

OUR FRIEND

Production Notes



**Premium digital and on-demand January 22, 2021**

**OUR FRIEND**

**OUR FRIEND** tells the inspiring and extraordinary true story of the Teague family—journalist Matt (Casey Affleck), his vibrant wife Nicole (Dakota Johnson) and their two young daughters—and how their lives are upended by Nicole’s heartbreaking diagnosis of terminal cancer. As Matt’s responsibilities as caretaker and parent become increasingly overwhelming, the couple’s best friend Dane Faucheux (Jason Segel) offers to come and help out.  As Dane puts his life on hold to stay with his friends, the impact of this life altering decision proves greater and more profound than anyone could have imagined.

Black Bear Pictures presents A Scott Free production; **OUR FRIEND**. A film by Gabriela Cowperthwaite based on Matthew Teague’s National Magazine Award winning article (originally published in *Esquire Magazine)*, **OUR FRIEND** is directed by BAFTA-nominated director **Gabriela Cowperthwaite** (BLACKFISH, MEGAN LEAVEY) and written by **Brad Ingelsby**(AMERICAN WOMAN, THE WAY BACK).

**Jason Segel** (THE END OF THE TOUR, FORGETTING SARAH MARSHALL), **Dakota Johnson** (FIFTY SHADES franchise, SUSPIRIA) and Academy Award® winner **Casey Affleck** (MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, LIGHT OF MY LIFE) star. The supporting cast features Tony® and Emmy® winner **Cherry Jones** (“24”, BOY ERASED) as an indomitable hospice nurse; country music star **Jake Owen (**making his film debut) as a not terribly thoughtful family friend and Emmy Award® nominee **Gwendoline Christie** (“GAME OF THRONES,” WELCOME TO MARWEN) as a woman whose brief encounter with Dane restores his depleted spirit.

**OUR FRIEND** was produced by **Kevin J. Walsh** (Academy Award® nominee Best Picture for MANCHESTER BY THE SEA), **Michael Pruss** (EQUALS)**, Ryan Stowell** (THOROUGHBREDS), **Teddy Schwarzman** (Academy Award® nominee Best Picture for THE IMITATION GAME). The Executive Producers are **Ridley Scott** (Academy Award® Nominee Best Director for THELMA & LOUISE, GLADIATOR, BLACK HAWK DOWN and Best Picture for THE MARTIAN), **Ben Stillman**, **Michael Heimler**, **Ted Deiker**, **Brad Ingelsby** and **Matthew Teague**. Rebecca Feuer is Associate Producer.

The talented behind-the-scenes crew includes director of photography Joe Anderson, production designer Cara Brower, editor Colin Patton, composer Rob Simonsen, music supervisor Linda Cohen, and costume designer Alana Morshead.

**OUR FRIEND** was filmed in Fairhope, AL, where the Teagues’ story took place, and Moab, UT.

*“During filming I was prepared for a little bit of unreality. There was the initial reality of Nicole’s death, there’s my best presentation in my story; then there’s Brad’s retelling, Gabriela’s vision and finally the actors doing their job. By that point, we’re several layers removed from reality—so it was shocking to me how close and how real things have been.”*

*- Matthew Teague*

**The Friend: Love Is Not a Big Enough Word**

**His wife was just thirty-four. They had two little girls. The cancer was everywhere, and the parts of dying that nobody talks about were about to start. His best friend came to help out for a couple weeks. And he never left.**

By [Matthew Teague](https://www.esquire.com/author/7887/matthew-teague/)

A group of people on a boat in the water

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**Most of September 17, 2012,** has evaporated from my mind. I still have a few memories. I have the way the surgeon's voice shook. I remember my wife calling my name while she was still under sedation. And I have an image of the hospital floor, up close. I remember white tile and a hope: Maybe I will never have to get up. Maybe they will just let me die here.

Nicole was thirty-four, and the doctor had been direct: "It's everywhere," he said. "Like somebody dipped a paintbrush in cancer and flicked it around her abdomen." I staggered down a hallway and then collapsed. I remember the tile, close to my face, and then watching it retreat as my best friend picked me up from the floor. His name is Dane Faucheux, and I remember noting, even in the midst of a mental fugue: Dane's a lot stronger than I realized.

I was in shock and stayed there a long time. We don't tell each other the truth about dying, as a people. Not real dying. Real dying, regular and mundane dying, is so hard and so ugly that it becomes the worst thing of all: It's grotesque. It's undignified. No one ever told me the truth about it, not once. When it happened to my beloved, I lost my footing in more than one way. The tiled floor of life—morals, ethics, even laws—became a shifting and relative thing. I smuggled drugs. Lied. Hid money from the IRS.

I think I've hung on to the sensation of the hospital floor and being lifted away from it because it captures everything that followed in the next two years. The shock of mortality. One man's collapse. And another man's refusal to let it happen.

A person looking at the camera

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Dane Faucheux and Nicole went to college together,

and over the years Matt and Dane became as close as brothers.

**Dane decided to move in** around Christmas 2013, on the night our dog died.

Almost all of that year is lost to me. Nicole had ovarian cancer, which had metastasized to her stomach, and she endured a series of physical insults that, taken individually, would have been shattering; a single trip to the chemo ward, watching what looked like antifreeze flow into her veins while the nurses offered me cheese crackers, would have changed my life forever. Taken together, though, the surgeries and chemicals all form a smear that can't be taken apart and examined.

I do have a few recollections from that year, and Dane appears in each. For instance, when Nicole started finding hair on her pillow, I braced for her agony, because she was so young and so beautiful. But she asked me to meet her in the living room with a towel, scissors, and my beard trimmer.

She dragged a chair into the middle of the room and pulled her hair—long and dark and cascading—into a ponytail. "Go ahead," she said.

I sawed at it with the scissors until it came free in my hand. She looked up with wet eyes and smiled.

A person looking at the camera

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The author.

"I might as well rock this," she said. "Give me a Mohawk."

Afterward, we stepped into a bathroom so that she could look in a mirror. She was Creek Indian, and I had never seen her cheekbones so proud, her eyes so defiant.

I sent a photo of her to Dane, and a few minutes later he sent one back. He had carved a Mohawk of his own to match hers.

Nicole laughed. We had met Dane fifteen years earlier, when we all lived in New Orleans and they were in college together. Men trailed Nicole everywhere; in grocery stores men would follow her from produce to dairy and out into the parking lot. When she smiled, men imagined she needed them, and she smiled a lot. So I had developed a pitying skepticism of other men's motivations. But even when Dane didn't know I was watching, he averted his gaze from her body, and he accepted her smile as nothing more than a small gift. He offered us his friendship with such humility, such deference to our marriage, that I trusted him from the beginning. I'm not sure Nicole ever forgave us for both being men, because over the years it allowed me to grow close to him in a way she never could.

His expressions of affection were, for her, tiny victories. So when she held up the photo of him with a Mohawk and laughed—"Look! Ha ha!"—I knew she meant it in the most competitive, gloating way possible.

"No one ever told me the truth about dying," says Teague. "Not once. When it happened to my beloved, I lost my footing in more than one way."

In a season of butchery and wreckage and defeat, she had triumphed. I asked Dane later why he had done it. He didn't understand the question. "It was more fun than me just shaving my head bald," he said. It had never occurred to him to do nothing.

Later that year, I remember him standing sentry at the hospital. He had driven from New Orleans—we were living in a small town called Fairhope, Alabama—to stand guard for hours in the hallway outside Nicole's room so that she could sleep. One afternoon, a group of church ladies arrived. There is no force under heaven as mighty as a band of middle-aged Baptist ladies, and from inside the room we could hear Dane wage a battle of kind intentions.

"They are resting right now," he said. "I'm so sorry."

"Well, we came by to pray for them," one of the ladies said.

"Yes, ma'am," he said. "But I feel pretty sure God can hear you out here in the hall."

We spent that Christmas season in the hospital. Friends came and decorated the room, and our two little girls curled up against Nicole in her hospital bed while she read " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas." We all tried to ignore the clear tube pumping feces up from her bowels and out her nose.

Dane had come to visit after Thanksgiving and never ended up returning home. He burned through his weeks of vacation time, visiting the hospital during the day and sleeping at our house each night.

The night after Christmas, our pug, Gracie, threw up something black and putrid on the floor at his feet. He put her in a basket with a blanket in his car and searched for an open animal clinic. When he found one, he explained our situation to the veterinarian, and after some testing she blurted, "I'm so sorry, but this dog has cancer and I think she's going to die. Actually, I know she is going to die." And then she burst into tears.

Dane called me. I sat in the blinking red and green lights of our hospital room, listened to the news, and offered, "Okay."

Gracie's death didn't move me. It annoyed me. She was forcing me to have a talk with my daughters that would link cancer and death, and I wasn't prepared yet.

Dane came to the hospital with a bottle of wine. We sat on the floor and drank amid the wrapping paper of the girls' Christmas presents.

"I think maybe I should just move in with you guys," he said. "Just to help out for a couple of months."

That meant leaving his job, his city, his friends, his apartment, his life.

"Okay," I said.

**We readied ourselves** for the physical horrors of death. Nicole seemed especially practical about it. She told us, "Just don't let me stink."

She shed weight, but we expected that. Dane and I could hardly see it, because we never left her. When visitors came, though, we could see it reflected in their faces, or when her shirt slipped to the side, exposing her collarbone. It looked wrong, like something alien implanted under her skin.

The most obvious manifestation of her illness, aside from weight loss, were the wounds. After each surgery, her skin was slower to heal, and finally a surgeon asked me if I knew about wound-packing.

"No," I said.

"You need to learn," he said.

Each night, Nicole would lie naked on the bed and, using tweezers, I would extract a piece of ribbon from the wounds in her abdomen, sometimes several feet long, which would uncoil in the air above her like a pus-covered tapeworm. Then I would repack new pieces of ribbon into the holes, folding them in, spiraling them inside her, while she wept and begged me to just skip it, please, this one time.

Please, Matt. Please.

Since we had met, when she was still a teenager, I had loved her with my whole self. Only now can I look back on the fullness of our affection; at the time I could see nothing but one wound at a time, a hole the size of a dime, into which I needed to pack a fistful of material. Love wasn't something I felt anymore. It was just something I did. When I finished, I would lie next to her and use sterile cotton balls to soak up her tears. When she finally slept, I would slip out of bed and go into our closet, the most isolated room in the house. Inside, I would wrap a blanket around my head, stuff it into my mouth, lie down and bury my head in a pile of dirty clothes, and scream.

Sometimes at night, Nicole would wake howling and sweating, with a twist in her bowels. I would call for Dane, waking him, and he would hold the back door open for me while I carried Nicole to the car. Then he would sit up with our girls until we came home. Sometimes hours later, sometimes weeks.

Eventually I started to notice something strange: little bits of half-digested food emerging from Nicole's wounds. I called her oncologist, who used a word I had never heard before: fistulas. When there's an infection or some other foreign thing in the body, the flesh works to eject it, forming tunnels to the surface. Her body no longer recognized food as useful and was now expelling it directly out the front of her abdomen, like a foreign substance.

Nicole tried to lift her head and look at her belly. "Does that smell like poop to you?"

"No, it's hard to . . ."

"Is there poop coming out my front? Tell me."

For months, we tried to catch it with everything from colostomy bags to special gauzes to cloth diapers, but the stomach acid would burn through any adhesive and eventually started eating her flesh. There was no stopping it. There were only more narcotics for the pain.

