

California State University, Long Beach: My Journey in Film, Friendship, and Academic Triumph

The Spielberg Connection: A Dream Come True

When I was accepted into the same film program that Steven Spielberg once attended, it felt like destiny. The man whose movies shaped my childhood had once walked these halls, sat in these classrooms, and probably stressed over film projects just like I was about to. Sure, he dropped out, but he came back to get his degree. If Spielberg could do it, so could I.

The campus of California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) was absolutely stunning. Nestled just minutes from the ocean, with palm trees swaying in the breeze and that perfect Southern California sunshine, it was an inspiring place to chase a dream. The Film & Electronic Arts Department was everything I hoped it would be—immersive, challenging, and full of talented, creative minds.

A School Steeped in History and Beauty

CSULB wasn't just a film school—it was a university with deep history and a reputation for excellence. Founded in 1949, it has since grown into one of the largest and most respected public universities in California.

I remember walking onto campus for the first time and just stopping to stare at the Walter Pyramid. It was blue – a giant, shimmering blue against the California sky. Later, I'd find myself escaping the chaos of the film department in the Japanese Garden, the sound of the waterfall washing away the stress of deadlines and script rewrites. I spent plenty of time roaming the grounds, listening to music on my iPhone with earbuds in, soaking up the energy of a place buzzing with youthful ambition.

And let's talk about that 70% female student population. It was a pleasant surprise. CSULB had no shortage of gorgeous, intelligent, and talented women. I met many amazing girls while I was there, including my secret crush, Hailey. We spent hours working together on class projects, and she always impressed me with her drive and intelligence. I even met her dad! I never actually asked her out but probably should have. Looking back, I guess I was intimidated by her ambition and style. Not surprisingly, she went on to become a successful production manager for major shows, which honestly didn't surprise me. She's smart, driven, and absolutely adorable. Missed opportunity? Yeah, probably.

Making Lifelong Friendships

While I was there, I met some incredible friends who made the experience even better. Taka, Quin, Daniel, Joel, Tyler, and Rhea—we tackled film projects together, stayed up late editing footage, and hung out at our favorite spot on campus: The Beach Hut coffee shop.

The camaraderie in the film program was special. Everyone was passionate, dedicated, and eager to create. I loved being around that energy, and even though I was older than most

students at 40 years old, I was treated as a peer. Sure, I had life and industry experience, but that didn't stop us from bonding over late-night shoots, last-minute script rewrites, and caffeine-fueled brainstorming sessions.

When the Students Thought I Was the Professor

I'll never forget walking into my first film theory class. Everyone stopped talking and stared. One student even said, 'Oh, are you the professor?' I almost choked on my coffee. From then on, I made sure to get to class a little late to avoid the confusion. On multiple occasions, I walked into class on the first day and was mistaken for the professor. Once, for fun, I walked to the chalkboard, wrote the instructor's name on it, and announced that we were having a essay exam. The groans and complaints were immediate. The real professor walked in, completely confused as to why the students looked so crushed. Meanwhile, I sat back and enjoyed the show.

There were even times when I was older than the professors themselves. Some of them had impressive careers, but I could have easily taught a few of those classes myself. However, I wasn't there to teach—I was there to learn, to earn my degree, and to prove to myself that I could do it.

The Film & Electronic Arts Program: A Hands-On Education

My major was Film & Electronic Arts, and my specialty track was Production Management. It was a perfect fit.

I worked on several student films and live events, gaining real-world experience. The professors were outstanding—Steve, Tom, Jerry, Reed, Sarah, and Chris—each brought something unique to the table.

- Steve and Tom had incredible industry insights that made the lessons feel real.
- Jerry had a no-nonsense attitude that kept us sharp and focused.
- Reed was an encyclopedia of production knowledge and was always willing to help.
- Sarah and Chris were supportive and insightful, pushing us to be better filmmakers.

I fully immersed myself in the program. I showed up to every class, sat in the front row, and never missed a single lecture. It was expensive to attend—there was no way I was going to pay for it and not take it seriously.

The Magic of Long Beach: More Than Just a College Town

Friday nights usually meant heading to 2nd Street in Long Beach. The air would be thick with the smell of street tacos and the sound of live music spilling out from the bars. One night, I remember stumbling into an arcade and spending way too much time trying to win a stuffed animal for... well, let's just say someone I was trying to impress.

- 2nd Street was the go-to spot for nightlife, great food, and shopping.

