>> Lauren Appelbaum: I oversee our work to create equitable and accessible opportunities to increase the number of people with lived disability experiences throughout the overall storytelling process. These initiatives, we hope, will increase diverse and authentic representation of disabled people on screen, leading to systemic change in our society views and values peoples with disabilities. Myself, I'm an individual with an acquired non-apparent disability called reflex sympathetic dystrophy. And I had, as well as some of my colleagues, the privilege of consulting on numerous projects, including this one that we just got to see today. One in five people in the U.S. have a disability, and so the lack of representation, which is less than one percent in children's television, means that millions of children are unable to see themselves in media today. But, as we're seeing with Firebuds, which has introduced several disabled characters, it ensures that disabled children and adults alike, which are often overlooked, are represented. So joining me today -- as I'm seeing -- in the comments, everyone's kind of here to see our guests today -- we have Emmy award-winning writer and producer, Craig Gerber, the Creator and executive producer of Firebuds.

>> Craig Gerber: Hi everyone.

>> Lauren: As well as writer Jeremy Shipp and his son Henry, who inspired this episode. Henry was born with a cleft lip and palette, and he also voices Caster in this episode. So Craig, I'm going to start with you. As the Executive Producer, you've made the decision to really have a truly inclusive show in so many ways. As we talked about in October, this world of Gearbox Grove and nearby Motopolis includes a recurring character Jazzy, a young black girl who uses a wheelchair. And in this episode we meet Caster, who's undergoing a surgery for his cleft lip and palate. Why is it so important that we see a diverse representation of so many different types of disabilities on Firebuds?

>> Craig: Well over the course of my previous shows, I've seen firsthand how much representation matters to young children, especially on Elena of Avalor, which featured Disney's first Latina princess and an extremely diverse cast. You know, it's really important for children to see themselves represented on screen in a positive way. It bolsters their self-confidence, it gives them a sense of being seen for who they are. And you know, the disabled community is a group that I felt has been underrepresented in the past, so we wanted to address that in Firebuds, first by introducing a recurring character, Jazzy, whose roommate is a wheelchair car. And she has spina bifida. But she recurs in the show -- she's the sister of a main character. There are several episodes that are centered around Jazzy in particular. So that was one way that we wanted to include more diversity, especially for the disabled community. Another way was individual episodes. And in the case of this one that we just watched, "Cleft Hood," you know, our show involves medical first responders, so we thought there was a great opportunity to do a story about someone who has medical issues that required hospital stays, so that kids watching at home with similar challenges could see themselves reflected on screen and get a sense of sort of empathy from that. But the specific credit for this storyline goes to Jeremy. It was his idea.

>> Lauren: Excellent. So let's head over to Jeremy and -- would love to learn more about how this idea came about.

>> Jeremy Shipp: So obviously it was inspired by my son. He is -- he's very inspiring to me and it's not because of his condition. He's inspiring because of his attitude and he's just a pretty positive kid. So I wanted to do a story with a character like him.

>> Henry Shipp: Thank you!

>> Jeremy: And I -- You're welcome! I pitched "Cleft Hood" and I was not there when Craig greenlit the episode. But I do remember my story editor at the time, and I don't think I've told this to Craig. He told me when he pitched for me, he said, you know, Jeremy's got an idea for this show called "Cleft Hood," and he explained what it's about. He said that Craig instantly said "I want to do it." Just like that. [snaps] So I thought that was really cool. So I'm very excited very proud of how -- it came out.

>> Lauren: Yeah it's -- it is truly a really great episode. And Henry, I'd love to to jump over to you. You know, Castor really represents so many children who have to miss fun activities or school because of hospital and doctor visits and such and -- what message do you hope Castor sends to children and their parents watching?

>> Henry: I really want them to feel like they're not alone, like there are other people who have those same problems as them.

>> Jeremy: Mmhmm.

>> Henry: Yeah.

