MOVIES REVIEWS

By Vicki Nunn, Brecky Nunnsense, Rhema FM 91.9

JUNE 2007 REVIEWS

1. Akeelah and the Bee - PG: starring Keke Palmer as Akeelah, Laurence Fishburne, Angela Bassett, and Curtis Armstrong

It's a nice change to find a movie for the family that is realistic, with real-life characters without the crass humour or soppiness found in so many family movies. It's based on Akeelah Anderson, an 11 year old in Los Angeles who attends one of the poorer schools in the city and is possibly heading for a meaningless life of drudgery or worse because she doesn't see the importance of school.

Akeelah scrapes by in her schoolwork, afraid of standing out or being labeled as smart, but she has a gift with words and language and regularly achieves 100% in her spelling without even studying. One of Akeelah's fondest memories is playing Scrabble with her father, who passed away a few years before, so she decides to enter her school's very first spelling bee, urged on by her principal, played by Curtis Armstrong. Secretly delighted when she wins, she is also uncomfortable with being thought of as a 'brainiac' by the other kids at her school.

Reluctantly she decides to participate in the regional spelling bee, but Akeelah needs encouragement and tuition and is introduced to a former university professor Joshua Larabee, played by Laurence Fishburne. Akeelah's mother Tanya, played by Angela Bassett is not happy about her daughter's choice to focus on her spelling and neglecting her other schoolwork. Unfortunately, because of her long working hours, Akeelah's mother has little time or energy to see that what Akeelah is doing is not just some trivial activity, but a great gift which should be focused and strengthened.

Before I saw this movie, I had no idea how competitive the spelling bee competitions were in the USA. I just thought you had to be a good speller and that there was little talent needed other than a good memory. Boy was I wrong! The spelling bee national championships in the USA are incredibly intense. Not only do the participants need to have a great memory, they've got to understand the origins of words to give them a better understanding of their meaning and the spelling of every derivation of each word. I remember at one point that Akeelah had to learn something like 50,000 words, and their origins. It gave me an appreciation for the work these kids put into the competitions.

While this movie has no major ups and downs and is fairly conventional, it is a tale of encouragement and hope. Ultimately Akeelah's achievements inspire her family and her local community, and shows that hard work and determination can bring positive results for those who want it. While not everyone can achieve number one status in everything they aspire to, this movie may well persuade an underachiever in your family to try harder.

Keke Palmer was outstanding as Akeelah and I quite enjoyed this movie.



(Another new release movie on a school theme that I can thoroughly recommend is the Ron Clarke Story.)

2. Zoom - PG: starring Tim Allen, Courtney Cox, Chevey Chase

Now let me just say from the outset, if you decide to watch this movie, be prepared for some grossness, which I am sure will appeal to the kids. While most of the time I can enjoy the odd joke about bodily functions and snot, I actually had to look away at one point in the movie.

Captain Zoom, played by Tim Allen, is a washed up, retired old superhero who has lost his powers, while everyone else in his old superhero team died. With similarities to an earlier movie entitled Sky High, this movie is a light-hearted piece of fluff with very little in the way of a plot.

The US Government seeks out super-talented kids in the population to create a new superhero team, after it is revealed that Zoom's evil, dead brother is coming back to earth through a vortex and may well prove to be a threat. Completely unaware of the impending return of his brother, Zoom resists being forced out of retirement and being made to mentor this new batch of superheroes.

Eventually Zoom and the new superhero kids form a kind of family, but it takes a bit of time and I found myself thinking, "Ok Zoom, I get it! You don't want to be there! You don't want to mentor these new kids, but enough already, get over it and get on with it.

There are some reasonable special effects in the movie, but nobody could claim that this is a movie with real depth. The lame climax of the movie was a let-down, and possibly the only saving grace of this movie for me was the scientist character played by Courtney Cox who falls down a lot and simply idolizes Zoom.

If you want something light-hearted to pass the time with your family, and you don't mind some toilet humour, then Zoom is the movie for you. Not a particularly enthralling or fulfilling movie overall, but it never claims to anything more than a time filler.



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MAY 2007 REVIEWS

Once again this month, I found two terrific family movies which I can thoroughly recommend.

1. Night at the Museum - PG: starring Ben Stiller, Robin Williams, Dick Van Dyke, Ricky Gervais, Steve Coogan, Owen Wilson, Mickey Rooney, Jake Cherry.