- The arcade district and entertainment scene provided endless fun.
- The Long Beach Convention Center always had something happening.
- The Queen Mary was a must-visit—its historic hotel rooms, haunted reputation, and luxurious bars made it an incredible place to hang out.

It was a college experience blended with real-world experiences, and I loved every minute of it.

The Motto That Stuck

At CSULB, we had a saying: "Go Beach!" It was more than just a motto—it was a badge of honor. Everyone said it, everyone lived by it, and it truly embodied the spirit of the school.

Graduation: A Moment for My Mom

After years of hard work, a perfect academic record, and countless projects, I graduated with a 3.9 GPA and Magna Cum Laude honors.

I had the maximum transfer credits, having previously attended community college for four years across two different decades.

When graduation day came, I made one very important decision: I only invited my mom. I wanted the moment to be just for her. She had supported me through everything, and this was my way of giving back. It was a special day for both of us.

Final Thoughts: The CSULB Experience

My time at California State University, Long Beach was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

- I made lifelong friends.
- I studied under amazing professors.
- I worked on real film projects.
- I proved to myself that I could balance work, life, and education at the highest level.
- I achieved academic excellence and graduated near the top of my class.

If I could go back and do it again, I'd probably only change one thing—I'd live on campus, party like a freshman, and experience college life in full. But honestly, even without that, CSULB gave me everything I could have hoped for.

A Campus of Film, Fame, and Fond Memories

Lights, Camera, Action: Movies Filmed at CSULB

One of the coolest things about attending California State University, Long Beach was that it wasn't just a great school—it was a real-life Hollywood film set.

The Walter Pyramid, that massive blue geometric wonder, wasn't just an iconic landmark for students—it was a sci-fi battlefield in one of my all-time favorite 90s movies: *Starship Troopers* (1997). If you've seen the movie, you probably remember the scenes where the recruits were training in a futuristic military academy—yep, that was our campus. Seeing my university featured in a film I loved was surreal. Standing on the set of *Starship Troopers*, that was filmed at my school, really brought me back to what inspired me in the first place and what inspired Spielberg -- science fiction! Would you like to know more?

And that wasn't the only time CSULB got the Hollywood treatment. *CSI: Miami* was basically a regular student on campus, constantly filming episodes there. It was always amusing to see a "Miami crime scene" being staged in the middle of sunny Southern California.

Long Beach: Hollywood's Favorite Backlot

It wasn't just the university—Long Beach itself was practically an extension of Hollywood. The city's mix of urban landscapes, coastal beauty, and industrial zones made it a prime shooting location.

Some of the biggest movies filmed in Long Beach include:

- *S.W.A.T.* (2003) – The intense police training sequences and some chase scenes were shot in Long Beach.
- *Gone in 60 Seconds* (2000) – The high-speed car chases with Nicolas Cage and Angelina Jolie? Many of those streets were right around my college.
- *The Fast and the Furious* (2001) – Long Beach has always been a street racing hotspot, so of course, it played a role in this franchise.
- *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* (1986) – The parade scene? Parts of that were actually filmed in downtown Long Beach.
- *Titanic* (1997) – Some of the ship's interiors were filmed aboard the Queen Mary, which sits permanently in Long Beach.
- *Transformers* (2007) – Several scenes were shot at the Port of Long Beach.

It was always exciting to spot film crews, big-name actors, and elaborate sets scattered around the city.

A Musical Legacy: The Carpenters and the Richard & Karen Carpenter Performing Arts Center

One of the most beautiful venues on campus was the Richard & Karen Carpenter Performing Arts Center, named after the legendary sibling duo The Carpenters. They were Long Beach natives, and their contributions to music were enormous.

Karen Carpenter's voice was one of the most hauntingly beautiful in music history, and it was amazing that their legacy lived on at CSULB. Their family donated to build this state-of-the-art concert hall, and it became a hub for incredible live performances.

One of my proudest moments as a film student was being the lead camera operator for a concert at the Carpenter Center. It was an unforgettable experience—directing live shots, feeling the energy of the performance, and realizing that this was exactly the kind of work I wanted to do.

A Campus Steeped in Film, Music, and History

CSULB wasn't just a university—it was a part of Hollywood's history, a stage for legendary musicians, and a dream school for a film nerd like me.

If you were a movie lover, a music enthusiast, or just someone who wanted to be surrounded by creativity and culture, there was no better place to be.

And through it all—the films, the concerts, the classrooms, and the friendships—one thing stayed true...

So to anyone thinking about attending? Go Beach!