>> Lauren: Excellent. Let's stick with you for a moment. Let's chat a little bit about the Anya stuffy. I loved kind of learning more about the -- the origin of Anya. So Jeremy and Henry, you know, I remember you telling me that this is a toy that you played with when you were young, and I'd love to learn more, and I think our viewers would really love to learn a little bit more about the origin of Anya.

>> Jeremy: So I will begin. Anya was a big part of our existence. This is the real Anya. My wife had found a doll with a cleft on it, so we got it for our young kiddo. And you know, I've told this a couple of times. I asked Henry -- and I don't remember how old you were, two or something -- I said what is -- "what is this doll's name?" And he instantly said Anya. He just knew it was Anya.

>> Henry: Yeah.

>> Jeremy: So I felt like if we're putting Castor in there who takes, you know, takes a page out of Henry's book, then Anya should be -- in there. And to -- credit to the designers. You know, I had sent them a picture of Henry and I believe they designed Castor with kind of his -- his essence. And then I sent them a picture of Anya. And if you look, you'll see that the -- the vehicle stuffy that Castor has is very similar to Anya. Do you remember Anya?

>> Henry: Yes, I do.

>> Lauren: I wonder how many parents who are watching now are thinking where can I find that stuffy themselves? [crosstalk]

>> Jeremy: I'd have to ask my wife, I don't remember.

>> Lauren: All those years ago. [laughs] So Craig, you know, I -- really love the character of Beth, you know, the therapist, you know, talking about how therapists help people understand their feelings. It's -- not something that we see a lot on screen and such. And she explains it in such a great way that young children can understand. Can you kind of elaborate on why her role is so important?

>> Craig: Yeah, well it seems to me that the importance of mental health has not been valued as much as it should be on screen and off, just in general. So you know, having a character like Bo's mom Beth, I think is a fantastic way to introduce the concept of taking care of yourself mentally to a young audience. There's an episode in season one where -- I think Jeremy, did you write this episode -- this episode? You did, right?

>> Jeremy: The episode about meditating? Yeah.

>> Craig: Yeah that -- that's the one, yeah, about meditating. Beth teaches the Firebuds to take three deep breaths in order to calm their bodies down, and she even sings a song about it. And Beth is voiced by Melissa Rauch, who's wonderful. And it's -- it's a terrific song, it gets the message across. So much so that when my youngest son about a year back saw an early version of the episode, a couple weeks after he was taking three deep breaths to calm himself down. You know, and my wife was like, "what are you doing?" He's like, "I'm taking three deep breaths!" I feel like I should probably remind him of that now. I think that would be very helpful. [laughter] But it was cool that it stuck with him, even you know, a couple weeks after seeing the episode. And you know, we're hoping to find other -- other episodes going forward in the show where Beth can, you know, tackle other easy to understand concepts for, you know, taking care of your mind. It really also is nice to have a character in the show who's a therapist, so the idea of a therapist becomes familiar and normalized with young kids. Because again, there -- has been a stigma about that in the past, and there's -- no reason for it. You know, we should be healthy both in our bodies and our mind, if we can.

>> Lauren: I love that. I mean, I remember learning pre-pandemic, so I have to imagine it's even more now, that anxiety was one of the leading disabilities among the preschool age. And to be thinking about that -- we think -- about it in, you know, kids in high school and young adults, but we don't have to think about it in young kids, so I think it's really sending a great message to our children. You mentioned songs -- and Jeremy I really loved when we were talking about the song "Put yourself in their wheels," you know, how important it really is to put yourself in other shoes, or in Castor's case wheels. You know, why are songs so important like this, and you know -- and I love seeing them in the episodes.

>> Jeremy: Well, songs are fun! Songs are fun to watch, they're fun to listen to. When we write them, I think we're given liberty in songs to be a little bit more abstract, perhaps, a little bit more poetic, just a touch. And I think the melody of these songs is helpful in communicating some concepts that might otherwise be harder to convey through just prose dialogue. And in this particular instance, from the moment I pitched the story I wanted it to be about empathy. I wanted it to be about understanding another's feelings, or at least trying to see things from their point of view. I didn't want it to be just putting a spotlight on the cleft condition. And I think the song is, you know, empathy is a is a concept that preschool audience has to kind of understand. I'd say I think the song does a -- lovely beautiful job of conveying that idea.

