

MY YEAR WITH OUT SEX

PRESS KIT

Written and directed by Sarah Watt
Produced by Bridget Ikin

Hibiscus Films Pty. Ltd.
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TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Running Time	96' 9"
Length (metres)	2637.59 m
LENGTH (FEET)	8653.5 FT
RATIO:	35 MM COLOUR. 1:1.85
SOUND:	DOLBY SR & DOLBY DIGITAL

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX – BILLING BLOCK

SCREEN AUSTRALIA and HIBISCUS FILMS present
in association with FILM VICTORIA, SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FILM CORPORATION,
ADELAIDE FILM FESTIVAL and SHOWTIME AUSTRALIA

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX

SACHA HORLER MATT DAY

Director of Photography GRAEME WOOD

Editor DENISE HARATZIS ASE

Production Designer SIMON McCUTCHEON

Costume Designer KITTY STUCKEY

Casting JANE NORRIS Mullinars Consultants

Post Production Supervisor MARYJEANNE WATT

Line Producer BARBARA GIBBS

Executive Producers JOHN MAYNARD, ANDREW MYER, JOANNA BAEVSKI,

ANDREW BARLOW, PAUL WIEGARD

Associate Producer BARBARA MASSEL

Produced by BRIDGET IKIN

Written and directed by SARAH WATT

Developed and financed with the assistance of SCREEN AUSTRALIA

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Developed with the assistance of Fine Cut Films

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ONE-LINE SYNOPSIS

One family. One year. No sex. What else is there? — Sport, spending, saving, singing, storage solutions, spiritual stuff, Santa ...

A wry look at twelve months — from the award-winning writer-director of LOOK BOTH WAYS, Sarah Watt.

ONE PARAGRAPH DESCRIPTION

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX is a kind of a love story about all the big questions, and even more of the small ones. Over one messy year, Ross and Natalie navigate their children, nits, housework, birthdays, Christmas, faith, football, job insecurity, more nits, and whether they will ever have sex again.

SYNOPSIS

Ross and Natalie and their kids Louis and Ruby lead routinely busy lives until Natalie collapses suddenly and wakes in hospital following emergency surgery. It's weeks before she can return home, frail and grateful, anxious about the future. Friends Greg and Winona offer unsolicited advice and Natalie is persuaded to join a community choir, run by the quietly charismatic Margaret. Meanwhile, they're 'restructuring' at Ross's work. Should he jump before he's pushed?

Natalie's health improves but her moods are volatile, she still can't drive, she's lost her job and there's less money to spend at Christmas. Determined to find some meaning, she takes the kids to church, where she discovers Margaret is the local curate. Over the summer, the family and their new puppy travel to the Gold Coast. It's a washout, Natalie can't make sense of the map and Ross crashes the car.

Natalie gets part-time work, at the same time as one of Ross's mates is retrenched. During the send-off, he and a colleague, Rosie, share a meaningful, if clumsy, embrace. The family goldfish dies and during its funeral, Ross recognises Margaret as the lead singer in a defunct '80s rock-band. As Natalie's spirits sink, Ross takes charge at home. On Good Friday, the clothes' dryer blows up, Ross can't fix it and Natalie mistakenly assumes the kids have outgrown the Easter Bunny. Then their puppy is savagely mauled and placed on life-support, Ruby loses a tooth and there's a further outbreak of nits.

Ross coaches Louis's footy team to a narrow win. Afterwards, he and Natalie argue bitterly over the ethics of the victory. Natalie seeks out Margaret and they find themselves in a casino where they drink too much, sing karaoke and win the jackpot on the poker machines.

Returning home, Natalie is overcome with a blinding headache. Ross goes with her for a brain scan. Terrified she's used up all her luck, Natalie admits she has no faith or belief, and is convinced she'll go to hell. As Rosie is promoted to the role of Ross's supervisor, everything seems to hang in the balance. Finally, there's good news about the scan. For his birthday, Natalie buys Ross a bottle of champagne — not the most expensive, not the cheapest — and a cow in Sri Lanka. With the kids kept busy at Greg and Winona's, they have just enough time if they want to break the drought and end their year without sex.

LONGER SYNOPSIS

It's August in Melbourne and the morning of Ross's 39th birthday. He and his wife Natalie mark the occasion with some practised fumbling under the bedclothes before they are interrupted by their kids, Ruby and Louis, bearing gifts. This is a routinely busy household of shiftwork, homework, bills to pay, nit treatments, footy practice and violin lessons — until Natalie collapses suddenly, and wakes in hospital following emergency surgery for an aneurysm. Ross wonders how he will cope with her uncertain recovery, his added responsibilities, as well as a threatened 'restructure' at his work in a radio station. His friend Greg suggests he quit, set up on his own and become a consultant for twice the money.

When Natalie finally returns home, weeks later, she is frail and grateful, and tries to imagine how her family would manage without her. On the pretext of aiding her recovery, Greg's wife Winona persuades her to join a local community choir run by the quietly charismatic Margaret. Meanwhile, at Ross's work, there's talk of retrenchments. Management has been replacing staff with inexperienced casuals for less money.

By December, Natalie seems improved but she still can't drive, she's lost her job, there's more pressure to make Christmas special this year and they have less money. Determined to give a context to it all, she takes the kids to church, where she discovers Margaret is the local curate. When Ruby has an accident, Margaret drives them to hospital where Ruby gets six stitches.

For their summer holidays, the family with their new puppy, Bubblehead, travel to the Gold Coast. Natalie can't make sense of the map, Ross crashes the car, and the kids have to make do swimming in the pool in the rain.

Greg co-opts Ross into the role of assistant coach to Louis's footy team and begins an intense regimen of training. Worried about money, Natalie applies for a part-time job. The family goldfish dies and Margaret agrees to preside over the funeral. Ross recognises her as the lead singer in a defunct '80s rock-band.

At the radio station, one of Ross's mates is laid off and his colleagues gather to say good-bye. In a spontaneous exchange of feeling, Ross and a co-worker Rosie share a meaningful, if clumsy, embrace.

