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A collection of media tidbits from OTM Producer-At-Large Mike Pesca

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Not another teen movie: no really it isn't



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BOB GARFIELD: A high school sophomore is the latest winner of a scriptwriting contest sponsored by scenarios USA, a non-profit that turns teenagers' ideas into educational films --mainly they're designed to get kids to talk about sex. The idea is to get an authentic perspective by leaving the adults out of the conversation, because adults talking about teens talking about sex sound like idiots, as in this example from the 1950s.

"The fact was, I was horny. Trent was hot; I wanted to have sex and that was all the reason I needed."

MAN: A girl like Barbara should get to know her own limitations and should explain -- someone should explain to her the difference between boys and girls in their reactions to sexual excitement.

WOMEN: Yes. Yes, that ought to help. Oh, but don't you think her best bet is just to keep away from boys who want to pet?

BOB GARFIELD: The shorts produced by Scenarios USA about abortion, AIDS, violence and teen pregnancy seem to sit well both with students and with schools because according to Scenarios, 7 million students see the films each year. In the film by contest winner Janet Aponte called From An Objective Point of View, best friends make a pact not to have sex without first consulting one another. Reporter Jessie Graham was on the set.

HANNAH WEYER: Action.

WOMEN: Shut up!

JESSIE GRAHAM: In a tiny Brooklyn brownstone bedroom, Janet Aponte stands squeezed behind camera equipment and bright lights. She leans against a wall plastered with pinups from Details Magazine watching two fully clothed teenagers kiss on an unmade bed. The boy reaches for a condom. The director gives the actors instructions.

HANNAH WEYER: And when you say the "Whoa!" you have to go "Whoa!" and you slide right away -- just slide off her.

MAN: Okay.

JESSIE GRAHAM: Janet is 16 years old. She's watching professional actors breathe life into an idea that was born in her bedroom in the apartment she shares with her mother and grandmother in Glendale, Queens. She still can't believe Hollywood directors are making her story into a movie.

JANET APONTE: It's really weird cause my whole life I just imagined little things and put them on a computer or a notebook and-- now they are actually coming to life in front of a camera, and it's very weird.

MAN: Lock it up--

MAN: Lock it up--

MAN: Roll sound.

JESSIE GRAHAM: In Janet's film when 16 year old Rachel has a drunken encounter that ends in a pregnancy scare, she makes a pact with her best friend Kelly. The two girls promise they'll consult each other before having sex.

KELLY: Wait-- hold up - I forgot something -
- I'll meet you downstairs.

RACHEL: All right.

JESSIE GRAHAM: But then Rachel catches Kelly grabbing a condom on the way out of her house.

KELLY: You're the one that's coming up with all the aggravation and everything, acting like you've never seen a condom.

RACHEL: Oh, I have seen one, but what I want to know is what you're going to use it for. Little Miss Purity who had a pact with me -- an agreement!

KELLY: I'm sorry - okay? Maybe I changed my mind.

JESSIE GRAHAM: Kelly has a date to lose her virginity to her boyfriend, Trent, but her friend's challenge makes her re-think her choice. The result is a thoughtful look at teenage desire.

WOMEN: [...?...] marker.

JIM McCAY: And action!

KELLY: What was I thinking? Did I think I couldn't get pregnant or an STD? No. I got a A in biology - I know how all that works. Was I feeling peer pressure? Double no. I could care less what other people think about me. The fact was, I was horny. Trent was hot; I wanted to have sex and that was all the reason I needed.

JIM McCAY: Take your time at the end, okay?

WOMEN: Okay.

JESSIE GRAHAM: Married filmmakers Jim McCay and Hannah Weyer are volunteering their time to direct the film. McCay directed *Our Song* and *Girlstown*, two films that gave surprisingly raw and candid portraits of teenage girls. He says he was drawn to the Scenarios project by the non-judgmental and honest approach it brings to adolescent issues.

JIM McCAY: Well you know the more layers the story has and the less simplistic the story is, the much more - there's much more to talk about. So I think these are great, great starting points for kids who are, who are viewing them to-- to go further into these issues and say well I, you know, agree with this or don't agree with that.

JESSIE GRAHAM: The production site in a borrowed Brooklyn brownstone looks like any movie set, but each professional filmmaker on the set has a Forest Hills high school student working with them. Janet's friend, Brittany Mendenhall, helped with the sets. She says she's glad to see the actors are being filmed in typically messy bedrooms.

BRITTANY MENDENHALL: Like when you watch a lot of shows you can tell there's no teen input because the rooms are so clean; the beds so neat. And I'm like 95 percent of teenagers do not make their beds, so it's just unrealistic.

JESSIE GRAHAM: The film concludes with Kelly deciding not to have sex with Trent.

KELLY: Pact or no pact, it's going to happen eventually. But when it happens, it's going to be when I'm ready. Maybe it'll be next year. Or next month. Or maybe even sooner.

JESSIE GRAHAM: 18 year old actor Melanie Diaz plays Kelly. She grew up on Manhattan's Lower East Side and says she appreciates being part of a project created by someone around her age.

MELANIE DIAZ: I think that's why I like the script so much, is because Kelly - she's not - she's not saying sex is bad; she's like yeah, I want to have sex, but I'm not ready - and that is -it's not that sex is like this evil thing - you can't do it! [LAUGHS] It's just like no, I know myself and I know I'm confident, and when I'm ready, I'm ready!

JESSIE GRAHAM: After 2 days of filming, Janet Aponte is getting ready to take a livery cab back to Queens, but first she watches her actors push through their last take on a cold Brooklyn basketball court.

JANET APONTE: This last scene, the basketball court scene, it symbolizes how even though Kelly decided at the end not to have sex, she's still here with her boyfriend -- that relationship hasn't changed. She's still here with her best friend -- that relationship hasn't changed. Nothing will change no matter what she decides to do, because what she does behind her bedroom doors or her boyfriend's bedroom doors doesn't apply to the rest of the world.

JESSIE GRAHAM: Viewers may soon see Janet's film on networks like Showtime or MTV where Scenarios projects have aired before, but mainly it'll be seen in high school classrooms across the country starting next fall where it will be used to start some difficult conversations.

KELLY: Or maybe even sooner.

JESSIE GRAHAM: For On the Media, I'm Jessie Graham in New York.

MAN: Okay, that's a wrap - it's a wrap on everybody except camera department and Kelly. [THEME MUSIC]

BOB GARFIELD: That's it for this week's show. On the Media was produced by Janeen Price and Katya Rogers with Sean Landis; engineered by Irene Trudel, Dylan Keefe and George Edwards, and edited--by Brooke. We had help from Andy Lanset, Allison Lichter and Jim Colgan. Our web master is Amy Pearl.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: Mike Pesca is our producer at large, Arun Rath our senior producer and Dean Cappello our executive producer. Bassist/composer Ben Allison wrote our theme. You can listen to the program and get free transcripts at onthemedia.org and e-mail us at onthemedia@wnyc.org. This is On the Media from National Public Radio. I'm Brooke Gladstone.

BOB GARFIELD: And I'm Bob Garfield.

BROOKE GLADSTONE: And Bob -- you'll know when you're ready.

BOB GARFIELD: I hope so. [MUSIC TAG]

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