>> Lauren: It'll be fun to see how many of our children will be singing lines from these songs, you know, doing the three deep breaths that Craig mentioned, or you know, other lines from other songs from various episodes, because you know -- and even years from now, kids remember songs from shows and such -- and so I feel really lucky that I had the opportunity to first, you know, communicate with some of you -- about the series, I guess two years ago. I was -- remember reading through the -- I think the first version that I had a chance to look at was -- back in March 2021, and so it's nice to be kind of this full circle. And so Craig, can you talk about the value -- I know, you know, you bring in people for all different reasons, to bring people in with, like, lived disability and other experiences to kind of help ensure that your scripts are going in the right direction?

>> Craig: Sure. Well when you're trying to portray a character who's diverse authentically, you want to get the little details right. You know, there are certain things that a writer can relate to or empathize with when creating a story, and we can do a ton of research, but in order to have a character and their experience really ring true, I think it's important to seek the advice of experts who have lived that experience. And so that's why working with consultants like RespectAbility, and there are others for different, you know, occasions, it really helps us all. It helps the writers, it helps the designers, helps the animators. When we were first doing episodes with Jazzy, our consultant Tatiana Lee, who had the same medical condition as Jazzy -- she told us everything we need to know, including a lot of stuff you couldn't learn in a book. And you know, right down to how Jazzy's feet should look when she's transitioning between her wheelchair car, Piper, and a regular chair. You know, and it's little things like that that make the show so much richer. And it's also a terrific learning experience for all of us on the writing staff, so it really helps everything and everyone. And you know, at the end of the day, like, the kids and adults watching feel like they're being well represented, and it helps authentically portray them to others watching.

>> Lauren: Let's stick there for a moment about authentically portraying, because, you know, I remember we also kind of talked about casting then -- and such. And so Henry, you know, when we started advertising this event, I got a lot of emails from folks saying, oh, I don't see it anywhere on IMDB or elsewhere. Did they cast the character authentically? Most people expecting the answer to be no, because historically that's what had happened. But I was very excited to respond to them like, yes, it actually -- character is voiced by a boy who was born with a cleft palate and such. So why is this so important?

>> Henry: I feel like people who have, like, this clefts can really get into Castor's character more than, like, a person who had never heard the word cleft before in their life. They probably would just be like clefts, yeah, that's what I have.

>> Jeremy: You talked -- can I ask a question -- [crosstalk] do they ask about it?

>> Henry: No, they don't really ask about it.

>> Jeremy: I've been pretty impressed, his friends seem to just take it in stride. It's no -- you know...

>> Lauren: And that's what an episode like this can help do for kids who haven't grown up knowing Henry their whole life, and may meet someone for the first time later in life. After seeing this episode, they might be like, oh it's -- nothing unusual, it's just -- a fact of life that my friend has a cleft, and such, and are fully included in -- everything, in school and community and such. So Craig, what can viewers continue to expect from Firebuds in relation to disability representation?

>> Craig: Well there's one episode coming up at the beginning of season two that we're really excited about. It's called "Wrong Way Rescue." And in this episode we discover that Axel the ambulance, one of our main characters, has dyscalculia which causes her to mix up the order of numbers. And in this episode she finds out that she has this condition, but also learns a positive message about managing it, while also relying on her other talents to get the job done, or in this case to get the rescue done. You know, it's a fun episode, has a great song -- another great song, and you know, I'm really excited about the fact that we are representing someone with a disability through one of our show's main characters. So that's an --that's a nice touch, I can't wait for folks to see it.

