



BABY BOY

A documentary short by

Jessica Heng Lin Qing

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Toby Wu Zhi

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FACT SHEET

PROJECT TITLE

Baby Boy

RUNTIME

24 Minutes

COMPLETION DATE

26 March 2020

PRINCIPLE CREW MEMBERS

Director

Jessica Heng Lin Qing

Producers

Amanda Bambby Cheuk Yuet Ga

Toby Wu Zhi

Director of Photography

Chua Zong Xuan

CONTACT INFORMATION

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LOGLINE

At a major crossroads in his life, a 17-year-old ex-gang member struggles to change as he wrestles with strands of his abused past and ongoing family tension.

SYNOPSIS

Baby Boy is a documentary short about Zaki, a 17 year old ex-gang member. In this intimate portrait of change, Zaki's passion for boxing and return to education bears much promise, yet is disrupted by the splintering of his familial unit. His coming of age is distinctly marked by the crucible of impending fatherhood.



(L-R) Chua Zong Xuan, Toby Wu Zhi, Amanda Bambby Cheuk Yuet Ga, Jessica Heng Lin Qing

INSPIRATION

Change is hard. Youth in risk face many setbacks in their journey to reintegration, and face judgement when they come close to re-offending. Current media portrayals are often black and white, opting for reductive “turning-a-new-leaf” narratives, cautionary tales or showing conditions of social inequality as a spectacle of poverty. Our film, however, hopes to explore the ongoing challenges faced by youth in risk and recognise their efforts invested in trying to change, regardless of result, in hopes of giving them confidence to commit to reintegration. It is crucial that we as filmmakers/journalists try to understand the entire network of influences that (dis)empower these youth and use our voices to affirm them.

CHALLENGES

Our team primarily struggled with our duty of care for Zaki and to ourselves. Due to the volatility in Zaki’s family situation, many unfortunate events transpired at once. Our profiles quickly became distraught, sometimes confiding in us their inner emotions and perspectives. Because this is exactly the type of moments we hoped to capture, a moral dilemma surfaced - do we roll the camera, or simply listen to them as a form of concern? Furthermore, having spent extended periods of time with Zaki and his family, it was difficult to dissociate ourselves from the emotional turmoil that we encountered before our eyes. Confused and unable to distinguish our position in Zaki’s life, we subsequently became entirely embroiled in his emotional state and situation, which at times derailed our focus on filmmaking.

FUTURE

We plan to work with social service agencies that are committed to helping youth in risk. Through private screenings, our film serves as a learning resource for organisations like TRYBE to generate discussions between youth and their case workers. Reaching out to wider audiences, we will be entering film festivals focusing on the themes of youth, family and change. Beyond just film distribution, we hope to keep the conversation going among youths through social media and in partnership with popular local podcast channels who believe in the cause as well.



Knowing that there are youth in risk in Singapore who are living such tumultuous lives right now, under the glitz and glamour of everyday Singaporean life, reminds me that telling his story is so relevant, and so important for him and for our society. We can no longer turn our backs against them knowing what we know now. Here, we were not trying to portray a completely hopeful nor completely hopeless story, simply one that was realistic. To me, that was the most difficult thing to do.

- Amanda Bambby Cheuk Yuet Ga
Producer

Getting to know Zaki and filming this fragment of his life has put my own life into perspective. While Zaki faces specific pressures I will never know, I resonate strongly with his struggle to prove himself. We all know what it’s like to be 17 and so unsure of ourselves, but I believe Zaki shows an exceptional level of self-awareness that most of us did not have.

- Toby Wu Zhi
Producer

A sliver of hope can be scrounged through Zaki’s accounting for his life, as his latent self awareness stands testament to a growing sense of ownership over his actions. I hope you feel connected with Zaki’s unique charisma through these vignettes of his life, and that in his story you will be confronted to reflect upon the mantras deeply embedded within every individual’s inability to overcome their inertia.

- Jessica Heng Lin Qing
Director

Emotionally draining, but incredibly worth it. Documenting the life of a youth in risk was from the beginning, idealistic. The uncertainties that came with it yielded unexpected twists and outcomes, nothing according to plan. But this is as real as it can get. We were also learning about ourselves as much as we were learning about Zaki. I believe that there are no rotten apples, only poor environments. Let’s have more empathy as a society.

- Chua Zong Xuan
Director of Photography



PRODUCTION STILLS



Zaki and Yahya spend quality father-son time over cigarettes and watermelon.



At times, Zaki feels like he doesn't fit in the boxing community.



Zaki recalls how his past acts of violence haunted him.



Once an obedient child, Zaki now doesn't subscribe to Ani's ideals, resulting in a barrier in communication.



Ani piously prays for hope while Zakir, albeit reluctantly, follows suit.



The bigger black fishes and smaller gold fishes swim in the same tank that is often left murky and uncleaned.



Zaki shops for his impending newborn son, struggling to understand what it takes to be a father.



Zakir reveals to Zaki that he wants to be a policeman so that he can catch the bad guys.



On his way to work, Zaki reflects on his unstable emotional state of mind due to his family.



It's an uphill task for Zaki to continue believing in himself when the odds are against him.

This work was produced as a final-year project in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

BEHIND THE SCENES



During a test shoot, the Baby Boy crew engages both Ani and Zaki through reminiscing some childhood photo albums.

(L-R) Yahya, Zong Xuan, Ani, Zaki, Jessica

Zaki demonstrates his boxing routine with his partner as the crew observes on the sidelines in preparation.

(L-R) Toby, Boxing Partner, Zaki, Jessica, Zong Xuan, Reuel



Learning that he at times feels out of place in the gym, the crew follows Zaki into the back alley where he usually skips in solitude.

(L-R) Zaki, Toby, Zong Xuan, Jessica



This work was produced as a final-year project in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.



Jessica checks in on Zaki
off-screen as he reflects
upon the events in his life.

(L-R) Zaki, Jessica

The crew faced another empty
outing following the absence
of Zaki on our shoot day.

(L-R) Jessica, Toby, Bambby



Taking a leap of faith, the crew
approached the house again in
hopes to meet up with Zaki for a rec-
onciliation. He was there,
and we made up, thereby
concluding our production.

(L-R) Jessica, Toby, Bambby, Zaki,
Zong Xuan