



# HAPPY AS HARRY

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HE'S PLAYED GEENA DAVIS' SON, A VIOLENT HOMOPHOBE, HOPES TO PRODUCE *THE NORMAL HEART*, AND FOUND TIME TO MARRY HIS BOYFRIEND. IT'S ALL GO FOR HARRY COOK, REPORTS MATTHEW MYERS.

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**DNA: Congratulations on being nominated for Celebrity Of The Year at Australia's first LGBTI Awards. How did that feel?**

**Harry Cook:** I felt honoured and overwhelmed to be in the same category as nominees such as Dr Kerryn Phelps. It felt very special.

**Last year you married your partner Liam Davis in the US – a bittersweet celebration given you can't marry in your own country?**

Yes, it was depressing that we had to do it over there. It was just the two of us with our dog.

**No family?**

We chose not to. We told them to stay home because one day, when it's legal and can happen here, we'll get everybody together and do it again. We're waiting! Although we were legally married in the States, it's not recognised here in Australia.

**And we don't yet know if overseas marriages will be recognised once we finally get marriage equality.**

No. It would sure be lovely if we do!

**You came out in 2013 via YouTube. Did you worry it might effect your career?**

Yes, I was terrified. There's this unspoken thing about actors not being openly gay, which is sad. And when some actors come out as gay, sometimes, not always, there's this idea that what they can do is limited. I haven't found that yet. Touch wood!

**Do you think the perception that a known gay actor can't play a straight role is changing?**

Yes, especially now that we've had Neil Patrick Harris as Barney Stinson in *How I Met Your Mother*, where he's a womanizer; and Zachary Quinto playing Harry in the US version of *The Slap*. There's a lot more chances happening for gay actors to play straight roles. The more that happens the better. I hope it continues. In *Drown* I played the one straight character in the whole movie!

**You were advised to keep your sexuality a secret for your career's sake. Looking back, was that wrong?**

Yes, it was wrong... well, I think it's unnecessary. When I started, around six years ago, I had a different agent and manager and they told me to keep it quiet, but the team behind me now is incredible. I think it's sad to hide that part of yourself because of your career. I always had to hide Liam whenever we had an event or he just couldn't come along. It's great being able to showcase your work and enjoy all the fun stuff with the people you love. So, yeah, I believe in telling it like it is!

**Your first big role came playing Geena Davis' son in *Accidents Happen* (2009). How did that come about?**

I had just left school. The script came along and I was offered an audition for the lead role of Billy.

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But when I went in to see the casting director I asked if they'd mind if I read for the part of his older brother. They said maybe and they'd get back to me and I thought I'd blown it. But they called me back in for the part I wanted and I managed to get it. That whole thing was surreal, especially as I'd never done anything before. Going from nothing to having a big role was cool.

**And you got on well with Geena Davis?**

I still do! Geena's one of the loveliest, sweetest, kindest, most down-to-earth people. She's become a mentor to me. I really look up to her. I couldn't have asked for a better screen mum.

**Has she had the most influence on your acting career?**

Yes, and not just her acting. She taught me how to behave on a movie set just by being herself. She's so gracious to the crew and sweet to every actor. She takes her job seriously, but knows how to have fun. I was nervous when I met her, but I think she knew how terrifying it must have been for a 17-year-old Australian actor fresh in his first film.

**Drown is an incredibly intense film, dealing with violence and homophobia, and you played one of the perpetrators. How did you handle that?**

It was rough. I found it hard the whole way through filming. We shot all the violent stuff on the beach over a two-month period and by the end everyone was exhausted. Those scenes are just so horrible and brutal, and it breaks your heart doing it every

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night for months. It was one of the hardest films I've ever done - and will probably ever do. At the end of each day I had to have a shower and a bit of a cry.

**When Matt Levett, who played Len, spoke to DNA he said you all bonded and looked out for each other.**

We had to. We were all so shaken up every day that we needed a group hug, especially Jack Matthews who played Phil. It was his first film and he was so good and so brave. I couldn't do something like that again, but I was very pleased with the way it turned out.

**How did you prepare for the role of Meat?**

I trained five days a week and ate nothing but protein. I'd seen people like Meat who were the bystanders in bad situations and didn't speak up. I knew what that character was like. I thought back to school where a lot of people weren't actual bullies but they'd stand by and let the bullies do their thing. I think that's common.

**Playing lifesavers, did you all immerse yourselves in that environment?**

Yes, we filmed at a lifesaving club. One day, while we were waiting to shoot a scene, an actual lifesaver came up to us and said, "It looks like a gay bar up here!" We were all like, wow! This is exactly the reason why we're making this film - because of people like you! But not all lifesavers are like that.

**Have you experienced homophobia yourself?**

Yeah, quite badly back in school, and in general life. Liam and I were once in a supermarket and some guy barged right through us and said, "Move fags!" We were so shocked we didn't get a chance to say anything. Unfortunately, it happens a lot. People don't realise how much.

**You and Liam love your bulldog, Poppy but would you like to have children?**

We would love to. We've been looking into adoption or surrogacy, although surrogacy is no longer legal in Australia, which is a pain. We'd have to go to LA to do that. But that's not really a problem for us. Maybe in the next five to ten years we'll have a little kid running around.

**Who would you turn straight for?**

It's such a gay answer, but... Emma Stone (*La La Land*). I think she's such a sweetheart. I'd probably only be with her for her personality but she's also gorgeous looking.

**Who is your diva?**

Beyoncé. She's an epic performer who knows how to own the stage and has such a powerful voice. I love the *Lemonade* album.

**When it comes to theatre, film and television, do you have a favourite medium?**

Film. I love the fact that a film starts and ends in a whole two-hour story. I think you also have a lot more creative freedom on film because they are slower to make.

**What project are you currently working on?**

It's still early days but I'm hoping to produce the LGBT-themed play *The Normal Heart*. It's a great play by Larry Kramer dealing with the AIDS crisis in the '80s. I've been wanting to produce it for years now.