

## DIRECTOR FABIO JAFET PHIL VARONE: WAKING UP DEAD

by Christine Natanael/photos courtesy Fabio Jafet



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“Watching someone you love self-destruct is a painful experience,” says former Saigon Kick/Skid Row drummer Phil Varone “especially when it’s yourself.”

That statement, made with absolute clarity, comes from a place that it took four years of chemically altered, sex-crazed, rock’n’roll fueled debauchery to get to. And Emmy-award-winning journalist and filmmaker, Fabio Jafet, was there to document the swirling nascent descent of his friend. From the four years of footage, we now have the raw 90-minute film titled *Waking Up Dead*.

I recently spoke to the director, Jafet, via phone, to get the details on just how he got such

intimate access, how and why he decided on Varone as a subject, as well as other projects he's working on.

**CHRISTINE NATANAEL:** So, how did you get—start from the beginning on how you decided to do the *Waking Up Dead* thing with Phil Varone. Did it start as the Skid Row tour thing?

**FABIO JAFET:** Well, I met Skid Row in 2000. I was working for CBS at the time and we were doing a piece on KISS—the last two shows of the original line-up of KISS, and it was going to be a feature for CBS.



**CN:** Right.

**FJ:** And I had no idea that Skid Row was opening up the show. I was a huge Skid Row fan as a teenager. And you know, I ran into Snake in the tunnel, and I instantly recognized him. I started talking to him, and he told me that they had been on the tour and that this was the last couple shows, and that they have a new line-up; they have Johnny Solinger singing and Sebastian wasn't in the band. I hadn't heard anything about Skid Row coming back, so I was really interested in watching their show. So, I went and watched the set, and then I did the piece on KISS. The last city that we were in, the next stop, Snake came up to me and started talking to me. And I thought it was really cool because he remembered me. So then I had this crazy idea, I said, "Listen, have you guys ever thought about doing a behind the scenes DVD? It would be a great idea for you guys to do it now, with the new band, to introduce everybody." And he was like, "No, man. That'd be a really cool idea." He gave me his name and number and told me to call him when the tour was over. At that point I also realized that Rob Affuso wasn't in the band, and that it was Phil Varone playing the drums. And I started talking to Phil backstage a little bit, and we figured out that we lived fifteen minutes away from each other in Ft. Lauderdale. So, we exchanged numbers, and uh, that was it. It came back to, uh, I was living in Miami at the time, and I came back to Miami and did the piece on KISS, and one day I decided to call Snake out of the blue. And to make a long story short, you know, I was up in Jersey the following weekend to start videotaping, filming Skid Row before they even went into the studio to record *Thickskin*.

**CN:** Right.

**FJ:** And then Phil and I just hit it off. After that one trip, I came down to Florida and Phil called me and we started hanging out. We had a lot of mutual friends, ironically, from South Florida. In the course of making a DVD, I had to spend time with each guy in the band, and the more time I spent with Phil, because of the close proximity, I realized that he was just, a train wreck, obviously, so I just started videotaping everything, not knowing what I was gonna do with the tape or the film. I couldn't include that into the band's DVD, obviously, but I started just accumulating everything. And that's how it started.

**CN:** And he didn't care that you were filming while he was getting high? I mean, obviously, he was more guarded when you first started filming, he didn't just whip the coke out, immediately.

**FJ:** No, he didn't. Yeah, I had spent a lot of time with him before that, and in the course of, I don't know if you saw the *Under the Skin* DVD, but it was everything from them rehearsing at Snake's house, because all the guys were living at Snake's house in Jersey, to them at Bon Jovi's house, to recording the record, to them on tour, them at home, them hanging out watching television—I pretty much covered every aspect of their lives for X amount of months. And so, I knew Phil. I spent a lot of time with Phil before he started doing all this other stuff. And then one night, he just, you know—actually, the first time that I saw him do coke, we went to see Pantera at the Hammerstein Ballroom in New York City. We were hanging with the guys backstage, and none of the guys in Pantera did anything except drink, heavily, before the show, but after the show, we were out in New York City and Phil was going into the bathroom and asked me if I wanted to do something. And that's when I knew he was doing drugs. That was the first time that he did it in front of me. He didn't really seem to care that much, at the time.

**CN:** Yeah, it was in a bar, bar environment, have a few drinks...

**FJ:** Yeah, bar environment, he was going to the bathroom to do a couple bumps and come out. I didn't really think too much of it at the time. I've seen people on drugs before. It's not like I've never seen it, obviously, being in the music business, but I didn't at the time, think that it was a problem, for him.

