



PRESENTS

# FAR FROM THE TREE

A FILM BY RACHEL DRETZIN

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## **SYNOPSIS**

FAR FROM THE TREE follows families meeting extraordinary challenges through love, empathy, and understanding. This life-affirming documentary encourages us to cherish loved ones for all they are, not who they might have been. Based on Andrew Solomon's award-winning, critically acclaimed, New York Times bestselling non-fiction book "Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity."

## **FAR FROM THE TREE**

When readers and critics called Andrew Solomon's prize-winning 2012 book FAR FROM THE TREE a cultural touchstone, few would have guessed that, just a few years later, much of the world would enter an era that has been called "the end of empathy." We are witnessing deadening daily battles based on issues of difference and identity. The film adaptation of FAR FROM THE TREE looks beyond politics to a more resilient institution: the family, where the most profound differences can unite people instead of pushing them apart. Its transcendent portraits offer a reminder of the best within us, as we see that a parent's limitless love can trump anything.

Inspired in part by his family's struggle to accept him as a gay man, Solomon began researching children who fall "far from the tree" in a variety of ways. The result was his bestselling *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*, now out in twenty-four languages and the recipient of more than fifty national and international awards. In it, he draws on stories about sexual and gender orientation, physical and developmental deviations, and behavioral anomalies such as criminality. Solomon examines the hopes and dreams, triumphs and disappointments that are a part of every family and concludes that everyone who has children has children who are different in some ways, and that we share the experience of loving our children despite and because of the ways they deviate from what we imagined when we set out to have children. "Almost no one," Solomon has said, "looks at his or her children's problems and wants to exchange the kids for a better model. We love the children we have." Each form of difference can feel isolating, but if we recognize that everyone struggles with such differences, we can arrive at profound truths about love. The *New York Times Book Review* wrote, "This is a passionate and affecting work that will shake up your preconceptions and leave you in a better place. It's a book everyone should read and there's no one who wouldn't be a more imaginative and understanding parent—or human being—for having done so."

Based on Solomon's book, the new documentary FAR FROM THE TREE explores the difficulties and rewards of raising and being a child whose experience is vastly different from that of his or her parents. Directed and produced by Emmy®-winning filmmaker Rachel Dretzin, it follows families coping with the challenges presented by Down syndrome, dwarfism, autism, and having a child in prison. Their profound, sometimes heartbreaking, but ultimately hopeful stories are related with extraordinary candor and transparency; this is a film rooted in the myriad forms of intimacy. Like the book, it provides lessons in love that far outstrip its immediate subjects, but also makes us unafraid of differences by which we might otherwise have been very much intimidated. It's hard to hate someone whose story you know, and the film adaptation of *Far From the Tree* provides stories that can mitigate the surging hatred around us. It is a film that restores dignity to people whose rights are under siege, a rare window into the lives of others.

Each of the film's central families tells a unique story, but Dretzin deftly uncovers parallels that touch on issues of community, understanding and self-acceptance. She has interwoven Solomon's own story with them. Deeply compassionate, the film illustrates how families that face extraordinary challenges meet them in the most ordinary ways: with love, empathy, and a desire to understand one another. It encourages us to cherish loved ones for all they are, not who they might have been. In demonstrating how families have learned to love children who are different from them, it shows us all how to love the diversity in our world—how to find in aberrance not a threat, but a shimmering, new beauty.

It's a crucial film for a time when the American mainstream has begun to erase such lives.

**FAR FROM THE TREE**  
**ABOUT THE PRODUCTION**

***"Having a severely challenging child intensifies life ... I would not wish to trivialize the difficulty of these identities, but I knew about all that going in. The revelation was all the joy."***

— Andrew Solomon

*Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and The Search for Identity*

A self-described "weirdo" as a child, Andrew Solomon's interests included opera and the poetry of Emily Dickinson. But it was his being gay that gave him a fraught relationship to his parents. "My mother imagined that her first-born son would be part of the real mainstream — the kind of kid who was popular at school, athletic, at ease in the world, and basically quite conventional," he says in the film. "And instead, she got me."

So the National Book Award-winning author of *The Noonday Demon* decided to investigate the ways in which other families deal with their differences. The result, *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and The Search for Identity*, comes to the seemingly contradictory conclusion that it is in fact our diversity that unites us. Solomon wrote the book both to understand his own life better and to understand the kinds of difference by which he was made uncomfortable.

The result of ten years of exploration and interviews with some three hundred families, Solomon's book was an epic undertaking. Filmmaker Rachel Dretzin read the book after it was featured in the *New York Times Book Review*. "I couldn't get it out of my mind," she remembers. "I went out and bought it that day and devoured all 800 pages. When I finished it, I read it again. What appealed to me, aside from Solomon's craft as a writer, was the book's 'shimmering humanity,' as one critic put it."

