

**First Independent Pictures
Whitewater Films**

Nearing Grace

Directed by
Rick Rosenthal

Adapted from Scott Sommer's novel *Nearing's Grace* by
Jacob Aaron Estes

Opened theatrically October 2006; Available on DVD October 2007

RATED R / RUNNING TIME: 105 MINUTES

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NEARING GRACE

CAST

Rose Nearing	SHANNON DAY
Henry Nearing	GREGORY SMITH
Shep Nearing	DAVID MORSE
Blair Nearing	DAVID MOSCOW
Merna Ash	ASHLEY JOHNSON
Grace Chance	JORDANA BREWSTER
Lance	CHAD FAUST
Tripp	LOGAN BARTHOLOMEW
Strawberry	AMY MINDERHOUT
Spanish Teacher	RAISSA FLEMING
Clement C. Haydes	BRIAN DOYLE MURRAY
Studly Bartender	NOAH ROSENTHAL
Prom Band	THE DANDY WARHOLS
	COURTNEY TAYLOR TAYLOR
	BRENT DeBOER
	JOHN FELL
	CALEB SPIEGEL

NEARING GRACE

THE FILMMAKERS

Director	RICK ROSENTHAL
Screenplay	JACOB AARON ESTES
Based on the Novel	<i>Nearing's Grace</i> by Scott Sommer
Produced By	RICK ROSENTHAL SUSAN JOHNSON TRACY UNDERWOOD
Executive Producers	JOHN WELLS NANCY STEPHENS
Co-Producers	LAURA HOLSTEIN JACOB MOSLER
Director of Photography	DAVID GEDDES C.S.C.
Production Designer	MARK ZUELZKE
Edited By	MADELEINE GAVIN
Line Producer	JOEL HATCH
Associate Producers	RYAN PETERSON DOUG SUTHERLAND
Casting By	MATTHEW LESSALL, C.S.A.
Music By	JOHN NORDSTROM

Costume Designer CYNTHIA MORRILL

Music Supervisor LINDA COHEN

NEARING GRACE

SYNOPSIS

“What if the one thing you want is the last thing you need?”

Eighteen-year-old Henry Nearing grapples with this question in the coming of age drama “Nearing Grace.”

Set in the suburbs of New Jersey in 1979, Henry Nearing (Gregory Smith) is looking for love a little harder than the rest. His mother Rose died six months ago and his father Shep (David Morse) has been on a bender ever since. Brother Blair (David Moscow) is a self-styled acid casualty and best friend Merna Ash (Ashley Johnson) wants to be more than just friends. Searching for meaning, Henry sees Grace (Jordana Brewster) as the most alluring answer to his discontent. As interest turns to obsession, Henry drops out of high school a month before graduation to begin the process of facing up to his life.

Directed by Rick Rosenthal (“Bad Boys”) and adapted by Jacob Aaron Estes (“Mean Creek”) from a Scott Sommer novel, “Nearing Grace” features an outstanding ensemble cast that includes Gregory Smith (“Everwood”), Jordana Brewster (“The Fast & The Furious”), Ashley Johnson (“What Women Want”) and David Morse (“The Green Mile”).

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NEARING GRACE

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Since “Nearing Grace” revolves around a young man’s long and winding journey to adulthood, it is fitting that the story behind the making of the film is equally circuitous. The journey of Scott Sommer’s novel to the big screen began more than 20 years ago, when director Rick Rosenthal first discovered the book.

“The novel was a terrific read,” says Rosenthal. “It evoked Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Phineas in *A Separate Peace*, and Hermann Hesse’s *Siddhartha*.”

But despite his enthusiasm with the material, Rosenthal was forced to put his dream of helming a film adaptation on the backburner when other feature projects intervened and the Rosenthal-directed pilot “Life Goes On” became a ground breaking hit for ABC.

“With everything that was happening, I let the option on *Nearing’s Grace* lapse,” says Rosenthal. “But then, one morning about three years ago, I woke up thinking about the book and set out to find whether the rights were still available.”

Rosenthal set out to find out if the rights to the book were still available.

