

"Read Between The Lines: I Will Take Your Head Off Your Shoulders"

by Kate Dailey February 14, 2008 2:39 AM



I made my first trip to Sundance this year, and all it took was a navigationally impaired cab driver, two cramped flights, a delayed shuttle, and the longest, snowiest, scariest, lost-est van drive of my *entire life*. By the time I arrived in Park City, all I wanted was to eat dinner, watch TV, and go to bed. While I had to make due, meal-wise, with a 7-11 Burrito and a six-pack, my television diet proved much more satisfying: the latest episode of *The Wire*, featuring both Avon Barksdale and Sergei Malatov, two welcome callbacks from seasons past.

The next day, on a bus to the theater, who should walk on but Sergei himself, [Chris Ashworth](#). Turns out, he's not Ukranian -- not even close. He's just about the sweetest, most mild-mannered Virginian boy you could ever hope to meet. And while he mostly relies on southern charm, he'll resort to Brazilian Jiu-Jitso if things get tough.

Chris agreed to sit for an interview, and called me from LA after Sundance ended. As it turns out, my fancy, high-tech recording equipment hadn't picked up any of our conversation, and I had to recreate the interview from my notes. Chris was more than generous about filling in gaps, fact-checking my copy, and, at one point, helping me to ferret out typos. The completed version, minus his very kind and genuine goodbyes, is below.

Kate Dailey: You're a relentless self-promoter: [your clip reel is on YouTube](#), you're constantly updating [your MySpace page](#). Do you feel like you're working outside the Hollywood system, and is that working for you?

Chris Ashworth: I'm trying to, because believe it or not, I got *The Wire* on my own. The first good agent I had was 2007, believe it or not. Everything that I had been cast in [before that], including *The Wire*, was brought about by my own doing. I didn't have representation sending me out. There were no negotiations regarding salary on *The Wire* because I was hired as a local. I just wanted to work.

KD: So how did it happen?

CA: I was in Southwest Virginia and they cast out of Baltimore...I guess they were looking for an authentic Russian, even though [Sergei's] Ukrainian. They couldn't find one in L.A. or New York, and the local director in Baltimore, Pat Moran, called me. I had met her a couple of years beforehand. She told me that she'd told HBO that I was really Russian. [*laughs*] I was like, "What?" I really didn't know how to proceed. I try to be the epitome of southern hospitality and not deceive people, and she said I would get over it, she would get over it, and that's acting. And she was right. So I went and auditioned for that role as a Russian. And let me tell you, Chris Ashworth does not sound Russian whatsoever. ["In fact, Chris Ashworth has a very deep and noticeable southern accent." -- *KD*]

KD: So for the first part of your career, you really went out there and tried to get jobs on your own.

CA: I did try to self-promote because I never had anyone to do it for me. It's so true. I ended up with the shadiest of representation, both management- and agent-wise, and it's just now that I'm really getting into the groove of having good representation. It could have been a lot better. I was trying to figure out how the business worked. I mean, I came from such a small town in Virginia, and it's not like you can just pick up the classifieds and read about acting jobs.

I had to deal with a lot of broken promises, though looking back, they weren't really promises -- just lip service -- and I'm finally at a spot now where I have representation that I can work with. No matter how much work I have and how great the roles are, I'm still going to be tossing and turning at night, wondering if I'm still going to be working. *The Wire* is so hot right now, but the writers' strike is really slowing this down. ["This interview was conducted before the strike was settled." -- *KD*] You know the phrase, you need to strike when the iron's hot, and I don't think they every intended in working the "strike" of a writer's strike into that phase.

KD: How did you get into acting?