Ruby can't decide how to celebrate her 8th birthday. Ross takes charge, supervising celebrations, building storage solutions, sorting and labelling drawers. Half-way through her party, Ruby loses a tooth and is consoled by Ross. Natalie's spirits plummet. At the hairdresser's, a casual comment leaves her in tears.

At the radio station, things remain awkward between Ross and Rosie. At home, Natalie has a head-cold and she and Ross still haven't had sex for eight months. Natalie begins a new job at a call-centre and finds herself drawn back to church over Easter. On Good Friday, the clothes' dryer blows up, Ross can't fix it and Natalie mistakenly thinks the kids have outgrown the Easter Bunny.

On the way to school, Bubblehead is savagely mauled by another dog and is put on life-support. There's further outbreak of nits requiring treatment and Ruby loses another tooth.

By June, Bubblehead has recovered. In the final minutes of the Under-12s football, Louis's team is close to victory. Ross instructs him to maintain possession of the ball and not take any risky shots for goal. Louis's team wins and Ross and Natalie argue over the ethics of the victory. Natalie claims Ross is turning into Greg; Ross accuses Natalie of changing since she met Margaret and started going to church. The kids listen to the argument, and wonder if the Tooth Fairy's failure to appear is a bad omen.

Natalie seeks out Margaret and agrees to go with her to meet her new date. They find themselves in a casino and a tearful, chain-smoking Margaret learns that she's been stood up. Margaret admits to a crisis of faith, allowing Natalie to confess she's been trying to pray but finds it impossible to believe in God. The women drink too much, sing Karaoke and win \$50,000 on the poker machines.

Ross drops off Louis at the cinema to meet friends, then calls in on Greg and Winona where things are tense. Alone with Ross, Greg admits he can't fight with Winona: all the unencumbered assets are in her name; the risky margin-lending is in his.

Bored with the movie, Louis escapes to the foyer where he is approached by a man whose motives seem suspect. Later that night, Ross admits to Louis he should have encouraged him to have had a shot at goal.

Everyone is asleep when Natalie returns from the casino, her bag laden with coins from her winnings. She discovers Ruby's baby tooth still in its glass, waiting for the Tooth Fairy. Natalie exchanges the tooth for coins. When she bends down, she is struck by a blinding headache.

Rosie rushes to deliver the latest news to her radio station colleagues: their boss has been made redundant and she's been promoted to the role of supervisor.

Ross goes with Natalie for her brain scan. She is terrified she's used up all her luck,

convinced she'll go to hell because she has no belief in God, not Margaret's, nor anyone else's. Ross admits that God isn't his explanation for stuff either; all they can do is hope.

Finally, there's good news about the scan. Natalie buys Ross a bottle of champagne for his birthday, not the most expensive, not the cheapest. She's also bought him a cow in Sri Lanka. With the kids kept busy with a new game at Greg and Winona's, they have just enough time if they want to break the drought and end their year without sex.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was interested in how we get through our days and whether they are any better or worse for having been examined. About whether our perception of control — or lack of it — makes any difference to our actual control. I was interested in whether we earn our good or bad luck, or whether it's random. We've been told for many years that we earn it, and if we earn it, then we deserve everything, from luxury cars, and upgrades of everything, to complete and constant happiness.

To explore these ideas I invented a non-ruling class family in an average suburb who could encapsulate all the anxieties and joys that our mostly muddled society has to offer. I wanted the audience to be able to connect with these people and their sadness and happiness. I love the big-ticket life questions writ upon the small domestic stories.

And I wanted the film to be entertaining, to be warm, to use colour as music and music as editorial. I wanted it to be kind of a love story between family and friends. And hopefully a little bit funny.

Sarah Watt, Melbourne

PRODUCTION STORY

Sarah Watt began writing the screenplay for MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX early in 2005, shortly after finishing her feature debut, LOOK BOTH WAYS. She says:

I didn't want to make another film with a sex scene in it. So I got the title quite early on! That was one idea. The other ideas seemed to come out of the kind of free-ranging anxiety most people seemed to be expressing when I began writing at the start of 2005.

She was interested in exploring the deeply human need to make meaning out of the apparently random way good fortune and catastrophe disrupt the more predictable trajectories of people's lives. She set about creating a portrait of a family whose fortunes she would attempt to chart over the course of one crowded year.

I tried to think up characters who might represent things we all share, that seem vaguely "normal". Obviously, I tried to resist a caricatured or a clichéd version of normal, but the kind of normal that as many people as possible could relate to. ... I guess I think of myself as being fairly typical, so when I experience something more than once, or something happens in my own life or to my friends, or what I hear people talking about around me, I assume it's likely to be stuff we all share.

She embarked on the screenplay with script editor, Barbara Masel, with whom she'd worked on LOOK BOTH WAYS, and reunited with its producer, Bridget Ikin. It was a collaboration each was keen to repeat. Sarah was also eager to work with others from LOOK BOTH WAYS, such as editor, Denise Haratzis, production designer, Simon McCutcheon (who was art director on the previous film), first assistant director, Chris Odgers, and sound mixer, Peter Smith.

By mid-2007, the film (whose development had been supported by Screen Australia and Fine Cut Films), was ready for financing. Bridget Ikin:

I think that one of the pleasures in Sarah's work is the kind of currency that she brings to her writing. So making the film quickly seemed important. I said to Sarah: I think I can raise a certain amount of money relatively quickly, and if we cast it modestly and work within that parameter, I think we can make the film soon.

Bridget says the successful collaborations forged during LOOK BOTH WAYS formed part of her strategy in financing the new film.

In everyone's book, LOOK BOTH WAYS had been a success; it had been a critical success, a commercial success and had won many awards overseas and in Australia. It sold well overseas. For all our financing partners it had been a productive collaboration and a successful film, so I hoped they would want to invest in Sarah's next film. They all wanted to. It was part of our deliberate "we're not reinventing anything" approach. We were choosing to develop relationships — to work with the same financing team, as well as creative team — and hopefully now also attract the same audience who'd enjoyed LOOK BOTH WAYS.

