(500) Days of Summer: Production Notes

I think the key is for me to figure out what went wrong. Do you ever do this? Go back and think about all the things you did together? Everything that happened, replaying it over again in your mind, looking for the first sign of trouble?

<div align="right">Tom</div>

This is a story of Boy Meets Girl, begins the wry, probing narrator of *(500) Days of Summer,* and with that the film takes off at breakneck speed into a funny, true-to-life and unique dissection of the unruly and unpredictable year and a half of one young man's no-holds-barred love affair.

Tom, the boy, still believes, even in this cynical modern world, in the notion of a transforming, cosmically destined, lightning-strikes-once kind of love. Summer, the girl, doesn't. Not at all. But that doesn't stop Tom from going after her, again and again, like a modern Don Quixote, with all his might and courage. Suddenly, Tom is in love not just with a lovely, witty, intelligent woman – *not that he minds any of that* – but with the very *idea* of Summer, the very idea of a love that still has the power to shock the heart and stop the world.

The fuse is lit on Day 1 – when Tom (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), a would-be architect turned sappy greeting card writer encounters Summer (Zooey Deschanel), his boss's breezy, beautiful new secretary, fresh off the plane from Michigan. Though seemingly out of his league, Tom soon discovers he shares plenty in common with Summer. After all, they both love the Smiths. They both have a thing for the surrealist artist Magritte. Tom once lived in Jersey and Summer has a cat named Bruce. As Tom muses, "we're compatible like crazy."

By Day 31, things are moving ahead, albeit "casually." By Day 32, Tom is irreparably smitten, living in a giddy, fantastical world of Summer on his mind. By Day 185, things are in serious limbo – but not without hope. And as the story winds backwards and forwards through Tom's and Summer's on-again, off-again, something blissful, often tumultuous dalliance, it covers the whole dizzying territory from infatuation, dating, and sex to separation, recrimination, and redemption in a whirl of time jumps, split screens, karaoke numbers, and cinematic verve – all of which adds up to a kaleidoscopic portrait of why, and how, we still struggle so laughably, cringingly hard to make sense of love…and to hopefully make it real.

A Comment from Co-Writer Scott Neustadter

On July 22nd, 2001, a Sunday, if I'm not mistaken (and I'm not), sometime between the hours of 7 and 9 (Eastern Standard Time), a monumental, cataclysmic, earth-shattering event took place at a restaurant called "Serendipity" in New York: I got dumped…hard. We'd only been dating a couple months and yet, as often happens in the wake of such things, I was flooded by some powerful emotions: hopelessness, crippling inadequacy, the world ending, that sort of thing. I stayed in a lot during those days – listening to the Smiths on a constant loop, watching old French films and lamenting my not being alive in an era that would appreciate me. In short, I was [a jerk].

Now, at this time, my friend [Michael] Weber and I had written one screenplay together, an outlandish and rather inane comedy solely designed to make us both laugh. A few people read it and thought it was funny, but nothing ever happened, and that was that. We kept writing, but rarely finished anything we started. And then, after a few aborted attempts to write something big and commercial, my frustration level, coupled with my already gloomy mental state, convinced me that I

needed to do something nuts. So I did. I impulsively quit my job of 4 years, said goodbye to my friends and family, and flew off to London for an indefinite period of time (to "study," as I told all those concerned.)

An amazing thing happened next. Almost instantly upon my arrival, I met someone new. She was smart. She was pretty. She was perfect. Six months later, she dumped me.

(500) Days of Summer is the story of those relationships. Or, at least, how I remembered them afterwards. (OK, fine – how I *chose* to remember them.) Weber and I always dreamed of writing a romantic comedy like our heroes Cameron Crowe and Woody Allen – one that was relatable and identifiable, where the comedy came from a real place rather than some squirrel attack in the woods. Our aim was simple: tell the story of a relationship, make it real, make it funny, try to make it not suck.

This is the result. An anatomy of a romance. Equal parts autobiography and fantasy. A pop song in movie form. *(500) Days* is a lot of things – funny (hopefully) sad (definitely), peculiar (for sure). There's music and dancing, split screens, narrators, and a cartoon bird. The one thing there *isn't* is irony. But today, looking back on the experience, I can indeed find something wholly ironic – that an idea borne from the pain of two bad relationships has directly led to some of the best in my life, with a great director, amazing producers, and practically everyone else involved in the project.

The Beginnings of Summer: Penning a Postmodern Love Story

For all intents and purposes, Summer Finn – just another girl. Except she wasn't.

Narrator

(500) Days of Summer began in angst. It was sparked by two young screenwriters – one single and recovering from a badly bruised heart, the other in a long-term relationship – reminiscing over relationships that could have been, that maybe *should* have been, but somehow just…weren't. Almost everyone has had one, and, in an age where everything seems to happen faster and more intensely, they seem to be ever more common. So how, wondered Scott Neustadter and Michael Weber, does a young romantic survive such a reality? And how could today's version of romantic idealism be portrayed on the screen in a way it's never really been seen before?