CA: It's hard to say. I like entertaining people, and in every interview I've done I always talk about where I grew up -- Bedford, Virginia. It really was the epitome of *Little House On The Prarie*, and I grew up mimicking the TV. That's where I learned accents. Maybe it was in Social Studies, in fifth or sixth grade, when I started reading about England and the beginnings of America. When I was called on to read out loud, I read with a British accent. And other kids -- I was never the most popular, I was somewhere down the middle -- I remember other kids saying, "Get Chris to read it again with that accent." No one else could do it. I don't know if it was a gift from God or not -- I mean, we all have talents. I don't know if that was the beginning of it. I liked entertaining people, and I got a kick out of no one else being able to do that accent. I wanted to work for the government and tried to do as many accents and learn as many bits and pieces of other languages as I could. I wanted to be an actor when I was a kid. Of course, everyone grows up saying that's what they want to be -- that and an astronaut.

KD: Okay, but most kids grow up and then turn out to be a dentist or a salesman. But you stuck with acting. How did that happen?

CA: I finished up at a no-name college -- no offense. Someone's going to read this and figure out which one I'm taking about. It was a decent school, and in 1998 I had finished my last year. I had two Associate's degrees and one Bachelor's in Criminal Justice and Criminal Administration, or something like that. I didn't go to my graduation. I slept in and told my mom I wasn't going to go to work that day, and was thinking of not going the next day. It was straight out *Office Space*.

KD: Where were you working?

CA: I don't remember. I may have been self-employed. I've had so many jobs. I remember picking up the paper and looking at the classifieds. Then I called this lady at church that I used to know who was a really, really great, gifted singer. She was always involved in plays, and had a big name from doing them -- Lisa Butler. I called and asked where I could get started. She didn't have film or TV experience aside from local commercials, and told me of a few local theaters I could try. I called every one of them that day and it just so happened -- and I still get goose bumps talking about it -- there was this one theater called the Cherry Tree Players, and they were casting *The Best Little Whorehouse In Texas*. I had no experience, not at all -- I still don't have any, really. But the woman on the phone said, "We're having auditions today, and if you'd like you can come down."

KD: So you got the part?

CA: I played several roles [with them]: a Scandinavian man, a redneck -- let me tell you, me pulling off a southern accent was a stretch [*laughs*]. She cast me in several roles, and it was great. I sat out on the back steps after practice or a show one night with the lead and we were talking, and she had done so many productions but she had never ventured out, and I said, "Why don't you pursue this? You're so talented." And she said, "I'm happy doing this." I said, "One day, were going to have a conversation and I'll be somewhere else, God willing. I'm going to take it as far as I can." It's ten years later since we had that conversation, and I just ran into her and she remembers that night. But I was twisting and turning and said I think this is what I'm supposed to do -- forget criminal justice. All my family is in law enforcement, and that's where I thought I would end up. Oh, I just remembered this. You'll like this.

KD: Okay, let me hear it.

CA: A few years before that -- after five years in college, three different schools -- I remember having a conversation with my father at the end of our driveway. I told him I wanted to quit school and go to L.A. and become an actor. I didn't think about this until just now. I did bring up the fact that Brad Pitt was the chicken at a Pollo Loco and ate at a Taco Bell to get through. Now, I don't know how much truth there is to those stories, but I admired what I'd heard. I tried to use that as leverage, but my dad wasn't having it. We didn't argue, but he said, "You need a backup plan." I said, "I only need that if I plan on failing, which I don't." [My parents] were always supportive, but if I were in their shoes, I wouldn't want my kid to go into acting.

KD: Let's get back to *The Wire*: when did they find out that you weren't actually Russian?

CA: I was way beyond cast. Some people knew it from the outset, but...I don't remember how long David Simon thought I was Russian....

KD: And a lot of your fans still think you're Russian, right?

CA: All the time. At Sundance, it was overwhelming. I mean, I'm all about Southern accents and hospitality, and if you were to describe [the fans who approach me], it's just one word and that's warm. And I think I speak and it's kind of like shell shock: Sergei's so violent and so cold. I try to spend time talking to whomever. It's such an honor and privilege for people to give input on *The Wire*. It flatters me and keeps me going; it's the gas that fuels my fire. Even if it's bad feedback. [laughs] I mean, I haven't had any, but if anybody's got any...