Within months, Bridget had raised the film's budget with investors Screen Australia, Film Victoria, the Adelaide Film Festival, the South Australian Film Corporation and Showtime Australia. Katrina Sedgwick, director of the Adelaide Film Festival (whose Investment Fund had also previously commissioned LOOK BOTH WAYS) was an eager early investor, offering MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX its premiere in the 2009 Adelaide Film Festival. The film's executive producers were John Maynard, Andrew Myer, Joanna Baevski, Andrew Barlow and Paul Wiegard.

Sarah began the process of casting, auditioning actors for the rôles of Natalie and Ross and their children, Louis and Ruby. For the rôle of Natalie, Sarah was looking for an appealing actor who was prepared to be seen in an unglamorous way, in the frank terms that the script demanded. Sacha Horler had appeared in a small rôle in LOOK BOTH WAYS. Sarah says:

... (Sacha) was willing to go to all sorts of lengths to be the character ... And she has such an incredible ability to be in the moment while the camera's rolling. You can see the transformation of her thoughts and feelings as they're happening.

For the rôle of Ross, Natalie cast Matt Day. Sarah comments:

Matt was willing to be a dag, he was willing to forego the alpha male. Again, he just brought a spirit of collaboration to the project. They seemed to fit well together.

Agent Jane Norris, from Mullinars Consulting, drew up a long list of children for the five rôles in the film. After an extensive process of auditioning, Sarah settled on newcomer Jonathan Segat in the rôle of 12-year-old, Louis, and Portia Bradley in the rôle of his sister, 7-year-old, Ruby.

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX was shot over 7 weeks from the end of March, through April, 2008, in Melbourne, Victoria, (in locations around Altona and Williamstown); and a few days additional shooting on the Gold Coast in Queensland. The challenge was to create the effect of the story taking place over a twelve-month period, with its seasonal, as well as emotional, shifts.

The film was edited in Melbourne, with sound and digital post-production moving to Adelaide. The film's playful title sequences were created by Maryjeanne Watt and Petrina White, with visual material sourced from the Getty Images library. Sarah saw these still and moving elements has being critical to the film's mode of address.

The soundtrack draws on an eclectic mix of mostly Australian songs, (featuring performers such as Bob Evans, El Perro del Mar and Bombazine Black) as well as some familiar international tracks (such as Bananarama). Sarah comments:

I love the energy that songs can bring. I didn't want to underscore the emotion with music, I wanted to provide an editorial over the top of the film. It's more declared this way.

OUR CARBON OFFSET PROJECT

- Bridget Ikin, Producer

Working with Mark O'Brien of Beyond Neutral® P/L, a Canberra-based greenhouse and sustainability consultancy company, we explored the possibilities of reducing the carbon footprint created during the making of the film. Mostly, it was a combined effort of re-thinking, awareness raising and undertaking small but important actions (including offsetting our air travel and minimising/ recycling our waste).

Mark viewed our production/ post-production processes as a case study of what to consider in assessing the likely greenhouse footprint generated by a film's production in Australia (with the long-term view of creating a published 'template' which others in the film industry might choose to work with).

Our intention was to complete a full assessment of the greenhouse emissions caused by the production, then to purchase more units of accredited greenhouse offsets from renewable energy than the emissions we had generated (thereby creating a positive outcome that went past carbon neutral). But we discovered how tricky it is to really determine our total carbon emissions ... where do you start, stop? - where is the "boundary" when so many aspects of making a film are outside our direct control, and, without question, high in energy and resource use; typically this information is commercially sensitive, not disclosed readily and often unknown for an individual film.

So, with Mark's encouragement, we switched tack, to a 'portfolio' approach to our carbon offsetting: committing instead to purchasing and retiring 100 tonnes of Gold Standard carbon credits, and providing a sizeable contribution to Oxfam Australia.

Mark O'Brien: "Our response to climate change can create multiple benefits which, while addressing greenhouse emissions, also deliver a sustainability dividend. The use of Beyond Neutral®'s carbon offset portfolio approach has allowed MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX to support projects addressing the imperative of greenhouse while helping create a sustainable future."

Gold Standard accredited renewable energy projects

Our offsets were sourced from a small number of internationally accredited projects contributing to sustainable development. Using Australian Government statistics, an Australian family of four produces around 20 tonnes of greenhouse emissions p.a., so our purchase of 100 tonnes of carbon credits is roughly five times the annual emissions of the family in our film.

Oxfam Australia

Like Natalie in MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX, who chooses one of their 'cow as a gift' cards to give to her husband for his birthday, we support Oxfam's community-based development programs, which often target cultural sustainability and social injustice.

IN CONVERSATION:
SARAH WATT & BARBARA MASEL

BARBARA MASEL:

You said the germ of LOOK BOTH WAYS didn't come from story, it came out of ideas and I wondered if it was the same for MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX?

SARAH WATT:

Definitely. The first idea being that I didn't want to make another film with a sex scene in it. So I got the title quite early on! That was one idea. The other ideas seemed to come out of the kind of free-ranging anxiety most people seemed to be expressing when I began writing at the start of 2005. Around that time there was a fair amount of job insecurity in Australia with Work Choices, global uncertainty and instability, talk about climate change, the Asian tsunami —

BARBARA MASEL:

— And that was well in advance of all the economic downturn and the credit crisis.

SARAH WATT:

Yes. Everything had to be more, more, more because we had to feed this growth machine. And I remember noticing that you could go and buy t-shirts off a rack at a shop for \$5 that were made in China, or you could go to another shop in the same complex, in the same suburb, and buy a t-shirt priced at \$300, also made in China. There was a kind of disconnect going on.

BARBARA MASEL:

Boom-times claim to offer more choice. Which feeds the anxiety, too.

SARAH WATT:

Things in the supermarket that used to be very, very special were almost quite common. You couldn't just buy a bottle of olive oil, you had to have the biodynamic, hand-pressed, extra-virgin oil. I guess I was interested in what all this meant, especially for the non-ruling classes, the people without the power of choice and without control. Not the very poor, not those that once would have traditionally been defined as the struggling working class, but I guess John Howard's battlers, the middle-class who don't have inherited wealth or the security of family back-up.