>> Lauren: I love when that happens. You know, I think it's great that we're introduced to characters right away knowing that they have a disability, and then other times finding out several episodes in, because people have grown attachments to the characters, and then they're like, "oh wow, I also have dyscalculia" or whatever it might be. And then it's just, you know, like, "oh, anything that she can do, I can do too." And it's just a nice way for people to -- and I really love how we bring in these kind of non-apparent disabilities that we're getting a chance to kind of see through -- your series, that just aren't as often represented in children's content. So it's -- great. We are going to be going to some audience questions in a moment. So I want to remind folks that if you'd like to ask a question please do so. And I'm going to kind of jump to the first one, and it's -- it's back to seeing a bit more about Castor. "Are we going to see Castor in future episodes?" And Michelle in the audience is asking "if Castor does reappear, will he have a scar?"

>> Jeremy: Well I -- I'm not allowed to talk about future episodes, but I can certainly say that Castor does have a scar. It's a little bit harder to see because he's dark purple, but it's there if you watch -- if you watch it. And there's a couple ways, you know, he kind of smiles and the light catches it. And it is pretty accurate to -- to the way a post cleft lip surgery scar appears.

>> Henry: Yep. Yes.

>> Lauren: So Henry, I'm curious, what was it like to work with your dad?

>> Henry: It was really great. I had someone that I could trust and would laugh at all of my really bad jokes.

>> Jeremy: I think that door swings both ways. [laughs] I -- you know, when we wrote the episode, I did not think about my son voicing the part. That was obviously inspired by him, but I didn't think in my wildest dreams that he would -- come to audition for it. And our story editor at the time said, you know, "you should audition your son if you think he's a good actor." And I do! I do think he's a good actor. So we auditioned him and sent it in and --

>> Craig: Turns out, he is a good actor. [laughter]

>> Lauren: Yeah -- just from now and our pre-call, you know, I love seeing how, like, engaged you are with the process. I know that we have some kids in the audience right now and they might be kind of curious. Can you talk a little bit about what the recording process was like, Henry?

>> Henry: Hmm. It was very dark and everyone was nice and -- I don't have a very good memory.

>> Jeremy: Do you -- remember being nervous? I remember.

>> Henry: Yes I was very nervous.

>> Jeremy: Nervous and it was -- this was I think January 2021. And we went in, it was a dark room, and there was a window, you could see the technicians on the other side. But -- the creative directors, Craig, and the voice director Sam Regal, they were on Zoom.

>> Henry: Yes, I remember that.

>> Jeremy: And do you remember, you know, how they would ask you to read lines, like, a couple times over?

>> Henry: Yeah. There was like -- there was like a stand and then they put the lines on the stand, and then I had to stand up and look at the stand to read my lines.

>> Jeremy: Yeah and they give -- you know, give him adjustments, can you try reading this line a little bit slower, or a little bit happier? That's where -- some kids can get tripped up is doing the line in a slightly different way. You did pretty well with it I thought.

>> Craig: Were you in the booth with him, Jeremy?

>> Jeremy: I was. I was allowed to be in the booth as long as I turned my phone off and remained quiet. [laughs]

>> Craig: It was -- it's easier now to record because of the -- you know, since the pandemic, because most people -- we have our screens off when -- when we're doing the Zoom, so if you're in the booth like Henry was, he can't see our faces. Usually -- it used to be and now is again where you're just sitting on the other side of glass but it's soundproof. So Henry would say something, and then just see a bunch of people talking but not be able to hear them, which can be very daunting. But luckily Henry didn't have to deal with that. So I was glad -- it was the one benefit of the Zoom was that he didn't have to see a bunch of people talking about his performance but not know what they're saying. [laughs] When I -- I've done a couple of characters and that's the worst part. I feel for the actors.

>> Lauren: And then I guess because this was, you know, you did go in during the pandemic, I guess it was very helpful that, you know, you were a family unit in the sense of being in that small room, didn't -- it was a little less worry -- worrisome about having all different people in together.

>> Jeremy: Yeah it was a -- it was a highlight of my -- career thus far, sitting in that room.

