

Transamerica

Production Notes

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CAST

Bree	Felicity Huffman
Toby	Kevin Zegers
Elizabeth	Fionnula Flanagan
Margaret	Elizabeth Peña
Calvin	Graham Greene
Murray	Burt Young
Sydney	Carrie Preston
Arletty	Venita Evans
Alex	Jon Budinoff
Bobby Jensen	Raynor Scheine
Hitchhiker	Grant Monohon
Mary Ellen	Bianca Leigh
Dr. Spikowsky	Danny Burstein
Police Sergeant	Craig Bockhorn
Voice Coach	Andrea James
Fernando	Maurice Orozco
NYC Cop	Paul Borghese
Tennessee Waitress	Kate Bayley
Taylor	Stella Maeve
Little Girl	Teala Dunn
Taylor's Father	Jim Frangione
Kelly	Kelly O'Connell
Calpernia	Calpernia Addams
Sandi	Sandi Alexander
Melissa	Melissa Sklarz
Felicia	Felicia Kittles
David	David Harrison
Sammy	Forrie Smith
Phoenix Lady	Elayne Stein
Phoenix Cop	Amy Povich
Male Nurse	Burton Elias
Filipino Nurse	Cecy
Wayne	Matt Young
Ms. Swallow	Barbara Hubbard Barron

Gas Station Dog
Lucky

Lou Lou
Zero T. Poodle

FILMMAKERS

Written and Directed by
Produced by

Executive Producer
Associate Producer
Director of Photography
Sound Recordist
Editor
Production Design
Music Composed and Performed by
Costume Design
Music Supervisor
Casting
Production Manager
Key Hair & Make-Up
Location Manager
Supervising Sound Editor

Duncan Tucker
Linda Moran
Rene Bastian
Sebastian Dungan
William H. Macy
Lucy Cooper
Stephen Kazmierski
Griffin Richardson
Pam Wise, A.C.E.
Mark White
David Mansfield
Danny Glicker
Doug Bernheim
Eve Battaglia
Elinyisia Mosha
Lynn Campbell
Michele Baker
Lou Bertini

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT
Duncan Tucker on TRANSAMERICA and Transsexuality
Or
You've got to be Sneaky to be Subversive

TRANSAMERICA tells a story that is both universal and revolutionary. It's strange how we all want the same things – family, love, home – and yet there's no such thing as “normal”. The main character in TRANSAMERICA is transsexual, yet the film is not about transsexuality. At heart it's an old-fashioned story about a parent, a child, and the bonds of family. The plot is structured along the familiar lines of classic American road movies, yet the two protagonists whose lives it celebrates are anything but familiar. My hope is that TRANSAMERICA will transport viewers into the minds and hearts of two human beings they might ordinarily look upon as outsiders, or more likely, not look upon at all.

Several years ago I got to know a lovely woman who told me, some months into our friendship, that she was a pre-op transsexual. She'd had electrolysis, facial feminization surgery, years of hormone therapy — everything but the final genital operation. Until she outed herself, I'd had no idea she wasn't a biological female. Her life had been incredibly difficult. She struggled constantly with loneliness, the pain of her past and an uncertain future. Yet for every heart-breaking story she told me, there was an improbably funny one. More than anything my friend wanted “a normal life.” I was moved by her courage and her humor. I wondered whether her dream would remain forever beyond her grasp.

As the story of TRANSAMERICA evolved, I met and talked extensively with many other transwomen. Sometimes I saw unappeasable anger. More often I saw great resilience and beauty of spirit. A surprising number of the transwomen I met lived “deep stealth”, which is to say as genetic women, unrecognizable as anything other than female.

While researching TRANSAMERICA I also interviewed several street hustlers. They were damaged kids, guarded, hidden. Most of them had been abused as children. They confused sex and affection, and suspected that physical appeal was the only measure of their worth. This is why Toby comes to Bree's bed, when out of empathy and loneliness he tries to give her the only gift he thinks he has to offer. Most people find this scene uncomfortable – as they should. Like the boys I met, Toby suffers from terrible self-image problems. He toys with dangerous drugs. He finds it difficult to relate to adults in a non-sexual way. He's angry, suspicious, eager-to-please, hungry for attention, seductive, highly sexual, and just a kid.

