

REEL SUSPECTS

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PRINTER FRIENDLY

SURFACING

A film by Lindsay MACKAY
95 min, Canada, 2014
Colour, HD & DCP

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Sam is a self-conscious and stubborn 14-year-old girl, finding it difficult to fit in. She finds strength in the underwater world her lifeguard course provides. But insecurity takes over when her unwillingness to change out of her bathing suit in front of the more developed girls becomes a point of ridicule. It's this fear that leaves her with a wet bum. Her solace from the bullying is Lucas, her handsome and empathetic lifeguard instructor, who reaches out to help.

After a skinny dipping prank goes awry, mom punishes Sam by making her work cleaning the family-run retirement home. As the days pass, Sam develops unexpected friendships with two of the retirement home's residents, who teach her about growing up...and growing old.

LONG SYNOPSIS

It's spring term in a small town: swimming lessons, hanging out with your best friends, new classes and new possibilities. But this year, things are different for 14-year-old Sam. Her friends are moving on, focusing on boys, experimenting with drugs, while Sam is too uncomfortable to even take off her bathing suit in front of the other more developed girls.

The community pool is where her deepest insecurities and raging hormones express themselves. Sam is constantly bullied and teased by the other girls at their lifeguard-training course. The only solace she finds is underwater where she begins to fixate on the teenage legs of Lukas, her 17-year-old

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swimming instructor, as they dangle in the pool. Over the course of the semester, Sam finds herself in over her head and out of her comfort zone attempting to gain Lukas' attention.

To make matters worse, Sam falls victim to a skinny-dipping prank set by her former friend Molly at the local pool. Furious, her mother forces her to take some responsibility and work as a cleaning lady at the family-run retirement home. This is not how Sam imagined her year.

As Sam becomes increasingly isolated from her friends and family, she gravitates towards two residents: Judith, a mysterious woman who keeps a watchful eye on Sam, and Ed, an erratic and grumpy widower determined to escape to his old home. Sam searches for answers: What were their lives like before? What secrets do they still carry with them? Ed initially shuts out Sam completely. But as the two slowly get to know one another they discover they are more alike than they think.

In an attempt to get close to Lukas, Sam convinces him to help Ed return to his old home. At this crumbling old farmhouse, Lukas shows a frightening side that turns Sam's world upside down, while Ed plays the unlikely hero giving Sam the self-respect and courage to stand up to Lukas and Molly.

At its core, SURFACING is a unique coming-of-age story that spans generations, in which both the young and the elderly come to rely on one another to grow up.

DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Lindsay MacKay is a graduate of the Directing program at the AFI Conservatory in Los Angeles, where she was granted the distinguished Franklin J. Schaffner Fellow and Richard P. Rogers Spirit of Excellence Awards, and her thesis film won the esteemed College Television Award (the Student Emmy). Her work has screened at festivals worldwide including SXSW, AFI Fest, Palm Springs International ShortsFest and Camerimage.

SURFACING is the feature film debut for MacKay, and made her a Top 10 Finalist in the prestigious Zoetrope Screenwriting Competition. She is currently developing a feature length version of Clear Blue.

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CAST

JULIA SARAH STONE (Sam) is an award-winning actress who, in 2012, was recognized by Nylon Magazine as an actor about to break out in their glowing review of the hit Canadian indie feature *The Year Dolly Parton Was My Mom*, Stone's debut feature film role.

In 2011, she won Best Lead Actress in Vancouver's POV Film Festival playing a dying young girl helping her mother accept death in *Ellipse* (short film), for which she was also nominated for an LA Young Artist Award in 2012. In 2012 she won the coveted Best Performance in an International Feature Film for her break out role in *The Year Dolly Parton Was My Mom*, where she played a pre-teen experiencing an identity crisis upon learning that she's adopted. Stone continued to be an indie film darling when she received a Best Actress award at LA WebFest 2012 for her work in the hit Canadian web series *My Lupine Life*.

Since then, she appeared in the Lifetime Movie Network's *The Pastor's Wife*, The Hub Network's *The Haunting Hour*, The CW's *Emily Owens MD* and the Canadian indie feature *Vampire Dog*.

She recently captivated audiences as a series regular on AMC's Emmy-nominated series *The Killing*. Coming roles include appearances in the Charlie Kaufman-directed FX pilot, *How and Why* alongside Catherine Keener, Sally Hawkins, John Hawks, and Michael Cera, and the role of Mina in the feature film *Everything Will Be Fine*, with James Franco, Rachel McAdams and Charlotte Gainsbourg.

