



Interview with Wilson Cruz

By Windy City Times

Wilson Cruz could act for the next 50 years, and one of the roles he will always be associated with is that of the groundbreaking character Enrique "Rickie" Vasquez in the seminal 1994 TV series *My So-Called Life* ([out on DVD](#))

). Cruz talked with Windy City Times about that show, gay actors and one of his newest ventures—the hilarious Logo stop-motion animated sitcom *Rick & Steve: The Happiest Gay Couple in All the World*.

WCT: (Windy City Times) Watching *My So-Called Life* was like stepping into a time machine: the clothes, the music—like TLC...

WC: (Wilson Cruz) Don't look at my hair. Ignore the hair.

WCT: At the time you were filming this, did you think you were doing something groundbreaking?

WC: Yep; I'm not a complete idiot. [Laughs] I knew that I had never seen anybody on TV [who] came anywhere close to me, so the fact that somebody was putting me on TV—I thought, "Well, they're not going to be able to handle it, and I'm really going to serve it up." I knew it was a big opportunity, and I wasn't going to let it go by without making a bit of a splash." I wanted to make it as honest and authentic as I possibly could, and that wasn't hard with the writing I was given every week.

WCT: Claire [Danes, who played the lead character, Angela] was actually 13 when you all did the pilot?

WC: [Yes,] and she played 15. She was amazing.

We didn't get picked up for the first fall season. We made the pilot in the fall of 1993 and got picked up in the fall of 1994, so it was a full year before we made the second episode. When we came back, she looked older and Devon Gummersall, who played Brian, was a full three inches taller. I was 19 when I did the pilot.

WCT: Was this your first foray into television?

WC: Well, I [had] a recurring role on a FOX series called *Great Scott!*, where I played a choir boy. It was a series with Tobey Maguire and Kevin Connolly, and that's where I got my SAG [Screen Actors Guild] card. Basically, I was a theater boy, and I prided myself on that.

I learned on the job, basically—from all [the actors] and Marshall Herskovitz and the other great directors. They told me that less is more, and that's what I learned.

WCT: Then there was A.J. Langer, who played Rayanne. Was she as wild in person as she seemed on the show?

WC: Nothing but nice. She was the one person who was the least like her character. Isn't that amazing?

Now, she's a lady. She married a British lord—and she's a mother.

WCT: When you filmed your coming-out story on the show, did they use your own life? The stories

are similar.

WC: Well, that was interesting. When Winnie and I did the commentary for that episode, we couldn't figure out what came first: the chicken or the egg. We couldn't figure out if I had told her if it had happened to me when I read it or [if] I had told her before and then she wrote it. I think I told her that I had been kicked out of my house, but I didn't really give her any details until after we filmed the episode—and she was shocked that it was so similar. Winnie was very intuitive, though; there was a very weird dynamic with all of us.

WCT: How surprised were you when ABC decided not to run the show anymore?

WC: Not that surprised. The truth of the matter is that I think it was a little too real and too honest. People want to escape when they come home, and that show wasn't about escaping; it was a mirror.

Then, MTV [which picked up the show] really knew how to market it to the right audience, and that's when it took off—but it was too late [at that point] .

WCT: If the show had continued, do you think that Rickie would have had a boyfriend?

WC: Oh, absolutely. There was no doubt about that. Winnie and I had talked about that. Who could resist him? Please! [Laughs]

WCT: You know, modesty becomes you.

WC: I know—and I'm the most modest ever. [Both laugh.]

WCT: You've done a lot of things, including the series Noah's Arc. Is there going to be a movie [based on that show] —and, if so, are you in it?

WC: Yes, there will be a movie, and [it looks like] I'll be in it—but I don't know any details.

WCT: And you apparently knew [series creator] Patrik-Ian Polk before you were on the show?

WC: Yes. I knew Patrik when I was doing My So-Called Life. We've been trying to work together since, but it never worked out schedule-wise. He wanted me in his movie Punks, but I was doing [TV's] Party of Five at the time, and I couldn't get out of it.

WCT: And now you're on Rick & Steve. How would you describe your character, Evan?

WC: Evan is probably the most self-involved piece of plastic you've ever seen in your life. [Laughs] He's that little twinkie who thinks the whole world revolves around his cute ass—and it does. And his voice couldn't be any higher—I actually have to do vocal warm-ups.

WCT: And after Rick & Steve debuted, I started hearing “I know, right?” everywhere.

WC: [In Evan's voice] I know, right?

WCT: So how did that even come about?

WC: From the twisted mind of Q. Allan Brocka. He did a short years ago when he was in film school. Logo bought the rights and I auditioned—and for some odd reason they gave it to me. Evan could be the Karen [of TV's Will & Grace] of that show.

WCT: Do you have a favorite episode?

WC: My favorite episode is when Evan goes to West Lahunga to get his medical marijuana. I actually play my mother in that episode as well; when she hits that high note when she's singing,

that's me. I love when you go to East Lahunga Beach, and they tell you to set your clocks to “five minutes ago.” [Both laugh.] Does it get any more brilliant than that?

WCT: There are so many little bits and pieces to this show. For example, Chuck [Evan's older partner] and Evan live at [a house numbered] 5019, which reflects their ages, 50 and 19.

WC: [Laughs] I love that you caught that.

WCT: On a more serious note, you participated in a forum called The Glass Closet. You said at one point that for actors who want to come out, the Hollywood scene is worse than ever. Why did you say that?

WC: I just think that the way that people behind the scenes (like agencies and management companies) are handling people. ... I'm not saying that things are not changing; I'm saying that at the moment it's not necessarily very pretty. I think it's because of what happened with [Grey's Anatomy's] T.R. Knight and Isaiah Washington. The management companies and agencies are concerned that it's more about the actual outing than the work that the [actors] are doing, so they spend a lot of time keeping them in the closet.

The dynamics [are different] when you get agencies and management companies involved in a very personal decision. They're not thinking about the actors; they're thinking about the bottom line. The fact of the matter is that most people believe that you won't be hired to play straight roles if you're out—and there are very few examples of that being untrue.

I'm happier because I'm out, and I've been working for 13 years. I don't know a lot of people who can say that. In the end, it's about, “Can you do the work?”

However, for some reason, it's OK for a straight actor to play a gay role, but it's like some coup d'etat when a gay actor plays a gay role because, all of a sudden, that's the only thing they can do.

Actors don't pigeonhole themselves; they're pigeonholed by the industry. [Agents and managers] think so little of the audience that they think the audience can't suspend disbelief. We're supposed to believe that these people on NBC's Heroes can fly—but they can't be gay. [Laughs] It's amazing to me.

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