I'll be the first to admit that I often find the characters that Ben Stiller plays, and the movies he's in, quite irritating. His involvement with the movie "Night at the Museum" almost put me off viewing it, but I was intrigued to see there were some well respected actors including Dick Van Dyke and Mickey Rooney.

Stiller plays Larry Daley, an unsuccessful, unemployed, unrealistic dreamer who has never achieved the success to which he believes he is entitled. When he sees that his son doesn't respect him, Larry realises that he needs to get a job, get focussed and sort himself out. There are few jobs for which Larry is qualified and when he's offered a job as a night-watchman at the museum, he almost refuses it when he thinks it's beneath him. His sons' voice in his memory though, reminds Larry that he must get his act into gear.

While I would normally have difficulty getting into a movie like this because the main character is so shallow and unlikeable, I had very little time to think the matter over, because the movie action was very quick and dragged me along almost breathlessly with it. On his first night, Larry can't believe his eyes when everything in the museum comes to life. The T-Rex skeleton scares the living daylights out of him, a stuffed monkey steals his keys as he's trying to escape some lions who've escaped from their room. Meantime, the miniature cowboys and Romans are going to war against each other, and Attila the Hun wants to hunt Larry down.

The next morning, when everything and everyone has returned to their lifeless normal selves, Larry is so overwrought that he decides to quit his new job, until he is reminded that if he wants to save his relationship with his son, he needs to develop a backbone and some stickability in his life.

This action-packed movie is perfect for family viewing with no overt unsavoury elements that seem to creep into so many so-called family movies today. You'll enjoy watching Larry's frantic efforts to get everything under control, and especially his attempts to thwart a robbery attempt at the museum.

One of the best family movies I've seen for a long-time with stand-out performances from Robin Williams, Ben Stiller and Dick Van Dyke, I would happily recommend "Night at the Museum", and gave it 4 stars out of 5.



2. The Nativity Story - PG:. starring Keisha Castle-Hughes (girl from Whale Rider); Oscar Isaac, Hiam Abbass, Shaun Toub and Alexander Siddig. The screenplay was written by Mike Mike Rich, a practicing Christian whose faith shows up clearly in this movie.

While this real-life drama focuses on Mary, the mother-to-be of Jesus, there are other elements contained within the film which seem to have been omitted from earlier versions of the nativity story. The Nativity Story allows us to catch some glimpses of the political turmoil of the time, and how the Jews were oppressed by the Romans. This account shows the real human story, dirt, dust and all and the struggles that Mary's peasant family would have faced at the time.

Through the movie, we get an idea of what really could have transpired in that short, momentous period in Mary's life: Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, standing pregnant belly to pregnant belly, one carrying John the Baptist and the other carrying the promised Messiah; there's Joseph's shock when he sees Mary returning pregnant from Elizabeth's home; Joseph's eventual acceptance of Mary's pregnancy after his dream/vision of an angel; and on the trip to Bethlehem, Mary and Joseph's developing relationship - they share their thoughts about what the child will be like "Will he already know everything?" Mary says while Joseph ponders "I wonder if I will be able to teach him anything."

In the East, the wisemen are making their way to where the star predicts the new king is to be born. Meantime, Herod is making plans to destroy the prophesied king and anticipating that the threat will come from the line of David, Herod calls a census of the people so that they must return to the home of their forefathers. The ruler sets his men up in Bethlehem to find the new king and to kill him when he reveals himself.

The are suggestions of important moments to come in Christ's life including Joseph's anger at the merchants making money in the Temple, a crucifixion beside the road as the two travel to Bethlehem, Mary washing Joseph's feet; and a reference even to the serpent in the garden of Eden when Mary is endangered by a snake as they cross a deep river.

While the movie starts out slowly and it takes time for us to gain some insight into Mary's personality and feelings, it focusses upon the often neglected relationship between Mary and Joseph, which adds further dimension to what otherwise may have been a simple retelling of the traditional account.

With occasional elements of humour, this thoughtful human story of Mary and Joseph is better than any other nativity movie that I have seen before,.


Popcorn
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APRIL 2007 REVIEWS

This month's movie reviews are on two family movies that I can thoroughly recommend: Charlotte's Web based on the famous children's book of the same title by EB White and also the animated movie Open Season.

