

THEN SHE FOUND ME

An Odyssey Entertainment presentation.

A Hunt / Tavel Picture / Killer Films / John Wells Production

In Association with Blue Rider Pictures / TH!NK Films. Directed by Helen Hunt

A film review by Franco. P. Visser

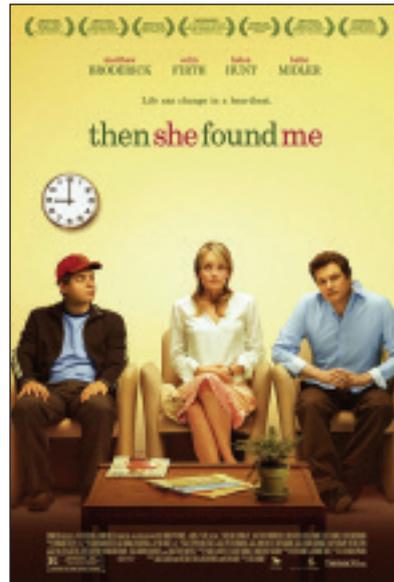
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There is a Jewish story about a father who was teaching his little son to be less afraid, to have more courage by having him jump down the stairs. He put his son on the second stair and said "Jump, and I'll catch you", then on the third stair and said "jump, and I'll catch you". The little boy was afraid, but he trusted his father and did what he was told and jumped into his arms. The father then put him on the next step and then the next, each time telling him "jump, and I'll catch you". Then the boy jumped from a very high step, but this time the father stepped back, and the boy fell flat on his face. He picked himself up, bleeding and crying, and his father said to him "That will teach you".

Based on the novel written by Elinor Lipman, *Then She Found Me* tells the story of a Kindergarten teacher named April Epner (played by Helen Hunt) and everything in her life that changes within a very short space of time. Her husband Ben (played by Matthew Broderick) tells her one evening that he wants a divorce. The couple struggled to have children, and Ben is no longer prepared to stay in the marriage. Soon after this April's adoptive mother dies. April meets, and falls in love with a book-cover illustrator named Frank (played by Collin Firth). Frank's children are attending the Kindergarten where April teaches. Then April's biological mother, Bernice Graves (played by Bette Midler) makes contact with her for the first time ever via Bernice's gay assistant, the isolated and professionally-absorbed Alan (played by John Benjamin Hickey). Bernice is a successful television star who has her own talk-show. She tries very hard to be part of April's life, although mostly with negative consequences.

Soon, April and Bernice meet up. When April asks Bernice why she gave her up for adoption, Bernice answers by reciting "On you will go though the weather be foul, On you will go, though your enemies prow, Onward up many a frightening creek. Though your arms may get sore and your sneakers may leak....." (from *Oh, the places you'll go!* by Dr. Seuss). What appears to be a humorous response to an important question shows Bernice's unpreparedness with regards to dealing with this significant question; one that is often central to adoptees. This 'poem' by Dr. Seuss acquires more importance in the viewer's mind as the film unfolds (especially if one has read the entire poem). Though it seems inappropriate and meaningless at the time, Bernice's recitation opens up a central theme throughout the film – it's all about life, and about the sometimes very difficult journey that life sends each of us on. Bernice is later on able to tell April that she fell pregnant with her as a 15 year-old, and that her strict and unforgiving father reacted very severely to her falling pregnant. She also tells April that she was "conceived according to a great American tradition.....at a drive-in". Again Bernice uses humour to shield her extreme anxiety and discomfort at



facing her past decisions and acts.

In the midst of all of this it is not surprising to find April's character specifically struggling to make sense of everything. April finds it very hard and stressful to integrate all these events and changes into her life, positively and as they occur. April also desperately wants to conceive a child, and it is more and more evident that she will not be able to. She does fall pregnant – ironically on the day that her husband asks her for a divorce, following a kind of 'last ditch effort' from both to save their marriage. During this time April is seeing Frank romantically, and both he and her soon-to-be ex-husband pitch up at the doctor for April's check-up visits. A very interesting dynamic develops as the relationship between April and Frank is triangulated with Ben's presence.

This pregnancy does not last. Soon April's faith as a devout Jew is tested when she 'loses'

her unborn baby. This film portrays the impact and significance of April's loss in a rather striking and emotionally moving way; it all comes to a head when April is prepared for in-utero fertilization following the failed pregnancy. The viewer in this instance gets a real glimpse into the 'feelings' aspect of such a loss, and one cannot help but 'feel' with April's character as she is confronted by the enormity and significance of the loss that she actually experienced.

Another theme highlighted by this film is that of 'being adopted versus not-being-adopted'. April is the eldest of two children. Her younger brother, a medical practitioner, was not adopted, being their parents' biological child. Both April and her brother have their respective issues, and the viewer gets a glimpse of both sides of the 'sibling coin'. April felt that she 'suffered' the most as she was not their parents' 'own' child, whereas her brother felt that he 'suffered' the most as a result of having an adopted sibling and not receiving the special attention reserved for adopted children. Luckily April and her brother are able to solve their feelings with, and about each other. How the film finally concludes I again leave up to you to find out.

There is a Jewish story about a father teaching his little son to be less afraid, to have more courage. "Jump" he said, "and I'll catch you", and the little boy trusted him, and the little boy jumped. And when his father caught him he felt filled with love, and when he didn't he was filled with something else, something more.....life. How very true and significant this simple story is as an excellent metaphor for 'how' the nature of life is. *Then She Found Me*, in which Helen Hunt makes her directorial debut, is a very interesting and moving film, and definitely worth viewing for it stirs the heart and delivers social commentary, that is to say life-commentary in an excellent manner. I end this review by wishing you and yours a blessed Festive Season. May the New Year be filled with peace and expectation of life and whatever life brings.