

# Comedy provides insights into balancing family life

By Gerri Pare  
Catholic News Service

NEW YORK — A stand-up comedienne's sudden success stands to wreck her relationship with her kids in *This Is My Life* (20th Century Fox).

Life changes drastically in a matter of months for would-be comedienne Dottie Ingels (Julie Kavner). She lives in Queens, with daughters Erica (Samantha Mathis), 16, and Opal (Gaby Hoffmann), 10, at the home of her Aunt Harriet (Estelle Harris). Dottie scrapes together a living as a cosmetics saleslady at Macy's. Her husband (Louis DiBianco) has long since flown the coop.

One night a savvy agent, Arnold Moss (Dan Aykroyd), sees her amateur routine in a Manhattan comedy club and puts Dottie on the fast track with bookings in Los Angeles and Vegas.

The kids are initially thrilled for



Kerry Hayes-20th Century Fox  
Julie Kavner stars as Dottie Ingels, whose daughters must cope with their mother's meteoric success as a stand-up comic in *This Is My Life*.

their mom. But the lure of near fame and fortune wears thin when mom's never around for them, especially when Erica is in the throes of adolescent angst. Mom's unexpected romance with Moss makes the girls feel even more left out, so much so that they leave for Albany, and the dad they barely remember.

Director Nora Ephron's first-time film effort — co-written for the screen with her sister, Delia Ephron — is a lighthearted and mildly insightful family comedy.

The movie zeroes in on the pain of teenage Erica's coming-of-age without the guidance she needs from her mother. At the same time it also focuses on Dottie's desire to balance following her dream with being both mother and father to her girls.

Kavner is a natural in her first starring role but young Mathis as insecure Erica outshines her.

But casual remarks by adults about having sexual affairs are not helpful. Most troubling is a scene where the mother of Erica's boyfriend realizes the teens have just had sex, and, unfazed, cheerfully gives them birth-control information. Although played for comedy, such blase acceptance of teenage intimacy sends kids the wrong message and is clearly one that is not in their best interest.

The main thrust of the movie, however, is that it takes love and commitment to win at parenthood.

Due to a brief adolescent bedroom scene with a parent's casual acceptance of her son's sexual activity and several sexual references, the U.S. Catholic Conference classification is A-III — adults. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

## Fr. Nouwen's latest book sounds reveille for devotion to Stations

Walk with Jesus, by Henri Nouwen; Orbis Books, (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1990); 98 pages; \$9.95.

By Father Benedict Ehmann  
Guest contributor

Father Nouwen's new book sounds a well-tuned reveille to awaken a slumbering devotion. The Stations of the Cross is a sleeping beauty in Catholic devotional life today. It has fallen asleep for two reasons.

One is that our churches are locked — for security reasons — during most of the week nowadays, and devout folks have no access to visit. The other is that communal Stations are no longer celebrated in many parishes, even during Lent. Small wonder if people suppose that the church no longer approves or recommends the Stations.

Not only does the Catholic Church still approve and recommend the Stations, she even endows them with a plenary indulgence. Furthermore, the same indulgence is granted to those who are "impeded" from making the Stations, "if they spend at least one half an hour in pious reading and meditation on the Passion and Death of Our Lord."

Although this benefits primarily the homebound and hospitalized, I'm sure it's not stretching the benefit too generously to say it includes those who are "impeded" because the churches are locked most of the time.

Father Nouwen's *Walk with Jesus* is

not a prayer book, but a little meditations manual. Four pages are devoted to each Station — a picture page and three offering text. The pictures by Sister Helen David are quite lovely. Instead of illustrating the Station's subject, they depict contemporary scenes of Third World anguish. These provide vivid reminders of where the Passion of Jesus is borne today.

After each picture Father Nouwen's three-page text offers a matching meditation, first unfolding in detail the vista of the picture and then narrating the portion of Jesus' Passion portrayed in the Station. The text concludes with a reflection on the fulfillment of the Passion in our own lives.

This tri-level perspective is maintained admirably throughout Father Nouwen's book. He prays that his readers "will enter ever more fully, through the passion and resurrection of Jesus, into the presence of God and that of all our brothers and sisters everywhere in the world."

And he meets that hope generously. His Stations pilgrimage is worldwide, from Nicaragua to Vietnam, the Philippines to Bangladesh, Brazil to Sudan. We are reminded that "Jesus died and rose for all people, with all their differences, so that all could be lifted up with Him into the splendor of God. All pain, whether in the wide world around us or in the small world within us, belongs to Jesus, and is transformed by Him into glorified wounds which allow us to recognize Him as

our risen Lord."

This amazing grace ought to be front stage in our outlook. Sadly, however, it so often isn't and is shifted backstage. Then we are left desolate and wretched, coping alone with the world's misery and our own. All pain is waiting to be consecrated by an intentional offering of it to Christ, uniting ours with His.

Like everything he writes, Father Nouwen is aflame with this faith throughout his book, and he will

surely ignite us if we expose ourselves to it. In this hope he prays at the end:

"Dear Lord, as your passion, death and resurrection continue in history, give me the hope, the courage, and the confidence to let your heart unite my heart with the hearts of all your suffering people, and so become for us the divine source of new life."

May this gem of a book sound a clear reveille for many readers and awaken them to fresh devotion to the Stations of the Cross.



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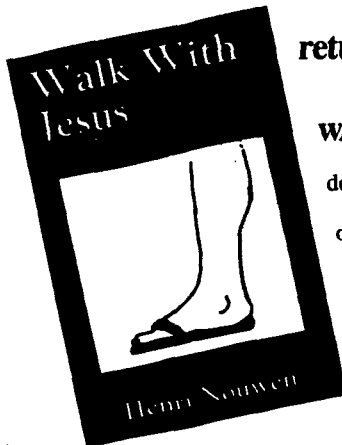
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—Orbis Publishing

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