1. Open Season - PG: voiced by Martin Lawrence Ashton Kutcher, Gary Sinise, and Debra Messing.

Boog is a grizzly bear that was brought up by Beth the ranger, and he is so domesticated, that he is afraid of what's outside his home. He's certainly never been into the forest, but a series of events cause him to be left in the forest to fend for himself, accompanied by a very annoying deer named Elliot, and voiced perfectly by Ashton Kutcher.

Unfortunately, hunting season is about to begin, and Boog the Bear and Elliot the deer have to figure out how to survive. Before they know it, a bunch of helpless animals is looking to them to help them escape the hunters.

Open Season, is full of comedy, much of it bathroom humor which appeals to very young kids and even some of us older ones, but there's still enough adult humour here to grab even the grown-ups.

Although the concepts of hunting and killing may be a little too strong for some children, it is a good film about caring for others before yourself, and could provide an opportunity for you and your family to discuss a variety of related issues including friendship and helping others.

Although I'm not generally all that keen on animated films, I enjoyed Open Season much more than I had expected and would even watch it again. It's one I can recommend, but just keep the hunting themes and the sensitivity of your children in mind.



2. Charlotte's Web - G: starring Dakota Fanning with voices from Julia Roberts, Oprah Winfrey, Steve Buscemi, Sam Shepherd, Kathy Bates, Reba McIntyre, John Cleese and Robert Redford, with Dominic Scott Kay as the voice of Wilbur.

This is a real-life movie with added computerisation, and is based on the beloved children's book of the same name by EB White. Fern Arable is a farmer's daughter who takes the runt of a litter of pigs into her care, when her father makes it clear that the piglet will not survive. Hand-feeding little Wilbur, Fern is soon besotted by the pink creature and treats it almost like a favourite doll. But soon Wilbur grows too big to live in the house and so they give him to Fern's uncle who lives across the road.

Wilbur is placed in a barn with many of the farm animals but he is lonely without his human friend Fern. The other animals think he's a bit peculiar and don't seem to want to make an effort to be his friend. But there is another creature in the barn who enjoys Wilbur's passion and enthusiasm for life – Charlotte the spider. The two are soon fast friends and in time, the other animals in the barn learn to appreciate Wilbur, and they grow to become like a family.

But it soon becomes clear in Charlotte's Web, that Wilbur's main purpose in life is to become the roast on the family's table at Christmas time. No piglet on that farm has ever lived past winter, and so Charlotte the spider determines to find a way to save her dearly loved friend Wilbur, the pig.

Charlotte's plan for saving Wilbur is quite ingenious and if you don't know the story, then I won't spoil it for you. This tale was one of my favourites as a child, and I laughed and cried at the characters, and wanted desperately to become Charlotte's friend, because she seemed so wise and loving.

While there had been an earlier animated version of the story, that never even came close to the quality of the book, this modern rendition is superb family entertainment, with the only blemish being an occasional computerised sequence that doesn't quite work. Charlotte's web is faithful to the original book, filled with warmth and humour and draws us into the story and to caring about the characters, even rotten old Templeton the rat!



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MARCH 2007 REVIEWS

1. The Wild - G. Voiced by Kiefer Sutherland, Jim Belushi, Eddie Izzard and William Shatner.

An animated movie, The Wild commences in a zoo in New York where the animals get together for game time one evening.

Ryan the lion cub, is embarrassed that he can't roar like his dad Samson - he's a lion cub trying to grow up too fast. Unfortunately Ryan accidentally makes the gazelles stampede and endangers all the other animals a the games. Ryan's dad Samson scolds him because he believes that Ryan caused the stampede on purpose as he was grumpy and feeling sorry for himself.

Feeling unjustly treated, Ryan leaps out of the zoo and onto the "green boxes" which everyone knows, takes escaped animals away. Later on, Samson realises that Ryan has run away, so he and his friends break out of the zoo in an attempt to save Ryan. Knowing that Ryan is probably heading for a ship that will take him far away, they keep a watch out for the Statue of Liberty because they know that Ryan will be on a ship bound for overseas as part of the the "Zoo to Africa Rescue Program".

The group of friends eventually steal a tugboat to try to catch up with Ryan's ship, and their boat comes to rest on a volcanic island.

In their search for Ryan, Samson's friends discover that the lion is not the big, fierce jungle cat he's always made himself out to be. How can they save Ryan when they're all just a bunch of scaredy-cats? What's the big secret of the island, and what's going on with the weird herd of wildebeest?