“I discovered that Scott Sommer had died several years before and the rights were held by his brother, Dean, who lived in upstate New York,” he says. “And then it turned out that Dean was married to a woman I had once dated in college! So, it definitely seemed like fate was trying to lead me back to *Nearing’s Grace*.”

Fate may have been on Rosenthal's side, but in order to bring the book to the big screen, Rosenthal first had to navigate the complicated labyrinth of independent film financing.

"We had a lot of people circling the project, and after months of trying to get it financed, I finally put up some of my own money," says Rosenthal. "Then we went back to some of the people who had invested quite successfully in my last feature, "Mean Creek" and they came aboard."

With the financing in place, Rosenthal and the film's producers set out to determine how to bring the book's multi-layered story to life on screen.

One of the first decisions they made was to subtly change the novel's title to reflect what they viewed as the theme for the film.

"For me, the film is very much about duality," says Rosenthal. "It's about life and death, about lust and love, about the literal and the abstract. So I felt that changing the title from *Nearing's Grace* to "Nearing Grace" gave it a more active duality. Not only is Henry nearing the character Grace, but by the end of the film, he is also nearing the state of grace."

These dualities and paradoxes run throughout the film's story and are one of the main reasons Rosenthal believes it is such a universal tale.

"It's a film about grief, desire, hope, and about how hard it is sometimes to be alive," he says. "It asks, 'What if the one thing you want is the last thing you need?' Everyone has to deal with that paradox at one time or another. Teenager or adult, sooner or later you will face that question."

Producer Susan Johnson adds, “The film is about getting caught in the middle between what you think you want and what the world is really presenting to you.”

Those choices are often more complex than they may seem on the surface, as Rosenthal points out.

“‘Nearing Grace’ is about uncovering what’s beneath the surface,” says Rosenthal. “Too often, we are guilty of taking appearances for granted and not looking deep enough. And the film has a number of surprising turns that flow from revelations about our main characters.”

The relationships between those main characters – particularly Henry’s relationship with Grace – are key elements the filmmakers believe audiences will find just as relatable now as they were in the film’s 1970’s setting.

“Every guy I know has had at least one ‘Grace’ in his life,” says Rosenthal. “Someone he knows is wrong for him, but the chemistry is too strong. I think the dilemma of falling for the wrong person occurs just as often in today’s world as it did in the 1970’s. With both men and women.”

Producer Tracy Underwood agrees. “We all responded strongly to the timeless feeling of the story. Although it’s set in the late 1970’s, it could take place anytime — anywhere.”

The task of adapting a timeless story that seamlessly blends drama, humor and emotion into an entertaining story was not an easy one and required a writer with an ability to blend genres.

The filmmakers tapped Jacob Aaron Estes, the writer of the Rosenthal and Johnson produced “Mean Creek,” which premiered at Sundance 2004, went on to screen at Director Fortnight at Cannes and was released later that year by Paramount Classics to great critical review.

“The tough part of any adaptation is to condense the story while preserving the essence of the book, its characters and evoking the environment in which the story is set,” says Rosenthal.

One of the key elements of Estes’ screenplay is the way the film’s ensemble cast of characters has been brought to life.

“Audiences will identify in some small way with every character in the film,” says Underwood. “The story revolves around Henry who is dealing with a myriad of issues. But beyond Henry, there is so much to connect to between the complexity of Grace, the pureness of heart of Merna, Shep’s damage and surprisingly the older brother’s perspective on this faltering family unit.”

To bring these complex characters to life, the filmmakers needed to assemble a talented group of actors that would be able to handle their own character’s intricacies, while fitting into the chemistry of the ensemble.

“We all knew that casting would be tricky,” says Underwood. “Although the role of Henry is paramount because he’s in every frame—the tapestry of how all the characters connected was crucial. Luckily, we had Matt Lessall on board as our casting director. He had developed a great working relationship with Rick and Susan the previous summer on “Mean Creek” and he did a tremendous job casting this film,” says Underwood.

For the lead role of Henry Nearing, the filmmakers turned to Gregory Smith, a talented young actor who has appeared in such films as “The Patriot” and “American Outlaws” and is best known for his starring role in the WB television series “Everwood.”

