

Thoughts on *(500) Days of Summer*

Scott Neustadter, Michael H. Weber, and Marc Webb

The truth is, none of this was supposed to happen.

I had quit the movie business, where I'd worked as a development exec for the past four years, started the search for a legitimate, practical career, and made peace with the fact that I would never be the writer I had kinda, sorta, always since-I-was-a-fetus wanted to be. And I was fine with this, really, because at that time, at long last, I had finally met THE ONE. I didn't need screenplays and movies, dreams and ambitions. Instead, I had this girl, and she would save me.

And in a way, I guess, she did.

(500) Days of Summer was written in the aftermath of that relationship (it had to be), and while it's technically not a true story in the strictest sense, believe me when I tell you virtually everything in its pages came true.

Even that last little bit.

I was a Tom before I was a Summer. In one relationship I started as a Tom and ended as a Summer. Most recently, I was a Tom once more.

To my surprise and amusement, the release of the movie has led some to consider me an expert on relationships. The idea that I now possess any wisdom regarding the opposite sex or modern romance could not be farther from the truth – just ask any of the Summers and Toms from those aforementioned relationships.

It will be interesting to me, and Scott and Marc as well (and Joseph Gordon-Levitt too), to revisit the movie five years from now. In ten years, in twenty. Will any of us know more then? Will we ever have it figured out, or will we still be making the same mistakes?

Perhaps being a Tom or a Summer is not a mistake at all. Right now, I'm neither. And I miss it. Maybe love is the best mistake you can make.

And if I'm really lucky, I'll get a movie out of it.

Before I read *(500) Days of Summer*, I'd completely lost interest in the romantic-comedy genre. Somewhere between puberty and when I started paying taxes, I stopped believing in the world these rosy-cheeked girls in cute winter knit caps kept promising me. What did it have to do with me?

When I sat down to read the Xeroxed pages that had already been dog-eared from about three weeks of neglect in my backpack, I wasn't really looking forward to it. It was the title that finally got to me. Needless to say, something clicked.

The writers, Scott Neustadter and Michael Weber, had managed to write an uncynical story for cynical people. Without descending into some oddball high concept, it unearthed some skewed relationships that – God – I hadn't thought of in a while. It was like they were looking into my past

and plucking some very private sentiments from some very repressed places. And making jokes out of them. And that's the beauty of it.

We all know Summer because Summer isn't just a girl. She's an event. I met my first Summer when I was seventeen. I won't go into the sordid details, but suffice it to say pretty girls with rebel hearts are in high demand. Some people end up with their Summer. I did not. I couldn't shake that feeling that something had gone horribly, painfully wrong with the universe. Expectations and Reality diverged.

As time wears on, you forget just how acute love can be. When I finally picked up the script, I started to remember. No matter how ridiculous it might seem on the outside, being on the inside is an incredible thing. And that's the secret code of this movie. You see everything from Tom's point of view. Really, you *feel* everything from his point of view. And this curious restriction makes the world come alive. Our movie is not about war. It's not about poverty. It's a playful pop song of a movie. It's about a young man trying to make sense of a young woman.

But these limitations are why the craft of the screenplay is so good. It's a fable conjured from everyday life. Scott and Michael manage to discover all the beauty, pain, humor, drama, and insight from this seemingly small event. The awkwardness of Anal Girl, the bittersweet irony of the bench scene, the whimsy of Hall and Oates [*i.e. the morning-after dance with strangers in the park – MFE*], the incisive, heartrending truth of Expectations vs. Reality. It's all here, tied together with a bit of wisdom that hopefully Tom's put some thought into by the end of this story: "She's better than the girl of my dreams: she's real."