**CN:** Obviously, living in Miami, you've seen it, come on now.

**FJ:** Oh sure, all the time, especially in the clubs, yeah, without question. All that I had seen up to that point was recreational use, not a full-blown drug addict. And, at that time, in New York, when I first saw it, I didn't think anything of it. It was like, whatever. It was not my place to sit there and judge. It wasn't a part of what I was doing. I was doing a fan piece on the band and that night we were just hanging out, you know?

**CN:** Right.

**FJ:** Then when I flew back down to Florida, I think we went out a few times and I watched some shows, and that's when he kind of started doing it in front of me. And I had a camera with me, and I said, "Listen, do you mind if I shoot?" I think that scene is in the movie, where I said, "Do you mind if I tape you like this?" And he says, "No, you can tape whatever you want. I trust you."

**CN:** Wow.

**FJ:** I just sat on the footage. I figured, you know what, my background is journalism, I worked in network television and I won a couple of awards in broadcast news, and—you know, you're a journalist, you know what a good story is.

**CN:** Sure, you sit on it, sometimes.

**FJ:** So I said, you know what, I'm gonna get all these elements. I don't know if anything's ever

gonna come out of it or happen with this, but I'm gonna get it.

**CN:** Sometimes you just have access and you don't know what's gonna happen to it.

**FJ:** Well, sure, without question. I grew up in the '80s. I grew up with a Motley Crue poster on my wall, with Poison on my wall, Ozzy, Skid Row, Bon Jovi, Guns'N'Roses, all those bands, you know. I used to read Circus magazine all the time. It was like, my Bible. And you read about all these antics, you know, Nikki od'ing and dying and coming back to life, and I had never seen it. You never see it. You read about it. There's been movies like Almost Famous, Sid and Nancy, less dramatized, but you never see like, a real musician or rock star from that genre or any genre whatsoever just self-destructing like that. So, I knew if I had it, I was like, "Oh my God, if this continues like this, this could be something that no one has ever seen before." That's kind of where my mind was with that. Not knowing how it was going to end, if it was gonna get worse or if he was gonna stop one day. You know, because in addition to all the drug stuff, there's all the groupie stuff that fans don't get to see as well, either, and also the inner-workings of a band that—you know, a lot of financial issues. To me, as a fan growing up, I mean, you know how it is...

**CN:** You don't believe they're like that. You think they're ten feet tall and bulletproof.

**FJ:** Oh, totally. You think they're on top of the world. Like, "Oh, my God, they're famous rock stars! They're rich! They must be driving Ferraris! They must be living in mansions! They must have the most beautiful women in the world and have millions of dollars in the bank!" And you just never realize that it's so not like that. And talk about a blow to my whole teenage fantasy, you know when I started seeing all this stuff unfold in front of me, I thought it was an amazing story.

**CN:** Yeah. A lot of the kids don't realize—they might go see their favorite band on tour and when the tour is finished, that guy will go home to his wife and have to go back to his job doing whatever he does.

**FJ:** Yeah, totally. Without question. You know, some of the guys made a lot of money, and some of them have been smart, but I think a lot of them have not been smart. I mean, obviously the guys in Poison are still making a ton of money, God Bless 'em, and Motley Crue are making a ton of money, and that's pretty much it, really, oh, and Bon Jovi. But all of the other guys really don't make that much money.

**CN:** A lot of them made a lot in the '80s and they lost it and are lucky enough to be in a position where they are making it again. And a lot of the thrash bands just never made that much to begin with. It's always been rougher for them. The glam bands always had a lot more and lived it much quicker.

**FJ:** Sure. Definitely.

**CN:** And didn't plan...



**FJ:** What do you do when you're 42 years old and you have no skills and your best days are behind you and you have no money in the bank? It's pretty tragic. You know, you can just go down the list of all the bands that were popular in the '80s and see what those guys are doing now and what their checking accounts look like now. I would say a majority of them are not too far off from where Phil is.

**CN:** So, let me ask you about this, because sometimes this has happened to me over the years. You meet someone that's a subject that you're going to interview, you maybe have an affinity for their music or an affinity for whatever it is they do, you're going to interview them, you genuinely like the person when you meet them, it's objective when you first meet them. You then become friendly with them, so friendly, in fact, that you find out too much information, but you're so invested in the story by that point that, as you were with Phil, that you're riding this line between-- you've got to get this story because you know it's gonna be worth something, but you're still friendly with the person and it's tearing you inside. How do you, inside yourself, deal with that schizophrenic feeling?

