

# Dear Zoe (film)

***Dear Zoe*** is a 2022 American drama film directed by Gren Wells from a screenplay by Marc Lhormer and Melissa Martin. It is an adaptation of the 2005 novel of the same name by Philip Beard. The film stars Sadie Sink, Theo Rossi, Kweku Collins, Jessica Capshaw, Justin Bartha, and Vivien Lyra Blair.

## Plot

Fifteen-year-old Tess DeNunzio lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with her blended family: her stepfather, David, who married Tess’s mother, Elly, when Tess was five, and her younger half-sister Em, a first grader. Tess’s biological father, Nick, lives nearby in a poorer neighborhood; he was briefly married to Elly after Tess was born, but the two divorced when Tess was little. After Tess’s three-year-old half-sister, Zoe, died in a hit-and-run accident while Tess was supposed to be watching her, Tess helped David care for Em while Elly coped with depression. The family attends therapy together, though Tess still feels grief acutely and feels she has been excluded from David and Elly’s grief. Isolated and carrying the burden of Zoe’s death, Tess reaches a breaking point when she discovers that her mother has begun a flirtation with Justin, the much younger grocery store clerk. Tess goes to live with Nick, even though she feels guilt over abandoning Em. Nick doesn’t have a steady job, but he breeds German Shepherds, and Tess begins to take care of a puppy whom she names Frank. Nick drives Tess to school every day in his rusted truck and agrees to drive Em home from school so that Tess and Em can spend time together. Tess and Nick attend church together, but a hymn reminds Tess of September 11, and she runs from the church screaming.

Tess is drawn to a teenage boy who lives next-door to her father, Jimmy Freeze. She talks to him on the porch one day, and Jimmy says he knows Tess’s father. She offers him a beer, but her dad stops her and tells her not to hang out with Jimmy Freeze. When a suspicious character named Travis carrying a wad of cash approaches Tess on the porch, Tess realizes that her father is dealing drugs out of the back of his truck. Tess confronts her father, and while he doesn’t stop selling the drugs, he gives Travis a black eye for showing up at his house. One night, Jimmy climbs into Tess’s window, and the two smoke weed together. He reveals he struggles to get along with his dad and stepmother and was sent away to a correctional facility. He

Dear Zoe	
<span></span> <div>Official release poster</div>	
Directed by	<u>Gren Wells</u>
Written by	Marc Lhormer <p>Melissa Martin</p>
Based on	<i><u>Dear Zoe</u></i> <p>by <u>Philip Beard</u></p>
Produced by	Marc Lhormer <p>Brenda Lhormer</p> <p>Peter Phok</p> <p>Christopher H. Warner</p>
Starring	<u>Sadie Sink</u> <p><u>Theo Rossi</u></p> <p>Kweku Collins</p> <p><u>Jessica Capshaw</u></p> <p><u>Justin Bartha</u></p> <p><u>Vivien Lyra Blair</u></p>
Cinematography	Joel Schwartz
Edited by	Rachel Katz
Music by	<u>Michael Yezerski</u>

also discusses his mother's death, though Tess doesn't tell him about Zoe. They kiss goodnight, and Jimmy continues to climb through her window at night, but Tess keeps her developing relationship a secret from her father.

Summer begins, and Em feels abandoned because she only sees Tess on rides home from school. David asks Tess to call her mother; they begin to talk weekly, and Tess notes that they're both improving. On a phone call, Tess's mother says she's afraid of losing Tess, and Tess promises her she isn't. While Tess misses Em and her mother, she continues to live with her father

because it's easier to forget Zoe there. Jimmy gets Tess a summer job at an amusement park where he also works. Soon, Jimmy tells Tess he loves her, and Tess says she does, too. One day, Tess runs into Em and David at the amusement park, and Em gives Tess the silent treatment. Though Tess feels guilty, she is having the best summer of her life.

