

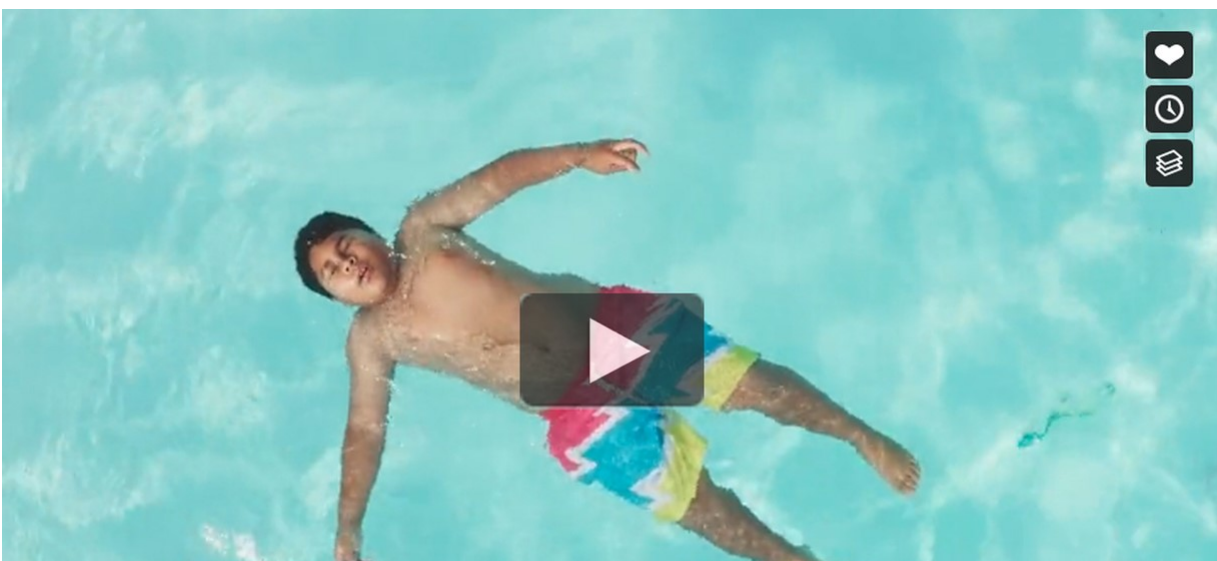
Life

HARVARD-WESTLAKE

"A very self-reliant, mature, and independent student, Matt is a creative and sensitive young man of great substance." That's how I described Matt Sayles '00 in his college recommendation letter when I was his dean. I also quoted his photography teacher, Kevin O'Malley, who was convinced that "Matt is more talented than even he knows." As educators, there's nothing more rewarding than seeing the young people we work with as teenagers grow into adults who make their marks in the world. Sure enough, Matt has gone on to great success as a portrait and commercial photographer and director. Last summer, he made the short film we share with you today. I hope you'll find it as resonant, thoughtful, and thought-provoking as I did.