These physical horrors, though, were nothing compared to what would come.

I told our family counselor, Julia, I knew things would get worse. "If I have to put her in a backpack and carry her to the chemo ward, I'll do it if it means getting an extra day with her."

Julia is a kind woman, but honest. "Before this is over," she said, "you will long for it to end."

Never, I said.

**For months after Dane moved in,**Nicole couldn't eat much, so I fed her intravenously. I had no medical training, but it didn't require a doctor; it just required someone sterile and awake.

It's difficult to appreciate the sterility of a hospital or lab until you try to impose it at home. In the early months of 2014, Dane and I cleaned ceaselessly—the house, the children, me, the medical equipment, Nicole herself. Boiling, wiping, filtering. But human bodies defy sterility, with our holes and our sloughing and our fingernails and our wet places.

The machine that pumped the fluid into her veins would shriek any time it needed attention—if a tube kinked, or she rolled over on it, or it ran out of fluid, or any number of other possibilities occurred—which happened every few minutes. During those months, Nicole was drugged and mostly unconscious, and I lay awake listening to the IV pump. I turned its amber display to face the wall, but that didn't help; I lay there doing the math, calculating how many milliliters of fluid remained until she needed more. In those months, I may never have slept an unbroken hour.

One day Dane touched my arm and I cried out, unsure of who he was. "You need sleep," he said.

He started conspiring against me, or so I suspected. From outside the bedroom door, I would overhear him talking with Nicole about my exhausted mental state, which seemed absurd considering her condition. He started calling Julia, the counselor, behind my back. And he was making some sort of secretive arrangements with my other friends.

One morning he sat down with me. "We are going away for a couple of days," he said. "You and me."

"What? No."

We would drive up to the foothills of the Appalachians and spend a couple days hiking. Another friend of

Nicole's had agreed to come sit with her, he said.

"No."

Julia felt it was for the best.

"No."

It wasn't for me, he said. It would make me a better caregiver for Nicole. "And for your girls," he said.

I conceded. We spent the next couple days in a national forest, walking endless trails, crossing streams, climbing rock formations, mile after mile after mile. At the end of one trail, we found a waterfall and sat in the cool pool at its base, looking up at the cataract pouring down. My body was useless; I could feel my equilibrium shifting left and right, as though I were still hiking. But in my physical depletion, I discovered what Dane had known all along: My mind felt sharper and was more hopeful than it had been in months.

After a few minutes, we noticed movement at the top of the waterfall. A half dozen college-aged women had climbed onto rocks jutting from the top of the falls, and while we watched they started taking off their clothes. I blinked at Dane and we both burst out laughing.

"Dude. What is happening?"

"Don't question this, Matt. You need this."

The girls started leaping from the rock into the deepest water at its base, and then climbing up and jumping again. They looked like angels, perpetually falling to earth. They seemed impossibly joyful and healthy, and we could hear them laughing above the sound of the water. Finally Dane said, "Let's do it!" and took off his shirt.

"I can't do that, man."

"Why?"

I had no answer and every answer. I was married. My wife was dying. I knew that every moment of enjoyment in this forest would cost me later in guilt. And unlike Dane, I had not worked out in ages. No one wanted to see that. Instead I said, "We don't know how deep the water is."

I watched Dane climb up and chat with the girls on their rocks, all hugging themselves against a cool wind. Nicole's illness had cost Dane; at thirty-six, he had given up a management position and a girlfriend back in New Orleans. She could not grasp his devotion to Nicole and me—it is ungraspable—and their relationship had come undone. From her perspective, he must have seemed disloyal. He moved to the edge of the rocks to jump, and I found myself on my feet, clapping and cheering and wishing the sun would stop setting, and these young women would never age or fall ill or die, and Dane could hang there in space for the rest of time, a portrait of readiness and compassion.

**Nicole rallied.**She started eating again. She had slept through the months of IV feeding and woke up pleasantly surprised that she could now fit into smaller clothes than ever before. She started entertaining visitors. People would drop in to see her and she would sit up, beaming. Chatting. Apologizing for the state of her dress, or the house, or her hair, which had started growing back. She would describe all the things she wanted to do, and people—wonderful, kind, well-intentioned people—would nod and encourage her and marvel at her bravery.

This happened again and again throughout 2014. She would disappear into herself, silent, sleeping, afloat on powerful drugs, and then she would awaken with a new item to cross off her list: She wanted to visit New York one last time. She wanted to be the grand marshal of a Mardi Gras parade. She wanted to jump into the downtown fountain with all our friends. We did it all. What her life lacked in length, it made up for in height.

Each time she went down, doctors and nurses offered dire timelines. Months to live. Weeks. Even days. Each time, she rose again. It was magnificent to behold. It also came with a hidden price.

Each time Nicole faded, Dane took over many domestic duties—washing clothes, cleaning, shopping, cooking. I took over the rest. I woke and dressed and fed the girls, Molly and Evangeline, who were ten and seven. I helped them with their homework. I scheduled dosages, ordered supplies, checked the mail, paid the bills. I juggled money because nobody would die if we didn't pay our taxes, so the hospitals and surgeons came first.

During those times, Nicole was adrift on an opiate sea. We kept so much liquid morphine in the house that the doctors warned us about burglars. Then she graduated to Dilaudid, which is seven times stronger than morphine and ran on a continuous pump around the clock, alongside a terrifyingly powerful drug called fentanyl. These potions interrupted the signals between her mind and body, along with everything else in the physical world; her hallucinations disturbed Dane and me and would have terrified the girls. So we had to start keeping them away from her.

One night, she called to me and said she needed help to the bathroom. I tried to help her sit up, but she said, "No, I'm a Barbie doll. I can only move one limb at a time." So I lifted her head and then her back, straightened her head, moved one leg off the bed and then the other, finally standing her up. I moved her left foot, then her right foot, and so on until we had completed the task. To this day, her lead nurse, a woman named Faith, saves a photo of one of Nicole's Dilaudid pumps, which she shows to other nurses. That one pump recorded more than twenty thousand milligrams poured into Nicole. "That's more Dilaudid than I and all the nurses I work with have ever given," she said. "Combined."

When she would emerge into one of her better periods, she would awaken, aghast at the way I was running the house. One morning, she staggered into the kitchen, shocking us all, and announced that she planned to make eggs for the girls. Where had I hidden the spatula? Why was there so little milk in the refrigerator? Was it spoiled? It didn't taste right. Nothing tasted right. "How am I supposed to leave in peace?" she asked me. "I can't die like this."

With each decline and rise, she became more manic. One morning early last summer, I found her standing over the stove with the gas wide open while she tried to teach Molly how to light it. She couldn't remember how. I moved to switch off the gas and Nicole glared. She was unrecognizable with hatred.

Molly saw it and winced.

"It's not your fault, baby," Nicole told her, leading her away. "It's not your fault. Daddy needs to fix the stove."

There was nothing I could say. Her impending death stripped our relationship of every external measure of fairness. I could offer no arguments; I could not say "That's dangerous" or "Please don't use the girls against me."

I could appeal to nothing, because nothing trumps dying.

**Technology started to loom** over our lives in a new way.

Dane continually found packages arriving on our front porch—packages of the most mundane items, like toilet paper or school notebooks—and assumed I was ordering them. Then medical supplies started to arrive. And clothing. Food. We discovered that Nicole was secretly ordering things online, clinging to her role as shopper.

"I am still a valid person," she seethed when I asked her about the packages. "I'm still part of this house."

I let it carry on a long time, in part because she couldn't keep track of her phone. She would call Dane and me to her bedside, enraged, to accuse us of stealing her phone as it sat on the pillow beside her head. Finally, when she tried to send money to someone in Iraq, I changed our accounts without telling her.

I found myself locked in a battle against a swelling horde of electronic opponents. When I discouraged Nicole from something—when I took away her car keys, or access to our accounts, or certain visiting hours—she would go to online cancer forums and write posts about my choices. Those forums are populated by people in similar awful situations who go online to hear yes in a world that is suddenly telling them no, and these people—this faceless mass of online handles—always told Nicole to keep fighting, that she could beat this, to just ignore my negativity.

Death is an invisible thing that can't be cursed at, or ignored, or denigrated. Each night, though, I lay down beside her, she would tear into me for hours, propelled by anger and fear and Dilaudid.

I started avoiding bedtime. I see now that, after fifteen years of marriage, this was my first step down a path that diverged from hers: hers toward death, mine toward a life afterward.

Dane and I stayed up late watching television every night. Without understanding why, we both became obsessed with zombie shows and movies. We spent every night—every night for an entire summer—watching the living dead shuffling eternally into frame just before being dispatched to the afterlife by some hero.

Afterward, we would sit in the dark for hours, sometimes in silence, but usually discussing the day's interactions with Nicole. I confessed to him one night that a dark fantasy had flickered through my mind earlier involving a spoon and mayonnaise.

He laughed. Nothing tasted right to Nicole anymore except mayonnaise. She ate so much of it that when Dane and I went to the grocery store, we would buy two jars at a time. She had a jar-a-day habit. On this particular day, she had asked me to make her a turkey sandwich, which I did and then brought into the bedroom. She took one bite and handed it back. "Less turkey, more mayo," she said.

I remade it, spooning on double the mayonnaise.

"No," she said again, disgusted. "More mayo."

I heaped the stuff on this time. Great mounds of it.

When I handed it to her, she shook her head. "So you're trying to starve me," she said. "I guess I'm not dying fast enough."

Since the day of her diagnosis, everything in my life had revolved around this frail figure before me. Decisions and depression. Hopes and heartbreak. And now, for a sliver of a second, I pictured myself prying open her mouth and pouring a whole jar of mayonnaise down her throat.

When visitors came, Nicole could draw herself up and present a model of grace and fearlessness—the same for online forums and Facebook. Those sentiments were true—she carried herself with courage, and love, and poise—but when we were alone, she cut me without mercy.

In just a few words, Dane saved me.

He said, "She lashes out at you because she knows you'll stay."

And when I would deny her yet another delirious fantasy—of going someplace exotic when the bathroom would forevermore be the extent of her travels—he had a simple clarity that I assumed I had lost for good.

"Just tell her yes," he said.

**A sort of delirium** set in.

Dane had lived with us for almost a year now, lived in the shadow of death, and he and I found ourselves cracking jokes so dark, so morbid, that they defied explanation.

We made a pact: If he married someday or if I remarried and one of our wives was diagnosed with cancer, the other would show up at the hospital and slip a knife between his ribs. A mercy killing. We cried laughing, imagining the puzzlement of witnesses on the scene: "This guy just walked in and stabbed him. And what's really weird? The dead guy told him 'thank you.' "

We told stories about how we would both be old men, drooling and incontinent, and Nicole would shuffle in to demand a mayonnaise sandwich.

We laughed at our inept drug smuggling. I had heard weed could help counter the nausea from chemo, but medical marijuana is illegal in Alabama. So some friends offered to get us some. I told them to just leave it in their mailbox, where I could pick it up. "Just make sure to pick it up before noon," my friend said. "That's when the mailman comes." The next morning, I found the brick of weed in the right spot, wrapped in clear plastic, and on top of it, the day's mail.