Solomon proposes that parents who must struggle to love and understand their child often arrive at a deeper love following those struggles. It was something Dretzin says she felt intuitively, but the families whose stories the author had chronicled were living proof. "He showed the beauty and the purpose of caring deeply for someone who isn't easy to care for," she explains. "It's an experience that reveals your own compassion to you, revealing things you might not know about yourself. I found it a thoughtful, philosophical statement about life, about parenting, and about love."

As a documentary filmmaker, Dretzin immediately recognized the cinematic potential of the book and was immediately excited by the prospect of turning it into a film. "There's a built-in drama and narrative arc to many of the stories," she explains. "But I also felt

that, while Andrew's writing is incredibly visual, the experience of actually seeing these people who we consider so different would add yet another layer." Featuring an array of ordinary people facing extreme challenges, Dretzin's new documentary, FAR FROM THE TREE, tells the stories of parents and children dealing with exceptional circumstances and finding profound meaning in the experience, as seen through their own eyes.

Solomon was approached by more than thirty filmmakers after the book came out, but Dretzin, he said, understood its themes more clearly than anyone else; "We formed an almost instant intellectual and emotional alliance that has never wavered. We agree on all the moral questions the book asked, and that the film now presents in a new and gorgeous way."

Reading the book and making the film challenged Dretzin's assumptions that "disabilities" define people's lives in a negative way. "Previously, I would see someone and think, 'I feel so bad for them,' or look away," she admits. "Solomon brought their great humanity, strength and power to the forefront. He recognized the joy in communities and lives that most of us see as unfortunate."

Producer Jamila Ephron agrees, adding, "I can't think of any other works that have increased people's capacity for empathy in a way that comes close to this. You don't end up the same as when you started."

Solomon admits to some trepidation about including his own story in the book and the film. The point of doing so, he says, was to try to break down barriers that keep people from being open about their experiences. "If telling my story could contextualize these other stories and be helpful to people, then I was willing to do it. The film is an opportunity to reach a different audience than the book with that same message. It has been both thrilling and nerve-wracking, but has felt like the most important project I've undertaken."

The author hopes the film will prompt audience members to ask themselves whether what society considers illnesses or abnormalities might instead be seen as identities. "The word identity can valorize something while the word illness disparages it," he says. "In different contexts, the same quality can be seen as either or both. Being old can be seen as an illness or an identity; so can being gay, or having autism. We are living in radical times when what has been seen primarily as an illness becomes more broadly embraced as an identity. I lived through that change for gay people, and wanted to do all I could to help other people stranded in illness to know themselves as having a cherished identity."

## EVERY HAPPY FAMILY...

***Once this guy said to me, man, if I were you, I would kill myself...He felt I must be miserable and I think that it's probably a pretty common assumption. What body you are in has everything to do with your perspective of the world.***

—Joseph Stramondo

The filmmakers knew that in a feature-length film they would be able to tell only a handful of stories, so it was important that they present diverse and compelling experiences. “We were looking for stories that brought to light the themes we were most interested in exploring in the film,” says Ephron. “But we also had to make sure that the few stories that went into the film spoke to one another — that each formed a constellation with the others.”

The film opens on an intimate family scene between Jason Kingsley and his mother Emily Perl Kingsley. When Jason was born with Down syndrome, his mother explains, she was told that his case was hopeless and advised to institutionalize him before she formed an attachment. “It was so ludicrous,” she says now. “That an obstetrician doesn’t understand that you’ve spent nine months forming an attachment!”

Instead, she and her late husband Charles set out to prove the experts wrong. She became a super-mom, giving her son coaching all the time, and Jason went on to learn to read, do arithmetic and speak basic Spanish. He appeared regularly on the television show “Sesame Street,” becoming a leading spokesperson for what people with Down syndrome can accomplish. Jason surpassed all expectations. “I thought this was a piece of cake,” Emily says wistfully. “They must have been just plain wrong.”

Now in his 40s, Jason is extremely articulate. He has a solid understanding of his abilities. Jason quotes Shakespeare in the film, lives semi-independently with two other men with Down syndrome, and has held the same office job for 18 years. “I think slowly but I’m smart in my own way,” he tells Dretzin. “I’m basically a normal guy.”

But Jason’s remarkable intellectual capacity outstripped his social intelligence and his understanding of reality is tenuous at best. Razor sharp on some subjects, he has difficulty discerning fact from fiction, a conundrum fully revealed in his romantic obsession with a cartoon character whom he longs to meet. His mother continues to challenge him with excursions to museums and high-level conversation; she understands every bit of his potential. But as she grows older, she is increasingly concerned about his ability to handle his own future.

Family videos show Jack, the third child of Amy and Bob Allnut, as a vibrant and curious toddler. But Jack began to fall behind at an early age. He never developed verbal skills

— howling, raging and lashing out physically in frustration. Jack was eventually diagnosed with autism. “It was never a normal mother-son relationship,” Amy confesses. “I assumed he was impaired, that he had no idea what was going on.”

Still, the Allnuts tried every treatment they could find — music therapy, allergy testing, a gluten and dairy-free diet, physical and speech therapy — to no avail. Nothing improved his condition, until a dedicated specialist took charge of Jack’s treatment and taught him a form of typing. When she gave him the tools to communicate, the first thing he told his parents was, “I’m trying and I am really smart.”