CRAIG ARNOLD (Lukas) is best known as series regular Luke Baker on the hit teen drama show *Degrassi: The Next Generation* and as a recurring character on *Heartland* (CBC). Other guest starring roles include *Played* and *Spun Out* (CTV), *Bomb Girls* (Global), and *Haven* (Showcase). He's also had principal roles on *Lost Girl* (Syfy/Showcase), *King* (Showcase) and *The Firm* (Global).

Arnold first appeared on the big screen in Jason Buxton's award-winning *Blackbird*, a film festival favorite that premiered at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival, winning the Best Canadian First Feature Film Award, a nomination for the International Critics' Award (FIPRESCI), and later received the Claude Jutra Award at the 2013 Canadian Screen Awards.

KENNETH WELSH (Ed) is a veteran theatre actor who has starred in the North American premieres of Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing*, Andy Bergman's *Social Security*, Sam Shepard's *Curse of the Starving Class*, David Mercer's *Ride a Cock Horse*, Edna O'Brien's *Virginia*, Christopher Hampton's *Treats*, and *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune* by Terence McNally opposite Kathy Bates. He also starred in the revival of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* at the Lincoln Center, with Stockard Channing. He wrote and performed his cabaret piece "Standup Shakespeare", off Broadway, directed by Mike Nichols.

Welsh's list of film and television credits is as impressive as it is long. Recently, these have included *The Art of the Steal*, *The Story of Luke*, *Survival of the Dead*, *Nothing Really Matters*, *Adoration*, *The Last Templar* (NBC), *Grey Gardens* (HBO). Other favourites include *Love and Hate*, *Empire Inc.*, *And Then You Die*, *Loyalties*, *Margaret's Museum*, *Perfectly Normal*, *Twin Peaks*, *Hiroshima*, *Adrift*, *The Aviator*, *Heartburn*, *The Day After Tomorrow*,

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Four Brothers, The House on Carroll Street, Absolute Power, The Exorcism of Emily Rose, Legends of the Fall, and Crocodile Dundee II.

DIANA LEBLANC (Judith) has been an influential and important force in the Toronto theatre community for many years. As an award-winning director, actor, and artistic director of vision and inspiration, she has worked extensively in both French and English theatre. She has directed more than a dozen productions for Théâtre français de Toronto (TFT).

Leblanc has directed several lauded productions at many Toronto theatres including the Harold Green Jewish Theatre, Tarragon Theatre, Mirvish Productions (the highly successful *Copenhagen*) and Soupepper Theatre - of which she is a founding member - in addition to her work with TFT. She has also worked extensively outside Toronto: for the Stratford Festival, Ottawa's National Arts Centre, Montreal's Segal Centre for the Performing Arts and the Manitoba Theatre Centre, among others.

For Soupepper, her credits include *Farther West, The Zoo Story, A Streetcar Named Desire, Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf, Doc* and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (which she previously famously directed for the Stratford Festival and was subsequently made into a film).

LEAH PINSENT (Mary Ellen) is a multi-nominated, three-time Gemini award winner, along with other nomination nods for Canadian Comedy Awards and Genies. Among her numerous credits are most recently: *Flashpoint* as a courageous woman who struggles with the kidnapping of her husband; *Sunshine Sketches Of A Little Town* as a shy spinster looking for love; *18 to Life* as a lesbian biker chick; *Murdoch Mysteries* as a stern school headmistress; and *Republic of Doyle* as an RCMP officer.

Most recent features include *Eating Buccaneers*, playing a new-age graphic artist and *The Bend* as an alcoholic mother who lost her son to suicide. Pinsent had also a recurring role on *ReGenesis*, starred as Veronica in the five-year run of *Rick Mercer's Made in Canada* and acted in various Ken Finkleman productions.

JAMIE JOHNSTON (Nate) is best known for his role as Peter in the teen drama series *Degrassi: The Next Generation*. Johnston was a series regular for six seasons on the Emmy-nominated series, which landed him a Young Artist Award for Best Actor. He also received Young Artist Awards for Best Actor in a TV series for his role as a series regular on *Wild Card* (Lifetime) and for Best Actor in a TV movie for his lead role *The Tenth Circle* (Lifetime).

