

I, TONYA (2017)

- Released on December 8th, 2017
- 2 Hours
- 11 million USD (estimated)
- Directed by Craig Gillespie
- Written by Steven Rogers
- Clubhouse Pictures (II), LuckyChap Entertainment
- Rated R for pervasive language, violence, and some sexual content/nudity
- Harding denied having any involvement in the attack, but pleaded guilty to conspiring to hinder prosecution. She had to pay a \$160,000 fine and was sentenced to three years' probation and 500 hours community service. She was also banned for life from the U.S. Figure Skating Association.

QUICK THOUGHTS

- Marisa Serafini
- Phil Svitek

DEVELOPMENT

- "I went on the Tonya Harding website to see who her agent was, to see if life rights were even available," Rogers said. "I called the number for her agent and it was a Motel 6." - Steven Rogers
"I had never interviewed anyone before," he said. "I went up the first time just to see if we liked each other. She picked me up in her truck and there was no outside door handle, she had to open it for me [from the inside]. I knew I was on to something." - Rogers
- Roger's search led him to Texas where he thought he had found Harding's manager. It turned out the person wasn't, but she was a friend of Harding's and because the woman was familiar with Rogers' writing credits she connected him with Harding.
- After a few months of searching, Rogers was finally face-to-face with Harding. The two hit it off and agreed to have Rogers sit with her over two days and interview her about her life. But first Rogers had to get her life rights. It took some time, mostly because Rogers said Harding didn't want to pay for a lawyer so she got her ex-manager to do the negotiation pro bono.
- Rogers knew when he was done with the script at the beginning of 2016 he could not send it to the studios. For the first time ever in his career he went the independent film route and quickly found Brian Unkeless (the "Hunger Games" franchise) as a producing partner.
- The movie was bought for around \$5 million following its world premiere at this year's Toronto International Film Festival.

WRITING (Steven Rogers)

- Known for *Hope Floats*, *Stepmom*, *Kate & Leopold*, *P.S. I Love You*
- Steven Rogers' script was featured on the 2016 Black List of the most-liked scripts of the year
- Rogers interviewed [Tonya's] estranged ex, Jeff Gilllooly, as well. "Their stories were so wildly different, they didn't remember anything the same," he said.
- "The perception of truth, memory, family, media, and class, I thought that all would be interesting to write about," Rogers
- "I felt like this tone is very specific to Tonya, and I didn't feel like it would survive the studio system."
- Was in the process of leaving show business when AI Films picked up his spec script about the unbelievable true story behind one of America's most infamous sports dustups
 - Screenwriter Steven Rogers was inspired to write the film after watching a documentary about ice skating which mentioned Tonya Harding
 - Rogers arranged secure interviews with Harding and ex-husband Jeff Gilllooly
 - Both remembered the events of the 1994 attack on Nancy Kerrigan very differently. Rogers decided: "Well, that's my way in: to put everyone's point of view out there, and then let the audience decide."

- There were a few caveats before [Rogers] took it out on the market: there couldn't be rewrites without his consent, and Allison Janney had to play the role of Harding's mother.

STORY/TOPICS

- The "truth"
- Breaking the 4th wall
- Humorous or serious?
- Standards of the Olympic committee
- History of ice-skating

CAST:

MARGOT ROBBIE (Tonya Harding)

- [Robbie was] searching for movies that could be star vehicles for her when she came across Rogers' script. She jumped on board to star as Harding and also be a producer.
- [Steven] did a *six-hour* interview with Tonya," Gillespie told IndieWire. "He watched the documentary, he tracked her down, he went up there, they met. This is *her* interview, which is why these stories feel so spontaneous and personal and bizarre."- Gillespie
- "I really felt like it was there in Steven's script that, by the end of the movie, we should empathize with [Tonya]," Gillespie
- "Working with Margot was a dream come true. We laughed, we cried, we were exhausted at some points."- Stan
- "I just wanted to see if she was okay," Robbie says. "I felt like out of all the footage I'd ever seen and watched online, it didn't feel like there was any resolution to her story. No one had assured me in any of those documentaries that she's okay now, and after spending all this time trying to see things from her point of view, I feel for her."
- To prevent damaging her hair, Margot Robbie wears wigs as Tonya Harding. Surprisingly, the hair team used beer to achieve the "crunchy" permed look when regular hair products didn't produce the desired result.