**FJ:** Well, when Phil decided that he wanted to put this out, you know, I told him, "The only way that this can work is that it has to be real, be honest. You can't censor me," you know? I said, "If this is gonna work, it's gotta be the real deal. Otherwise, I'm not interested in doing it." Now, there are some things that are not in the movie that I couldn't put in. There's some really, extremely graphic sexual stuff that's not in the movie, that really, you know, I don't think had a place in it. And there are a couple of, how do I put it, some financially related stuff about the band that I didn't want to put in the movie either, because of relationships and stuff that could have really reflected poorly on other people that didn't want to have anything to do with the movie. You can kind of read between the lines there.

**CN:** Right.

**FJ:** Now, you saw the movie. I don't think that I really left anything out, you know? I think I was, pretty, objective in the movie. I don't think I was biased at all. Obviously, I wanted him to come across as a good guy and have some sort of a happy ending. But, you know, we didn't create that ending. It just—you know, in a documentary, you're just documenting.

**CN:** Luckily the ending worked out to be happy.

**FJ:** Yeah, it did, because he got out of the music business. He realized that if he continued being in the business that he would eventually probably kill himself, because he was absolutely miserable. Absolutely miserable. There is a couple of minor things. There is this

one scene that was pretty powerful, which I'll tell you, off the record, that he didn't want in the movie. But other than that, I had free reign to do whatever I wanted, you know, which is pretty brave on his part, you know, just to say, go with it. And he stayed here at my house for a good month, 'cause I have an editing suite in my house, and he was with me during most of the editing process. Because I wanted to make sure that I wasn't doing something that he would not approve of or—because, at the end of the day, yes, I created it, but it's him on camera exposing his whole life. And his life isn't that good on camera, you know what I mean? It's a train wreck. So, I had to be respectful of that.

**CN:** Well, it does take a lot of balls to even allow it to be released.

**FJ:** Without question, it takes a lot of balls.

**CN:** I mean, it's one thing to talk about being that much of a train wreck, but it's another thing to actually allow someone to actually see you being that fucked up--not a paparazzo "accidentally" catching you being fucked up like that, but to know and consciously allow someone to document it day in and day out.

**FJ:** Yeah, without question. I couldn't do it. I couldn't have cameras on me doing that. No way. Absolutely not.

**CN:** I couldn't.

**FJ:** It says a lot about him, and I think it was part of his recovery effort, was to put the movie out. His therapist watched the movie and wanted to show his patients, which I didn't think about it at the time, but he said, "This is one of the greatest anti-drug movies I've ever seen in my life, because if this doesn't get you to not do drugs, you know, I don't know what will." And he was showing it to some of his patients that had some serious substance abuse problems. I mean, that wasn't the intent. We weren't on top soapboxing, "Okay, don't do drugs." Or this is the message we want to get across, but I mean, I wouldn't want to be Phil Varone. I don't know how many people would after watching a movie like that.

**CN:** Well, not Phil Varone, *then*.

**FJ:** Yeah, Phil Varone, *then*. He's had a tough go. A lot of it has been, I think, a victim of the music business. A big chunk of it is him, self-destructing, which is big under the pressure of the financial end of the music business. It's like a vicious circle. I'm not excusing the behavior, whatsoever, but it's not black and white, you know what I mean?

**CN:** Well, it is what it is.

**FJ:** It is what it is, sure.

**CN:** And it's coming at a very intriguing time, your release of this, because I know here in New York, it's like 1977 all over again with the coke everywhere. It's insane. I can't even go out to clubs anymore, if I'm not working because it's just everywhere.

**FJ:** Are you serious?

**CN:** Yeah, and I've gone to so many funerals because of it. It's really bad here. So this is

coming at a really, really good time. It's strange that that's the drug that's coming back into vogue because the last decade it was heroin. And prior to that it was the crack. So, I guess they think that because they're snorting coke it's not as bad and they don't realize that it only takes a gram and a half of cocaine to kill you. Then add drinking Red Bull on top of it, alcohol and Red Bull, Stackers, whatever else the hell they take these days, and Starbucks...