“I thought, my God, he’s in there,” says Amy. “It was like I was meeting him for the first time.”

By being able to express himself to others, Jack has begun to understand himself better as well. “There definitely is a community that is beginning to assume that autism is not a disability, but an identity,” says Dretzin. “You see it at the end when Jack Allnut is walking with his autistic friends, who call themselves ‘The Real Boys.’ They have a different way of communicating, but it’s not lesser — it’s just different.”

The story of Jack Allnut and his family is in many ways the opposite of the Kingsleys’. Jack has autism, but after many nonverbal years, he learned to type and was able to express himself. “Jason’s parents believed their child could shatter all expectations for someone who had an intellectual disability,” says Dretzin. “They pushed and pushed and then had to come to terms with his limits. Jack’s parents became hopeless and made assumptions about his limitations. Then they had to reckon with his depths. I loved the way those two stories related to each other.”

Dretzin discovered that as she spent time with the people in the film, her unease with their physical and intellectual differences quickly melted away. “At the Little People of America convention, within half an hour, you’re not noticing that everybody’s small, because you’re the one who stands out there,” she says. “Instead you’re thinking ‘that woman has a really funky haircut, that woman has a great sense of humor,’ and so on. Their differences from each other become much more marked.”

The filmmaker and her crew accompanied Loini Vivao to the convention. At 25, Loini had lived a very sheltered life with her mother and felt very much alone. She’d never been on a date or had a close friend who was like her. On her way to the Little People of America convention, Loini is excited but apprehensive. “Growing up, I never really knew that people like me existed in the world,” she says. “I saw them on TV, but I’ve never met any up close.”

Dretzin captures Loini’s amazed delight as she beholds a hotel lobby full of little people — alone, in couples or large groups of friends. For the first time in her life, she blends into the crowd and it is her mother who stands out as different. During that weekend she meets a woman named Maddie and a friendship blossoms. “It was wonderful to find



someone one who is like you," Loini confides with tears. "I found my first friend who can understand me."

"The idea that you can feel like you're the only one in the world is central here," says Dretzin. It is so powerful when you find other people who are like you, so I had to put Loini in the film. Her experience of going to the Little People of America convention is incredibly dramatic. Once she's there, we find Leah and Joe, and in a way, they continue her story, because they are at a point where they feel very empowered and comfortable with who they are."

Leah Smith and Joseph Stramondo are a married couple with dwarfism. Joseph, who is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at San Diego State University, says, "When you see people like me, the core experience is negative. People have very low expectations. It's surprising to them when I indicate somehow that I'm not suffering."

The children of average-size parents, Leah and Joe achieve a pregnancy during the course of Dretzin's filming. They are an affectionate and romantic couple and their hopes for their child might surprise some. "Every person has a desire for their ideal child," says Leah, who serves as media and entertainment advocate for the Center for Disability Rights as well as director of public relations for Little People of America. "So I have a desire to have a little person. But if I have an average size child, I will still get it on a level because I understand what it is like to be different from your family." Finally, the film shifts to the the Reese family, whose elder son Trevor committed a terrible crime. Derek, Lisa and their two youngest children, Tyler and Rebecca make small talk on a group phone call to Trevor, it is easy to assume they are speaking to a young man away at college. But Trevor is an inmate at maximum security Angola State prison, sentenced to life for a crime his parents never imagined he could commit.

Solomon learned about the family after Derek Reese read *Far From the Tree* and sent a letter to the author expressing thanks for his sensitivity. In the letter, he also shared the family's experience. Believing that their story could be essential to the film, Solomon flew to Texas to meet and talk with them in person. The Reeses were understandably reluctant to participate in anything that would require reliving the worst times of their lives. Feeling unwelcome in their longtime hometown, they had felt it necessary to move to another state after Trevor's conviction. Reopening old wounds was the last thing they wanted to do.

Eventually the family consented to being filmed without making a firm commitment that they would allow the footage to be used. "Andrew kept telling me, 'You've got to give them time, this is so terrifying to them,'" says Dretzin. "Once they began to really trust us and the process, it was incredible how real they were."

It would take almost a full year from the time Solomon first approached the Reeses until they agreed to allow their story to be shared. Says Solomon: "They had experienced a

terrible darkness. Ultimately, they hoped that by talking about it, they could save others from a similar experience, or at least let others know they weren't alone in such tragedy. They are people of great integrity in this way."

The Reeses initially reacted with disbelief to the accusation that their 16-year-old-son had killed a child in cold blood. That changed to bewilderment, shame and guilt as the evidence mounted against him. He eventually confessed. "There's no reconciling this issue," Derek. "You carry the guilt with you forever. Your son killed an 8-year-old. If something like that happens in your family, there must be something wrong with your family, your parenting, your whatever."