At the Netflix party at Sundance, I was waiting for my friend to come out of the bathroom, and this guy was just standing across from me, staring at me. I didn't know what he was thinking about or what his motives were, and finally I went over him and said, "Hi, I'm Chris Ashworth." He said, "I know, and it's a huge pleasure to meet you. My family is Russian and I have to tell you that I believed you were Russian and I'm not easily fooled." Turns out he was a producer working on a film in Chicago and asked me about playing a Polish character. He asked me if I could do it, because the accents are similar, and I said I could. I have to alter some things, but that was great, and that was a great idea that may actually take me somewhere, by fooling someone into thinking I was Russian.

KD: You really do have the accent down. Did you do any kind of training to prepare for *The Wire*?

CA: I should say thank you. I grew up mimicking accents; I never had any dialect coaching or classes. I had a couple of private sessions with a guy to help neutralize my accent if I need to. So changing my "win" to "when" and my "Whinsdays" to "Wednesdays" is as far as we went. I never had any coaching with it. I have no idea where I picked that up.

KD: So you had no basis? Did you hear it in your head or watch old movies or what? How did you know how to do a Russian accent?

CA: I had it in my head. I many have rented a movie with a Russian accent the more I think about it. I haven't thought about it in a long time, and I've been asked that so many times. Maybe I did rent a movie with Harrison Ford, thought I don't think the accent was very good.

KD: If you're taking about *The Hunt for Red October*, you're right. The accent was not very good. ["In fact, it was non-existent. That was Sean Connery doing a bad Russian accent; Harrison Ford's was in *K-19: The Widowmaker*." -- KD]

CA: I had it in my head somewhere: maybe I heard it in New York. In the ears of American audiences, all the accents are going to be similar -- Armenian, Russian.... To actual Russian audiences, some of them thought I was Russian, which is the biggest compliment I can receive.

KD: So how were you cast?

CA: I was cast in 2003. I had spent four years going back and forth to DC and Baltimore for projects, and that's how I met Pat Moran. I was working on *The Replacements*, the Keanu Reeves movie. I played one of his teammates. I didn't have any lines -- I was cut from the film -- but some of the people who had been there for a few months were going to go to her office. I had never heard of her. They asked me if I would like to go, too, and I went. It was the most worthwhile experience. I was tired, but someone said I should go, and I went and introduced myself. When the time came to do *The Wire*, she remembered that my résumé said I could do accents, and she gave me a call.

KD: How long were you on the set?

CA: In 2003, the second season, we filmed from January to July. I was there seven months. We were there for seven months off and on -- a lot off, because it's a huge cast and there are a lot of stories going back and forth and weaving in and out, so I was more off than on.

KD: Had you heard about *The Wire* before being cast?

CA: I'd heard about it for sure. I think at the time I was spending a lot of time in New York trying to get into this crazy business, and a writer/director friend of mine, Jason Noto, [he and I] were trying to get things started in New York, and he said, "You've got to see this show; it's the best thing on television." And I watched it and fell in love. I would have loved to be on it, I remember thinking when I was watching it. And as an actor, you're always thinking things like that when you watch TV, but what are the realities of it happening? I just kind of dismissed it. I don't know if I sent in a headshot or a résumé. Maybe I did, but I know it was something that, as a fan, I had to spend time every Sunday watching. The writing is still unmatched, and it still blows my mind that David hasn't walked away with anything, with any kind of award. I was watching the SAG Awards last week, and I watch the Emmys every year, and I don't want to name the shows [that get nominated], but I'm thinking, "Where's *The Wire* in all of this?" Seriously, what a joke. There are great shows that were nominated. [The Sopranos](#) is great, but they've received so many awards. I mean, they've earned them, but there is no love for *The Wire* when it comes to those awards.

KD: How much of your character came from the showrunners and how much did you develop on your own?

CA: The majority of what you see came from David Simon and Ed Burns and the brilliant writing staff, but David did give me the green light to ad-lib when it called for it. Sometimes I would throw in extra stuff in Russian. I tried to learn as much Russian as I could. I had Russian friends and I would say, "I think that Sergei would say this, how do you say it in Russian?"