**FJ:** And your heart will explode.

**CN:** So how has it gone since the release? You were here for a screening?

**FJ:** We have a long history of trying to get released. We had a lot of legal shit with the movie, a lot of false starts. It played in Tribeca. I want to say 2005. It was supposed to be for a week, but it was only for two days. We had four showings and all four showings were sold out. And it was supposed to have been released a while back, but there was concern from attorneys where to get every single release. If somebody's blurred out on camera, obviously we didn't get their release.

**CN:** Yeah, I saw there were quite a few faces blurred.

**FJ:** Yeah, quite a few faces blurred, and then there was a concern at one point that Phil actually might get arrested in Florida, you know, if we get some overzealous prosecutor that sees that he's doing drugs on camera, he could technically go after him. So, a lot of people, a lot of attorneys were...

**CN:** They can technically go after him for having done drugs in a state after the fact?

**FJ:** Yes, technically, he could be, if he had an overzealous prosecutor that wanted to try to make a name for himself or raise some stink he could come after him.



**CN:** I don't think that would hold water anywhere, but...good try.

**FJ:** Yeah, *try*. They can give you...

**CN:** They can keep you tied up in this litigious society, but I don't think that it would stand.

**FJ:** No, I don't think so, either, but nobody wants to get dragged through that. But obviously, we released it anyway. Obviously we just decided to go ahead and do it, because if that

would happen, that would be great publicity for the movie.

**CN:** Of course, it would be the best publicity ever!

**FJ:** Sure! So, it played in New York for a couple days, and since the release now, which was June 26th, all the reviews have been amazing. I know that Amazon sold out its first run and they just reordered and it's gonna be in FYE. I know there's a lot of major chains that are kind of waiting to see what's gonna happen with it. But it's doing well at Amazon. It's doing well at the mom and pop places, and now Virgin Megastore took an order and FYE took a pretty large order this week. And the reviews have been amazing so far, so I couldn't be happier about the way the release is going.

**CN:** Very good. Has it done any festivals, though?

**FJ:** We did some of those in 2005. We did the *Chicago International Documentary Film Festival*. We were in the *Wine and Country Film Festival* in San Francisco. We were in the *Beverly Hills Film Festival*. I think that was it. I think those three. Then we had a showing in New York. Then we had a showing in Ft. Lauderdale. So the movie's been seen in Chicago, New York, Ft. Lauderdale, Beverly Hills and San Francisco on screen. But no, we didn't do any big festivals. We didn't do Sundance. We didn't do Tribeca. We didn't do Cannes. We did submit to those places, though. I don't know why we didn't do it. I think we were just trying to get it released.

**CN:** Right. Get it out there. So, do you have any plans to follow-up on his stand-up career or anything like that?

**FJ:** No. Phil's a very good friend of mine. Actually, I just talked to him today for about half an hour. It's just, making this movie was just so stressful. Between funding it ourselves, the hours spent on it, the drama of getting it released that I don't think I could ever go through another process like that again. I need to go off and do something different for a while. Maybe I'll work with Phil again in the future, but I'm just so spent from doing it. I can't even put it into words just how stressful it was.

**CN:** Oh, I can imagine. I can definitely imagine.

**FJ:** You know, when I started working on the movie, I was working at CBS in Miami. I had a great job and was in a senior management position. I was director of special projects in news programming, and I left that job, which was a six figure job, to do this movie, to finish it. And so I quit, which, I almost got a divorce over it from my wife, and I drained all my savings. The movie took a lot longer to complete than I anticipated. I basically went a full twelve months without getting a paycheck while I was trying to get this done.

**CN:** Yeah, it's rough. Filmmaking is rough.

**FJ:** It is rough. Doing it independently is very rough. And I don't think I'll ever do this again like this—not like this. I'm glad I did it, and I'm extremely proud of the movie, but I'll never go through this process again like this. It's too much of a rollercoaster to get it done.

**CN:** So do you have plans to go back to network journalism or are you going to continue on in filmmaking or try to do a combination of both?



**FJ:** No, I'm actually working with Tom Holland--who is the writer/director of *Child's Play*, *Fright Night*, he did *Psycho II*, and a couple Stephen King movies--on a new secret project that will be unveiled probably in the next couple months. It's gonna be like a real Hollywood thing. It's gonna be pretty cool. He saw *Waking Up Dead*, and we have mutual acquaintances, and he was just blown away by the way I edit and the way I can tell a story. We're doing a collaboration, which I'm ecstatic about. So it's gonna be like a real legitimate, you know, big time, probably the biggest project I've done to date. Basically, I pitched him a concept. He loved the concept and just took it up. He just made it even bigger. And he's writing it, and he's gonna direct, and I'm gonna shoot, and I'm gonna edit the piece and produce. I'm very excited about that.