“Gregory Smith was incredible to work with,” Rosenthal says. “At times I felt I was in a flashback and working with a young Sean Penn again. At other times, he reminded me of Truffaut’s alter ego Jean-Pierre Leaud, while some days it was as if Buster Keaton had made an appearance. “

“Gregory brought an innocence to Henry that we weren't seeing in other actors his age,” says Johnson. “He's got this incredible resume, and yet he's managed to somehow escape the emotional trappings most young actors encounter, trappings which actually prohibit them from having significant range as they get older. And he's the most professional, focused person I've ever worked with. He's completely dedicated to his character, and that passion affects everyone he works with in a positive way.”

“Greg’s an old soul in a young body” adds Rosenthal, “and he brought an amazing maturity and esprit de corps to the filmmaking process. He’s very dedicated to his craft, but he also knows a lot about production – he’s been acting since he was five – and he asked smart questions and offered very helpful suggestions.”

Smith found himself instantly attracted to the project even though he first read it under some unusual circumstances.

“I was not actually having the best day in the world,” says Smith. “But when I read the script, it just totally turned my day around. I was floored and I called right away to find out more about it. I really connected to the story and felt like it had already happened to me. It cheered me up and I thought that if I could be in a movie that actually did that, then that’s what this business is all about.”

What most attracted Smith to the project was his character's emotional journey.

"You sort of join him at a stage in his life when things are not going his way," says Smith. "He's having some problems with his father and his brother and things are just not going well for him. The film is basically seeing him trying to figure things out, to process all this information and decide where he's supposed to be and what he's supposed to do."

The filmmakers were equally pleased with the two young women cast opposite Smith in the film – each of whom had to bring dramatically different characters to life.

Producers cast Jordana Brewster for the role of Grace, Henry's classmate and the school seductress that he believes is the girl of his dreams. Best known for her work in the blockbuster film "The Fast & The Furious", Brewster proved a shrewd choice for the alluring role of Grace.

"Jordana Brewster was Grace for me from the moment I met with her," says Rosenthal. "Her audition was just amazing – she lit up the screen. We probably met with fifty other potential Graces – including some really terrific actresses – but no one brought together the mix of looks and emotional complexity the way Jordana did.

"Jordana Brewster is sexy, and beautiful, and perfectly manipulative, yet she managed to find a way to make Grace vulnerable," says Johnson. "What first attracted us to Jordana was her resemblance to Ali MacGraw, whom we had all discussed as a prototype for Grace. And Jordana is a very curious person. She brought that sense of exploration to Grace in a subtle and interesting way."

Brewster welcomed the opportunity to take on a role in an independent film that was a far cry from many of the big-budget actioners she has previously worked on.

“It seems like every film these days is based on special effects or action and a lot of those huge-budget films are not really that intelligent,” says Brewster. “I was attracted to this movie because every character is very clearly defined and you care about all of them by the end of the script – that is incredibly rare.”

Playing Brewster’s polar opposite in the film is Ashley Johnson. As Merna, Henry’s next-door neighbor and longtime best friend, Johnson had to create a character that was a convincing draw for Henry while being a complete contrast to Brewster’s character.

Rosenthal had been a fan of Johnson’s work ever since he saw her play Mel Gibson’s daughter in the film “What Women Want”, but was still blown away by her performance in the film.

“Ashley has amazing vulnerability and great timing – and it was pretty apparent as soon as we met her in person that she was Merna,” says Rosenthal. “But who knew she could sing? We certainly didn’t – and everyone on the set was knocked out by Ashley in the scene in her bedroom with Henry when she sings ‘All By Myself.’”

“Ashley is a magical person to be around, and that energy jumps off the screen,” says producer Johnson. “You can’t help but love her, and root for her. Her portrayal of Merna binds the movie together.”

The actress was drawn to the project because of the simplicity of the coming of age tale.

“It’s a pretty simple story that I think a lot of people can relate to,” she says. “It’s about growing up, the things that happen in your life, the choices you make, and the roads you go down.”