More than any of the other stories, the Reese family story is about the steadfastness of parental love. "Their child has done the most heinous thing you can do and they are devastated by that," says Ephron. "You don't blame a child for having dwarfism. It's very hard to not blame a child for committing a murder. But their love for him is unshaken."

Lisa echoes that feeling when she says, "A mother can't just stop loving a child. We just didn't see this coming. Sometime people ask me if I have children and I say I have an 18-year-old in college and a high school sophomore. I don't mention my first son. It's not wanting to get into it, but not wanting to be dishonest."

While most of the stories in the film are ultimately uplifting, the filmmakers felt it was important to include one with no convenient conclusion. Executive Producer Mary Bing argues that the Reese story is uplifting in a different way. "I think sometimes you have to go to a really dark place to come out on the other side," she says. "The courage of that family in speaking the truth was really inspiring to me."

## APPLES AND ORANGES

***Responsible parenting entails changing your children: you educated them; you teach them manners; you try to instill moral values in them. Not changing them is neglect. But you also have to accept them and help them believe that you'd never want anything but who they truly are. It's so hard to know what to change and what to accept; it may be the most difficult and important task of parenthood.***

— Andrew Solomon

FAR FROM THE TREE is an eloquent reminder that love can transcend fear and confusion. The families included have become deeply connected through their struggles; they have grown from having their worlds opened up in ways they never expected. “When you look at what some of these people have been through, you think, ‘My God! No one would have wanted that!’” says Dretzin. “But many actually feel grateful. The challenges have transformed their families and lives in remarkably positive ways. I know Joe and Leah are deeply happy being who they are. Being little people has given them access to something that they wouldn’t have had access to if they were of average height.”

Still, issues surrounding disability and identity can pose profound challenges for parents. “If a parent has a child who has dwarfism and there’s a drug available that can give them a few extra inches of growth, that puts the parents in a very hard position,” says Dretzin. “It’s the same with behavior therapy for autism. In some cases, it really improves the quality of life, but others feel like they’re being forced into a mold that they’re never going to be comfortable in. I think the more enlightened parents focus on the beauty and value of difference, the more qualified they’re going to be to make these hard choices. They may still decide to try to help their child look more typical, but at least they will be making their decision with open eyes, and not from the place that many of us would initially. We’d assume that it’s bad to be different. Often, it clearly isn’t.”

Piecing all the stories together into a unified narrative was a demanding process for Dretzin and editor Ben Gold. “The most minor change could cause a big shift in the way you responded to the scene that followed it,” says executive producer Diane Weyermann, President of Documentary Film and Television for Participant Media. “The stakes were very high, because the material’s so strong and you owe it to the families who shared their lives with Andrew. Rachel and Ben were relentless — they never gave up trying things until they got it right.”

Weyermann sees the film’s potential to serve as an antidote to the current atmosphere of divisiveness. “Nowadays there is so much us-versus-them in the world,” she says. “FAR

FROM THE TREE turns the tables on that. It makes us less afraid of one another, less fearful, more open, accepting, and empathetic. It embraces the human characteristics that bind us all together. These differences, if you really think about them, don't have to set us apart — they can also bring us together."

The ongoing stories of the families in FAR FROM THE TREE reveal many similarities. After years of rejecting himself as a gay man, Solomon has embraced children, marriage and his father's love. Bob and Amy Allnutt realize that their life with Jack will always present great challenges, but they also know it will offer a wealth of extraordinary moments. Emily Kingsley loves and appreciates Jason for his intelligence and caring qualities, regardless of his limitations.

Solomon says the experience of writing the book and making the film were important steps in understanding his own family. "I used to confuse love and acceptance," he says. "And through my coming out, I felt unloved by my parents—but as I went along meeting these people and hearing their stories I found that while love should exist from the cradle, acceptance is a lifelong process, whether your kid has an obvious different or not. And my parents always loved me; they just struggled to accept me—as every parent struggles to accept his or her child. The book and then the film allowed me to forgive my parents for their struggles to forgive me.

In many ways, the film heralds the value of a more diverse planet. "I would like to think that the film actually conveys a message, not only of tolerance, but of admiration for people who are different," says Solomon. "It's about resilience, of course, but it's most profoundly about the larger social question of having a society that in its totality embraces a variety of human experiences."

## **FEATURED IN THE FILM**

**AMY ALLNUTT** is a faculty member in the Department of Health and Human Performance at Marymount University in Arlington, Virginia. Mother to Elizabeth (19), Emma (17) and Jack (14), Allnutt advocates for kids with autism at Ability Awareness Events in Montgomery County, Maryland.

**BOB ALLNUTT** is a commercial real-estate broker who grew up on Homestead Farm in Poolesville, Maryland. In his free time, he plays blues harmonica in two local bands and is teaching his son Jack to play basketball.

**JACK ALLNUTT** describes himself as "an autistic card holder who is smart and oddly funny." Silent until he learned to type in November 2012, he is currently in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and is on track for college. His family involves him in all activities, and he believes "the lessons of learning are limitless."

