

Cinemateca 2012

# **A Better Life** 2011 (PG-13)

## Una vida mejor

One Night Only: Tuesday, September 25, 2012 (7pm)



### **Film Information**

**Directed by**

Chris Weitz

**Language**

English/Spanish

**Running Time**

98 minutes

### **Film Notes**

Premier Fiesta Mexicana is the kind of working-class bar that most Southern Californians drive past without even seeing. The Bell Gardens restaurant and nightclub offers a dinner show with mariachi music and is packed most weekends, but on a summer night nearly a year ago, Carlos Galindo wasn't there looking for a good time. He was looking for a truck—and a way out of a desperate situation.

Carlos, the lead character in director Chris Weitz's *A BETTER LIFE*—a new movie about the personal struggles of a Mexican gardener in the United States illegally—had scraped together every last dollar to buy a used pickup. With the vehicle, Carlos (played by Mexican star Demian Bichir) could become his own boss, build a landscaping business and care better for his teenage son, Luis (newcomer Jose Julian), who was drifting toward gang life. But mere hours after Carlos closed the truck sale, a day laborer stole his pickup, and Carlos was trying to find it in Premier Fiesta Mexicana's parking lot.

The truck theft is the kind of infuriating but minor crime most people would handle with a call to the police and an insurance agent. But one of the central themes of *A BETTER LIFE*... is that those kind of easy options aren't available to illegal immigrants. People like Galindo may collectively sustain the mansions of Los Angeles, *A BETTER LIFE* argues, but individually they are as vulnerable as a house of cards.

"All he does is work," Weitz said of Carlos during a break in filming at the bar. "He is invisible—and he prefers to remain

invisible. Because to raise his head is to risk getting in trouble."

To remain in the shadows necessitates concentric circles of concealment. "It might as well be a science-fiction film," Weitz added of how he and screenwriter Eric Eason tried to reveal the hidden layers of an illegal immigrant's life. "There are worlds within worlds within worlds—almost a parallel universe."

*A BETTER LIFE* seems like the kind of mid-budget (\$10-million) production—with swaths of dialogue in Spanish and no actors recognizable to mainstream ticket buyers—that would premiere at the Sundance Film Festival looking for a distribution deal. But instead, the film was co-financed and will be released by Summit Entertainment, and made by the man behind one of the studio's biggest hits: Weitz directed Summit's "Twilight Saga: New Moon."

*A BETTER LIFE*'s path to the screen, however, was anything but fast, stretching over decades.

**- continued on reverse side -**

From "Chris Weitz's 'Better Life' shines light on illegal immigrant issues" by John Horn, LA Times

**More Information****- continued from front side -****Screenplay by**

Eric Eason, Roger Simon

**Featuring**Demián Bichir  
Eddie 'Piolin' Sotelo  
Joaquín Cosío  
José Julián  
Nancy Lenahan  
Gabriel Chavarria  
Bobby Soto  
Chelsea Rendon**Cinematography by**

Javier Aguirresarobe

**Film Editing by**

Peter Lambert

**Original Music by**

Alexandre Desplat

**Country of Origin**

USA

Back in 1989, television producer Paul Junger Witt, best known for the series “Soap,” “The Golden Girls” and “Empty Nest,” heard a story about a gardener who had his truck stolen. “I immediately thought of THE BICYCLE THIEF,” Witt said, a reference to the landmark 1948 Italian film about a father and his son searching for a bike without the police’s help in Rome. “It’s a simple story, but it puts a human face on an invisible slice of the population.”

In his drive to infuse the production with as much authenticity as possible, Weitz and producers Witt, Christian McLaughlin, Jami Gertz and Stacey Lubliner (Gertz and Lubliner’s Lime Orchard Productions co-financed the film) traveled to all corners of Los Angeles, about 70 locations including the Romana Gardens housing development in Boyle Heights.

The filmmakers also worked with Father Gregory Boyle’s Homeboy Industries and the community organizing Legacy LA not only to make sure the script mirrored neighborhood vernacular—kids call their fathers “apa” and not “papi,” for instance—but also to help round out the film’s cast with former gang members. One such person, Richard Cabral, who has a small part in A BETTER LIFE, was discovered at a Homeboy casting session...

While Weitz and McLaughlin call the film “apolitical,” the movie nevertheless has a point of view about immigration: Our current laws destroy families, deportation is only a temporary (and pitiless) remedy, and put in the same situation many of us might do exactly what Carlos (and the illegal immigrants that he represents) does—survive by any means necessary.

“When you turn a camera on somebody, you inherently humanize them,” Weitz said of how the film depicts Carlos. “I hope that once you see the movie, it will be hard to look at Mexican American immigrants as the others.” Said screenwriter Roger Simon, once a liberal who is now a conservative blogger: “This is an issue where the left and the right should start talking with each other in a straightforward way.”

**From “Chris Weitz’s ‘Better Life’ shines light on illegal immigrant issues” by John Horn, LA Times**