As Dr. Spikowsky tells Bree early in TRANSAMERICA, Gender Dysphoria (AKA Gender Identity Disorder, or GID) is listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders endorsed by the American Psychiatric Association. This listing has had the dual effect of giving transsexualism legitimacy – there's a medical diagnosis for it – and of stigmatizing transsexuals as mentally ill. I believe transsexuality is a biological rather than psychological state. I believe that transsexuality is NOT a mental disorder,

though it's clear that growing up transsexual in a society that shuns transsexuality causes great emotional distress.

– Duncan Tucker

ABOUT THE MAKING OF TRANSAMERICA

“Would Bree watch *Desperate Housewives*? Yes, she would love it and throw *Desperate Housewives* parties. She mighteven consider going blonde.”

--- Felicity Huffman

Felicity Huffman, who learned about Tucker’s offer for her to star in TRANSAMERICA while she was at the first table read for the “Desperate Housewives” pilot says, “Duncan told me, ‘it’s not a movie about what’s under your skirt.’”

“The film draws its life and soul from the people whose story it tells,” says Tucker. “I chose to make it a road movie because I wanted to show these two extraordinary characters against a backdrop of ordinary America and Americans. Bree and Toby unwittingly pioneer new territory in their own lives as they travel from the Northeast to the Southwest, and the sweep and scope of the landscape they pass through mirror their interior journeys. It’s impossible to write a screenplay like this without honoring the tension implicit in the characters and situation. But Bree and Toby remain spirited, hopeful people. I tried to make their story swift-paced and funny, with a lively sense of adventure and of possibility.”

As a road movie, the makers of TRANSAMERICA were able to offer their cast and crew the rare luxury of shooting the film more or less in sequence.

But shooting in rural and “red state” America, the producers were a bit concerned that the film’s subject matter would get them into trouble. Producer Sebastian Dungan recalls instructing the crew, if asked by locals, to say the film was about a woman and her son going on a cross-country road trip.

“Not exactly a lie, but not the whole truth either,” Dungan recalls. “Like many low-budget films, we often had to rely on the hospitality of local churches and community centers who rent their facilities as inexpensive holding areas near sets. I remember being particularly nervous about one such holding, a Mormon church in the middle of Nowhere, Arizona, that was down the road from where we shot the Sammy’s Wigwam sequence where Toby confronts Bree about having a penis. Locations posted signs to respect the church – “no cussing, no smoking” one read – but I was nervous that our rowdy New York crew would forget where they were. At one point, I walked in on some crew members having fun with one of the prosthetic penises that we were prepping for an upcoming scene. There was an image of Jesus on the wall. I had to break up the fun.”

Recalls Huffman, “The film started shooting in New York which was wonderful since I got to be in the city again. As a young actor I always dreamed of actually filming a movie in New York. Since I am a member of the Atlantic Theater Company I cajoled several of the members to come down and watch the first couple days of shooting, just to make sure I wasn’t too far off in left field or completely full of shit. Then we went to upstate New

York, which was beautiful and made me miss the East Coast. We flew to Phoenix, which was the honeymoon of the project for me.”

“It worked out well that as Felicity and Kevin got to know each other better, so did Bree and Toby,” says Tucker. “Halfway through the production, we moved out to Arizona, where the country feels enormous and the skies are always blue. It was fun to be in those beautiful locations – the high desert outside of Chino Valley, Watson Lake in the Granite Dells, a beautiful ranch nestled in the boulders outside of Prescott, white bluffs in Skull Valley on the old Senator Highway. Everyone started having a really good time on the set. We shot what we call Bree’s and Toby’s ‘honeymoon scenes’ there, the sequence of their trip where they really start to enjoy each other.”

Those “honeymoon scenes,” and the scenes leading up to the film’s dénouement, in which Toby discovers Bree’s true identity, required Huffman and Kevin Zegers to create a tricky and transparently honest dynamic between them. As Dungan puts it, “Toby and Bree could not be more different characters. She is conservative, verbal, extremely body conscious. He is wild, exhibitionistic, and insecure about his intelligence. Both are loners, with a suspicion of a world that has abused and stigmatized them. Both have retreated and closed themselves off rather than get burned again. The tension between their differences and their similarities and the compromises the story leads them to make is the core of their journey.”

