

# *Sharknado Star*

## STEPS OUT OF COMFORT ZONE TO PRODUCE

# *Gut-Wrenching*

# *Documentary*

BY BRITTANY MAHER

Actress and activist Cassie Scerbo once walked the same halls as the deadliest school shooter in U.S. history. It's still surreal for her to associate her hometown with such tragedy. Nearly two years after the Parkland, Florida, shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, the "Sharknado" and "Bring It On: In It to Win It" actress has been working to help her hometown recover through philanthropy work. Now, with the stories she's gathered, she is stepping out of her comfort zone to produce a documentary around safety in schools. "It's just an indescribably horrible feeling knowing that kids ten years younger than you were walking down these same hallways and these same hallways ended their life," Scerbo said.

**S**cerbo's heart is still broken over what happened at her former high school. She vividly remembers the feelings of helplessness when she first received the devastating news. "I remember this overwhelming feeling of just wanting to be in Parkland with my community," Scerbo said. "And the hardest part about it was that I couldn't because I was leaving to film in Romania the next day, to shoot the final 'Sharknado' so I had to go and fly in the complete opposite direction, very far away from the one place I wanted to be."

Since then, Scerbo has been back and forth from her hometown of Parkland to her current residence in Los Angeles. She felt propelled to jump into action and stand by her community as they healed from the incident.

With her love for her community matched with her natural drive for activism, Scerbo aims to use her voice and platform as a space to create change around bullying. "I really am a huge believer in using your voice — my thoughts

on having a platform and using your voice are very strong," Scerbo said. "You've got an audience and you've got a voice for people that don't have as big of a voice as yours."

Even before the Parkland tragedy, Scerbo was heavily involved as an activist against bullying. She is vice president of Boo2Bullying, a non-profit organization committed to eliminate and eradicate bullying through education and positivity. "One of my favorite things to do is to go into the schools and speak to kids and figure out what's going on and try to change the climate, open up a conversation and break the silence," Scerbo said. "I've always loved doing that even prior to this, but this takes it a little bit further with the documentary."

The idea behind creating a documentary came from hearing people's most vulnerable stories. But producing a documentary goes beyond gathering footage and interviews, it takes hours and hours of in-depth research, listening and self-educating. "A documentary is more powerful just

because we wanted to actually create change,” Scerbo said. “Giving this level of work, and this level of research has definitely taken it even a step further.”

While she’s no stranger to Hollywood, this is Scerbo’s first time as a producer. She said the role came with extreme learning curves, but it brought her a new appreciation for the production aspect of film. “Starting with the role as a producer, being on the other side of the camera, was so interesting to me just because I had never known,” Scerbo said. “Honestly, I have gained so much respect for producers. Not that I had not respected them before, but I didn’t realize how much time and energy goes into every bit of production.”

Dealing with such heavy subject matter has taken its toll on Scerbo. During production, there were times where she says she felt mentally drained and fought to continue moving forward with production. “It’s been a new avenue for me, it’s been a lot,” Scerbo said. “I think it’s probably been even a little more draining for me personally because all the subject matter and watching some of the footage in editing is just so gut-wrenching to listen to and just the reality that this happened to my hometown.”

There have been delays in production, which has proven to be frustrating but necessary. Scerbo said the documentary was supposed to come out months ago, but production keeps getting pushed back because of the amount of information that needs to be told. The more the creators were learning and meeting people, the more they felt compelled to cover.

Despite dealing with painful material and interviews, Scerbo’s passion is what kept her pushing forward. “For me personally, it was a really great learning experience,” Scerbo said. “Even though this material was very heartbreaking, it’s definitely an avenue that I want to continue to explore because when you are passionate about a project, it is really neat to watch it come to fruition and to watch all the pieces come together.”

While singing and acting are both still major parts of her career, she sees herself doing more production work in the future. “As much as it was hard work, I really look forward to continuing to produce,” Scerbo said. “So, I am 100 percent looking forward to continuing forever doing this type of work trying to eradicate any negativity, behavior, bad policy, whatever it may be, and ultimately just use my voice and help people do things.”

Scerbo’s main goal for the documentary is to promote safer schools and is set to come out on January 15. “It’s about saving lives, ultimately, and creating change so that these things don’t happen anymore,” Scerbo said.

