good outfit for you to wear." I think I had a golf hat with a brim and a jacket and they said, "That looks good." So, wardrobe duplicated that outfit.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

I don't remember a read-through of the script before we started shooting, but I do know that they took Sandra and I out and taught us how to drive a bus. I want to say it was two days they actually took us out, and it was, like, in Santa Monica on the beach in the parking lot – in the beach parking lot and they actually let us drive a bus. And then, of course, we never drove a bus. Neither one of us drove a bus, but they just wanted us to have the experience of sitting behind the wheel and actually driving a real bus, and that was fun. That's when I first met Sandra. At that point, she was just another actress and she had the lead role in the movie. That's all I knew about her. She was not a known name of any type. But she was a really nice lady. She was very pretty and we were just having fun.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's hear again from Alan Ruck.

ALAN RUCK

They took us out for a little, just, like, "This is what it's going to feel like. We don't want anybody to be surprised." So, they took us out on the 105. So, we were sitting near the back and I was sitting with Keanu and they said, "OK." They told the stunt driver to basically give it some movement. So, it did kind of like, you know, like an avoidance S-pattern, really fast, with a bus. And it's like, "Wow, I've never felt that before!" And I looked over at Keanu and he said, "Yeah. Squirrely."

BETH GRANT

We get in buses to drive out to the freeway and I'm like, "What? What are we doing?" And we get out there and I think, "Oh, so they're going to shoot, like, one scene out there. You know, to get some exteriors or something." And then as we're talking, someone said, "No, we're shooting – this is where we're shooting the whole movie." And I remember I flushed, because of Mary, my baby – it never occurred to me. I just thought she'd be in my trailer. And realizing that she wasn't going to be able to come, and I started crying. And I wasn't sobbing or anything. I just had tears in my eyes and here it was my part was gone, we're going to be shooting on a freeway, I'm going to be a minimum of six weeks and why am I doing this movie?" And whatever comfort Sandy gave me, whatever it was she said to me, "I'll be with you." I don't know what she said. I thought, "Well, I've got her. I think Keanu looks great. She's going to be great. It'll be OK."

KRIS TAPLEY

Now, camaraderie is obviously key on a movie like this and an ensemble like this. Let me bring in Maggie Murphy on that point. Maggie was the second assistant director on the film. She worked closely with the first AD, David Sardi, who we'll meet next week. But I'm bringing her in here because she had a lot of contact and communication with the cast as David's second. Here's what she remembers of the group dynamic.

MAGGIE MURPHY

I mean, there wasn't a jerk to be found on that bus. There wasn't anybody that you went, "Oh, yeah, that pain in the ass." Because, you know, like, to be fair, they're actors, and actors can be tricky. But I also studied to be an actress, so, I have sympathy for the craft and putting yourself out there and being on camera and being in front of people. And so, I am pretty protective of them in terms of helping them get their job done and protect their privacy and stuff. But sometimes they can be tricky, and I would say that nobody on that bus was a problem that I can remember. I would have remembered.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

Everybody seemed to gel on that very first day, if I remember correctly. Everybody liked each other from the very get-go. So, there was a camaraderie from the very first day. And if you don't like each other, it would just have been miserable, and that's one of the things I always thought about, how miserable it could have been if we had one or two jackasses on the film.

KRIS TAPLEY

Casting director Risa Bramon Garcia.

RISA BRAMON GARCIA

And I think that was something that Mark and Jan wanted, was good people who were going to have the stamina and the generosity to go through this, because it's not going to be easy for anybody. There were no assholes.

KRIS TAPLEY

Sonia Jackson.

SONIA JACKSON

There's a lot of down time, so you had to like the people that you were around. And because we're so hot – so, you're sitting waiting, and they didn't necessarily take us back to base camp, so, often we kind of just, you know, waited on the bus. We had fun with each other. You know, you might think that you might not like one person or someone's giving other people a hard time. Everybody had fun.

ALAN RUCK

You know, generally, there's always one person who's kind of, like, the office dick, you know? And we didn't have that. We didn't have any selfish personalities. We didn't have any of that, especially not from our two stars. It was a joy to go to work every day.

KRIS TAPLEY

I just want to jump in a second. You know, I've often said when you do something like this, dedicate this kind of time to excavating something you love, you're in danger of ruining it for yourself. What if it turned out all of these people, or some of them, whatever, were assholes. The movie might be tainted for me. But as it turns out, and as you keep hearing, that wasn't the case. I guess for the purposes of a podcast, maybe you want conflict. Maybe you hope people are at each other's throats. I don't subscribe to that need and I just want to say one of my favorite aspects of this entire journey is how much I like all of these people. So, anyway, let's keep digging here. My goal as we go is to kind of immerse ourselves in the day-to-day of *Speed* from the perspective of these actors.

BETH GRANT

I remember I was reading a series of Agatha Christie mysteries and I spent a lot of time reading. I also spent a lot of time, you know, joking around with Sandy because we were stuck together. She was stuck with me and I had a lot of fun with her between takes, and at four o'clock we would always go and get a little chocolate. We would kind of wait during the day, but then there would always be that four o'clock lag. Because we would shoot – I would leave my baby in the valley 5:30 in the morning and it was about an hour drive. So, we shot 6:30 to 6:30, but I was gone 5:30 to 7:30, which you can imagine, a new mother, killed me.