**CN:** I'm fascinated by the way you film guys do that. I mean, I do still photography, obviously, and I do the interview thing well, but as far as editing things to timecode and adding the music. I don't know. I think my head would explode.

**FJ:** See, I think taking stills is a lot harder than doing video because you have one picture to tell your story, you know? And to capture that, I think is a lot tougher, I really do. I can't take still photos to save my life.

**CN:** And plus they give you added pressure, because they give you three songs, the first three songs to do it--of a live show--that's all you get.

**FJ:** Oh, really?

**CN:** Yeah, you only get the first three songs and you have to do it without flash.

**FJ:** Oh, wow. It better be when the lights are on, then, huh?

**CN:** Yeah. And I love the lighting designers that only give you red and blue...

**FJ:** (laughs)

**CN:** because red and blue in the digital sensors of the camera gives you crap...

**FJ:** There you go. Right.

**CN:** So, it's always a challenge. It's always fun. And then there's the climbing over the other photographers and the security in the photo pit at the same time. It's real fun. As a camera guy, if you were shooting a live show, you'd pretty much have the lay of the land with your camera crew and you might be in your trailer coordinating it if you're the director, or whatever.

**FJ:** Yep.

**CN:** Me, I'm down there and I've got maybe four or five other photographers or more to climb over, plus the security guys, plus the kids stagediving coming at the back of my head...

**FJ:** Oh, yeah! When I used to work for CBS and stuff, for FOX, NBC, and CBS, I shot a ton of, probably over 50 NFL games on the sidelines. I'm fighting 50 other photographers and the linesmen and the refs, so, I totally get it.

**CN:** But there's an adrenaline rush to that, too.

**FJ:** Totally!

**CN:** That makes you go, "Yeah! I got it! I know I got it!"

**FJ:** You get that money shot and you're like, "Yes!"

**CN:** There's something about doing it. How did you get started in journalism?

**FJ:** God, this is actually a funny story. When I was in high school, I decided that I wanted to work for *LIFE* magazine, that's when *LIFE* magazine was still relevant, to travel the world and have someone else pay for it, covering news events. I wrote for the high school newspaper as a writer. And I actually got my own column called "The Rock Scene" where I would review the new records that came out. One of the records that I reviewed, and I still have this article, was Skid Row's self-titled album. Which I predicted would be the huge hit of the summer, and it was. And I reviewed *Live Like a Suicide* when it came out from Guns 'N' Roses, so that's pretty much how I started. I did journalism in college. And then I got a job at a local station in a town called Yuma, Arizona as a news photographer. It's video, but they're called "news photographers". And then I went from there. I worked in Yuma. I worked in Ft. Meyers, Florida. I worked in Miami for most of my television career, where I won nine Emmys for news. I covered the Oklahoma City bombing. I covered O.J.'s trial. I covered the '96 Olympics. I covered the Pope in Cuba. I covered the Yitzak Rabin assassination in Israel. I've covered news in Australia and Haiti, all over the United States, you know. I mean, I've been everywhere covering news and every major sporting event. You name it, I've done it.



**CN:** And out of those, what was the one that got you the most pomp?

**FJ:** Probably, ooh, let me think... Probably the Pope in Cuba in 1998. I was in the middle of the first Catholic Mass in Havana and in the middle of 350,000 people. And it was the first time under the Communist dictatorship of Fidel Castro that they allowed the Pope into the

country. And that was pretty amazing to see everyone's reaction and to be in the middle of literally 250-350,000 people. I have pictures of it. It was amazing. That was pretty intense, being close to the Pope and stuff and Castro was pretty remarkable. It was probably the biggest one that stood out to me.

**CN:** Yeah, right?

**FJ:** And then, going to Israel, too, when Rabin was assassinated in '96 was pretty intense. I had never been to Israel, and you realize that on every block Israeli soldiers with M-16s and Uzis are patrolling the streets and it's very tense. A very tense place.

**CN:** Oh, I know. I've been there.

**FJ:** I don't think I'll ever go back to Israel. I just felt so—I guess afraid is the right word—to be at a bus stop or to get a taxi or public transportation...