Later, when we had to take away Nicole's phone—probably the most difficult decision of the entire ordeal—she started leaving us venomous, drug-addled handwritten notes. They were heartbreaking. But her creativity and determination in delivering them took on an artistry. We couldn't figure out how she was doing it.

"I got this on my pillow," Dane said one night. A crayon scrawl.

I showed him mine, a loopy screed about needing her phone. "I found it in the bathroom," I told him, "stuck on the wall opposite the toilet, at eye level when sitting."

In our heartache and exhaustion, we both started to giggle. "You know what she's doing, right?" Dane said.

"What?"

"She's texting us."

It got to where I started hiding from Nicole, unable to face the rage. Too cowardly to sit and bear it, I would curl in the fetal position on our porch swing, where she could not find me. Or I would retreat to one of the girls' bedrooms upstairs, where she could not follow. I stopped eating and drinking.

Dane appeared there one night with a plate of food and a bottle of water. He admonished me with profound compassion. "I'm going to let you stay like this for one more day," he said. "After that, you'll have to get up."

As he walked out the door, he stopped to complete his argument. "For your girls," he said.

Even in my spiral I could see that our daughters had fallen in love with Dane. They sensed in him a strength that I no longer had, and they confided in him.

Each night, he would sit alone on our porch after Nicole and I went to bed. He would read, or call his friends back in New Orleans, or count raccoons crossing under a streetlight. A few times Molly got up and went out to join him.

I watched them through a window. He would sit with her, rocking on the swing, and listen while she talked about bad dreams.

**The dressing**on Nicole's abdomen became a massive, complex thing that required specialist nurses to come in every couple days and assemble it as a team. Its purpose now was to keep her abdomen from coming apart altogether.

One day, immediately after the nurses left, Nicole started pulling apart the bandages. "I think I'd like to have myself a shower," she said.

I watched, speechless, as she pulled off the last of the gauze and made her way to the shower, dribbling stool and acid onto the floor as she walked. I just lay on the bed, unable to move.

A long while later she returned and lay beside me. She requested tape and gauze.

"Let me call the nurses," I said.

"No. I can do this myself."

As she unwound the tape, it stuck to her hands, to itself, to her belly. Her stomach belched up a geyser of yellow crap, which flowed down her sides onto the bed. Her hands stopped, and I looked up to her face. She had passed out.

I touched her cheek and her eyes fluttered open. She smiled. She seemed puzzled to find herself covered in hot excrement and tried with her bare hands to contain it. It smeared all over her torso, up her arms to her elbows, and all over the bed. I reached to help and she pushed me away.

Something in me broke. The remaining thread of the last fiber of the final cable holding me together just snapped, and I rolled off the bed. I didn't want her to see. I crawled into the bathroom and curled around the base of the toilet, shaking and weeping.

From the bedroom, I heard her call out, "Dane . . ." Her voice was diaphanous, like she was calling through silk. I heard Dane come to the door, and she told him I needed help. She had called him for me.

Dane opened the bathroom door and I cried out, "It's just shit everywhere, Dane." With vast discretion, he didn't try to pick me up from the floor this time. He just closed the door.

The nurses came and replaced Nicole's dressing. I don't remember how long I lay in the bathroom, but the light through the windows had shifted when I emerged.

Later, Nicole's lead nurse, Faith, sat down with me. "I see it now," she said. "She needs antipsychotics."

**Haldol was designed** as an antischizophrenic drug in the 1950s, at the peak of the mental-institution boom in America. It's a knockout drug. "Hound dog," the nurses called it.

According to Alabama law, licensed practical nurses, who were now staying at the house and watching Nicole around the clock, were not allowed to administer it. Registered nurses could, but they could come by only once a day.

There was a loophole in the law, though, they said: Someone else could administer it.

Me.

So while the nurses watched and advised me, I started giving my wife the injections that would, in a sense, finish her life. She drifted away on Haldol, an ocean measured in milliliters, no longer calling for food or water, which meant the volcano of her stomach stopped erupting. Her face relaxed. Her jaw drooped.

Her breathing slowed, and over the next few days it grew louder—loud enough to hear throughout the house. It sounded like someone slowly dragging a cello bow across her vocal cords. I realized then that the last honest person to describe death may be whoever came up with "croaking."

The way dying looks, or so I expected, was like this: A small group of friends and family gather around the patient, watching as she draws and releases her final breath. People hold hands and exchange glances to acknowledge how profound the moment is just before a doctor checks for a pulse and announces, "It's done."

The way it actually happened was like this: There was medical equipment blocking the way to our bathroom, so on the morning of September 9, 2014, I went upstairs to shower. I had a head full of shampoo when I heard Dane call from the foot of the stairs. I couldn't make out what he said, so I rinsed off and stepped out of the shower. A few seconds later, as I tried to towel off, he called again: "Hurry."

I tried to pull jeans onto my wet legs as I stumbled down the stairs, and just before I made it to the bedroom I heard Nicole's rasping breath. I think I did, at least; I was trying to zip up my pants before entering the room, where Dane stood with two nurses. They stood looking at Nicole.

"What happened?" I said.

"That may have been the last one," Faith said. "Maybe. They're coming slow."

Nicole's pulse had faded days ago, to the point where no one could feel it. So we stood watching her for a couple minutes. She simply didn't breathe again. No spiritual release. No change in complexion. No shift in facial features. She just stopped.

It was a routine death in every sense. It was ordinary. Common. The only remarkable element was Dane. I had married into this situation, but how had he gotten here? Love is not a big-enough word. He stood and faced the reality of death for my sake. He is my friend.

**The months after**Nicole died stretched and shrank and stretched again, like taffy.

Grief hollowed me out, and I expected that. But underneath it I also felt a deep sense of relief, and even joy. For the first time in two years, I felt hope. I kept that a secret, though. People would stop me on the street to express their sorrow, and I would find myself stooping to match their emotional tone. "Oh, yes, it is so difficult, but we will make it somehow."

The truth was that, after two years of suffering, Nicole finally felt no more pain. After two years of horror, the girls and I felt like we had escaped something. Molly told me that, for the first time in as long as she could remember, she didn't dread hearing me call from the foot of the stairs, because she knew I had no more bad news to deliver.

Dane helped the girls adjust to an endless life without their mother, but the days without Nicole were empty, and he wanted to find work. I told him there was no need. He could just live with us, and I would split my income with him. Forever if he wanted. We had survived an endless winter and entered into an existential springtime.

But Dane quietly descended into a depression of his own. He felt restless and started spending more time in his room. At one point, he visited a pet shop with a friend, and she alternated between picking up the puppies and kittens. "Don't you want to hold one?" she asked him.

"Nah," he said. He couldn't explain it, but he knew that if he held a small animal he would burst into tears.

In January of this year, four months after Nicole died, fourteen months after he abruptly left behind every single thing that makes up an adult life to put himself at the service of Nicole and me, he decided that he needed to move back to New Orleans and reclaim his own life.

In a most unexpected way, Dane's leaving hit me harder than Nicole's because I wasn't prepared for it. He didn't know how to tell me that he was leaving, so he just started packing up. He left one day when the girls were at school. On that day, he stopped as he climbed into his car. "I'll be back in a couple of weeks," he said. "It'll be weird, though, because you'll be married by then."

We both laughed. He pulled out of the driveway, and I just stood there in the yard for a long time, wondering what to do, my eyes all wet. Then, after a while, I turned and went back inside my empty house.

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**OUR FRIEND**

**About the Production**

**THE ORIGINAL STORY**

**OUR FRIEND** started as an *Esquire* article by veteran journalist Matthew Teague, published 5/10/15 (<https://www.esquire.com/lifestyle/a34905/matthew-teague-wife-cancer-essay/>). “In the aftermath of Nicole’s illness and death, I really didn’t want to think or write about it right away,” says Teague. “But a year later I was ranting to my editor at *Esquire*, Mark Warren, about how we don’t talk honestly about death in our culture. You have the movie versions—Leo DiCaprio drifting peacefully to the bottom of the sea in TITANIC or the cowboy with the sort of noble death, or we use euphemisms like ‘so and so bought the farm.’ These are ways we avoid speaking directly about mortality; it left me unprepared for the reality of how it *was.* And he said, ‘I think you should write about this.’ I replied, ‘I don’t know. Every story needs a hero and I can’t be the hero of this story.’ It had been too hard. I fell apart from beginning to end. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘what about your friend, Dane?’ And I thought, yeah, okay. Dane is my hero, so that’s how the magazine story came to be.”

Teague confides that as he wrote the story, ‘I honestly thought it would be too mundane, too every day, because [Nicole’s] was not a glamorous or exciting death; people die this way every hour. It’s an everyday glimpse at mortality. But Mark said, ‘If you do the everyday thing right it becomes the universal thing.’ Then he said, which I’ll never forget, ‘a story like this has the power to split the atom,’ which was the first time I realized that maybe there is something here that people will connect with. Once the story came out there was a flood of response from people who had lost loved ones, or were caretaking—exhausted people, broken-hearted people, and I felt like maybe, by baring my own soul, I had helped these people, and that was really gratifying. It really touched me.”

The story came to the attention of producer Michael Pruss at Scott Free Productions who recalls how “my good friend, Brad Ingelsby [the screenwriter of this film] and I both followed Matthew’s work as a journalist. One day Brad called and asked, ‘Have you read Matthew Teague’s piece in *Esquire*? It’s a remarkable story of grief and loss and friendship and the enduring power of love. I think there’s something special here. Would you investigate it and read it?’ I did and was equally moved, so I reached out to Matthew Teague. We had a number of really interesting phone conversations about his life, what he’d been through and the process of creation that came from this awful tragedy that he and his children had suffered through. After a while Matthew asked, ‘What makes you the right person to tell my life story?’ And, of course, that’s an incredibly honest and legitimate question to ask a film producer. I said that all I could say is that I’d experienced grief and loss in my life and shared that my younger brother died when he was eighteen. It had been a very tough time for my parents and me and I told him how he’d articulated so many things that I had felt—the process of grieving and healing and the journey between those two things—in a way that was powerful and universal. I hoped he’d see me as someone he could trust with his story. He said that it was still a very fresh wound in his life and that the journey still continued for him and his children. When we spoke again he said, ‘I think this is still too soon.’ So I thanked him for considering, wished him all the best and said that “I hope you and your children heal and, if nothing else, it’s been an honor to get to know you a bit.’”

Teague remembers that “after the story came out there was a wave of interest. Any good magazine story ends up with a wave of interest from movie makers. And I said, no, no, no, no. I didn’t want to do it. I wanted to keep it to myself, or if I was ever going to [see it adapted] I wanted to write it myself. Then after a lot thought, I realized, this one may be too close for me to view objectively and write. So after about a year and a half I called back Michael Pruss at Scott Free. He was the only one I called back because he had not just written to say ‘Hey, I like your story, I want to make a movie.’ Michael had written to say that he had some tragedy in his own past that led him to feel strongly about the story. So I called him back and said, “Are you still interested in this? You’re the only one I’d want to do it.” And, he said, “Yeah.” And so, we got started.”

**DEVELOPING THE SCRIPT**

After Pruss received Teague’s call, he contacted screenwriter Brad Ingelsby. Brad “went down to Fairhope,” Pruss remembers, “and started talking with Matthew and Dane and Matthew’s children to start the process of understanding how we could tell their story, and most importantly, to earn Matthew’s trust and partnership on this journey.”