>> Henry: Thank you.

>> Jeremy: Sure! [laughs]

>> Lauren: So often we see characters with facial differences being made as villains. You know, we see that in a lot of content made for families and older kids and adults, and unfortunately sometimes in young kid content as well, where the facial difference is, you know, is -- what makes them the villain. And I really love how Firebuds kind of flips that script. And Jeremy, can you really share more about why this is so important?

>> Jeremy: Yeah, I really didn't -- wasn't aware of how often villains have some sort of facial difference. Scar is a very common design trope for villains, some sort of scar tissue. And then you know, having Henry in my life, you become more aware of these things, and you see how often designers and moviemakers and storytellers and showrunners put scars on their bad guys, because -- you know, it's a kind of quick read. You can gather that this bad guy or villain has had a, you know, a dark backstory, and they had a, you know, a trauma, and now they -- you know, they're hardened and they want to watch, you know, the world burn or whatever. So I just think that's not the only game in town. I don't want to say that a villain can't have a scar, but I do want to say we should scrutinize those choices, because scars can connote so much more. They can suggest that a person had a -- life-saving procedure. They could suggest that a person had an experience that made them stronger or facilitated or empowered their life in a certain way, or could mean that they're very loved. So facial difference need not belong only to the villainous. And I think it's more brave to show our protagonists, our heroes with facial difference. And that is just one of the many ways that we can, you know, authentically represent the -- variety of people we have now on this planet, you know?

>> Craig: We have -- another -- vehicular character with a scar who -- a blimp who start -- for, like, I think, you know, he was like a villain for part of an episode, but very cheerful villain. He was happy to be a henchman, he was a hench-blimp. But becomes -- turns very quickly to be a friend in the episode, and now is a recurring character as one of the Firebuds' best friends, and sometimes an honorary Firebud.

>> Jeremy: That's right.

>> Craig: So that's a really fun character. And you know -- we've never explained he has like -- this kind of I guess it's a scar, he's a vehicle, so I don't know, a scratch down his windshield, but we've never explained where it came from or why he has it. But it's neat, I think it gives him character. And he's heroic, you know, he's been a hero since the episode he debuted in. So I think that helps.

>> Lauren: I think having a mixture of some where it's very explained and we had a big story about, and others where it's unexplained -- it's actually a really nice thing because it allows so many other children who are watching the show to be like, "oh, I bet you he got that scar, he got that scratch, the same way I did!" You know? And -- all these kids can relate in different ways, and that kind of really leads into this next question from the audience. Craig, how do you hope these stories will be received?

>> Craig: Well, I mean -- I hope -- they're received well. I hope a lot of the stories are received well just generally. But I think, you know, the hope is that children will either relate and feel represented by what they're seeing on screen, or they'll gain empathy for those that look like -- what they're seeing on screen or have that experience. You know, one of the big goals of Firebuds as a series is to foster a sense of empathy and community spirit in the kids and adults watching. So you know, the goal with shows like this is to get away from thinking as someone with a certain condition or from a certain background as something other than yourself and just part of this big human community. So I really hope that the shows are received in that spirit.

>> Lauren: Excellent. This question goes to all of you. Who's your favorite character and what makes that character so unique?

>> Henry: Me! [laughter]

>> Jeremy: That's one down, he has chosen himself. Castor's certainly out there for me, and I think if it weren't for my son voicing him, if I had to pick another, I really love Piston because he's so similar to me. He loves rules and following the rules and coloring in the lines, and that's very much me.

>> Craig: I think I mean I think this whole, right -- this whole -- I mean Castor -- this whole conversation is a second place to Castor, obviously, like, who's the runner up? You know, I mean you know, there's -- I've lived with these characters now for four years, and so there's a lot to love in all of them. It's certainly fun writing Piston, but you know, at the end of the day, I guess, you know, I have to go with a character that was inspired by my own son and named after my own son, Bo, because that was the -- that's what started it all.

