

# WIL WHEATON



## JUST A GEEK

Unflinchingly honest tales of the search for life, love, and fulfillment beyond the Starship Enterprise

## Alone Again, or . . .

**ON APRIL 5TH, 2002**, as Anne and I were packing for a Spring Break trip to Lake Tahoe with Ryan and Nolan for a much-needed change of scenery, I received a phone call from my manager. It was the end of pilot season—a period at the beginning of each year when studios cast for their new fall television shows. Most actors, myself included, hope to get a job on a pilot each year, because it means financial security and a chance to be on the next *Friends* or *West Wing*. During pilot season, most actors have several auditions each week, and it's a hectic but exciting time. The pilot season that had just ended was the fourth in a row where I'd had fewer than 10 auditions, all of them failures.

“Is your fax machine on?” my manager said.

“Yeah.”

“Good. I'm sending you two appointment sheets for next week.”

“Oh crap,” I said. “I can't go. It's Spring break for the kids, and Anne and I are taking them up to Lake Tahoe.”

“When do you leave?”

“In about 20 minutes. When are the auditions?”

“You’ve got an independent film on Tuesday, and at least one, possibly two pilots on Wednesday. Callbacks will be Thursday or Friday.”

“What do you think I should do?”

“I can’t make that decision for you. Talk it over with Anne and call me right back.”

I hung up the phone.

*“I know how you feel about your family, but this is our last shot at pilot season,”* said a familiar voice.

*“This is stupid, Prove To Everyone,”* I replied. *“You and I both know I’m not going to book these jobs, and we’re all looking forward to this vacation. We’re packing up the car, for fuck’s sake.”*

*“What the fuck is wrong with you?! You’ve had ONE audition in months, and you’re going to pass on THREE OF THEM in one week? Do you want to be an actor or not?!”*

*“I’m not so sure I do.”*

*“Oh, you think you’re going to be a big writer because you write a stupid weblog?”* we were joined by The Voice of Self Doubt.

*“I thought you guys were gone,”* I said.

*“We were just waiting for you to call on us again. You know that fear you feel right now? That fear that you may be letting a golden opportunity slip through your fingers, and you’ll regret it for the rest of your life? We felt it too.”* Prove To Everyone was right. The Fear hadn’t completely gone away. I’d just managed to keep it hidden for a few months.

*“If you blow off this opportunity, you will live the rest of your life as That Washed Up Has Been Who Used To Be An Actor When He Was A Kid,”* he said.

I stammered something about April Fool’s and how I’d redefined myself.

*“That’s bullshit. Anyone can write a bunch of drivel on the Internet,”* said The Voice of Self Doubt.

*“No, Wil’s right. If he passes on these auditions, he can always sign autographs at a Star Trek convention for a few more years until he digs himself out of debt,”* Prove To Everyone said. *“And there’s always Celebrity Boxing to get that career going again.”*

I walked out to the car and told Anne that I had to stay home.

A few minutes later, we called the kids over to the dining room table.

“You guys, I just got a call from Chris,” I said, “and I have two auditions next week.”

“Did you tell him that we’re going on vacation?” Nolan said.

I couldn’t look him in the eye. “I told him that we had that planned, but I have to stay here and go on these auditions.”

“Why?! We’re getting ready to leave!” Ryan said.

I looked to Anne. Her eyes were welling up, but she said nothing.

“I’m really sorry, you guys. I haven’t had any good opportunities for work in months, and I have to take these chances when they come along.”

It was silent in our house. A car drove by outside. Nolan said, “Well, can you drive up and meet us?”

I shook my head. “It’s eight hours there and back, Nolan. If I get a callback, I’d just have to turn right around and come home.”

“This sucks,” he said.

I looked at Anne again. She looked away.

“I know how much we’re all looking forward to this trip,” I said, “but I just can’t go. Once you’re there, you won’t miss me at all.”

We all knew that wasn’t true. We were having enormous problems with Anne’s ex-husband, and our family desperately needed to get away from him. I really didn’t want to stay home. I wanted to go with them, and play Auto Bingo and I Spy on the drive up. I wanted to play with the kids in the melting snow and roast marshmallows over the cabin’s wood-burning stove.

Silence hung over the four of us, until Anne quietly said, “Why don’t you two go and get your backpacks, and take them to the car.”

The boys went into the back of the house, and I looked at my wife.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“I know.” She wiped tears out of her eyes and left me alone at the table.

*“You did the right thing,”* Prove To Everyone said.

