

Entertainment

Insight and fine acting enliven facile script in 'Memories'

By Judith Trojan
USCC Communications Department
New York (NC) — 'Tis the season for endearing family-life films. While not heavily insightful, "Memories of Me" (MGM) will inspire a hearty blend of laughs and tears, especially for those over 35 who have unfinished business with their aging parents.

At 37, cardiac surgeon Abbie Polin (Billy Crystal) is a laugh-a-minute until overwork fells him with his own minor heart attack. Facing his own mortality for the first time, Abbie reaches out to his level-headed girlfriend, Lisa McConnell (JoBeth Williams), a pediatrician frustrated by Abbie's inability to express his love. Lisa realizes that the emotional void in their relationship is symptomatic of a larger wall between Abbie and his father, Abe (Alan King), a lifelong movie extra living in Los Angeles.

With an eye toward mending his broken heart and some fence in his relationships with Lisa and Abe, Abbie heads west to Los Angeles to visit dear old dad.

What he finds after a five-year estrangement is the same father who embarrassed him as a child with dumb jokes told at his expense, a father who thrives in a little-known Hollywood subculture as the king of movie extras. Abbie quickly tires of playing perpetual straight man to a father who never seemed to grow up in life or in show business. During his decades as a Hollywood extra, Abe never once sought a speaking role. It takes the arrival of Lisa, whom Abe calls "Christian," and another critical illness to break down the barriers between the men, enabling them for the first time to play the soul-satisfying roles of father and son.

Crystal and King are a perfect match as a father and son who attempt to cover their fears with humor. Abbie comforts patients with jokes in the operating room, while Abe entertains out-of-work pals in a local hangout for extras. So much alike, yet uncommunicative aliens, the characters mesh almost too easily when mortality and loving Lisa get in the way. As real-life stand-up comics who also excel as actors, Crystal and King bring their own wonderful shticks to a script co-written by Crystal and Eric Roth. Williams is also a warm, appropriate choice as a mature love interest for Abbie.

Although more than a tad too facile, and

directed in an uninspiring fashion by Henry Winkler, "Memories of Me" boasts entertaining performances and touches of insight into troubled parent-child relationships that extend unresolved into middle and old age.

Due to some rough language at times laced with sexual references and a brief sexual encounter between the unmarried protagonists, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

Complicated thriller

"Patty Hearst" (Atlantic Releasing) is a gripping psychological thriller, though it may be a bit confusing for those who do not recall all the details of the kidnapping of the Hearst heiress by self-styled terrorists on February 4, 1974.

Directed by Paul Schrader and adapted by Nicholas Kazan from Hearst's on book, the movie assumes an understanding of the divisive socio-political climate when the 19-year-old Hearst heiress was kidnapped from her college apartment in Berkeley, Calif. It also expects working knowledge of the events that transpired and led to Patty's transformation from a wealthy campus coed into an urban guerrilla whose involvement in a bank robbery and other crimes brought about her conviction and imprisonment.

Shot entirely from Hearst's point of view, the film documents the terror, brutality and brainwashing that she endured from her captors, the Symbionese Liberation Army. A small group of political radicals — mostly white women who clung inexplicably to the rhetoric of a black revolutionary named Cinque (Ving Rhames) — the SLA used the heiress to acquire media coverage and money to back their muddle-headed cause. When she outlived her usefulness, they gave her the option of joining the SLA or being set free. She chose to stay.

Failures as revolutionaries, Cinque and his band of misfits succeeded in one thing — brainwashing a '19-year-old WASP into trashing her "bourgeois" roots. As an urban terrorist renamed Tanya, Patty lost public support and almost her life.

Natasha Richardson (daughter of Vanessa



NC News
In a light moment from "Memories of Me," Alan King (left) shares a laugh with his estranged son, a surgeon, played by Billy Crystal. The U.S. Catholic Conference says the film "will inspire a hearty blend of laughs and tears."

Redgrave and director Tony Richardson) brilliantly reflects the inner terror and sense of degradation that resulted from Patty's physical and emotional abuse by the SLA. Blindfolded, bound and gagged in a closet for six weeks, badgered with political rhetoric, sexually used and abused, and constantly threatened with execution, Patty had no power to say no.