**JASON KINGSLEY** was on the road to becoming one of America's most celebrated advocates for people with Down syndrome when he was just three years old. Born in 1974, Kingsley appeared on 55 episodes of "Sesame Street" and numerous other television shows including an hour-long NBC special called "This is My Son." In 1994, he co-wrote with Mitchell Levitz the book Count Us In: Growing up with Down Syndrome, which has sold 40,000 copies and is still in print.

**EMILY PERL KINGSLEY**, Jason's mother, won 22 Emmy Awards during her 45-year career as a writer for "Sesame Street." She has authored 20 children's books, numerous "Sesame Street" home video releases, and "Kids Like These," a CBS telefilm about a middle-aged couple who have a son with Down syndrome. In 1987, Kingsley wrote "Welcome to Holland," a widely published short essay that likens the experience of someone finding out their child has a disability to having a trip to Italy rerouted to Holland.

**DEREK REESE** is a former US Navy officer who has worked for a major oil company for the last 25 years. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry from Millsaps College in Mississippi, and an MBA from Farleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey. A dedicated runner, Reese has competed in triathlons in Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas.

**LISA REESE** is a high school math teacher in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in economics from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia.

**TYLER REESE** is a sophomore in college in New York City, majoring in physics. He recently finished a summer internship with the Ozark Foothills Literacy Project in Batesville, Arkansas.

**REBECCA REESE** is a junior in high school. She is interested in child psychology, social work, teaching and working with young children.

**HOWARD SOLOMON**, Andrew's father, is the former Chairman of Forest Laboratories, Inc., a New York pharmaceutical company best known for its successful anti-depressant, Celexa. Solomon discovered Celexa (known in Europe as Cipramil) when he was researching drugs to help treat Andrew's depression. Solomon retired in 2014. For many years he served as the chairman of the New York City Ballet.

**LEAH SMITH** is the media and entertainment advocate for the Center for Disability Rights, where she also coordinates the anti-suicide campaign, "Live On," and contributes to the blog "Disability Dialogue." She has served two terms as Director of Public Relations for Little People of America and has worked or volunteered for the Life Run Center for Independent Living, the Liberty Resources Center for Independent Living and Taxis for All Philadelphia. She holds Bachelor's degrees in both political science and public relations and a Master of Public Administration, all from Texas Tech University.

**JOSEPH A. STRAMONDO** is an assistant professor of philosophy at San Diego State University. He formerly served as the chairman of Little People of America's Advocacy Committee and has played a variety of roles in other disability rights organizations, including ADAPT, the Connecticut State Independent Living Council and Disability Rights Texas. He lectures and writes on issues related to bioethics, the philosophy of disability and feminist philosophy. He received his Ph.D. in philosophy from Michigan State University in 2014.

Leah and Joseph's daughter, Hazel Stramondo-Smith was born on June 2, 2016.

**LOINI VIVAO** lives in East Patchogue, New York, and is of Salvadoran and American Samoan heritage. She went to Suffolk County Community College where she earned an associate's degree in liberal arts. Vivao has a very rare form of dwarfism, Majewski Osteodysplastic Primordial Dwarfism Type II (MOPDII). She is still in touch with her friend Maddie, whom she met at the Little People of America convention.

## **ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

**RACHEL DRETZIN (Director, Producer)** has been honored with numerous awards for her documentaries, including the Emmy Award, the Peabody, the Du-Pont Columbia and the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. For many years she has directed and produced documentaries for "Frontline," PBS' eminent documentary series. These include "The Lost Children of Rockdale County," which examined the roots of a rare syphilis outbreak among young adolescents in an affluent Atlanta suburb; "A Hidden Life," about the outing of the conservative Republican mayor of Spokane, Washington, by his local newspaper; "Failure to Protect," which traced the anatomy of a botched child-protection case and the flawed system that allowed it to happen; "The Merchants of Cool," about the corporate hunt for "cool" and the race to sell it to teenagers; and "Hillary's Class," which followed the stories of a group of women who graduated with Hillary Clinton from Wellesley College in 1969.

With her husband, filmmaker Barak Goodman, Dretzin is co-founder of Ark Media, a Brooklyn-based production company and a leading producer of nonfiction content. She was the senior producer of four major series for PBS including "The African Americans," which won the Emmy, the Peabody and the Du-Pont Columbia prizes, and "Black America Since MLK: And Still I Rise," which premiered in 2016. She senior produced "Makers: Women Who Make America," six films directed by independent filmmakers tracing the groundbreaking accomplishments of women in various fields, and she created and senior produced Henry Louis Gates' genealogy series "Finding Your Roots," now entering its fourth season.

Dretzin also directed *Naked*, a short film for *The New York Times Magazine* about sexuality in midlife, and reported a feature out of Sarajevo during wartime for NPR's "All Things Considered." She has also produced films for MSNBC, ABC and WNET. Dretzin has been a faculty member of the graduate program in social documentary at the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. She graduated with honors from Yale University and lives in Brooklyn, where she has three teenage children.

