

SHORT FILM SET IN GOSELEY ESTATE

40-year-old director said it seemed natural to have film made in her home town

By CHARLOTTE DOBSON

WHEN YOU think of film locations, you probably think of Hollywood Boulevard, the Latin quarter of Paris or maybe Alnwick Castle from the Harry Potter blockbusters.

Well, how about the Goseley estate in Swadlincote? Perhaps you didn't know that this quiet suburban pocket of south Derbyshire has been the site of the latest critically acclaimed short film *Sis* by Deborah Haywood.

The 40-year-old writer and director said it seemed natural to have her film made in her home town. She said:

"The reason *Sis* was set on Goseley was because I had imagined it there in my head when I was writing it. My best friend Rosalee lives there so I go there quite a lot, we have been best friends since we were four".

Sis tells the story of two little girls, Lauren and Amy, who hear that there is a man who "likes children" living in the area and so decide to dress up track him down to show him their handstands.

Yes, I can hear the alarm bells ringing, you immediately imagine the worst, especially when a their neighbour knocks on the door with a petition "to evict the paedo down the road."

Yet rather than depict the seedy fate of the little girls, the film looks at society's inherent fear of pedophilia. Through the eyes of Lauren and Amy we are given a comic glance at the way communities are quick to establish a village villain.

Deborah explains this: "I saw him as more of an innocent victim rather than as an actual pedophile. Every community seems to have that 'weirdo' who maybe dresses a bit funny or is a bit of a loner, who then becomes labelled as something much worse."

Clearly not shy of a controversial subject Deborah said she was drawn to film mak-



STARS OF SWAD: Director Deborah Haywood with budding starlets Demi-Jo and Billie Lee Parker at the Ashby Film Night.

ing film scripts. With film you can take more risks and I like taking risks."

Combining comedy with such a serious topic does tread a fine line between humour and bad taste, but *Sis* really does pull it off. The brilliant performances from local starlets Demi-Jo and Billie Lee Parker steal the show as they strut around the neighbourhood in their beads and sunglasses.

But how do you get such young actresses to perform in a way that is funny, endearing and believable?

"Once the girls were cast I started to go round their house and play games with them, a favourite was ambulances. When we started filming it was important to create a safe environment for them. But they're under the age before they start to feel self-conscious. They're definitely the most natural performers I've worked with."

At the recent screening at Ashby film night Demi-Jo and Billie Lee Parker seemed quite at home in front of an audience, declaring that their favourite bit about being in the film was "dressing-up."

For the Swadlincote director, creating films that seem real and believable is integral to her work, she adds: "I like to write about ordinary people in everyday struggles, I felt I could write about that. You can make really interesting films about everyday experiences."

Her first short film *Lady Margaret* was shot at Willesley lake and tells the story of teenage girl who goes for a ride with two older boys to the woods. Childhood and adolescence seems a common thread through Deborah's work. She said: "Everyday is exciting when you're a teenager. Children and teenagers have so many new experiences all the time, good and bad."

Deborah has just completed her third film *Biatch* and currently divides her time between living Swadlincote, London and California, where her husband works.

Sis managed to scoop the top prize at the Rushes Soho Short Film Festival earlier this year.

DRESSING UP: Demi-Jon and Billie Lee as Lauren and Amy in *Sis*



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