BARBARA MASEL:

I remember when we began, the prevailing political spin was that if you were enjoying good fortune, then it was because you'd earned it. The corollary, of course, being that if things were not going well for you, then you were to blame for that, too. Nothing's simply good or shitty luck.

SARAH WATT:

That's right. Do you believe bad luck's random but good luck's earned? Or do you believe it's all random; or do you believe it's all earned? If you believe it's all earned then somehow you have to believe you can control it — it's your karma, or what you eat or don't eat. And along with the anxiety goes the guilt that you're bringing any misfortune on yourself by not being a positive thinker or a Hatha Yoga expert. So rather than just getting through the day by being a good partner to someone, or friend to somebody, or a loyal colleague, there's this idea that through your behaviour you can actually control your health, prosperity, opportunities, everything.

BARBARA MASEL:

So that was the territory you were interested in. How did you move from that to story?

SARAH WATT:

I tried to think up characters who might represent things we all share, that seem vaguely "normal". Obviously, I tried to resist a caricatured or a clichéd version of normal, but the kind of normal that as many people as possible could relate to. I've tried to create a portrait of a family — not a blended one — but I've tried to suggest other versions of family in some of the other characters, so if you're not personally in a family like theirs, you'll still have lots of points of connection. I guess I think of myself as being fairly typical, so when I experience something more than once, or something happens in my own life or to my friends, or what I hear people talking about around me, I assume it's likely to be stuff we all share.

Because I'd already come up with the title MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX, the story suggested its own structure: it has to be set over a year, a lot of things can happen in that time, so you've got to decide what to include. And because of the title, everything you choose should link back to sex, or not having sex. So I start building a structure, and I've got the characters, and then out of these elements, the story emerges.

I try and keep the details really specific. But in the specifics I have to find something universal. So if the characters have a crisis, I have to show it in a way that's detailed and authentic, but it's about not making that crisis the most important thing. It's about making the fallout from that crisis the point of universal connection.

BARBARA MASEL:

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX is full of twists and turns and yet there are a number of aggregating patterns which only become apparent over the course of the story. Things repeat themselves in unusual ways. Do you map everything out in advance of writing it?

SARAH WATT:

I kind of do, but in such an unformed, disorganised way that I don't think you could dignify it by calling it map. It's more like a scrawl. I do tend to make big picture notes — very rough, scribbled in notebooks on buses — but I don't write a treatment and I just start by writing the script. That's why I like to know what my structure and boundaries are because I've yet to learn how to write a conventional three-act structure type of film.

BARBARA MASEL:

What a relief.

SARAH WATT: (laughs)

But you never know, maybe one day.

BARBARA MASEL:

How long did the script take to write?

SARAH WATT:

In the same way that we'd worked together on LOOK BOTH WAYS, it went through quite a lot of drafts. I think we began it just as we were marketing LOOK BOTH WAYS and then by 2006 and all through 2007 I was writing full-time. So it was a very intense two-and-a-half years.

I suppose people wouldn't be shocked if you said, "It's taken me two years to write a book." Even though a script's less wordy than a book, if you tried to write it in prose form, you would have a considerable book. I like to treat it as if it was a piece of literature. As detailed and thought through as that.

BARBARA MASEL:

Your process is one of meticulously reworking and refining and redrafting. How do you preserve the sense of surprise? How do you keep it fresh?

SARAH WATT:

I just keep my bullshit antenna very well directed towards myself. And working closely with you as script editor. So it's a combination of keeping my own antenna alert and bouncing it off someone who's very familiar with the script and my process and what my intentions are. If you've set yourself a challenging structure, then you've actually got quite a lot of problems to solve, so it becomes a case of problem-solving rather than just gestures at self-improvement. That in itself opens up new areas, as well as new problems to be solved.

BARBARA MASEL:

So you're constantly pushing up against boundaries to test the robustness of the material?

SARAH WATT:

Yes.

BARBARA MASEL:

As with LOOK BOTH WAYS, the characters in MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX rehearse worst case scenarios, and then find themselves ambushed by other things which they'd never anticipated. There's a lot of chance and fortune and good and bad luck in this film, isn't there?

SARAH WATT:

It's something I personally struggle with, so find interesting. Here's a good example: I go to the airport — I'm always a nervous flyer — and they say, "Would you like to get on an earlier flight?" Actually that never happens, because I never pay enough for my ticket, but just say they said, "You could get on an earlier flight." I would be absolutely paralysed with indecision because I don't know whether they're offering me tomorrow's newspaper story: "I nearly caught the death flight but luckily at the last minute they offered me an earlier flight." Or, I've actually signed up for the death flight and if I'd just allowed the universe to unfold as it was going to ... Actually, as I think about it, if they'd offered it to me, that would have been all right — it's when you ask for it, that's when it seems risky.

BARBARA MASEL:

Some of us don't feel entitled to ask. It's inviting the universe to put you in your place.

SARAH WATT:

And yet I know all that stuff about going out and making your own luck. I just love the ironies. I can see the contradictions in the smallest things, never mind the biggest things.

BARBARA MASEL:

And that's where the comedy is, isn't it?

SARAH WATT:

It is funny, especially when you catch yourself out.

BARBARA MASEL:

After you'd made LOOK BOTH WAYS, you talked about how western secular cultures had abandoned a lot of the rituals and faith of religion but hadn't been able to let go of

some of the magical thinking and superstition.

SARAH WATT:

We're sometimes more tolerant of people touching wood, or crossing their fingers, than we might be of them popping down on their knees and having a good old pray. It's very messy. And it's funny.

BARBARA MASEL:

One of the questions I'm often asked about the film is — is there animation in it?

SARAH WATT:

Not as such. But the film is divided into months of the year and we always referred to the action as "flurries" of activity. Because that was one of my interests: to show the busy-ness of modern life. Time goes so fast and there's so much going on and yet there are times when life is incredibly boring and nothing much happens. I wanted to have these flurries of activity and then give the audience a little bit of a rest.

