

You're Never Really Ready to Meet Ron Perlman

By Cindy Rae



Picture by J...

**(Not a fiction, this is a retelling of the first and only time
I ever met Ron Perlman,
at Tampa Bay Comicon, August 3rd, 2019)**



You're never going to be really 'ready' to meet Ron Perlman, I don't think. You can try to be, of course. Sure, you can. You can watch the most recent thing he's done, scan his Twitter page for what he's thinking, watch YouTube videos of the man at conventions, re-watch your favorite episodes of Beauty and the Beast, and (of course) you can even rehearse what you're going to say.

You can do all of that. You can do more. But you still won't really be 'ready' to meet him. That's nothing against you, and your preparation skills. Nothing at all. It has nothing to do with your good intentions to mention that he's had a great career, has lovely children, had an impact on your life and why, or what not. (And most of those things you probably won't even get a chance to say, if you meet him at a convention. The line moves fast, and you only have so much time for conversation.)

But it doesn't have to do with that, either.

Because in a word, Ron Perlman is overwhelming. (As overwhelming as you ever thought Vincent was. And we all know Vincent was impressive.)

So, you can try to be 'ready' for this moment all you like. You can plan and prepare. You can pick out what you're going to wear, show up early, and mentally practice what you're going to say, all of which I sort of did, back in August.

And after it's over, you'll still try to remember "Did I actually say that, or did I just think I was going to say that?" and "What an incredible experience that was!" and "Shoot! I should have said (blank) but I didn't!"

It's not you. It's Ron. He's overwhelming.

There's a physicality to him that gets 'shrunk down' on the screen, (any screen) but just explodes off him when you're in his presence. This is not a small man. This isn't even an average-sized one, and it's more than physical. I don't know how tall Vincent was 'supposed to be,' in the show. But right now I think they did well to keep the impression of him at anything under seven feet tall. Because Ron, at just over six feet tall, seems a lot 'bigger' when you're in his presence. That's just the man. That's how he is. And I don't even think it's something he's 'consciously doing.' I think it's just him, innately. Or it's become him, over the years. It's part of who he is.

In interviews, he's talked about 'needing the makeup' in the early stages of his career, thanks to needing something to hide behind, for a while. And that it worked out well for him, that by the time he was really ready to act 'in his own skin,' that those non-heavy makeup roles started coming his way. He tells you he's grown into who he is. I think that shows, in the way he carries himself. I think it has to. He's a big man. He has a big man's 'presence.'

When you watch him sign autographs at a con, you see that he's 'spread out' across the table, big shoulders hunched, a little, as if he's almost trying to minimize how much space he's taking up, in what is always a cramped, back-against-the-wall area. It's a polite gesture, and when he stands up, people near him look just a bit like Lilliputians amongst a giant. He dwarfs everyone.

But I'm getting ahead of myself...



August 3rd, 2019, had been circled on my calendar for months, and that was kind of a problem for me. Plans made very far out have a habit of falling through. My life has a lot of moving parts, and it seems like things I make big plans for far away from the date just don't come to pass, that often. Especially things that are going to cost me money, because there's always

some diversion for that. (Especially over the summer, when I'm not drawing a paycheck.)

But I'd known Ron was going to come to the Tampa Bay Convention Center since the date and guest list were announced, way back in early spring. The day Ron's face (as Hellboy) showed up on the website, I gasped. By the end of the day, everybody in my immediate family had texted me. ("Go check the website for Comicon. Guess who's coming?") My eldest daughter walked in the door saying "You're gonna want to get your tickets for Comicon early, this year. Because I know who's going to be there!" And I answered back "Ron Perlman!!" and that was that.

He was only going to be there on Saturday, (of a three day gig) and that added even more to my 'worry factor.' What if my Mom got sick and needed to go to the doctor's? What if one of the kids had a car breakdown, and our money had to go to getting her a new one? We're all driving older vehicles. It's not out of the question. What if Ron had to cancel? What if some secret, indefinable 'something' happened, so there would be just no way I could go?

