

## PRODUCTION NOTES



Directed and written by **Jonathon Newman**

Produced by **Deepak Nayar**

Starring **Toni Collette, Ioan Gruffudd, Maurice Cole** and  
**Richard E. Grant**

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## INTRODUCTION

Multi award-winning actress **Toni Collette** (*Little Miss Sunshine, Sixth Sense*) stars as Zooley, alongside **Ioan Gruffudd** (*Fantastic Four, W*) who stars as her husband Alec. They are joined by BAFTA-nominated actress **Anne Reid** (*Cemetery Junction, Savage Grace*) starring as Zooley's mother Diane, **Richard E. Grant** (*Wah Wah, Love Hurts*) as the mysterious Mr Potts, OSCAR-winning **Hayley Mills** (*Wild At Heart*) as Mrs Lange and young newcomer seven year-old **Maurice Cole** who stars as the little boy Eli, sent to help a couple in emotional turmoil.

### SYNOPSIS

Zooley and Alec Morrison are a married couple who have been unable to heal the wounds caused by the death of their 5 year old son several years ago.

Now unable to conceive, the Morrisons await confirmation of a child to foster.

One day, a 7 year old boy who calls himself 'ELI' appears on their doorstep quite mysteriously, explaining the foster agency has sent him.

The boy is old beyond his years and it becomes apparent that he is the listening ear amongst the couple's marriage breakdown. The boy offers moral support and idealistic suggestions to his foster parents on how to repair and re-ignite their love for each other.

Adored by his foster Mother and admired by his foster Father, the couple begin to rebuild their foundations at home, at work and emotionally until they find the love they once had for each other.

Miraculously, Zooley discovers she has conceived - a baby is on the way.

Simultaneously, Eli mysteriously disappears... leaving only a letter on his bed. Furthermore, the agency has no record of this child. It appears he never existed in the first place...

The feel-good feature film was shot on location in and around London for six weeks and is a Reliance Big Pictures and Starlight Films production in association with Kintop Pictures, Bent Nail and Serendipity Films. International Sales are being represented by Simon Crowe of SC Films International.

## INTERVIEWS WITH THE CAST AND CREW

### Toni Collette

Toni plays Zooney who is married to Alec and is mother to their little boy who died five years previously. She explains why the role appealed so much to her: "It was the script and it was the story. I think it's such a beautiful story about two people who are drifting apart and brought together by a very special child and I think it had a real purity to it – it's very funny and clever. It has great depth and poignancy – and when you can marry those things in a script, you're onto a winner because it reflects reality."

Toni is quick to praise the young Maurice Cole who plays Eli: "He's been absolutely incredible. I can't think of one scene where he hasn't absolutely nailed it. I cannot wait to see this film cut together because he's so honest in what he does and just from watching him on set I know that he's created a really special, memorable, cute, funny, brave and smart character."

The relationship between Zooney and Alec is very interesting as they are coping with the loss of their child in completely different ways. As Toni explains "Zooney is eager to mend what's gone wrong and is desperate to have another child because she's looking for ways to bring a child into their lives. Alec has shut down and is completely closed. I suppose if you go through something like losing a child, it's going to be very intense emotionally and people deal with it in different ways and you see him re-emerge throughout the film. His initial response to having Eli in his life is that he doesn't want him there at all but he goes through the motions for his wife who he can see is more enthusiastic and eventually he's infected."

Toni praises the other cast members enormously and explains that the great group of people added to her fantastic experience of making the film: "I think the cast and the crew have been really special and all contributed so much to the telling of this story. Working with Ian was a true pleasure; he's a great actor and just a lovely person. Richard E Grant is a lovely guy and a brilliant actor and I've been watching him in films since I was a teenager. He's got such a good heart and he's very funny and witty and always has a story to tell."

When asked if she has enjoyed working on the film, Toni replied: "I bloody loved making this movie! I love what it has become given the tiny budget. In the first week we were shooting out in the foster home and I looked through the lens and thought

'there is no way in the world people would have a clue that this film only cost 3 million pounds.' It looked so opulent and rich and I think there are so many talented people who have worked on this film and for me that's what it comes down to – a mixture of telling the story and getting caught up in it but also hanging out with good folk and enjoying an experience together. It has been a laugh – definitely."