Johnston has also appeared as a series regular on *Zixx Level One* (YTV); in recurring roles on *Really Me* and *Connor Undercover* (Family Channel); and in principal roles on *Wingin' It* (Family Channel), *Rick Mercer Report* (CBC), *Todd and the Book of Pure Evil* (Space), *King* (Showcase) and *Played* (CTV). His feature film credits include a lead role in *Degrassi Goes Hollywood* and the thriller *Love Me*, as well as a principal role in *Jesus Henry Christ*, starring Michael Sheen and Toni Collette.

JENNA NYE (Molly) makes just her third feature film appearance in *SURFACING*. She first appeared as a supporting actor in *Life of Crime*, starring Jennifer Aniston and Tim Robbins, which closed the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival. Nye then played Brittany in the film *Life After Beth*, starring Anna Kendrick and John C. Reilly.

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CREW

A production by : Clique Pictures – Devonshire Productions – Buck Productions

Producers : Lauren GRANT, Paula DEVONSHIRE, Sean BUCKLEY

Director: Lindsay MACKAY

Scriptwriter: Lindsay MACKAY

Cinematographer: Guy GODFREE

Production Designer: Rose LAGACE, Lisa SOPER

Line producer : Jonathan A. WALKER

Music (composer): Brendan CANNING, Ohad BENCHETRIT

Production Sound mixer : Stephen BOURNE, Neil MCINTYRE

Editor : Jorge WEISZ

Digital Colourist : Lorriane GRANT

Costume Design: Ruth SECORD

Make-up : Oriana ROSSI

Casting : John BUCHAN – Jason KNIGHT

Producer - PAULA DEVONSHIRE owns Devonshire Productions Inc. (DPI), a Toronto-based production company specializing in developing and producing domestic and international films and television series.

DPI produced Real Time starring Jay Baruchel and Randy Quaid, which opened Slamdance 2008 and had its Canadian premiere at TIFF and the legendary George A. Romero's Survival of the Dead, which premiered in Venice followed by TIFF 2009. Devonshire produced the sequel and prequel to the critically acclaimed Ginger Snaps. Devonshire also works in television where she produced "Pure Pwnage", "Men With Brooms", and John's Grisham's "The Firm". DPI's most recent production is the psychological thriller The Dark Stranger starring Katie Findlay, Enrico Colantoni and Stephen McHattie.

Paula is currently in post-production on Atom Egoyan's Remember, which she co-produced. Devonshire has several projects in development including Backwater with director Rachel Talalay (Tank Girl, Dr. Who), Dead & Buried with director William Phillips and Warg an international co-production with Sweden's Solid Entertainment.

Producer - LAUREN GRANT runs Clique Pictures, a Toronto-based film and television company focused on working with female creative talent both in front and behind the camera. The Hollywood Reporter named Grant one of 15 Talents to Watch in their Next Gen Canada 2014 edition.

Grant produced the feature film Picture Day with Tatiana Maslany (Orphan Black), and the futuristic short film Frost, which both premiered at the 2012 Toronto International Film Festival and have screened at numerous film festivals. Picture Day won the Borsos Competition for Best Film at the Whistler Film Festival and the Audience Award at the River Run International Film Festival. Frost was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award. Clique Pictures also produced the Genie award-winning short film, a residential school musical, Savage. Her upcoming transparent fashion documentary Traceable will premiere on MTV, Bravo, M3 and e! in Canada and Pivot in the United States in April 2015. Grant is developing the romantic comedy The Art of Being Busy, the post apocalyptic lesbian thriller Riot Girls and the supernatural comedy The Evil Shed. She is currently in pre-production on the feature documentary Metamorphosis.

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Producer - SEAN BUCKLEY has been running Toronto-based Buck Productions for more than 15 years. Buck Productions creates and produces feature films, branded content, television, commercials, documentaries and music videos.

Throughout his career, Buckley has produced several successful feature films including dramas *A Beginner's Guide to Endings* with Harvey Keitel, and *Unrivaled* with MMA great Rashad Evans; action film *Defendor* with Woody Harrelson; and comedies *Cooper's Camera* with Jason Jones and Samantha Bee, *Running Mates* with Henry Winkler, and *Servitude* with Dave Foley, and most recently *The Privileged*, starring Sam Trammell.