KD: For instance?

CA: When I [met Marlo](#) this second episode of this season, when I was trying to intimidate him. There's no way Marlo -- as intimidating as he is -- that these Russians would fear him. The Russians that I did meet, in New York, in Brighton Beach, they would have eaten him alive. These guys could get real violent real fast, and they weren't going to put up with him, and would

look at Marlo as being beneath them. I wanted the audience to know that, if he could, Sergei would have come through the glass and attacked him. So I said. "[*Unintelligible Russian*] gangbanger?" It means, "Do you understand, gangbanger?" As in, "Read between the lines: I will take your head off your shoulders." And Jamie Hector, who plays Marlo, was such a nice guy, and that's the only time I was able to work with him. And as crazy as that character is, Jamie has got such a great role and has done such a great job of it. That's one of the most intimidating character, as a fan watching it, and one of the most ruthless characters that I've seen. He's not like that in person. He's really quiet and laidback and a sweetheart, and to look him in the eyes and threaten him over and over again -- we had to do several takes. That was one of the times I ad-libbed.

Oh, and when I'm beating the engineer in Season 2 and have him tied up in his chair, the majority of that scene is ad-libbed.

KD: Who choreographed that fight?

CA: Jeff Gibson choreographed the fight scenes. Those were his ideas. I wanted to hit [the engineer] with a hook: I've trained in mixed martial arts [MMA] for years and have friends that fight in a cage. That was a long day for the engineer. I got so close, and Jeff was saying, "It's TV," [and that I didn't] have to get so close. I just wanted it to look real. And the engineer was getting nervous. He kept asking me to stand back... That scene took all day. I wanted to get it right. Jeff choreographed that, and I basically choreographed the scene where Dominic [West] and the FBI agent came into my room and [grabbed me](#). Jeff was overseeing the whole thing and had ideas, but I was the one saying, "I could throw myself against the wall, I could do this or that." I did some fight choreography with a friend years before on some indie stuff, and David basically gave me the green light. It was great working with those guys. Those writers already give you a gem to work with every time; it's just the most well-written show I've seen in my entire life. They gave me plenty of wiggle room to ad-lib. There were times things were said, when I'd have to drop a Russian word or phrase -- I can't remember what it was, but I remember talking to David, saying that my Russians friends were saying this is what they'd say seventy years ago, but now it sounds dated. And David was so awesome to work with and trusted my judgment.

KD: Since you've brought up the scene with Fitz and McNulty, you need to settle a small argument I uncovered when researching you online. Apparently, there's somewhat of a dispute over whether or not you were naked.

CA: Seriously? [*much laughter*] I definitely was not naked. I've turned a lot of stuff down because I don't do nudity and don't want to go down that road. That's kind of cool -- I didn't hear about that, and I do try to read what people are saying online.

KD: I've noticed on your MySpace blog and in reading your interviews that you have a very strong faith and belief system. Does the no-nudity issue play into that? And do you often find yourself at odds in Hollywood, which is not known as being a place really conducive to faith and belief?

CA: I do find myself at odds at times, but I try not to judge anybody else. I know what I'm supposed to do and doing right from wrong in God's eyes. God's ideas of right and wrong can differ from that of man's, and Hollywood is a place that likes to eat people up, to chew them up. As a Christian -- and I'm trying to choose my words carefully here... [*pause*] There are plenty of people that are over the top, that give Christians a bad name. I mean, there are people ramming it down people's throat and beating people over the head, and Jesus did it with love. I just try to be the nicest person I can be to everyone and not judge anyone, but often people have this preconceived idea of what I'm going to be like [because of my beliefs], and it's quickly torn down once they meet me. I've never had any problems [in Hollywood] but there's some stuff I won't do and I try to take each project as it comes and see, in the long run, if this is going to make me happy. Is this something I'm going to let my kids watch? I try to be a role model to my little cousins and people I watch growing up back home. I answer to God, and don't answer to anyone in Hollywood. I'm not by any means trying to be holier-than-thou, but at the end of the day I want to know I did the best I could with what I've been given. Every program, as great as it is, is going to come and go, and we as people are going to come and go, and at the end of the day I want to be able to answer to myself and to God.

