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Stu Pollard

Filmmaker's hometown
plays key supporting role

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Stu loves Lou

Like his films, **Stu Pollard** is a creation in motion. Preparing for the release of his second film, *Keep Your Distance*, the Louisville native sees it as another stepping-stone in a career that will someday bring even bigger projects to the Commonwealth.

“We’ve created a film that we hope people will enjoy, but yes, the hope is, too, that it will also catch the attention of a company, such as Dreamworks, which would allow us to bring a \$10 million film to Kentucky instead of a \$1 million one,” said Pollard, a 1985 graduate of Kentucky Country Day School whose first film, 1999’s *Nice Guys Sleep Alone*, had an 18-month run on HBO and will continue to be seen on television through 2016. “For a first film, just out of the gate, that’s phenomenal.”



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Keep Your Distance was filmed in Louisville.

Pollard was born in Louisville. His parents, **Carl** and **Judie**, divorced when he was 3. He recalls moving quite a bit—about once a year—but he was always in the same school—KCD. His mother, **Judie** Brandenburg, now lives in Sarasota, Fla. His father, **Carl**, and **Carl’s** wife, **BeBe**, own Goshen’s Hermitage Farm—a site used in *Nice Guys*. His sister, **Susan**, lives in Lexington.

Despite the success of his first film and the four years it took to raise the money and finish his second one, Pollard, 38, is a relative newcomer to the business. After high school he went to Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., and graduated with a degree in marketing. He took that to New York and worked with McCann-Erickson, one of the nation’s largest advertising agencies, for three years before moving to Los Angeles to attend the University of Southern California School of Cinema-Television.

Having a business and marketing background has allowed Pollard to fuel his creative pursuits. With a crew of as many as 40 people, he is still in some ways a one-man show. He writes, directs and produces, but he also conceives business plans, raises funds and promotes his films. It could be his first

film, his second film or the *Keep Your Distance* soundtrack. Like a true entrepreneur, he keeps the front seat of his car littered with product—CDs, DVDs, press kits and bumper stickers.

A call to his 502 area code cell phone could find him coming out of an office on Louisville's Brownsboro Road or meeting associates for dinner in Santa Monica, Calif. "You surround yourself with as many good people as you can and try your best to keep the ship on course," Pollard said of producing. "Diplomacy is key."

Every day is something. Every day is different. When he sat down for a lunch interview with *Kentucky Monthly*, it was item No. 6 on a to-do list of 34.

"There are a lot of moving parts," Pollard said of running his film companies, Lunacy Unlimited and Blue & Grey Film Ventures (named in honor of his college alma mater's colors).

By Hollywood standards, Pollard's projects are considered small-budget affairs. Co-producer **Jennifer Sims**, another Louisville native, described the experience: "Yes, we stayed in a hotel, but it was an extended stay hotel right off the highway, pretty far from anything. Most of the crew didn't have cars. We had to use Stu's dad's van from the farm that smelled like hay."

Proven success can bring greater opportunities, and while Pollard doesn't see himself becoming the next **Steven Spielberg**, he would like to see what he could do with a larger budget. In an interview with *Y'all Magazine* he said he likes being independent, too.

"I like doing things my own way. It's nice not to have to worry about people looking over your shoulder," Pollard said. "It's a challenging and risky way to make films, but all the hurdles make the finished product much more satisfying."

Part of doing things his own way is bringing projects to Kentucky.

"If I were working for a big studio with a big budget, I would still do that when possible," he said.



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Stu Pollard made use of many Louisville landmarks, such as *The Seelbach Hilton*, in his new film. He also shot at *Churchill Downs*, *Cave Hill Cemetery* (shown below with actor *Stacy Keach*) and 80 other locations.

Part of that is out of loyalty. "What I can't begin to accurately express is how thankful I am for the way the community supported *Nice Guys*. I got e-mails from transplanted Louisvillians from around the country saying they'd caught it on HBO one night and it made them homesick. That's a very big part of what inspired me to make *Keep Your Distance* in Louisville. It's my way of saying thank you for caring so much about what I'm doing."

Pollard's passion for his projects has made it easier for him to land known talent, such as **Morgan Fairchild** in his

first film and **Stacy Keach** in his second. "Working with Stu has been such a pleasure," said Keach. "He has a unique ability to allow the actors to discover the material for them-

selves, which is a great quality to have."

Leading man **Gil Bellows**, best known for his roles in *Ally McBeal* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, said he jumped at the chance to work with Pollard. "Stu has such a great sense of humor—we just clicked," he said.

