

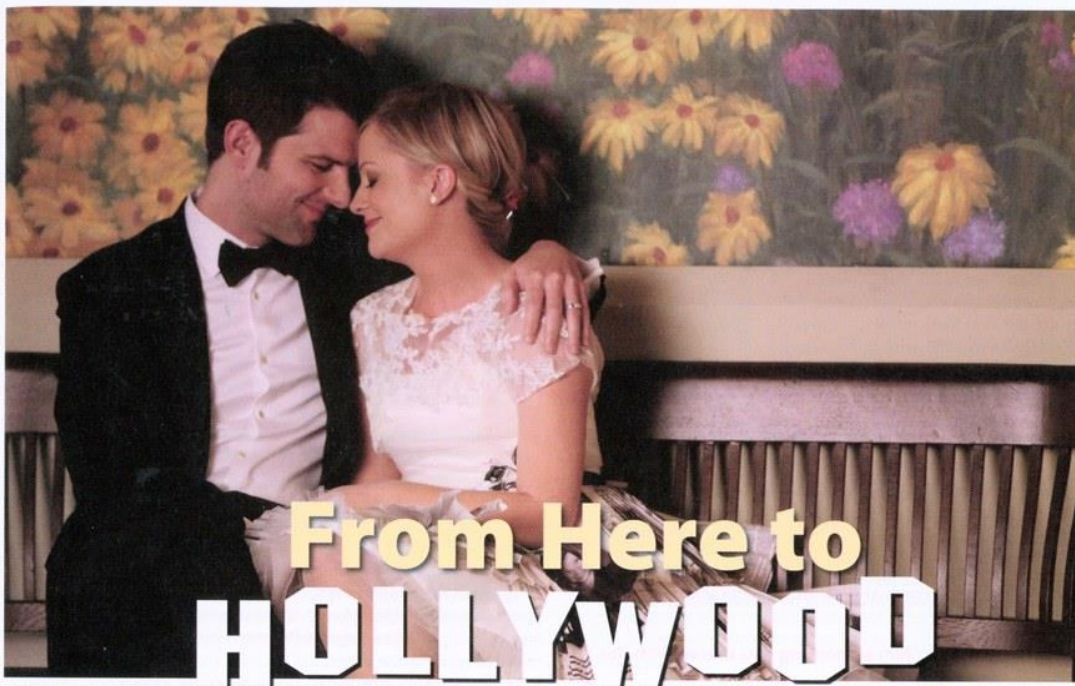
{meet}

Adam Scott set out from Santa Cruz right out of high school to chase down the Hollywood dream.

24 | Santa Cruz Style

Photo: ©Prakash Shroff

Photo: ©Tyler Golden/NBC



# From Here to HOLLYWOOD

## Adam Scott's gamble pays off

By Peter Crooks

**A**dam Scott remembers the first time he went to the movies by himself. He was 9 years old and wanted to see "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial" in a classic movie house in Santa Cruz. Just like young Elliott in Steven Spielberg's early '80s classic, Scott hopped on his bike and pedaled after his dreams.

"I rode my bike to the Rio Theatre, back when it was a movie theater," says Scott, who turned 40 in April. "It was the fourth or fifth time I had seen 'E.T.,' but there was something about going by myself that seemed important."

Scott didn't know it at the time, but that bike ride may have been an early audition for his career path. The youngest of three children, Scott was born and raised in Santa Cruz — he describes his hometown and childhood as "idyllic" — but he felt a yearning to chase down the Hollywood dream right out of high school.

Like many young actors, Scott didn't hit the jackpot with a showy role on a hit sitcom or in a big-budget blockbuster right away. He spent years sharpening his acting chops, chasing auditions and landing the occasional part (you may have seen him in "Hellraiser: Bloodline"), but also spending a lot of time waiting for the phone to ring and thickening his skin.

Fortunately for Scott — and audiences — patience and tenacity paid off in a big way. For the past several years, he has been on a hot streak, finding his groove as a comic actor in hit movies ("Step Brothers, Our Idiot Brother") and beloved cult shows ("Party Down," "Eastbound and Down"). By far his biggest showcase has been NBC's acclaimed comedy "Parks and Recreation," on which Scott plays the immensely likeable Ben Wyatt, paramour to the show's star, Amy Poehler.

Santa Cruz Style caught up with Scott to talk about his Hollywood success story, as well as his affection for his hometown.

(Top) "Parks and Recreation:" Adam Scott as Ben and Amy Poehler as Leslie in NBC's award-winning comedy television series.



**Santa Cruz Style:** Adam, nice to speak with you. From everything I've read, you grew up as a major film buff long before heading to Hollywood.

**Adam Scott:** I remember being 12 and telling my parents that I wanted my ashes to be scattered in the Del Mar Theater after I die. (laughs) Which was just a little melodramatic, looking back.

I got interested, really young, in movies and TV. I absorbed all this knowledge the same way others do about sports teams and statistics, but I was remembering actors and directors and film credits. I mean, I'm happy once I'm outside, but I can spend all day watching movies.