Although “Nearing Grace” revolves around the story of three teenagers, casting the main adult role in the film was equally important. As Shep, Henry’s widowed father who is struggling with his own grief, actor David Morse added another layer of heart to the film.

“In casting David Morse as Shep, I think we all knew immediately that we’d found our father figure anchor,” says Underwood. “He’s only in a few scenes, but the emotional weight of that character and how he affects his son’s journey is so important to how the story unfolds in every single scene.”

Rosenthal adds, “David has such a powerful presence and I felt he gave Shep an amazingly poetic soul, even in his own grief, he was trying to be a father. I thought David made Shep both heroic and tragic at the same time and not a lot of actors can do that.”

With strong script and talented cast in place, the team behind “Nearing Grace” geared up for its five-week shoot. Although the story is set in South Orange, New Jersey, the production team opted to shoot the film in Portland, Oregon that marked a return to the locale in which Rosenthal & company had shot “Mean Creek” the summer before.

“We had gotten to know the area pretty well the previous summer during the production of “Mean Creek” and we were lucky to have a number of the same local people back working on our crew this time,” says Rosenthal. “That made it feel a little like an extended family.”

The extended family would be needed to pull off a complicated shoot that presented a number of difficult challenges.

“Creating a period piece on a limited budget is challenging,” says Rosenthal. “The wardrobe, the locations and the cars all have to reflect the late 1970’s – and that takes a lot of extra work. We also had an extended sequence in the rain that spanned three different locations and involved a motorcycle crash - that definitely stretched the resources and manpower of an indie film. The film was very ambitious – we had nights, rain, airplanes, a prom, scenes in a lake, a motorcycle crash, and a car blowing up.”

The production team also had to face the challenge of re-creating the 1970’s atmosphere. In order to accomplish that, the producers worked with the actors to develop the right look and feel for the film.

“Gregory, Jordana and Ashley each did a significant amount of research about the 1970’s,” says Johnson. “We sort of bombarded them early on with imagery and music and then let them go off and discover the period on their own. The film takes place in 1979, a year of huge transition. Disco was on its way out, punk was in, and clothing was all over the place. There were choices to make at every turn, and we really listened to what each actor felt was integral to his/her character with regard to defining 1979.”

“I try to work from an ‘image grid’ for each film I do” says Rosenthal, “a series of key images that help us visualize the time, the look and the feel of each project. Early on, we pulled a series of photos for each character and I think that helped each actor as well as the production designer and the cinematographer develop a common vision for the movie we were making.”

“The 1970’s were a time of ‘sex, drugs and rock and roll,’ and we wanted to capture that period, yet we still wanted to make the film feel contemporary and relevant,” says Rosenthal.

Towards the end of production, the filmmakers also had to deal with a scheduling conflict as Smith had to return to production on his television series “Everwood.”

“By the time we reached our final week, Gregory had already begun shooting the third season of ‘Everwood’ in Utah,” says Johnson. “This meant flying him back and forth between locations. At one point, he was up for 72 hours straight, but you would never know it from his performance. I made a bet with him that I would stay up as long as he did and I’m proud to say that I made it, crawling, to the end. I didn’t have to be on camera though!”

Despite the challenges of production, the “Nearing Grace” team was aided by a talented crew that added a great deal to the finished product.

Behind the camera was Director of Photography David Geddes, a veteran cinematographer and Rosenthal collaborator who has worked on a slew of films, and television series including “Halloween: Resurrection,” “Dark Angel,” and “MacGyver.”

“I was fortunate to have worked with David Geddes before and we had a strong relationship that let us keep our sense of humor throughout most of what went down,” says Rosenthal. “He did an amazing job lighting the film and it certainly doesn’t look like a small little indie.”

With Geddes handling the visuals, the production also received a big boost with the film’s music from an unlikely source.

“Our music supervisor helped us approach Courtney Taylor Taylor of the Dandy Warhols to play our prom band,” says Underwood. “It was great to have the input of such a unique musician who understands and supports the story so completely. In hiring John Nordstorm to compose our score, we found such a talented guy to find the right mix of the time and timelessness to create the mood of the film. And in searching for source, it was a blast to listen to track after track of our favorites as well as songs less familiar to create our characters’ playlists.”