>> Lauren: Do you wanna -- I know you've talked about what started it all, you know, at other times, but our viewers might not know. Do you want to elaborate a bit on that?

>> Craig: Oh yeah absolutely. My seven-year-old who, you know, four years ago was three. Back then he was obsessed with fire trucks and he used to carry one around and talk to it like it was his best friend. And it got me thinking how excited would he be if that fire truck came to life, and was a kid fire truck that had the same enthusiasm that he did for going out and helping people, and they could go on adventures together, and you know, I really just -- it turned into something where I was really excited about making a show about first responders and their families and to bring that element to it. But it started as sort -- as a bit of a love letter to my son.

>> Lauren: Excellent. I mean that's what -- I feel like I -- when I'm talking to folks in children's content, it almost always is a, you know, thinking about what it is that our children are going to watch and how we can help influence that. So Henry I'm going to jump back to you. If Castor does appear in more episodes, is there anyone you want to guest star opposite you?

>> Henry: I can't remember any actors' names.

>> Lauren: That's okay.

>> Craig: Aim high, because we can record this and send it to them and dare them to say no. [laughter] Just come on, go for it!

>> Henry: Tom Cruise!

>> Jeremy: All right, there we go!

>> Lauren: All right, we're going to send that over.

>> Craig: That was good, thank you! You know, we -- we haven't had done a plane character yet, so I'm just saying. Could be Tom Hanks --[crosstalk]

>> Jeremy: Hope you're -- hope you're listening.

>> Craig: You'll be hearing from us!

>> Lauren: I'm sure the Comms team will get on it right away.

>> Craig: Do it for Henry!

>> Lauren: So I'll start with Jeremy but then I invite everyone else to kind of answer this question as well if you'd like. What's been the most memorable part working on the show so far?

>> Jeremy: Oh, the most memorable part is recording my son. That was not something I ever thought that would -- would be happening. And you know, when I say recording it, I was sitting there quietly watching him. But still -- but just to hear him bring Castor to life in a way that he kind of is, you know, super enthusiastic and fun loving, that was a real -- that was a real high point for me.

>> Lauren: Craig is there a -- feel free to talk about Henry as well, but is there another moment that you'd like to share that was memorable to you as well?

>> Craig: Well, I mean that -- that is memorable because it's nice to have, you know, someone who like --someone who had that experience playing that character inspired by him. Like, it's all there, right? Like, that's pretty cool. I think one of the -- you know, I spend so much time remembering so many little details about the show to get it made that I oftentimes can't remember anything that actually happened while making the show, if that makes sense. Like, I remember episode production numbers, but -- one of the things that was really memorable was when we screened the -- an episode for -- in a theater on a big screen for the families of first responders. It was right after the show came out, it was sort of tied to first responders day. And you know, it was just -- that was a moment where you could see everything we were trying to do come together. And you could hear an audience enjoy it around you. And so that was -- that was pretty awesome to see that. Because it was like, after all that hard work, we could be there -- and see it paying off before our eyes and ears.

>> Lauren: If you could be a car, what kind would you be?

>> Craig: Oh my goodness. Yeah, all right. Henry, I want to hear what Henry says first. [crosstalk]

>> Henry: I think I would be --

>> Jeremy: The Batmobile?

>> Henry: Yes, that was what I was thinking! [laughter] Is that allowed?

>> Jeremy: Sure, I presume if you could be a car it's allowed to be the Batmobile.

>> Craig: You mean is that allowed because it's not a Disney character? [laughs]

>> Jeremy: Well, you know. [laughter] I would be a 2010 Toyota Corolla. That's what I drive.

>> Henry: I'd be a HumVee. Either a HumVee or the Batmobile.

