

Episode #027 (Transcript)

Charlie Sandlan (00:03):

In the early 1940s, the actress Susan Peters was well on her way to becoming a movie star. In 1942, she received a Best Supporting Oscar nomination for her role in the film *Random Harvest*. But in 1945, she suffered a very serious accident, and she became paralyzed from the waist down.

Charlie Sandlan (00:22):

Her comeback film in 1948, *The Sign of the Ram*, was the first time that a wheelchair user was cast as the lead in a major film. And it's only taken 72 years for that to happen again. Last Friday, November 20, the Hulu film *Run* premiered, and it stars Sarah Paulson and my former student Kiera Allen who is on today. And I can't wait to share this conversation with you. So put the phone back in your pocket. Creating Behavior starts now.

Speaker 3 (00:56):

(singing)

Charlie Sandlan (01:20):

Well hello, my fellow daydreamers. I guess I have to start off with what you guys have been really waiting for this entire week which is the state of new pet Bernie the ladybug. And I'm happy to report that Bernie is still alive. Now, I continue to learn a shitload about ladybugs thanks to Trish, and I guess the one thing I will share with you is that ladybugs hibernate, and I bet you didn't know that. Ladybugs hibernate.

Charlie Sandlan (01:54):

So we had a couple days where we thought we lost the little bugger, but we found him. We found Bernie yesterday up in the corner, very just far right corner, of our living room window. And I think that's where Bernie is going to camp out for the next couple of months. The glass is cold, which is I guess what you need if you're a ladybug. If you get warm during the winter and you wake

up and you think it's spring, you're totally fucked. So the key is to keep Bernie cool and ... Yeah, I guess that's about it. So that's where we are. He's hibernating.

Charlie Sandlan (02:36):

So today, my talk with Kiera Allen, the star of the Hulu film Run. And I'll tell you, it's a big deal to have waited 72 years for a wheelchair user to be cast as a lead. This is really ... says a lot about the director, Aneesh Chaganty, who if you ever saw the, it's a little clever whodunnit film Searching, directed this film. But he knew and insisted that he had an actual wheelchair user for the part. He could have cast an able bodied actor for the role, but he didn't do it. And it goes against a lot of the stereotypical damaging tropes that have been really perpetrated against people with disabilities for, I don't know, the hundred years that we've had cinema.

Charlie Sandlan (03:42):

And it's happening right now. If you've watched the film The Witches with Anne Hathaway or read any of the outcry that has come from that. You know, she plays a witch. Right? And of course let's give the witch deformed hands. You know, she's got these mangled two fingers and a thumb on each hand, and it's used in a way to scare you. It's ugly. It's made to feel gross because she's a witch, and it's just another trope that gets wheeled out. And it's offensive, really.

Charlie Sandlan (04:24):

Why I think Run is such a big deal is that Kiera, she's the hero of the film. And the hero of the film is a smart, precocious, clever, resilient teenager who's just trying to survive, trying to get into college like anybody else. And you know, she happens to find out that her mother has been keeping her sick and ill for the last 20 years, but eh you know other than that she's a normal kid.

Charlie Sandlan (04:57):

To see her navigate the journey of this film is just really exciting, and to do it opposite Sarah Paulson, are you fucking kidding me?

To get an opportunity in your first film to work with one of the best actors working. She's got a lot to say. You know, what she learned working with Sarah. What she learned watching her work. And how she collaborated with Aneesh who seems like just a great director for an actor. And the things that they talked about and how they collaborated.

Charlie Sandlan (05:31):

And I'll just say this, you know Kiera she's only 22. She's got her whole life ahead of her. And I thought this when I interviewed her for our summer intensive, which is when I worked with her for six weeks, two years ago. Someone who's incredibly intelligent, and smart, and has an artistic soul. And I'm just really proud of her, and I'm happy to bring our talk. So I'm just going to shut up now and turn it over to Kiera Allen.

Kiera Allen (06:05):

Yeah, well first of all thank you so much for all of the kind things you said, and thank you so much for having me on. It's so exciting to be reuniting all of this time later. Especially because I was talking to you when I was auditioning for the movie. So now we've come full circle. It's been shot. It's coming out. Looking back is crazy, and surreal, and exciting. It was done a while ago, created by a person that I am not anymore. I am now two years older and looking back on it. So I'm really excited for people to see it and to hear what they think.

Kiera Allen (06:40):

I had such an amazing time shooting this movie. It was such a wonderful formative experience, and so I'm really grateful that I get to share that with so many people now. You know people I know, my loved ones, and people who have supported me. And also with people I've never met before who were just really psyched to see this movie and really loving it. Which is just the coolest, wildest thing.