*“Fuck you,”* I said.

I sadly bid them farewell and watched them drive up our street. I stood at the end of our driveway long after they’d passed out of sight. When I walked into our silent and empty house, I sat at our dining room table, and wondered if I’d made the right decision.



05 APRIL 2002

*Alone Again, Or . . .*

The Big Plan for this weekend was to go up north with Anne and the kids, because it’s their Spring Break, starting today.

We get the rental minivan (ugh) loaded up and ready to go, and I get a call from my manager: I have two auditions on Monday, both pilots, and I have an audition on Tuesday, for an indie. I’m also supposed to test for at least one, possibly two pilots on Wednesday.

So all of my stuff comes out of the rental beast and I go from spending the weekend with my family to spending it alone, preparing for these three auditions.

Holy crap, how things can change in an instant.

It’s not a bad thing, missing the vacation, because I continue to make it down to the last handful of actors on all my auditions, (except for the call I had last week, where I got to

spend all of 25 minutes with the material and the producers were taking calls on their cell phones and leaving the effing room while I was doing my audition) and the more I have the better my odds are . . . but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't going to miss them.

It's weird to be in my empty house, alone, without even Ferris to keep me company.

It's just me and the cats, just like the old bachelor days . . . except I am under pain of death to "keep the fucking house clean" from my old lady.

It should be interesting to see how I do on these three auditions, since I'll have three whole days to prepare a character and memorize the scenes, without any distractions.



What a huge, steaming pile of bullshit! "*It's not a bad thing?*" Who did I think I was fooling? Though I was desperately trying to believe that I had made the right decision, I wasn't even fooling myself. The only saving grace was the minute possibility that I could book one of these jobs. If I did, I would be able to convince myself that I'd made an acceptable sacrifice.

When we actors fight for roles (and unless you're a Big Hot Superstar, it's *always* a fight), we only control about 10% of the factors that will ultimately get us the job: our preparation and how we look. The rest of the process is completely out of our hands and includes elements such as:

- Casting Director prejudices—how excited about *me* is this casting director? This is about 60% of the fight.
- Studio pressure—do they want a big name for this part? This is about 20% of the fight.
- Nepotism—is one of Jimmy Kimmel's cousins available? Surprisingly, this is only about 5%.

- Chemistry—how do I fit in with the rest of the cast? This, too, is about 5%, but isn't even a factor until the very end of the process.

Since I had so much at stake, I did everything to ensure that I gave the best auditions possible. I spent lonely and silent hours in my house, creating unnecessarily complex character histories. When I finished, I memorized my lines. When my lines were memorized, I memorized the other character's lines. When that was finished, I tried different hairstyles and costumes. When I went into those auditions, I wanted to leave as little to chance as possible.

The first audition was a complete disaster.

It was at 2:30 in the afternoon, so I slept late, and then spent the morning reviewing my character notes and audition script, which actors call "sides." The second audition was to happen later in the day, and I wouldn't have time to return home between the two to change, so I carefully hung a different wardrobe in the back of my car before I left the house around 1:45, for Walt Disney Studios in Burbank.

When I was a kid, I always liked going to Disney. As far as studios go, it's actually pretty boring: no back lot like Universal or Warners, and no front lot like Fox, but standing at the corner of Mickey Mouse Avenue and Dopey Drive is pretty magical when you're a kid. Hell, it's pretty magical when you're an adult!

I showed my ID to the security guard and waited while they searched my car. There had been some nebulous threat against movie studios, and they were all really manic about security. Driving onto the lot at Warners was like going into an embassy, complete with concrete barriers and guys with guns, but Disney was a bit more relaxed. As long as there wasn't a box in the trunk that said "THIS IS A BOMB" in big red letters, you'd be fine.

I parked my car and checked my watch: 2:25. I looked at myself in my rearview mirror and said, "You're a good actor. Go

kick their ass.” It’s something that I do before every audition. It started out as a practical way to steady my nerves, but over the years, it’s turned into a superstitious ritual.

I walked across the parking lot, past several actors on their way out who looked exactly like me. *Was one of these “The Guy,” or did I still have a chance to be “The Guy?”* Those thoughts, spoken by The Voice Of Self Doubt, lead to unemployment, so I pushed him out of my head.