The movie was quite funny in places, and the stand-out comedian was definitely Nigel the koala. Benny the squirrel and Bridgette the giraffe, along with Larry the not-so-clever python all contribute to make a delightfully simple family movie, suitable for all ages. The overall theme of being true to yourself I thought was a good basis for a family movie.



2. Instant Message – PG. Stars lesser known actors Patrick J Adams, Lindy Booth, Marla Sokoloff, Jonathan Cherry, Shawn Laurence and Art Hindle.

Seth and Gina were childhood penfriends who had never met. When they were younger, they sent photos of their better-looking friends to the other because they were embarrassed about their own appearance. Growing up, they continued to write and to send photos of their friend, pretending it was them, but never got an opportunity to meet, and that's where this movie starts.

When Gina has to write a story for her newspaper about a toy conference, Seth goes along as a representative for his toy company. Before they meet for the first time, they arrange for their best friend to meet in their place instead. Their best friends meet and begin to fall for each other.

Meantime the real penfriends do kind of meet, not realising who the other person is, but don't hit it off at first. When it becomes evident that their friends are falling for the other person, they become jealous, thinking that their friend is stealing their penfriend.

Some crossed-wires lead to some interesting and humorous moments in the movie, although there was certainly potential for many more.

The acting was fine, the scripting passable, and while the movie was overall ok, it didn't evolve into anything of earth-shattering importance, but hey, I wasn't really expecting that anyway.

If you can ignore the slightly rude scene, when the two best friends get a little too frisky, this movie is probably suitable for families with older teenagers, but not for younger kids.

While the film had the potential to really develop into a complicated and quite humorous farce, it just grew dull and fizzled out. A good movie for just passing the time.



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FEBRUARY 2007 REVIEWS

1. Retrievers - G. Stars Robert Hays (of Flying High fame), Mel Harris, Alan Austin, Alan Rachins, Taylor Emerson, Robert Wagner and Betty White in minor roles.

The Lowry family, Tom and Karen and their children Liz and Woody move from the big city to a small country town. Tom wants to cut back on his work and stress levels, and has accepted a lesser paying job at a small firm, with the intention of relaxing and spending more time with his family.

The day they arrive at their new home, Pilot, a golden retriever shows up and the whole family is enchanted. When no owner is found, the Lowry's decide to keep her and discover very quickly that their new addition is very pregnant – in fact, she's about ready to pop!

Pilot soon has six gorgeous puppies and when they're old enough to be weaned, the parents set about finding them homes, despite the children's protests. But Pilot, the puppy's mum has other ideas about her offspring being taken away, and she sets about retrieving them – after all – retrieving is what she knows best. She goes from house to house barking, and listening for a response from one of her pups.

When the family realize how much Pilot pines for her pups, and how much they miss them as well, they decide to get them back. But which one should they pick out of the six, and where do they find them? Perhaps they could bring them all home again.

The acting and writing is very good. Overall it is well filmed and manages to pull at the heart-strings of softies like me almost straight away. One line in the movie says it all "These dogs are so full of love, you just can't get enough of them." Throw in a dash of humour, a hint of danger, a touch of sadness and seven delightful dogs, and you have a lovely family friendly movie.



2. George and the Dragon – PG. Stars James Purefoy, Piper Perabo, Patrick Swayze, Michael Clarke Duncan & special guest appearance by Val Kilmer.

George, a knight returns from the crusades with the intention of marrying and settling down on a small farm. After the heart-wearying battles he fought overseas, George just wants a simple life. But to obtain the farm, the king asks him to rescue his missing daughter who is betrothed to the local warlord, played by Swayze. Meantime the princess has found the very last dragon egg in existence and is determined to protect it. George on the other hand, thinks it's a ridiculous idea and they both clash.

While the story may sound simple, it's filled with interesting characters, humorous fights, jokes, silly antics and enough action to please even the most action or comedy-oriented fans.

With a paper-thin plot, the interaction between the odd and interesting characters, make it a worthwhile and light-hearted adventure for every one in the family to watch. It's a good 89 minutes of entertainment, only slightly marred by a slightly silly ending and some imperfect special effects. Overall, very good entertainment.