I was convinced I was going to miss it before it even happened. I just *knew* fate was going to step in, as it so often does, and remind me I have other things to do than go to a comic book convention.

I pulled up the website every week, to confirm he was still on the guest list. (Greg Hildebrandt dropped off. He's part of the Brother's Hildebrandt, and created the first, iconic Star Wars poster. I wanted to go meet him. I took this as a bad sign.) But Ron's picture of Hellboy stayed there, and I remained cautiously hopeful.

I did everything 'in advance.' I bought the tickets for my family (and extended family) in advance. Drove down (in the rain) the day before the convention even opened, to pick them up in advance, rather than wait for

the day of. Guarded them in my wallet, buried deep inside my purse, which stayed where I could see it, hanging on a doorknob in the house, so the cats wouldn't knock it over and the contents somehow disappear. Gave up the last 'free day' of summer vacation to do it all.

I washed up my favorite (only) 'Vincent' tee shirt, and double and triple checked my amazing Kevin Barnes poster (If you don't have one, beg him to send you one. You won't be sorry), the thing I knew I wanted Ron to sign. The image is a picture of Vincent and Catherine, with the prologue from the show, in the background. Too wonderful.

My family got annoyed with my asking who all in our bunch was going, were they SURE they were going, and what day would they be there? (Tickets are day-specific. And I was darn sure going on Saturday, so I had to make sure everybody else had 'the right ticket' for when they would be attending. Pain in the neck.)

I was a mess. I set the alarm early, for the day of. I took everybody to breakfast at a pancake place and then rushed them through the meal. ("It's a pancake, it's not a steak. Chew and swallow. Let's move, people!") I wanted to get there early. I wanted to make sure this was going to happen. Because even the morning of, I still did not believe.

I put my convention wrist band on at breakfast, so I'd stop fiddling with it and lose it. I checked my cash (autographs by celebrities are 'cash only') and rechecked it, and took my debit card, besides. (There's an ATM machine there. If I had to, I had to.)

If we had a 'budget' for this day, I don't know what it was. (If the lights get turned off, they get turned off. It's Ron Perlman. That's the mood I was in, by the time we got done with the meal.) Everybody at the table knew what I was going there for. As far as I was concerned, everyone else at the

convention was an 'also ran.' Hubby and the kids were chuckling at me, a little. They knew I was excited.

We got to the Convention Center without getting into a car accident, another thing I 'considered' as a reason I wouldn't be able to actually go. But because I was carrying a poster in a rolled-up mailing tube, I had to go through security, to get checked.

Not that the nice cop who looked in it cared, but he too, got the story about how that poster was painted by Kevin Barnes, who also signed it, and he was a terrific artist for "Beauty and the Beast" back in the day. I think I was giving off that "Don't make eye contact with the crazy lady" vibe, by about then. My family just chuckled and went in ahead of me. They weren't carrying a poster tube.

But that meant a lot of other people got in ahead of me, too, and even though I went straight to where Ron's (currently empty) table was set up, the line for his autograph was already forming, even though he wasn't scheduled to be there for another forty five minutes or so.

Then, a small stroke of luck. One of the people working the convention (and in that area) was an ex-student of mine, and a friend of my daughter's. We chatted while I stood in line, and he told me Ron Perlman was definitely there. He'd not cancelled or postponed, and my former student (I taught him to read "Green Eggs and Ham") indicated that they were going to have to make extra room for the monstrosity of a thing that was now becoming 'Ron's line.'

'Ron's line' was a thing to behold, and that was even before he got there, or gave a panel. There were about 200 people in front of me, and at least that many behind, and more coming. We were cordoned up like an E ticket ride to Disney World (Look it up, youngsters. I'm not gonna explain it), and that part was actually kind of fun, because everybody in Ron's line was so nice. A

young couple behind me had an artist's print of Hellboy, and that's what they were getting signed. A lot of people there were wearing "Sons of Anarchy" shirts, and a few older (cough) gals like me, were wearing Vincent shirts. We smiled at each other across the line, and when we got close enough, said things like "I like your shirt!" and "It was my favorite show!" You know BatB fans. They're great, everywhere.