KD: You've done a lot of stunt work, and you train in [Mixed Martial Arts](#). Were you a stuntman that fell into acting, or an actor that can do stunts?

CA: Definitely an actor. I mean, I've done my own stunts, and the more physical the better regarding fight scenes. If I come away a little banged up, that's fine. I want it to look real, and if it doesn't someone hasn't done his job. I'm an actor first -- an actor who is capable of doing his own stunts. I just did an episode of *Without A Trace*, and there was a fight scene in that as well, between another soldier and myself, and it was great. I went right to my Muay Thai training: put the guy in the clinch, take him down, and that was so at home for me. When it comes to stunts, I'd just like to be able to learn to do it right. My dad was great and skilled marksman; I grew up doing this stuff with my dad. I grew up and went into acting, but my best friends are all trained fighters and Navy SEALs.

KD: There is a toughness that you have to bring to Sergei. You in person are so warm, but Sergei -- there was [a scene at the end of Season 2](#) when Pablo [Schreiber]'s character, Nick, goes in to the police and is telling them who everyone is within the Greek's organization...

CA: I know that scene. "He just carried it like that."

KD: Right -- Nick's saying he suspects that Sergei is the muscle of the organization, just because "he just carried it like that." And so much of Sergei's character is non-verbal, and based on you reacting. How do you convey that?

CA: I don't know. I'm not really sure. It could be reaction, but I think I set the pace in the beginning in the [first episode](#) of the second season when Ziggy says, "Russian, right?" and I say, "Not Russian, Ukraine," and they say, "Oh, it's all the same," and they're messing with me, and I look him in the eyes and didn't blink and nodded my head a little. I wanted to make it so that people watching knew: it was going to come to a point later where everyone was going to learn a lesson. That set the precedent right there. And later, when I was beating the engineer -- everyone

on the set knew I did MMA. The looks I gave people as Sergei, and later [doing] that scene with the engineer, it got into people's heads. Mostly what [the cast] knew of me was from my acting on set, but in the back of their heads, they also knew I had experience with fighting.

KD: Where did that experience come from?

CA: I was jumped and put in the hospital when I was eighteen, and the last thing I heard the guy say was, "Shoot him now." I didn't get shot, but I had a concussion and I got beat even more, because I followed the car the guys got out of, to try and get the license plate for my dad to run.... After that, I started training in other forms of karate and stuff, but nothing compares to what you see in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. It's the most realistic martial arts: Muay Thai and Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu, and I started training in them.

KD: So you started training as a means of self-defense?

CA: I knew I needed to learn how to take care of myself. I was working on a project in 1998, and I got jumped again -- but the guys that jumped me also jumped my training partner, a champion Muay Thai fighter. We were trying to walk away, and they tried to run us over in a parking lot. They stopped the car and proceeded to keep on pushing it. We tried to walk away, but sometimes you can't walk away, especially where there's a wall behind you back.

KD: I take it you won that fight.

CA: I started to laugh because I couldn't believe it was happening again...I thought of an internship I did with the police in Danville, Virginia. I asked one of the guys, "How do you deal with the public when people have attitudes toward you, but don't realize all the problems that the police have to deal with?" He said, "I'm as nice as I can be, but mean as I have to be." So I told [one of the men trying to fight] that we don't have any problem with them and they don't need to get combative. His exact phrase was, "What the fuck are you going to do, pretty-boy?" I said, "It's funny you should ask." I was able to put him in a hold and subdue him without really hurting him. While [forcing him to submit], I was asking him, "Why are you doing this? Why did you feel that you have to come up and injure my friends?" I didn't have to hurt him, but I took control of the situation and that felt good.