Charlie Sandlan (07:01):

It was literally right when you finished the summer with me that you had the auditions, and I remember us talking about the script. You were freaked out about the process, and ...

Kiera Allen (07:15):

Yeah. First feature film, yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (07:16):

First feature film.

Kiera Allen (07:19):

It's funny. It was such perfect timing. I actually had my first self tape audition the day after we finished class. So we finished class on a Friday, and I got the self tape audition request on Saturday. It was just bang bang right like that, and I think it was very luck that it happened that way. Because I had learned so much in your class that it was so fresh in my mind and had been so revelatory to me that I could then carry into this audition that I cared so much about.

Kiera Allen (07:50):

Because I was immediately so drawn into this character, this story. I probably worked harder on that self tape than any other self tape I've ever done. But I had more of a process, definitely, after having worked together in this class. And being able to experiment and try different things and see what worked for me and what didn't.

Kiera Allen (08:11):

What I learned at Maggie Flanigan Studio definitely was the foundation for so much of that. I don't think I would have felt as prepared going into it if, going into the shooting, if I hadn't been at Maggie with you. Also, I don't think I would have felt as confident. Like, I was able to do things in that class that I didn't think I was capable of. Things came out of me that I wasn't expecting. I was learning one by one all of these limits that I thought I had that were actually just illusions.

Kiera Allen (08:38):

And so to come into the shooting process with that kind of confidence and power that I didn't have before was really, really a great help. Being able to listen and respond. I remember when I called you and told you, "Sarah Paulson is playing my mother."

Kiera Allen (08:54):

And you said, "Well, you're going to get a lot of behavior from her." Which is so true. She's so extraordinary, and she's such a generous actor. Even when we were doing my coverage, the camera was on me, and her face wasn't even going to be shown. She went 100% to give me everything I needed. And so just to sit there with her and be able to listen to her and take in her behavior, to have the tools to do that it just made it so easy to live in the scene. When you have the tools and you're opposite and extraordinary actor, the rest just comes.

Charlie Sandlan (09:28):

That's rare. A lot of stars won't do that for you.

Kiera Allen (09:31):

She was hugely, hugely supportive of me in ways like that and off camera as well. I could come to her and say, "You know, I'm struggling with this thing," or, "I'm nervous about this thing," or, "How do you do this?" And she was always there for me. So she really went above and beyond to make sure that my first experience shooting a film was a positive one and that I did the best work I could do. A lot of that was thanks to her.

Charlie Sandlan (10:00):

So this film, Run, is about a woman, Sarah Paulson, who raises her daughter. We see in the beginning is confined to a wheelchair, she's been sick her entire life. She's been popping pills since she was a child. And we slowly find out that maybe you're not as sick as we thought. And so it's like this classic case of Munchausen's, this woman who you discover has been keeping you sick. It's the journey of you figuring all of this shit out, figuring out that your mother has been deceiving you, and then how you literally save your life.

Kiera Allen (10:38):

I remember ... I'm thinking back to when we were in class, and you would talk about like, "You have to really live through things in your performance and think about ..." I think you mentioned Nicole Kidman in Big Little Lies and like look at what she lives through in that performance. It's intense, and it's horrifying. But you have to really, fully experience it in order to do your best work. And that's definitely something that I took with me into this role of this character has this crazy traumatizing, devastating journey that's constantly requiring her to draw upon all her resources and use all of her strength.

Kiera Allen (11:18):

I loved this character so much and felt her spirit so much on the page that I was like, "If I don't fully live through this, I'm not ... I'm doing her a disservice, and I'm doing this story a disservice." So yeah, I was coming in every day essentially preparing to go through that. And it was really ... It could be extremely gratifying because I really felt like I was getting inside this character's head, and her life, and experiencing things that I had the great fortune to never have experienced in my own life, to feel all of those things. It's unimaginable in real life, and this film and this role really gave me the safe space to explore this very dangerous situation and this really terrifying situation.

Kiera Allen (12:08):

I had a safe place to experience terror. I had a safe place to experience rage and to express rage. That's not something that happens in regular life, and so I got to live this very, very heightened existence for the six weeks or so that we were shooting. But I do really love this character, and I love her resilience. I love how crafty she is. My character was guiding the action rather than being subject to the action around her. Like you said, she's a fighter the way she fought through. It was a very, very rewarding role for all of those reasons.