One pair was a mother/daughter team, maybe in their seventies and fifties, respectively. The SOA fans look mostly younger, and the kids seem to mostly like Hellboy. Ron is multi-generational, in his appeal. It's the universal truth. (My kids remember him as the voice of 'Slade,' from Teen Titans. Gotta love it.)

Ron was late, (about 45 minutes or so,) and hubby kept checking back in on me, making sure I was okay. I was. And I was not moving from my spot, which now didn't look that bad, considering the line was still growing, behind me. They put out a sign saying that if the celebrity had to move to the photo area, or to give a panel, then they did, and unfortunately, some people in line might be turned away without being able to get something signed. That they'd try to accommodate everyone, but there might not be a way. He'd do two autograph sessions. It gave me a small sense of pride and happiness to see that Ron's line dwarfed everyone else's. I don't know if anyone I was standing near had ever gotten his autograph, before. No one mentioned it, if they had.

When he came out to sit down, I couldn't see that happening, thanks to being so far back in the queued up line, but the front of the line cheered, and we now knew we were moving. Not 'too' quickly, but finally making some progress forward. Pretty much everyone around me was all smiles, at that.

Hubby did a no-no and stood to one side, and sneaked some pictures for me, while my ex-student and daughter's friend pretended to look the other

way. (This is one of the reasons why I love my husband and my ex-kindergarteners. Both of them do silly things for me.) Hubby managed to get several shots before one of the other floor workers shooed him away, and he sent them from his phone to mine. They're not bad, for being something you weren't supposed to do. (I married a rebel. One I owe.)



Things in line started picking up speed, and I came to understand the 'rhythm' of it all. Everything is set up so that you move fast. An assistant gave us all a Post it note, so we could write down on it whatever we wanted Ron to inscribe. It made sense. It saved time.

There were many pictures of him in his various roles spread out on a table, as you got closer, and you could pick the one from the role you wanted. (There was even one of the Hunchback, from "Name of the Rose" and a shot from "Quest for Fire.") Vincent was there, of course, as was Clay Morrow. Shots from Blade. Shots from Alien: Resurrection, and Pacific Rim.

I didn't need any of them, though they were nice glossies. I already had my treasure.

As I got 'closer,' I took my poster out of the tube, fighting to unroll it, gently, and then 'roll it in reverse' so I could get to unbend enough so it would lay flat, for Ron's signature. It was printed on thick paper, and being a little stubborn. It wouldn't do me any good to hand Ron something he couldn't sign! I kept at it. It was coming along.

And as I looked at my Post-it note, I blanked. Years of watching one of the most literate, most quotable shows on TV, and suddenly, my brain turned to mush, and I couldn't think what I wanted Ron to write!

I scrambled, and came up with "Blessed" or "We are blessed" and wrote that on the Post-it. (It's the word he gives to Catherine in "Though Lover's Be Lost" when she asks him how he's feeling. He replies simply, "Blessed." The way he says it always makes me melt.) I scribbled it down.

But then I realized "No, there's something else I want!" and I had to ask down the line if they could nab the lady with the Post-it notes, and get her to pass up another one, for me. (Yes. I was that idiot person.) And now, instead of the line feeling like it's moving slow, or even 'normal,' it feels like it's moving fast, and I'm getting nervous, between the poster rolling up, and re-writing my Post-it note, and texting the gang (BatB friends and family) that I'm almost there, and peeking around people (I'm short) and then, getting actual glimpses of the amazing man, himself.

His hair is snow white, and wavy-full, and he's wearing all black, with an open shirt over a tee shirt, and his handlers are helping the line move along, and he's in a folding chair in front of a long, covered table, and selfies are being taken at one end, for those who forked over the extra cash for that, and by the time it's my turn to get the poster signed, I'm a babbling mess.