KD: On *The Wire*, as you said, everything is so separate, and there are so many stories and scenes that don't intersect. Was it the same way off the set?

CA: We all got along so well. That's not a canned answer. It's the truth. We didn't keep ourselves apart at all. There were times when an actor or actress would have to walk away if they're doing an intense scene, just to get riled up. When I was beating the engineer, if you couldn't find me at Craft Services, I was off somewhere getting ready, though I don't need a lot to get into a fight scene.

KD: But you seem like such a nice, mild-mannered guy.

CA: I appreciate that, thank you. You don't want to seem angry. We got along well, we spend a lot of time joking around in our down time, and just getting to know each other and watching everyone do their own thing. I spent a lot of time watching the other actors. There are so many great actors on *The Wire*. Like I said, I didn't have any acting classes, so that's how I learned -- by watching these great actors.

KD: What was your first day on set like?

CA: My first day on the set was hard. It's the biggest thing I'd done and only thing I've done, really, that ever counted for anything. Paul Ben-Victor, the actor who played Vondas, was in the first scene -- the first scene I'd ever done in my entire life, with such a great cast, anyway, and such a good budget. [Paul] was sitting across from me and I was nervous. I was so nervous. I was thinking, "This is the beginning of my acting career, please don't screw it up." I'd spent years auditioning for something like this, and all the all the pressure was there. I recognized [Ben-Victor] but didn't talk to him, because I was sure he knew I was nervous. My hands were on the table and I was thinking how I was going to deliver my lines. He just put his hand on my hand and said [in a Greek accent], "Son, talk." It was so simple, and it unleashed a flurry of questions before we started, and he gave me good advice.

Sergei would have had more lines in the beginning, but I wanted to nail my lines and get [them] right. David said I could have had extra stuff if I was less tense. But I became more relaxed as we went on, and it's because the set was so relaxed.

KD: What did you do to relax when you weren't filming? You were in some pretty bad neighborhoods.

CA: Oh, we roamed the corners, worked on our characters. Just kidding. They actually told us that it's not a great idea to go wandering around. You'll be well received for the most part, but there were some times with Method Man when we were filming or doing scenes together, and I remember someone yelling, "We don't care who you are. Get out of here. You don't belong here." It was so sad. There are so many poor spots in Baltimore. It's got some really great spots and some not-so-great spots. There are lots of areas where there isn't a great amount of money or jobs, and it's not just gangs or drug dealers causing problems. There are a lot of hardworking people and single-parent homes [where people] are trying to make it. They pay the price for the ignorant people dealing drugs and causing problems.

KD: *The Wire* does a good job, though, of showing how systemic the problem is. I mean, it really makes the problem seem so endemic and so hard to escape, and even if you are trying to make the right decisions, sometimes selling drugs is inevitable -- the only option you have.

CA: They do get the reality of it. Of course, I was dealt a good deck of cards: not rich but not poor, somewhere along the middle. I have a great family. Thank God for them. I grew up with people who are in prison for murder, and people who are working for the highest rungs at the White House. I always thought that even if you're given the worst situation, you need to be accountable and you can't turn around and blame someone else. [But] in Baltimore and in some of those places, they have a long way to go to [get to that place where you can] make the best of

what [you've] got. There's Method Man's name again, but when he and I were working those scenes that night, we were standing beside Craft Services and eating sandwiches, and this lady came up with a child who was two or three at most, and said, "He hasn't had anything to eat all day. Can we get something to eat?" It brought tears to my eyes. My heart cracked. I mean, from where I'm from we'd let you come stay at my house. What do you mean you don't have anything to eat? We said, "Of course, take as much as your pockets can hold." If we get in trouble, we get in trouble, though I can't imagine anyone getting upset because we gave food to a kid who hasn't eaten all day.

KD: Wow, and then you go film a scene...

CA: TV is TV, but while I'm making money having a great scene with great actors, when something like that happens, it's hard to get out of your head.

KD: So what are you working on now?

