



# Son of None

a TODD LOOBY film

*Obrigado*  
Productions



## LOGLINE:

Constantly disheveled, falling behind and failing at school, seven-year old Liberian war orphan, Joshua, attempts to heal the pain of his past by comforting the one thing more vulnerable than he.

## SYNOPSIS:

Joshua is a seven-year-old Liberian war orphan new to a Christian Mission. Still learning the rules and the English language, he is constantly falling behind and failing at school. His classmates laugh at him, his housemates taunt him and the mission's administrator publicly embarrasses him.

His teacher reminds him to use his Christmas-time birthday to make friends, though Joshua shows more interest in the mission's animals than his social life. And when a baby goat goes missing, he finds himself on the edge between the loss of his past and a future of hope.

"Son of None" is the first narrative film to be produced in post-war Liberia, West Africa. In Joshua's beautiful and sad eyes we see the pain this war inflicted on children, but in his demeanor we see the compassion that has helped the country heal.



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## CAST



### **Joshua Cooper as Joshua**

Joshua Cooper was brought to Liberia Mission, Inc. in 2008 by co-star Harris Mulbah after his mother passed away. His father is a subsistence farmer and could not afford to give Joshua an education on his own. Joshua is in Kindergarten II and he is still learning English – a second language to his native Kpelle.

Director Todd Looby met Joshua while filming a documentary on Liberia Mission Inc. Joshua was Todd's first choice to play the lead in "Son of None". He proved to be a natural actor who possessed an innate understanding of Todd's direction and a unique ability to transmit his own experiences into this fictional story without a hint of self-consciousness.



### **Martha Yah as Joshua's Teacher**

Martha Yah has been a Kindergarten teacher at St. Anthony of Padua School since it opened in 2006. Before she came to Lower Carreysberg, she lived in Nimba County, a part of the country ravaged by the first civil war. Martha is Joshua's actual teacher and enthusiastically agreed to be in the film. Martha improvised several lines - not related to her teaching lesson or actual events - which wound up in the final cut and helped to strengthen the story.



### **Harris as "Administrator"**

Harris Mulbah has been a "house father" at Liberia Mission since 2004. Harris' father, an ex-military man, saved him and 300 others as they narrowly escaped rebel forces fleeing to Guinea during the second civil war. Harris comes from Lofa County and is a friend of Joshua's father. Upon Mr. Cooper's request, Harris brought Joshua to the Mission in 2008 to give him a better life. Harris lives at the Mission 6 days of the week and returns to the Redlight District on Sundays to visit his family. Harris enjoyed his first attempt at acting and also proved to be quite natural.



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## Jerome C. Cabeen as "Uncle Jerome"

Jerome Cabeen was a high school art teacher in Houston, TX for 12 years prior to doing four years of mission work in Honduras. Jerome came to Liberia in 2008 to teach at Liberia Mission, Inc. with his wife Clarisa Chavarria-Lara. He has since become the Mission's director and is planning to move back to the United States in the fall of 2010 to start a family and potentially pursue acting on the side. "Son of None" was Jerome's first acting role.



## Mulbah Kollie as Darius

Like, Joshua, Mulbah is also from the Kpelle tribe and his family is from Lofa County, Liberia. Both of his parents were killed by stray bullets during the civil war. In 2008, he was brought to Liberia Mission by his Grandparents who could not afford his schooling. At 16, he is now in the eighth grade and an exceptional student. He wants to become a musician and actor when he grows up. Mulbah was doing laundry when we approached him about acting in the film. He immediately agreed and improvised much of his part.



## Monsignor Robert Tikpor as "Priest"

Mnsgnr. Tikpor is a diocesan priest and has served Liberia Mission since 2006. During the 80s he was given a special assignment by social justice activist, Archbishop Michael Francis to minister to President Doe's number one enemy – a former member of the regime. Though *he* survived, the man in his care did not. Since that dangerous time, Mnsgnr. Tikpor has served in Rome and throughout Africa before returning to his native Liberia.

Mnsgnr. Tikpor's sermon-scene was pure documentary. Fr. Tikpor is known for his more lively sermons and when he began preaching about Christmas and the "birthday" of Jesus, Todd turned on the camera for what was supposed to have been a moment of rest.



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## CREW



### **Todd Looby: Producer / Writer / Director / Camera / Editor**

Award-winning filmmaker, Todd Looby was born and raised on the Southside of Chicago. He is a mostly self-taught filmmaker. Shortly after receiving his MS in Environmental Sciences in Civil Engineering in 1999, Todd returned to Chicago and began taking classes at Chicago's "iO" (formerly Improv Olympic). The following year Todd acquired a DV camera and began making films. Initially making rudimentary documentaries and comedic shorts, Todd began tackling feature film work in late 2005 while working full-time as a commercial construction manager. His first narrative feature, *THE SITE*, premiered at Henry Jaglom's Iowa Independent Film Festival in 2007. The film was cut further in the Fall of 2007 and was screened at Chicago's Facet's Cinemateque as part of IFP/Chicago's "Meet the Filmmaker" series in the Spring of 2008.