KRIS TAPLEY

Julia Vera.

JULIA VERA

We were so beaten up towards the end of that. Eight weeks, honey. Eight weeks! Sun up to sun down.

KRIS TAPLEY

Simone Gad.

SIMONE GAD

Yeah, it was a very good group. Very professional. Very nice. And Daniel Villarreal, I've known Daniel since the '70s and '80s, from an artist Latino group called Asco, and so, I remember him from those early days, so it was a really fun surprise to work with him.

KRIS TAPLEY

Speaking of which, we haven't heard from Daniel in a minute. Here he is.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

They were long days, you know, at least 12-hour days, and, you know, we had to entertain ourselves. I did the crossword every day and they let me take pictures, so I was taking pictures, wandering off, you know, into different areas taking photos, because I'm a photographer. So, that was a lot of fun, you know, it's just like being about to sort of, like, make my own version of, you know, the movie. Spending time with Jan, you know, like, talking about photography – he gave me some books, you know, when we were shooting. He gave me these incredible photography books. A Japanese photographer, a Bolivian photographer, and then that guy, the Brazilian guy that became really famous. What's his name? Salgado? So, it was great. It was just, like, a very stimulating ride.

CARLOS CARRASCO

You would start a scene and a bus would take off down the highway, and by the time they yelled "cut," we'd be, you know, two miles away from base camp or something, and because movies are like this, they all have to get together and decide what to do next and whatever, and they'd forget about us. Well, I know they didn't forget about us, but they would leave us way out there on the bus, two miles away from base camp, while they decided what to do. And we're all on this bus trying to amuse ourselves and everything.

KRIS TAPLEY

Alan Ruck.

ALAN RUCK

You know, Simone Gad speaks French, so I said, "OK," I said – because Daniel Villarreal, you know, was supposed to pull a pistol and say, "Stop the bus! Stop the bus!" And so, I said, "OK, here's the trailer in French." And so, what we did was we had him say his lines in English but silently, just mouth the words, and then we had Simone fill in all the French, you know? I mean, just silly stuff like that.

SIMONE GAD

After eating our meals, we had breaks and Keanu would make a special brown rice with all these seasonings for us, and really – I loved it. I looked forward to it. And he would do it a lot. He'd bring his brown rice maker and it was a real special treat. It was just delicious. So flavorful. It was a highlight for me. I know it's a little thing, but it was a wonderful highlight.

KRIS TAPLEY

David Kriegel.

DAVID KRIEDEL

I had just come off another movie and did a TV show and was happy to be working, and was super excited to get to play with all the camera gear, because I was a pain-in-the-ass 20-something-year-old who didn't realize I was overstepping my bounds by pushing cinematographers aside so I could look through their camera.

KRIS TAPLEY

Loyda Ramos.

LOYDA RAMOS

It was so freaking hot. They used to bring in these big tubes for air and put it through the windows so that we could breathe, and one day all the girls took off their tops and sat. We're like, "We can't fucking stand this. We're dying. We're going to protest by sitting in our bras." And they said, "Go ahead!" And so, we all have a picture of all of us, including Sandy, sitting there in our bra, you know, on the freeway in August, like, burning up, you know? It's hilarious.

BETH GRANT

And it was hard, because between shots, there we were. Not a tree, not a shrub, not a plant, on a freeway in the baking hot sun. We shot in September, the hottest month of the year in California, you know, with really, you know, no shade. Obviously, they got us umbrellas and stuff, but it was tough.

KRIS TAPLEY

Let's get Loretta Jean Crudup back in here.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

Oh my God. You know, I see all these actors on TV, but to partake, to actually be there touching, hugging, talking. "Hey, Loretta Jean." "Hi, Sandra." You know, "Hi, Keanu." "Hi, Loretta Jean." It was outstanding. I really couldn't even tell you now, the feeling – inward feeling. It was dynamic to know, "Hey, I'm part of the industry now. They know my name."

JULIA VERA

You know that beautiful Long Beach area where the hotels are, and then we would make a turn around, and as we were coming back, on the side where the apartments were, or buildings were, all of a sudden, they're throwing eggs at us. Somebody that really didn't like us messing up their traffic.

SIMONE GAD

And then there were scenes where I had to do a lot of crying, because the director really liked my crying ability, so I had to do several takes, and different angles. And that was challenging, but it was fun, though.

KRIS TAPLEY

More on that point, here is Natsuko Ohama.

NATSUKO OHAMA

I do remember getting very angry at the group on the bus because, you know, we were such a great team of friendly people. But I knew that on the day that I had to do these emotional shots, the crying, that I needed to have some space, and they don't have that responsibility. So, when they were rolling, they were still kind of giggling and talking back there and there was sound going on and I had to scream at the top of my voice, you know, "Shut the fuck up." I did. I just had to do that, and then everybody was quiet. Because they realized they didn't have pressure on them the way that I did. And so, can you imagine what would happen if we don't get that shot? You have to back up thousands of cars and everything has to reset. I mean, it's not like on a set where you're in a living room where you can just go. It's a huge undertaking.