Buckley's television credits include *Our Family Vacation* (Travel + Escape), and he serves as executive producer for the doc-reality series *The Project Guatemala* (CityTV) and *McMorris & McMorris* (MTV), featuring two competing snowboarding brothers. Close to his heart is a documentary called *Leave Her to Die*, which focuses on a Thai home for HIV+ children. The documentary screened across North America and all \$800,000 raised from the project was directed back to the home in Thailand. Buckley is an in-demand speaker on industry panels and has lead him to being included on Realscreen's Global 100 list, honouring the top independent production companies.

Executive Producer - DANIEL BEKERMAN is based in Canada with broad experience in creative producing, financing and service production. *The Witch*, a U.S./Canada co-production, recently won the Best Director Award at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and made major sales to Universal and A24. *Bang Bang Baby*, a musical directed by Cannes Residency alumnus Jeffrey St. Jules, starring Jane Levy, Justin Chatwin and Peter Stormare, won the Best First Feature Film Award at the Toronto International Film Festival and the Best Picture at the Santa Barbara International Film Festival. It also won the Best First Feature Award at Canadian Screen Awards. *The Pin*, a WWII set love story that the NY Times called "A Revelation" and *The Husband*, directed by Bruce McDonald, which The Huffington Post called their favourite of TIFF, were both theatrically released in 2014.

Pay the Ghost, directed by Uli Edel and starring Nicolas Cage, and *The People Garden*, written and directed by Nadia Litz and starring Dree Hemingway and Pamela Anderson, are currently in post-production. Daniel is currently in production on *Army of One* directed by Larry Charles (Borat), and *2 Lovers* and *a Bear* directed by Oscar nominee Kim Nguyen which stars Tatiana Maslany and Dane Dehan.

Executive producer - TIM NYE had a successful career as an internet innovator developing technology used in the early days of local search engines and developed one of the world's largest domain portfolios before selling to a large hedge fund to pursue philanthropic activities. Using a portion of the proceeds, he developed Abbolita Productions focusing on financing independent film and development.

Abbolita Productions was an executive producer on *Life of Crime* starring Jennifer Aniston, which was the closing night film at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2013, and is an Executive Producer on *Life After Beth*, a zom-rom-com starring Dane Dehaan, Aubrey Plaza and John C. Reilly, which premiered in the U.S. dramatic competition at the Sundance Film Festival 2014. Nye is also writing a science fiction script and co-developing a project based on life rights of a boxing personality.

Cinematographer - GUY GODFREE is a 12-year member of the International Cinematographers Guild, Local 667 and is a graduate of the American Film Institute Conservatory's Cinematography Program, in Los Angeles, CA. He was awarded the Eastman Kodak Gold Award for Excellence in Filmmaking for his Cinematography work on the film *Revelations* in 2010.

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His credits include the 2013 Whistler Film Festival selection Patch Town, 2011 Toronto International Film Festival selection Frost, which also received Best Canadian Short at the Edmonton International Film Festival, and Ten for Grandpa, which he also co-produced, premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival and won the Gold Hugo Award at the Chicago International Film Festival.

Editor - JORGE WEISZ has been an unstoppable force working on Peter Stebbing's Empire of Dirt, which premiered at TIFF and earned him both Canadian Screen Award and Canadian Cinema Editor's Award nominations, Copperheart's television series collaboration with Vincenzo Natali Darknet (Super Channel) and the feature The Pin (which has received rave reviews internationally). Weisz has also worked with Charles Officer on his short films 100 Musicians and The Truth about Rainbows. He has recently worked on the indie feature Pretend We're Kissing.

REVIEWS – CRITICS - AWARDS

This lovely feature debut goes swimmingly for MacKay thanks to a revelatory performance by young star Julia Sarah Stone... Quiet, reserved, but completely remarkable in her ability to convey a range of subtle emotions simply by using her eyes, Stone is quietly powerful. Sam's a darling, and SURFACING is almost impossible to resist.

CINEMABLOGRAPHER

A coming-of-age movie driven by sharp observations and a poetic sensitivity towards outcasts... SURFACING is graced by an exceptional lead turn from Julia Sarah Stone, whose performance is exquisitely crafted yet feels wonderfully devoid of guile... Featuring a stellar supporting cast and several wonderful set pieces, SURFACING is a poignant debut whose hard-won wisdom belies the youth of both its star and director.