With a textured story brought to life by a talented group of actors, “Nearing Grace” is the rare film that successfully blends comedy, drama, and the big and small moments that make life so interesting.

“It’s really a movie that has something for everyone,” says Underwood. “It’s a beautiful story about coming of age and dealing with significant loss, while dealing with the requisite perils of high school. I love that the story is complicated and layered.”

Johnson agrees that audiences are likely to connect with the film.

“We hope audiences will be drawn to the same things that appealed to us the first time we read the script,” she says. “We all responded to the 1970’s setting, the music, the clothes, the language, the sexuality and the timeless challenges that Henry faces.”

For Rosenthal, the film marks the culmination of a 20-plus year journey and represents a project unlike any with which he has ever been involved.

“I have never been involved with a film that has such a beautiful mix of comedy and drama, humor and heart,” he says. “This has been a 20-year journey and it’s incredibly satisfying to see “Nearing Grace” come together. So many people made amazing contributions to this film that I think it actually works on some levels we never even anticipated. I feel like everyone brought a lot to the party.”

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NEARING GRACE

ABOUT THE ACTORS

GREGORY SMITH (Henry Nearing)

Canadian born actor Gregory Smith has turned the industry upside down with his passionate performances, securing his place in the upper tier of Hollywood's hottest young actors.

He is best known for his work on the WB's critically acclaimed show "Everwood." Smith plays Ephram, opposite Treat Williams as his father, in the story of a family who moves to Colorado after the mother's death.

Smith has worked with some of Hollywood's biggest names, starring opposite Colin Farrell in the Warner Bros. film "American Outlaws," and opposite Mel Gibson and Heath Ledger in Columbia/Tristar's "The Patriot." His work in the Dreamworks film "Small Soldiers" earned him high praise from director Joe Dante. He began his film career at the early age of six and built up a lengthy resume with such films as "Leaping Leprechaun" and "Spellbreaker: Leaping Leprechaun 2," "The Adventures of Captain Zoom in Outer Space," a starring role opposite Richard Dreyfuss in "Krippendorf's Tribe," and starring with John Hurt in the independent film "The Climb."

His work on the small screen is equally eclectic and impressive, earning him the 1997 UNICEF Award at the Berlin Film Festival. Smith has appeared in "Street Justice," "Hat Squad," "Sirens," "The Commish," "Mom P.I.," "Fly By Night," "Meego," "Outer Limits," "M.A.N.T.I.S.," and "Are You Afraid of the Dark?" He co-starred with Francis Fisher in the NBC movie "The Other Mother, and starred

opposite Shelly Duvall in the Showtime film "My Teacher Ate My Homework," earning him the Young Artist Award for "Best Leading Young Actor." He also starred in Disney's television movie "Zenon - Girl of the 21st Century," still airing on the Disney Channel.

JORDANA BREWSTER (Grace)

This October, audiences will see Jordana Brewster starring in "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre" prequel. Directed by Jonathan Liebesman for New Line, the film promises to be another huge Halloween film. She was recently seen starring in "Annapolis" for Disney, opposite James Franco. Last year, Brewster was seen in the Sundance 2004 hit "D.E.B.S.," based on Angela Robinson's comedy short, which was released by Samuel Goldwyn Films in March 2005.

Prior to that, Brewster starred in Universal Pictures' Box Office hit "The Fast and The Furious" for director Rob Cohen. She also starred in "The Invisible Circus" for director Adam Brooks. The film, which premiered at Sundance 2001, also starred Cameron Diaz, Blythe Danner and Christopher Eccleston. Brewster also starred as Delilah in the science fiction thriller "The Faculty," for director Robert Rodriguez and Miramax's Dimension Films. She received critical praise for her work in the highly rated NBC mini-series, "The Sixties."

Brewster sharpened her acting skills on the daytime drama "As the World Turns." She divided her time between high school and her role as 'Nikki Munson' on the Emmy Award winning series.