3. The Devil Wears Prada – PG. Stars Anne Hathaway, Meryl Streep, Emioy Blunt and Simon Baker.

Based on a best-selling novel, The Devil Wears Prada stars Anne Hathaway as journalism graduate, Andy Sachs who lands a job as assistant at Runway, one of America's elite fashion magazines. Andy is hoping that the experience in such a prestigious magazine will give her enough clout to get a real journalism job later.

Andy though, begins to get drawn into a world she has always shunned, and eventually she has to start making choices that impact on her personal life and relationships. The world of the fashion magazine is shown at it's cut-throat worst, and Runways's Director Miranda, played flawlessly by Meryl Streep, is the icy queen of it all. Streep carries the role superbly, and while the character could have been one-dimensional, we see real glimpse of a flawed and hurt person beneath the steely veneer.

If you can ignore the standard "makeover of the frumpy chick into a gorgeous girl", then I think you'll enjoy this movie.

Andy's struggles to retain her old values and resist the temptations of her new world, provide this movie with depth, and enable the viewer to empathise with Andy in her struggles. This movie was surprisingly good.



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JANUARY 2007 REVIEWS

1. Lady in the Water – PG. Stars lesser known actors Paul Giamatti, Bryce Dallas Howard, Bob Balaban and Jeffrey Wright.

Lady in the Water is a strange and fascinating story, probably appealing more to those who enjoy fantasy and fairy tales. The Lady referred to in the title is a mythical creature, but the story takes place in modern times. The manager of an apartment complex finds a water creature in the swimming pool. The pale-looking woman has a purpose and the caretaker begins to find out what it is and calls on special people living in the complex to help out.

I found Lady in the Water difficult to really get emotionally involved in, even though I wanted to. The innocence of the water creature calls us back to an innocent time in our childhood. There was one moment that my heart was touched when one character who had lost all faith and hope in mankind, had his hope renewed and his heart restored through the experience with the water creature.

This movie will not be everyone's cup of tea and is certainly not a Christian-based story. While promising much more than it ultimately delivered, it was nevertheless and intriguing and challenging concept.



2. An Inconvenient Truth – G. Presented by the former almost president of the USA, Al Gore.

I must advise from the outset that this so-called documentary is based on the theory of evolution. The movie is presented as if we the viewer, are attending a conference, but has good graphics and some thought-provoking research.

The documentary is about global warming and how mankind is impacting on the environment through pollution. Unfortunately, most of the "facts" presented are based on the theory of evolution, which Al Gore never even mentions. He seems to expect everyone to accept evolution as fact. Surely this must cause us to question the authenticity of the results?

I approached this movie as a cynic because I've heard and read numerous articles about global warming, and many refuting the original claims. I've read articles claiming that we are heading into a new ice-age rather than a warmer age. Mr Gore trotted out all of the old arguments I've heard before, and after watching the movie, I'm no more convinced than I was at the start that we are experiencing global warming. Certainly, I do believe that we are having an impact on the world as a result of pollution, but I am also suggesting that perhaps Mr Gore is also scare-mongering, which causes me to question his intentions.

On several occasions throughout the presentation, I found Mr Gore's posturing rather irritating. I could not help but think the man's ulterior-motive is perhaps to gain power and position through his campaigning.

As a conscientious recycler, I was pleased though by the ending of the movie. It provided hope by suggesting that the damage we are doing to the world is repairable and that as individuals we each can and must make a difference.

Overall though, I did not find the movie particularly satisfying, helpful, or necessarily correct. I felt that Al Gore came across as more interested in self-promotion than in the issue he is plugging.



3. Material Girls – PG. Stars Hilary Duff and her sister Haylie Duff, along with Brent Spiner and Angelica Huston:

After inheriting their father's cosmetics empire, Tanzie and Ava Marchetta suddenly lose their money and possessions when the company is involved in a terrible scandal. The former party girls have to learn how to live in the real world and try to discover the real truth behind the scandal. Can they save the company and their father's reputation?

While there is some character exploration in Material Girls, it barely delves blow the surface, but at least encourages us to like the main characters a little more. This light-hearted story never claims to be anything more than a fluffy piece of entertainment to help pass the time.



By Vicki Nunn, Brecky Nunnsense, Rhema FM 91.9

DECEMBER 2006 REVIEWS

1. Children on Their Birthday: Rated PG and has lesser known actors Sheryl Lee Diamond, Christopher McDonald, Joe Pichler, Tania Raymonde, Jesse Plemons, Phyllis Frelich and Tom Arnold. It is based on a short story by Truman Capote.