STEVE GRAVESTOCK @ TORONTO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Julia Sarah Stone gives a performance of tremendous depth, spark and dramatic range... She has the emotional capacity to turn bleary-eyed in a heartbeat, but also the sly wit and gleaming smile to showcase the character's efforts to make something more of her boring, small-town life... SURFACING is a film of deep feeling and sensitivity, anchored by an astonishing and assured lead performance from its young star.

WE GOT THIS COVERED

FESTIVALS & AWARDS

2014 – Toronto International Film Festival (Rising Star) – **BEST LEAD ACTRESS** for Star Julia Sarah Stone

2015 – Santa Barbara International Film Festival

2015 – TIFF Next Wave

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2015 – Omaha Film Festival

2015 – Stockholm Junior Film Festival

2015 – Canadian Screen Awards, Nominee, Achievement in Visual Effects

ABOUT THE STORY

SURFACING was inspired by MacKay’s experience as a teenager working as a cleaner in her parents’ nursing home. She started writing the script in 2010 for a development class during her final year at AFI. “I had many other ideas but was having difficulty starting those scripts,” explains MacKay. “Barry Sabbath, my mentor at the time, told me to start writing something I knew just to get me started.”

Within two months, MacKay had written the first draft but was self-conscious about letting anyone read it. Sabbath suggested she enter the script into a few writing competitions to get past her fear. “I submitted it to the Zoetrope Screenwriting Competition and to my complete surprise it was a top 10 finalist with over 3500 submissions,” she recalls. “I was very shocked when I got the news.”

As a child, MacKay dreaded going to the nursing home with her parents. “It was like having hundreds of grandparents who all wanted to know what grade I was in, comment on how quickly I was growing and wanted me to spend time with them.” However, working there as a teenager forced her to get to know the residents on a personal level. “I began to open up to the possibility of connecting with an older generation.”

The ease with which she wrote SURFACING proved how important that time actually was. “I have come to discover that most of the themes in my work stem from my childhood and my experiences in the nursing home,” offers MacKay. “I was driven to write this story to create a conversation around these ideas and explore how different generations can find common ground by recognizing each other as individuals.”

The story charts the lives of people in transition. The themes of aging and love explored in the intergenerational story have direct links to MacKay’s own experience. “As I was entering an exciting period in my life – holding a boy’s hand and having a first kiss, - a man had lost his wife. As I was growing up, they were growing old.”

For MacKay, SURFACING is “an story important to tell, not only because it’s based on my personal experience, but because it’s universal. At its core, it’s a coming-of-age film for all generations. I’ve discovered that we’re always growing into who we are, and therefore, have to find solace in the moments of being in between.”

In time a mutual friend introduced Mackay to producer Lauren Grant. “I loved the story,” recalls Grant. Immersed in several other projects at the time, she suggested that fellow producer Paula Devonshire meet with MacKay. While in Los Angeles for the AFM, Devonshire decided to contact MacKay for a coffee. “I emailed her out of the blue,” recalls Devonshire. “We met and connected immediately.”

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Devonshire was initially interested in MacKay's short *Clear Blue*, and subsequently optioned the feature film rights. However, while reading the script for *SURFACING*, she found herself captivated. "It was a lovely, smart script with insightful views into youth, teen bullying and sexuality," explains Devonshire. She was also caught by the way in which MacKay's script spanned generations. "It's not just a youth story."

Grant agrees and adds. "It's not a teen movie in the traditional sense. Sam doesn't spend a lot of time with other teens. It's her relationships with the people she meets at the home which have the strongest impact on her maturation." "Lindsay's experience makes it different," continues Devonshire. "The story is about elderly people interacting with a teen – about an 80-year-old and a 14-year-old who become friends – they learn from each other and find hope where they least expect it."

In April 2013, Devonshire, Grant and Daniel Bekerman joined together to produce the script. Bekerman eventually withdrew from active involvement, but sent the script to Sean Buckley who joined Grant and Devonshire to produce and help with financing. Grant and Devonshire moved forward to develop and finance the project. During development, the filmmakers worked to "focus the story and reduce the page count," explains MacKay. "We also worked on fleshing out the characters arcs." The working script attracted financing from the OMDC, Telefilm, Super Channel and a private investor, all within the space of a month. "The speed with which we got the film funded speaks volumes about the quality of Lindsay's script," offers Grant.