Brewster took some time off after "The Fast and The Furious" to complete her degree at Yale University, she graduated in 2003. She has lived in Brazil, England and New York.

ASHLEY JOHNSON (Merna Ash)

Ashley Johnson was born on August 9th in Camarillo, California. From 1990-1992, Johnson starred as “Chrissy Seaver” on ABC’S “Growing Pains.” In addition to “Growing Pains,” Johnson would later make appearances on various notable television shows such as: “ER,” “Ally McBeal,” “Roswell,” “The Guardian,” and “Married to the Kelly’s.”

A Hollywood Reporter article proclaimed, "Johnson is a revelation. She is an unconventional beauty with the resources to suggest the longings and maturity of a young woman wise beyond her years." Johnson starred alongside Hugh Grant and Julianne Moore in 20th Century Fox's “Nine Months”; as Mel Gibson's daughter in “What Women Want” (directed by Nancy Myers) and in “Anywhere But Here” alongside Susan Sarandon and Natalie Portman (Directed by Wayne Wang).

Johnson has starred in two independent films in the past year: “King of the Corner,” as Isabella Rosalyn's daughter, and “Killer Diller” alongside Fred Willard and Lucas Black. In “Fast Food Nation” she stars with Ethan Hawke, Greg Kinnear, Bruce Willis and Patricia Arquette. The film was directed by Richard Linklater and is in competition for the 2006 Cannes Film Festival. Johnson was also the lead in the film "Pity Card" which was in the Sundance film festival earlier this year.

DAVID MORSE (Shep Nearing)

David Morse has long been recognized as an actor of great talent and versatility in film, television and theatre. Morse made his motion picture debut in Richard Donner's acclaimed drama "Inside Moves," and then went on to star in two Sean Penn directed dramas, "The Indian Runner" and "The Crossing Guard" (Independent Spirit Award nomination – Best Supporting Actor). Morse has starred in countless standout film roles such as Alex and Andrew Smith's independent film, "The Slaughter Rule" opposite Ryan Gosling; Scott Hicks' "Hearts In Atlantis" with Anthony Hopkins and Hope Davis; Frank Darabont's highly acclaimed prison drama, "The Green Mile" (Screen Actors Guild Award nomination for Outstanding Cast Performance); Lars Von Trier's musical drama "Dancer In The Dark" (which won the Palm d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival) opposite Bjork and Catherine DeNeuve; and Taylor Hackford's thriller "Proof of Life" alongside Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe. Morse's other feature film credits include: "The Dreamer," "Crazy in Alabama," "The Negotiator," "Bait," "Contact," "The Long Kiss Goodnight," "Extreme Measures," "The Rock," "12 Monkeys," "The Good Son," "Desperate Hours," "The Gateway," and "Personal Foul."

Aside from "Nearing Grace," Morse was seen this year in "16 Blocks," with Bruce Willis and Mos Def and "Down In The Valley" with Edward Norton and Evan Rachel Wood.

In television, Morse is best known for his role as Dr. Jack "Boomer" Morrison in the Emmy- winning ensemble drama, "ST. Elsewhere." Most recently he starred in the CBS series "Hack." His other TV series roles include ABC's "Our Family Business" and the sitcom, "Big Wave Dave's." Morse also starred in the telefilms "Diary of a City Priest," "Murder Live," "Prototype," Stephen King's "The Langoliers," "When Dreams Come True," "Six Against The Rock," "Down-Payment on Murder," "A Place at the Table," "Winnie, Brotherhood of The Rose,"

“Cry in the Wild,” “Cross of Fire” and TNT's “Tecumseh: The Last Warrior.”

On stage, Morse starred in the Seattle Rep world premiere presentation of "Redwood Curtain" and worked in over thirty productions from 1971 to 1977 with the Boston Repertory Company. He made his Broadway debut in the role of Father Barry in the theatre adaptation of "On the Waterfront," and triumphantly returned to the Off-Broadway stage in Paula Vogel's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama, "How I Learned to Drive." For this starring role, Morse won the Drama League Award, the Lucille Lortel Award, the Drama Desk Award and the Obie Award. Additionally, Morse won DramaLogue and LA Weekly awards for his performance in the Los Angeles production of "Of Mice and Men." Other stage appearances include the Off-Broadway productions of "The Trading Post," "Threads" and "A Death in the Family."