“I felt an enormous responsibility,” recalls Inglesby. “It was quite daunting. Luckily, Matthew and I worked closely. I would send him pages to read and he would approve them. I always made sure I had Matthew’s approval during the writing process. Matthew lived the story, so I always got the best details out of him. He was so open and honest about allowing me in. It was one of the best experiences of my career. I knew it would be difficult to recreate exactly what Matthew and Dane went through during Nicole's cancer struggle, but I wanted the spirit of that struggle—and the spirit of Dane’s sacrifice—to come through—and also to portray Nicole in an honest way. I didn't have the ability to spend time with Nicole, of course, so I really leaned on Matthew to make sure I was honoring her appropriately. More than anything, I wanted to make sure Matthew was happy with the finished product.”

Teague discovered that “Brad Ingelsby is not just a great screenwriter, he’s a wonderful human being, and I’m grateful for that. He and I talked every day for at least a year and a half and we would pass drafts back and forth. It’s easy as a writer to get very possessive of the work that you’re doing, but Brad is such a sensitive person that he very kindly let me work on drafts and share my notes and ideas and then he took it and assembled it. Through the process we got to be not just colleagues but I think, it’s fair to say that we’re great, very close friends.”

Producer Teddy Schwarzman recalls that at this point, “Scott Free approached Black Bear Pictures to finance the project. We asked if they were looking for someone to simply finance or if would they like us to produce and finance. They said they wanted a collaboration, to broaden the umbrella of collaborators on the project, which was great because we were incredibly moved emotionally by Brad’s beautiful script. Brad has written some of the best screenplays that we’ve read to date—OUT OF THE FURNACE, AMERICAN WOMAN and others—that are just raw and real and powerful and emotional and move you in the best of ways without ever being manipulative.”

“There’s a lot of playing with time in the script,” notes Jason Segel. “The filmmakers believed that there’s an important reason to not tell this as a *linear* story of a descent into death; this is about the complications of life and what happens when you add a ticking clock to that. One of the beautiful things about marriage is you have this idea that we both agreed not to leave and we have time to figure out our issues. Well what happens when an artificial ticking clock is brought in, somebody is *going* to leave, so there is a timetable to figuring out this stuff?”

**FINDING THE RIGHT DIRECTOR**

“Gabriela Cowperthwaite, our filmmaker, is someone whose work I’d loved and admired for a long time –professionally and personally she’s an extraordinary person,” says Pruss. “She’s somebody whose work, whether it’s the documentary BLACKFISH or the narrative MEGAN LEAVEY, has been focused on true stories and the search for authenticity and truth. When an action movie at Fox we’d been developing was put on hold when the Disney-Fox deal happened, I told her that I’d loved getting to know her and didn’t want it to end there. And I asked if she could give me a few weeks to come up with something. As luck would have it, Brad had just turned in **OUR FRIEND**. I called Gabriela and I said, ‘Do you remember that action movie we had at Fox? Now envision the opposite and I think we may have a movie together.’”

“There are certain stories that you feel are yours,” says Cowperthwaite. “This was **OUR FRIEND** for me. I had read the article when it appeared in *Esquire* and was so moved by it—by its honesty and how it took a different angle, how it backed into grief in a way I had never seen before. And so I posted it on social media, which I never do, and I tagged Matthew Teague (who I did not know at the time)—I *don’t* do that sort of thing a lot—and congratulated him like he was a friend of mine. Later, when I had been working with the Scott Free guys on something else and Michael Pruss showed me the logline of a script he wanted me to read, which was the logline of **OUR FRIEND**, I went, ‘Oh my gosh, I know this.’ So I read the script immediately and wrote him back and said, ‘Yes. Just yes.’ And later talking to Matthew Teague, he said, ‘I knew you were serious. You had told me how amazing the article was; I knew you weren’t just trying to land a film.” It wasn’t just another Hollywood conversation. It came from an authentic place.”

**A STORY OF FRIENDSHIP, A LOVING, COMPLICATED MARRIAGE AND PEOPLE WHO DRIFT AWAY**

“This movie is about a million different things,” notes Segel. “It’s about grief, it’s about friendship, it’s about loss, it’s about selflessness, it’s about service.”

“Beyond being an exploration of friendship and courage, **OUR FRIEND** definitely expresses how nobody is perfect,” adds Pruss, “how as good as people want to be, they sometimes don’t live up to their aspirations. And that’s okay. We learn to live in the imperfections of our lives. I think Matt is an imperfect character, as is Dane and all their friends. That’s life, isn't it? But I think the more you unpack all of this you find the ultimate notion that people are good and can be incredibly selfless, especially in extreme circumstances.”

Teague believes that the story expresses “the deep value of friendship. If there’s just one person who will stay by your side through everything, hold onto them and never let them go.” Teague continues, “When Nicole got very sick [Dane] moved in to hold me up while I took care of her. The reality was that with all the medicines and things, it could get very difficult—personalities change: night after night for months Nicole was very hard on me while she would be so loving to everybody else and I was devastated by this. And Dane said, ‘Matt, she is that way to you because she knows that you won’t leave.’ That was so gratifying to hear. And I realized that *he* was the one person who wasn’t going to leave.”

“Matt reaches a point, I guess you’d call it rock bottom, where he just can’t do this alone so he’s forced to open up and Dane is there to fill that void. It’s really beautiful”, says Segel. “What Matthew Teague conveyed to me more than anything was how meaningful it was to have a friend who was willing to do that for him. I think that there’s an interesting exploration in the movie about male friendship. You tend to be less emotionally accessible with your male friends, I suppose, until you need them. I know it happened for me in my early 30s when I realized, oh, these friends who I joke around with are there for me if I need them. That’s a really important moment in your life and there’s something powerful about Matt and Dane realizing that we’re more than just hangout buddies. We’re partners, you know; we’re platonic friend-partners in this life.”

Dakota Johnson cites “the saying that ‘blood is thicker than water,’ but actually the original saying is ‘the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb. So, the meaning is actually the reverse—that blood brothers, people who choose each other in life have a thicker connection than an actual blood relative. And I think that completely applies to Dane in this movie. The connection, the friendship between the three of them is so thick and so pure that it’s almost more than family.”

“I really loved the theme of friendship,” adds screenwriter Brad Inglesby, “how great friendship can change your life. Growing up, I was deeply moved by films like STAND BY ME and BREAKING AWAY, stories about the power of great friendship in life. When I read Matthew’s article I had the same emotional reaction I had while watching those films.”

**OUR FRIEND** is also the story of a marriage, a loving but complex relationship infused with realistic tension. “There’s a saccharine version of a story like this—of grief brought into a *beautiful* marriage,” notes Segel, “but because of Matthew Teague’s honesty, this movie explores grief brought into a *complicated* marriage. This is a couple dealing with all the struggles that you deal with in a real relationship—and then comes cancer on top of that.”

Teague describes how an element triggering tension in his and Nicole’s real marriage—and as it is portrayed on the screen—was ambition. “[Ambition] was a huge part of my character when I was a very young man. It started out, as it does so often, as a well-intentioned, positive thing; I was determined to provide for my family and make a living as a writer, which is not an easy thing always to do. But ambition is a thing that can take on its own life, and it can consume you, as it did for me. I was so determined to be not just a good writer, but a great writer, and it started to be detrimental to my family. It was only through pain and hardship that I was awakened to the fact that things I thought I was doing for my family were starting to harm them.”

The film’s awareness that people can be loving and caring but flawed is seen in the ways Nicole’s close friends drift away during her illness. “It’s very scary when you’re losing somebody and people respond to pain and grief in many ways,” observes Dakota Johnson. “You might stay until the bitter end and beyond, like Dane, or *fear*—the number one thing that can totally bring us down as individuals—might get the best of you. And that’s okay because it’s not for the lack of love—it’s because it’s too painful to stare the loss in the face. Nicole still loved [the dear friend who’d failed to maintain her vow to remain by her side to the very end] so much.

**THE CAST & FILMMAKER**

“We’ve been blessed with an incredible cast on this film,” notes Pruss. “They’re not just actors working at the top of their game, but probably were born to play these parts—and that sounds like a cliché, but I truly believe it.”

“As Matt becomes overwhelmed with how much there is to deal with, Dane is this friend who acts as an emotional surrogate between the two of them,” notes Segel. “I was just really drawn to exploring what kind of person gives up their own life to help their friends.”

“Jason manages to capture the willingness to step in and be there when things are really hard, but he also captures Dane’s humor,” says Teague. “Dane’s one of the funniest people I know, not just because he does comedy on stage but in our everyday interactions. He makes me laugh all the time. I was surprised that the harder things got, the more resolved Dane and I were to hold onto a sense of humor, which I thought would be one of the first things to go; but I think it’s sort of a foxhole sense of humor—the pressure is just so great that at some point you have to laugh, just to survive. And Jason manages to get that and I’ve loved watching him.”

“Jason is just one of the warmest humans on the planet,” adds director Gabriela Cowperthwaite. “People know him for his comedy—he has so much experience in that world, and he’s one of the most generous actors imaginable, always taking the most subtle thing an actor gives him and elevating it, turning it into something profound or unexpectedly hilarious. He also has the ability in drama to tap into this emotional reservoir that you didn’t know existed. As Dane he’d be doing impromptu humor that would destroy us—we’d just be crying it was so funny—and then something would shift, and he’d be tapping into something more darkly complex, suddenly exposing this internal life that becomes one of my favorite questions of the film - what drives Dane? - (which we saw in THE END OF THE TOUR), and that combination is pretty indelible and very special.”

“Jason Segel is just fantastic in this film,” lauds producer Teddy Schwarzman. “While he’s played so many tremendous roles this is probably his best performance ever. His dramatic range, his comedic timing, his ability to connect with Matt, with Nicole, with the children in this film and become **OUR FRIEND**’s emotional core. It was so impressive to watch. He was also a dream to work with on set, one of the nicest people in the world; he encapsulated Dane.”

Segel’s approach to Dane was as layered and complex as the character he portrays. “I’ve played a real person a couple of times. One of them, David Foster Wallace, has a giant fan base so you are obligated to properly honor this legacy that people are very familiar with—so accuracy is very important. But on this story, no one at large knows the real Dane and so you have a little more latitude to play the character as you think best serves the story.” While Segel met the real Dane on the set, “I was most interested in playing this character in a way that highlighted what we were trying to explore in the movie versus going for stark realism and mimicking another person’s mannerisms. That wasn’t on my mind as much as getting to the heart of it, which is that this man did a very selfless act. *That* is what I wanted to explore and how I wanted honor in the man.”

“The simplest way to play him is to see this as an entirely selfless act—I’m going to give myself away for two years, but I think there is a more complicated aspect to Dane,” Segel continues. “I tend to think that you only do something like this because you are also running from something in your own life and that was interesting to me, this idea of hiding in service. I think that Dane is a guy who feels really uncomfortable should you ask him a question about his life because he doesn’t like any of the answers. He has a relationship that he can to put on hold, conveniently, right when she wants a commitment. He has panic attacks and spends a lot of time alone and this opportunity to be caretaker provides great answers to all of the questions about his life. What are you up to? I’m taking care of somebody, selflessly. All of a sudden, a lot falls into place for Dane. I didn’t want to play a guy who’s just a martyr. I wanted to play a guy who was trying to figure out his own stuff as well. And so the end of the movie also raises some interesting questions of ‘What now?’ as it should.”