ABOUT THE CAST AND CHARACTERS

With a strong personal connection to the character, MacKay was hoping for an exceptional actress to bring the role of Sam to the screen. "Sam is a young girl, who, like me at that age, is in a state of being in-between – being young and wanting to be reckless but not fitting in with her peers." The filmmakers cast a wide net to find someone who could play fragile and strong, honest and truthful.

Julia Sarah Stone quickly became the forerunner for the coveted role. Mackay was already familiar with the young actress' work in *THE YEAR DOLLY PARTON WAS MY MOM*, and considered her a strong actress. Her initial feelings were confirmed on viewing Stone's audition tape. "She sent in multiple readings so it was easy to assess her incredible range," recalls MacKay. The Vancouver-based actress then flew to Toronto for a callback. "She blew us away," continues MacKay. "She takes direction really well." Stone's evocative eyes were another strong point in her favour. "Julia's eyes have the ability to convey enormous depth," says MacKay. "I knew she could easily portray the shifting emotions needed to play Sam."

Stone had one more test to complete. With much of the story unfolding in the swimming pool, the filmmakers needed to confirm Stone's underwater skills. Devonshire explains. "Lindsay learnt in *Clear Blue* that an actor could be fantastic on land, but unable to be the same under water." A

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swimming test was quickly arranged to see if Stone could swim and emote convincingly. The filmmakers liked what they saw and Stone finally won the role.

The title SURFACING was an important aspect of the way Stone approached the role. “It’s symbolic of Sam’s self-consciousness and is a big part of her journey.” She was also intrigued by the way in which Sam’s adolescent yearnings speak to everyone’s experience. “She’s entering the next chapter of her life. There’s a lot of fear and apprehension about that’s going to mean, but she’s also very eager. Everyone can relate to being on the verge of change. Whether it’s growing up or growing old, it’s a huge transition. This is a story for everyone.”

The filmmakers turned to Canadian acting icon – Kenneth Welsh. “Kenneth views himself as more of a comedic actor and wanted the challenge of allowing his emotions to unravel as Ed does in the story,” recalls MacKay. “He said the older he gets the more sentimental he’s becoming. That’s true to the character and his arc. As he opens up to Sam, the story reveals its rawness and truth.”

Sam also develops a relationship with Judith, another resident at the nursing home. Veteran stage actor Diana LeBlanc’s audition elicited the desired reaction. “Diana embodies more space than her actual body. I remember Lauren saying that her audition brought her to tears,” says MacKay. LeBlanc found herself captivated “that there exists, even if it’s in this fictional realm, the possibility of a mute aiding a solemn 14 yr old, to find some kind of communication. Connections can be made in highly unexpected situations.”

Leah Pinsent plays Mary Ellen, Sam’s mother. Mary Ellen, a single parent with two teenage kids, runs a retirement home. “I don’t think she sleeps very much,” says Pinsent of the character. “The job is a constant worry and Mary Ellen’s trying to make ends meet. Mary Ellen adores her kids and is torn that her children, especially Sam, are growing away from her.”

“Leah captured what we hoped to find,” explains MacKay. “She’s the hard yet soft mom that’s got a little bit too much going on. I thought her and Julia could have a good rapport.”

MacKay describes the character Lukas, Sam’s swim coach and crush, as a complicated role. “As a swim coach, Lukas is an authority figure but he is also a young man looking for romance and then taking it too far.” She didn’t want the character to be a villain. In his audition, Craig Arnold was able to strike the right balance. “Craig blew us away,” says MacKay. “We were all creeped out and intrigued by him – a sign he’s a great actor.” For Arnold, “Lukas is both charming and scary. He starts off as a nice guy, but as the film progresses you start to see a different side of him, and begin to wonder about his motives.”

Jenna Nye plays Molly. Once Sam’s good friend, Molly has become best friends with new girl Melissa. “Molly wants to impress Melissa but Melissa also wants to impress Molly.” They bond with each other through picking on Sam. “At times I thought this is terrible, I would never actually say that,” says Nye. “I hope people take from Sam’s confidence at the end that you can’t actually do that to someone and that people learn about bullying.”

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Natalie Ganzhorn plays Melissa. “The film does a great job of addressing bullying. You see the stress it puts on Sam. You also get to see Sam learn to stand up for herself with confidence, which is something I hope everyone who is bullied finds.”