CA: With the writers' strike, there was a project that's been put on hold that I was allegedly supposed to be a part of. I received a script, but I don't want to give the title away [in case] it never comes to fruition. There are more and more options every day because of *The Wire*. The cast should have no problems finding work in a perfect world, but with the strike going right now, it's hard to say. There are a couple projects that many happen. As of right now, I'm still taking applications. [*Laughs.*]

KD: How did you find out you were going to be on the fifth season of *The Wire*?

CA: I received a call from David's assistant -- a courtesy call, because she knew I wanted to come back. I know on the internet, I get questions on [my website](#) and on MySpace: "Where [is Sergei]? Are you in prison?" I didn't really know. They did show me in court. They filmed me in one of the last scenes [of Season 2]. They were going through, down the line in front of the judge, and they stopped on me. I was there but they never showed it.

KD: We missed Sergei in a suit?

CA: Sergei was in a suit, as I recall, because my neck was itching and I wanted to get out of it. I had an altercation in the parking lot of the courthouse that day, because the van was taking about four of us to the courthouse, and this guy cut us off and almost caused a head-on accident. We're just driving along and this car comes cutting across the parking lot and causes our van to swerve pretty violently. The guy parks, and the transpo guy says, "What's your problem?" and the guy goes off like it was his fault. I had a problem with that, because the driver was so nice. The guy was so in the wrong, and if I'm wrong I'm going to tell you I'm wrong and say I'm sorry. I said, "Between the lines, if you have a problem take it up with me...If there's a problem, I'm going to fix it."

KD: As Sergei?

CA: Yeah, I used my Russian accent to mess with him more. It was like character work for me. I get aggravated at people who aren't considerate of others. Life's short to fight. That really bothered me. It's one thing to jump in my face, and hopefully I don't give people a reason to do that, but to do it to a guy who's doing a job to the best of his abilities and is such a nice guy, that rubbed me the wrong way.

KD: Let's get back to Season 5. You get a call from the assistant...

CA: She said it was a courtesy call [to let me know to show up to work], and I started laughing, because I was elated. I was at my parents' house in Virginia. I went upstairs and said something to my dad, who was reading the paper. He's a retired cop, and so many people in law enforcement and government love *The Wire*, just eat it up, and years later still ask if I'm coming back. So I said to my dad, "Guess I'm going to go for a jog, gotta get in shape...cause I'm coming back to *The Wire* this season." He just looked at me, and I'll never forget that look. My parents have worked so hard and I cannot describe the blessing it is to call my parents and say I've been blessed with another job. I was so excited to walk up there and tell my dad that. I loved that show, and I loved working on it. Despite us not earning Emmys or so forth, it was such a great project to be a part of. I would love it if they said, "Just kidding, there's going to be a Season 6."

KD: So would a lot of people. So will we see more of you on Season 5?

CA: [long pause] I -- well -- I guess I can't answer that. [pause] I know when to shut up. I can just see David looking at me in the back of my head.

KD: How is he to work with? Is he hands-on?

CA: David Simon is hands-on, but not in a micromanaging sense of the word. He was hands-on, but with the most amount of easygoing-ness one could handle. He was a joy to be around, and Ed Burns, too. David with his journalism background and Ed with [his] law-enforcement background made the perfect team. These guys are great. No one in Hollywood is ever going say, "Oh, those guys are horrible to work with" about anyone, but if someone is terrible to work with, I wouldn't say nice things. They were great to be around, and great to work with. Many times I would have questions, and I could not have had a greater response. There were always so willing to help. They were in it for the project.

KD: Who's your favorite character?

CA: Other than myself? I really like Marlo. Jamie does such a great job with his character. He's got the look that Sergei has, where he doesn't have to say anything. He knows what he can do and everyone around him knows what he can do. I love my character most, and most actors and actresses would say that about their characters. It adds something different, the violent aspect. It just adds something more. If it wasn't me? Marlo, and Andre Royo's Bubbles. That man is amazing.

KD: Did you get to work with him at all?