BARBARA MASEL:

Sometimes the advances in the story take place in the ellipses between the months. In our early conversations, before you'd even written a draft, you talked about wanting to strip the story of all its usual, dutiful, naturalistic set-ups.

SARAH WATT:

Yes, I love that idea. It's a much more directed experience for the audience.

BARBARA MASEL:

So the film's divided into months of the year, each with its own title, to which you've assigned to each one a sexual reference.

SARAH WATT:

They're almost like chapter headings and they do have an animated feel to them because they use found footage to support each of the sexual references.

BARBARA MASEL:

Without the titles, would the film's meaning be different?

SARAH WATT:

I suspect I would have needed another device to create the space to allow the audience to reflect on where they are. Maybe in a different film there might have been shots of the ocean rolling in to shore. Or a flock of birds reeling into a dark, evening sky. (laughs)

BARBARA MASEL:

Natalie is an unusual kind of heroine, given the kind of women we're often invited to identify with. What were you looking for when you came to cast Sacha Horler in the rôle?

SARAH WATT:

I wanted someone appealing because in a lot of my work, the women characters are always having to express very unappealing sentiments. They nag their husbands, they're depressed, they're a bit stretched. They go through all this stuff that most people go through, and yet it's meant to be an entertaining experience for the audience. You don't want them sitting there thinking, "I want to stab this woman in the eye." So I wanted the audience to be drawn to Natalie. I loved that Sacha was willing to go to all sorts of lengths to be the character. She was prepared to wear her hair any way, dress in bad tracksuit pants and a hoodie. She was happy to be at the service of the story. And she has such an incredible ability to be in the moment while the camera's rolling. You can see the transformation of her thoughts and feelings as they're happening.

BARBARA MASEL:

And what were you looking for when you cast Matt Day in the rôle of Ross?

SARAH WATT:

I auditioned Sacha and Matt together and they seemed to have a believability as a couple. Matt was willing to be a dag, he was willing to forego the alpha male. Again, he just brought a spirit of collaboration to the project. They seemed to fit well together.

BARBARA MASEL:

What about the casting of Natalie and Ross's kids, Louis and Ruby? How did you find Jonathan Segat and Portia Bradley?

SARAH WATT:

Jane Norris (from Mullinars Consultants), a great casting agent, especially with kids, did a large search and put together a long list of kids to we audition. Portia is actually an experienced actor in her own right and is very professional. There wasn't the room to be reshooting, so I needed someone who was comfortable on a set, in front of a camera. She was only eight at the time, and she was playing a child of seven, turning eight. She could produce the same performance over and over, or give variation, if required. Amazing.

Jonathan who plays Louis was perhaps less experienced as an actor but there was something about him that I responded to. His instincts and preparation for the rôle

were very good. He seemed to suit the part so well that I just couldn't go past him.

BARBARA MASEL:

And what about the casting of Maude Davey as Margaret, the character Natalie befriends?

SARAH WATT:

Margaret is constantly transforming throughout the film. She's one thing at the start, and progressively reveals herself to be something else later. I wanted the audience to believe her moment by moment, and not get the clues ahead of time about who she might be. Maude is a very good actor and was able to hold off, and not give away everything about the character. I think you can believe everything that you eventually find out about her, in hindsight.

BARBARA MASEL:

As with LOOK BOTH WAYS, you had two weeks quarantined for rehearsals in preproduction. Why was that important for your process?

SARAH WATT:

Well, not actually to rehearse the lines. It was more to do with having enough time with all the actors, for them to have enough time with each other, to make sure we were all making the same film. It was more to do with consistency and coherence across everyone. I didn't want a bravura performance in one scene and something undercooked somewhere else.

It's not just to make the lines believable, but so that the actors can inhabit their characters. I do quite a lot of preparation, making folders for each of them, where they grew up, how many sisters they have and whether they came from the country or city, what school they went to, endless stuff like that so the actor's got a history they can work with. Not just for when they're speaking the lines or following the action but beyond the film.

BARBARA MASEL:

You do some rewriting in rehearsals, but by the time you come to shoot the film, the script's pretty fixed, isn't it?

SARAH WATT:

I don't want to be making last-minute changes to something I've spent two years refining. It's difficult for everyone on the set, forcing a change at the last minute. I really like to layer meaning by repeating things in other scenes. On the spur of the moment you might think, "Yeah, why wouldn't he say this instead of that?" But it's usually for a reason. And because everything's filmed out of sequence, you can't trust

yourself to remember the underlying purpose. So I've found it better to keep to the map, keep to the plan that everyone's agreed on. Even for me as the director, I'm still making the same film that I told everybody we were going to make.

BARBARA MASEL:

The film uses largely unscored music, mostly songs. Why?

SARAH WATT:

I love the energy that songs can bring. I didn't want to underscore the emotion with music, I wanted to provide an editorial over the top of the film. It's more declared this way. I write stuff that could be construed as melodrama and to add an underscore would be supporting it as a melodrama. Not that there's anything wrong with that, but I prefer a drier humour in my drama. I get uncomfortable with the manipulation of underscore.

BARBARA MASEL:

There's quite a distinctive tension between your desire for authenticity in the performances and your declared editorialising in the titles, where you invite the audience to step back and see the bigger picture.

SARAH WATT:

I think I called myself a naïve filmmaker when I made LOOK BOTH WAYS, and I've been so busy making this one that I still don't think I've seen a lot of cinema. So I think it's not hard to be different because I've got no idea what the same is.

Sarah Watt**WRITER AND DIRECTOR**

Sarah Watt is a writer, director and animator whose first feature film LOOK BOTH WAYS premiered at the Adelaide Film Festival in 2005 and was invited to screen in more than 30 film festivals around the world. It was invited to New Films/New Directors in New York and received a Special Screening at International Critics' Week in Cannes. Among the film's many acknowledgements were the Discovery Award at the Toronto Film Festival; Best Film at the AFI Awards; the FIPRESCI Award at the Brisbane International Film Festival; and Critics' Awards at the Rotterdam Film Festival and the NatFilm Festival in Denmark.