Set in a small town in Alabama in 1947, Children on Their Birthdays is essentially about the friendship between two boys Billy-Bob Murphy and his friend Preacher, and the sweet, innocent and strong-willed Lily-Jane who changes their lives forever.

Billy-Bob's father had died in the war and both he and his mother miss him terribly. It is on Billy-Bob's 13th birthday that the 5 o'clock bus stops in town and an attractive young girl and her mother get-off. The boys are stunned and delighted when Lily-Jane moves into the boarding house next door. Lily-Jane Bobbit and her mother are there for the summer, but Lily-Jane has dreams of becoming a star in Hollywood and loves to dance around the yard and act the lady at every opportunity. She's a gracious and thoroughly nice girl who will allow injustice to occur. Lily-Jane's father once said to her, "Whenever possible, we must balance what we ought not to do with what we ought."

Lily-Jane imagines a world where children dance in the streets and everything is pretty. The two friends Billy-Bob and Preacher are so smitten with Lily-Jane that they begin to compete for her affections, and soon have a falling out.

It is after a con-man comes through town (played by Tom Arnold), who takes everybody's money, that Billy-Bob and Preacher agree to forget their differences, and team up with Lily-Jane to get back the town's money.

While there's no great grand story here, there are a series of incidences that add up to a summer story. The movie endeavours to focus on Billy-Bob and how he sees the world, but it is the character of Lily-Jane that almost steals the show as she is an insightful, thoughtful, resourceful and thoroughly unusual girl.

Children on Their Birthdays is an unabashedly nostalgic, idealistic look at a past innocent era and a satisfying little story, worth watching with the whole family.



2. Hoodwinked: Rated G, and voiced by Anne Hathaway, Glenn Close, Jim Belushi, Patrick Warburton, Anthony Anderson and many more.

Who is it that is stealing recipes from everybody in the forest and causing them to close up their shops? Is it innocent-looking Red Riding Hood? Is her sweet singing a cover-up of an evil mind? What about her granny? What does granny do in her spare time that she is keeping quiet about because it may embarrass the family? Could the recipe bandit be the axe-wielding woodsman who jumps screaming through Granny's window? But surely the robber is none other than Wolf who spends his time tracking people through the woods and threatening them?

While a promising premise for a story, I found Hoodwinked rather tedious. The cartoons were quite grotesquely drawn and their movements seemed irritatingly awkward. In fact, I found the cartoon style rather distracting and Twitchy the squirrel's speech was bothersome and difficult to understand.

On a couple of occasions the humour was ok, but for me they fell flat most of the time. On the positive side, it is a good movie for smaller children, although kids are becoming so sophisticated today, that they may also be unimpressed with the quality of the cartoon and the lack of humour. In all, a movie probably suited only to the very young, or to pass the time.



By Vicki Nunn, Brecky Nunnsense, Rhema FM 91.9

NOVEMBER 2006 REVIEWS – Christmas films

1. Cars: Rated PG and voiced by Owen Wilson, Paul Newman and Larry the Cableguy

Cars takes place in a world where cars are people, and Lightning McQueen is a rookie racing car who has becomes rather conceited after winning a couple of major races. On his way to California for the biggest car-race of all time, Lightning finds himself stranded in a backwoods town called Radiator Spring, in a heap of trouble.

After accidentally damaging the road into Radiator Springs, Lightning has to repair it before he can continue onto California. He whinges and whines and resists every inch of the way. But as time passes, he begins to recognise that life isn't about being handed everything on a platter. The folk at Radiator Springs do some growing too as they come to realise that maybe they have neglected their town.

The scenery looks so incredibly real in places that you'd swear it was. The movie is a gentle, mildly humourous ride with a couple of genuinely funny moments. Mater is definitely one of the most interesting characters in the movie, although he's not the brightest sparkplug in the motoring world. The line in the movie that sums it up is "There's a whole lot more to racing then just winning."



2. RV: Rated PG and starring Robin Williams, Cheryl Hines, Jeff Daniels, Joanna Levesque & Josh Hutcherson.

Bob Munro takes his family on vacation in an RV instead of going to Hawaii as they'd planned. The kids, Cassie and Carl and the wife Jamie are very unhappy about it and reluctantly agree to go along. ON the way to their destination, they a number of misadventures including an encounter with wild racoons and a faulty sewerage system. The Gornicke family try to befriend Bob and his family, while Bob & his family do everything they can to avoid the strange Gornicke family. The underlying theme is about honesty and what really matters most which includes one's family.