DAVID MOSCOW (Blair Nearing)

David Moscow made his feature film debut in “Big” as Young Josh, the Tom Hanks character in Penny Marshall's classic film comedy. His additional film credits include “Just Married” with Ashton Kutcher, “Riding in Cars with Boys” with Drew Barrymore, “Restaurant” with Adrian Brody, the Sundance Festival Films, “River Red” and “Hurricane Streets,” as well as the upcoming “David and Layla.”

On television, Moscow starred in the WB Network's comedy series, “Zoe Bean.” Moscow’s stage credits include Broadway's "What’s Wrong with this Picture” and several off-Broadway productions. Moscow is also a screenwriter and producer, with several of his own projects in development.

CHAD FAUST (Lance Guhning)

Chad Faust stars as "Kyle Baldwin" in the USA Network original series "The 4400." Faust was most recently seen as the sexually confused Christian teenager "Dean Withers" in the feature film "Saved," starring alongside a collection of young stars including Macaulay Culkin, Mandy Moore, Jena Malone, Patrick Fugit, and veterans Martin Donovan and Mary-Louise Parker.

Probably the only actor to play an entire supporting role in nothing more than a green speedo, Faust battled egos with Colin Firth in Buena Vista/Touchstone's "Hope Springs," in which he played Heather Graham's self-righteous younger brother. Among other film credits, he has appeared in "Try Seventeen" alongside Elijah Wood, Franka Potente, and Mandy Moore, as well as in the critically acclaimed Showtime movie "Bang, Bang, You're Dead." He will soon be seen in "Tamara."

Faust has guest starred on several series including WB's "Smallville" and Fox's "Still Life," and was also featured in the highly-successful miniseries "Taken" on SCI FI.

Faust has written, directed, and produced six short films and one feature. The feature, "We Ran Naked," is a film about an author living in the shadow of his successful first novel, and premiered in 1999 when Faust was just 19.

Also a solo recording artist, Faust has released two CD's on the independent label Zotzman Music. Faust was raised in Victoria, Canada and currently resides in Los Angeles.

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ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

RICK ROSENTHAL - Director/Producer

Rick Rosenthal has been directing film and television since the 1980s with credits like the hard-hitting drama “Bad Boys,” starring Sean Penn, the bittersweet romantic comedy “American Dreamer,” starring JoBeth Williams and Tom Conti and the Emmy-winning ABC series “Life Goes On.”

After graduating from Harvard with a degree in Visual and Environmental Studies, Rosenthal came west to attend the American Film Institute. He made his feature debut with “Halloween II” and returned to the franchise 20 years later to helm “Halloween: Resurrection.”

Committed to helping new filmmakers find a voice, Rosenthal’s production company, Whitewater Films, launched its banner with “Mean Creek” in 2003, written and directed by Jacob Aaron Estes (screenwriter on “Nearing Grace”). The film was selected by the Sundance Festival, included in the Directors Fortnight at Cannes and sold to Paramount Classics and Focus Features.

From 1998-2001, while continuing to direct, Rosenthal served as Chair of the Directing Program at the AFI’s Center for Advanced Film and Television Studies, where his students included Patty Jenkins (“Monster”), Brian Dannelly (“Saved”) and Estes. He has also taught at the International Film and Television Workshops in Maine where his students included Alejandro González Iñárritu (“Amores Perros”).

Rosenthal currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife, three kids and a Golden Retriever named Elle. An avid hockey player, he skates on a team oxymoronically called "the L.A. Canadians."

JACOB AARON ESTES - Screenwriter

In 2003 Jacob Estes made his directorial debut with his award winning script "Mean Creek," for which he also won the prestigious Nicholl Fellowship in Screenwriting. The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was subsequently picked up by Paramount Classics for distribution. "Mean Creek" boasts a talented ensemble cast anchored by Rory Culkin and Scott Mechlowicz and received rave reviews in Variety, Entertainment Weekly and Premiere Magazine quickly establishing Estes as a "director to watch."