"There are certain topics that romantic comedies always hint around and never really tackle directly," says Neustadter. "Questions such as: is there really such a thing as 'the one?' And, if there is, what happens if you lose her? What do you do now? Can you still believe in love? Do your beliefs about love change? These were the questions Weber and I wanted to write about even though we don't quite have the answers."

Thus was born the character of Tom Hansen, a guy who believes madly, passionately, even unreasonably in the mystery and power of love, and the woman who doesn't – Tom's romantic muse, total obsession, and frustratingly non-committal, destiny-denying bane of his existence: Summer. But it wasn't just Tom that the screenwriters were interested in; it was the inner workings of his *memory,* as he looks back on just what really happened between him and Summer.

"The idea we had for the screenplay was sort of a romantic comedy meets *Memento.* We wanted to follow a guy sifting through the memories of a relationship, moving backwards and forwards through time as he starts to see things he might not have seen while he was going through

it," explains Neustadter. "You watch him gaining perspective and learning something about himself and about love. Tom realizes he is someone who is in love with the idea of love and that's why his story becomes a very hopeful one. He sees something about the nature of love. It's not your conventional romantic comedy, but it is a very romantic story."

From the beginning, Neustadter and Weber chafed against the perennially cutesy, sentimental, and unexamined conventions of romantic comedies – and searched for a truer way to tell Tom's story of the romance that put his heart through a mix-master, only to leave him with an even stronger, if more mature, belief in love. "We threw away all the rules and looked at alternative structures," explains Neustadter. "We followed every single idea no matter how crazy it seemed, from the way people are transported by a song to how they drown their sorrows in a movie. Anything that was in Tom's mind and memory was fair game."

Continues Weber: "Writing this movie became an incredibly creative experience, because we gave ourselves so much freedom and we were constantly exploring how people's emotions and relationship are tied up in the culture all around us – in the songs, movies, books, television, and art by which we define our identities."

Neustadter and Weber also played freely with time, moving ahead and then backpedaling though Tom's and Summer's relationship at will. "Jumbling the chronology of the movie was a lot of fun for us," continues Weber, "but there was also a method to our madness. By pulling out certain moments on their way up and on their way down, you see things you might not otherwise notice and from a new perspective. And, if you think about it, that's how memory really works, where something will trigger your mind to think of an amazing, wonderful moment and then that will trigger the memory of a bad moment and then comes a revelation of how they were all connected."

Most of all, the priority was on keeping the whole process as emotionally honest as the two men could possibly withstand. "We've all been in the trenches of love, we've all gone through the highs and lows, so Scott and I felt that the only way to tell this story was to come at it from a completely real place," says Weber. "It was pretty interesting for us because Scott was just going through a break-up and I was in a long-term, stable relationship, so we each brought a totally opposite perspective, living it and not living it, and I think that tension helped to bring out more of the comedy."

…The search for a director with a vision that could stand up to the screenplay's creativity lead the filmmaking team to newcomer Marc Webb, who had cut his teeth on music videos and commercials and was in search of his first feature film. He quickly gave his own heart to *(500) Days of Summer.* "When I first read the script, it was like Tom seeing summer for the first time," muses Webb. "Something clicked, and I just knew this was the one."

Like any man infatuated, it was a sense of mystery that drew him deeper in. "The first time I read it, I remember feeling something I couldn't define," Webb recalls. "When I went back and read it again, I realized there is a theme in the movie that is implicit, it's not ever explicitly stated, but it's that Tom finally is hit with the idea that happiness is found within. He sees that it isn't in the big blue eyes of the girl in the cubicle down the hall, even though she can be very beguiling and gets him thinking that she is what will bring him happiness. The truth is that you have to realize who you are

and understand your own potential before you can really find true love. At the end of the day, I felt this story was a very fun way to say something that had some meaning for me."

Webb was also excited about the daring style of *(500) Days of Summer* – and the writers were equally excited about him. "We didn't know anything about Marc at first, but we had the most remarkable marriage of ideas with him," says Neustadter. "All three of us very much wanted to make the same movie, and that was exciting."

Adds producer Mason Novick: "Marc is that rare director who doesn't sacrifice substance for style. He's stylish, but all of his choices are specific, deliberate, and used to forge a point of view."

Webb was, he says, highly energized by the challenge. "I came from a world where there are very few rules, where you're not as obligated to a strict narrative sensibility, and so you can break away from standard conventions. So I loved the idea of diving into a comedy that allowed itself to be non-linear and a little fantastical. The challenge for me was, within that, to find a way to keep the character real enough that they engage people on a deep emotional level. You could say I wanted to find a line in this movie right between reality and magic."