Sarah also received the Best Screenplay and Best Director Awards at the IF, AFI and Australian Film Critics' Awards.

Before LOOK BOTH WAYS, Sarah's short animated films had attracted widespread international attention. SMALL TREASURES (1995; 15 mins) won — amongst many awards — the Baby Lion for Best Short Film at the Venice Film Festival that year. LOCAL DIVE and LIVING WITH HAPPINESS followed, both of which screened widely at festivals and theatrically, winning many international and Australian awards.

In 2009, Lothian Children's Books (an imprint of Hachette Australia) will publish CLEM ALWAYS COULD, a book for children, which Sarah has written and illustrated.

FILMOGRAPHY

2009 MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX 96 mins drama 35mm
Writer/director

2005 LOOK BOTH WAYS 100 mins drama 35mm
Writer/director

2001 LIVING WITH HAPPINESS 6 min. animation 35mm
Writer/director/producer

2000 WAY OF THE BIRDS 24 min. animation 35mm
Director

1998 LOCAL DIVE 4 min. animation 35mm
Writer/director/producer

1998 DERWENT ENVY 15 min. drama 16mm
Co-writer/director/producer/co-producer

1995 SMALL TREASURES 15 min. animation 35mm
Writer/director/producer

1993/4 THE WEB SERIES 1 & 2 5 min. animations 35mm
Director

BRIDGET IKIN**PRODUCER**

Bridget has produced many films through her company Hibiscus Films, establishing its position as a leading producer of quality specialist cinema. She produced Sarah Watt's debut feature LOOK BOTH WAYS (2005) which received many international awards, as well as Best Film at the 2005 AFI Awards.

She produced Jane Campion's AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE (Silver Lion Venice Film Festival 1990), Alison Maclean's feature CRUSH (In Competition, Cannes, 1992) followed by Clara Law's FLOATING LIFE (Silver Leopard, Locarno, 1996).

Additionally, the company has produced many distinctive short films, most notably the memorable KITCHEN SINK (director Alison Maclean, In competition Cannes, 1989).

For four years (1996 – 2000), she was the General Manager of SBS Independent,, responsible for commissioning more than 400 hours of distinctive Australian drama and documentary.

She was the Associate Director Film of the 2002 Adelaide Festival, whose artistic director was the maverick American director, Peter Sellars. In a world first, the arts festival commissioned four new feature films — for which Bridget was the executive director: THE TRACKER, AUSTRALIAN RULES, WALKING ON WATER and KABBARLI.

She was a Feature Film Evaluation Manager at the Film Finance Corporation [now Screen Australia] (2004-6).

The idea to work together again with Sarah Watt and Barbara Masel was hatched very organically after we finished LOOK BOTH WAYS. It wasn't long after that Sarah started writing MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX. I love Sarah's sensibility, and the world of ideas I feel she inhabits and wants to explore, but I also feel I've found a collaborator I really want to continue working with, and that's rare and special.

BARBARA MASSEL ASSOCIATE PRODUCER & SCRIPT EDITOR

Barbara Masel has a long association with script development and production, with a background as a film and television script editor, commissioning editor and dramaturg. She was associate producer and script editor on Sarah Watt's, LOOK BOTH WAYS (2005). More recently she was dramaturg and script editor on Tony Ayres' feature film, THE HOME SONG STORIES (2007).

She was associate producer and co-creator of the television series EFFIE: JUST QUIETLY (2001) for Robyn Kershaw Productions. Between 1996 and 2000, she was Commissioning Editor, Drama at SBS Independent where she commissioned a diverse range of material, including feature films, television series, short films and animations. Prior to this, she script edited NAKED — STORIES OF MEN for Jan Chapman Productions and the ABC, and co-produced and created the television series, SEVEN DEADLY SINS for Generation Films and the ABC. Writers and directors with whom she has collaborated include: Glenda Adams, Geoffrey Atherden, Andrew Bovell, Ken Cameron, Ian David, Nick Enright, P. J. Hogan, Ray Lawrence, Alison Maclean and Cory Taylor.

Awarded a Churchill Fellowship to study script development methods and practice in the UK, she has worked as a Lecturer in Writing at the Australian Film Television and Radio School, served on its governing Council, and been a script assessor for federal and state funding agencies.

Sarah sees humour and drama in places others might overlook; her politics and aesthetic frame these observations and give them meaning. She's able to reflect on the relativity of experience; everything depends on where you're standing. She's able to find the ironies in our small triumphs and private griefs. And she's drawn to those complicated feelings which defy easy summary or classification. I suspect it's why audiences have responded so enthusiastically to her films: the powerful charge of validation we all get from knowing we've been understood.

GRAEME WOOD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY

Graeme Wood has worked as a cinematographer on feature films, television series, documentaries and television commercials. He was nominated for a Film Critics' Circle Award for his work on THE DISH (2000). His other film credits include Tony Martin's BAD EGGS, Esben Storm's SUBTERANEO, Richard Lowenstein's SAY A LITTLE PRAYER and John Hillcoat's debut GHOSTS OF THE CIVIL DEAD.

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX is, in a word, human. I just tried to use the most naturalistic and simple lighting that I possibly could. I really do prefer the environment to give you the cues. Having worked in documentaries, I've learned there's an inherent beauty in ordinary places. One of the challenges of this film is that it's so reality-based — real, tiny suburban house, real shopping centres, real real real, all the way through. You could easily overstep the mark to make it fit into your preconception of what a good-looking location would be, and it would spoil it. Low-intervention filmmaking, I call it.

SIMON MCCUTCHEON**PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX marks Simon's feature film debut as production designer. The film continues his association with Sarah Watt, having worked on LOOK BOTH WAYS as art director. He has since also production designed his second film, BLESSED (director Ana Kokkinos). Other credits as art director include the mini-series THE PACIFIC, as well as feature films ROMULUS MY FATHER and THE BOOK OF REVELATION, and a number of the television series.