**JAMILA EPHRON (Producer & Co-director)** is a documentary filmmaker with a background in historical non-fiction films. Her work has received Emmy-and Peabody Awards and includes "My Lai," "The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln" and "Clinton," each for the "American Experience" series on PBS. She has also co-produced a three-hour documentary on second wave feminism, "Makers: Women Who Make America," for WETA, and "Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies," based on the Pulitzer Prize-winning book by Siddhartha Mukherjee. Ephron is currently co-directing and producing an "American Experience" special on the Woodstock Music festival.

A Seattle native and Sarah Lawrence College graduate, the producer lives in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.

**ANDREW SOLOMON (Producer)** is a writer and lecturer on politics, culture and psychology, a professor of clinical psychology at Columbia University Medical Center, and president of PEN American Center. His books have won more than 50 awards including the National Book Award, the National Book Critics Circle Award and the Wellcome Prize.

Solomon's 2012 best seller *Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*, has received numerous awards, including the National Book Critics Circle Award for Nonfiction, the J. Anthony Lukas Award, the Anisfield-Wolf Award, the Wellcome Book Prize, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize, the Green Carnation Prize, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency's Distinguished Achievement Award in Nonfiction and the New Atlantic Independent Booksellers Association (NAIBA) Book of the Year Award for Nonfiction. *Far From the Tree* was chosen as one of *The New York Times*' "10 Best Books of 2012" and named a best book of 2012 by *Publishers Weekly*, the *Boston Globe*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Salon.com*, *Kirkus Reviews* and *Time* magazine. It was also named a Book of the Year by *The Economist* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

Solomon's previous best-selling book, *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression*, won the 2001 National Book Award for Nonfiction, was a finalist for the 2002 Pulitzer Prize and is included in the *London Times*' list "100 Best Books of the Decade."

In 1988 Solomon began his study of Russian artists, which culminated with the publication of *The Irony Tower: Soviet Artists in a Time of Glasnost* in 1991. His 1994 novel *A Stone Boat*, the story of a man's shifting identity as he watches his mother battle cancer, was a national bestseller and runner-up for the *Los Angeles Times*' First Fiction prize. In 2016, he published *Far and Away: How Travel Can Change the World*, which was a NY Times notable book. From 1993 to 2001 Solomon was a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*. He has also written for *The New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, *the New York Review of Books*, *Travel & Leisure*, *Artforum* and many other periodicals. Frequently called upon for commentary on mental health, family and disability issues, Solomon has made numerous appearances on television and radio. Videos of his TED talks have garnered more than 21 million views.

Solomon received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Yale University and later earned a master's degree in English and a Ph.D. in psychology at Jesus College, Cambridge. In 2015 he was elected president of PEN American Center. Solomon also serves on the boards of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the World Monuments Fund, Yaddo, and the Alex Fund.



The writer is an activist in LGBT rights, mental health, education and the arts. He is the founder of the Solomon Research Fellowships in LGBT Studies at Yale University; a special advisor to the Yale School of Psychiatry on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender mental health; and a member of the board of directors of the National LGBTQ Task Force.

Solomon lives with his husband John Habich Solomon and son in New York and London, and is a dual national. He also has a daughter with a close college friend. Habich Solomon is the biological father of two children with lesbian friends living in Minneapolis; these children are also part of the family.

**JEFF SKOLL (Executive Producer)** is a philanthropist and social entrepreneur, working to bring life to his vision of a sustainable world of peace and prosperity.

The first full-time employee and president of eBay, Skoll developed the company's inaugural business plan and helped lead its successful initial public offering and the creation of the eBay Foundation.

Since 1999 Skoll has created an innovative portfolio of philanthropic and commercial enterprises, each a distinctive social catalyst. Together, these organizations drive social impact by investing in a range of efforts that integrate powerful stories and data with entrepreneurial approaches.

The Jeff Skoll Group supports his organizations, which include the Skoll Foundation, the Capricorn Investment Group, the Skoll Global Threats Fund and Participant Media, a company dedicated to entertainment that inspires and compels social change.

**DIANE WEYERMANN (Executive Producer)** is president of documentary films and television at Participant Media, a company dedicated to entertainment that inspires and compels social change. She is responsible for the company's entire documentary feature film and television slate.

Participant's documentary projects include Alex Gibney's ZERO DAYS, Morgan Neville's THE MUSIC OF STRANGERS: YO-YO MA AND THE SILK ROAD ENSEMBLE, Davis Guggenheim's AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH (an Oscar winner), WAITING FOR 'SUPERMAN' and HE NAMED ME MALALA, the Oscar winner CITIZENFOUR, Emmy winner "Food, Inc." and MERCHANTS OF DOUBT.

Prior to joining Participant in 2005, Weyermann was the director of the Sundance Institute's Documentary Film Program. During her tenure at Sundance, she was responsible for the Sundance Documentary Fund, a program supporting documentary films dealing with contemporary human rights, social justice, civil liberties and freedom of expression from around the world. She launched two annual documentary film labs

focusing on the creative process – one dealing with editing and storytelling, and the other with music. Weyermann's work in the documentary field extends many years prior to Sundance.

