

Interview: Director Todd Looby Premieres 'Be Good' at Chicago's Gene Siskel Film Center

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CHICAGO – One of the Chicago filmmakers to watch is Todd Looby. The director, who has won awards for his short film "Son of None" at Slamdance 2011 and the Boston Film Festival, premieres his latest feature film, "Be Good," on June 22nd at the Gene Siskel Film Center in Chicago.

Looby has been producing films since 2007, when his first feature, "The Site," was screened at the Iowa Independent Film Festival. His second film, "Lefty" (2009), was recognized as one of the Top 10 Movies of 2009 by Chicago Tribune's Metromix. He followed that up with his award-winning short "Son of None" (2010), which he produced while filming a web series in Liberia. "Be Good," is a personal statement, based on his own experiences becoming a new father.

The film is an excellent slice-of-life regarding new parenting and those first few months. Paul (Thomas J. Madden), is a stay-at-home Dad, while his wife Mary (Amy Seimetz) reluctantly ends her maternity leave in caring for their new daughter Pearl (portrayed by the director's daughter, Tessa). What transpires speaks to fatherhood, the bond of mother to child and the new landscape for child raising responsibility in the post millennium. The premiere of "Be Good" will be at the Gene Siskel Film Center in downtown Chicago at 8:15pm on June 22nd. HollywoodChicago.com spoke to Todd Looby on the day before his premiere.



Amy Seimetz (Mary), Tessa Looby (Pearl) and Thomas Madden (Paul) in 'Be Good'
Photo credit: ObrigadoProductions.com

HollywoodChicago.com: This is obviously an autobiographical film. What incident or series of incidents in your own life first inspired you to make it a screenplay and film?

Todd Looby: I initially conceived of the story when I had a two week period in taking over the primary care of our daughter. During that time I felt kind of stuck, in the sense that I didn't realize the amount of work it would take and that I couldn't fulfill my work as an independent filmmaker. I needed the time to work to get something out there, in order to get to the actual filmmaking work. I was fully unable to do that, because taking care of a baby takes up all the time. So we were stuck in a situation where my wife wanted to stay at home, but we were doing the opposite.

That period did end relatively quickly, but I took all of the anxiety that I felt during that period and hyperbolized it into something dramatic, adding fictional elements to make it more into an exciting story.

HollywoodChicago.com: Your own daughter plays the baby Pearl in the film. From concept to finished script to production, what was the timeline that allowed for the casting of your daughter and how long was the shoot?

Looby: From concept to start of production was about two months at the most. There wasn't a whole lot of time for pre-production. I came up with the idea, put together a six page detailed outline, and called people to see if they were interested. About a week before production, I started scripting it out a little bit more, so I would have a better idea of what I wanted for the shoot.

We shot for one week with Amy Seimetz, that's all we had for her. We used almost every minute during that time. We then shut down for a month while Thomas Madden went to do a show for ABC, and then started back up in late July of 2011, and shot for one more week and that was it.

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the process of bringing Amy Seimetz aboard, and how was your shooting relationship during that week.

Looby: I was thinking about different young actresses who were doing good work and would fit the role's profile. I also wanted to branch out beyond Chicago, so I contacted Joe Swanberg and asked him if he could give me contact information for Amy. He did, and Amy talked on the phone, and after about a half hour we were both sold on working together on the project.

HollywoodChicago.com: The subject of parenting is always personal and somewhat touchy. Since you portray a sense of stark honesty in 'Be Good,' what statement are you making about babyhood parenting, that you think nobody else has made?

Looby: The reason I wanted to tell this story because I was interested in the moral hierarchy that a person goes through when becoming a parent. Everyone knows that things will change when having a kid, we just didn't know how it would change. When I refer to 'moral hierarchy' I'm talking about what's good for yourself, what's good for your family and what is good for the outside world. You find in the actual parenting practice how those things conflict.

There is also definitely a movement where mothers have to go back to work, even when they don't want to. These are educated women, and they are ambitious, but there is a connection between the mother and baby that is to be respected, and it was very eye-opening on how biological and endearing that is. I haven't seen either of those topics before.

HollywoodChicago.com: There is a sense of intimacy in your shooting style for this film. What were you trying to accomplish by making the confined atmospheres of cars, apartments and office become as much as a character as the roles in the film?



Todd Looby, Writer/Director of 'Be Good'
Photo credit: ObrigadoProductions.com

Looby: I liked that you used the word confine, because what I was saying about that two week period I referenced is that you do really feel confused about your environment. Your whole world shifts, and you feel that the possibilities that were once open to you are not there anymore, and you have to learn to re-navigate in the world. We shot it in such a way that the spatial confinement could reflect on what was going on inside the characters.

HollywoodChicago.com: You include independent Chicago filmmaker favorite Joe Swanberg in a key cameo within the film. Was this scene based on some real advice Swanberg gave you, or are you using him to represent the struggle of balance that all new parents endure in this situation?

Looby: We never had a real conversation like that. When I thought up that scene, what I basically wanted was for someone to have the opposite experience as Paul. The situation was basically true, obviously Joe had made all these films while he was parenting, and I wanted Paul to feel unproductive in comparison.

Another thing that happens during child-rearing in the first six months, that nobody really thinks about, is the sleep issue, in how much that affects your life. If you have a well-sleeping baby, your life is much different than someone who doesn't have that. There is an undeniable sense of even jealousy when you hear of a baby who sleeps. [laughs] 'Oh, what I wouldn't do for six hours of sleep.' That is something that Joe and Paul talks about in the film, which real parents do all the time. 'How are they sleeping?'

HollywoodChicago.com: What was the decision behind you becoming a character in the film as T.J., sort of a Greek chorus observing your own life? Was it to make the project easier or was it to get your acting chops back?

Looby: The whole reason I direct films is because I love acting, so instead of waiting around to be cast, I just taught myself filmmaking to put me into my own films. I acted in my first feature, didn't in my second, so I felt was I ready to get back into it again. In this film also, I really trusted my Director of Photography, and felt like I didn't have to monitor his shots. I love acting, so it was fun.

HollywoodChicago.com: How did the subject matter of your award winning short film – ‘Son of None’ – inform you later about the preciousness of life regarding your own daughter, and what also informs your optimism for a better world for your daughter in the future?

Looby: If there was a connection between ‘Son of None’ and this film, it was totally subconscious. Why I made ‘Son of None’ was to portray the preciousness of life in its most humanly undesirable form. That wasn't necessarily a realization when we had a baby, it just brought it home more.

As far as optimism towards the future, we have to see what happens. Parenting is more discussed now, people are trying new things and what was once new-age is now integrated in popular parenting culture. That gives me optimism, because the struggles we had the first six month of her life has paid off now, in how great a kid she is. When we really put our own desires aside, and focused on her, she turned out right and hopefully will be a compassionate and good person. That does form my optimism, amid things that are not so optimistic.

"Be Good" premieres at the Gene Siskel Film Center on June 22nd, 2012, and will have seven additional screenings through June 28th. [Click here](#) [16] for dates and times. Featuring Thomas J. Madden, Amy Seimetz, Todd Looby, Joe Swanberg and Tessa Day Looby. Written and directed by Todd Looby. Not Rated.



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