

Recent releases mixed bag of insult, intelligence

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting.

'The Brady Bunch Movie'

(Paramount) Fluffy comedy updating the 1970s TV sitcom family of three boys and three girls (headed by parents Shelley Long and Gary Cole) into the troubled 1990s, where the Bradys remain do-goody innocents despite scornful schoolmates and the sleazy attempts of a greedy real estate agent (Michael McKean) to yank their home out from under them. As blandly directed by Betty Thomas, the threadbare plot and broad characterizations seem most likely to appeal to the sitcom's fans, leaving the rest of the audience wondering why a full-length movie was merited. 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.

'Billy Madison'

(Universal) Dimwitted comedy in which a retiring billionaire (Darren McGavin) decides to leave control of his hotel empire to his loutish 27-year-old son (Adam Sandler), provided the wastrel manages to graduate grades 1-12 in six months, or else it all goes to the billionaire's scheming assistant (Bradley



Paramount Pictures
'The Brady Bunch Movie' transplants the 1970s TV sitcom family of three boys and three girls into the troubled 1990s.

Whitford). Director Tamra Davis' dismal attempt to fashion a vehicle for Sandler's limited comic talents never rises above dumb toilet jokes and moronic situations adding up to zero as entertainment. Occasional sexual innuendo and alcohol abuse, brief violence played for laughs, some crude bathroom humor and an instance of rough language.

The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is PG-13 — parents are strongly cautioned that some material may be inappropriate for children under 13.

'Just Cause'

(Warner Bros.) Tawdry melodrama in which a Harvard law professor (Sean Connery) is persuaded by his lawyer wife (Kate Capshaw) to make a last-ditch effort at overturning the murder conviction of a Florida death-row inmate (Blair Underwood), whose confession had been coerced by a brutal police detective (Laurence Fishburne). Director Arne Glimcher maintains moderate suspense through a darkly twisted plot abetted by some fine performances until the narrative goes haywire with a ludicrous ending. Some intense violence including grisly shots of corpses, fleeting shadowy nudity and recurring rough language. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'The Quick and the Dead'

(TriStar) Revenge-themed Western in which a female gunslinger (Sharon Stone) arrives in town to compete in a quick-draw, shoot-to-the-death contest, intent on gunning down the sadistic town tyrant (Gene Hackman) who had her lawman father lynched years earlier. Director Sam Raimi's flashy but cynically ludicrous shoot-'em-up amounts to nothing more than redundant stagings of stylized shootouts that greatly glamorize guns and killing. The USCC classification is O — morally offensive. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

'Boys on the Side'

(Warner Bros.) After accidentally killing her abusive partner, a pregnant woman (Drew Barrymore) flees with a lesbian musician (Whoopi Goldberg) and a woman with AIDS (Mary-Louise Parker) to Tucson, Ariz., where they supply moral support for each other in facing a series of emotional crises. Director Herbert Ross' bighearted and sentimental tragicomedy concentrates on themes of love, forgiveness and commitment, though the result is handicapped by its contrived treatment of numerous romantic complications ranging from the bizarre to the maudlin. The USCC classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Seattle Catholic student pens moving homeless tale

By Terry McGuire
Catholic News Service

SEATTLE — Nicholas Walker, 11, who wants to be a film critic some day, has shown his story-telling skill with the publication of his first book, "Safe at Home."

The book grew out of a Young Authors writing assignment given the sixth-grader last spring. Walker is a student at Seattle's Assumption/St. Bridget School.

He decided to write about homelessness because his mother, Robin, volunteers at Common Meals, a program that trains homeless people to work in the food service industry.

Walker created a fictional 11-year-old named Jeff who becomes a star on his



youth league baseball team while keeping the reason for his mysterious absences a secret — he is ashamed of being homeless.

In the story's climax, teammates find Jeff and his mother asleep in their broken-down car. The team's sponsor, whom Walker modeled on a neighbor,

provides a happy ending by offering the mother a job.

Walker, who played shortstop last year on a Little League team, wrote the story on his computer at home, not knowing it would evolve into a 38-page book.

"I didn't think it would actually turn out that long," the youth told *The Catholic Northwest Progress*, Seattle archdiocesan newspaper. "I kept getting more and new ideas."

His mother, teachers and others encouraged publication of the story. Loren Johnson, marketing director of Aslin Publishing in Edmonds, initially thought it would be a good magazine piece but then saw its potential as a book and took on the project.

"I was touched, she said. "The thing

that struck me the most was Nick's emotions for the characters and the way he was able to put himself into the feelings that a homeless child would have. I thought it was so beautiful."

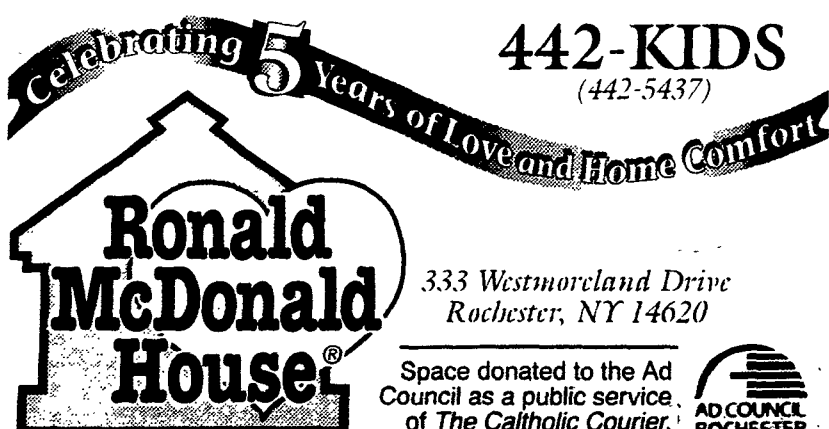
Walker's father, Jim, who works for an ad agency, did the illustrations. Copies of the book quickly sold out at an auction benefiting Common Meals. "We raised \$450," the young author said.

Johnson said her company plans to publish the book commercially and is looking at ways to contribute a percentage of the sales to aid the homeless.

Meanwhile, Nicholas Walker is planning to write about homelessness again in the Young Authors program this spring. "I want to go to Common Meals," he said, "and interview a homeless person."

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