For seven years, she was the director of the Open Society Institute New York's arts and culture program. In addition to her work with contemporary art centers and culture programs in the Soros Foundation network, she launched the Soros Documentary Fund (which later became the Sundance Documentary Fund) in 1996.

**MARY BING (Executive Producer)** has been a producer on such films as Terrence Malick's VOYAGE OF A TIME, Ira Sachs's FORTY SHADES OF BLUE (Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner) and her own adaptation ANTON CHEKHOV'S THE DUEL, based on the classic novella.

Bing directed the short film BROTHER, which played at numerous film festivals. Bing met director Rachel Dretzin at Yale University, where she got a degree in English literature. After getting master's degrees from NYU in both psychology and social work, she practiced as a psychoanalyst in New York City.

**SAM RUSSELL (Cinematographer)** is a cinematographer and filmmaker based in Brooklyn. His last film, BY BLOOD, which he co-directed, chronicles the ongoing conflict between the Cherokee Nation and the Cherokee Freedmen, descendants of African American slaves held by the tribe, who are fighting to regain their tribal citizenship. The film explores a largely untold history and the impact of a battle over race, identity and the sovereign rights of Native American people. After screening at film festivals around the world, BY BLOOD is slated for broadcast on PBS and digital release.

Russell began his career shooting films for PBS and its flagship public-interest program "Frontline." He served as director of photography on the series "Makers: Women Who Make America," Henry Louis Gates' genealogy series "Finding Your Roots" and "Cancer: The Emperor of All Maladies," for Ken Burns and Ark Media, among others. His next telefilm, "Disruption," is a look at the future of work and who is being left behind in this era of economic disruption.

**WOLFGANG HELD (Cinematographer)** was born in Germany but has been working as a director of photography in New York City since the mid-1990s. He went on the road with Sacha Baron Cohen as DP for his movie BRUNO, won an Emmy in 2008 for Best Cinematography on the PBS show "Carrier" and lensed *Children Underground*, nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature. Most recently, Held shot Marina Zevonich's FANTASTIC LIES and Leonardo DiCaprio's BEFORE THE FLOOD (partial

photography).

Since making his debut as a cinematographer on Mo Ogradnik's indie hit RIPE (1996), Held has filmed over 20 narrative features, including FLOATING (Best Cinematography Prize, New England Film Fest), THE TIC CODE, MAZE, DISAPPEARANCES, TEEH, SOPHIE AND THE RISING SUN (Sundance Gala, 2016) and the upcoming films O.G., starring Jeffrey Wright (currently in post).

Held has also served as cinematographer on many acclaimed documentaries, including METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER, MAD HOT BALLROOM (partial photography), CRAZY LOVE, THE LOTTERY, AMERICAN TEEN, AND RACING DREAMS and WIGSTOCK: THE MOVIE. He traveled the globe with Nicholas Kristof for the PBS show "Half the Sky" and "A Path Appears," also shooting many segments for the ongoing doc series "Years of Living Dangerously." Other credits include the Netflix documentary series "Wounded: The Battle Back Home."

Throughout his career Held has also photographed and coproduced films with his wife, documentary filmmaker Pola Rapaport. These films include BROKEN MEAT (Best Cinematography, Oberhausen International Film Festival), BLIND LIGHT, FAMILY SECRET, WRITER OF O, HAIR: LET THE SUN SHINE IN and THE GYMNAST AND THE DICTATOR.

**BEN GOLD (Editor)** has worked in film and television for more than 20 years. He honed his editorial skills on numerous episodes of PBS' "Frontline," including "A Perfect Terrorist" and Emmy winners "Money, Power & Wall Street," "Truth, War & Consequences," and "United States of Secrets," which he also co-produced. Since then, Gold edited the Hurricane Sandy Relief Concert doc "12-12-12," for the Weinstein Company, and "Solitary," for HBO Documentaries. Both telefilms will be seen in 2017.

Gold grew up in Berkeley, California, and currently lives in New York City.

**NICO MUHLY (Original Music)** is an American composer and sought-after collaborator whose influences range from American minimalism to the Anglican choral tradition. The recipient of commissions from the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, St. Paul's Cathedral and others, he has written more than 80 works for the concert stage, including the operas "Two Boys," "Dark Sisters" and the forthcoming "Marnie."

Muhly has also composed for stage and screen. His credits include music for the 2013 Broadway revival of "The Glass Menagerie" and scores for the films KILL YOUR DARLINGS, ME AND EARL AND THE DYING GIRL AND THE READER. He is a frequent collaborator with choreographer Benjamin Millepied and, as an arranger, has paired with Sufjan Stevens, Antony and the Johnsons, Rufus Wainwright and Joanna Newsom. His

compositions include the song cycles "Sentences," for countertenor Iestyn Davies; and "Impossible Things," for tenor Mark Padmore; a viola concerto for violist Nadia Sirota; "My Days," for the Hilliard Ensemble; and "Recordare, Domine," for the Tallis Scholars.