Jamie Johnson plays Sam’s older brother. He secured the role after doing a chemistry read with Stone. “Sarah and Jamie had a wonderful brother sister vibe,” recalls Grant. “He was cool enough that he’s not going to be worried about having a little sister around.” Johnson easily embraced the role of Sam’s protector. “Sam is getting into a little of trouble. I’m trying to keep her on the right side of the tracks; trying to protect her from her bully friends and swim coach.”

Stone shares a perspective on bullies she hopes audiences will take away from the film, “Kids bully each other because they feel uncomfortable in their own skin, being in that transition phase where they are afraid to grow up and not knowing what it means.”

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

“SURFACING was a very ambitious shoot,” explains Devonshire. “A lot of it was shot in a pool with underwater photography. We had minors and we had senior cast members, all of whom required different levels of consideration.” Fortunately for the filmmakers, Stone turned 16 a day before the shoot began. “That was a lucky break because we could treat her as an adult and maximize our shoot days.” The majority of the film was shot in Riverside Glen, a nursing home in Guelph, Ontario. Many of the residents offered their private spaces for the shoot. The pool sequences were shot in a pool in Stoney Creek.

First explored in her short *Clear Blue*, water again becomes an important aspect of MacKay’s aesthetic and metaphoric repertoire. “Water has a natural cinematic flow,” she explains. The underwater shots were photographed in slow motion to emphasize a “feeling of weightlessness.” She was driven to film water differently than she had seen it done. “I’d rather be close than far away,” she explains. “It’s about going underwater and finding a scene, evoke an emotion.”

Although this was the first time MacKay and cinematographer Guy Godfree have worked together; the two have known each other for several years having attended the AFI a year apart. “We have the same idea toward movies, about stories, that performances are paramount, and to do things that make sense,” Godfree explains. “SURFACING is about Sam’s exploration, and that is the key focus for everything we do.”

Godfree and MacKay worked closely to amplify the emotional possibilities of the pool scenes. “Water represents sexuality chaos and desire. It manifests itself in Sam’s insecurities and her budding relationship with Lukas and plays a key role in her growing sense of self and self-respect,” MacKay explains. “Being underwater also closes you off from the world so you can’t hear anything but your own thoughts. It was important for me to find a way to capture that visually.”

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“Lindsay is inspired by photography, art and landscapes and Guy got that,” offers Grant. “They developed a short hand with specific ideas for the style and tone. It was easy to get everyone to embrace her director’s vision.” Their collaborative relationship resulted in a dream creative match according to Sean Buckley. “Guy and Lindsay have accomplished something truly remarkable,” says Buckley. “At first glance, these very complex, layered portraits seem very simple, but each shot of the film takes on a whole other significance.”

The production design was used to evoke a distinct sense of time and place. The story is set in the ‘90s, revisiting the period before technology had been fully embraced. The filmmakers also made conscious decisions about the colour palette. Grant notes, “The blues, neutral colours and the bright pops of colour were selected specifically.” Those choices extend to the costumes. “Sam wears blues and greens, Judith’s nightgown is cream, Ed’s is brown and maroon, and only Mary Ellen’s had pops of colour. All these elements helped to create the world they live in.”

Sam’s bathing suit was an important way to show the character’s development. Stone explains, “A lot of people feel uncomfortable in a bathing suit and that awkwardness and vulnerability is very significant to Sam. Feeling uncomfortable in her body is an important phase that she learns to accept.”

The cast is quick to share praise of MacKay’s directing style. “The story is really important to Lindsay,” offers Stone. “It shows in her attention to detail but she is also open to creative input, even asking us to improvise here and there. She wanted to make sure the lines sounded natural.”

Kenneth Welsh adds. “I like that Lindsay gives you that time to work through, explore and try different rhythms.” He was particularly pleased with her direction during the scene when Ed tells Sam about his wife. “She suggested that I play it the way I played the moment when I came out of the car, when I was crying. And so I did and that was the one.”

As a fairly new actor, Nye appreciated the encouragement and guidance. “Lindsay would give me tips on what to do to get different approaches to a scene. We did a lot of background work. She’s such an amazing director, it was amazing to work with her.”

Leah Pinsent, who plays her on-screen mother, is equally effusive about the Julia Sarah Stone. “Julia seems fearless,” offers Pinsent. “For someone playing a character who has her own teen angst, she’s a very put together young lady. She’s wonderfully easy to work opposite. There was no ego involved, professional, straight forward, with a wonderful ability to be in the moment and improvise.”