Although Richardson is mesmerizing from start to finish, her performance is enhanced by Schrader's dark and visually menacing vision of Patty's ordeal. Fragmented, backlit and often disorienting, Schrader's images are those seen by a young woman quickly losing her grip on reality.

This is an intense, highly dramatic film. Although the rapes and beatings are merely suggested, we cringe with Patty when we see that they are about to begin. Totally on her side, the film also shows how the FBI, the media and judicial system exploited Patty for their own gains, much as the SLA had done.

Because of much conscienceless violence, threatened and enacted; a continuing sense of menace involving physical and emotional torture as well as sexual abuse; and wall-to-wall profanity, all of which is used in a non-gratuitous, docu-drama fashion to tell a real-life crime victim's story, the USCC classification is A-IV — adults with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Film guide offers aid to concerned parents

THE FAMILY GUIDE TO MOVIES ON VIDEO, edited by Henry Herx and Tony Zaza. Crossroad (New York, 1988). 331 pp., \$12.95
Reviewed by Joseph F. McKenna
NC News Service

The home-video phenomenon has overtaken our households with a swiftness matched only by the phenomenon of the home video's progenitor, television. Because we routinely pick up videocassettes with the milk and bread, feature films, not surprisingly, are "seen by considerably larger numbers of viewers at home than by the patrons of movie theaters," notes Henry Herx, one of this guide's editors.

And this fact should remind us that the home videotape, like television, is so integral to our culture as to help shape our moral and ethical boundaries. Sometimes the influence is bizarre. I am reminded of the Cleveland bank employee who helped himself to his employer's safe after watching Steve McQueen in "The Thomas Crown Affair."

Appropriately, then, the U.S. Catholic Conference's Department of Communication has produced this "definitive guide to home-

viewing based on traditional values." With its roots in the work of the old Legion of Decency, the department has long provided the moral benchmark for those seeking guidance on the content and style of films.

Videophiles with children especially have "concerns in searching out the value and appropriateness of a movie," says Herx, who is a reviewer in the USCC department. "It is the intention of this guide to provide concerned parents with sufficient information about the moral dimension of story and treatment, age suitability and the artistic and entertainment quality of each of the movies listed."

The guide also points the way to such exceptional films as "Gandhi," whose vision of peace receives terse but nonetheless strong praise from the reviewers and editors who compiled the guide.

With 5,000 other such reviews of contemporary film fare, this guide deserves shelf space in the homes of those who want to keep the "cool medium" from chilling the family's moral values.

WXXI-TV to air programs on youth illiteracy

Recent studies show that a mother's education level is more important in ensuring the future success of a child than almost anything else, including her income or even her marital status.

This education, or lack of it, is often the determining factor in whether a child is exposed to books and to reading, which psychologists and educators have now confirmed is a crucial factor in the child's development. A child who is read to and who has access to books while growing up will ultimately attain higher test levels, be a better student and succeed in life more readily than the child who has been denied the simple pleasure of story telling.

In a rural area of Kentucky, at least one mother is determined that her children are going to be prepared for the future. And to make sure, Theresa Spencer had to first prepare herself.

Spencer's story of accomplishment and hope for the future is profiled in the documentary "First Things First," a Project Literacy U.S. (PLUS) production airing Wednesday, Oct. 19, at 9 p.m. on WXXI-TV21 in Rochester.

Spencer, who is now 28, quit school at the age of 13 to marry, and a year later began her family. It was only recently, with her fourth child, Hollie, that she realized that her own fu-

ture and especially those of her children, was linked to her completing her own education and then sharing that knowledge with the youngsters.

She enrolled in the Hart County School System's Parent and Child Education program, which requires parents to bring their children to an early childhood education program, while the parents work toward acquiring their high school equivalency diplomas.

Spencer now has her GED and continues to attend classes to help other mothers whose goals are similar to hers. While the mothers meet to learn, their children do likewise in a pre-school setting down the hall. Later the two groups converge for parenting classes.

Today, Spencer marvels, "Each time you read a story to a child, even the same story, they learn something new. I didn't realize (Hollie's) little mind was so open and could consume and learn so many things so quickly."

"First Things First," hosted by "The Cosby Show" co-star Phylicia Rashad, is a production of WQED/Pittsburgh. The October 19 broadcast will be followed by "Kids Who Read Succeed," a local follow-up program in which experts will discuss the problem of youth illiteracy in the Rochester area.

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