### **Ioan Gruffudd**

Ioan plays Alec, Zoey's husband, he tells us how he became involved in the film: "My journey to coming to play Alec in this film was a very quick one. I read the script on a Monday morning from cover to cover, fell in love with it immediately, ran and told my wife 'I'm off to London for six weeks' and four days later, I was literally on the set playing the part. It was a very quick transition from reading the script to actually performing it. It was a bit of a shock to the system and I had to hit the ground running but it has just been a wonderfully pleasurable experience."

Ioan tells us a little bit more about his character: "Alec Morrison is married to Zoey and works in a toy factory making and selling toys. The man who we first meet in the film is in turmoil for many different reasons. His company is going through the recession and is about to fall apart – he's up to his eyeballs in debt and we see that he is emotionally tormented because he's mourning the loss of his child. He's a character who is slightly cold and distant at the beginning of the film – somebody who isn't instantly friendly but hopefully empathetic and as the story progresses you see why he's behaving like this; especially the way he is towards Eli – a seven year old boy they've decided to foster."

As Ioan explained, one of the greatest things for him about his job is that he gets to work with people he loves and admires: "In my opinion, Toni is one of the greatest movie actors of all time. I think she's just an extraordinary actress and a brilliant human being so as well as being over excited I was a little bit petrified to step onto set with such a powerhouse but she's brilliant, she just like one of us but she is also extraordinarily talented. Toni made me raise my game because I had to match her incredible performance."

Working with Jonathan Newman who Ioan described as 'talented and full of confidence' helped Ioan with his performance: "You have to have confidence especially when you are at the helm because it permeates down towards the rest of the crew and certainly us as actors. It puts you at ease because you know somebody is in real control."

Ioan believes that the film will stand the test of time: "it's a movie that everyone can enjoy and draw great pleasure from."

## **Maurice Cole**

Maurice plays Eli, a seven year old boy, old beyond his years who turns up at Zoey and Alec's doorstep. It becomes apparent that he is the listening ear amongst the couple's marriage breakdown. Eli is very different from the average child, as Maurice explains: "He has really big words and expressions like mortgage, bank security, markets, subprime mortgage business lenders, recession and 'arigato' which is Japanese for thank you. He dresses in a suit everyday with a clip on tie."

Maurice very much enjoyed working with Ioan, predominantly because he told lots of funny jokes. Maurice tells us one: "Austria is Hungary so he takes a bit of Turkey, puts it in Japan and eats it off China."

With many children likely to be very jealous of Maurice's acting role, he has some words of advice: "Just practice everything basically, practice acting, practice words, practice everything you need."

## **Richard E. Grant**

Richard plays the mysterious Mr Potts, he tells us about what the film is really all about, "Love, love, love, love love, never give up hope and nothing is ever what it seems. I think that what the great late John Lennon said shortly before he was murdered that 'life is what happens in between your plans' aptly fits what happens in this story in that you're going along one path and you think 'this is how it works' but in reality a whole lot of things are going on."

On a more personal note, Richard has a lot of respect for his fellow cast members: "My favourite part in making this film is absolutely unquestionable – working with and being around Toni Collette and Ioan Gruffudd because they are such good souls who have great senses of humour and who don't take themselves seriously."

## **Jonathon Newman**

Jonathan Newman directed an award winning short version of the film in 2005 which was sold to HBO and BBC. As Jonathan explains "Foster began life as a short film which I made in 2005. Cut to five years later and here we are with a feature film!"

Introducing the film, Jonathan says "Alec and Zoey Morrison, played by Toni Collette and Ioan Gruffudd are a couple whose relationship is on the rocks. When we come into their lives in the beginning of the film, they are a couple who are struggling with their relationship. At the same time, his business, a toy manufacturing

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business he inherited from his father, is also going downhill mainly due to the economy and also the crisis which happened in their life about two years ago, which was the tragic loss of their son. This little boy Eli suddenly comes into their life and is the catalyst in causing transformation."