**The Del Mar is a great theater. Can you remember some of your favorite movie experiences in Santa Cruz?**

**Scott:** Sure, there are so many. The Del Mar had four screens, so you could see four movies in a day by buying one ticket. I remember seeing "Cujo" with my sister, and "Richard Pryor Live on the Sunset Strip" with my brother. "The Empire Strikes Back" and "Return of the Jedi" at the 41st Avenue Playhouse. I seem to remember seeing "Heathers" at the Nickelodeon as a kind of seminal experience.

**Was your passion for film something you shared with the family?**

**Scott:** I remember my dad showing me "Jaws", and saying, "This is a great movie." That was an important moment, my dad guiding me toward "Jaws" as a signpost of perfection. Of course, if my dad had been someone who said, "Smokey and the Bandit" is a great movie! it might have guided me in a different direction. I was certainly shaped by my family. My mom introduced me to Woody Allen and Monty Python, and my brother and I were really into David Letterman and Steve Martin, who really shaped my sensibility.

**Before you went off to pursue an acting career, you had some interesting jobs in Santa Cruz.**

**Scott:** I was one of those guys at Marini's (at the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk) wearing a white uniform making taffy for hours and hours. I was a taffy slave. And I worked at Pizza My Heart, delivering pizzas.

**You talked about that recently on Late Night with Jimmy Fallon, and mentioned that Pizza My Heart also delivered VHS movies back in the day. It made me think of Quentin Tarantino working in the video store down in Manhattan Beach watching all the great directors on VHS before making it big. I also remember hearing that you were very influenced by Spike Lee — to the point where you were wearing an Africa medallion around Santa Cruz.**

**Scott:** (Laughs) Yeah, and wearing a New York Knicks cap even though I didn't know who the Knicks were, or anything about sports for that matter. I even had the same little eyeglasses as Spike Lee, which



**"Party Down":** Adam Scott as failed actor Henry Pollard returns to work at Party Down Catering that is comprised of aspiring actors.

was ridiculous. But I was very impressed by "Do The Right Thing". All the chaos and strife in that film was eye-opening for someone who grew up in an idyllic place like Santa Cruz. Watching "Do the Right Thing" made me go back and watch all of Spike Lee's movies, which led me to all the New York movies of Martin Scorsese. And when I saw those films, I knew that I would need to move to New York or Los Angeles and take a chance on acting.

**And, many years later, you got to work with Martin Scorsese, as well as Leonardo DiCaprio and Cate Blanchett, on "The Aviator".**

**Scott:** Yes, that was certainly a heady summer working with all those people. There's not a moment of it that I don't remember — you need to appreciate an experience like that, and I certainly did. It was hard work, too. We were playing these great characters, we

weren't just playing versions of ourselves. Everyone wanted to be at their very best.

**What was it like being directed by Scorsese?**

**Scott:** Well, he's amazing. He is very collaborative. He always gets great performances out of his actors and I saw why. He really likes actors, and he lets you bring what you want to bring to the role. He just wants you to help make the whole movie better.

**Let's step back a bit. Before you worked with Scorsese, you spent a lot of time trying hard in Hollywood, taking parts in less-than-Aviator projects, but sticking with it. When you look back at the time you heard more no's than yeses, what do you take from those experiences?**

**Scott:** The early years were certainly tough. I came to Hollywood in 1993 and started trying to get an agent. During that time, I was working really hard, and I was certainly willing to sell out to get a role, to survive. It took me seven years to get a good role in a Morgan

Freeman movie called "High Crimes", and it was about seven years after that by the time "Step Brothers" came around, which led to the recent projects I've had the good fortune to be involved with. For me, it took a long time to hit, but I'm glad it happened that way. I know now that if I had popped when I was 23, not only would I not have been good enough, but I would have made bad choices. I don't see it that way anymore, and fortunately I'm in a position where I have been able to do things that I love doing, like "Party Down."

**The struggles of Hollywood actors come across to hilarious effect in "Party Down". That show was only on for two seasons, but everyone who has seen it loves it.**

**Scott:** Thanks. I'm really proud of that show and am so glad that it all came together. It started as an idea in my friend

Rob's backyard, so that it has entered the cultural lexicon a little bit now is great. I get approached by "Party Down" fans all the time now, which would have been absolutely insane to consider when we were making it. It was just a great experience, and I miss doing it terribly.

## COMING ATTRACTIONS

Look for Adam Scott on small and big screens later this year in the following projects:

### The Greatest Event in the History of Television, Part 2

Scott teams up with Parks and Rec co-star Amy Poehler for another shot-by-shot opening credits remake. We'll find out which show when Greatest Event premieres on Adult Swim on June 6.

