

# Penguin Bloom



A Review by Garry Victor Hill

## Film Details

Directed by Glendyn Ivin

Produced by Emma Cooper, Bruna Papandrea, Steve Hutensky, Jodi Matterson and Naomi Watts

Screenplay by Shaun Grant and Harry Cripps

Additional Writing by Samantha Strauss

Based on *Penquin: The Odd Little Bird Who Saved a Family* by Bradley Trevor Grieve and Cameron Bloom

Cinematography by Sam Chiplin

Production Design: Annie Beauchamp

Music by Marcelo Zarvos

Editing by Maria Papoutsis

Costumes by by Joanna Maepark

Filming Locations: Sydney's northern beaches and Phuket Thailand.

Production Companies: Screen Australia, Endeavor, Content Create, NSW, Made Up Stories, Jam Tart Films and Broadtalk

Released On: January 12<sup>th</sup> September 2020 at The Toronto Film Festival. Global release dates were in late January 2021

Distributors: Roadshow and Netflix

Running Time: 95 minutes

Rating: PG

## Cast

Naomi Watts as Samantha Bloom,

Andrew Lincoln as Cameron Bloom

Griffin Murray-Johnston as Noah Bloom, the narrator

Jacki Weaver as Jan

Felix Cameron as Rueben Bloom

Abe Clifford-Barr as Oli Bloom

Rachel House as Gaye

Lisa Hensley as Bron

Leeanna Walsman as Kylie

Gia Carides as Megan

Gaye as Rachel House

The setting for this film is that perennial favourite dream of Australians and people who want to migrate to Australia; the unspoiled, undeveloped beach town where hardly anyone is on the beautiful beach. Here the fading dream still exists as the Bloom family live in a spacious villa on a cliff edge means so that they have sea, forest and town views that are a real estate agent's dream. 90% of Australians, (those living in tenements, urban sprawl, units or dusty desert towns) still dream of living in a locale something like that where the Bloom family live. How many people in Australia really live this way? At a guess, perhaps 1% and even that figure includes a high proportion of resident foreign millionaires who can afford the beach houses Australians cannot..

As Noah, one of the three Bloom children, narrates over these images then over others concerning relationships, the sense of fairy tale the setting gives continues. Nearly half

Australian marriages end in divorce, domestic violence rates are high and most families suffer financial stress, job insecurity and the misery of existing in overcrowded, noisy cities. Here we see the happy Bloom family playing and the athletic mother frolicking in the uncrowded surf with her children. Next comes the holiday in Thailand and the pleasing beautiful happy images continue. So far this film looks like another cinematic escapist fairy tale.

Then everything changes in a few seconds. When reality bites the Bloom family, it bites hard

In Thailand Sam Bloom leans against a wall railing, which collapses. The shot here stays on the broken railing. The next scene is set in a small, darkened room, where Sam lies disheveled, tired and vexed in bed. Lying on her back, we can see the attached urine pouch and the bedside pole she needs to sit up. She needs help to get out of bed and into her wheelchair or to be taken for a shower. Being a paraplegic for the rest of her life means that she exists not as a noble martyr, but as a depressed, frequently cranky woman. She frequently subsists in weary dullness, alternating between silent agony or tantrums. She knows that she has no hope of a cure and the happy past becomes a torment that leads to a destructive rage. Repulsive, right-wing and cranky as he was, Somerset Maugham had it right when he said that suffering does not make people noble, it brings out the worst in them: the scenes in this film after the return from Thailand make that observation graphically clear.

The fairy tale is over, with a vengeance.

Her extremely patient husband Ken seems a candidate for sainthood as he lives for fulfilling her wants and continually tries to shield the boys by maintaining a semblance of what the family once was, but eventually he cracks and reveals what it is like to live with guilt when faced with invidious choices. The family seems destined for endless misery when succour comes from an unlikely source.

When Noah finds an injured magpie near the beach, he brings it home to care for it and to cure it. Curing the bird, named Penguin, obviously works as a substitute for the mother who cannot be cured. Noah however has to go to school and Sam's efforts to stop Penguin's mischievous and destructive behaviour in the house lead to her tending to the bird., She soon befriends it. Penguin's needs and antics take her mind off her situation and give the audience some much needed comic relief. This bird is not the family savior, but does mark a turning point which redirect them all.

This marks the beginning of her mental recovery and a healthy readjustment to her life. Even so, the fairy tale is not taking over again. Sam's physical development appears as a slow process: she will always be in a wheel chair. The family has several problems as Ken and the children show the strain, his claustrophobic mother in law tries emotional blackmail and even magpies are shown to have a savage side.

Even so, Sam begins to consider what she realistically can do outside the house – and then she does it very well.

The optimistic ending has a creditable reality to it, both in cinematic terms and in the reality of the events which inspired the film.



*Naomi Watts in 2017*

*CREDITS*

*Above*

*[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naomi\\_Watts\\_\(36037832511\)\\_cropped.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Naomi_Watts_(36037832511)_cropped.jpg)*

*Frontspiece courtesy of Wikipedia*

*Information*

*“Penquin Bloom” in Wikipedia, IMD and Metacritic*