Kiera Allen (12:44):

The filmmaking team was adamant about casting a real wheelchair user in the part. I went after it as hard as I could because I felt so strongly about this part and about this character. Like you said, her journey is not defined by her disability, but it's also part of it. Which is how I feel about myself. My disability is part of my identity, it's part of my journey, but it doesn't define it. It's not who I am. It's part of who I am.

Kiera Allen (13:12):

And so to see a character that so reflected that, I got so lucky that for this opportunity that it was a character like that. And I think that's a really, really fortunate thing in terms of what people see. Like, the first time since 1948, I think, that a real wheelchair user is featured in a major thriller. For people to see that and to see that character being so fleshed out and having a fully defined perspective. And not being reduced to just the chair. I mean, how often do you see a disabled action hero that's ... and played by a disabled actor. That's just not something that happens.

Charlie Sandlan (13:56):

And not only that. I mean, it is a really fucking physical part. It is really physical, and you spent a great deal of time out of your chair, liberated from that as you're trying to get through the house, and you're trapped in many of these scenes. Can you ... That scene where you're out on the roof, I remember you asking me about that when you were looking at the script originally, and you're like, "How the fuck are they going to do this?" What was it like taking on just the physical aspect of this?

Kiera Allen (14:31):

It was a very physical role. I was working out for this role even before I got it. I was getting ready to be an action star, essentially. That's a lot of what this role is. It is very physical. But I really enjoyed being able to spend so much time out of my chair.

Kiera Allen (14:50):

One of the reasons the community preferred terminology is wheelchair user rather than say wheelchair bound is because the

wheelchair is not something that confines the person or restrains the person. It's freedom. It's a method of transportation, and it's also not the only place you will ever see a wheelchair user. Like, a wheelchair user out of their wheelchair is still a wheelchair user, but like I'm not always in my chair. I'm often sitting on a couch, or in a chair at a restaurant, or in bed, or even on the ground as you see in the film. And so it was very cool that they set it up that way. Where you get to see a disabled character in a lot of different forms that you don't always get to see.

Kiera Allen (15:37):

Shooting the physical scenes was really, really fun. Especially after I'd done all of that work to prepare for them, and I was working with a great stunt team up there. It was definitely very empowering. Something, again, you don't often see for a disabled character or actor, to see them crawling across a roof. But a wheelchair user has a significant advantage in crawling across the roof because you get really great upper body strength from pushing a wheelchair around. That's something that you don't often, often see is the physical capabilities of someone with a disability. Just because someone is disabled doesn't mean that they aren't physically strong and physically capable and can't do these amazing feats. And so to represent that both for the character, and for myself, and for a whole community of people was really, really cool.

Charlie Sandlan (16:30):

What was the most difficult part of approaching the role? Was it the physical aspect, or was it something ... a particular moment, a particular beat in a scene where you're like, "God, I hope I can do this. I hope I can get where I need to get." You know? For, I think, a lot of actors you read something, and you go, "Man, I know I've got to go deep here." You know?

Kiera Allen (16:48):

I mean, for me definitely the emotional was harder. It was a lot more intense. We did a lot of work for the physical in advance.

Like I said, I was working with the stunt team, and we were planning things out to make sure they were safe. I was working out and getting strong. And so all of that definitely required effort. Once we did them, everything was safe. Everything was good. I had a great time with them, but there were definitely days that were very challenging and very emotional. I mean, the things that this character goes through are so intense and so devastating.

Kiera Allen (17:21):

The scenes that I was most nervous for were the scenes that I had with Sarah. Because she's so extraordinary. And just to act opposite someone like that, you've really got to bring your A game, and I was very nervous for that. Despite the fact that she was so supportive and so kind always. She gave me so much. To reach the emotional place that I needed to be. To reach the terror. To reach the heartbreak or even the tenderness, and the love, and the understanding. Everything was in her face. All I had to do was look at her, and it just ... It transformed me.

Kiera Allen (17:53):

But I had a lot of scenes by myself as well, and those were definitely a challenge. Because you have no one to act opposite. You're on your own. And so that was definitely a challenge. But I guess I didn't think about much going into it until we started shooting and they were like, "Okay, Kiera. This week is all you. Like, there are no other actors on set this week. Everything we are doing depends on you."

