

Dan Velez

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Dan Velez, who combined a magnetic personality and deep passion for movies to launch a thriving career as a casting director, passed away Oct. 31, 2014, in a tragic accident at his apartment in Los Angeles, California. He was 30.

At the age of 13, Dan left Colombia with his mother, Ana Maria, and younger brother, Alejandro, and settled in Paw Paw, Michigan. Dan didn't speak a word of English, but he quickly conquered the language barrier by devouring American movies and television shows. In Dan's own words, "If Jean-Claude Van Damme could make it in the United States with an accent, then so can I."

Dan was both a fastidious high school student and immensely popular with his peers. He was a number one singles player in Boys Tennis Invationals.

When Paw Paw High School celebrated the winning of the Michigan Blue Ribbon exemplary school award on March 4, 2002, the student acceptance address was given by Student Council President Dan Velez, who expressed how grateful he was to live in Paw Paw after growing up in Columbia.

He also said "... Paw Paw High School prepares its students well because it knows that some day their chance to do something great will come. Paw Paw High School prepares its students to do things that to other people might have seemed impossible. And you know what, it's kind of fun to do the impossible."

Voted "most likeable" by his senior class, Dan finished with the second-highest grade point average at Paw Paw High School and won a full scholarship to Western Michigan University. But Dan knew his ultimate ambition was to make it in the entertainment industry, so he promptly left Michigan to pursue his dreams in Hollywood. He spent two years at Santa Monica Community College before beginning work in Los Angeles.

Once in Los Angeles, Dan quickly discovered that one of his greatest strengths was spotting talent. Sherrie Henderson, a casting director who later became Dan's business partner, recalled Dan's brief



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yet memorable experience as a casting intern. “Dan was just supposed to help me around the office, but it quickly became clear that Dan had the intelligence and work ethic to make it on his own as a casting director.” He soon made a name for himself by placing actors in films such as “Quantum of Solace”, and “Dragonball: Evolution.”

In 2008, Dan fulfilled a childhood dream by earning admission into UCLA’s prestigious undergraduate program. But once again he showed a pragmatic streak; instead of returning to the classroom, Dan teamed up with his former boss, Sherrie Henderson to form Dream Big Casting. While running Dream Big, Dan casted scores of promising actors in feature films, television programs, and nationally televised commercials. Dan’s clients appeared on Nickelodeon, Comedy Central, IFC, and in television spots for the Ford Motor Company.

A tireless worker, Dan built on his success and branched out into other businesses in recent years. He founded Space Station Casting Studios, building it from a single room into a 17,000 square-foot facility - the largest casting space in Los Angeles. Dan also developed Dan Velez Acting Studio to help actors hone their craft. His latest business venture, Thespis, is an online platform for actors. The guiding principle behind all these ventures, Dan said, was to make sure all actors get “a fair chance.”

Whether competing as a tri-athlete, casting, cooking, or being a wonderful son, brother, and friend, Dan approached all endeavors with his whole heart and without reservation. There is not one person that Dan did not inspire to be better.

He is survived by his father, Juan, in Columbia; his mother, Ana Murphy Ramirez; and his brother, Alejandro, an entrepreneur who was encouraged and inspired by Dan’s many accomplishments, both in Oakland, California. He is also survived by his step-father, Bill Murphy of Traverse City, and many other family members and friends. His local family includes aunt and uncle Kathy Murphy and Jeff Brown.

A memorial service was held at Space Station Casting Studios in Los Angeles on Saturday, Nov. 8.

Dan was one of the most creative and successful casting directors in LA, who cared so deeply about supporting up-and-coming actors to follow their dreams. In memory of Dan, a Scholarship Fund has been started to support actors each year. See link below to learn more about Dan and about the Scholarship Fund: <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/the-dan-velez-scholarship-fund>

The family address is: Alex Velez 424 2nd St., Oakland, CA 94607.