Dakota Johnson is an exceptional actress,” says Schwarzman. “Best known for the FIFTY SHADES series, she has moved on to some really groundbreaking work with some really interesting directors, whether SUSPIRIA with Luca Guadagnino, A BIGGER SPLASH and now **OUR FRIEND**. She’s really shown that she is one of the top actors working today and is taking her work to a whole new level. Dakota really committed herself to the role of Nicole, bringing a level of warmth and joy and appreciation for her spouse, for her children, for her friends, community.”

“What blows my mind about Dakota is her comic timing,” notes Cowperthwaite. “She comes from comedy, but not everybody remembers that. She plays off people—she’s drinking what you’re pouring. She can spar dramatically with anyone you put in front of her, she conjures these comic moments I never thought existed, and she has vulnerability, which is why I wanted her for this role. As exuberant as she can be—she’ll dance in the fountain and laugh with abandon—you see her trying to be strong through her pain which felt so much like Nicole. And the way she is with the girls [Isabella Kai and Violet McGraw who play her daughters] is unlike anything I would have expected from someone who doesn’t have kids of her own. She is so loving with these little girls—and those are some of my favorite scenes in the movie.”

“It’s been really fulfilling to see Dakota play Nicole,” adds Matthew Teague. “Some of my favorite things that I’ve seen her do have actually been between takes, when she’d be playing with the girls who play my daughters—snuggling them or playing ‘I see you’ from across the room. I realized in an emotional moment that she’s mothering them and it reminded me so much of Nicole. And Dakota’s beautiful like Nicole and sweet like Nicole was.”

“Nicole Teague is the heart of the film and Dakota played the part with tenderness and vibrancy,” notes Affleck. “A talented and hard-working actress who cares a lot about her work, Dakota had a lot to do. Her role was the hardest in the film by a country mile. And she ran laps around everyone.”

“The character Matt Teague is a complicated guy and Casey [Affleck] has found an entry point to this character that is very relatable,” observes Dakota Johnson. “Typically, this character could be seen as very isolating but Casey has a warmth to him, an intelligence and this twinkle in his eye that makes Matt an intricate and loveable character.”

“Casey is just one of the best actors out there,” says Cowperthwaite. “He hits these moments that would just take me by surprise. I knew that he likes to keep things fresh and authentic —and luckily he’s working with a director who happens to love that stuff. You’ve got to be on the balls of your feet with him, because to him, the script isn’t a rulebook, it’s more like a springboard. You have to just listen to his music and as a result, you get these performances you never expected out of this simple line reading. And that’s been amazing.”

Per producer Teddy Schwarzman, who produced Affleck’s narrative directorial debut LIGHT OF MY LIFE, “Casey’s dramatic range is exceptional, and his timing is perfect; he plays off of the people around him so incredibly well and there is never a sense of falseness.”

Jason Segel describes how “I initially approached this movie thinking how this was a very sensitive and emotional subject and that grief was the most important thing that we were going to be exploring. But throughout the process, especially working with Casey, I’ve realized how valuable humor is to a story like this, to grieving itself, to making it through. It cannot be doom every day—you won’t make it. And so what emerged for me are the moments where Matt and Dane or Dane and Nicole or Dane and the kids allow themselves to laugh and enjoy each other while they have each other. I learned a lot about grief through those scenes, actually. You think you’re doing a scene about a phone call, giving terrible news, and, unexpectedly, you find yourselves laughing because an actor like Casey is not clenched tight to anything. He is living the moment and exploring the scene with no attachment to a result, so all of a sudden you’re like, ‘Oh, right, I didn’t see this from, a million miles away but maybe this is really important for this moment.’ So I’ve learned a lot from acting with Casey, I must say.”

“He’s a wonderful guy,” says Teague, “a complicated, artistic person, very focused and intense, and that made me really happy, because I think I have some of those elements in myself. As he and I talked, the happier I was that he was the guy in the role because he picked up very early that this is a character for whom truth is imminent. For whom truth is the aim. And I believe that and always wanted to live that way. I think that’s carried on in his portrayal—someone who, even through the struggle of terminal illness, is determined to look at it directly.”

Did Affleck model himself on the real Matthew? “There is no such thing as playing a real person,” replies Affleck. “Every character in a movie is a fabrication of the actor, director, writer, and any underlying material that the story might be based on. On the other hand, every character in a movie should be as real as the actress or actor playing the part. They need to feel, even if completely fictional, like flesh and blood with history and feelings as real as anyone in the audience.”

Teague believes that “Casey’s done what I hoped that he would: be as much of himself as he could while inhabiting this character and make the truth of the feelings and the things that happened the focus, rather than any sort of external acting method, so I’ve been really pleased with that.”

“Scott Free attached an absolutely wonderful director in Gabriela Cowperthwaite,” says producer Teddy Schwarzman. “BLACKFISH is a scathing, incredibly appropriate documentary and MEGAN LEAVEY was a wonderful narrative feature debut. Gab has such humanity, such warmth, a wonderful sense of humor and an eye for authenticity. She’s able to capture pain, love, hope, fear, desperation and joy all in the same take. She has a real eye for emotional truth and did a wonderful job with the actors. They all truly loved her and felt like they could speak to her about their characters, their issues, their interpersonal relationships and explore the organic truth to each scene and their narrative arcs. And Gab, patient and a great listener created an environment that allowed them to flourish.”

Cowperthwaite notes how “one thing about someone coming from documentary into the narrative world and wanting to tell these true-life stories is that you know what real looks like. You’ve spent your life looking at the real thing, so when you see a scripted version of it, you know how to get at it in the most genuine way possible. There is something in our documentary tool set that we bring to bear, notably agility, because when you see a moment of magic you know how to spring at it. While making a narrative you must also be able to perceive that *this* is the moment, so you surround yourself with amazing people like my DP Joe Anderson, who’s also made documentaries, an agile crew and seasoned, professional actors at the top of their game and you spring to life. I always tell people that documentary’s like a shooting star—you have no idea if it’s coming or when it’s coming. It’s literally a moment. And narrative is like going and looking at a sunset—you know it’s coming and it’s going to be in these beautiful forms and shapes and colors. The beauty is foretold in a way because you have this script, this beautiful foundation, but how do you find the spontaneity? The answer is in these living, breathing performances. I want my actors to feel like anything can happen.”

One thing Matthew Teague says he “worried about with a director was that we find a really skilled person who wouldn’t see this as just another job, another paycheck. When they started talking to Gabriela and I realized that she’d made a social media post about how much the magazine story had moved her back when it came out, I was overjoyed. After I watched her documentaries and MEGAN LEAVEY I knew that she was somebody for whom the truth matters a great deal. She doesn’t care about putting a sheen or gloss on the story. She’s made a career in telling difficult stories and wants to tell the truth, so I knew she was perfect.”

“This film belongs to one person: Gabriela Cowperthwaite,” declares Casey Affleck. “She took an autobiographical account from a magazine article that had been turned into a screenplay, attached actors, hired collaborators, chose locations, devised a visual language, selected a soundtrack, balanced diplomacy and dogma, knew when to pull and when to give slack, kept the train on the track, and made everyone smile. She wrapped her arms around the entire production and carried it across the finish line. She has a fierce intelligence that she always uses for good. I loved working for her and so did everyone else in every department.”

“Gabriela is so level-headed and makes me feel very safe, emotional,” says Dakota Johnson. “I feel like I’m allowed to really explore the depth of each emotional peak and valley without being judged or made to feel stupid, which is I think, the number one fear of an actor,” she laughs. “She is really careful with everyone—and I don’t mean afraid, I mean like *full of care*. And she has a full-rounded idea of the whole story and I think she knows how to get what she wants. She knows when she’s gotten what she needs, and then we move on quickly, and that’s incredible. And to have a woman at the center of this whole operation, I think is key, because it’s a maternal and a feminine telling of this story and that’s really beautiful, because I think it reaches people in a different way. And I think having a documentarian background, she’s able to see moments that are so little, that nobody else sees, natural, quiet little things. She’s noticing the small stuff and making them the important things, which they are, instead of trying to *make* things important.”

Jason Segel agrees: “Gabriela coming from documentary definitely adds to the skill and desire to capture the realism—that’s where her eye goes. And she’s lived with this story, dramatically, for years, and has really thought through what is important to her, and what she wants an audience to take from the story as an audience. I think that coming from documentary, Gabriela is interested in what happens beyond the scripted lines, so a lot of times the camera’s been rolling before you knew it was and times you’ll find that she doesn’t yell ‘cut’ when the scene is over, and you sort of continue. I think some of the most real stuff has come out of that room to breathe, which is nice, because, some of the same skills that I used, learned, doing like the Judd Apatow comedies, are equally as applicable to drama—especially *listening.”*

**SHOOTING IN FAIRHOPE**

“Our approach to the entire film was to be as authentic and honest as possible, hence we shot it in Fairhope, Alabama, where Nicole and Matt’s story took place,” notes producer Michael Pruss. “We used many of the real locations, like Theater 98 [where Nicole performed], the town fountain, and Mobile Bay. Fairhope is a town of writers and artists. It’s on the bay and feels inspiring, almost ethereal at times. We were all very taken by Fairhope and the kindness and generosity of all the locals who welcomed us with open arms from the very beginning. The city and the state have been really wonderful, a pleasure to work with, and we’re deeply thankful to them.”

“We’re in the real place, Fairhope, Alabama!” enthusiastically adds Cowperthwaite. “It’s just a beautiful town and I found that Nicole’s everywhere; it’s such an exciting thing to know as you drive by the theater that she’s the theater. We drive by the park where she used to play with the girls–she is that park. And as we drive by Matthew’s house all the time, it’s like, oh my gosh, her art, her sensibility, it’s all there. And what I love about Fairhope is how it reminds me, and probably all of us who are in this crazy busy industry, to take a second. That’s what everybody does here. You pause and you hear a conversation—it’s so amazing how much people want to connect and talk to you. It’s so humanizing. It’s how we should be living, to take a second and look at each other, and what better metaphor for the movie we’re working on?”

“I wanted the movie to be shot here in Fairhope because I love my little town and I’m proud of it,” says Teague. “Nicole and I could have moved anywhere—I’m a writer and can type stories from wherever—but we wanted to find just the right place for us and to raise our girls, so we came to Fairhope, and I love it. When we started talking about the movie, there were other places where it may have been cheaper or more convenient to film, so after bragging to the producers about Fairhope as a great location and about the people who lived here, I was so happy when we decided to film here. I was initially worried about traffic problems and how it can get kind of tiresome having film crews in your backyard every day for a couple months,” he laughs. “But that hasn’t happened. People here have been very kind, very warm, and, I think, appreciative of the film. At the end of the process somebody stopped me on the street to say how grateful they were that we had done this and how good it was for the community. I think people have been really happy.”

“We found ourselves here in this amazing town for six weeks and have gotten to know the town. It’s just a real pleasure, everybody’s incredibly nice—I just love it,” says Segel. “I fit in well in a small town. You can’t be the jerk in a small town or you’re the town jerk, so everyone’s always on their best behavior. And you can feel the echoes of their life here in town. People will come up and say, ‘I knew Nicole,’ or ‘I knew Faith,’ the caretaker, and ‘I knew Dane,’ and it’s so lovely because it makes the story feel very personal; you’re reminded that you’re honoring something that really happened.”