Sarah was keen to reflect the arc or trajectory of the story through a changing colour palette. The structure of the film is quite ordered and clear — thirteen months, each with its own title. We thought that changing the colours of each chapter would be one way to enhance this. To a large extent, the different months and their different colours are representing different emotional states. But I didn't want that to be what everyone notices about the film, it should be in the background, subliminal.

SACHA HORLER**NATALIE**

Sacha Horler is an award-winning film actor, having won two AFI awards in the same year (1998) — Best Actress for her performance in John Curran's PRAISE, and Best Supporting Actress for Christina Andreef's SOFT FRUIT. She also won a Best Supporting Actress AFI for Kathryn Millard's TRAVELLING LIGHT (2003).

Since graduating from NIDA in 1993, Sacha has regularly performed for the Sydney Theatre Company and for Company B at Belvoir Street.

She played a small role in Sarah Watt's LOOK BOTH WAYS. Other films include MY MOTHER FRANK (2000), WALK THE TALK, and RUSSIAN DOLL (2001). Her television credits include SECRET BRIDESMAIDS BUSINESS, LOVE MY WAY and GRASS ROOTS.

Actors always talk about wanting to play rôles that are really challenging and MY YEAR WITHOUT SEX is right up there with anything I've done. Ever.

There's such humour and warmth and 'realness' in the characters Sarah creates. She clearly understands these people. I think there will be a lot of people who will identify with Ross and Natalie's relationship.

As an actor, you can't keep a whole fictional year in your head. You just have to think: how can I be as truthful as I can be in this scene, in this moment, in this take?

MATT DAY**ROSS**

Matt Day has established a reputation as one of Australia's leading film and television actors. His film credits include MURIEL'S WEDDING (1994), DATING THE ENEMY LOVE AND OTHER CATASTROPHES (1996), and KISS OR KILL (1997) for which he received an Australian Film Critic's Circle Award nomination and an AFI Award Nomination.

Playing ROSS is Matt's first film role since returning from many years living in the UK. His television credits there include guest roles in HOTEL BABYLON, SECRET DIARY OF A CALL GIRL, THE CHASE, THE MESSAGE and SPOOKS.

His Australian television credits include WATER RATS, HELL HAS HARBOUR VIEWS, THE INFORMANT and most recently TANGLE. On stage, Matt has appeared in SCARLETT O'HARA for the Melbourne Theatre Company and SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION with the Sydney Theatre Company.

Sarah's managed to find the details in the ordinary and make them extraordinary — that's where she finds the drama, in the details of everyday life.

The thing about working with Sarah is that she'd already established a really strong aesthetic with LOOK BOTH WAYS, so I came with a really clear idea about the director's vision and what she might be trying to achieve. It's really a great place to start for an actor.

FULL CREW LIST

Written and Directed by	SARAH WATT
Produced by	BRIDGET IKIN
Associate Producer	BARBARA MASEL
Director or Photography	GRAEME WOOD
Editor	DENISE HARATZIS ASE
Production Designer	SIMON McCUTCHEON
Costume Designer	KITTY STUCKEY
Casting	JANE NORRIS MULLINARS CONSULTANTS
Post Production Supervisor	MARYJEANNE WATT
Line Producer	BARBARA GIBBS
Executive Producers	JOHN MAYNARD ANDREW MYER JOANNA BAEVSKI ANDREW BARLOW PAUL WIEGARD
Script Editor	BARBARA MASEL
Production Co-ordinator	AMANDA WRAY
Production Secretary	ALICE GLENN
Production Assistant	MAGGIE MILES
Producer's Assistant	JODIE PASSMORE
Producer's Attachment	FOTINI MANIKAKIS
Production Runner	PAUL O'HALLORAN
1st Assistant Director	CHRIS ODGERS
2nd Assistant Director	JOHN MAGEE
3rd Assistant Director	NICK EMBERY
Location Manager	DREW RHODES
Assistant Location Manager	JOHN 'JT' THOMPSON
Location Manager, Gold Coast	DELLA CHURCHILL
Continuity	PAUL HARDING
Casting Assistant	LARA SIGNORINO MULLINARS CASTING
Extras Casting	MAGGIE MILES
Community Liaison	THERESE CARTY

Children's Dramaturg	GREG SAUNDERS
Tutor/Chaperone	CLARE BRADLEY
Production Accountant	JANNI ALEXANDER
Payroll Accountant	FELICITY STOWARD
Focus Puller	CHRIS CHILD
Clapper Loader	MICHELLE MARCHANT
2nd Camera	JEREMY ROUSE
2nd Camera Focus Pullers	CAMERON GAZE JOSH FLAVELL
Gaffer	CHRIS DEWHURST
Best Boy	ROB DEWHURST
Third Electrics	CHRIS WALSINGHAM
Additional Electrics	ANGUS KEMP
Key Grip	PETER MacDONNELL
Grip Assistants	JACK REILLY ADRIAN GOODWIN
Best Boy Grips	JAMES McWADE MARC SCHELLANDER
Production Sound Mixer	JOHN WILKINSON
Boom Operator	DAVID VANCE
Boom Attachment	HIRO IGARASHI
Buyer/Dressers	TONI McCUTCHEON ROBERT MOLNAR
Props/Dresser	ASHLEY FRASER
Standby Props	SIMON CARTER
Art Dept Co-ordinator	SHARON YOUNG
Art Dept Runners	MEL PAGE KIM HAUXWELL
Graphic Artist	CARLY BOJADZISKI
Scenic Artist	DEBRA GOLDSMITH
Vehicle Coordinator	NICK HARTIGAN
Dog Trainer	LUKE HURA
Props Maker	DAVID BELL
Costume Supervisor	ERIN ROCHE
Costume Standby	SARAH CARR