Jonathan knew who he wanted to play the parts straightaway. "I have always been an enormous fan of Toni Collette ever since I saw her in *Muriel's Wedding* and then I watched her in numerous films including *About a Boy*, the *Sixth Sense* and *Little Miss Sunshine*. She's got the most incredible emotional range which she seems to be able to access quite easily. She was my first choice and I was just delighted that she accepted and I think after that it was very easy to assemble the rest of the cast. We had a good script, we had Toni attached and then loan came on board."

Eli is played by seven year-old Maurice Cole who plays the part with great maturity as Jonathan explains, "It's a very big role for a seven year old to have to tackle especially because he's got some very complicated dialogue - he's using dialogue that adults use. He really rose to the challenge, at one point I think he's talking about the recession and sub-prime mortgages and it's phenomenal to hear that kind of dialogue coming out of a seven year old's mouth."

Mr Potts, played by Richard E. Grant whose most notable role came in the film *Withnail and I* plays a rather mysterious character who lives in Chelsea Gardens. Jonathan tells us, "We first meet him in the film when Zooey takes Eli for a walk into the gardens and Mr Potts is there and chats to them. In the beginning she is a bit taken aback by this homeless man who has started up a conversation with her but as we progress with the story he appears more and more and gives advice to the characters. There is one really lovely scene where Alec, trying to forget his troubles, goes into Chelsea gardens and finds Mr Potts and spots a swarm of fireflies and sits next to him and has a conversation. They just sit in the moonlight and fireflies fly away into the night sky. There's a little bit more to Mr Potts than meets the eye."

There are many hidden messages in the film, one of which is summed up very eloquently by Mr Potts. As Jonathan explains, "Mr Potts is talking about not living life in the past and ultimately, the message in this film is about living life in the present because everything passes you by. Ultimately the characters are stagnated by the trauma that happened in their lives a couple of years before and as a result are unable to move forward in their lives. When Eli comes into their lives and causes this transformation, they're able to really connect with the present."

Jonathan tells us what he is most proud of in the film: "I think for me a really good film starts with the script and we put a lot of work and thought into the script and I was very happy with it before we started production. To be able to work with amazing actors and see the incredible performances that they delivered and being able to bring these characters to life has been great. I made the film the way I wanted to make it and I believe it's a credit to the cast and the performances."

When asked what type of audience Jonathan was aiming for, he reiterates just how crucial it is to think of your audience right at the very beginning: “that’s a discussion myself and Deepak had when we went into this and we said ‘who are we making this film for?’ and at the beginning that was an adult audience. However we thought that we would be excluding children and families if we just went down that road so we rethought it and I rewrote the script for a family audience. I really feel not only adults but children alike will not only enjoy the film but also relate to it.”

Jonathan is extremely proud of Fosters and he hopes that “the audience will come away with a sense of how important family is. Ultimately this is about a couple who transcend their past and the trauma of their past and resurrect their relationship so as a result it has a very uplifting message.”

### **Deepak Nayar**

Deepak is the producer of Foster. He tells us how he became involved in the film: “Jonathan sent me this short called ‘Foster,’ which I thought was absolutely brilliant. It had the right balance of humour and emotion and it just stayed with me. I remember the very one Sunday morning I sat at a coffee shop in Hampstead and hashed out the idea of what would then become the film. And from there the idea developed further and further and whole film got put together very quickly.”

Deepak sums up the film beautifully: “It is a story about a couple who love each other but are falling apart because they desperately want to have a child but cannot. A very precocious child comes into their lives and makes them live and enjoy life as they have forgotten to do so.”

Although the film has some rather sad and upsetting moments, Deepak hopes that the audience comes away feeling uplifted: “Enjoy life. Don’t let the moment bog you down. The whole idea behind bringing Eli into the story was that he comes into these couples’s lives who are drifting apart. He joins them together again and allows them to enjoy life.”

Deepak has a lot of respect for Jonathon, which he further elaborated: “I would say that Jonathan is a very calm director. And as they say, everything starts from the top. If the top is not happy it trickles down and everybody runs around like mad people. Because Jonathan is sure of what he needs to get, he exudes calmness. Therefore the set stays calm”

## BIOGRAPHIES

### Toni Collette

Toni Collette is an Australian actress and musician, known for her acting work on stage, television and film.