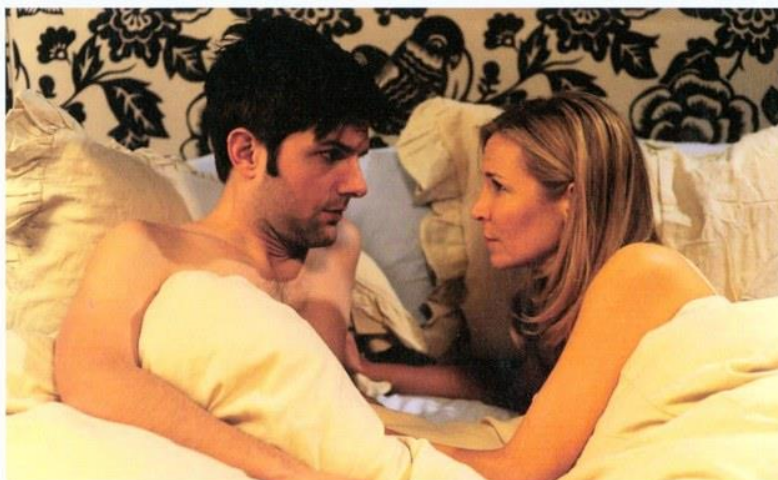
### The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

Ben Stiller directs this update of the Danny Kaye classic about a shy and simple man who spends his days dreaming about being anything but shy and simple. The film hits theaters on Christmas Day, and features Scott in an all-star ensemble, including Stiller, Sean Penn, Kristen Wiig, Patton Oswalt, and Shirley MacLaine.

### Hot Tub Time Machine 2

Currently Scott is in negotiations to join the cast of the upcoming sequel to the 2010 comedy "Hot Tub Time Machine."





"Friends With Kids:" Adam Scott and Jennifer Westfeldt as Jason and Julie. This was Scott's first lead in a feature film.

As sad as it was to see "Party Down" end, it led right to "Parks and Recreation," which has worked out beautifully for you. What was it like to go from a great little show that had a tough time finding viewers to joining an already successful network show with a huge audience?

**Scott:** It was sort of serendipitous. I had auditioned for the pilot and didn't get it. Right when "Party Down" was getting canceled, I got the call, so it worked out perfectly. It was sort of surreal, because I was already a huge fan of the show.

You play a very likeable guy on "Parks and Recreation". It's easy to root for Ben Wyatt, especially during the recent season where your character and Amy Poehler's character got married. It made for one of those great TV love stories, like Ross and Rachel on "Friends."

**Scott:** Thanks. It's so much fun to work with Amy. She is brilliant. I just love her. And we love those characters, we've been rooting for them for a long time — from their first meeting to getting married. It's been gratifying and a lot of fun.

You said you were already a fan of "Parks and Recreation" when you got the call to be on it. If you could have been in any of the shows you watched as a kid in Santa Cruz, like "Knight Rider" or "Simon & Simon," what would you choose?

**Scott:** Definitely "Simon & Simon". And I directed a little film recently, where Jon Hamm and I did a shot for shot remake of the opening credits of "Simon & Simon," so in a way, I did get to be in it.

Someone sent me your "Simon & Simon" remake on YouTube. It was hilarious and creative and it also made me think how much different filmmaking is from when you started out. If you were just graduating from high school now with filmmaking ambitions, would you use the Internet and social media as a way to get exposure?

**Scott:** Oh, I would definitely be making videos and posting them on YouTube and "Funny or Die." Especially for people just starting out, it's a great way to get yourself out there. Because if your stuff is really good, it will get a bunch of hits and people will see it. And if it's not good, who cares?

Bringing it back to Santa Cruz, now that you have a busy career, a wife and two kids, how often do you come back to visit?

**Scott:** Not often enough, a couple of times a year. My brother and sister still live in the area and we try to visit as often as we can to spend time with the family.

Do you see yourself moving back here someday?

**Scott:** At this point, it's not very realistic, because it would be a horrible commute. (Laughs) But I wish I could, because it's the greatest place. 🍷

## GREAT SCOTT

Not up to speed on Adam Scott? Put these titles in your Netflix queue.

### Party Down

Beloved cult series about Hollywood wannabes working a day job at a catering company. Scott, playing a long-struggling actor, leads a terrific cast of comic actors.

### Step Brothers

Bawdy, absurdist comedy was Scott's breakthrough role as Will Ferrell's obnoxious over-achieving brother. Bizarre highlight: Scott leading an a cappella sing along of "Sweet Child O' Mine" in the family car.

### Friends With Kids

Scott's first leading role in a feature film, a romantic drama about a pair of platonic Manhattanites who decide to have a child together.

### The Greatest Event in the History of Television

Scott's directing debut, which premiered last year on Cartoon Network's "Adult Swim," features Scott and Jon Hamm ("Mad Men") as actors melting down when their shot-by-shot remake of the "Simon and Simon" opening credits goes wildly over budget.

### Parks and Recreation

Scott and Rob Lowe joined the cast of this delightful NBC sitcom at the beginning of season three. But if you haven't been watching, do yourself a favor and start with season one.