SEBASTIAN STAN (Jeff Gillooly)

- Rogers found Gillooly/Stone easier than Harding. I think it was because his wife liked the movies I wrote, that was my in," Rogers said. "He didn't want to profit on it," Rogers said. "That's not how he was portrayed in the media. I genuinely liked him."
- "Their stories and their recollections were *wildly* contradictory, they really did not remember anything the same," he said.
- "My agent sent me the script to 'I, Tonya' last year. From an actor's perspective, the script was like finding gold. Not a lot of things like this come my way. It had this documentary style and so many funny elements, but also these very scary, violent sequences. I've never played anyone that was a real person before, so that excited me. I immediately went online and looked him up and found an episode of 'Inside Edition' with him and it was such an interesting character study. He was fascinating. I was bouncing ideas around with Craig and getting excited and then I had a moment where I realized this is a true story and these are real people and their lives were ruined by this. I've learned through the years to keep a rein on judging characters. It's very easy to do that."- Stan

ALLISON JANNEY (LaVona Golden)

- Rogers couldn't find Harding's mother so Rogers created the character through research and Harding's recollections. Rogers and Janney, couldn't track down the real LaVona Golden. "He tried everywhere, everywhere led to a dead end," Janney recalls to EW. "Tonya wasn't really interested in knowing where her mother was, or didn't really care."
- "I have always written parts for Allison in all my scripts," Rogers said. He has known the actress for most of his adult life. "She's never gotten to play a part that I've written for her."
- "[Real Tonya] came up to me ... and said, 'Wow, you were my mother. You played her perfectly."

- Janney won the Golden Globe award for Best Supporting Actress.
- "I think she just was a really angry resentful woman ... Nothing in life worked out the way she wanted it to and I think she feels she was owed something she didn't get and was going to get it with her daughter," Janney said. "The challenge for me was finding the humanity under LaVona and putting together what I thought must have been a pretty horrendous upbringing for her."
- "I was mortified and glued to my television set and very much was on the Nancy side when I watched it [24 years ago]. I didn't relate to Tonya, and I thought, how terrible that she did this thing and just evil," Janney said
- Allison Janney had seriously trained to become a figure skater throughout her childhood and adolescence. However, when she was 17, she accidentally walked into a sliding glass door and gravely injured her right leg. In 2014, during an interview on "Fresh Air," Janney told interviewer Terry Gross that her leg came close to being amputated. "I lost like three-quarters of my blood. I lost an artery and cut tendon....I was in the hospital for like seven--seven, eight weeks. I missed my first year of college. You know, and after that, of course, I didn't really--I didn't skate for a very long time."
- Not being a 'bird' person in particular, [Allison Janney](#) had some difficulty adapting to having one perched on her shoulder for so many of her scenes, so the production had to 'audition' three different birds before settling on one they nicknamed "Little Man," the least hyperactive of the lot.

JULIANNE NICHOLSON (Diane Rawlinson)

- The experience of making the film made [Nicholson] reassess her preconceived notions about Harding's character.
- "I did feel more compassionate towards her," she said in an interview with Refinery29. "I felt that she was dealt a raw deal from the time she was born. She didn't have the skills to be in any other world aside from the one that she grew up, which was kind of no holds barred, take what's yours by any means necessary. And when she was dropped in the real world, it didn't make sense to her."
- "I wish we had more women like [Tonya]," she said. "But I think it's scary to a lot of people, and in particular, men. It threatens something in themselves, it doesn't fit with their idea of how a woman is supposed to act."

PAUL WALTER HAUSER (Shawn)