Kiera Allen (18:18):

And so to go through these emotional journeys: finding the pill bottle; finding the label of the pill bottle; finding out that I've been trapped in my room; the roof crawling scene which is physical and emotional. All of those scenes I was doing completely on my own to find those wells of emotion, and strength, and connection within myself without a scene partner was certainly a challenge and often very surprising in really exciting ways. Where I was like, "Wow, I didn't know that was in me," but like all of that ... With

nothing but myself, all of that emotion just came out of me. And sometimes would have really surprising, wonderful moments of finding out I was connected to the character in a way that I hadn't even realized yet.

Charlie Sandlan (19:05):

What do you mean by that?

Kiera Allen (19:05):

Sometimes I would read a scene, do the work, and cross my fingers, and hope that what I had planned would come to life. And then I would show up on set, and the moment would happen, and I would have a completely different reaction. And I would ...

Sometimes it would surprise me, and very often I was like, "Oh my god, that's not something I would have planned, but that feels so much more true to this character." Like it felt like the character reared up inside me and was like, "This is how I feel," and I was like, "Oh, I didn't know you were there. Good to know."

Charlie Sandlan (19:45):

That's a really important thing as an actor. Because you're doing your homework on a script, right? And you have these ideas. And what a lot of actors do is they just end up doing their homework, right, at the other actor, and these are my decisions. But you've got to be able to do that kind of work. And then you leave yourself alone, and the moment trumps everything. Whatever happens in the moment.

Kiera Allen (20:08):

Yeah, the moment trumps everything.

Charlie Sandlan (20:09):

And that's when something spontaneous, that's when something surprising can happen to you. Is that kind of what you're talking about? Just like the in the moment you're like, "Fuck, I didn't even know that this was going to go this way at all"? You know, you hear cut and you're like, "Whoa, that was amazing."

Kiera Allen (20:24):

It can be a little disconcerting. Because I can have a moment where in the script it says I have this big emotional breakdown, and I've done all my homework to prepare for that. And then I come into the scene, and that moment comes, and I just feel cold. You know, the first time something like that happened to me I was like, "Oh my god, I'm not doing my job. I have failed. I have not done what I've planned." But I learned to give into moments like that, and sometimes it brought me to a much richer, more interesting place of like, "Maybe the breakdown doesn't come at that second. Maybe first you go numb, and two seconds later it whirs out of you in a way you hadn't planned or expected. Or maybe it is a quieter moment, and I was lucky enough to work with this amazing team that was open to things like that. Or I'd be like, "I feel like this is how this character feels in this moment, and are you open to that? Are you open to trying it like this?"

Kiera Allen (21:17):

And there was plenty of room for experimentation and for interesting failure, so to speak, that could be even better than what I had originally put down on the page. So those moments of spontaneity were definitely some of my favorites on set.

Charlie Sandlan (21:32):

And you and Aneesh it seemed had a very close working relationship. I know you had talked about writing character journals. What was that?

Kiera Allen (21:41):

Aneesh and I worked together very closely in preproduction and during the shooting, but we did a lot of work even before we started shooting on the character, building the character. And he had written this amazing script with Sev Ohanian and had a very strong idea in his mind of what the character was, but he was generous enough to put so much of it into my hands as well and gave me the opportunity to write character journals, write backstories and bios. He even had me write a list of everything that I thought would be in Chloe's room. And we would go back

and forth. And sometimes he would be like, "No, I don't think she likes this band," or like, "I don't think that this happened at this age. Because that would mean she would react like this here."

Kiera Allen (22:26):

And we would go back and forth. But sometimes he would also be like, "Hm, I hadn't thought of it that way. I like that. Keep that." And so it was a very beautifully collaborative process bringing this character to life, and I was so lucky that especially me coming in working on my first feature film that he put that kind of trust in me. That he let me be part of putting that character together like that.

Charlie Sandlan (22:49):

I mean, did you feel, I don't know, maybe intimidated at all? Like I don't ... Maybe I don't have a right to say anything. It's my first film. I'm new. I'm working with all of these experienced people. There are a lot of actors that can feel very reserved. So I don't know, did you have to work through any of that insecurity, or just being scared shitless?

Kiera Allen (23:10):

Absolutely, absolutely. And I think preproduction really helped with that. The fact that he gave me those assignments. He told me, "Go home and write everything that you think happened in this character's life up to the point that the film starts." I gradually opened up as he proved himself to be so receptive to that and so welcoming to that. He really made that space for me and really even throughout the shooting process I became more and more comfortable with speaking up. Because we would talk, and he said, "You're not helping me if you don't speak up. If you're uncomfortable with something, like if you don't feel right about a line, if it doesn't make sense to you, that's going to read in the film. And that doesn't make it a better film. It makes it a better film if you talk to me, and we figure that out, and you do the best work you can do. So he was really very welcoming to that, as was everyone on set, as was Sarah. It was really a wonderful process in that way.