BETH GRANT

Our very first shot, we've got 11 cameras shooting inside the bus, not to mention helicopter shots, you know, with 300 cars on a live freeway, and we're doing the first shot, and it's Alan's line, and we're all, like, "This is impossible. This movie." You know, all of us are, like, keyed up. And Alan went blank. It just didn't come out. First shot of the movie. And there wasn't a sound on that bus, because we were all actors. We knew it could be us. We all wanted to hug him. There was nothing we could do. We just all – it was just dead quiet, while you hear the ADs, you know, on the walkies, going, "Alright, turn 'em around. Turn 'em around." And 300 cars had to turn around, you know, and come back, and helicopters have to go back. I mean – but the great thing about that happening right off is that it relaxed everybody, and Alan is such a trooper and has such a good sense of humor that, you know – and of course, he's fabulous. I don't think he lost another single take during the whole movie. I mean he's such a strong actor. It was just one of those things. It could have been any of us. And it probably would have been any of us. All of us made mistakes. I remember once, it was Sandy's close-up, and I have, as you might have noticed, angular features, and I have, like, a large chin and nose, and I was sitting right next to her, and my nose and chin were kind of creeping into her shot. Now, you talk about embarrassed! I would much rather have lost my line than have Jan, in his Dutch accent, you know, something about, "No, your nose! Your chin and your nose are in the shot!" And then they showed me and I was, like, "Oh my God!" I've never been so mortified. It was horrifying. Horrifying! So, I had to turn 300 cars around because of my chin and my nose.

CARLOS CARRASCO

We also, you know, were not unaware of the fact that there is always a camera on you, you know? So, we all sort of, you know, came to that conclusion of, "You know what? Don't ever stop. Keep doing stuff, you know, even if the scene is not necessarily about you, but there's going to be a camera on you, so, might as well go for it."

DANIEL VILLARREAL

Sort of like knowing where every camera is, so you sense what the action is, so you give Jan those looks that he liked, so he always has something to cut away from, you know? It's like you're being hunted, you know? Like there's all these hunters out there, and it feels that way, like you're the prey of all these cameras. So, yeah, you couldn't relax. You had to be on edge, and that's the feeling that the movie has, you know, the energy that it has.

ALAN RUCK

It always seemed to work out like this: We would go to lunch, and they'd say, "OK guys, it's going to be, like 15, 20 minutes." And then I would go lay down in my trailer, and it was an hour later. It always an hour later, you know? That 15 or 20 minutes always stretched into an hour when they had to rig whatever they had to rig. And so, you know, I had a fun morning, I had lunch, I had a nap, and then I had a really good afternoon. It was a great job, and it was all in town.

CARLOS CARRASCO

We used to joke among ourselves that after the first several, couple of weeks, we, the ensemble, came to the conclusion that we had a very easy job, because we just had to show up each day and go, "OK, what are we doing today? Are we screaming or are we sighing in relief?" Because it kind of worked out that that's sort of what we did every day. "Oh no! Oh no!" And then, "Oh, thank God." And you do that every day for, like, two months, and then you're done. I would say that in terms of traditional direction, you know, like, you work with a director and you talk about moments and so forth and so on, there really was very, very little of that. The only time that he did a comment on my performance, when I pulled Keanu out of the thing, I improvised a line about his "hairy cojones." "You're not too bright but you've got some big, round, hairy cojones." That wasn't the script. I kind of came out that way. So, I remember that then Jan came to me and he said, "Well, yeah, you know, that was very interesting. That was OK. But, we're going to shoot it again, and this time, could you please say the line in the script?" "Yeah." So, we did it again, and I don't even remember what the line was. But then I was pleased that when the movie came out, oh, there's the "hairy cojones" line. That was our actor-and-director moment.

KRIS TAPLEY

I like to imagine Jan didn't understand what that meant in the moment, and then later someone explained it to him and he decided it was kind of great. Anyway, here's Natsuko Ohama with more on Jan.

NATSUKO OHAMA

I mean, he is kind of underestimated, and in those cramped quarters, it's not only the shots, but the way he could – he would just know how to do something and cramp himself into a corner with the camera, like, just jammed up against this and get a shot himself. I mean, he really was amazing. He's got such a photographer's eye. Let's face it, it's not like the highway to the airport in Los Angeles is the Amalfi Coast or, you know, Pacific Heights or the Palisades or something. It's just raw highway and cement and

airport, and the way he guided that and made that move and got this, it's really an underestimated piece of work, I think.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

Wild packs of dogs use the freeways as, like, their transpo, you know? They move around the city like that. So, on the freeway, because it was still being built, there were so many dogs like that. So, a couple of those dogs got rescued there, but then also, when we were driving through the city, especially, like, in South Central, you know, we would have our base camp. So, I would wander around the neighborhood a little bit, so we would find dogs in, like, bad shape. One was chained. You know, people, like, ended up adopting them. I think Kriegel adopted one of those dogs.

DAVID KRIEGEL

There were two of them. There was one that we were in downtown somewhere on a side street and there was a dog just mangled and chained up on a fence and we just took him. And a good friend of mine was wanting a dog. He was this – he was a little Rasta dog with full-on dreads and whatnot and he ended up – my friend was a pretty big producer and line producer, and he ended up being, like, this Hollywood set dog that just was on every Hollywood set there was. And then there was another time, we would – between takes we would sit out on this empty freeway before it got filled up with all the extras and their cars, and there was a pack of stray dogs. And I literally just sat there with my lunch for, like, 45 minutes until one of them got the courage to sort of walk over and I gave him some of my sandwich and sat with him for a little while. And unfortunately for him, I decided to keep him, because Sandy Bullock said, “Hey, if you're not going to keep that dog, I'll take him. I'd love to have a dog.” So, he could have been Sandy's dog, but he got stuck with me instead, unfortunately.