ABOUT THE CASTING OF TRANSAMERICA

FELICITY HUFFMAN

The filmmakers of TRANSAMERICA had very firm ideas about the kind of actor they wanted to play Bree.

Duncan Tucker explains, “I wanted to cast a woman because I wanted to honor where the character was going and not mire her in what she left behind. I was looking for a transformative actress who could disappear into the role.

“I had admired Felicity’s work for some time and knew she had great range. I was convinced she had the chops, heart and humor to play the role. Her work exceeded my wildest expectations.”

Huffman’s portrayal of Bree, a conservative, biologically male transsexual “living stealth” in the days before her scheduled surgery, is a triumph of transformation, an astonishing example of how completely an actor can fearlessly disappear into the skin, and psyche, of another person.

Creating Bree, says Huffman, was about getting across the idea “That you feel alienated from your true being, that you feel you are an impostor.”

Taking on the role was a daunting prospect but Huffman never considered it too risky.

“Risky, no, scary, yes,” she admits. “I didn’t think I could pull it off. I knew nothing about the transgender world. How does a woman go about becoming a man who is becoming a woman? Did I become a man first and then figure out how, as a man, I should let my inner woman out?”

Says producer Sebastian Dungan, “I think Felicity was fearless in playing Bree. But I also believe that as an artist Felicity is dedicated to honesty, and, as a person, loves a challenge. So I don’t think she was worried about perception or glamour. She just saw a great part and dove into it.”

Adds Huffman, “Everyone has had experiences like the ones Bree has: being self-conscious on an excruciating level, not fitting in, wishing people could see you as you really are, having to hide your true self from those you love. True, gender dysphoric individuals experience this at an intense level, but it is still a truth of the human soul. If TRANSAMERICA can tell a story about that, it transforms it from an “issue movie” to a movie everyone can relate to because the characters’ struggles are true and universal. And those are the movies I want to watch.”

Although Bree would be played by a woman, Huffman nonetheless went through a radical physical as well as emotional transformation to prepare for the part.

“I had to figure out the physicality of the role,” she recalls. “I met with two wonderful women, Andréa James and Calpernia Addams [on whose life the award-winning Showtime movie *A Soldier’s Girl* was based]. They not only talked to me about the inner life of gender dysphoria but about the physical challenges. They were my guardian angels throughout the shooting.

“I remember Danny Glicker, the brilliant costume designer, and I calling Andréa asking, ‘What does it feel like right after sexual reassignment surgery and what does the bandage look like?’ We passed the phone back and forth as she described the bandage to him and the pain to me.”

Adds Tucker, “We often think of all TS women as odd-looking, caught in a limbo between masculine and feminine. That is because we’re often only aware of the visible ones, the TS people we recognize on the street. In fact, every year hundreds of ‘stealth trannies’ pass through transition and then melt invisibly into society.”

To reach a point where Bree could look, sound, walk, talk and dress like a transgender person who is on the verge of successfully “living stealth,” at least most of the time, Huffman and the TRANSAMERICA crew worked diligently on the most extreme of makeovers.

Huffman began by asking herself, “How *does* a woman stand, sit, gesture?”

Says Huffman, “I went to work with a wonderful coach, Danae Doyle, who teaches transgender woman how to behave like women. I had to learn everything from the outside in. I learned how to walk, how to hold my arms and hands. For example, men’s arms are longer and their hands are much bigger, so to hide this I stood with my elbows severely tucked in and my hands neatly folded over each other. I learned how to stand, walk, and gesture. For me, interestingly enough, a large part of the transformation was training to be more feminine.”

Huffman continues, “For my voice training I went back to Andréa James, who also teaches transgender women how to find their female voice. The voice is the hardest thing. You can look like Kate Moss but if you sound like James Earl Jones or Tony Curtis in *Some Like It Hot* you’ve got a problem. So I had to sound like a man who hasn’t quite found his female voice. Understandably, Andréa had never had to do it the other way around, that is, make a women sound like a man trying to sound like a women. Andréa suggested I use ‘the voice’ as I went about my day.