Kiera Allen (24:10):

It's hard to believe that there was ever a time when I was like, "Oh my god, they're going to regret casting me. They're going to think I'm stupid if I bring this up." Our relationship really evolved in such a wonderful way where those fears dissipated very quickly.

Charlie Sandlan (24:26):

But I think those are very common. I think every actor would have those thoughts, you know?

Kiera Allen (24:31):

Yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (24:31):

It's such an overwhelming thing to be thrust into a professional set like that.

Kiera Allen (24:37):

Yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (24:37):

And then working off of someone who is one of the best actors out there right now. Was there a moment where you said to Aneesh, "I don't know if I would say this." Did you offer some suggestions on some actual text, or did you keep pretty much to what he wrote on the page?

Kiera Allen (24:55):

I never changed any text without speaking with him about it. There were small things like ... especially things related to the chair and how I moved and how I would operate that he was very open to, but I mean the script is brilliant. It's not like I was coming in and being like, "You have to rewrite the scene." I mean, which I wouldn't have done even if I had felt like I were in a position to do something like that. Because it was a beautiful script, and it gave me so much to work with. And past that, it was just the fact that it's a living document. And they allowed me to breathe life into it as much as anyone else on set.

Charlie Sandlan (25:36):

Talk about baptism by fire, on the job training. You're going to go into your next film, and you're going to bring all this experience. What do you know now that you didn't know when you showed up on set for the first time?

Kiera Allen (25:50):

I learned about eyelines and the fact that you can't just look at a certain spot and expect that it will look on camera like you're looking at that spot. They have to set up the tape, and they have to make sure that it all looks clean and good on camera.

Kiera Allen (26:06):

You can pick up your spoon with your left hand because you feel like, you know, that's what I want to do in the moment, and then the continuity person will come to you and be like, "Actually, that's not what you did in the previous shot." So learning to balance your craft with the very necessary work that you have to do, technical work that you have to do, to make it look good on camera.

Kiera Allen (26:27):

But all of that started to become instinct over the course of the film. Like, all that I was doing very much manually in the first couple of weeks. I had to think specifically about, "Okay, where did I put my hand, and did I go to this side or this side? Where is my mark?" Get all of that in my head before each shot. But by the end of the film, I would just say, "Where's my mark? Where's my eyeline? Do you remember what hand I used? Where am I starting from?" And like I'd just go into it. I was used to it by that point.

Charlie Sandlan (26:56):

So you learned the kind of questions to ask.

Kiera Allen (27:00):

Learned the questions to ask, the things to keep in my memory, the things I could be spontaneous with, and the things that I had to keep consistent. The whole technical framework of it that you have to keep in mind in order to be free. Like, you have to know

the limits and the boundaries in order to be free within them. So I think that's ... That's something that I learned which I think you can only learn on a set.

Charlie Sandlan (27:22):

Yeah. I mean, you know, you can take a film technique class and work on some sides, but it's different when you've got 15-20 people running around, and you've got the pressure of actually needing to deliver some behavior. I'm curious what those character journals did for you in terms of creating behavior. How did it help you?

Kiera Allen (27:47):

It made me feel much closer to the character. Especially because I was writing them in her voice. Like, I asked Aneesh, I said, "I don't want to write this in third person. That makes me feel distanced from this character, and it makes me feel like I'm doing an acting exercise." I was like, "I want to write journals in this character's voice. I want to write this as what she would have written on this night for this reason." Like, I want it to be integrated into her life that she wrote this, and why she wrote this, and like I wanted it to feel real. And then, as you say, the moment is king? What's the-

Charlie Sandlan (28:24):

The moment trumps everything.

Kiera Allen (28:24):

The moment trumps everything, yes. And so I really had to, by the time I got onto set, be prepared to say, "I'm going to let go of that. I can't be sitting here thinking about the past five years of my life and how they might impact this moment." I have to trust that I know that and that it's in me.

Charlie Sandlan (28:40):

That's right.

Charlie Sandlan (28:41):

Because you can't be thinking about anything when you're acting, right?

Kiera Allen (28:44):

No-

Charlie Sandlan (28:45):

... be right there in the moment. You've got to be able to work off the other actors.

Kiera Allen (28:48):

Yeah. Yeah, you really do. And so I ... For that kind of background work, I had to learn that just because it was revelatory while I was doing it doesn't mean I have to be in that same moment thinking of that same thing when I'm in the scene. I just have to trust that it's there.