>> Craig: You know, it's funny you say that, sort of you are what you drive. I was thinking -- my answer would be, like, an old VW Bug, which I drove for a little while when I first got out of college. And the car was -- I think older than me at the time. But you know, they like -- they don't have -- it's like they just keep plowing through, those VW bugs, they kind of -- they don't look like any other cars, they just sort of and -- they don't really have all the bells and whistles. That car had no air conditioning, the heater was basically just like -- a vent from the engine, so like basically it was just like, you were drafting off however warm the engine was. And I drove that that car over the Rockies in a snowstorm, and it made it. I was driving by every other car and truck you could imagine stranded in snow banks off the side of the highway. And it was getting pretty cold, because like I said, it's just as warm as the engine is, that's the heat. So but -- you know, it was like the little car that could, so I can relate to that.

>> Lauren: We have another audience question, and this one's for Henry, but I imagine that Jeremy may weigh on -- -- weigh in on it as well. Henry, do you plan to continue voice acting or acting in general?

>> Henry: I think I do. Yeah, that would be fun.

>> Lauren: Excellent. Well, you'll have to let us know what you do next so we can share it with everyone. Another question -- and this can go to all -- of, "how can we show our appreciation to first responders?

>> Jeremy: Aww. Well I'll tell you what we do. My wife buys donuts and brings them to the fire station, which I'm hopeful is just her showing appreciation for first responders, and not because they are a particular quality of handsomeness, but, um -- [Laughter] But I -- you know, I think they're a great bunch. We've gone by to the fire station a number of times, like, always friendly, always happy to give us tours. That's how -- that's how we do it -- other than making the show, which I think is a -- not only a love letter to, you know, Craig's inspiration there, but a love letter to first responders and their -- contribution.

>> Craig: Yeah I mean that was one of the things -- we've been trying to do. But in addition to that, you know, there are -- I mean there are a number of charitable causes, both for first responders but also charitable causes that -- you know, you'll see fire stations or police departments sort of organize for other folks. So you know, I kind of like supporting what the first responders are supporting, you know? And I -- so I think that's one easy way, because it's easy to find either the sort of charitable organizations for them, or by them. They're all around.

>> Lauren: The other thing is to simply say thank you as well.

>> Craig: There is that, too.

>> Lauren: We -- you know --

>> Craig: But, you know, go to the station when things are quiet. Don't try to flag folks down when they're driving down the road.

>> Lauren: Or when you see people, you know, just out and about -- in their uniforms, not working, you know, not in the middle of doing some life-saving, but you know, saying thank you.

>> Craig: I think thank you goes a long way with just about everybody. And I don't mean that -- I mean that to elevate it -- it's a -- it's a nice -- doesn't cost you anything, and it's a lovely thing to hear.

>> Lauren: Another question from Henry -- for Henry. How did your friends react knowing that you're going to be on TV?

>> Henry: I haven't told most of them, but the friends that I did tell, they were like, oh man, that's pretty cool!

>> Jeremy: Yeah. Henry's been very good about -- because he knew, because I told him, he wasn't allowed to talk about it for a while, this is a big thing to sit on top of. So he -- only recently has he understood that he's allowed to tell kids about it.

>> Lauren: Are you going to have a viewing party on Friday?

>> Jeremy: That's a good question!

>> Henry: I want a party.

>> Jeremy: You want a party, okay, I guess we are!

>> Lauren: [laughs] Apologies that I just put that on your plate. So we have another question in the audience from Jennifer about RespectAbility's role in consulting on Firebuds. I can speak to it, but Craig, I know you could also speak to it.

>> Craig: Yeah, I mean -- you're more than welcome to answer it. And -- you know it as well as I do.

