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## 'Buffalo Kids' Screenwriter Reveals Boy Who Inspired Animated Hit Died Two Weeks After Film Was Greenlit: 'It Was Very Emotional'

By K.J. Yossman ▾



“[Buffalo Kids](#)” is a turn-of-the-century caper that follows two Irish orphans, Mary and Tom, as they traverse the U.S. in search of their uncle, meeting a cast of heroes and villains along the way. Their adventure also leads them to Nick, a fellow orphan with cerebral palsy they quickly embrace as a surrogate brother.

It is the relationship between Nick and Mary in particular that is the beating heart of the film, which is perhaps unsurprising since it is based on a real sibling bond between co-director Pedro Solís García’s daughter Alejandra and his son Nicolás, who was also born with cerebral palsy.

Tragically, Nicolás never got to watch the movie that he inspired. In an interview with *Variety*, the film’s co-screenwriter and producer Jordi Gasull reveals that the 16-year-old died just before “Buffalo Kids” went into production.

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After spending significant time finding funding for the movie, which comes from the same creative team as “Mummies,” Gasull was thrilled to inform Solís García the project was finally moving forward. “I told him ‘We have the green light!’ and 15 days later, Nicolás died,” recalls Gasull, tearing up as we talk. But the director (who helmed the film alongside Juan Jesús García Galocha) did have a chance to tell his son it was going to happen. “When Pedro told Nico ‘We’re going to do your movie’ he looked at him like he was delighted,” says Gasull. “It was very emotional and we owe [the film] to Nicolás and all the kids with cerebral palsy.”

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While Nicolás was the main inspiration for the film, which is produced by Spain's 4 Cats Pictures and Core Animation, it also borrows from Gasull's own experience – he once had a real-life collision with a buffalo – as well as from history. After topping the box office in its native Spain, “Buffalo Kids” opened in the U.K. and Ireland ([distributed by Warner Bros. Discovery](#)) this weekend. Ahead of the launch, Gasull spoke to *Variety* about the film's conception and production as well as his hopes for a North American release.

### **Where did the idea for “Buffalo Kids” come from?**

Pedro told me, “I want to do a feature film of the story of my kid.” I told him I love the idea so much but we have to find a story for the characters. He sent me one that was a kind of “Home Alone” in an orphanage but it really didn't work. Then a friend of mine told me about a book about the orphans from New York in the 19th century. I read it and I thought “Oh, my God, here we have a story.” So I started to do some research on real orphans and real stories in the wild frontier and I felt that we had something.

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### **What was it like writing the real Nicolás, who was non-verbal, into the screenplay [which Gasull wrote alongside his longtime co-writer Javier López Barreira]?**

After a lot of work we delivered the first screenplay, which had Nick talking, and I remember Pedro telling us, “No, no, no, this cannot be. My kid didn't speak. You have to write a character that speaks with his eyes.” So I did some research and talked to

Pedro and watched videos from the real Nick. Then I re-wrote the script without him talking. Then we sent it to Pedro and he said, “Now this is my son.”

### **Did you encounter disability discrimination when pitching the film, either to financiers or distributors?**

No. It was the reverse. Everybody told me that it was a very simple but very well-written story where the characters were really strong. They thought it was risky for audiences but nobody told me “This is not a likable character.” It was actually the reverse. They told me the script is beautiful.

### **Did you expect the success in Spain?**

I expected less success. I mean, I thought it would perform well but that we would be like around 600,000 admissions, €4 million [the film has since grossed almost \$5.5 million domestically]. I wouldn't think that we'd be in numbers very close to “Mummies,” I have to be honest, because it's a much more complex movie, and it's a much more serious subject matter. It has been a truly nice surprise for us.

### **What was the most emotional scene for you while making the film?**

When they meet the buffalo. Because several years ago I had a car accident with a real buffalo in Yellowstone. My younger son broke his nose, he was crying, but my older son approached the buffalo — which was dying — and touched him, and he and the buffalo stayed together for a few moments. So that inspired that scene. And I cried when I saw the dance scene [with Nick and Mary]. When I saw it, I told Pedro and Galo “You're great directors, you made me cry like a muffin, as we say in Spain.” I was really touched. They did an amazing job because it was very difficult. I mean, it's a very simple story with just a small budget and they delivered a lot of quality and emotion.

### **What has been the response from audiences?**

Tons of people have written to us, have sent us messages, have tried to reach us through Facebook, through the web page of 4 Cats Pictures and Core Animation. It has been amazing. I have never had such a level of response for any of my movies. This has been extraordinary. Mainly they are impressed with the way that Nick is depicted. They said that it was really, really touching.

### **Given the success in Europe, is it disappointing “Buffalo Kids” hasn't been picked up yet in the U.S.?**

I mean, I'm a dreamer, and I hope that it has good results in U.K. and that might trigger the Anglo-Saxon audiences, because I feel that it's a movie that U.S. audiences will embrace. Because this story, it comes from the truth, it's not something made up. It's not: “OK I'm going to deliver a message.” No. The message comes from the [authenticity of the] story and I feel it's totally unique. And when I show it to American audiences, American friends, they have been totally involved emotionally. So I dream we can have something there.

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