Additional Costume	KEELY ELLIS
Makeup & Hair Supervisor	PETA HASTINGS
Makeup & Hair	DALLAS STEPHENS
Assistant Makeup & Hair	DOMINIQUE MATHISEN
Prosthetic Makeup Artist	NIK DORNING
Unit Manager	CHRIS PIKE
Assistant Unit Manager	DAVE MASON
Unit Assistant	PETER BOEKEMAN
Safety Report	LANCE ANDERSON
Safety Supervisors	ADRIAN KORTUS DANNY WOODROW
Traffic Control	FILCON
Nurses	CAMILLE RUSSELL SALLY-ANNE UPTON
Medical Adviser	KATY HESKETH
Radio Operations Advisor	ROSS SMITH
Stunt Co-ordinator	ZEV ELEFTHERIOU
Stunt Drivers	ROY EDMUNDS GRAHAM JAHNE
Caterer	REAL TO REEL JENNY STOCKLEY
Camera Equipment	CAMERAQUIP MALCOLM RICHARDS
Film Stock	KODAK IVY CHING BORIS MITCHELL
Travel	STAGE AND SCREEN
Unit Buses	TRAVEL TRUCK
Greenhouse Advisor	BEYOND NEUTRAL PTY LTD MARK O'BRIEN
Stills Photographers	JENNIFER MITCHELL SARAH WATT
Press Kit	BARBARA MASSEL

EPK Camera	DANIELLE KARALUS
Stills Post Production	KREISLER & DE BONI
Post Production Accountant	JILL DURES
Post Production Assistant	JODIE PASSMORE
Delivery Co-ordinator	FOTINI MANIKAKIS
Post Production Script	CLEVER TYPES KERRIE McGOVAN
Assistant Editor	MERI BLAZEVSKI
Telecine Transfers	COMPLETE POST
Telecine Colourist	SAL KENNEDY
Assistant Telecine Colourist	NICK BITAR
Calendar Titles Editor	MARYJEANNE WATT
Graphic Design	PETRINA WHITE
Animation	JASON PAMMENT
Moving & Still Images courtesy of Getty Images Getty Images clearances	BEN CLAMP
Post Production Facility	OASIS POST AUSTRALIA
Colourist/VFX Supervisor	MARTY PEPPER
Compositor/VFX Artists	TONY BANNAN KEVIN RUSSELL MARK DICKSON
Head of Post Production, Oasis Post	DALE ROBERTS
Post Production Producer, Oasis Post	KATE BUTLER
Closing Credits	JADE ROBINSON
Film Scanning Facility	COMPLETE POST
Film Scanning Technician	SAL KENNEDY
Producer, Complete Post	KERRI SCHWARZE
Film Recording & Film Laboratory	CINEVEX
Laboratory Manager	IAN ANDERSON
Laboratory Production Supervisor	ROSS MITCHELL
Film Recording Technician	JASON TURPIN
Sound Facility	BEST FX

Supervising Sound Editor	PETE BEST
Sound Designer/Editor	CRAIG CARTER
Dialogue Editor	PETER SMITH
Effects Editor	TOM HEUZENROEDER
Assistant Sound Editors	BELINDA TRIMBOLI SCOTT ILLINGWORTH
Foley	JOHN SIMPSON
Re-recording Mixer	PETER SMITH
Mix Assistant	ADRIAN MEDHURST
Dolby Sound Consultant	BRUCE EMERY
ADR Facilities	BEST FX SOUNDFIRM HUZZAH SOUND
ADR Recordists	PETER SMITH CHRIS GOODES ANDREW PLAIN
Mix Facilities	BOOM SOUND @ BEST FX SOUTH AUSTRALIAN FILM CORPORATION
Radio Voices	MICHAEL VEITCH NORMAN SWAN ANDREA GIBBS WILLIAM McINNES
Music Supervision	MANA MUSIC JEMMA BURNS BERNARD GALBALLY
Music Consultants	ROSEMARY PEARSE MARK FERRIE
Choir Leader	EMILY HAYES
Legals	VERGE WHITFORD & CO CAROLINE VERGE
Insurance	WEBSTER HYDE HEATH INSURANCE BROKERS RICHARD HYDE
Completion Guarantor	CINEFINANCE

CORRIE SOETERBOEK

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	JOY WONG
Australasian Distribution	FOOTPRINT FILMS

**FULL CAST LIST
(IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)**

Ruby	PORTIA BRADLEY
Louis	JONATHAN SEGAT
Natalie	SACHA HORLER
Ross	MATT DAY
Old man	ROY DAVIES
Newsreader	CATHERINE HILL
Rosie	SONYA SUARES
Con	PETRU GHEORGHIU
Tim	EDDIE BAROO
Howard	TRAVIS COTTON
Greg	FRED WHITLOCK
Blake	SEAN RHYS-WEMYSS
Georgia	LAUREN MIKKOR
Chloe	CHLOE GUYMER
Winona	KATIE WALL
Clinic doctor	DANIELA FARINACCI
Intensive care nurse	RACHAEL MAZA
Natalie's mother	LIBBY STONE
Natalie's father	ROGER OAKLEY
Nurse	SCOTT TERRILL
Hospital doctor	RODNEY AFIF
Margaret	MAUDE DAVEY
Choir	THE ROGUES CHOIR, EAST BRUNSWICK
	ERROL'S ANGELS CHOIR, NORTH MELBOURNE
Irene	TAMMY McCARTHY
Radio technician	DAVID VANCE
Swimming club Santa	JOE SILIATO
Pole dancers	ANNA CATTONAR DEBRA WATERS
Bubblehead	KLINGON
Antoinette	WILLIAM McINNES
Petrol station couple	SILAS JAMES BENITA HARRISON
Team leader	ELKE OSADNIK
Call centre workers	CAROLE PATULLO LEON TEAGUE

Call centre applicants	BARRY MAIN
	LUCIENNE SHENFIELD
Hairdresser	LARA SIGNORINO
Rohit	SACHIN JOAB
Katie	STELLA McINNES
Friend	STELLA MAYNARD
Bubblehead's rescuer	CHELSEA BRULAND
Mothers	MARCELLE KNAPP
	CHRISTINE HUA CAO
Man in foyer	GREG SAUNDERS
Patient	HENRY ISMAILIW
Wine salesman	MATT JAMES