Charlie Sandlan (29:04):

Was there a big mistake that you made where you were like, "Oh, shit. I really fucked up there"? Where like the whole set has to come to a stop, "Cut, cut."

Kiera Allen (29:17):

You know what? It's so hard to answer that question because I was in this leading role in my first film, and so every single day I felt like I made one of those massive mistakes at least. Like, everyday I felt like I ruined the whole move. Every day at some point I was like, "Oh my god, I'm going to get fired."

Charlie Sandlan (29:36):

Listen, that's so human, though. That's so human.

Kiera Allen (29:40):

I was so scared. I was so nervous and definitely got more comfortable as things went on, but like every, you know, "What does that X mean? Why do you need me to sit here?" Well, that's probably not something I would ask. I'd probably just do it and just be like, "You need me to sit here? I'll just sit here." That's an easy one. But yeah, I definitely constantly felt like, "Oh god, I'm not living up to expectations."

Charlie Sandlan (30:05):

What did you learn from watching Sarah work?

Kiera Allen (30:06):

Oh my god. I feel like I learned how good someone can be. So much of it was just admiration, and sitting there and being like, "I don't know how she did that, but she did." I would ask sometimes to be on set to watch her work when she was doing scenes that she shot by herself. Because I just wanted to see how she did it, and honestly she's so good that sometimes I would be like, "Her process is completely opaque to me. Because it looks like she just goes up and does it."

Charlie Sandlan (30:39):

It looks effortless, right? It looks-

Kiera Allen (30:41):

It looks effortless. It looks effortless.

Charlie Sandlan (30:41):

This is why everybody thinks they can act. Right? This is ... I think I said this to you guys the first day in my class. This is why everybody thinks they can do it. Because you watch really, really good acting, right, and it is effortless. They do it, and she does it, with grace and simplicity and ease. That takes an incredible amount of work to be able to do that.

Kiera Allen (31:03):

Yeah, yeah. It was really incredible to watch. I don't know if I could put into words what I learned from her because so much of it was so experiential. Sitting opposite her working on these scenes or watching her work was such an enormous privilege and master class just to see how one of the best does it. It can't not have an enormous impact on you.

Charlie Sandlan (31:25):

Did you guys talk about the relationship? Did you get into some discussions about leading up to opening shop?

Kiera Allen (31:33):

Sarah wasn't there for preproduction for as long because she works all the time, and so she was coming right off another project. And so we really squished a lot into a few days, and went out to eat a couple times, and talked about the character. So

much of it I think is her character and my character each living in our own worlds. And so there was so much we couldn't share with each other because so much of it is us keeping secrets from each other, and our perspectives on the relationship are so different. And so there was a lot that we chose to kind of keep a mystery from each other.

Kiera Allen (32:05):

What was really helpful was we shot a lot of the kind of pre-disaster scenes first. Like in the first few days, we shot a lot of hanging out in the house, and having dinner together, and doing physical therapy together, and her giving me chocolate for dessert, and all of these things. Rather than discussing it, we more lived it. Like, we kind of felt what it was like to live in this house as these characters, and to have this rapport we did a lot of improv and a lot of giggling.

Kiera Allen (32:37):

Yeah, coming off of that it was really kind of sickening to go into the rest of the scenes having had those really wonderful, lovely experiences and which were so closely connected with the lovely, wonderful experiences with Sarah who's someone who I care about so much and feel so much love for. To then take that and twist it when the character starts to discover what she does was really, really impactful. That was one of the hardest things to live through as an actor was to take something that felt very real, and very genuine, and very beautiful and discover everything that underlies that.

Charlie Sandlan (33:14):

Well you know what I thought was so interesting about her performance, and it was the one scene where she pulls up behind the mail truck, and she gets out, and she's running up to the mailman. The way she played that, the fear, how terrified she was that you were hurt. She played that as if you were in a lot of danger. And you're like, "Okay, that was really great." Because I think from her point of view, I mean she did. She loved you. She

cared for you. She wanted you to be safe. And so it just adds to how fucked up she was.

Kiera Allen (33:48):

Yeah. Yeah. One of the scariest things about her performance, and some of this I was able to see on set when we were working together, and some of it I was only able to see when I could see the whole movie and put all the pieces together, is just how good this character is at pretending. Those moments really did feel so real to me, even knowing what I knew about the script and what was to come, I really ... I believed her, which was very helpful for my character as well. Because my character believes her too. So it really is. It's terrifying, and heartbreaking, and her performance is really a work of genius.

