



**HONG KONG  
PROFILE**

**A reel-y good gift**  
(From left) Devon Seybold,  
Sebastian Long,  
Lisa Belcher, Luke Seybold,  
Brayden Handcock and  
Evian Oosthuizen

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# The Gift

Director Lisa Belcher and the cast of her new short film

"In film and television today, there aren't enough stories that champion the father," Lisa Belcher says, emphatically. A long-time actress, screenwriter and producer, American-born Belcher is making her directorial debut with short film, *The Gift*, which was filmed around Hong Kong in May.

Belcher is sitting with five local actors aged 10 to 16 who play some of *The Gift's* leading roles, and they nod sagely at her point about patriarchal role models. "The last movie I can think of that was about dads was *Star Wars*, and that didn't end too well," chimes 16-year-old Evian Oosthuizen, who plays Johnny in the film.

*The Gift* originated as a short story, written by Belcher's brother Steve Wayne on the themes of fatherly love and bullying. Belcher adapted it into a screenplay at the beginning of this year, and was determined to use a cast of young actors from HK schools. "We [also] had many kids on set in behind the scenes roles," she explains. "We ran a professional, proper film set that provided a healthy learning environment for budding filmmakers."

The eponymous gift is a blue and yellow parcel, which lead character Bobby is given by his father and represents his father's love. Bobby carries the gift everywhere. As bullies encourage Bobby to abandon the gift, the tension builds. "[Bobby] makes some bad decisions," says Belcher.

Bullying is something that clearly resonates with the young cast. "It happens a lot in schools. Not a lot of people realise how common it might be," says Oosthuizen.

Funds for the film were generated through an IndieGoGo crowdfunding campaign, and many local sponsors got on board, too. "I feel overwhelmed with the sponsors' support... we couldn't have done it without them," says Belcher. "It's indescribable how cool it is to see your writing brought to life," she smiles.

It might sound pretty brave to make your directorial debut with a cast aged seven to 16, particularly as some scenes were done with around 30 extras. "I feel strongly that it's work, but at the same time we need to have fun," Belcher says.

Oosthuizen laughs, "It was fun, but when Lisa wants our attention, the sound guy has to take his earphones out!"

Maintaining continuity and 'safety' (redoing scenes multiple times in case of unnoticed error) is a serious business on a film set, and required the utmost patience of the youngsters during the set's 8am to 5pm days. The cast unanimously groan jovially when it is mentioned.

"Often Lisa will say 'oh that's perfect, now let's do it again!'" grins 14-year-old Luke Seybold, who plays the main character Bobby. His co-star, 14-year-old Sebastian Long agrees. "I definitely learned that, when you're making a movie, a 10 second scene will take two hours to shoot! It's not like in theatre where you have to go up and do the whole thing in one go."

It may have been a learning curve, but being involved with *The Gift* was the first time most of the young actors had been on a film set, and was evidently an inspiring experience. "I'd like to be an actress, it'd be cool," grins Devon Seybold, 10, who plays Bobby's friend Tory.

"But I can't see that far into my future!"

"I like acting because it's such a short life that we have, and through acting you can kind of experience anything you want to," muses Brayden Handcock. Sixteen-year-old Handcock plays Jackson, one of the bullies. "I mean, I've never been a bully before but I get to experience what that's like now!" he says. "You can experience so many things in so many ways."

A brand new crowdfunding campaign is just being launched to fund the post-production process. Belcher says *The Gift* should have a HK premiere within the next year, and then hopefully be shown at international film festivals. "If we win a few of the festivals, we'll be eligible for the Oscar for Best Live Action Short Film in 2016 – that's actually my big dream. Why not us, why not this film? You can do anything if you have the right attitude." *Anna Cummins*

To find out more about **The Gift**, visit [thegifthemovie.com](http://thegifthemovie.com).

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