While a bit of a dipstick, Bob Munro, played by Robin Williams, does some maturing as does his family. While never claiming to be a deep movie, and although crass in a couple of spots, it was much better than I had anticipated. There were a couple of laugh-out-loud moments and I had to almost close my eyes at the embarrassing or stupid antics, but fortunately these were few and far between. A bit of a slap-stick entry from Robin Williams, who I often have difficulty watching because of his overacting, I nevertheless enjoyed this movie.



3. Twelve Days of Christmas Eve: Rated PG. Starring Steven Weber, Patricia Velasquez, Chad Willett, Molly Shannon and Stefani van Pfetten

Starring a number of familiar but not lesser known actors, Twelve Days of Christmas Eve is about as close to "Groundhog Day" as you can get, but with a less obnoxious main character. Calvin Carter a successful businessman who owns a chain of discount stores across the USA, has forgotten what's important in life and is focussed totally on making it big. On Christmas Eve, Calvin lets down his family time and again including his brother, father, ex-wife, son and current partner. As he leaves his store that evening, proud of his success, he is struck by the sign hanging over his store and squashed flat. He wakes up in a strange hospital bed where he's told his problems are internal. Calvin sulks because he just had the best Christmas Day ever. In a moment he falls asleep and wakes up in his own bed with Christmas Eve starting all over again. We find that Calvin has to relive Christmas eve over and over until he gets it right. But if he doesn't get it right by the twelfth time, he doesn't get to wake up again.

It was an interesting progression over the various Christmas Eves watching Calvin move from disbelief, to amusement, to twitchy paranoia, through to boredom, desperation, depression and finally acceptance. Calvin's a slow learner, but he eventually learns some painful home-truths about himself, which force him to do some soul-searching.

While similar to "Groundhog Day", it has enough differences to make it worth viewing, and where I have difficulty watching Bill Murray, I found Steven Weber's portrayal of Calvin sat more comfortably with me.



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NNOVEMBER 2006 REVIEWS CONTINUED:

4. Crazy for Christmas: Rated G. This telemovie stars lesser known actors Andrea Roth, Yannick Besson, Jason Spevack, and Daniel Fathers.

An eccentric rich man, Fred Nichols, hires a divorced mother as his limousine driver on Christmas Eve. Torn between spending the evening with her son, who misses his father, or earning extra money to help with their tight finances, Shannon agrees to the job, as long as it's only for two hours. The rich guy Fred goes a little crazy, giving away cash to complete strangers and buying a hot-dog stand so the owner can go home early on Christmas Eve.

It turns out that the reason rich Fred chose Shannon as his driver is that he knew her parents when they were younger, and didn't treat them very well. Peter the reporter gets wind of Fred and is extravagance, and tracks them down, Sparks fly between Peter and Shannon. Shannon's line to her son Trevor, "Sometimes you gotta do things you don't wanna – that's life," tells a little about how she sees life. While the movie starts off at an interesting pace, it begins to drag and I became quite bored with it. To me, Shannon's son Trevor is portrayed as quite an unlikeable little brat of a boy who whinges and pouts most of the time.

Frankly, the whole story and acting just didn't come across as genuine or real, and I'm sure I could have done something much better with my time.



By Vicki Nunn, Brecky Nunnsense, Rhema FM 91.9

OCTOBER 2006 REVIEWS

1. Over the Hedge - PG: voiced by actors including Bruce Willis, William Shatner and Nick Nolte.

What do animals do when they find they're forest has been sub-divided into human homes while they were hibernating? They improvise! Now the little bit of forest left can't support them anymore, so how can they survive? Fortunately (or is that unfortunately) RJ the raccoon knows the ways of the humans and through the humans the little animal family should have enough food to survive, if they can only survive the humans.

Laugh-out loud funny in some places, this is a movie suitable for all ages though some scenes may frighten young ones.

At times, the creatures almost looked 3D and on occasion I felt like I could almost reach out and grab one of the porcupine's quills. A warm and humourous story of family and friendship.