“Well, suddenly I didn’t want to talk anymore. I was so embarrassed and self-conscious trying to speak in my woman/man/woman voice, so instead I found myself nodding or shaking my head or smiling in a “how yaw doing” kind of way. *Anything* to keep from speaking.”

More superficial yet equally important elements of Bree came from her hair, makeup and wardrobe. Tucker describes the process:

“I had always been of the opinion that very meticulously thought-out and very feminine make-up, just a little bit too heavily applied, was the way to go,” he says. “Our make-up artist, Lynn Campbell, was key make-up artist for *Sex and the City*, and Felicity worked closely with her. They contoured her face, accentuating the planes and angles, making her look more gaunt and bony. They used foundation that was just a shade off of what was appropriate for Felicity’s coloring, to tell the story that Bree hadn’t yet fully figured out how to use make-up.

“Jason Hayes, who did the wigs for *Hairspray* on Broadway, built us two amazing human hair wigs at a tenth of what they would normally cost, because of his belief in the project. We wouldn’t have been able to afford them otherwise. He actually ended up taking a huge amount of hair out of the wigs, to thin them so they looked more like the hair of a man who decided to begin hormone therapy in mid-life.

“I asked costume designer Danny Glicker to think about catalogue-ordered clothes, since I imagined Bree was too self-conscious to go shopping in public, and to stick with pastels and ultra-feminine colors. He and Felicity soon discovered that Bree’s favorite color was lavender, though she was also partial to mint, beige and pink, that she wears scarves to conceal her neck, jackets to conceal her figure, long dresses to conceal her legs – all of Bree’s clothing choices are about covering up.”

Huffman observes, “Before sexual reassignment surgery, a candidate has to live as a woman for at least a year, before the person is cleared for the actual surgery. So I ask all the guys out there: think about waking up one morning and putting on a dress, make up and high heels and going to work or the grocery store or the bank. Can you imagine how terrifying that would be?”

“I started to be able to comprehend the heroic journey gender dysphoric people take. *If* they are brave enough to fight for who they truly are, they are viewed as freaks and alienated from society. If they choose not to, they are alienated from themselves. I started the research for this movie thinking gender dysphoric people were interesting but at best an odd anomaly. I ended the film knowing that these are some of the bravest people in the world.”

“Felicity created a whole range of movements, ties, a walk and a voice that made her an entirely different person,” recalls producer Dungan. “I’ll always remember when we were shooting in Phoenix and Bill Macy came to visit the set with their two young daughters. The youngest didn’t recognize her mother in her full hair-makeup-costume-deep-voiced persona and started crying when Felicity tried to pick her up. I felt bad for Felicity as a mother but I knew that we had really succeeded in her transformation at that point.

“Actresses are under enormous pressure to look beautiful,” concludes Dungan. “But they also want good, meaty parts, and Felicity’s work in this film reminds me of what Charlize Theron went through for ‘Monster’ and Hilary Swank’s performance in ‘Boys Don’t Cry,’ as examples of actresses taking risks. Felicity’s total commitment to the reality of Bree is one of the things that I admire the most about her involvement in the film. The work she did on her voice and walk and mannerisms, getting coached by real transsexual women, was entirely her idea.

“It was also entirely Felicity’s idea to wear the uncomfortable undergarments of a transsexual even when there was no way they could be seen.”

Once shooting began, Huffman’s greatest challenge was to maintain the character, though she reports the film’s director helped with this.

“Duncan became my watchdog,” she says. “Every time my voice went into a higher register, every time my gestures became too comfortably feminine, every time I lost Bree’s walk, every nod of the head that wasn’t totally Bree, Duncan would call me on it.

“I have to say, Duncan is a brave man, because if I wasn’t snapping at him, denying the lapse, the producers were snapping at him saying we couldn’t afford another take just because my gesture was slightly off. But Duncan is tenacious. He wrote the script and loved Bree and when she didn’t show up on the screen in all her authenticity he became a bulldog. I had to do it again. He pushed me and pushed me. It is a blessing to have a director who won’t settle, and believes in your ability so much that he won’t accept anything but the absolute, one hundred percent, truth from you. I settled into the character more as the film progressed, and consequently neither my husband nor my agent could recognize my voice when I called. My husband finally made a rule that I couldn’t talk to him ‘in character.’ It was too weird.”