As for leading actress **Jennifer Westfeldt**, she's asked Pollard to lend a hand on her next project. "Stu is a gracious leader who creates an environment in which everyone can shine," she said.

You can see in talking with Pollard that Louisville and Kentucky have left a mark on him. When asked whom he'd like to work with in the future, **Maggie Lawson** (who had a part in *Nice Guys*), **Ashley Judd** and **Ned Beatty**—Kentuckians all—are among the first names out of his mouth.

As for directors, **Cameron Crowe**, whose Kentucky-set film *Elizabethtown* debuts in October, is among his idols. "I'd love to work with producer **Marc Abraham** (a Waggener High School grad who has 26 films to his credit) or screenwriter **Stephen Gaghan** (a KCD alumnus who won the Academy Award for *Traffic*)."

For his next project, he's working on a screenplay on the tragic life of Kentucky Derby-winning jockey **Chris Antley**. "It's about what happens when all of your dreams come true too soon," Pollard said.

Antley was among the leading jockeys in the world by the time he was 18, and in 1987 he rode nine different horses to wins in one day. Within a year he surrendered his racing license and was in rehabilitation for his abuse of cocaine and diet pills. Antley rebuilt his career to be one of the West Coast's leading riders in the mid- to late 1990s won the Derby aboard *Charismatic* in 1999 and was dead—the result of a drug overdose—by the end of 2000.

But for now, Pollard still has work to do to make sure that *Keep Your Distance* duplicates the success of his first film, which includes speaking at colleges and making the film festival circuit.

"If I learned anything in this business, you have to know your motivation," Pollard said. "If you're doing it for the money—you'll never have enough. If you're doing it for the fame—the fame is fleeting. If you're doing it because you love it, at the end of the day you'll be fulfilled."

—STEPHEN M. VEST

Keep Your Distance



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Gil Bellows has the lead role in *Keep Your Distance*.

Independent film maker **Stu Pollard's** latest release, *Keep Your Distance*, is a series of parables wrapped in a suspenseful psychological thriller. The characters, according to Pollard, each represent something—"Power, Love, Money and Sex—which has a checkered history of making some people happy while making others miserable."

Radio talk show host **David Dailey** (played by **Gil Bellows** of *Ally McBeal*) is unrivaled in terms of popularity, but he is as much imprisoned by his celebrity as he is empowered.

Workaholic **Melody Carpenter** (**Jennifer Westfeldt** of hit the independent film *Kissing Jessica Stein*) courageously divorced her husband because of his infidelity. Now 32, she sees a future full of possibilities—but none of them match her dreams.

Aspiring musician **Sean Voight** (**Christian Kane**, most recently in the TBS mini-series *Into the West*) stands to inherit millions, but without someone to share it with, the promise of a financial windfall makes his solitude all the more maddening.

Susan Dailey (**Kim Raver** of the Fox hit *24*), David's wife, wants to push the boundaries of their sexual relationship,

but she and her husband have radically different ideas about where those lines are drawn.

"If happiness is at the thematic surface of *Keep Your Distance*, then lurking below is trust," Pollard said. "That's how the title came about—the amount of distance you keep from someone is a means of measuring how much you trust them."

Who do you trust enough to enter your personal space? Or as a catch-



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Actor **Gil Bellows**, left, chats with **WHAS' Terry Meiners** while preparing to star opposite **Jennifer Westfeldt** (at right) in *Keep Your Distance*.

phrase from the film states, "Everyone you trust has the power to betray you."

Other featured stars in the film include veteran actor **Stacy Keach**, best known for his portrayal of **Mike Hammer** in the 1980s; **Elizabeth Pena**, the sultry maid in *Down and Out in*



Kentucky Monthly has a cameo appearance in *Keep Your Distance*, with actress **Kim Raver**.

Beverly Hills; and **Jamie Harrold**, the nervous water board clerk in the **Julia Roberts** film *Erin Brockovich*.

Another major player in the film is **Louisville**—from **Churchill Downs** to the **Seelbach Hotel** to the studios of **WHAS Radio**—Pollard's hometown shines brightly as the backdrop.

The film debuts Sept. 1 at the **Kentucky Center for the Arts** in **Louisville**. It opens in theaters regionally in the following weeks and, like Pollard's other film, *Nice Guys Sleep Alone*, will eventually find its way to cable, DVD and international release.

A soundtrack of the movie includes **Louisvillians Tim Krekel** and **Peter Searcy**, the western Kentucky band **The Muckrakers**, central Kentuckian **Carter Wood**, and **Louisville bands The Middle Men, Digby** and nearly a dozen others.



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—STEPHEN M. VEST