I went out of my way to pass through the intersection of Mickey Mouse Avenue and Dopey Drive, and arrived at the audition one minute late. The room was empty except for a water cooler and a few chairs. A sign-in sheet sat on one of them. I picked it up, and wrote in my name, SAG number, character name, agent, and time I arrived. I looked up the list to see if there were any familiar names ahead of me, but I didn’t see anyone I recognized. All the names were crossed out, and someone named David was ahead of me.

I looked around for David.

*Was David the guy who was going to take my job away from me? Maybe I’d go Tonya Harding on him before he got to go in.*

*“Hey, David! Nice to meet you! I’m Wil. Did you see this interesting thing on the window ledge?” Shove. “Oops. Sorry about that. Let me just cross your name off the list here . . .”*

David was nowhere to be found, so I sat down and waited.

And waited.

And waited.

At 10 minutes past 3, I heard the bell chime on the elevator down the hallway. Of course! David was downstairs, plotting my destruction. I heard footsteps coming down the hallway, and glanced at the open window that was next to me. When I looked back, Sean Astin walked into the room.

My heart leapt. Sean is one of my favorite people in the world, and we really hit it off when we worked on *Toy Soldiers*

together. In the months of publicity tours that followed, we became good friends, but as his career took off and mine tanked, I fell out of touch with him. All my murderous thoughts about the still-unseen David went out of my head.

“Is that Sean Astin?” I said with a huge smile.

“You look just like Wil Wheaton,” he said.

I jumped out of my chair, and we embraced.

“I am so happy to see you,” I said.

He picked up the sign-in sheet. “How have you been?”

*Shitty.*

“I’ve been better, but I’m great now,” I said.

“I’m sorry I couldn’t come to your wedding,” he said. “We were in New Zealand.”

“Yeah, your assistant told us—what was that? Three years ago? Holy shit. That’s a long time.”

He nodded.

“Was it fun?” I said. *Fellowship of the Ring* had only been out for a few months, but it was well on its way to being a phenomenon.

“A lot of work, but also a lot of fun,” he said.

I wanted to drop my sides, forget the audition, and spend the rest of the afternoon in a coffee shop, catching up.

“Hey, what are y—”

The door opened, and the casting director walked out, chatting amiably with a fairly well-known actor. *Why wasn’t his name on the sign-in sheet?*

“. . . so we’ll talk to you soon!” he said.

The well-known actor shook his hand and left. The Casting Director looked right through me and said, “Hello, Sean! Thank you for coming in!”

Sean smiled, and I did my best impression of the invisible man while they shook hands.

The Casting Director looked down at the sign-in sheet and called out, “David? Is David here?”

*“Dave’s not here, man!”* I thought, and stifled a giggle.

I looked around the empty room. Unless he was hiding behind the water cooler, David wasn’t here. “Have you seen David?” The Casting Director said to Sean.

“No. But I think Wil is next,” Sean said.

The Casting Director looked at me like I had just appeared in a puff of smoke.

“Just a second,” he said, and walked to the hallway door. “David?!” he called out.

“Yes?” Came the distant reply.

“We’re ready for you.”

I guess he was sitting around the corner, or maybe down on the stairs, but the mysterious David walked into the room, and handed his picture and resume to the Casting Director, who turned to me and said, “You’re next.”

“Okay. Thank you,” I said.

The Casting Director’s voice took on an incredibly obsequious tone as the door shut behind him. “This is David, everyone . . .”

I looked at Sean.

“Tell me again why we do this?” I said.

“Because we love *The Process*,” he said.

“Oh yes. *The Process*.”

We both shook our heads, and I picked up my sides. There’s a very delicate balance between over-preparation and under-preparation, that’s best compared to a pitcher coming out of the bullpen: as an actor, I can’t over throw before I get into the game, but I can’t be warming up on the mound, either. Over the years, I’ve found this balance by reviewing my sides and notes when the guy ahead of me goes into the room. That way I have about 3–5 minutes (depending on the length of the scenes, of

course) to warm up, and I usually go into the room ready to blow my fastball past them or stun them with the knuckler.

Of course, this doesn't work when the guy ahead of me stays in the room for over 20 minutes.

After 10 minutes or so had passed, I turned to Sean. "Do you want to trade numbers and maybe get together to catch up sometime soon?"

He reached into his pocket for a pen. "I'd love that," he said.

I tore the bottom off a blueish scrap of note paper that had directions to my second audition on it and handed it to him.

"I'll give you my cell and my home numbers," he said.

He wrote them down and handed it back to me. I tore off a smaller corner, and wrote my home number down. "I don't have a cell right now," I said with some embarrassment.

