

FEATURE

'Grass Harp' plays out boy's life in old South

NEW YORK (CNS) — The following are capsule reviews of movies recently reviewed by the U.S. Catholic Conference Office for Film and Broadcasting. Each review contains the USCC and Motion Picture Association of America ratings.

High School High

Dopey comedy in which an affable high school history teacher (Jon Lovitz) tries to motivate his rowdy inner-city class and winds up infiltrating a neighborhood crime ring preying on the students. Director Hart Bochner gleams limited humor from a feeble script and cartoon-like characters. Comic violence, sexual innuendo, fleeting rear nudity, intermittent crude expressions and minimal profanity. 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.

Jude

Grim adaptation of Thomas Hardy's bleak 1896 novel, *Jude the Obscure*, in which a would-be scholar (Christopher Eccleston) runs off with his high-spirited cousin (Kate Winslet) to start a family de-

spite each being married to another. Director Michael Winterbottom employs overly explicit visuals in a harrowing story of star-crossed lovers suffering from their defiance of social mores. Graphic scenes of birth, death and sexual encounters with full nudity. The USCC classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

The Grass Harp

Screen version of Truman Capote's 1951 novel about an orphaned boy (Edward Furlong) growing up in a small Southern town during the Depression, looked after by two spinster sisters (Piper Laurie and Sissy Spacek) whose tranquil home is shattered in a terrible dispute between the sisters, forcing him and the rest of the town to take sides. Directed by Charles Matthau, the result is a lovely little movie re-creating charms of a past era without sentimentalizing the boy's encounters with the adult world and odd behavior of his quirky elders (including retired judge Walter Matthau and swindler Jack Lemmon). Some violence and strong domestic tension. The USCC classification is A-II — adults and adolescents. The MPAA rating is PG — parental guidance



Fine Line Pictures/CNS

Piper Laurie and Walter Matthau star in *The Grass Harp*, an adaptation of Truman Capote's novel about a boy's adolescence in a small Southern town during the Depression.

suggested.

Palookaville

Low-key comedy about three jobless Jersey City losers who halfheartedly plan robberies to pay bills but bungle every attempt. Director Alan Taylor maintains a wry tone as their basic humanity keeps the trio reluctantly on the straight and narrow. Fleeting sexual innuendo, brief nudity and recurring rough language with profanity. The USCC classification is A-III — adults. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Sunchaser

Unconvincing clunker about a smug Los Angeles physician (Woody Harrelson) taken hostage by a dying 16-year-old killer (Jon Seda) and who becomes involved in the youth's quest to be cured by a Navaho medicine man and is himself somehow transformed. Menace, brutal violence and incessant rough language. The USCC classification is A-IV — adults, with reservations. The MPAA rating is R — restricted.

Gov. Casey's story one of courage to maintain convictions

Fighting for Life, by Robert P. Casey. Word Publishing (Dallas, 1996) 255 pp., \$21.99.

Reviewed by Peggy Weber
Catholic News Service



BOOK REVIEW

Former Pennsylvania Gov. Robert Casey is known as a fighter for life — both his own and others.

In his book, *Fighting for Life*, he shows how fierce and strong his determination has been to save his own life and that of the unborn.

Casey uses an interesting technique in his tale. He does not use a chronological narrative to tell the story of his life from boyhood to his brush with death.

Rather, he alternates chapters to tell of his life from his childhood as the son of a former coal miner to how he learned he had a disease that seemed to have no cure.

His story is interesting because he talks frankly about the diagnosis that he had amyloid, a rare disease that can systematically destroy major organs of the body.

However, he and his wife, Ellen, kept the finding a secret from their children and the rest of the world for about eight months. He notes that "I passed through the most difficult and lonely period in my life" while waiting for further test results

and trying to figure out his future.

Casey also offers an honest look at his life. He writes that "for some years I'd been known to some opponents in the state's political circles as the 'Three-Time Loss from Holy Cross.'"

He tasted victory in his fourth run for governor and was re-elected to his second and, by Pennsylvania law, his last term. Casey writes about losing and winning and how those experiences shaped him.

But mostly he writes about how he never gave up on his own life or his principles. He acknowledges that he was snubbed at the 1992 Democratic convention because of his pro-life stand. And he talks about his foes and the problems he has faced as a man, a lawyer, a politician and a father of eight.

His tribute to his wife, his high school

sweetheart, is touching. And he writes with obvious affection about his children. However, his book is strongest when he talks about his own father and his confrontation with death. Casey's dad became a lawyer at age 40 after spending years in the coal mines. His father was kicked by a mule and wore the scars of that experience throughout his life.

Casey writes that he led a blessed life and did well with school and sports and life. However, he captures the reader's attention best when he writes about how he was told he would die.

He endured fatigue, a loss of appetite and an inability of cuts to heal. He writes

about his socks filling with blood as he tried to film a commercial for the state.

Casey did not give up. He kept looking for help until a doctor told him that a transplant would cure him. And he shows great sensitivity as he talks about the young black man whose mother donated his organs to him.

This book is a great story about the courage of a man fighting for himself and for others. It is inspiring and makes one aware of the cost of one's convictions.

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Peggy Weber is a reporter and columnist for *The Catholic Observer*, newspaper of the Diocese of Springfield, Mass.

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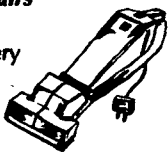
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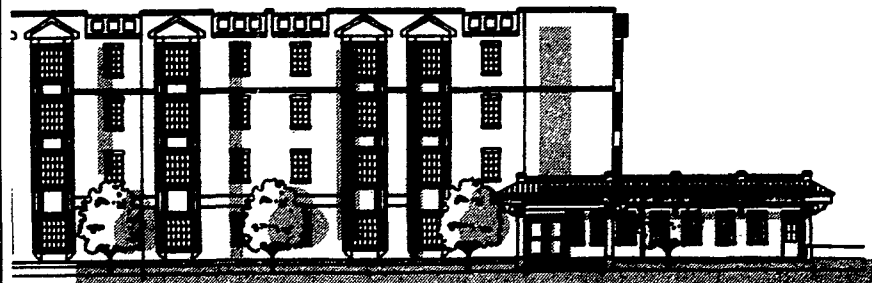
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