



2017 | USA | Coming-of-Age, Drama | 91 min | 16:9 | Dolby 5.1

COLD NOVEMBER

a film by Karl Jacob (*Pollywogs*)

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LOGLINE

On the cusp of womanhood, 12-year-old Florence goes on her first deer hunt, a traditional rite-of-passage in her matriarchal family.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Deep in the wilderness of rural middle America, 12-year-old Florence is eager to undergo the rite-of-passage of her first deer hunt. A tradition passed down through many generations of women in her family, the act of killing a deer symbolizes the transition into adulthood. As Florence is taught how to shoot a gun and skin a deer, she gains a deeper understanding of life and death. When Florence finds herself alone during a hunt, however, expectations dissolve into chaos as she must rely on her instinct and training to follow through with her decisions, pull herself together, and face becoming an adult.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

At age twelve, I went on my first deer hunt with my family and faced the fatal decision of taking the life of a creature bigger than myself. It wasn't until much later that I realized how important that moment was, as the act of the death experience is an essential rite-of-passage in many cultures throughout the world.

In revealing the timeless mythology embodied by this modern American rite of passage, and in the hunting and mourning experiences of a girl who is becoming a woman, I hope to spark thought about how facing mortality is a fundamental and confronting part of what it means to be human.

I also hope to challenge the stereotype that the hunting ritual is an inherently male practice. I grew up in a similar situation to Florence, where my mother, aunts, and grandmother played a huge part in my life and had also gone through this hunting experience as young women. Having them as a resource in developing the character of Florence has brought a unique female perspective to this story.

- Karl Jacob



Q&A W/DIRECTOR

Why did you choose to focus the story around Florence?

There is a near omnipresent tradition in cultures throughout the world that centers around the transition out of childhood, usually around eleven or twelve years of age. For a long time throughout human history, this age range has been the period when kids go through a ceremony to become adults. Examples range from the Jewish Bat Mitzvah to communal near-death beatings. Rituals that focus on the death experience as the main goal are the most common among a wide range of groups.

As I personalized and compared this knowledge with my own “death ritual” of killing a deer at the age of eleven, it soon became clear that the story had to be about a young woman. I was raised by six women: my mother taught me how to gut out a deer, my grandmother taught me how to shoot my first gun. The fact that each of them had also gone through this ritual as kids seemed like the most interesting and salient way to approach telling the story. The insight and talent that actress Bijou Abas brought to the role of Florence also helped immensely. The character would not have been the same without her commitment to developing Florence completely.

Tradition and family are clearly very important to the film’s narrative. Even though it’s a fictional feature did you draw on personal experience to craft the story?

My family played a big role in making this film happen. We shot the film on family land during deer hunting season, and my parents, aunts, uncles and grandma were actually hunting while we were simultaneously shooting. I wanted the film to feel lived in and to use real animals. The scene of all of the women skinning a deer together and the one of Florence field dressing a deer are all real. These are the people who actually killed the deer themselves. Everyone in my family was very supportive and they were on hand to coach, assist, and make sure the animals were dealt with in a humane way that preserved the meat in line with family tradition. I am effectively documenting this personal ritual that is admittedly unique for most modern Americans, despite it being an ancient survival ritual. A semi-tangential fun fact is that I am actually a vegetarian, and so is Ben, the cinematographer!



How did consideration of economics shape the world you create in the film? What kinds of financial resources did you envision Florence and her family as having at their disposal?

I think Florence's family will likely come across as a middle class family, which I believe makes sense for the time frame of the movie. One of the goals of the film was to accurately portray the region, and Hibbing has had a long history of being both middle class and a place where economic downturns can happen fast when the mines shut down. I think we definitely reflect all of these points in the film.

Though the film focuses on familial ritual and hunting, its portrayal of hunting and, by extension guns, clearly intersects with contemporary political debates surrounding gun control and the second amendment. Did you intend the film as a political intervention or for it to take a political stance?

I never intended the film to take a political stance, but I definitely realize its political importance. I personally value the tradition of living off the land, which my immediate family has done and continues to do to an extent. It's what got my grandparents through the Great Depression. Guns play an important role as a tool in that lifestyle, which perhaps has not been portrayed that much, if at all, in popular media. As I discover the place that *Cold November* can have in gun discourse, I'm excited at the prospect of the film being seen by someone who has maybe spent their entire life in a city. One's relationship with guns is completely different when they are not being used primarily as objects of war, which is effectively the case in most urban living. I think I am a bit of an anomaly as a predominantly liberal, urban-living vegetarian who values the importance of gun ownership. I think the world needs to know that people like me exist, and that perhaps the "gun debate" is not as simple as the NRA vs The Liberals. There are nuances to every issue, and having compassion with someone's story that is different than your own is important. I mean, it's the foundation of what our country is supposed to stand on, right? For that reason I am proud to be adding this angle to the conversation.

CAST



BIJOU ABAS



KARL JACOB
Pollywogs, The Dictator



ANNA KLEMP
Blue Sky



HEIDI FELLNER
Lambent Fuse



MARY KAY FORTIER-SPALDING
Memorial Day

KARL JACOB

Director, Producer, Actor

Karl Jacob is an actor and filmmaker from northern Minnesota who currently splits his time between Minnesota and NYC. His co-directorial debut, *Pollywogs*, premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival in 2013. As an actor, he has worked with Julianne Moore and Michael Shannon in the Peter Sollett film *Freeheld*; Ben Kingsley and Sasha Baron Cohen on *The Dictator*; Joe Swanberg in three seasons of the IFC series *Young American Bodies*, and on *Law and Order: SVU*. His films have played at festivals throughout the world, including SXSW, LAFF, TCFF, Maryland FF, Tribeca, and Cucalorus. Onur Tukul's *Applesauce*, which Karl produced and acted in, premiered at Tribeca in 2015. *Cold November*, which received the Emerging Artist grant from the Jerome Foundation and is a 2016 IFP Narrative Lab film, is his debut feature as a solo writer-director.

JESSICA BERGEN

Producer

Jessica Bergren is a producer from Northern Minnesota. She made her production debut as an associate producer on *Pollywogs* in 2013. She has since produced the eco-thriller feature "*Strange Nature*," directed by Jim Ojala and slated for release in 2016, and worked on several other MN-made feature films in various production capacities. Most recently, Bergren scouted and managed locations for the films "*I Am Not A Serial Killer*" (SXSW 2016), directed by Billy O'Brien, and "*Wilson*," directed by Craig Johnson.