Toni has won many awards including Theatre World Award "Outstanding New Performance in a Broadway production" for *The Wild Party* (2000), Tony Award Nomination "Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Musical" for *The Wild Party* (2000), Hollywood Film Award Nomination "Hollywood Actress of the Year Award" for *The Sixth Sense* (2000), Academy Award Nomination "Best Performance by an Actress in a Supporting Role" for *The Sixth Sense* (2000), Golden Globe Awards Nomination "Best Actress Musical or Comedy" for *Muriel's Wedding* (1996). She also received a BAFTA nomination in 2003 for Best Actress in a supporting role - for *About A Boy*.

Toni has finished filming *Like Minds* with Richard Roxburgh and has also starred alongside Steve Carell and Greg Kinnear in *Little Miss Sunshine* directed by Jonathan Dayton and Valerie Faris.

### Ioan Gruffudd

Ioan began acting in his teens in his hometown, of Cardiff, Wales. At 18 he enrolled at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in London. He has played leading roles in major film and television projects such as his well known character in '*The Fantastic Four*' franchise as Mr Fantastic, directed by Tim Story. He also starred in the critically acclaimed '*Amazing Grace*', alongside Albert Finney. However, it was his title role in the award winning ITV miniseries '*Hornblower*' that earned him adoration with both fans and critics.

Ioan Gruffudd continues to show his versatility as an actor with a wide range of projects. Ioan has finished filming '*The Kid*' directed by Nick Moran, in which he plays the character of Colin Smith, alongside Natasha McElhone, Rupert Friend and Jodie

Whittaker; a story about a boy growing up on a poverty-stricken council estate in London.

2008 was an extremely busy year for Ioan Gruffudd. He was seen in the fantasy adventure film *'The Secret of Moonacre'* directed by Gabor Csupo. He also played the voice of the title character in the animated film *'Agent Crush'*, and appeared in *'Fireflies in the Garden'*; a story which centres on the complexities of love and commitment in a family torn apart when faced by an unexpected tragedy. Directed by Dennis Lee this contemporary drama also co-stars Julia Roberts, Ryan Reynolds and Willem Dafoe.

Also in 2008, Ioan was seen in *'Meant to Be's'*; a pilot for CBS which is based on a romantic drama about a woman who has been brought back from the dead to help improve the lives others. Ioan also played the role of Tony Blair in Oliver Stone's drama *'W'* which chronicles the life and presidency of George W Bush. He starred alongside Josh Brolin and Thandie Newton.

His extensive television credits include the ITV hugely successful miniseries *'The Forsyte Saga'* with Damian Lewis and Gina McKee; the lead role in the TV adaptation of Tony Parson's novel *'Man and Boy'*; and he played Pip in Tony Marchant's *'Great Expectations'* with Charlotte Rampling and Justine Waddell.

Ioan's other film credits include: *'King Arthur'* directed by Antoine Fuqua and starring Clive Owen and Keira Knightly. *'Black Hawk Down'* directed by Ridley Scott and co-starring Josh Harnett and Ewan McGregor; *'102 Dalmatians'* co-starring Glenn Close and Alice Evans; *'Soloman and Gaenor'* and the award-winning *'Titanic'* directed by James Cameron and Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio.

## **Maurice Cole**

Maurice Cole, now 10 years old trained at D&B Theatre School. Foster is his first acting role in a film. Other credits include a commercial and still photography for Tesco and Currys.

## **Richard E. Grant**

Richard studied English and Drama at University in Capetown, South Africa and began acting soon after. In 1982, he moved to London and made his English TV-film debut in *Honest, Decent and True* (1985). The next year, he featured in *Withnail & I* (1986), and *How to Get Ahead in Advertising* (1988).