“Julia has a very expressive face, very easy access to her emotions,” adds Welsh. “You can almost feel her thinking through what she’s doing except it doesn’t show. She takes and gives, works back and forth.”

The benefits of working on an independent film resonated with everyone involved with the project. “There was no entitlement, we all pull together, share ideas, go with the flow, you’re part of the solution,” explains Pinsent. It was an environment the filmmakers worked hard to achieve. “We’re hands on producers, we’re always thinking about how to make the best movie,” explains Grant. “It’s rewarding to work in a ‘how can we help you’ way,” adds Devonshire. “Both Lauren and Paula felt

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like family in the process of making this movie. We were united in our passion about the story we were telling,” says MacKay.

The filmmakers believe audiences will discover something new each time they watch SURFACING. Buckley comments, “The film is both simple and complex, and the messaging is casually presented for you to draw on and take what’s relevant to your own situation.

DIRECTOR’S INTERVIEW – SANTA BARBARA INDEPENDENT

How did this story come about?

One summer, when I was a teenager, my parents suggested I take a job at the nursing home as a cleaning woman. I reluctantly agreed. Working there meant I had to slowly get to know many of the residents on a personal level.

As the summer passed, I began to understand that this moment in these people’s lives wasn’t as peaceful as I had always imagined. As I struggled through the summer managing feelings of guilt, anger, and confusion, I discovered that many of the residents were struggling, too. They were angry that they were expected to gracefully step aside for a younger generation that didn’t understand or appreciate them. They felt the guilt of having lived a long life and not having accomplished all they set out to, and they shared in my confusion and fear of the uncertain.

As I was entering an exciting period in my life — holding a boy’s hand and having my first kiss — a man lost his wife. As I fought with my parents about responsibility and freedom, a woman was admitted to the nursing home because her family could no longer take care of her. As I was growing up, they were growing old.

I have come to discover that most of themes in my work stem from my childhood and my experiences in the nursing home. Dealing with the idea of mortality and aging in my youth caused me to become hyper-aware of how we as a society force this very individual experience into a very archetypal idea. We see old people as grandpas and grandmas, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, but, most frequently, as people who have lived their lives and have come to terms with the fact that world keeps going after they are gone. Through SURFACING, I hope to breakdown some of those stagnant models and shed light on the confusion and uncertainty we all face no matter our age.

We’re all attempting to give our life worth, and we place that worth in the things we collect, the people we love, and the people that love us. But what happens when the things we collect vanish, the people we love die or move on, and people who love us forget?

I was compelled to write this story because I wanted to create a conversation around these ideas and explore how different generations can find common ground through recognizing each other as individuals. Sam is a young girl, who, like me, felt like she was in a state of in-between, being young

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and wanting to be reckless but not fitting in with her peers because she was a late bloomer and a bit of an old soul.

Through that summer, I learned a lot about myself and what I value in other human beings. The residents at the nursing home reminded me of the value of connecting with people, as well as recognizing that we all have flaws and face a lot of uncertainty, but by being there for one another, we somehow manage to get through it all.

It touches on a range of issues — growing up, body image, bullies, first loves, manipulation, getting old — but which of these aspects do you think the audience most resonates with?

Honestly, I just hope the story resonates with them on some personal level and creates a conversation around these issues.

Tell me more about the opening sequence. What was intended by the floating people?

This is something that can be left up to someone's individual experience however I was interested in exploring idea of transcendence through bookending the story with the images of the three characters floating and then returning to these spaces at the end the film and all three spaces have changed. I hoped to subconsciously highlight the notion that we're all passing through. Mortality is unavoidable, life continues on past the limits of our own experience but we are all linked through our humanity and the cyclical nature of life.

A little too heady perhaps? Ha ha.

Where did you find the young actress? She does a great job.

Julia Sarah Stone had been on our radar but she was in British Columbia and we were auditioning and filming in Ontario. So we had her send in audition tapes — and it was pretty obvious from the start that she had immense talent. I Skyped with her and talked about the character and had she send in more tapes while we continued the search in Canada. Then once we had narrowed it down she flew out for chemistry reads and we pretty instantly knew she was the right fit for Sam!

And we were right. She did great job! We were very lucky to have her on this project. She is a rare talent, with great depth and the incredible ability to say so much with no words.