CA: I met him at the Season 2 premiere in New York, but that's the only interaction we had. I also like Wood Harris -- Avon Barksdale. That character is the most laidback gangbanger, but he called the shots, and people knew it. I did interact with him because of our scene in the beginning of this season. He's a great guy to be around. You hear about so many actors that are really into themselves, but these are guys who are a joy to work with.

KD: The show is so critically acclaimed, even if it's ignored at awards season and in the ratings. Is it respected by casting directors and producers? Does *The Wire* open doors for you with them?

CA: It is opening doors for me. I'm just at the point now where I have great reps to help me walk through those doors, so it does help get me in. It is critically acclaimed, even though we don't have the hardware to prove it. I'm not really into the Hollywood scene. I drift between being out and about and [being] a homebody. With Sundance, that was great. It was overwhelming how many *Wire* fans were there.

KD: So you were at Sundance to get your face out and network?

CA: And they give away nice stuff, I hear. [laughs] Me coming from the middle of nowhere and never being a part of that scene, that was overwhelming. I went to just about all of [the swag tents]. Though I hear somewhere they were giving away iPods, and [fake sad voice] I never got an iPod! My manager got credentials and I was able to go to many suites...and that was unfathomable. People give away so much stuff and the value of some of it is unreal. I don't have the budget to buy that stuff. I took what I got on *The Wire* and said, "Thank you." I didn't try to negotiate a higher salary because it was local casting. It's amazing, some of these people got all this stuff for free, and they finally have the money to buy anything they want. We were in front of the Fred Segal suite, and there were people shouting, "Free stuff for rich people!" from the bridge. I thought that was funny. Dude, I'm still trying to pay rent. Paris, behind me, she doesn't need all those stuffed animals. But that was kind of funny.

KD: There must have been such a contrast between the Craft Services table in East Baltimore and the swag suites in Sundance.

CA: It was in the back of my head when I was there, that people put value on these things and not other things. The whole [Sundance] scene was insane at times. I go out every now and then. I need to be more a part of-- how to word this. I need to get out more and be seen and network, I guess, but it's a little foreign to me from where I come from. When I have a conversation with someone it's because I want to, not because I'm trying to get something out of [him]. If I can do something for someone, I'll do it to the best of my ability, because I've been blessed and I try to help other people.

KD: How do you walk that line?

CA: [Peter Krause](#) has been like a big brother to me, and he gave me a lot of good advice saying that *The Wire* is hot and I need to take advantage of it. Some of it may not be pretty, but [I need to] get out there and get good exposure. I'm not of the belief that all exposure is good or all PR is good PR, but he was right.

KD: How did you meet Peter?

CA: I met him...let's see, he did a miniseries in Albuquerque [*"The Lost Room"* -- *KD*], and I did a few stunts there. Nothing big -- they weren't really stunts at all. My friends were producing it for Lionsgate, and at the spur of the moment I came down and did some work on location. I wanted to get away from L.A. and come back to Virginia for a few months and spend time with my family, because it was close to Christmas. So I got a small role doing stunts and doing some crew work to see what working on the crew was like. I didn't like it, but allowed me to go to a new place. Everything was cast, so it wasn't something I could be a part of, but I met Peter there, and probably he's one of the nicest people I've ever met, actor or not. A blessing to be around, for sure.

KD: Any truth to the rumors that you'll be on [*Prison Break*](#)?

CA: My manager has talked with Casting several times and the right role hasn't come along yet. It would have to be a great role, but I would love to do it. I spoke with Wentworth Miller in Blockbuster a few months ago and we were talking about each other's shows. I complimented him on his work and he said he had heard nothing but good about *The Wire*. He wanted to rent it and catch up. I told him that my dad was now calling *Prison Break* his favorite show, instead of *The Wire*. I told him that he'd taken away my biggest fan [*laughs*]. So there are no plans as of right now, but I would love to be a part of it if Fox was listening. It's my other favorite show.

http://www.televisionwithoutpity.com/show/the_wire_1/the_chris_ashworth_interview.php