On the evening of Tess's 16th birthday, Nick calls to tell Tess he has been arrested, and so has Jimmy. Tess realizes Jimmy sells drugs with her father. On her birthday, her mother brings her presents, and Tess tells her about the park and Jimmy. Elly leaves, and when Tess's father and Jimmy come home, they accidentally hit Frank with the truck. Nick takes Frank to the vet, and Jimmy stays with her. Their intimacy escalates, and as they are beginning to have sex for the first time, the noise from the headboard and the memory of Frank being hit by the truck trigger Tess's memories of Zoe's death. They stop having sex, and Tess tells Jimmy the story of Zoe's death: Tess missed the bus, and her mother instructed her to watch Zoe outside. They were playing a game, and then Tess ran inside to watch the footage of September 11 on TV. When she ran back outside, Zoe stepped off the curb, thinking Tess had restarted the game, and was hit by a car. There was no blood, but Zoe died of internal bleeding. Tess feels responsible for her death and says she killed her sister. After she tells Jimmy the story, Jimmy tells Tess he still loves her. Nick calls later to say Frank will be fine.

Later that night, Tess wakes up Nick and says she needs to see a picture of Zoe. Nick drives Tess to her old house, and after Tess goes inside, she realizes she's going to stay. She climbs in bed with Em, who shows Tess that she's been sleeping with the picture of Zoe under her pillow. Nick lets Tess keep Frank, and after they say goodbye, Tess stands in the grass where Zoe landed after the car accident. Tess moves back in with her mom and David and continues to go to church with her father. She sees Jimmy all the time, though they haven't had sex again. Tess, her mom, David, and Em see a therapist as a family. She carries the photo of Zoe with her and looks at her when she wants to. By the end of the film, Tess is learning to live with her grief and loss.

<b>Production companies</b>	Zin Haze Productions Resonate Entertainment
<b>Release date</b>	November 4, 2022
<b>Running time</b>	96 minutes
<b>Country</b>	United States
<b>Language</b>	English

## Cast

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- [Sadie Sink](#) as Tess DeNunzio
- [Theo Rossi](#) as Nick DeNunzio
- Kweku Collins as Jimmy Freeze
- [Jessica Capshaw](#) as Elly Gladstone
- [Justin Bartha](#) as David Gladstone
- [Vivien Lyra Blair](#) as Emily Gladstone
- Mckenzie Noel Rusiewicz as Zoe Gladstone

- Tanyell Waivers as Vicky

## Production

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Filming began in October 2019 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and concluded in November 2019. The film spent an extended period of time in pre-production, with the novel originally optioned in 2010.<sup>[1]</sup> Production occurred in Pittsburgh, with a primarily local crew.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Release

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The film was released in select theatres and on demand starting November 4, 2022.<sup>[3]</sup> It was released on DVD on December 13, 2022. It was released on Blu-ray on February 14, 2023.

## Reception

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On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 71% of 14 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.0/10.<sup>[4]</sup>

## References

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1. Williams, Kate (December 12, 2019). "Sonoma movie producers wrap *Dear Zoe*" (<https://www.sonomanews.com/article/news/sonoma-movie-producers-wrap-dear-zoe/>). *Sonoma Index-Tribune*. Retrieved March 14, 2021.
2. Tabachnick, Toby (December 5, 2019). "Pittsburgh native brings *Dear Zoe* to film" (<https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/pittsburgh-native-brings-dear-zoe-to-film/>). *Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*. Retrieved March 14, 2021.
3. Complex, Valerie (2022-07-19). "Byron Allen's Freestyle Digital Media Acquires Drama Film *Dear Zoe* Starring Sadie Sink" (<https://deadline.com/2022/07/byron-allens-freestyle-digital-media-acquires-1235072721/>). *Deadline*. Retrieved July 20, 2022.
4. "*Dear Zoe*" ([https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dear\\_zoe](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/dear_zoe)). *Rotten Tomatoes*. *Fandango Media*. Retrieved February 3, 2023.

## External links

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- *Dear Zoe* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1657865/>) at *IMDb*

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