- *Key and Peele, Black Klansman*
- "I got an email [about *I, Tonya*] that said 'hey, you have an audition with the director. He's the director of *Lars and the Real Girl*, the script was on the Black List, written by Steven Rogers, and it's a biopic starring Margot Robbie. So in my head, I'm like, this is the project I want but probably won't get. They'll probably give it to Josh Gad or Jonah Hill or somebody. But I memorized 13-pages off-book and went in cool as a cucumber. I figured I had nothing to lose and I should just be myself and go in with confidence. I just had two auditions — a director's session up against a bunch of random guys and then a call-back, where it was just so Craig could see if I took direction well and looked malleable and stuff."
- Getting the role: "When I hung up, I acted like everything was calm, but then I started crying and I thanked God and thanked Jesus. And then my buddy picked me up, and as he rolls up, my face is all blotchy from crying, and he's like, "what happened?" He figured somebody died. And I go, "I got the part in *I, Tonya*." - Hauser
- "I did not get to meet the real Shawn Eckhardt, he passed away ten years ago unfortunately. But, you know there were some YouTube clips and there was some source material so I got to tap into that and kind of find my way into the character as best as I could."
- I put on 25 to 30 pounds for the role.
- When he read the script, he connected with "the severity with which Eckardt believed everything."
- "The more digging I did, the more you learn he had nothing going for him but his own made-up reality," said Hauser.
- Director Craig Gillespie praised Hauser, his "secret weapon," for delivering "an entertaining performance with such humanity."

- “Paul never made fun of Shawn. He absolutely understood the humor but he never was commenting on it,” Steven Rogers told *Newsweek*. “He played the part dead honestly, as if Shawn thought he was the smartest person in the room.”
- Loved the rare freedom Eckhardt offered him as an actor. “I got to take ownership on delusion and get away with it.”

BOBBY CANNAVALE (Martin Maddox)

SYMBOLISM/TRIVIA/EASTER EGGS

- When Tonya Harding herself first saw the film, she particularly liked the "Suck my dick!" line. She told Margot Robbie that she wished she had actually said that in real life

DIRECTING (Craig Gillespie)

- “I loved these contradictory interviews, I love that we’re giving the audience a chance to participate,” Gillespie told *IndieWire*. “It’s almost, in that sense, like a documentary. You get to see these people, and you get to try and decide if they’re lying. What do I believe? You get to make your own choices.”
- “Craig Gillespie is so creative and so focused and does his homework. I think because he does so much homework and pre-production work that when he shows up he is kind of light and airy, and malleable and fluffy, and funny and cool. He made it a very easy set to collaborate on. He made everyone really comfortable.” - Hauser

PRODUCTION (Nicolas Karakatsanis- DP)

- 31-day shoot very little from the script was changed
- Fewer than 10 people have performed a triple axel in competition. The production hired skaters Anna Malkova and Heidi Munger as skating doubles.
- Shot primarily on location
- “Craig loves shooting things anamorphic, and having lots of lens flares, and having a realistic, beautiful cinematic feel. He wanted very much to have a moving camera, which makes things challenging for VFX. He wanted to have seamless shots. As you can see in the movie, you’re very tight with Margot in a lot of places, and the camera’s moving with her. So those things have quite specific requirements for tracking, and getting all the data to be able to add things into a shot.” - Tierney
- “I really wanted her environment to be a little bit more quiet, and not quite full of stuff. I wanted there to be an emptiness there—a sadness, really. There’s a lot of negative space, and that was a really conscious decision.” -Jade Healy - Production Designer
- “We had to build out all the ice skating rinks—the Olympic sets behind it, all that stuff. Those portions were built.” - Healy
- Principal photography began in late January 2017 in Macon, Georgia, where Macon Coliseum was used as a set
- Throughout the shoot, Robbie suffered from a herniated disc in her neck, and had routine MRIs to ensure it was safe for her to continue filming skating scenes
- Filming wrapped in late February of that year, with pickups in Atlanta on May 16

EDITING/VFX (Tatiana S. Riegel)

- Gillespie wanted to keep his cameras tight on Robbie’s face for the skating shots, to capture her determined expression. “We ended up blending three or four takes to get the best version. It’s possible [to do a triple axel], but even somebody who can do it may need a few takes to get it right,” says Juliet Tierney, a visual effects producer for Eight VFX.
- We got Margot to replicate those moves just on bluescreen, so we had her face at the right angle.” Where possible, the effects crew used their scans of Robbie in action, digitally cutting her face out of their bluescreen shots, and mapping it over Malkova’s or Munger’s.
- They needed to create a completely digital face from scratch to properly match the skaters’ movements and angles, so they brought in a French production company called EISKO. “We felt

they had the best rig and the best technology,” says Tierney. “We brought them over from Paris, and they set up and captured all the data for us, and processed it, and sent it back to us.