*“When Nicole died, I don’t think I’d ever really been told the truth by anybody about the way death is. So, for me, the key thing I wanted is for this film to be honest, even if it’s upsetting, even if it’s difficult or challenging, I wanted it to be honest. And I feel like we’ve been true to that…*

*I was so concerned through the process about honoring Nicole and respecting her memory that it didn’t dawn on me to consider whether she would enjoy this or not. It was just about being so protective. Then as the production was unfolding a friend said, ‘You know, Nicole would love this.” And I realized that she would, she really would. She was a dramatic person in the best way and she would love all of it—from an artistic standpoint but also to see her story live on in a way that, hopefully, will be helpful to more people.”*

- Matthew Teague

**OUR FRIEND**

**About the Cast**

**JASON SEGEL (DANE FAUCHEUX)** is an actor, director, writer, and producer. He most recently created, produced and starred in the AMC anthology series, "Dispatches From Elsewhere" alongside Sally Field, André Benjamin, Eve Lindley and Richard E. Grant. The series follows a group of ordinary people who stumble onto a puzzle hiding just behind the veil of everyday life. Segel wrote the entire anthology series and directed the first episode, "Peter”.

Segel will next be seen starring in the Gabriela Cowperthwaite’s "Our Friend" opposite Dakota Johnson and Casey Affleck in January 2021.  The film, which premiered at the 2019 Toronto Film Festival, is about a couple (Johnson and Affleck) who find unexpected support from their best friend (Segel) who puts his own life on hold and moves into their family home, bringing an impact much greater and more profound than anyone could have imagined.

Additionally, Segel is currently in production on Josephine Decker’s feature, "The Sky Is Everywhere," starring opposite Cherry Jones.  The film, which is based on the Jandy Nelson novel, will be released by A24 through Apple TV+.

Segel received critical acclaim for his role as David Foster Wallace in James Ponsoldt's dramatic biopic, "The End of the Tour.” The film recounts the five-day interview between Rolling Stone reporter David Lipsky (Jesse Eisenberg) and Wallace, which took place after the 1996 publication of Wallace’s groundbreaking novel, 'Infinite Jest.' "The End of the Tour" premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and was released by A24. Segel received an Independent Spirit Award nomination for "Best Male Lead" for his performance in the film.

Segel is well known for writing and starring in Nicholas Stoller's "Forgetting Sarah Marshall.” The film, which was released by Universal Pictures in 2008, made over $100 million worldwide.  In the film, Segel wrote a "Dracula" musical which was performed by puppets and emboldened him to pitch his concept for a Muppets movie. He, along with Stoller, wrote "The Muppets", which was released by Disney and made over $150 million worldwide.  Additionally, the film won an Academy Award in 2012 for "Best Original Song" for "Man or Muppet," which was written by Bret McKenzie and performed by Segel.

Segel also collaborated with Stoller in 2010 to write and co-produce the film "Get Him to the Greek", where Jonah Hill and Russell Brand reunited as co-stars in a spin-off of "Forgetting Sarah Marshall". The film grossed over $90 million worldwide and won the Teen Choice Award for “Choice Movie: Comedy.”

Segel's other film credits include: “Come Sunday”, "The Discovery", "The Five-Year Engagement", "Bad Teacher", "This Is 40", "I Love You, Man", "Jeff Who Lives at Home", "Knocked Up",  "Gulliver’s Travels", "Despicable Me", "Slackers", "The New Jersey Turnpikes", "S.L.C. Punk", "Can’t Hardly Wait", "Dead Man on Campus", among others.

On television, Segel starred in the CBS comedy series "How I Met Your Mother" opposite Alyson Hannigan, Josh Radnor, Cobie Smulders, and Neil Patrick Harris. During the show’s nine season run, it was nominated for an Emmy for “Outstanding Comedy Series,” a People's Choice Award for “Favorite TV Comedy” and a Teen Choice Award for “Choice TV Show: Comedy.” He also starred in Judd Apatow's Emmy nominated television series "Freaks and Geeks" and "Undeclared".  
  
In addition to his work in television and film, Segel made his debut as a children's book author with 'Nightmares!', published by Random House and co-written by Kirsten Miller. The first installment of his middle-grade trilogy was released in September 2014 and debuted at #2 on *The New York Times* Bestseller List. The second book, 'Nightmares! The Sleepwalker Tonic', was published in September 2015, and the third and final book in the series, 'Nightmares! The Lost Lullaby' was published in September 2016.

Furthermore, Jason and Kirsten teamed up for a young adult trilogy. The first book, 'Otherworld', and second, ‘Otherearth,’ both garnered spots on *The New York Times* Bestseller List. The third and final book of the series, ‘Otherlife’ will be released on November 10, 2020 by Random House.

**DAKOTA JOHNSON (NICOLE TEAGUE)** is a BAFTA nominated and award-winning actress and producer.  She starred as Anastasia Steele in Universal Pictures’ billion-dollar FIFTY SHADES franchise. Johnson is a repeat collaborator of Luca Guadagnino, having starred in his films SUSPIRIAand A BIGGER SPLASH. Her other film credits include Scott Cooper’s BLACK MASS, David Fincher’s THE SOCIAL NETWORKand Drew Goddard’s BAD TIMES AT THE EL ROYALE.

Last year Johnson starred in the critically acclaimed independent feature, THE PEANUT BUTTER FALCON alongside Shia LaBeouf and Zack Gottsagen.  The film won the Audience Award at SXSW in March 2019 and grossed over $20 million in the US to become the top platform release of the year.  This year, she starred in Focus Features’ THE HIGH NOTEopposite Tracee Ellis Ross and directed by Nisha Ganatra, which was released in May.

In 2019, the accomplished actress launched TeaTime Pictures; an independent entertainment company with her producing partner, Ro Donnelly. A forward thinking and collaborative creative haven for likeminded artists, TeaTime Pictures signed a first look television deal with Platform One Media and has several features and series, both limited and ongoing, in the works.

Johnson is active philanthropist and is an advocate for Global Citizen’s She Is Equal campaign targeting world leaders to provide critical funding for women’s health and family planning.  Johnson also launched The Left Ear podcast featuring stories of assault, abuse, and harassment from survivors around the globe.

Johnson is the face of Italian luxury brand Gucci. She currently resides in Los Angeles.

Academy Award®-winning actor, **CASEY AFFLECK** **(MATTHEW TEAGUE)**, is an accomplished and striking performer who has established himself as a striking actor, writer, and filmmaker.

Born on August 12, 1975, in Falmouth, Massachusetts, Casey was raised in Cambridge, Massachusetts by his mother, Chris Anne, a Harvard-educated elementary school teacher, and his father Tim, an aspiring actor who paid the bills by working his way through a series of odd jobs; the two divorced when Casey was young. Casey’s older brother is successful actor, Ben Affleck.

Casey began his movie career in Gus Van Sant’s TO DIE FOR in 1995. He later re-teamed with Gus Van Sant in GOOD WILL HUNTING and GERRY, the latter of which he co-wrote and starred alongside Matt Damon. In 2007, Casey landed his breakout role as wannabe outlaw Robert Ford opposite Brad Pitt in THE ASSASSINATION OF JESSE JAMES BY THE COWARD ROBERT FORD. His performance garnered him Oscar, Golden Globe, and SAG Award nominations. The same year, Casey received significant praise for his starring role in the film GONE, BABY GONE, his brother’s directorial debut.

He famously starred in Kenneth Lonergan’s MANCHESTER BY THE SEA, which tells the story of a solitary janitor whose life is transformed when he returns to his hometown to take care of his teenage nephew.  Making its debut at the Sundance Film Festival, Affleck’s performance was the most acclaimed of the year, garnering over 40 regional critics’ awards, a Golden Globe Award®, Critics’ Choice Award®, Independent Spirit Award, National Board of Review Award, New York Film Critics Circle Award, Gotham Award®, BAFTA and ultimately an Academy Award® for Best Actor in 2017.

In 2017, Casey established Sea Change Media. Under the banner, which has a first look deal with Amazon Studios, Casey aims to develop new works from emerging filmmakers of diverse backgrounds, telling stories that seek to entertain audiences, inspire conversations and shift perceptions.

Most recently, Casey starred opposite newcomer Anna Pniowsky in his directorial feature LIGHT OF MY LIFE, which he also wrote and produced.

Additional film credits include: Christopher Nolan’s INTERSTELLAR, opposite Matthew McConaughey, Jessica Chastain and Anne Hathaway;OUT OF THE FURNACE, opposite Christian Bale; Steven Soderbergh’s OCEANStrilogy, alongside George Clooney and Brad Pitt*;* TRIPLE 9, opposite Woody Harrelson and Kate Winslet; AIN’T THEM BODIES SAINTS and A GHOST STORY*,* both opposite Rooney Mara; THE OLD MAN AND THE GUN, opposite Robert Redford and Sissy Spacek; and Disney's THE FINEST HOURS. On stage, in 2002 Affleck appeared in the West End debut of Kenneth Lonergan’s award-winning play *This Is Our Youth*, alongside Matt Damon.

**CHERRY JONES (FAITH PRUETT)** is a Tony and Emmy®-winning American actress best known for her work in theatre and television. Most recently, she appeared on Broadway in *The Lifespan of a Fact* opposite Daniel Radcliffe and Bobby Cannavale. She made her West End debut in the triumphant revival of Tennessee Williams’ *The Glass Menagerie*, which garnered seven Olivier Award nominations, including a nomination for Cherry for Best Actress. She is a five-time Tony Award® nominee for her work on Broadway, winning the Award for the 1995 revival of *The Heiress* and for the 2005 original production of *Doubt*, for which she also won the Drama Desk, Lucille Lortel, Outer Critics Circle and Obie Awards. Cherry is a founding member of the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Recently, Cherry won an Emmy for her portrayal of ‘Nan Pierce’ in “SUCCESSION.” She has also received Emmy Awards® for her portrayal of ‘Holly Maddox’ in “THE HANDMAID’S TALE” and for playing ‘U.S. President Allison Taylor’ on the Fox series “24.” She has had a recurring role on the Primetime Emmy Award®-winning Amazon comedy-drama series “TRANSPARENT,” for which she was nominated for the Critics’ Choice Television Award® for Best Guest Performer in a Comedy Series in 2015. She can also be seen in Channel 4’s “CHIMERICA” opposite F. Murray Abraham and “DEFENDING JACOB” opposite Chris Evans and Michelle Dockery.

Cherry’s film appearances include THE HORSE WHISPERER, ERIN BROCKOVICH, SIGNS, OCEAN’S TWELVE and I SAW THE LIGHT opposite Tom Hiddleston, Tina Fey’s WHISKEY TANGO FOXTROT, Sally Potter’s black comedy THE PARTY, Amy Poehler’s WINE COUNTRY, BOY ERASED alongside Lucas Hedges, Woody Allen’s A RAINY DAY IN NEW YORK, and MOTHERLESS BROOKLYN opposite Edward Norton. Next, Cherry can be seen in THE SKY IS EVERYWHERE alongside Jason Segel and Grace Kaufman.