Charlie Sandlan (34:27):

What was it like to watch the final cut? To sit there and just watch yourself live this out, you know?

Kiera Allen (34:31):

It was really an extraordinary experience. First of all, just to see something that you worked on for so long and put so much love into on a big screen like that where it's like being in a movie theater, and being in a movie theater is one of my favorite things in the world. Like, that was just really a treat.

Kiera Allen (34:49):

And I spent so long being so nervous to see it and to see my work in it, and I found that I was very proud of the work I did. I was so scared to go into it and be like, "Oh, I don't believe myself. I don't ... I should have done this instead of that." And instead, I found myself watching it and being like, "Oh, I remember really feeling that." Like, seeing the look on my face now I'm like, "Oh, I know how that feels."

Kiera Allen (35:15):

If I had not known it was me. If you'd cast a magic spell on me, and I had watched this performance not knowing it was me, I think I would have watched it and said, "Oh, I could never do

something like that." I was able to do things, like in your class, I was able to do things that I didn't know I was capable that. That, more than any objective qualifiers or critique of the performance is what makes me most proud. Is that I exceeded what I thought were my own abilities.

Charlie Sandlan (35:42):

Well you know, there was a really great article. You might have read it back in July in the New York Times, and the title of the article was, "After #OscarsSoWhite, Disability Waits For Its Moment," and they interviewed a number of actors, Ali Stroker, and she talked about the fact that she needed to develop ninja patience. That's a quote from her. You know, because she had to watch for so long, so many years, the impatience of able bodied people.

Charlie Sandlan (36:13):

We can become so petulant about the stupidest shit, and she said, "If you can't accommodate me, you can't have me," and she said, "I will never again do a piece of theater where I have to be carried on stage." After having done this part now, and know what you're capable of, and knowing what's possible, right, are there now things that you won't do? Are there roles that you won't take because of the way it looks at disability or treats it? I mean, do you have now some ground rules for yourself?

Kiera Allen (36:51):

Yeah, that's a good question. I think I had those standards and those rules for myself before. Because I ... Like, I have turned down parts before that I felt represented disability in a way that was untrue to me or was harmful, and I would go in and speak with directors and writers about why I felt that way. I don't know if that ever made a difference to anyone, but I felt very strongly about it. About we have to have truthful stories about people with disabilities. That's rare, and Run is one of those rare stories that I felt was ... represented a disabled character so well and so

truthfully, and in a way that felt really compelling to me and exciting to me.

Kiera Allen (37:37):

Reading the whole script I was like, "I cannot believe that a movie like this is being made. This is unlike anything I've ever seen before for a disabled character." What *Run* did for me, rather than establishing those standards, it kind of affirmed them for me. I was able to do this and say, "If I do have that ninja like patience, if I wait, and if I don't accept roles that I find untrue or even insulting; and if I speak up about those things; and if I continue to make my voice heard about the kind of stories that have to be told and give up opportunities for that, I will find my way into the right thing. I will find my way into a story that I feel really strongly about into a role that is really rich and really rewarding to play. I can wait for that. I'm willing to wait for that. Because that's what I do as an actor. That's what excites me as an actor, and so doing this film was really meaningful for me. For a lot of reasons, but for that reason as well.

Charlie Sandlan (38:44):

What I just find so commendable about you is your versatility. I mean, you're at Columbia right now, right? Getting your bachelor's in creative writing.

Kiera Allen (38:53):

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Charlie Sandlan (38:54):

So, do you see yourself writing your own material?

Kiera Allen (38:56):

Absolutely, absolutely. I love writing. I think writing and acting are equal passions for me. Neither of them has ever, has really ever, been above the other. I find them very complimentary. My writing informs my acting. As we talked about, I did a lot of writing in preparation for *Run*. My acting also informs my writing. Because if I'm thinking about a character that I'm writing, I'm often thinking about it from an actor's lens of, "If I were to really get inside the

head of this character to bring them to life in a physical way, what would I be doing?" And that often informs how I write a character. So for me, they're constantly in conversation with each other in my head.

Charlie Sandlan (39:38):

Yeah, there's this great Susan Sontag quote from one of her books, *Illness as a Metaphor*. I don't know if you've ever read it. She says this ... I just want to get your thoughts on this because it struck me and made me think. She said, "Everyone who was born holds dual citizenship in the kingdom of the well and the kingdom of the sick. And sooner or later, each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that place."

