

# PET NAMES

## Press Materials

Directed By: Carol Brandt

Produced By: Carol Brandt, Chris James Thompson, Suzanne Jurva

Starring: Meredith Johnston, Rene Cruz

Runtime: 76 Minutes

Color/HD/1.33.1

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## SYNOPSES:

### SHORT

*At the urging of her sick mother, grad school dropout Leigh goes on a camping trip with her ex-boyfriend.*

### MEDIUM

*When her chemotherapy patient mother urges her to take a vacation from playing nurse, grad school dropout Leigh (Meredith Johnston) invites her old high school boyfriend along on the camping trip. The two soon find that confronting old wounds during a weekend in the woods is anything but restful.*

### LONG

*With an unfinished degree in the back of her mind and her sick mother in the forefront, Leigh's brain has begun to eat itself alive as the slow days pass in her childhood home. When she bumps into her old ex Cam, Leigh quickly makes a series of decisions that lead them on a camping trip. Beginning with intentions to seek repair for their tumultuous past relationship, the duo soon find themselves dredging up deep-seated wounds that never healed. Through the misplacement of Cam's dog, a trip on mushrooms, drunken nights by the bonfire baring their souls, late night stories, making up dumb songs, jealous arguments, the "vacation" becomes a constant guessing game of whether or not the two will find themselves back together, or never speaking again.*

## CAST BIOS:

### **Meredith Johnston | Leigh**

*Meredith Johnston holds a BFA in Acting from the Theatre School at DePaul University. Her previous films include "Our Place", Stephen Cone's "Baby", and Martin Kaszubowski's "Christopher Darling". She toured the country with the all-female improv team "DAAANG Judi Dench", and can be seen regularly performing goofs at iO Chicago with her Harold team, "Scout". She plays music under the name Warm Human. This is her first writing and starring credit in a feature film.*

### **Rene Cruz | Cam**

*Rene Cruz is an interdisciplinary performing artist living and working in Chicago. His previous film credits include "Silence, Before Rain" (Jason Sklaver), and "Neighbors" (Santino Stoner). He has played venues across the country with folk-rock band the Wilder Society, and regularly performs in Chicago with SLO WAV. This is his first lead role in a feature film.*

### **Stacy Parish | Laurie**

*With an 11 year career as a professional disc jockey/voice talent, and 20 years of regional theatre experience, Stacy has spent most of her professional life performing. She is a working actor and model with the Belle Talent Agency in Green Bay, and has several professional film roles, commercial and industrial credits to her name.*

### **Chato | Goose**

*Chato is an 11-year-old pug with an aversion to not being actively loved. If you looked at him and thought 'this dog knows what the word cheese means' you'd be right. This is Chato's first feature role, though he has had roles in numerous shorts directed by his owner, Harper Robison. Harper's work has screened at the Milwaukee Film Festival and twice at the UW-Milwaukee Student Film Festival. A current student of UW-Milwaukee's film program, Harper also has a firm grasp on the concept of cheese.*

## CREW BIOS:

### **Carol Brandt** | Director, Producer

*A Wisconsin native, Carol Brandt studied film at the UW-Milwaukee, recently graduating in the spring of 2014. Brandt's student feature, "Things Found on the Ground", had its world premiere at the New Orleans Film Festival when she was in her third year of film school and won the Audience Choice Award at the Beloit International Film Festival later that year. Her short film "Give It Up For The Girl", received the Best Wisconsin Film award at the Milwaukee Short Film Festival in the fall of 2014. Brandt's sophomore feature, "Dear Coward on the Moon" premiered October of 2017 at the Milwaukee Film Festival as part of the Spotlight Presentations Program.*

### **Dana Shihadah** | Cinematographer

*Dana Shihadah is a Milwaukee-based filmmaker who has a special affinity for simplistic lighting and authentic acting. Her work as a cinematographer includes documentaries, narrative films, music videos, web series, and experimental pieces. Over the years her award-winning work has been screened at festivals both in the United States and abroad.*

### **Chris James Thompson** | Producer

*Chris is an award-winning director & producer in Milwaukee. His first feature "The Jeffrey Dahmer Files" premiered in competition at the SXSW Film Festival (2012), became a New York Times Critics Pick, and was acquired by IFC for distribution. Chris recently completed the short documentary "MECCA: The Floor That Made Milwaukee Famous" which was released by ESPN as part of their 30-for-30 series. In 2015, he produced the short "The 414's: The Original Teenage Hackers" which premiered at Sundance and was picked up by CNN Films.*