"Got it," he said.

I folded that scrap of paper in half, and put it into the breast pocket of the sport coat I was wearing for the audition. In the back of my mind, I wondered if I'd actually get the nerve up to call him.\*

I sat back down, and looked at my sides again, but I didn't read them. I was dangerously close to over-preparation territory.

Another 10 minutes passed before the door finally opened.

"David, you were *wonderful*," the Casting Director said as they passed us. "Stay close to the phone."

David left, and the Casting Director picked up the sign-in sheet. He crossed off a name (presumably mine) and looked up.

"Wil?" He looked around the room.

"I'm ready," I said. Again, he looked at me like I had flown in through the window. *Is he doing this on purpose?*

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\* I'm writing this down on March 8, 2004. We're having a fantastic heat wave in Los Angeles and all my doors and windows are open. Led Zeppelin I plays "Your Time Is Gonna Come" on my CD player. I just walked to my closet and reached into the pocket of that sport coat, which I haven't put on since I had that audition. Sean's number was still there. I still haven't gotten up the nerve to call him.

I handed him my picture and resume, as I stood up.

“Break a leg,” Sean said.

“Thanks,” I said, and entered the same room I’ve been entering for 20 years: always too small or too big, harshly lit, and dominated by an enormous conference room–sized table, around which sit several studio executives, producers, writers, and casting assistants.

This particular room had something new, though: the infamous casting couch crowded the left side of the room; upon it sat five executives. Clustered around the ubiquitous table were another seven people. A casting assistant stood behind a camera, mounted on a tripod.

“This is Wil Wheaton,” the Casting Director said.

I extended my hand to the executive who was nearest to me. She didn’t take it, but chewed rather forcefully on her gum.

“Hello,” I said, as I dropped my hand to my side.

Nobody said anything. One guy folded his hands in his lap, and looked at me expectantly.

“How are you guys doing today?” I said. *What the hell am I doing making small talk? Just shut up and do the audition!*

After a long pause, one of them said, “Fine. Thank you.”

Another looked very bored as he turned my picture over and looked at my resume.

“Oh, you were in *Stand By Me*?” he said.

*Have I been in anything else?*

“Yeah,” I said. “A long time ago.”

One of the other executives coughed.

Over the years, I’ve developed a remarkable sixth sense for these things. When I walk into an audition, I can tell almost immediately how they feel about me. It’s just like dating—within seconds, these people decide if they’re going to take you on a nice date, or just fuck you and never call you back.

These people weren't interested in having dinner, that was for sure. An uncomfortable silence filled the room.

*They hate me. What am I doing here?*

"Okay, Wil. Go ahead and slate your name, then we'll begin," said the Casting Director.

*Oh. This will be fun. Nothing like doing comedy for a room filled with people who hate me.*

I turned to the camera, took a deep breath, and hoped that my years of acting experience would pay off: I was now acting like I didn't want to kill these people.

"Hi, my name is Wil Wheaton," I said.

"How tall are you, Wil?"

"Uh . . ." I held my hand up to the top of my head. "About this tall," I said.

Silence.

". . . which, of course, would be about 5'11"."

"Thank you."

In every audition, there is this moment similar to the time between the lights in a theater going down and the curtain coming up, or the time between the clapping of the slate and the director calling action. But in an audition, there are no lights, and there's no slate. It's just this awkward moment when everyone hits a mental "reset" button, and the actor begins. In this particular audition, the moment was made all the more uncomfortable by the oppressive silence in the room. I took a deep breath, and began the first of four scenes.

It was just awful. There was some forced laughter, almost like a half-hearted laugh track, but that was it. When the first scene was finished, I flipped over the top page of my sides and started the second scene.

"Jenny, I thought—" I said, before I was interrupted by one of the executives behind the table.

“Oh, we’re just doing the first scene today,” he said. “Thank you.”

*Boy, it took your hero David over 20 minutes to do “just the first scene today!” He must have been really slow. Or maybe you’re just full of shit.*

“Wait,” I said. “I prepared *four* scenes. I spent three days preparing four scenes, and didn’t go on vacation with my wife and stepkids so I could come in here and give you this audition. I’ve been working my ass off to give you this performance, and even though I can tell that you’re not interested in me at all, I’m going to fucking do this, okay? I have a 25-year career behind me, including a performance in an Academy Award–nominated film, and that counts for something. So why don’t you all just lighten the fuck up, and respect the fact that I came in here to do this stupid song and dance for your noncreative asses?!”