Estes has been selected twice to develop his scripts at the Eugene O'Neill Theater Center's National Playwrights Conference under the artistic direction of Lloyd Richards, most recently in 1999 for his screenplay "Free Lessons." In 1997 Estes wrote, produced and directed a short film called "Positive" which had its premiere at The Frameline Film Festival and went on to play at OutFest and several other festivals around the country and the world.

In 2000, Estes earned a Master's Degree in Film Directing at The American Film Institute, where he wrote and directed three short films including his thesis, "Summoning." While a fellow at A.F.I., Estes also wrote the first draft screenplays for two of his classmates' thesis projects, including "Maria & Jose," a script which garnered the Colin Higgins Production Award for the team. "Summoning" premiered at the SXSW film festival and won the Best Actor Award and Silver Medal for Best Film at Mexico's Expression En Corto festival.

Estes began writing and filmmaking while attending The University of California at Santa Cruz, where he was given The Dean's Award for the Arts for the script and production of his one-act play "Leigh's Outrunning Her Mefa and Pefa Tonight." His interest in storytelling and theatrics began in Chicago, in grammar school, when he began writing short stories and acting in school plays, first starring in a musical rendition of 'Peter Pan' in which he was typecast as Captain Hook. He studied acting at The Young Conservatory Theater at A.C.T. and improvisation at The Second City of Chicago.

Estes is currently writing an untitled feature script for Castle Rock director Rob Reiner. Just prior to the commencement of production on "Mean Creek," Estes adapted the novel *Nearing's Grace* for director Rosenthal.

SUSAN JOHNSON - Producer

"Nearing Grace" marks Susan Johnson's second feature as a producer. Last year Johnson produced the critically acclaimed "Mean Creek" starring Rory Culkin, Ryan Kelley, Scott Mechlowicz, Trevor Morgan, Josh Peck and Carly Schroeder, which competed at Sundance and Cannes and won both the Humanitas Prize and the 2004 John Cassavetes Independent Spirit Award. "Mean Creek" was distributed by Paramount Classics domestically and Focus Features internationally. Johnson began her career at the William Morris Agency and subsequently worked on several features in the UK and US before directing and producing nearly fifty music videos and commercials. Johnson earned a graduate degree in Directing from the American Film Institute under a full scholarship.

Recently Johnson joined forces with actor Gregory Smith to form Braveart Films. Current projects include "Wieners" written by Gabe Grifoni and Suzanne Francis with Smith, Kal Penn ("Namesake", "Harold & Kumar") and Brandon Routh

(“Superman Returns”) attached to star; and “Blue 14” which is currently shooting in the Bahamas with a cast that includes Carly Schroeder (“Mean Creek”), Adrian Dunbar (“Richard III,” “The Crying Game”), Katharine Ross (“Donnie Darko,” “The Graduate”), George Harris (“Layer Cake,” “Black Hawk Down”), Jane Lynch (“A Mighty Wind,” “Collateral Damage”) and Christine Adams (“Batman Begins”).

TRACY UNDERWOOD - Producer

As Senior Vice President of features for Warner Bros. based film and television production company John Wells Productions, Underwood has been involved with all of JWP’s feature film productions. In addition to producing “Nearing Grace,” she also served as Associate Producer on “White Oleander” which was released by Warner Bros in 2002 and starred Alison Lohman, Robin Wright Penn, Michele Pfeiffer, and Renée Zellweger. The company’s most recent projects include: “Duma” directed by Carroll Ballard and “Doom” slated for release by Universal Pictures this October. Before her tenure will Wells, Underwood founded management and production company International Arts Entertainment with veteran agent Alan Greenspan. Underwood and Greenspan represented feature and television writers and directors and developed projects for and with their clients to produce. Six months after founding IAE, Tracy and Alan formed Dogstar Films (“Best Laid Plans,” “200 Cigarettes”) — a production company with director Mike Newell.

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