

How films change lives: personal stories

Good stories have long been recognized as having far more value than mere entertainment. Throughout human history, stories have taught people valuable lessons about themselves and their culture, about their past, their present and even their future. Today, films are one of our most powerful storytelling methods, and some films have had important impacts, on individuals and on entire societies.

Below are personal stories of how films have touched our lives in a variety of ways. If you would like to tell us how a film changed your life or had a significant impact in some way, click [here](#) to post your story.

Rodger
Winnipeg, Canada
(tarsal36@yahoo.com)
1/29/03

About Schmidt is one of the most depressing movies I have seen this year. Four English teachers, three retired and myself (near retirement) saw the film last week. We split on our enjoyment with two really liking it and two disliking it intensely. It was only afterwards that I came to any realization of why I hated it. With retirement less than two years away, it may have struck a chord a little too close to home in its depiction of life after work: the bad retirement speeches; returning to work when nobody really wants to see you anymore; the frailty of your life or your spouses; relationships with kids; the rv ignominiously named Adventurer which seemed to be a metaphor for Schmidt's life--cumbersome, directionless, unwanted. The recreational vehicle should be up for best supporting actor.

Can a film affect you that negatively yet have an upside in cinema therapy? The message to me was don't sit on your butt waiting for something to happen to you after retirement, start planning now. I have in fact begun discussing it with my wife and we have had a number of excellent plans. Retirement will begin with the purchase of a Winnebago. We'll see where life takes us after that.

Sally
Oakland, CA.
12/01/02

I was angry with my boyfriend. We'd had a fight. I'd yelled at him. Now I felt bad about it because I saw that the small mistake he made didn't justify my acting out this way. The real reason for my reaction was my hurt about his plans to leave the next morning on a fishing trip with his buddies for a couple of weeks. I felt excluded and abandoned.

As I thought about it the next day, I suddenly understood that my anger was a way for me to push him away by defending against my vulnerability and fear of abandonment. I sensed it would help me to tell him about these feelings when he returned, but I was too afraid to look stupid. It would make me feel too weak. He might take advantage of my vulnerability, criticize me, see me as needy, and push me away. Then I would feel even worse.

At that time I happened to watch a movie: Sliding Doors (starring Gwyneth Paltrow). Somehow it stuck with me that Helen, the main character displays a combination of strength and vulnerability when she meets James again on the street and expresses her interest in him even though she is not sure whether he is still interested in her. James responds with emotional openness too and they develop a close relationship from this point on.

When I watched the movie I noticed that Helen didn't look weak at all. In fact, she seemed kind of courageous and strong allowing herself to be so open and emotionally vulnerable. I can see myself as Helen. I realized that what Helen can do, I



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could do too.

I was very excited about this and I told my boyfriend about it when he came back. This film taught me how I could experience more emotional closeness if I allowed myself to be vulnerable with him. At times of emotional stress I'm usually not in touch with my strength and courage or the means to access them. But discussing my reaction to this movie scene with him, it sank in that I already carried these qualities inside me.

Alice
San Francisco, CA.
12/01/02

I was grieving the impending end of my marriage. I was in therapy. My husband and I had had a big fight which I told my therapist about. I felt he was oppressing me again. For a long time he had been my main purpose in life. Now it was clear the marriage was over. I had tried for a long time to make it work. During the session I cried a lot. I felt good. I told my therapist, "I believe that something good will come out of this but I can't be sure".

My therapist told me that many movies have been made that begin in despair and end in triumph. If I could identify with characters, who are trapped in their circumstances, and share their disappointments as well as their unsteady steps toward liberation, I could start finding reason for optimism in my own situation. My therapist said it could help me gain the courage to do what is necessary to change my situation.

She encouraged me to let a film inspire me to learn how to survive my loss without succumbing to it, possibly coming out of it transformed. She suggested several movies and asked me to choose a film that had touched me when I had seen it before. She said it wasn't crucial that the plot match my situation exactly as long as a character was going through some kind of transformation.

I chose the Alan Alda film, "The Four Seasons." After discussing it with my therapist, I started to enjoy my newly gained freedom after her separation. I discovered new strength and compassion. I got in touch with my autonomy and a new purpose.

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