Born in Vermont, Muhly studied composition with John Corigliano and Christopher Rouse at the Juilliard School before working as an editor and conductor for Philip Glass. He is part of the artist-run record label Bedroom Community, which released his first two albums, "Speaks Volumes" and "Mothertongue."

The composer currently lives in New York City.

**YO LA TENGO (Original Music)** is one of the most beloved and respected bands in America. Their uninterrupted 30-years-and-counting career is unparalleled in its creative breadth and refusal to rest on laurels. Ira Kaplan, Georgia Hubley and James McNew have enjoyed success entirely on their own terms — playing the world's best concert halls, museums and dives, collaborating with everyone from Homer Simpson and Ray Davies to Chris Elliott and Yoko Ono, portraying the Velvet Underground in the feature I SHOT ANDY WARHOL and composing scores for the films of Jean Painlevé. The group created a holiday tradition with their series of Hanukkah shows at the legendary club Maxwell's in Hoboken, New Jersey, resulting in charity donations totaling in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Yo La Tengo's film composer credits include ADVENTURELAND, GAME 6, JUNEBUG, OLD JOY, SHORTBUS, THE TOE TACTIC AND SYL JOHNSON: ANY WAY THE WIND BLOWS. Their music has appeared on the soundtrack of dozens of films, including SIMPLE MEN, AMATEUR, WALKING AND TALKING, I'M NOT THERE, BOYHOOD, TAXI TO THE DARK SIDE, DANNY SAYS AND DON'T BLINK—ROBERT FRANK, as well as TV shows "Six Feet Under," "24," "Elementary," "The Affair," "Waterloo Road," "Master of None" and "Halt and Catch Fire."

# # #

## **PRODUCTION CREDITS**

Participant Media presents FAR FROM THE TREE, a film by Rachel Dretzin, based on the book by Andrew Solomon. The film is produced by Dretzin, Solomon and Jamila Ephron. Executive producers are Jeff Skoll, Diane Weyermann and Mary Bing. Original music is by Yo La Tengo and Nico Muhly. Cinematography is by Sam Russell and Wolfgang Held. Editor is Ben Gold. Co-director is Jamila Ephron. Co-editor is Steve Golliday.

Participant Media is an independent entertainment company founded over 10 years ago by philanthropist Jeff Skoll to focus on content that inspires social change, with a library of more than 50 films, which include the Academy Award<sup>®</sup>-winning AN INCONVINENT TRUTH, LINCOLN, THE COVE and THE HELP; the Oscar<sup>®</sup>-nominated GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK, and FOOD, INC.; and THE BEST EXOTIC MARIGOLD HOTEL, CONTAGION and A PLACE AT THE TABLE.

## **FAR FROM THE TREE**

### **The Filmmakers**

Director	RACHEL DRETZIN
Based on the Book by	ANDREW SOLOMON
Producers	RACHEL DRETZIN JAMILA EPHRON ANDREW SOLOMON
Executive Producers	JEFF SKOLL DIANE WEYERMANN MARY BING
Cinematography	SAM RUSSELL WOLFGANG HELD
Editor	BEN GOLD
Music	YO LA TENGO NICO MUHLY
Co-Director	JAMILA EPHRON
Co-Editor	STEVEN GOLLIDAY
Line Producer	STEF GORDON
Associate Producers	DAN BROMFIELD KARIM HAJJ
Music Editor	SUZANA PERIC
Sound Recordists	JOHN ZECCA MARK MANDLER
Researcher	CLARK MATTHEWS
Sound Design & Mix	RICHARD FAIRBANKS
Additional Cinematography	JEFF HUTCHENS THORSTEN THIELOW JASON LONGO

LUCIAN READ

KARIM HAJJ

SCOTT ALEXANDER RUDERMAN

Post Production Supervisor

STEPHEN ALTOBELLO

## **FAR FROM THE TREE**

### **Featuring**

Jason Kingsley	Tina DePalma
Emily Perl Kingsley	Kerry Perillo
Dr. Joseph A. Stramondo	Derek Reese
Amy Allnutt	Lisa Reese
Jack Allnutt	Tyler Reese
Yaniv Gorodischer	Rebecca Reese
Raymond Frost Jr.	Grant Blasko
Ernest Daniels	Ethan Tucker
Bob Allnutt	Harry Burdick
Emma Allnutt	Mike Keller
Elizabeth Allnutt	Andrew Solomon
Alissa Margolis	Howard Solomon
Loini Vivao	John Habich
	Solomon
Jackie Vivao	George Solomon
Leah Smith	Blaine Smith
Gary Arnold	Blaine Solomon
Michelle Kraus	Laura Scher
Eileen Norman	Tammy Ward
Eugene Pidgeon	Oliver Scher
Mark Povinelli	Lucy Scher
Dr. Myriam Mondestin-Sorrentino	Malva Teague-Smith
Joseph Stramondo Sr.	
Louise Stramondo	Ken Ricard