LOYDA RAMOS

The greatest takeaway that I saw in making that film was the emerging stardom of Sandra Bullock. That was really her break, in many ways, and we kind of felt it. Like, you could tell, like, she was going to break out and she was just the sweetest thing.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

Demolition Man, that movie came out a weekend that we were working, and I told Sandra, “Your life is now going to change. You can't do a movie with Stallone and not have a life change.” Little did I know it wasn't that movie, it was the one we were shooting that would forever change her life.

BETH GRANT

I can't tell you what it was like to have somebody burst on the scene that you just knew was going to be a superstar and had all the kindness and sweetness that she had. And Hawthorne and I both just loved her. We were, like, you know, old, seasoned, you know, character actors who had been around, and I remember once I was sitting on the bus and watching her. We were somewhere in South Central and she was out on the street and she was giving candy to the local kids, and they had some music on and she's dancing with the kids, and we're looking at her, and Hawthorne said, “She has no idea

what's getting ready to happen." I remember us looking at her and knowing she was going to be a superstar. She just had the light. You just come across it every once in a while. You know, I've worked with a lot of – Brad Pitt. I think I was in his first movie, a thing called *The Image* with Albert Finney and a bunch of them, and there are just certain people that you come across that just have the light. You know, it's a job, and it's a hard job. It's not what people think it is. It's not, like, oh, you get discovered and la dee da. It is a huge job. You've got to run a corporation. You've got to build a company. You've got to have all these people working for you. You've got to choose material. I mean, it's a huge, very challenging, very difficult job. And there just are not a lot of people who can do it and sustain it. And we just knew she had the chops for it. I mean, she's smart. At the time she was building her own cabinets. She was remodeling her house and building the cabinets herself. And she had, you know, been trained at a Waldorf School and she was an egalitarian and kind and smart and self-reliant. So, anyway, she wasn't just like this little ingénue that got lucky and got a job.

ALAN RUCK

You know, she was who she is then, but it was, you know, before she became a megastar. And she's just full of shit. She's just full of it. I came back from lunch one day. I open the door and I see that there's a pile of dog shit on my floor. And it's like, "Who let a fucking dog in my trailer?" So, I go in, I'm like, "What the hell is this?" And I see it's actually not dog shit, but it's two bananas. One that's been left whole and one that's been cut into three pieces and it has been sprayed with some sort of paint and has little things stuck in it, like little twigs and stuff to give it texture, right? And I turn around, and Sandy is wetting her pants with laughter. I look down the way and she's, like, crying so hard, you know? So, I was like, "Alright. Alright. Alright. Alright." She was in so many more scenes than I was, so the next day I came in with a hot glue gun and while she was at work, I went into her trailer and I glued down everything in her trailer. I glued her boots to the floor. I glued her toothbrush to the counter. I glued her brassiere to the handle – the doorknob where she left it, you know? And that's the kind of stuff, you know, you just remember as like, "Wow," you know – somebody really cracked you up and somebody really got you.

CARLOS CARRASCO

Keanu – I've said it before and I'll say it again. Both of them, great people. I love them both. They're completely different. Keanu is very private, very withdrawn. I decided he's just very shy. And Sandy is Sandy Bullock, you know? She's Miss Bubbly, Miss Cheerleader, Miss Funny, Miss Let's Play Games, let's throw spitballs at each other. And that went a long, long, long way to keeping things loose and happy and, you know, amused and entertained on this bus.

LOYDA RAMOS

And I wanted to not like her because, just being a bitchy female at the time, I remember she had a role in this film that I had wanted. It was *Wrestling Ernest Hemingway*, where she got cast as a Latina, and I was pissed because I was, like, "She's not Latina!" You know? And I wanted to not like her because of that, and despite that, I couldn't help myself. I just thought she was adorable, yeah.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

She just made us all welcome. No change as she's the same way now. She don't care who you are. She don't care what you look like, how big you are, how short you are. She's crazy. She's totally crazy. She's so much fun. And she'd just – she'd make you laugh and everybody loved her. She made us all feel that we were even with her. She's Sandra. She's Sandy.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

I don't care about a lot of people, you know, their careers and all that stuff. But her, because she is such a beautiful person inside and out, I'm so glad that she is where she is now. I really, really am very happy for her, because she deserves it and she just doesn't change. She's still that nice, beautiful person inside and out, and I'm really happy for her.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

We were sort of, like, on the same level, you know? There wasn't the big star and the day player. It was just like a bunch of friends. And I had a really good time hanging out with Keanu. Keanu would call me Diablo, you know, because of my goatee. I would hang out in his dressing room once in a while. Not all the time. He was learning how to play bass at the time, you know? Because he was in that band, Dogstar, so we would listen to Fugazi. I was a photographer. I started out when I was, like, 14, so by 16, I was taking pictures of bands, like, at concerts and stuff, you know? So, I was totally into the punk scene, and so I turned him onto the Chicano punk rock bands, you know? I gave him some tapes. So, we would listen to music. And then he gave me a book by Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*. He's one of my favorite filmmakers, and also Keanu's.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