*LEFTY* is Todd's second narrative feature. It has screened at several fests across the country and was given "4-1/2 stars" and named among "The Top 10 Movies of 2009..." by the *Chicago Tribune's Metromix*. The *Kansas City Star* also named the film the "...favorite drama of the [Kansas International Film] fest..." adding "...The acting is excellent...the movie has a genuinely lived-in feel." Distribution of *LEFTY* DVDs began in summer of 2010.

Todd recently shot a feature-length documentary in Honduras, *Solo Madres: Stories of the Families Left Behind* about the impossible plight of impoverished single mothers in a politically unstable environment where 70% of fathers have left the family or have immigrated to the United



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States. While in the process of shooting “Song of None”, Todd shot a six-part web-distributed documentary about Liberia Mission, Inc. – an organization that was founded shortly after the 2003 Liberian civil war cease-fire and is now widely considered one of the best institutions in Liberia. Todd’s work often blends off-beat humor and drama in character studies that aim to entertain, inform and challenge audiences.

## DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT:

I had recently lived seven months in Central Honduras where my wife and I shot a feature-length documentary - *Solo Madres: Stories of the Families Left Behind* - while working with an organization that runs boarding schools for the poor. The children at the school often amazed me by the great generosity that they showed, despite the fact that many had come from extreme poverty. They were constantly thankful for the little they did have and they continually sought to help those with even less than they.

I went to Liberia in the fall of 2009 to shoot a documentary on Liberia Mission, Inc – a boarding school founded in 2003 directly after Liberia’s brutal civil wars. From the very early stages of planning the trip, I had also wanted to shoot a narrative short that would explore this concept of the poor generously helping those with even less than they. And because Liberia’s brutal civil war had the greatest effect on children – both as victims and unwilling combatants - I thought it was important to focus on the children who have been directly affected by the war.

Soon after arriving, I met Joshua, a young child who had a very gentle and magnetic personality. I had asked him if he would like to make "a show" - a term Liberians use for making a film. He enthusiastically agreed - so long as filming did not interfere with meals. He was a remarkably natural actor - a fact that was evident very early on.

I also wanted to play with the narrative and documentary genres in tradition of Herzog – adding fictional elements to the actual events and natural circumstances in these children’s lives. I incorporated as much natural sound and ambient “noise” as possible so as to provide an authentic representation of a chaotic boarding school for a Western audience.

I had also recently watched Kelly Reichardt's "Wendy and Lucy" and was enamored by the way in which Wendy embodied an unspoken painful past – her body language saying much more than dialogue, flashbacks or exposition could. I wanted to tell a story of Liberia's history without having to spell out Charles Taylor's atrocities and I wanted to show the trauma that was left in the war's wake without having to show or discuss its violence. I wanted to leave that up to an engaged and/or curious audience. However, and most importantly, I wanted to show the spirit of the Liberian people who are trying so hard to re-build their country. They are a people who have been left with nothing, but who hold an undying hope for the future. Through Joshua's eyes, face and demeanor we can see it all - a painful past and a tentative future which is bright as long as a giving spirit is present.

- Todd Looby, Writer / Director: “Son of None”

## MUSIC

Dan Macaluso is an independent composer and donated his composition “Sundiata” to the production.



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## SCREENINGS & AWARDS

**WINNER: Best Short Film** - 26th Annual Boston Film Festival - September 18, 2010

12th Annual Sidewalk Moving Pictures Fest - September 25, 2010

46th Annual Chicago International Film Festival - October 11, 17, & 19th

16th Annual Encounters International Film Festival - November 17, 2010

**WINNER: Special Jury Mention** - 16th Annual Slamdance Film Festival – January 22 & 25, 2011

Beloit International Film Festival – February 17, 18, & 19, 2011

Cinequest Film Festival – March 10 & 12, 2011

## PRESS

*Chicago Reader* – “Noteworthy films by Chicagoans—and former Chicagoans—featured in CIFF's Illinois[e]makers series.” – 10/7/2010

*Slamdance Jury* - For its compelling docudrama approach, wonderful lead performance, and stunning final sequence, the Slamdance jury would like to give a special mention to SON OF NONE. – 1/28/2011

*Variety* – “**‘Stranger Things’ wins at Slamdance**” - Special Jury Mention to "Son of None," written and directed by Todd Looby

## FILM SPECIFICATIONS

TRT 00:16:01

ASPECT RATIO: 16:9

ORIGINAL MEDIUM: Mini DV

SCREENING FORMATS: Mini DV; DVD; VHS; Digibeta; HDCAM

FINAL CUT: September 15, 2010

## CAST & CREW

CAST: Joshua Cooper, Martha Yah, Harris Mulbah,  
Jerome C. Cabeen, Mulbah Kollie,  
Monsignor Robert Tikor

WRITER / DIRECTOR: Todd Looby

SCRIPT CONSULTANT: Jerome C. Cabeen

PRODUCER: Todd Looby & Jerome C. Cabeen

EDITOR: Todd Looby

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: Todd Looby

MUSIC: Dan Macaluso

## LINKS

<http://www.obrigadoproductions.com>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1604210/>

<http://www.myspace.com/obrigadoproductions>

<http://www.youtube.com/user/ObrigadoP>

## CONTACT

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