### **Suzanne Jurva** | Producer

*Suzanne Jurva created the research department at DreamWorks SKG and was a feature film development executive supervising many Academy Award nominated and winning films including: "Saving Private Ryan", "Amistad", "Minority Report", "Gladiator", "Prince of Egypt", "Lincoln", and others. She is an award-winning documentarian, director, and producer and has been part of many film festivals for "Yoopera!" (PBS), "The Fabulous Ice Age" (Netflix), and "Changing Keys: Billy McLaughlin & the Mysteries of Dystonia" (PBS). Her work has been seen on The Weather Channel, NBC, NBC News, PBS, MTV, FOX, BBC, Showtime, and at The Library of Congress.*

## DIRECTOR STATEMENT:

*This story is based on real events. Real heartbreak, real laughter-inducing situations, real people. Our actors are dedicated to bringing this film to life in the most sincere and interesting way possible. The entire production is heavy with the cast and crew's emotional connection to the events that occur within Pet Names. At our very core, we are all broken humans trying to fix each other and end up breaking ourselves in the process. A constant game of shattering and gluing and losing pieces and finding extra ones. People are messy, emotions are messy, but they are beautiful and real and raw and exciting. It is my hope that with this film we drown the audience in a visceral experience of life and love and depression and redemption, all while experiencing the beauty of nature in a secluded campsite. Come get away from it all with us and experience something beautiful in the deep northern woods.*

## DIRECTOR Q&A:

### Why this story?

*I'll be the first to say the premise of this film is a tired one. But when I first read Meredith's script, I was so taken not only by the realism of the characters and all the interspersed little moments, but by the humor. Yes, the story is a drama, but it's probably one of the funniest dramas I've had the pleasure of bringing to life. I think the fact that the story is based on real events is what makes these scenes so visceral and compelling. You feel the reality of the situations, and the weight of the feeling between the Leigh and Cam.*

### What was it like directing an actress who had written the film herself?

*I will admit I was a little nervous at times since the story is semi-autobiographical for Meredith, I didn't want to screw it up or portray these life events the wrong way. Half the time, Meredith and I had the same ideas on set. Working together was easy because we had that initial trust developed before the camera even started rolling. Whenever we ran into a problem, we had already developed a sort of conversational shorthand to deal with the emotions of the scene or character traits that would make sense. I think we developed a really amazing creative team that will hopefully lead to more projects together in the future.*

### What is the significance of the title "Pet Names"?

*The title relates to the familiarity and terms of endearment that can only spring up through years of knowing a person. It also refers to the sarcastic way in which those names can be used. The embarrassing and intimate nature of these "names" is one of the many parts of a relationship that must be handled carefully and just right, showing us how relationships have very delicate and sensitive aspects that must be "protected".*

### How long was the shoot?

*The shoot was a total of 21 days. 10 of those days were shot all at once at a campground in northeast Wisconsin. The cast and crew all camped out together, huddling in tents to avoid the rain, staying up around bonfires, spending way too much money on turkey jerky from the nearby Walmart. The majority of the first cut of the film was edited together in a nearby cabin.*

### How big was the crew?

*Our core crew included myself, Dana Shihadah as our DP, Ryan Muenier running sound, and one production assistant. Off set we had one craft services guy who sometimes doubled as a grip, our on-set editor and DIT, and our animal wrangler/dog owner. Having a crew this size can be challenging in some ways, but ultimately this group was the perfect size to make this film. I can't imagine shooting this movie any other way. Our lighting was minimal, our shots were straightforward. Since the script was so strong, we were really able to simplify the production around the strength of the scenes and the dialogue rather than relying on fancy camera tricks or lighting techniques to draw the viewer's' interest.*

### Why 4:3?

*The cramped quarters of small tents, riding in cars, being stuck in your childhood town, stuck in a life situation you can't necessarily leave, these were all factors in choosing the format of how we would shoot "Pet Names." A*

*compressed frame really helped us to achieve the feeling of a claustrophobic main character who is constantly seeking escape.*

## **Can you explain the color palette of the film?**

*I provided our colorist with two reference photos at the beginning of the color grading process. Two old polaroids that had been faded to a warm greenish tint. Since so much of this story is centered around events from the past, I wanted to infuse a filmic sense of nostalgia throughout the entire film. I felt that the honey-colored scenes painted a beautiful picture of summer in the American midwest that we all miss so desperately during the off-season.*

## **What's next?**

*I'm currently in pre-production with Associate Producer Martin Kaszubowski for his second feature I co-wrote entitled "By Crook". The story follows two friends (Charlotte & Austin) on a runaway trip to Mexico, robbing gas stations and department stores on the way. It's reminiscent of a goofy Bonnie & Clyde. We're calling it a "self-aware platonic love story heist film".*