Well, that’s not exactly true. I said something more like, “Oh. Well, thanks for seeing me,” and I walked out of the room.

Sean looked up from his sides and asked me how it went.

“Not so good,” I said, grimly. “I’ve set the bar nice and low for you.”

“Sorry, man,” he said.

“Meh. Whatever.”

The office door opened. “Sean? We’re ready for you.”

“Hey, call me next week, okay?” Sean said.

“I will,” I said. “Break a leg!”

“Thanks.”

He walked into the room. “This is Sean Astin,” the Casting Director said. A chorus of happy voices greeted him as the door closed.

I gave the best audition I could under the circumstances, but I was furious when I left, as much at myself as I was at them. I violently crumpled my sides into a ball, and slammed them into the first trash can I found. By the time I got to my car, I was

seething. However, true to form, when I wrote about it, I did my best to focus on the positive, even calling these assholes, who I would have gleefully punched in the nuts if given the chance, “nice people.”



09 APRIL 2002

*Stay Gold, Pony Boy*

There is no word yet on the auditions, but here is my personal recap:

The 2:30 wasn't as good as I had hoped. I went in after a guy who clearly did a great job (he was in there for close to 20 minutes), which is the absolute worst time an actor can go into a room . . . I could tell that he had given them exactly what they were looking for and I really felt like they just wanted me to hurry up and get out of the room. They were all really nice people, though . . . people I could totally work with. It was just bad timing for me.

A good thing though, was that I saw Sean Astin while I was there. Now, Sean is one of my absolute favorite people in the world. I've known him since forever and I respect him tremendously both as an actor and as a person. It's funny; every time I tease him about getting roles in *Lord of the Rings*, or *Goonies*, or any of the other kick-ass movies he's been in, he tells me, "Hey, you got *Stand By Me*. So we're even."

So, since I am always looking for the hidden positives in the increasingly shitty world of life as an actor, seeing Sean made that call worthwhile.

The 5:00 call went much better. It was also for a sitcom and it was over at Warner Brothers. It was tough for me to focus, because of the lousy experience I had just had at 2:30, but I was somehow able to leave that behind me and I did a pretty good job. There was only one other person in the room besides the casting director, which means that there is not a

ton of laughter where there normally would be if you were in front of an audience. That can really throw someone who isn't experienced in these things, and I was really glad that I knew how to handle that. I think I'm a little bit too old for that part, but I guess they're seeing people of all different ages, so I think I'm still in the hunt on that one.

Thank you to everyone who sent me their good wishes. I especially enjoyed `cat mojo.conf > /dev/Wil`.

I copied that one onto the back of a calendar page and carried it in my pocket.

You know, the thing about both of these calls is, I did everything that I could possibly do to be prepared. I created characters, I learned the lines, I developed the relationships . . . I will never get used to the people on the other side of the table not putting as much effort into their side as I put into my side.

So, now the stupid waiting begins . . . I'll update when I hear something.



I waited for three days—without my wife, stepkids, or even my dog for company—for the call to come that I hadn't booked the jobs. When it did, I took a sardonic pleasure in the knowledge that, for once, I didn't come in second. I had bailed on my family at the last minute, and I hadn't even cracked the top 10.



12 APRIL 2002

*I'm a Loner Dottie, A Rebel*

I have a partial update from the auditions on Monday.

I've heard nothing from the second call. However, not surprisingly, the first call, where they really made me feel unwelcome, is going nowhere.

## JUST A GEEK

I talked with my manager about it and he got some feedback from them: they found people they really liked on Friday and I guess lots of actors left that room on Monday feeling shitty, like the producers didn't even want those actors to be there.

Well, duh. If they found people they really liked on Friday, why even bother to bring us in on Monday?! And why bother to bring in actors if they're going to make us feel like they don't even want us there?!

Now, I know I probably shouldn't say this, because in the entertainment industry, nobody is supposed to say obvious and truthful things, like Tom Cruise sucks, or James Cameron is an epic A-hole and Michael Bay is a complete hack, but here's some information from The Inside™:

This happens all the %\$@!^ing time. Actors prepare their guts out for an audition, only to get there, wait an hour or longer (SAG says they're supposed to pay us like 30 bucks or something if we're there longer than an hour, but if an actor actually asks for that he will be blacklisted by that casting director, so nobody ever does) and go into a room where producers are on the phone, or looking through paperwork, or doing just about everything in the world except paying attention to the actor who is auditioning for them.