He's one of the nicest people you ever want to meet. But he's not that outgoing guy. He's not the huggy-feely type of guy, and I think people misinterpret that. Because working 12-, 16-hour days, you get to talk to people, you know, you get to learn things about people, because there's a lot of downtime, so you talk to each other. And so, we would be having conversations about all kinds of things, you know, whether it be politics or personal lives or whatever. But he wouldn't be necessarily a participant, but he would be standing outside the group listening, and you could see him listening and taking it all in. It's very rare that he would actually say something and volunteer an opinion or something. That's rare. But you could see him. He was always there listening. You know, and no ego. Nothing. He's just really one of the nicest guys in Hollywood, as far as I'm concerned.

SONIA JACKSON

The first time we met him on set – he's shy, or he was, anyway, at the time. It was lunch and he was standing in the corner eating. We looked over and, "Keanu, come over here and sit down! You don't need to stand up there eating." Because, you know, he didn't know anybody and he didn't really want to intrude, kind of thing. After that he got really – when he knows you, he's really friendly.

CARLOS CARRASCO

He had a lot of aspirations, you know, of doing the classics and everything. And in fact, I remember the whole time we were doing *Speed*, he had a rumpled-up copy of *Hamlet* in his back pocket, because he was working on it and studying it. Because, indeed, a few months after *Speed* wrapped, Keanu went up to Toronto to do his Hamlet. And, so, he had a special connection with Natsuko, and it was just ironic that, you know, here we are on this bus and now he's the star of this movie, and one of his Shakespeare instructors is on the bus and she's, like, in a supporting role.

NATSUKO OHAMA

Yeah, I knew Keanu when he was very – quite young. He came to a Shakespeare company that I was a part of, Shakespeare & Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, as a student. And I think he left to do *River's Edge* then. That's how young he was. And he's always loved language. You know, he played Hamlet. He grew up around the theater. So, I had known him as a young guy and always been sort of fond of him. He's very unusual. Well, now, look at what's happened to Keanu. Keanu's become, like, a sage or something. He's ascended into this incredible place in culture.

KRIS TAPLEY

Just to drop in here before this next comment, Natsuko, who teaches at the USC School of Drama, by the way, is an expert at something called the Linklater Method. It's built on a set of exercises that help open the throat and develop resonance and range and tonality in the voice. So, here's Natsuko from an earlier interview remembering Keanu as a student.

NATSUKO OHAMA

He had a great, beautiful presence. He was very in-the-moment. He was very spontaneous. I think that the complications of language, the instrument of his voice, which is what I would have worked on longer if we had the time, you know, to get more flexibility and range in there – because it's not the kind of thing that he's asked to use a lot, or he wasn't at that time. You know, that takes 20 years of work, really, to get a voice that's going to pick up all those thoughts and nuances.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

I remember one day we were all just sitting there and Keanu mooned everybody. And I had my camera that day and I grabbed it, but I missed it. I didn't get a picture of it. I wish I did. But we were, like, screaming, like, "Oh my God!" And me and Marylou, Sonia, Loyda and Paula and Carmen, we were all in the back of the bus, and he would go back there and he would just go and do one-arm pull-ups, just, you know, on the bar that you hold onto on the bus. He would just go back there and he would just do one-arm pull-ups and we would just look at each other, like, "Wow."

HAWTHORNE JAMES

When I've heard him interviewed, he doesn't seem so excited about having done that movie, and I don't understand why. Because that movie took him to a whole different

place. And I'm curious about that, why he doesn't feel that way. And for me, he did such a good job in that film.

KRIS TAPLEY

With that in mind, you know, all these folks who thought they were making some ridiculous movie and half of them were annoyed at the what their roles had been reduced to – what did they think once they saw it all put together? We'll stay with Hawthorne to start.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

Actually, when I read the script, I said, "This is kind of corny. I don't know if I want to do this or not." And I'm so glad that I decided to do it. And it's like all movies. As long as it's logical to me, I don't care. As long as it makes sense, I don't care. But really, honestly, sitting in that movie theater watching this movie, I was totally blown away. I didn't know you could put 12 cameras on a bus and not have them interfere with each other. It was fascinating. It was a learning experience for me, in my career, as I've gone on and started to direct more stuff. I watched him and his eye is incredible, and the way that – the thought process that he had gone through, the pre-production, and knew what he wanted and knew how to get it. It really was a learning experience for me, because I didn't know what we were doing and it was all in Jan's head. And to have been at the premiere, I sat back and I watched that movie and I said, "That's what we were doing?"

KRIS TAPLEY

Beth Grant.

BETH GRANT

I liked all that about the movie, but I did not like me. I did not like my character. I was glad she died. I mean, it's terrible. And whenever people come up and say, "Oh, poor Helen. I was so sad when she died," and I thought, "All she did was care about herself and whine. 'What about the rest of us? What about the rest of us?'" I mean.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll just interject and say this. Helen is sort of a surrogate for the audience and Jan was totally right to have a "coward," as Beth says, on the bus. I think just about anyone would try to jump over to that flatbed. So, I don't see Helen as a coward so much as – here comes that word again – real.