With eight #1 songs and numerous #1 albums and multi-platinum hits to his name, chart-topping entertainer **JAKE OWEN (AARON)**continues to resonate with listeners and audiences everywhere. The Big Loud recording artist’s latest album, GREETINGS FROM… JAKE, garnered Owen’s seventh #1 hit and debuted with more than 154,000 album equivalents by release and garnered a CMA nomination for Video of the Year. The singer/songwriter continues to earn critical acclaim, with critics praising GREETINGS FROM…JAKE as a “country-grounded odyssey” (Billboard) that “unveils new layers of his artistry” (Sounds Like Nashville). GREETINGS FROM…JAKE follows the singer/songwriter’s hit albums AMERICAN LOVE, which debuted at #1 on Billboard’s Top Country Albums chart and 4 on the Billboard 200 all-genre chart, and the chart-topping album Barefoot Blue Jean Night, which produced four consecutive #1 hits including the most played country song of the decade (Country Aircheck), the MULTI- PLATINUM anthem title- track “Barefoot Blue Jean Night,” as well as the RIAA certified hits “Beachin,’” “Anywhere With You,” “Alone With You,” and “The One That Got Away.”

London-based **GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE (TERESA)** is one of the most exciting and unique British actresses working today, having caught the industry’s attention with her Emmy and Critics’ Choice nominated role in the global hit HBO series “GAME OF THRONES.” During her time on the show, she was nominated alongside the rest of the cast for a Screen Actors Guild Award for Best Ensemble in a Drama Series in 2014, 2015, 2016, 2018, and 2020.

Christie joined “GAME OF THRONES” in 2012 during the show’s second season and was nominated in 2019 for an Emmy for Supporting Actress, Drama Series for her iconic role as the warrior ‘Brienne of Tarth.’

In the summer of 2019, Christie played ‘Titania’ in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* at the Bridge Theatre in London. In January 2020, she appeared in the film adaptation of Charles Dickens’ THE PERSONAL HISTORY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD, alongside Dev Patel and Tilda Swinton.

In 2018, Christie appeared in the Robert Zemeckis film THE WOMEN OF MARWEN alongside Steve Carell and Diane Kruger. She also starred in Peter Strickland’s film IN FABRIC, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2018.

In 2017, Christie starred alongside Nicole Kidman and Elizabeth Moss in the second season of director Jane Campion’s Sundance show “TOP OF THE LAKE: CHINA GIRL.” The show received rave reviews and a 2018 Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Limited Series or Motion Picture Made for Television. That same year, Christie was seen in the highly anticipated film STAR WARS: EPISODE VIII – THE LAST JEDI. The film was directed by Rian Johnson and Christie returned as the franchise’s first female villain, ‘Captain Phasma’, alongside Daisy Ridley, John Boyega and Oscar Isaac. Christie first appeared in the beloved sci-fi franchise by starring in STAR WARS: EPISODE VII – THE FORCE AWAKENS (2015) alongside John Boyega, Adam Driver, Oscar Isaac, Andy Serkis, Lupita Nyong’o and Domhnall Gleeson, who joined the original stars of the saga, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, Peter Mayhew and Kenny Baker.

Christie’s notable theatre credits include: *Doctor Fauster* in 2010 playing the role of ‘Lucifer’ as well as the Theatre Royal Haymarket’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* as ‘Mag Wildwood’ in 2009 and the Queen in Shakespeare’s romance *Cymbeline* in 2007. Her feature film debut came in 2009 with a supporting role in THE IMAGINARIUM OF DOCTOR PARNASSUS*,*directed by Terry Gilliam who she worked with again in ZERO THEOREM. Additional film credits include Fox’s THE DARKEST MINDS and THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY – PART 2*.*

Christie graduated from Drama Centre London in 2005 and has also modelled for several fashion houses over the years.

**OUR FRIEND**

**About the Filmmakers**

**GABRIELA COWPERTHWAITE (DIRECTOR)** is a Brazilian American filmmaker whose narrative directorial debut MEGAN LEAVEY was released LD and Bleecker Street in 2017. The film is based on the true-life story of a young Marine corporal (Kate Mara) whose unique discipline and bond with her military combat dog saved many lives during their deployment in Iraq. Prior to this, Gabriela has worked predominantly in the documentary film space. Her film BLACKFISH, about the plight of orcas in captivity, premiered at Sundance in 2013 and was nominated for a BAFTA.

**BRAD INGELSBY (SCREENWRITER)** graduated from Villanova University and received his MFA in screenwriting from the American Film Institute. His credits include THE DYNAMITER, a coming-of-age drama directed by Matthew Gordon, OUT OF THE FURNACE, a dramatic thriller directed by Scott Cooper and starring Christian Bale, Casey Affleck, Woody Harrelson, and Forest Whitaker, and RUN ALL NIGHT, directed by Jaume Collet-Serra and starring Liam Neeson, Ed Harris, Joel Kinnaman, and Boyd Holbrook.

Brad’s latest film, THE WAY BACK, directed by Gavin O’Connor and starring Ben Affleck, was released by Warner Brothers in March 2020.

Currently, Brad is in production on his new series, “MARE OF EASTTOWN.” Ingelsby wrote, executive produced and is serving as showrunner for the HBO series, which stars Kate Winslet.

**JOE ANDERSON (CINEMATOGRAPHER)** is a BAFTA nominated cinematographer based in New York. Born and raised in Salt Lake City, Utah, his first short film appeared at the Sundance Film festival at age 16. After receiving a BA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, Joe’s first feature as cinematographer was 2013's SIMON KILLER directed by Antonio Campos. Joe re-teamed with Campos on 2016's CHRISTINE starring Rebecca Hall and Michael C. Hall. THE OLD MAN AND THE GUN marked Joe’s first time shooting for David Lowery which stared Robert Redford, Casey Affleck, Sissy Spacek and Tom Waits.

On commercials and short form projects Joe has shot for directors like Zach Heinzerling, Emily Kai Bock, Jeremy Saulnier, Michael Cera, Josh Mond, Toby Halbrooks and Ana Lily Amirpour.

More recently, Joe shot the reboot of the popular English series “TOP BOY” with director Reinaldo Green, for which he received a BAFTA nomination for best cinematography.

**COLIN PATTON (EDITOR)** is a wildly talented editor based in Los Angeles. Many of Patton’s film and TV credits come from his long-standing partnership with director David Gordon Green; starting as Craig Alpert’s 1st assistant editor on Columbia Picture’s PINEAPPLE EXPRESS and most recently working on two episodes of “DICKINSON” for Apple TV+ and Anonymous Content. Over the years, Patton’s collaborations with Gordon Green have garnered widespread festival attention at the likes of Venice Film Festival (IFC’s MANGELHORN and Lionsgate’s JOE) and the Toronto International Film Festival (Warner Brother’s OUR BRAND IS CRISIS), including Gordon Green’s Silver Bear Grand Jury Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival for PRINCE AVALANCHE, starring Paul Rudd and Emile Hirsch.

Patton also worked on Jeff Baena’s LIFE AFTER BETH for A24, starring Aubrey Plaza; Universal Pictures’ PITCH PERFECT 3, directed by Trish Sie and starring Anna Kendrick; and was an additional editor on David Oyelowo’s THE WATER MAN, which recently premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Other television credits include seasons 1 and 2 of David Flebotte and Jim Carrey’s “I’M DYING UP HERE,” which was an official selection at SXSW, and season 1 of NBC’s “THE GOOD PLACE,” created by Michael Schur.

**KEVIN WALSH (PRODUCER)** is an Academy Award®-nominated film producer with over two decades of experience in the entertainment business. Over the course of his diverse career, Kevin has worked alongside four major movie and music moguls – Ridley Scott, Steven Spielberg, Scott Rudin, and Tommy Mottola – and has established himself as a leading producer in cinema.

Kevin is President of Scott Free Productions, Ridley Scott’s film production banner, where he most recently wrapped production on 20th Century Studios’ THE LAST DUEL, directed by Ridley Scott and starring Academy Award® winner Matt Damon, Adam Driver, Jodie Comer, and Academy Award® winner Ben Affleck. During his tenure at Scott Free, Kevin has produced DEATH ON THE NILE for 20th Century Studios and Walt Disney Studios, directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh, along with Gal Gadot and Armie Hammer; NAKED SINGULARITY, written and directed by Chase Palmer and starring John Boyega and Olivia Cooke; OUR FRIEND, directed by Gabriela Cowperthwaite and starring Jason Segal, Dakota Johnson and Casey Affleck; JUNGLELAND, directed by Max Winkler and starring Charlie Hunnam and Jack O’Connell; EARTHQUAKE BIRD for Netflix, written and directed by Wash Westmoreland and starring Academy Award® winner Alicia Vikander and Riley Keough; ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD for Sony Pictures and Imperative Entertainment, directed by Ridley Scott and starring Michelle Williams, Mark Wahlberg and Christopher Plummer; AMERICAN WOMAN, directed by Jake Scott and starring Sienna Miller, Christina Hendricks and Aaron Paul; and ZOE, directed by Drake Doremus and starring Ewan McGregor and Lea Seydoux. Kevin also helped oversee the release of ALIEN: COVENANT for 20th Century Fox, MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS for 20th Century Fox, and BLADE RUNNER 2049 for Sony Pictures and Warner Bros.

Prior to his position at Scott Free, Kevin oversaw THE GREATEST SHOWMAN for 20th Century Fox for producers Peter Chernin, Jenno Topping, and Laurence Mark. The film was directed by Michael Gracey and stars Hugh Jackman, Michelle Williams, Zac Efron and Zendaya.

Kevin earned an Academy Award® nomination for producing the critically-acclaimed drama MANCHESTER BY THE SEA along with Academy Award® winner Matt Damon, Kimberly Steward, Chris Moore and Lauren Beck. The film was written and directed by Kenneth Lonergan and stars Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Lucas Hedges and Kyle Chandler. MANCHESTER BY THE SEA was released by Amazon Studios and Roadside Attractions and was nominated for six Academy Awards®. In additional to winning Best Film by the National Board of Review, the film went on to win Academy Awards® for Best Actor for Casey Affleck and Best Original Screenplay for Kenneth Lonergan.

Kevin previously produced the psychological thriller THOROUGHBREDS for Focus Features along with Academy Award® winners Nat Faxon and Jim Rash. Written and directed by Cory Finley, the film stars Olivia Cooke, Anya Taylor-Joy, and the late Anton Yelchin. Kevin also produced the award-winning, comedy-drama THE WAY WAY BACK for Fox Searchlight Pictures. The film was written and directed by Nat Faxon and Jim Rash and stars Steve Carell, Toni Collette, Sam Rockwell, Allison Janney and Maya Rudolph.

Prior to his work as a producer, Kevin worked as a screenwriter and wrote screenplays for Working Title Films, Reason Pictures, Walt Disney-based Mayhem Pictures and The Sports Studio. He adapted his original comic book THE LEAVES into a feature film for Lionsgate Entertainment. He also adapted a children’s book series, PYRATES, for Summit Entertainment and Alloy Entertainment.

In production, Kevin helped manage the sets of three films – THE ADVENTURES OF TINTIN, MUNICH and WAR OF THE WORLDS – for Academy Award® winning director/producer Steven Spielberg with budgets of $130 million, $75 million, and $132 million, respectively.

Prior to his work for Mr. Spielberg, Kevin was an assistant to Academy Award® winning producer Scott Rudin. At Scott Rudin Productions, Kevin assisted and traveled with Mr. Rudin as he produced seven films with a combined spending budget of over $200 million. The films included THE HOURS, THE ROYAL TENENBAUMS, IRIS, CHANGING LANES, ZOOLANDER, ORANGE COUNTY and MARCI X.

