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Interview: Emily Hagins and the Producers of 'Grow Up, Tony Phillips'

By [Jordan Gass-Poore](#) on July 27, 2013 - 1:30pm in [Distribution News](#) | [Local Indies](#)



The last time Austin-based filmmaker [Emily Hagins](#) went trick-or-treating was her senior year of high school, when her friends wanted to show a French foreign exchange student what the holiday was like in America.

That was two years ago.

"(I)t was really, really weird because we were getting weird looks, but the (French) girl was having a blast," Hagins said. "She had no idea that we were too old to be doing this."

The idea that certain childhood passions have no expiration date is explored in Hagins' fourth feature film *Grow Up, Tony Phillips* ([Elizabeth's review](#)). Because age, after all, is just a number. The movie is scheduled to hit VOD platforms this Halloween and later home video through Rogue Arts, an indie distributor that first approached the film's creators after its SXSW Film Festival premiere this year.

Despite setbacks, which included the casting loss of [Barbara Crampton](#) (*Re-Animator*) due to scheduling conflicts, the film raised \$80,001 through its [Kickstarter](#) campaign.

I spoke with Hagins and the producers of *Grow Up, Tony Phillips*, [Peter Hall](#) and [Paul Gandersman](#), before its world premiere at this year's SXSW Film Festival. The comedy, starring [Tony Vespe](#) (*My Sucky Teen Romance*) in the title role and [AJ Bowen](#) (*The House of the Devil*), was shot in 24 days in various parts of Austin, including Costume World off Burnet Road, Cedar Park, and the San Marcos arcade The Joystick. Hall, Gandersman and Hagins said they were looking for locations with a Midwestern "fall vibe."

Slackerwood: How did the three of you meet? And Peter, Paul how and why did you decide to work with Emily?

Peter Hall: We started working with Emily on *My Sucky Teen Romance* and I knew her a little longer just because I've lived here a little longer. I knew her through the film community. She was just always around at screenings. I kind of volunteered to work on *My Sucky Teen Romance* with her and that just kind of snowballed into a fantastic working relationship. We just enjoy working together. After that we just wanted to do another film. Paul and I, we just met again through the film community, film screenings and whatnot. (We) got to talking and wanted to start a company.

What was the film's casting process like?

Emily Hagins: Tony is played by a very good friend of mine who I've been working with for a couple of years. I just really wanted to make a movie he could be in, and the rest of the cast were people I've worked with before in *My Sucky Teen Romance*, and Tony's in *My Sucky Teen Romance*. [Katie \(Folger\)](#) is somebody that we met through [Devin Bonnee](#) (who plays "Craig" in *Grow Up, Tony Phillips*), just another local, Austin actress. Not doing an audition process that was more traditional. I was more about getting everyone together and seeing what their chemistry was like 'cause these kids were supposed to have been friends for a long time. Tony and Katie would go off and attend events with each other and kind of build this pretend friendship these characters supposedly had. And AJ, he's like the adult in the film, in a way, but also kind of

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immature (the character, not AJ), with the theme of growing up. ...He and Tony have also known each other for a long time in real life.

Is the film based on any real-life experiences?

Hagins: I've known Tony for so long and it was easy to write for him in a way because I would just kind of ask him what he would say in a certain situation. When I told him what the story was about and if he wanted to play the character he was like, "Oh, ya, I trick-or-treated when I was 18." In a way you could say it was based on a true story, but I didn't know that (story) at all when I wrote the script.

Here's the film's trailer.



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