BETH GRANT

Well, and not everybody gets their own death song. So, you can take care of that for me. At my funeral you can have them play "Helen's Death."

[SONG: "Helen Dies"]

KRIS TAPLEY

The track is actually called "Helen Dies," Beth. Sorry to be that guy. Anyway, here's Loyda Ramos.

LOYDA RAMOS

I have to be honest. I totally thought this film was going to tank. You know, I totally did it like a throwaway job. Like, "It's cool, you know, it's a paycheck. But this premise is ridiculous." You know, like, I totally did not think it was going to fly at all. You know, the whole premise about, you know, it's going to blow up if you slow down, I was just, like, "It's ludicrous." And when it was, like, the breakaway summer hit, I nearly shit. I was like, "You are kidding me." I swear to God. I did not see that coming, and it just illuminated to me how in this industry, you really cannot tell. You know, I've been in films that we thought were going to be, like, blockbusters. When we did *Three Amigos*, I thought that was going to be the runaway, like – and it really didn't do well at all in the theaters. It became a little cult classic in video but not in the first showing. So, yeah, it was a lesson learned, definitely.

KRIS TAPLEY

Simone Gad.

SIMONE GAD

I really loved it. I thought it was really creative. And Jan de Bont, I mean, he worked with Paul Verhoeven in Amsterdam as a cinematographer before he became a director. So, he has that background and very skilled. And he did bring a European sensibility to *Speed*, which is really wonderful. You know, it set a precedent. I mean, it's a classic.

KRIS TAPLEY

Here's Marylou Lim, who says people tend to get excited when she casually mentions she was one of the bus passengers in *Speed*.

MARYLOU LIM

I work with Will Ferrell. You know, I've worked with him for the last 17 years, so he knows that I've done it, so he makes fun of me all the time. I was on a movie with him, *Daddy's Home 2*, and the director needed a nurse, and so the director had asked me to do it. And so, I was like, "Oh, God, OK, whatever." So, it was just, like, a small walk-on, almost a background situation role. Anyways, at first, I was, like, "No, I don't know if I want to do it," and Will looks at me and he's like, "Come on, Marylou." He says, "You were on *Speed*!" And the director, Sean Anders, just looks at him, and he's, like, "What?" He's like, "That's amazing!"

KRIS TAPLEY

Carmen Williams.

CARMEN WILLIAMS

I thought it was an amazing movie. You know, I watched that movie over and over again with family members, with friends. I didn't just watch it because I was in it. I just thought the overall, everything about *Speed* – the action, the cast – everything was just on point. It's just one of those movies where it captures your interest from the first 10 minutes.

You know, you just fell right into it. I'm like, "Wow, I was a part of this movie?" And it's a movie that, a lot of people, it's their favorite, you know? A lot of people like *Speed*.

KRIS TAPLEY

Yeah, you can say that again. Anyway, Sonia Jackson.

SONIA JACKSON

I loved it. I thought, "Wow." A friend of mine said it. She said, "When I came out of the theater, I had to walk around the block so I could calm down." And I said, "Yeah." Because when you finished with that movie, there was so much excitement that you had to, like, dispel it.

KRIS TAPLEY

Back to Daniel Villarreal.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

It's quite a movie. It's put together nicely. It's very well done. How would I describe it? It's, like, it's modern, you know? It still holds up. It's like, it doesn't get old. After we wrapped, where I lived, like over in the Pico-Robertson area, the blue bus, you know, that line, turned around on my block, you know? So, I would see that bus every day and I'm like, "Oh my God, I'm tired – tired of seeing those buses," you know? It was kind of funny, like the bus was calling to me all the time, you know? I also ran into Sandy again over by Nate and Al's. And I hear somebody screaming, "Stop the bus! Stop the bus!" And, you know, I was getting that at the time and I'm like, "Oh my God." And I turn around and it was Sandy.

KRIS TAPLEY

By the way, when we did these particular interviews back in 2021, Daniel and Carlos had actually just attended a pandemic drive-in screening of *Speed* at the Greek Theatre here in LA.

DANIEL VILLARREAL

I was in *American Me* and Carlos Carrasco was in *Blood In Blood Out*, which is basically the same movie, you know? Same writer. So, I see Carlos at a lot of conventions, you know, where we do autographs, so I've stayed in touch with him. He sent me a message saying that there was a screening, and, you know, I said, "Oh, I want to go." There was, like, a little VIP thing where I, you know, put on my hazard lights, so they took me all the way to the front by the screen, and then they were just about to introduce the film, and then they said that Carlos and I were there, and then all the cars started honking, you know? "Beep! Beep! Beep!" And then as the movie started rolling, they were honking for, like, all the fucking credits. "Beep! Beep! Beep!" And then whenever something really fun would happen, which was most of the time, it was just, like, a honk-a-thon. You know, it was bittersweet, because where the Greek Theatre is, that's where Simone lived. So, I could have been, like, picking her up and taking her there, you know? So, when I was there, I was thinking, "Wow, I hope she's hovering."

KRIS TAPLEY

Carlos Carrasco.