Most of the time, the person who is reading with you is so overworked, he or she doesn't take the time to learn what the scene is about and reads the other lines in the scene with a flat, monotone disinterest that throws off the best of us. I guess what most of them fail to realize is that the best acting is *reacting* and it's tough to react to complete and utter disinterest.

A notable exception to this rule is Tony Sepulveda, who casts at Warner Brothers. He is one of my absolute favorite casting directors to read for, because he ALWAYS makes me feel welcome and comfortable and he ALWAYS knows the material he's reading. The last time I read for him, he was totally

off the script and even improvised with me. Tony is an incredibly busy man, yet he still manages to find the time to make actors feel welcome. It's a shame that there's only one of him.

You know, if I were a producer or director, I would want every actor who comes into my room to feel extremely comfortable. I would want to create an atmosphere where actors are free to feel vulnerable and take chances, where they are able to do their absolute best work. I would want actors to come before me and not worry about anything, at all, except showing me their take on the character.

Oh, I'm so living in a dream world. That is just not how it is. Four out of five times, I go into an audition and the people I'm reading for don't even stand up and thank me for coming in. Most of the time, I'm lucky if anyone other than the casting director even says hello, or shows a remote interest in my being there. I have experienced people taking calls on their cell phones and talking during my audition, taking calls on their cell phones and leaving the room while I'm doing my audition, reading the newspaper, reading their schedule for the rest of the day, talking to another person in the room . . . it goes on and on.

Good acting comes from an actor who is not afraid to stand there naked in front of a room and bare their soul to the camera. You'd think that the uncreative philistines who run this bullshit industry would give a shit about that and try to create an atmosphere where actors can relax and do their best work.

But here's the truth: these days, most of the people sitting in that room know that their show is going to *maybe* make it three episodes before the equally insecure and untalented people at the network cancel it before it can find an audience—and put reruns of some shitty reality show in its place. And because they know this, they are scared to death and they

don't trust their instincts and they project all their insecurities onto the actors who are in front of them.

You know, the audition process for *Win Ben Stein's Money* was the most fun I have had in YEARS, and that was entirely because Andrew Golder and the entire group over there told me, from the very beginning, "We want you to feel comfortable and relaxed. We want you to feel free to make mistakes and not worry about looking bad, because when you can do your best work, it makes us look good." It made me feel like I was playing before the home crowd in The Big Game™.

So the challenge for me is to somehow get over this terrible environment that pervades auditions these days. I have to be able to walk into a room and not give a shit about them, because they certainly don't give a shit about me. But that's extremely hard! I do care about them. I have put time, energy, and effort into creating this character for them and I *want* to please them! It's really tough to do my best, when I feel like the people in the room don't care whether I'm there or not.

Now maybe I'm insane, but wouldn't it be better, and easier, and more cost-effective, for the studios to put actors at ease and make us feel like they do, in fact, give a shit about us being there? If they'd do that, actors would be able to do much better work, because they wouldn't feel nervous and overly scrutinized. Shows would be cast much more quickly and everyone would go home happy.

But, as I said, I am so living in a dream world.



Thought for today:

*If imagination is not set to the task of building a creative life, it busies itself with weaving a web of inner fears and doubts, blame and excuse.*

—Laurence G. Boldt

Sour grapes, right? Sort of. The truth is, I'd put up with that sort of treatment for way too long, and I'd just had it. I'd rather not ever get hired for acting work again than continue to smile while being punched in the face.

The year before I wrote this blog, I'd been on the negotiating team for the Screen Actors Guild when we worked out our TV and Theatrical contract, and I was horrified to discover how our employers think of us: we're interchangeable, disposable, and not worthy of any respect. As an actor, I depended on those people to let me support my family and create the art that was such an important part of my life. Because we actors are so dependent on them, they can treat us like shit and we'll beg for more.

Well, I had a week to think about that, and I realized that I'd treated my family exactly the same way the Industry had treated me: I had totally disregarded their feelings and taken them for granted.

When Anne and the boys returned home, I knew what was important to me, I knew what I would fight for, and I knew where my priorities were. I met her in the driveway when they drove up and embraced her before she was even fully out of the car.

"I'm so sorry I didn't come with you," I said.

"I know," she said.

"Never again. I'm done with this bullshit."

Ryan and Nolan came out of the car, and made it a group hug.

"I love you guys so much. I'm so happy you're home," I said.

I vowed then, for better or for worse, that I would never let my career come before my family again.