Huffman reports that the transformation ran so deep that vestiges of Bree stuck with her as “Desperate Housewives” went into production a couple of weeks after TRANSAMERICA wrapped.

“It was a culture shock,” she says. “My voice was several octaves lower and by the end of TRANSAMERICA I honestly was having some confusion as to what side of the public restrooms I was supposed to use. Seriously, I would walk into the ladies room and suddenly freeze ‘am I allowed in here?...yes!...no! This isn’t my side... oh yes it is, I am a girl’! Plus I kept answering to Marcia Cross’ character whose name is Bree. I’d hear an AD say ‘We are ready on set for Bree’ and I would come flying out of my trailer.”

KEVIN ZEGERS

“Young actors are hard to cast,” explains Duncan. “Too inexperienced and natural and you worry about their range and consistency. Too experienced and polished, and you worry that they won’t be able to be raw. In Toby, we were looking for a balance between the two and a very specific age range.

“Duncan was insistent not to cast older for younger as is so often done, especially on TV where 28-year-olds play high school students. When our casting director Eve Battaglia first showed us Kevin’s pictures the reaction was, “this kid’s way too good looking.” But Kevin and his reps really pursued the part. Kevin had a lot of success early in his career and he’s now at that crossroads where he has to prove that he is more than a cute kid. He put himself on tape for us and the performance blew us away with its vulnerability and rawness. Also, Kevin, with his flawless looks, had managed to rough himself up. His passion for the part was clear, his acting chops undeniable and when we saw how “real” he could look, he leapt to the top of the list.”

Recalls Huffman, “I watched Kevin’s audition tape and thought he was phenomenal. But I was nervous he was going to be a young movie star, you know: arrogant, late, frightened, letting everyone know he was slumming it in an independent movie, and doing us a favor just by being in it. So I was relieved when Kevin walked into rehearsal and was the antithesis of the young, hot, jerky actor. He is hard working, polite, kind, considerate and a team player. Most importantly, for this project, Kevin is a brave actor. He was willing to go out on a limb and try new things. We spent six weeks together, sweating in an old station wagon with no air-conditioning in the Arizona 100 degree heat *and* we had a great time.”

Kevin Zegers wanted the role of Toby from the minute he read the script. “After I read the script and met with Duncan I put myself on tape and sent it to him in New York. I heard that there was some interest but after not hearing anything for a while I found Duncan’s number and stalked him until he gave me the job!

“I guess the old ‘persistence pays off’ thing really does work sometimes. I couldn’t just let this opportunity pass me by. This story was too beautiful and too important for me not to be a part of. This film genuinely means so much to me.

“I also loved Felicity’s work and was sure she could pull off the character. The amount of time and effort she put into making Bree as real as possible was truly astounding. Every young actor’s dream is to work alongside someone like Felicity. She always made me feel comfortable. I adore her.”

Tucker describes the character of Toby, “The ‘Toby’ Kevin discovered was a boy who’s been hurt and abandoned and ostracized his whole life. He’s the kind of teenager who just doesn’t let on what he’s thinking and feeling, he often just seems blank – so that you want to shake him by the shoulders and say, ‘What’s going on inside that head?’

“Toby is a weight on Bree’s shoulders, an obstacle in her path,” Tucker continues. “He’s the catalyst that dissolves her reserve, the trumpet that finally brings down the walls she’s built to protect herself. In the end, when Bree cries after her surgery, her tears are her reward, the grace she’s achieved, the treasure she brings back from her journey.”

Zegers adds, “Toby’s feelings toward Bree change throughout the story; from annoyance to friendship and eventually, to love. Even after finding out about her being a transsexual, the only part that upsets him is that she lied to him, not that she’s weird or different.

“He feels comfortable with Bree. He feels like her ‘outcast’ qualities and his offset each other. He feels okay with himself around her, he feels taken care of and finally, he feels loved.”

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