Kiera Allen (40:10):

You know, that quote is about illness, but with regard to disability, the border is a lot more permeable than people think. There is no person in this world who could never be disabled. It could happen to anyone, and I think people often look at disabled people as like, "You are fundamentally different from me. You live in a different world from me." To use the language of that quote, "You occupy the world of the disabled, and I occupy the world of the able bodied." I don't think that exists. I think it's the same thing. We all are kind of in this gray area of disability is an area of identity that anyone could take on at any point in their life.

Kiera Allen (40:53):

I haven't always been disabled. I have been able bodied for much of my life. I am not disabled. I'm not a different person now than I was when I was walking. You know, it's not as black and white a category as, I think, people think it is. And I think it might maybe makes things easier for people to be able to look at it as, "This is something that I never have to think about. These are people who I never have to identify with or connect with because they're unlike me."

Kiera Allen (41:22):

You know, it's easier to shut other people in a box and also to shut yourself away in a box and to not have to think about other people's experiences, but I think it's a much richer and interesting world if we open up those boxes and connect with people who maybe don't seem the same as us.

Charlie Sandlan (41:39):

Well you know, you've certainly now thrown yourself into the position of role model, and ... No, really. You know, when I look at other actors that are also breaking down this wall. You know, RJ Mitte I thought did a hell of a job in Breaking Bad. Jamie Brewer in American Horror Story was great. The Peanut Butter Falcon. Did you ever see that?

Kiera Allen (42:04):

Oh. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (42:05):

With Zack Gottsagen who has Down's syndrome. A lovely film. I just think that, hopefully, we as a business and industry, a society, continue to knock down these walls and tell more stories and be more inclusive.

Kiera Allen (42:24):

Yeah.

Charlie Sandlan (42:25):

What did listening do for you on set?

Kiera Allen (42:28):

Listening is everything. Not just in acting, in life. And it's something that Sarah and I talked about a lot as well. Breathing and listening. If you have your skills, you've done your work, then the most important things in the moment are to breathe and to listen. And the work will come through. The work will reveal itself.

Kiera Allen (42:49):

I remember early on she said something to me like, "Listening is so important and obviously not just for acting." It was such a simple thing to say, but it so struck me. And I was like, "That is very true." I have been thinking of it for so long just in terms of

acting, but obviously listening is such an important thing in life as well. And I started thinking more about, "Where does listening play a role in life?" And that's an area where I think that acting has really changed the way I live. What does it really mean to listen to someone and to be open to them?

Kiera Allen (43:28):

If you learn to do that, to welcome in someone else's emotions, and pain, and spirit while you're acting, that's something that you can learn to bring into your life as well. And that's really transformed my life. Learning to listen as an actor and as a human being.

Charlie Sandlan (43:44):

What kind of advice would you give to people who think, "Oh, this is too hard. It might not work out for me."

Kiera Allen (43:52):

You know, I was in a very weird position when this role came my way. They were looking for someone that fit my description, and they were looking for someone who was an unknown, and I got this huge random opportunity. You know, something like that may happen, and something like that may not happen. So much of it is down to luck.

Kiera Allen (44:17):

But I think before this happened, I was not expecting it. I was expecting to work other jobs and to kind of find a way to scrape by so I could continue to do what I love, which is acting and writing of course. I think coming at it from that angle of not wondering whether you're going to get the big break or not wondering whether you're going to get that opportunity that's going to lift you to a level where you can do all this other stuff, but just to think about, "How am I going to get to play roles that are really meaningful to me? That are really powerful for me? Something that I can really sink my teeth into, and something that makes me feel alive."

Kiera Allen (45:03):

If you feel alive when you act, that's a reason to do it. To seek out the opportunities that will make you feel that way rather than the opportunities that may elevate your profile in some way. And resilience is all about doing it for the right reasons, doing it for the love of the craft and the love of the experience, and the love of the people that you do it with. So I can't say what will happen in my career or anyone else's career, but for me as long as I'm doing work that I love, I'm happy.

Speaker 3 (45:38):

(singing)

Charlie Sandlan (45:40):

Well my fellow daydreamers, thank you for sticking around and keeping that phone in your pocket. Please check out Run on Hulu. It stars Sarah Paulson and introduces Kiera Allen. Listen, you can subscribe to this show. Follow it wherever you get your podcasts. Please, you know you could do me a huge favor..

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@creatingbehavior @maggieflaniganStudio. Lawrence Trailer, thank you for this song, my friend. And you guys, be resilient. Play full out with yourself. Don't ever settle for your second best. My name is Charlie Sandlan. Peace.

Speaker 3 (46:32):

(singing)