>> Lauren: Sure! So one thing that I thought that this team did really really well was really working with us kind of throughout the process. So it wasn't just a one-time, let's kind of check the box, all right, we talked to someone from the community and now we can kind of do our own thing. But it was a back and forth, you know, with different versions of the script to make sure the language was correct. And then it was also then working with the animators. And as Craig has mentioned, there are many different disabled characters that we're gonna get to meet, and so a lot of these -- a lot of these needed considerations when animating them, and ensuring that animation was done correctly. And so I think one -- one area that I really enjoyed working in was how we provided reference videos for the animators and such. We brought up Jazzy before. You know, the fact that she doesn't always stay in her wheelchair vehicle. She's sometimes sitting and she transfers, and what does it mean to transfer from one location to another, because I think some people might incorrectly assume that someone who uses a wheelchair is either always in a wheelchair or potentially a bed, but no, many people who use a wheelchair do move around to other places to sit and such. So -- so I really loved how we were able to kind of work with the animators. And then, as the show came up, you know, then we started working with the communications team. How do we market things and promote and such, and share with different members of the community as well.

>> Craig: And there, if I could just add on to that, there are multiple check-in points. As you mentioned, like, at our outline stage, you know, when the story's first kind of being developed, at the script stage, and again at the animatic stage as we're starting to animate. So that's, you know, with multiple check-in points, we create a good working relationship where the feedback can be a little more ongoing and inform some of the things that we do, in a greater way.

>> Lauren: Yes. I love those multiple check-ins. I think that that's -- that's super important, because something could appear fine in a written form, but then we all of a sudden see it in the animatic, and we bring up concerns and such, so it's great. It really helps avoid any misrepresentation. With that, we're going to move on to our last question. So we're going to ask everyone to respond to this. What do you want kids and families to take away from this episode?

>> Jeremy: Well. One of the things that I want them to take away is the theme of the episode, which is to exercise your empathy muscle. Try to think about how others are looking at the world. When I pitched the episode, the idea of empathy was baked into the idea. And Henry has certainly helped me exercise that muscle. You know, he has never dodged out of a surgery to go to a carnival, but he has, I think it's fair to say, not looked forward to some of your surgeries. So it's important for us to try to -- if we can -- think about how others are are experiencing the world and -- do our best to act accordingly.

>> Craig: You know, one of the things I really like about the song. I think there's a lyric in there, I'm going to paraphrase it, but it's, you know, it talks about how, oh, someone might be going through something you don't know. And -- I think that's what I really like about this episode, not in the sense of being empathetic, but also in the sense of knowing that, you know, these -- this character, like, the character of Castor is going through this thing that's not your experience, but it's -- it's very important to them, and to give some thought to that. And so then to apply that to, sure to people you know that may be dealing with something medical, but also to people dealing with something else. And I -- I really like that part of the message, you know, just to be mindful of that in your life -- that whenever you see someone and whatever their behavior may be, you know, they may be going -- you know, you may see someone, they may be super rude and they may be -- they may be having something in their life -- they may be having the worst day in their life, you know? And so it's just a good thing to keep in mind as you go through the world, both with things that are obvious, you know, like in the case of Castor, and things that aren't so on the surface.

>> Lauren: Henry, anything else you wanted to share?

>> Henry: Well, this might be the first time a few people, or like, little kids have ever heard the word empathy. And this is a pretty good chance for them to learn it, and maybe even learn a bit more about clefts.

>> Jeremy: That's one of the wonderful things about writing for this audience. You get the idea that some of the things you're talking about may very well be the first time they're hearing anything about these. So it's -- it's a big privilege to be able to kind of introduce a lot of people to some of these things. Well said.

>> Henry: Thank you.

>> Lauren: So if you want to watch this again, the Cleft Hood episode premieres this Friday, March 10, on both Disney Channel and Disney Junior, and then will be available to stream on Disney+ starting Wednesday, March 15. So I really want to thank Jeremy, Henry, and Craig. I really enjoyed having this conversation with you. As I've shared with you before, you know, this is a series that I really enjoy and, you know, as my daughter gets a little older, I'm like -- I have to find other little kids to introduce this to. But we're just really excited to be seeing this upward trends of authentic representation. And thanks again to the folks at Disney Branded TV for this wonderful series.

>> Jeremy: Thank you so much.

>> Henry: Thank you!

>> Craig: Thank you Lauren, and thanks everybody for showing up!

>> Jeremy: Yeah, honored.