Kevin started his entertainment career as an assistant to the Chairman and CEO of Sony Music Entertainment, Thomas D. Mottola, and was later promoted to Production Coordinator where he helped oversee the production of albums for Mr. Mottola’s priority Sony artists.

In 2011, Kevin was named one of Variety’s “10 Producers to Watch.”

Born and raised in London, **MICHAEL PRUSS (PRODUCER)** holds a 1st Class Hons. Degree in English Literature & Drama from Royal Holloway, University of London, and an MFA in Film & TV Producing from Chapman University in Southern California.

After beginning his career at Steven Spielberg’s company DreamWorks in 2005, Michael worked at Paramount Pictures as an assistant in Production & Development before joining Focus Features as a Creative Executive in 2007. While at Focus, Michael worked on projects such as Gus Van Sant's Academy Award® winning MILK starring Sean Penn, THE AMERICAN, starring George Clooney, and the animated feature CORALINE from Henry Selick.

Michael joined Indian Paintbrush as VP of Production in November 2010, and oversaw the acquisition of Drake Doremus's Grand Jury Prize winning film LIKE CRAZY (starring Felicity Jones and the late Anton Yelchin) at the Sundance Film Festival, 2011, which Paramount Pictures and Indian Paintbrush co-released in the Fall of 2011. Michael co-produced the director’s follow-up film BREATHE IN, starring Guy Pearce, Felicity Jones and Amy Ryan.

Since joining Scott Free in 2013, Michael has produced EQUALS - which had its World Premiere in Competition at the 2015 Venice Film (and was acquired for distribution by A24) - starring Nicholas Hoult and Kristen Stewart, and also produced Stewart’s short–film directorial debut, COME SWIM, that screened at Sundance and Cannes 2017. Pruss also collaborated with Drake Doremus on NEWNESS that also had its World Premiere at Sundance 2017 and was subsequently acquired by Netflix. The film stars Nicholas Hoult, Laia Costa and Danny Huston.

Michael's most recent collaboration with Doremus is the futuristic love story, ZOE, that was chosen as the Centerpiece Gala title at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival and was acquired for distribution by Amazon. The film stars Ewan McGregor, Lea Seydoux and Theo James.

In spring of 2017, Michael produced Jake Scott’s film AMERICAN WOMAN from an original script by Brad Ingelsby, starring Sienna Miller, Christina Hendricks, Aaron Paul, Will Sasso and Amy Madigan. The film had its world premiere at the 2018 Toronto Film Festival and was acquired for distribution by Roadside Attractions and Vertical Entertainment in the U.S. and Sony Pictures for International. The film was released in the US in June 2019 and internationally the following month.

Michael recently produced Wash Westmoreland's EARTHQUAKE BIRD, a Tokyo-set female-driven noir thriller starring Alicia Vikander, Riley Keough, Naoki Kobayashi, and Jack Huston. The film is based on Susanna Jones’ acclaimed novel of the same name and was fully financed and subsequently released by Netflix in November 2019.

**RYAN STOWELL (PRODUCER)**most recently produced Chase Palmer’s heist thriller, NAKED SINGULARITY, starring John Boyega, Olivia Cookie, Bill Skarsgård, and Ed Skrein; and Max Winkler’s JUNGLELAND, starring Charlie Hunnam, Jack O’Connell, Jessica Barden, and Jonathan Majors, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2019 and will be released by Paramount Pictures and Vertical Entertainment in November.

He previously executive produced Jake Scott’s drama AMERICAN WOMAN, starring Sienna Miller, Christina Hendricks, and Aaron Paul, which debuted at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival and was released by Roadside Attractions in June 2019.

Stowell also executive produced the psychological thriller, THOROUGHBREDS for Focus Features, along with Academy Award® winners Nat Faxon and Jim Rash, Kevin Walsh, and Alex Saks.  Written and directed by Cory Finley, the film stars Olivia Cooke, Anya Taylor-Joy, and the late Anton Yelchin.

Stowell previously co-produced the critically-acclaimed drama MANCHESTER BY THE SEA. The film was written and directed by Academy Award® winner Kenneth Lonergan and stars Academy Award® winner Casey Affleck, Michelle Williams, Lucas Hedges, and Kyle Chandler. MANCHESTER BY THE SEA premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for six Academy Awards® including Best Picture, winning two Academy Awards® for Best Original Screenplay and Best Actor.

Stowell is a native of Kensington, CT. A graduate of James Madison University, he began his career as an assistant to Emmy nominees Mark and Adam Kassen on their independent drama PUNCTURE starring Chris Evans. Stowell then joined Sony’s Columbia Pictures, where he assisted Senior Vice President of Production, DeVon Franklin.

In 2014, Stowell transitioned to Vice President of Production at B Story, a film and TV production company founded by Academy Award® winners Nat Faxon and Jim Rash and producer Kevin Walsh. In January 2017, Ryan was hired at Scott Free Productions, Ridley Scott’s production banner, where he served as Senior Vice President of Production.

Stowell resides in Santa Monica, CA and is an active volunteer at The Painted Turtle, a satellite camp of Paul Newman’s SeriousFun Children’s network.

**TEDDY SCHWARZMAN (PRODUCER)** serves as President & CEO of Black Bear Pictures, and oversees all operations of the company, including development, production, finance and strategic planning.

Schwarzman has produced a range of content, a sampling of which includes THE IMITATION GAME, Academy Award® winner for Best Adapted Screenplay and nominated for eight Academy Awards® including Best Picture; J.C. Chandor’s ALL IS LOST, which earned Robert Redford the Golden Globe® nomination for Best Actor; SUBURBICON, directed by George Clooney and starring Matt Damon, Julianne Moore and Oscar Isaac; BEN IS BACK, written and directed by Peter Hedges, starring Julia Roberts and Lucas Hedges; GOLD, starring Matthew McConaughey, Dave Franco’s THE RENTAL, and upcoming film I CARE A LOT, written and directed by J Blakeson, starring Rosamund Pike, Peter Dinklage, Eiza Gonzalez, Chris Messina and Dianne Wiest.

Schwarzman has also served as Executive Producer of Dee Rees’ MUDBOUND, nominated for four Academy Awards®, and Heidi Ewing’s upcoming film, I CARRY YOU WITH ME.

A member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Producers Guild of America, Schwarzman also sits on the Board of Directors of Elevation Pictures Corp., one of Canada’s leading film and television distributors, and serves on the Leadership Committee of the antipiracy nonprofit, CreativeFuture. Schwarzman earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Pennsylvania and a Juris Doctor, cum laude, from Duke University School of Law, where he also sits on the Board of Visitors.

**BLACK BEAR PICTURES**is a boutique media company that develops, produces and finances original and engaging content for film and television. Since its 2011 launch, Black Bear’s slate has grossed over $325,000,000 worldwide, been nominated for thirteen Academy Awards®, nine Golden Globes® and ten BAFTAS, and premiered at prestigious festivals such as Cannes, Sundance, Venice, Telluride, Toronto, New York, and London.

Black Bear has produced a range of content, including THE IMITATION GAME, Academy Award® winner for Best Adapted Screenplay and nominated for eight Academy Awards®, including Best Picture; ALL IS LOST, directed by J.C. Chandor, which won the Golden Globe® for Original Score and earned Robert Redford a Golden Globe® nomination for Best Actor; SUBURBICON, directed by George Clooney and starring Matt Damon, Julianne Moore and Oscar Isaac; GOLD, starring Matthew McConaughey, and nominated for one Golden Globe®; and Dee Rees’ MUDBOUND, starring Jason Clarke, Garrett Hedlund, Carey Mulligan, and Mary J. Blige, which garnered four Academy Award® nominations.

Black Bear’s recent films include Dave Franco’s directorial debut THE RENTAL released by IFC earlier this year, Academy Award® nominee Peter Hedges’ BEN IS BACK, starring Julia Roberts and Lucas Hedges, which premiered at the 2018 Toronto International Film Festival, and Academy Award® winner Casey Affleck’s film, LIGHT OF MY LIFE, which premiered at the 2019 Berlin International Film Festival.

Upcoming films include Heidi Ewing’s I CARRY YOU WITH ME, which won the Audience and Innovator Awards in the Next section at Sundance and, following its run at NYFF, will be released by Sony Pictures Classics in January 2021; J Blakeson’s thriller I CARE A LOT, starring Rosamund Pike, Peter Dinklage, Eiza Gonzalez, and Dianne Wiest, which was acquired by Netflix following its lauded TIFF 2020 premiere; Chad Hartigan’s LITTLE FISHstarting Olivia Cooke and Jack O’Connell, which was recently acquired by IFC Films and will be released February 2021.

**SCOTT FREE PRODUCTIONS**, formed in 1995, is the film and television production vehicle of acclaimed filmmaker Ridley Scott. The company is responsible for some of the most successful films ever made – including TOP GUN, GLADIATOR, BLADE RUNNER, ALIEN, AMERICAN GANGSTER, THELMA AND LOUISE, BLACK HAWK DOWN, TRUE ROMANCE, SPY GAME, MAN ON FIRE, and DAYS OF THUNDER. Scott Free films have received over 60 Academy Award® nominations.  Recent films include Wash Westmoreland’s EARTHQUAKE BIRD for Netflix, starring Alicia Vikander, Riley Keough and Jack Huston; James Kent’s THE AFTERMATH, starring Kiera Knightley, Alexander Skarsgard and Jason Clarke; and Jake Scott’s AMERICAN WOMAN, starring Sienna Miller and Christina Hendricks.  Other films include the Academy Award® nominated and critically-acclaimed box office phenomenon THE MARTIAN, starring Matt Damon and Jessica Chastain; the football drama CONCUSSION, starring Will Smith and Alec Baldwin; Ridley Scott’s ALIEN: COVENANT, starring Michael Fassbender, Katherine Waterston and Billy Crudup; BLADE RUNNER 2049, directed by Denis Villeneuve and starring Harrison Ford and Ryan Gosling; MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS, directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh opposite Johnny Depp and Michelle Pfeiffer; Ridley Scott’s Oscar®-nominated ALL THE MONEY IN THE WORLD, starring Christopher Plummer, Michelle Williams and Mark Wahlberg; and Drake Doremus’ ZOE, starring Ewan McGregor and Léa Seydoux. Upcoming films include Ridley Scott’s THE LAST DUEL, starring Matt Damon and Ben Affleck; Chase Palmer’s directorial debut NAKED SINGULARITY*,*starring John Boyega; the highly anticipated MURDER ON THE ORIENT EXPRESS sequel DEATH ON THE NILE*,* directed by and starring Kenneth Branagh with Armie Hammer and Gal Gadot also set to star; Gabriela Cowperthwaite’s OUR FRIEND, starring Jason Segel, Dakota Johnson and Casey Affleck; Max Winkler’s JUNGLELAND, starring Charlie Hunnam, Jack O’Connell and Jessica Barden; Alice Gu’s documentary THE DONUT KING; as well as the recently announced Andrés Baiz’ thriller PANOPTICON; KITBAG starring Joaquin Phoenix as French military leader and emperor Napoleon; and an untitled project surrounding the Gucci family fashion dynasty and the murder of Maurizio Gucci, in which Lady Gaga will star as Patrizia Reggiani, his ex-wife.