Cheers, Ed Hu | Head of External Relations | ehu@hw.com

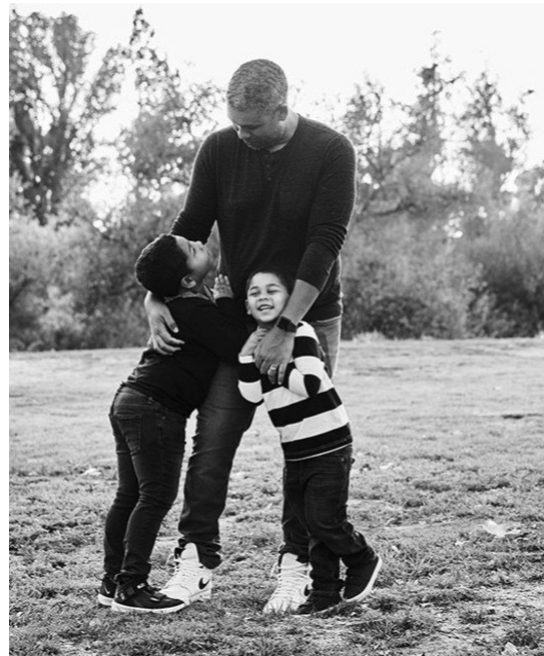
Body Language





Matt Sayles '00 on his short film **HUSKY**

Somewhere between shooting a campaign for *The Wonder Years* reboot and capturing celebrity reportage at the 2022 Academy Awards, Matt Sayles '00 made his first short film. *Husky*, which premiered at the Pan African Film Festival last month, starts a conversation you probably aren't having about male body image, but Sayles thinks you should be.



WHAT MADE YOU WANT TO MAKE THIS FILM?

I just woke up one day in quarantine and wrote it back in 2020. Being a father now is part of it. It's a personal story, but it's not just my story, it's really a mashup of stories from people I know who grew up husky. It's the story of being larger bodied and having to go through that experience as a child. That's something I wake up with every day, something I think about all the time.

HOW DO YOU THINK MEDIA PORTRAYALS OF THE MALE BODY HAVE CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE A KID?

In making the film, I looked back at the '80s and '90s, and the media image of men was even narrower than I remembered. It was Rambo, He-Man, Superman, Bo Jackson, Michael Jordan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, get-fit challenges.... That was pretty much the exclusive body type—statuesque men with slim torsos, broad shoulders, and square chins. There was that show *True Life* on MTV where a guy was getting calf implants because he didn't have big enough calves. Other than that, it was someone being made fun of and their size was a joke. Can you think of a larger bodied actor in the '70s, '80s, '90s who wasn't a comedian?

And I don't think that we've made much progress in terms of documenting the diversity of the male body. Even in more inclusive fashion campaigns, you'll find that the men have pretty much stayed the same. You'll see stories where a celebrity will gain 10 pounds, and it's "Look at his dad bod, ha ha ha ha." How does a 16-year-old or 12-year-old, whose body is just developing and doesn't look like a superhero's, feel when they see that? Or the celebrity social media challenge that featured people who are quite fit or slim by everyday standards losing their "quarantine 15" to get back to some level of "perfection"? Boys, just like girls, see that stuff, and it has an impact. I feel that for men and boys,

we're just starting to have this conversation. And, like many other things, it's changing dramatically in a small pocket and not at all in the rest of the universe.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE WORKING WITH YOUR SON?

He knew we were making a film, and he really wanted to be in it. He was going to be an extra, but the morning of the shoot, I mean, seven in the morning ahead of a 10 a.m. call time, we get a message that the actor playing the main character's son couldn't come to set because of COVID. So my wife and I had a conversation: Do we think Matthew can do this? We sat him down, asked him, and told him that he didn't have to—but he jumped at the opportunity. He enjoyed it and got to pick out a couple of toys at Target as a reward, which he thought was great.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE GET OUT OF WATCHING HUSKY?

I hope that people are more aware of the words that they use toward the people they love. The family in the film is a loving, warm family—none of them are cruel or mean—but their words impact the main character throughout his life. This idea that we were told as kids, “sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me”...it's ironic, and I've always thought, really, really wrong. You break an ankle or you break your arm, but physical wounds often heal. But the time a teacher said something cruel to you sticks with you. The time a parent or grandparent or friend said something about your body or your hair...those things stick with all of us. And this is regardless of size. This story happens to be about a husky boy. But it's equally sad when someone's made fun of for being too skinny, being small, having a different skin tone, or anything else. The people who love us sometimes say things that stick with us for a very, very long time. I'm just hoping that the audience recognizes how their words can impact those around them. And that if those things have been said to you—because a lot of people repeat the things that they learned, right?—that you can, as difficult as it may be, change the narrative going forward for your own children or the people in your life.

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