- The rig involved looks a little like a Christmas ornament, with an actor seated inside a ball of lights and cameras geared to capture them from every angle.
- Eight VFX created crowds for the skating competitions. We had six witness cameras in the stadiums. We shot in two different stadiums in Atlanta, and we scanned the whole stadium in both cases to capture all that geometry. Then we took those feeds and re-created the stadiums in CG. And then we’ve got all the right tracking points for the skating scenes as well, from the cameras moving.”

SOUND/MUSIC (Peter Nashel)

- Their requests for music rights were initially met with resistance. “[Artists] didn’t want their music used in a Tonya Harding film,” Jacobs says, adding that she was able to change their minds by convincing them to actually watch the film
- Some of the songs of the soundtrack were used in Harding’s real routines, such as ZZ Top’s “Sleeping Bag”. Others were selected by music supervisor Susan Jacobs: tracks from the 1970’s such as Fleetwood Mac’s “The Chain” or Supertramp’s “Goodbye Stranger” came from an era when music was “powerful and full” and “warm.” Jacobs felt the “classic rock songs filled the picture without getting in the way of the story.” Critic Emily Manning found that other, such as En Vogue’s “Free Your Mind”, Heart’s “Barracuda”, created “an interesting parallel between Tonya’s tenacity and ambition. The film ends with Siouxsie and the Banshees’ cover of “The Passenger”; Manning wrote: “There was something really right about seeing Tonya skate to Siouxsie.” Jacobs said that “The Passenger” was “something obviously female and the lyrics [resonated]”. The lyrics of Dire Straits’ “Romeo and Juliet” were also important as “they felt like the story”

PROMOTION

- *I, Tonya* premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival on September 8, 2017
- Shortly after, Neon acquired U.S. distribution rights to the film

BOX OFFICE

- As of January 29, 2018, *I, Tonya* has grossed \$19.2 million in the United States and Canada, and \$2.4 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$21.6 million
- After making \$11.6 million over a month in limited release, the film made \$2.9 million from 799 theaters in its wide weekend
- After the film earned its three Oscar nominations it was added to 161 theaters the following week and made \$3 million

RECEPTION

- Rotten Tomatoes - 90%, based on 224 reviews
- The site’s critical consensus reads, “Led by strong work from Margot Robbie and Alison Janney, *I, Tonya* finds the humor in its real-life story without losing sight of its more tragic – and emotionally resonant – elements.”
- Christy Lemire of RogerEbert.com gave the film three and a half stars out of four, describing it as “an irresistible, soapy mix of jealousy, competition and class warfare, fortified by powerful performances and unexpected emotional resonance.”
- Richard Brody of the New Yorker felt the film failed to find an original depiction of the working class, and “treats Tonya’s background, her tastes, her habits, her way of talking, as a joke... The result is a film that’s as derisive and dismissive toward Tonya Harding as it shows the world at large to have been”
- Asked in January 2018 if she had seen the film, Kerrigan responded that she had not and that “I was the victim” and she was “just busy living [her] life.”
- Nancy Kerrigan stated in interviews relating to her *Dancing with the Stars* (2005) appearance that she wouldn’t be seeing the movie despite not knowing how much of it would feature her, saying “I already lived through that.”

- At the 7th AACTA International Awards, Robbie won Best Actress, while Janney won Best Supporting Actress
- *I, Tonya* received five nominations at the 71st British Academy Film Awards, including Best Actress in a Leading Role for Robbie and Best Original Screenplay for Rogers
- The film also garnered five Critics' Choice Movie Awards, with Robbie winning Best Actress in a Comedy and Janney winning Best Supporting Actress
- At the 75th Golden Globe Awards, Janney received the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress – Motion Picture, while the film was nominated for Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy and Robbie was nominated for Best Actress – Motion Picture Musical or Comedy

SEQUEL/LEGACY

- “It’s easy to run this story through kind of a standard liberal arts analysis: the exact same experience can mean two totally different things to two different people, given people’s two different belief templates and two different ways of constructing meaning from experience. Because we prize tolerance and diversity of belief, nowhere in our liberal arts analysis do we want to claim that one guy’s interpretation is true and the other guy’s false or bad. Which is fine, except we also never end up talking about just where these individual templates and beliefs come from. Meaning, where they come from INSIDE the two guys. As if a person’s most basic orientation toward the world, and the meaning of his experience were somehow just hard-wired, like height or shoe-size; or automatically absorbed from culture, like language. As if how we construct meaning were not actually a matter of personal, intentional choice.” -David Foster Wallace