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The AFI FEST Interview: ONE WEEK AND A DAY Director Asaph Polonsky (AFI Class of 2012)

Description

For Eyal and Vicky, it is the end of Shiva, the seven-day Jewish mourning ritual when a bereaved family opens their home to visitors. Grieving the death of their 25-year-old son, the couple tries to return to their lives in different ways. Vicky is eager to get back to teaching her elementary school students, while Eyal tries to make use of his sonâ??s remaining medical marijuana from hospice. Unable to roll a joint, Eyal enlists the help of their neighborâ??s son, a stoner sushi deliverer named Zooler. Dentist appointments, kittens, annoying nymphomaniac neighbors, ping pong and air guitar are all fodder in Israeli-American filmmaker and AFI alum Asaph Polonskyâ??s (Class of 2012) feature debut. ONE WEEK AND A DAY is a dramedy about the unimaginable yet common grief of two surviving parents. Wry and moving but decidedly unsentimental, it finds absurdity in life after death.

AFI spoke to Asaph Polonsky about the film, screening in the New Auteurs section of AFI FEST 2016.

AFI: Why did you choose comedy as the genre to tell this story about grief?

Asaph Polonsky

Asaph Polonsky: The idea for the film first came to mind (and heart) when the girlfriend of a good friend of mine passed away. We were a bit younger and she was sick for a long time. It was a surprise when it happened, and he called to tell me that she had died just a few hours ago. With a few other friends I went over to his place. We were sitting there, with nothing to say until someone asked: â??Do you still have any of her medicinal weed?â?• Into such a tragic moment came a really funny one. Just the question itself made us all feel uncomfortable, but also released some tension.

That was the first thought of it. Also, I love comedies and I thought that dealing with such a tragic story, it should be told in a humorous way; there are tons of absurd moments in this kind of situation and it makes the drama more powerful when you are allowed to laugh.

AFI: How did this idea come to you?

AP: When my aunt was sick and passed away I noticed how everyone [dealt] with it differently, thereâ??s no right or wrong way and it is all very subtle; I wanted to investigate that. In the film, they are both dealing but not dealing. Vicky, the mom, on the surface is dealing, but inside she is broken and has no clue how to move forward, despite trying to show otherwise.

AFI: Your lead actor Shai Avivi is a professional comedian. What did he bring to the character of Eyal that surprised you?

AP: Many think that the role of Eyal was written for Shai, but that is completely the opposite. Once I met him for coffee and got to know him and not just his persona, I felt that he would not only be able to bring what was on the page, but also make it his own. Because Shai is naturally funny, we never had to play and push the humor but just had him in the moment. Itâ??s amazing what he can do with a few crumbs on a table, a shoe and a bowl. You canâ??t write that stuff.

AFI: A great strength of the film is that there are a number of instances in which your characters â?? who are in denial to a certain extent, or at least trying to forget the pain of losing a son â?? say one thing while clearly feeling (or even doing) another. Can you discuss how you handled this as both the screenwriter and director?

AP: I tried to stay true to the idea that itâ??s about people in denial. They have been living in pain for a long time, so why do they need to talk about it and confront it if they donâ??t have to? The pain and

loss is in every frame and moment, but they are just trying to keep head above water and live. So it was all about giving them clear actions to get through the scene. The script was sparse, without flashy descriptions, just actions and dialogue that were needed. The casting process was long so by the time the actors got the roles, they knew who they were. I only did one blocking rehearsal (on location) prior to the shoot, and had them spend as much time as possible together.

Free tickets to ONE WEEK AND A DAY will be available on AFI.com beginning November 1.

(Source: http://www.blog.afi.com)

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