It's my turn! This is it! And I get that this is going to be a quick slide down the table and out. Fine.

He's looking down at my Post-it note as he reads my 'inscription,' and I tell him the poster is by Kevin Barnes, and that the words he's reading on my note were the first words from the show, ("Once Upon a Time in the City of New York") and as he's writing, I tell him "Thank you for Vincent. There's never been a character like him." And he replies in That Great Voice "Better never be!" like he's ready to fight someone, if there is.

And I'm still babbling, looking down at him while he's looking down at the poster and signing it, and I'm listing the names of some great girlfriends I've spent the last few years with from the fandom, telling him all their names, and that they all say "Hello," and he does this amazing thing after I run down the list.

He looks up at me. And he asks: "Oh... Are YOU the one I'm supposed to take care of?" And those blue, deep-set eyes have just a bit of a smile in them, and I answer "I think so?" in as uncertain a voice as I've got, and the whole line is watching as he stands up, (way up) and as I'm in shock, he's already coming around the end of the table. And I am staring. Because I can't help but do anything else.



He's huge. No matter how big you think he is, he's bigger. Television, even movies belie that, and make him look smaller than he is. His shoulders are massive. The big jaw is bigger, the hands are wide, and the arms have an amazing reach. And he comes around the end of the table, stands with his arms wide open, and says "Come here."

And I did. (What else could I possibly do?)

I couldn't see anything but black shirt cloth and a big chest, and the hugest, gentlest arms I ever remember feeling came right around me, and with just a touch of humor in his voice he adds "Or I'll never hear the end of it," and all I can do is say "Oh... Thank you. Just... thank you," and in that moment, I know that I'm holding up a line with the better part of 500 people in it, and it isn't that I don't care, it's that I wouldn't trade this moment for anything.

My face (which is getting teary, and even does as I write about it,) is buried in this huge, massive chest, and I can barely feel the weight of his arms, and I know that's deliberate, because he doesn't want to hurt me, yet I feel

utterly enfolded. Because I am. And my arms barely fit around him, in return.

There's a physicality to him you have to be in the presence of, to understand. There's an incredible carefulness, a gentleness to him, all inside this massive body that reminds you that this is a giant of a man, and he likely dwarfs just about everyone he's ever been on a set with, both with and without prosthetics and makeup. To borrow a quote from the show (which borrowed it from Walt Whitman), "He is large, and contains multitudes." You get a keen sense of that, when you're near him. You just do.

He lets me go, and I get my poster, and I know I have to move along, and it's okay, I know I have to go, and do so, gladly. Ron Perlman has done something special for me, and in that moment, I think I might never come down from the shocked high I'm on. I'm a bit stunned, as I keep walking. I'm still processing.

Hubby meets me where the people in line queue out, and he's standing there, looking at me as I have this stunned smile on my face, and he can see I've got tears, and all I can say is "He hugged me!" And I tell him the whole story, and how amazed I am that it happened, that Ron was contacted by a friend who knew I was coming and he was actually waiting for me, in a way. And I'm not even sure if I'm telling the story in a way that makes sense, because I think I'm just babbling again, as I recount it. And hubby tells me I have some wonderful friends. And I can't help but agree.

And then I look down at my poster.

On my hastily (re-scribbled) Post-it note, I had written, for Ron to sign, "Once Upon A Time in the City of New York." - Ron Perlman.

But he had signed it: "*Once Upon a Time in the City of New York.*" - *Ron Perlman*, and then he added one thing more:

Vincent

It wasn't a thing I asked him to do. It was just something he did. And I know it's a little thing. Just one word more, a "V" and a scribble, really, But to all of us who are Beauty and the Beast fans, that one name means so very, very much.

I went to meet Ron Perlman. But I think Vincent signed my poster.

I hope, with all my heart, that all of you, one day, get a chance to meet Ron Perlman, too.

But you're never going to be really ready for it, when you do...



No matter where you are in your own real life/fairy tale, I wish you love, ~

Cindy