CARLOS CARRASCO

Honestly, after all this time, and like I said, sitting through it in its, you know, complete form, you know, on a big screen again and so forth, I just really had to go, "Well, you know what? It's OK. It holds up." You know, as a piece of entertainment, as a particular artifact of its time, even with regards to the filmmaking and techniques and stuff, it's a worthy piece. It does deserve its place.

KRIS TAPLEY

David Kriegel.

DAVID KRIEDEL

It comes up pretty frequently because there's almost never a day that *Speed* is not on some channel in some format. I also have four kids who range from grown to 11, and so, as their friends and their friends' families discover it – because they put on, whatever, FX or whatever channel and *Speed* popped up and they left it on in the background and then all of a sudden, they see their friend's dad on the bus, they're like, "What?" Because I don't really talk about that stuff much to people, unless they already know about it. So, it's regularly throughout the year that someone will mention it, it'll come up, it'll pop on TV and yeah, I mean, I guess it's – you know, it's nice to reminiscence. It brings up some happy memories and good stuff. My kids always think I'm a little cooler than I am, so that's fun. It is a part of our culture in a weird way.

CARLOS CARRASCO

The movie opened and it was this enormous smash success. And it did propel a certain number of careers to the next level, and it left a certain number of other careers, you know, in the bleachers waving goodbye. And I thought that was a shame because I thought there were some good actors there. I'm not an angry old, bitter troll who never had a rest of a career and stuff like that, you know, oh, because, "Curses! Curses to anything to do with *Speed*!" That's not the case at all. It's just kind of, like, "Oh, that's too bad that that happened," because, I'll tell you, I've been in this business a long time and I've been in, I don't know, maybe close to 60 films or something like that, and by saying that, I just say, "And most of them did nothing," you know? And if there's one thing I've learned in this business it's that there are so many disparate elements that have to line up for something to really be a success. There are so many things that can go wrong down the road, everything from bad marketing to whatever. So, those opportunities for something to really break through and take you with it are few and far between. And so, it's just, that's kind of, like, "Eh, gee whiz." I think that for some of us, that was the one, and ah, well, we didn't get on the bus.

DAVID KRIEDEL

When it was going to come out, a friend of mine was an agent at CAA. And I was with a small agency and I was kind of climbing and doing. And my friend called me and goes,

“Wow. This movie is testing through the roof. It’s going to be a big deal.” I was like, “Wow. That’s super cool.” And it was right about Super Bowl time, and I had Super Bowl tickets, and I wasn’t going to go because I needed the money for whatever. So, the two things were coinciding, and I get a call one day from CAA and I think, “Wow, I finally arrived. CAA wants me. I’m going to be hitting the big time,” blah, blah, blah. So, I call them back and the agent’s assistant gets on the phone and she’s like, “Yeah, I understand you have Super Bowl tickets for sale. We were interested in buying them.” I was just crushed. I was, like – you know, I have no illusion about what became of that for me, but you can’t be an actor without an ego. So, that was crushing. But I mean, I sound like a sappy asshole, but it’s all super fond memories.

CARMEN WILLIAMS

I even bought a car after we wrapped. I bought my first brand new car, a 1994 Nissan Altima, brand new. There were many blessings that came out of that. I made enough money and that money came at the time that I needed it. And I overcame my fear because I was kind of afraid of driving on the freeway back then. I drove the streets but – that’s why I was happy we were carpooling, because I didn’t have to drive the freeway by myself. But I kind of overcame my fear, because we had spent so many days on that freeway doing semi-stunts in a fast bus, going across the wood board, being transported to the other side. So, it was exciting. You couldn’t even be fearful anymore, so it kind of broke me, because I was fearful of being on the freeway. And then after *Speed*, you know, here I am in the fast lane. I never drove in the fast lane.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

I still have my little bus that – on the last day of filming, Sandra gave everybody a gift and she gave me, Marylou and Carmen a little necklace with a little bus on it. I used to hang out with Carmen and Marylou. I’d go to their house and, actually, Paula. She had that little party. I kept in touch with Loretta Jean, and I don’t know how soon after it was. I think it was a couple of years, I went and I picked her up and we went and had lunch and we caught up, and I ended up getting pregnant right after filming, so, when I went to the premiere, I was six months pregnant. And so, I really wanted Loretta to meet my son, because she was so sweet. I’d sit and talk to her a lot on the set. And then I would write her letters. And then it fell off. And then, I haven’t wrote a letter to her in a long time.

KRIS TAPLEY

I’d like to add two things to that. First of all, Sherri’s son, Vincent, was actually born on Keanu’s birthday. Go figure. The second is, I’m happy to say, she and Loretta Jean have reconnected after I put them back in touch. Let’s go back to Marylou, who actually crossed paths with Keanu again down the line as a costumer for *Bill & Ted Face the Music*.

MARYLOU LIM

I helped prep the show with Jen Starzyk, who was our costume designer. When we were in LA, we actually had fittings with Keanu and Alex and the director. So, the fitting took, like, three hours, because this is the first time they had actually seen each other

in, you know, for a while, in this working capacity. So, of course, they were, like, really excited about it. And so, we did the fitting and I was like, "I'm not going to say anything. I'm just going to see maybe if, perhaps, he recognizes me." But no, he's in his headspace and we're all in our headspace of this fitting. Blah, blah, blah. And so, once three hours are done, whatever, we're helping them get out of costume and, so, you know, we go into a closet, because I'm kind of helping him put things away. So, I say, "Hey, you know, just a funny story I want to share with you. I was on *Speed* with you." And he just looks at me and he kind of crooks his head and he's like, "Oh, yeah," you know, in a Keanu way. And I was like, "Yeah, yeah, I was on the bus with you," and he was like, "Oh my God! That's insane! You know, God, wasn't that so much fun?" And I was like, "Yeah, it really was," you know? I'm like, "It was pretty phenomenal. It has a lot of memories for me." So, he's like, "Yeah." He's like, "Who would have known, you know?"

