

The Playwright: Lee Cataluna

Where were you born?

Wailuku, Maui

Where did you go to school?

My family moved around a lot, and though I am not from a military family, I was the new kid many times. I went to 9 different schools before I graduated from high school (my family ended up back on Maui and I graduated from Baldwin High). After that, University of the Pacific in Stockton CA for undergrad and University of California Riverside for my MFA in Creative Writing and Writing for the Performing Arts.



Who was your best friend when you were a kid?

New best friend at every school, but my longest best friend was Kanani.

When did you start writing, or playwriting in particular?

I took a playwriting class taught by Victoria Nalani Kneubuhl and was so inspired by her. In terms of writing, I always loved to write, even when I was a little kid.



How did you start on this play?

The initial idea for the play came from the HTY company. Once I was asked to be part of the project, I started by visiting elementary schools on military bases and talking to kids to get their ideas about what to include in a play that would reflect their experiences.

What's been the most rewarding part of writing this play?

There are the amazing stories from military families we heard as we were working on the script. Then, each time the show is performed, we hear more stories - - stories that are beautiful and heartbreaking and inspiring and mind-blowing. There are as many different stories about being a kid in a military family as there are kids from military families, and it has been a humbling honor to learn about these experiences.

What's been the most challenging part of writing this play?

There was a time in San Diego when we had a room full of military families who came to watch a rehearsal of the play and critique it afterward. I sat in a corner and watched their responses to the play. Kids were jumping out of their seats because they recognized their lives on stage. Parents were nodding and smiling. Marines were weeping. It was the most intense reaction I've ever gotten to a play, especially a rehearsal. We were told, "You got it! You nailed it!" It was awesome. And after this intense, amazing experience, the audience left and the creative team got together and I was told, "The script is too long. You have to cut 10 minutes." OUCH! Hahaha.