**CN:** Oh, I lived there in 1985, so I know the first sight of a soldier getting on a city bus with a rifle is shocking.

**FJ:** You used to live there?

**CN:** I used to live there, yeah. It's considered good luck to pick up a hitchhiking soldier and stuff like that.

**FJ:** I was there when Rabin was shot and killed, so you can imagine the troop presence on the streets.

**CN:** I'm sure it was much bigger then. Even in '85 just to go in a grocery store or a store like a Woolworth's, they would search your pocketbook and your bag for bombs.

**FJ:** Yeah, I was panicked the whole time I was there. I was completely panicked.

**CN:** What they're just starting to implement here in New York on the subways, which they only do sporadically if you look somewhat suspect, over there is an every day way of doing things. You walk into a store and they stop you and search your big bag, your backpack, your pocketbook, and clothing looking for bombs.

**FJ:** Oh, totally, we went to Bethlehem, which you know, is in the West Bank, and when we came back, we went through a whole search process with the Israeli soldiers.

**CN:** Oh, I got strip searched at Ben Gurion airport upon entry to the country. I guess I looked "suspect".

**FJ:** Yeah. They don't mess around over there. It's terrible that they live that way, but--that's probably the most intense experience of my life, actually being there. I was there for 10 days, and I was "taking a shit" for every day that I was there. And then Oklahoma City was probably the saddest thing I've ever seen in my life--pretty sad.

**CN:** Yeah, right?

**FJ:** That's the biggest reason why I got out of news. It's such a downer. Everything's depressing, because all you do is cover tragedy.

**CN:** This is a sad thing to admit, but I don't watch the news, because the way they slant the news here is meant to keep you in fear.

**FJ:** Sure. Without question.

**CN:** And if you watch BBC News it's a much different slant on the coverage. Any international news channel covers it much different than we do here.

**FJ:** I read my news online, is what I do. That way I can read what I want.

**CN:** That I do as well, because I'm online all the time, obviously, working. Plus, anytime I have something on television, it's background music or a DVD or CD I'm gonna review or interview next.

**FJ:** Well, that's your life, though, you have to do that.

**CN:** Yeah, but there's just some days where if I hear another bit of music, I'm gonna lose my mind, so documentaries are nice.

**FJ:** You know, that's funny, I don't watch documentaries, although I actually won an Emmy for a documentary that we did on Afghanistan for editing. And then I edited two projects after *Waking Up Dead* for a friend of mine. But, I don't watch documentaries at all. I think it's because they're boring.

**CN:** Most of them are boring because they're filmed very dry.

**FJ:** They're edited very dry as well.

**CN:** It's like reality TV without the sensationalism.

**FJ:** (laughs) Right.

**CN:** So what are you doing now?

**FJ:** The Tom Holland project. We'll probably start shooting in the next three weeks. And after that, I don't have any other plans, really. I'm not sure yet.

**CN:** Yeah, but if it's gonna be a feature, those things usually take like, a year or something, right, or two years?

**FJ:** Yeah. It'll take about a year of my time. So, I'm definitely excited about it. I'm really excited.

**CN:** Is that the first time you've worked with Hollywood people?

**FJ:** On the film level, yeah. On this level, sure, I mean, I've done a couple network TV shows,

but it's not the same thing.

**CN:** It's not the same thing at all, no.

**FJ:** No, not the same thing at all, so, yes, it is the first time.

**CN:** Cool.

**FJ:** And I'm very excited. You know, Tom's uh, he's brilliant. He's a million miles to the second. Sixty-two years old and he's out of control. He's crazy. I mean, I love it.

**CN:** (laughs)

**FJ:** Anybody that can create "Chucky", you know what I mean?

**CN:** I know! I love that little fucker. He's great. I love horror films. I really do.

**FJ:** Do ya?

**CN:** Yeah.

**FJ:** I just went to the *Fangoria* horror convention in Los Angeles.

**CN:** I love *Fangoria*.

**FJ:** They just had a big convention out there. I was out there with Tom, actually, and it was pretty cool.

**CN:** That's some of the best stuff.

**FJ:** Totally. There's so much freedom when you write/work horror movies, it's not even funny. And that's where a lot of the up and coming directors and—that's how a lot of people break into the business is through the horror genre.