KRIS TAPLEY

A few of these folks have mostly left acting behind. After her son was born, Sherri actually became a bartender, though, funnily enough, she recently told me she's been going back out for background work lately. David and his wife own a children's dance company in Studio City called Creation Station. And Loretta Jean has written a couple of books. She also writes letters to inmates and is just a wonderful person. Let's start with Sherri.

SHERRI VILLANUEVA

Sonia Jackson, she said, "Oh, a good way to get experience is to get involved in plays and with community theater and things like that." And so, I went with her – I think it was the YMCA or – it was some weird place where they would do group readings. Different actors would get together in Hollywood and so, I went with her. I picked her up and we went to go do that, and then, I didn't pursue acting after that. I just, you know, was a single mom raising my kid and – actually, I tried. For, like, probably a year, I tried. I ended up standing in for Natalie Portman on *Heat*, and that was a good experience. And they did some filming over there off of *Aviation* as well, so that was cool.

DAVID KRIEGEL

My wife and I started our own business. We teach about 600 kids a week to love dance and to be better little kids through art and entertainment and I get to spend time with my own kids, watching them grow up and I'm pretty happy and, I mean, I miss acting sometimes, because I love acting, but the business of entertainment just takes so much of your life that I just couldn't do that anymore. A little hindsight and a little age on me and I see it for what it is, which is just a fortunate experience. I mean actors spend their entire lives waiting to have opportunities like that.

KRIS TAPLEY

I actually have to hop in here for an update. As I was editing this episode, I exchanged an email with David to catch up and I guess the call was too strong. He told me that, with his kids pretty well grown now, he's decided to get back to acting. He did a couple of plays and he's now pondering whether he wants to get back to auditioning or just

enjoy the carefree creativity. Maybe we'll see him on the big screen again soon. Here's Loretta Jean.

LORETTA JEAN CRUDUP

I couldn't even tell you. You know, I'm really almost in tears now, to know that was my first movie. It was thousands of people. Thousands. Hundreds of thousands of people, all over the world, that was going to see me, not knowing who I was. An unknown, at 59 years of age. Little old – I'm Mother Crudup in church, and my kids, I'm a Sunday school teacher. "Mother Crudup, I saw you on *Kenan & Kel!* Mother Crudup, I saw you on *Family Matters!* Mother Crudup, I saw you on *Fresh Prince!* Mother Crudup, I saw you!" This is what it's all about. It doesn't make me big, but I'm still being seen. But I'm still doing the job that I love. I'm still Loretta Jean. I'm still Mother Crudup.

KRIS TAPLEY

And we'll close today where we started, with the driver of Bus 2525, Hawthorne James.

HAWTHORNE JAMES

Everything I've ever done, it's been different experiences and it's been a lot of fun. It's been such a blessing to be able to do what I do, and to be able to be in films like *Speed* and *Seven* and *The Five Heartbeats*, and the first union movie I did was *Color Purple*. Even the first non-union movie I did with Rudy Ray Moore, that was an experience unto itself. You know, I've just been so blessed to be able to work and have fun and working with the great people that I've worked with. And I'd work with them in a heartbeat. I can't say that for everybody I've ever worked with, but for those people on that bus – in a heartbeat.

[OUTRO MUSIC]

KRIS TAPLEY

Next week on *50 MPH...*

KRIS TAPLEY

We're ready to start production on *Speed*, but before we get to set, what is the set?

JAN DE BONT

This movie is a little bit like a city opera. Some cities are, wherever you go, they're all the same, and if you go through LA, every area is different.

GUILLERMO DEL TORO

The beauty of *Speed* is that it's going to take place in the city of gridlock, in the city of freeways that move really slow, and that alone makes it absolutely delectable.

KRIS TAPLEY

I'll take you on a guided tour of the many locations of the film and bring in new voices like unit production manager Ian Bryce.

IAN BRYCE

It was ridiculously complicated. If you've ever built a house or put an addition onto your house, you know what it's like just trying to coordinate the subcontractors. Well, imagine magnifying that by, you know, quite a lot.

KRIS TAPLEY

Not to mention a very special guest who was there 30 years ago buttoning up permit after permit across the city.

DONNA WASHINGTON

I know that for that particular location, that whole area was completely cleared out. Like, they asked the neighbors to leave when they did that explosion.

KRIS TAPLEY

All of that and more next week right here on *50 MPH!*

KRIS TAPLEY

Thanks so much for listening. *50 MPH* is written, produced and edited by yours truly, Kris Tapley. You can find us on Twitter @50MPHPod. I'm @kristapley. That's Kris with a K. You can also catch every episode and more at our website 50MPHpodcast.com. If you dug the show, please like and subscribe and do all the things. We'll see you next time.