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Grant's American film credits in the early 90s include some of Hollywood's respected productions. He co-starred as the husband of Anais Nin in *Henry & June* (1990). He also played the mad English villain opposite Bruce Willis in *Hudson Hawk* (1991). Grant had supporting roles in Robert Altman's *The Player*, and Francis Ford Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (both 1992), as Dr. Seward. He worked with Martin Scorsese, in the adaptation of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1993), as a smug member of New York's high society. He reteamed with Altman for *Pret-a-Porter* (1994) as an eccentric homosexual and portrayed a grieving widower coping with a newborn in *Jack and Sarah* (1995). Next, he played a wealthy suitor to Nicole Kidman's Isabel Archer in Jane Campion's *Portrait of a Lady* and appeared as Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Trevor Nunn's film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Other film credits include: *Zambezia*, *Cosi*, *The Nutcracker*, *Cuckoo*, *Love Hurts*, *The Garden of Eden*, *Filth and Wisdom*, *Penelope*, *The Corpse Bride*, *Colour Me Kubrick*, *Story of an African Farm*, *Bright Young Things*, *Monsieur*, *Gosford Park*, *The Little Vampire*, *Christmas Carol*, *The Match*, *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, *Spice World*, *All for Love*, *Food of Love*, *Serpents Kiss*, *Portrait of a Lady*, *The Cold Light of Day*, *La Story*, *Killing Dad* and *Mountains of the Moon*.

Other television credits include: *Miss Marple*, *Above and Beyond*, *Frasier*, *Posh Nosh*, *Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Trial and Retribution*, *Scarlett Pimpernel*, *A Royal Scandal*, *Karaoke*, *Hard Times*, *Suddenly Last Summer*, *Honest*, *Decent*, *Legal and True* and *Here is the News*.

Other theatre credits include: *God of Carnage*, *My Fair Lady*, *Otherwise Engaged*, *The Play that I Wrote*, *The Importance of being Earnest*, *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*, *Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Man of Mode* and *Tramway Road*.

Richard wrote and directed *Wah Wah* in 2010.

## **Jonathon Newman**

Jonathan Newman is a British born writer and director. He grew up in LA and got the film bug at an early age, making short films on video. He is a graduate of the Northern Film School in Leeds.

In 2008 he was shortlisted out of 50,000 for the Hospital Club's top 100 media talents in the film category, voted for by industry peers around the country.

In 2008 his film "Swinging with the Finkels" which stars Martin Freeman, Mandy Moore, Melissa George, Jonathan Silverman, Angus Deayton and Jerry Stiller was a runner up for the FX/Filmaka competition.

Jonathan is credited as an assistant author on *The Guerilla Filmmakers' Movie Blueprint*, the best-selling book on independent film.

### **Deepak Nayar**

Deepak Nayar began his career producing films in his native India before making the move to Hollywood where his collaborations with renowned directors such as Wim Wenders, David Lynch and Mika Kaurismaki have helped make him among the world's fastest-rising and most sought-after independent producers.

In addition to his work on the Merchant-Ivory films *Heat & Dust* and *The Deceivers*, Mr. Nayar produced David Lynch's *Lost Highway* and Wim Wenders' *The End of Violence*, which debuted at the 1997 Cannes Film Festival. More recently he co-produced Wim's *The Million Dollar Hotel*.

Other forthcoming projects include *Harlem Aria* from the first time director William Jennings, starring Damon Wayans and Paul Sorvino and *Bhopal Express*, the true story of India's Bhopal chemical explosions, a tragedy that left hundreds of thousands of innocents dead.

Other films Deepak has produced include *City of Ghosts* (2001), *Delivering Milo* (2000), *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2000), *Harlem Aria* (1999) *Buena Vista Social Club* (1999) *L.A. Without a Map* (1998) (executive) (1999) *Without a Map* (1998) *The End of Violence* (1997) (1997) *Lost Highway* (1997) and *White Dwarf* (1995).

Television series Deepak has produced include *Hotel Malibu* (1994) *Hotel Room* (1993) *Second Chances* (1993) *On the Air* (1992) *The Deceivers* (1988) and *Heat and Dust* (1982).

Other films Deepak has been Second Unit Director or Assistant Director include *Storyville* (1992) (first assistant director) *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me* (1992) (first assistant director) *Wild at Heart* (1990) (second assistant director).

Other films Deepak has been Production Manager in include *The End of Violence* (1997) (unit production manager) and *Lost Highway* (1997) (unit production manager).