**CN:** And the special effects are fun.

**FJ:** Yep. Yep.

**CN:** You get to blow up stuff and chop stuff up...

**FJ:** Yeah. One of my friends is the Vice-President of Production over at Stan Winston. You know Stan Winston the special effects guy?

**CN:** Yeah, I know who that is.

**FJ:** Most people don't know who that is, so I have to rattle off the names of the characters in the movies that he's created.

**CN:** Okay. Go ahead and we'll put it down in the "official record".

**FJ:** Ah, we don't have to...

**CN:** We do for like, "interview purposes"...

**FJ:** Okay, he created the characters for *Terminator*, *Aliens*, *Predator*, *Jurassic Park*...

**CN:** There we go. That's for those who don't know. All right.

**FJ:** So, his conference room in Van Nuys, in his office has every character that he's created—and it's a two and a half story conference room with an open ceiling—and it's the most intimidating, unbelievable, cool conference room I've ever been in, in my life. So, that was going back to the special effects and stuff.

**CN:** Oh, too much fun! Well, you know the whole *Alien* thing goes back to Giger.

**FJ:** Oh, *Alien* is one of my favorite movies, actually.

**CN:** My friend is actually Giger's agent.

**FJ:** Oh, really?

**CN:** Yeah, so with the whole *Alien* tie-in, I knew exactly who Winston was.

*FJ:* What a crazy mind, to come up with stuff like that. You know what I mean? I'm always---like, George Lucas, you know, I'm a total *Star Wars* geek, and I'm gonna name drop right now. One of my really good friends is Joey Fatone from N'Sync. And he did a voice for a show called *Robot Chicken*.

**CN:** I love that show.

**FJ:** Okay, did you see the "Star Wars Special"?

**CN:** Yeah.

**FJ:** Okay, Joey was in it. So when they had the screening for it, it was at Skywalker Ranch. He invited me to go with him 'cause he knew what a geek I was with *Star Wars*. And we got to go to Skywalker Ranch and look at all the *Star Wars* movie props and I got to put on Darth Vader's helmet and all that kind of stuff. And I got to sit there, and George Lucas was there as well, at the screening, and I just sat there. I like to think of myself as a filmmaker, but when I see people like George Lucas, that created an entire culture based on an idea in his head, you know, I feel so small. You know what I mean? It's really overwhelming. It just blows me away how certain people can be that brilliant, without question. And I think that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, those are like, massive icons. You know what I mean? Am I making sense?

**CN:** Yeah. They started out with baby steps and got there, you know? I don't think they even anticipated to get to this level.

**FJ:** I look at them and go, "God, I'm never gonna do anything like that!" How in the world can anyone come up with something that is so massive like *Star Wars*? That's like, really cool. I'm

a total nerd.

**CN:** I remember when it came out.

**FJ:** Yeah. I saw it when I was a kid.

**CN:** Yeah, I remember when it came out and everybody was just so off on that for so long, because that came out about the same time as *Saturday Night Fever*. Both those came out at the same time.

**FJ:** Those are all classics. I just hope that someday I can do something that is memorable. That's my biggest goal—at least one project before I die that will always, that will live on, so to speak, that people will always look up to. I'm kind of hoping for that.

**CN:** It'll come. But it'll come to you at the weirdest time. When you're not looking for it, it'll just drop in your lap. That's usually how those things happen, because sometimes if you work too hard at trying to find it, it always eludes you.

**FJ:** Definitely. I'm with the thought of just to do stuff that you like. You know, I've learned that the hard way.

**CN:** That's what they call that "following your bliss" because you're doing it because you love it, so it doesn't feel like work.

**FJ:** Yep. I just turned down a project, actually, that I didn't feel was right for me. It would have been good for me monetarily, but I didn't feel like it would be good for me to do it, you know, on the path that I want to go on, so I turned it down.

**CN:** Well, you know, I do my website and my pictures and they don't make me a dime...

**FJ:** Yeah, but you know what though? It's yours. You know what I mean?

**CN:** Yeah. It's all mine.

**FJ:** There's a lot to be said about that. There's a lot to be said about owning your own stuff rather than being an employee or working for somebody else.

**CN:** I've never been a good employee, I guess. (laughs) That bears out by how many times I've been fired. (laughs)

**FJ:** If you went out and polled a hundred people, I'll make you a bet that at least 85 of them are not doing what they want to do with their lives, without question.

**CN:** Oh, absolutely not.

**FJ:** So, as long as you're doing what you love, everything else works itself out. I'm a big believer in that.