2. Zathura - PG: starring some little known actors: Josh Hutcherson, Jonah Bobo, Dax Shephard and Kristen Stewart, with Tim Robbins playing a small role as the father.

Zathura delivers what Jumanji the movie failed to deliver! Written by the same author with a similar kind of theme, except the Zathura game takes the characters to outer space.

The two main characters are brother with little in common, who compete to win their father's attention and affection. The older brother Walter treats his younger brother Danny with contempt and their self-obsessed teenage sister seems to care little for anyone else. Their father who has ½ custody of the kids, is trying to set up a warm home, but the pain from the parent's divorce and the constant bickering is making everyone miserable and on edge.

Lonely Danny finds an old board game called Zathura which he convinces his brother to join him in playing. Suddenly they're bombarded by a real live shower of miniature meteorites inside their house, which practically destroys the living room. It is through the adventures that follow that the three siblings begin to gain an appreciation for each other.

Well acted with a great story-line - I haven't enjoyed a movie this much in a long time. It's a rollicking adventure, though for younger or more sensitive kids could be quite overwhelmingly scary in places, so I caution parents.

I gave Zathura a big thumbs up, and being the science-fiction fan that I am, almost gave it an extra ½ popcorn.



By Vicki Nunn, Brecky Nunnsense, Rhema FM 91.9

SEPTEMBER 2006 REVIEWS

1. Dreamer - PG: starring Kurt Russell, Dakota Fanning, Kris Kristoffersen, and Elizabeth Shue.

Inspired by a true story, it's about Ben Crane, a horse trainer who trains prized thoroughbreds for their wealthy owner. Unfortunately, the racehorse Sonya, breaks her leg on the day of the race, and Ben is fired. After the owner decides to put the horse down, Ben decides to take the horse and try to heal her broken-leg. Because the race-horse Sonya is from fine racing stock, Ben figures that if he can heal her leg, he should be able to breed from her. Ben's family have been involved with racehorses for years, but for various reasons, the family farm has been sold off piece by piece and everything is relying on whether they can get the horse well again. Relationships between Ben and his father, daughter and wife are all quite strained.

Ben's daughter Cale, played by Dakota Fanning, befriends the horse Sonya and things start looking bad when the horse is found to be sterile and won't breed any champions. Good news arrives when the horse is found well enough to race again.

The movie is about more than a story about horses and horse-racing though, as we see the characters grow and opportunities for healing in the relationships within the family. In that regard, I thought the movie was good.

I like horses, but the main focus of this movie really put me off. The thrust of the story is that if you put all of your hopes and trust into your dreams, then it will all pay off. The father Ben pins all of his family's financial future onto a horse and onto whether the horse is going to win a major horse-race.

While I can applaud the story-writer and movie-makers' desire to say, “follow your dreams and don't give up”, I didn't like the unrealistic emphasis it placed on that. Perhaps it's the cynic in me, or the realist, but life is rarely like the film portrays.

It was a nice, feel-good movie, and the acting was good, but I didn't like the emphasis on gambling everything you have on a dream.



2. Yours, Mine and Ours - PG: starring Dennis Quaid, Rene Russo, Rip Torn, Jerry O'Connell and Linda Hunt.

Dennis Quaid and Rene Russo's play a widower and a widow who meet many years after they knew each other in high school. They rekindle their relationship and despite the fact that between them they have 18 children, decide to get married in rather a hurry. Dennis Quaid's character is in the navy and runs his household like he runs his ship, including whistling for the children (is there an echo of Sound of Music there?) Rene Russo's character is very laid back, almost hippyish and as you can expect, there is quite a clash between the two households when they merge.

The main thrust of the story is how the kids decide they really can't stand each other and set about ruining their parent's marriage. Throw in some unusual pets including a pot-bellied pig, and a kooky housekeeper, played by Linda Hunt, and you have plenty of opportunities for screaming matches and out and out fights.

A remake of the 1968 film of the same name starring Lucille Ball and Henry Fonda, I felt that this movie was the better of the two because Rene Russo and Dennis Quaid's relationship felt real.

The film ended in such a way that there is plenty of scope for a sequel.

I enjoyed the characters and would have loved to have seen more of Linda Hunt's housekeeper personality. While the movie only really had time to skim the surface of the relationship dynamics between the kids, if the movie-makers opt for a sequel, perhaps we will see more development in that area.

Another feel-good movie with nice ethics about working at relationships, and that selfishness and getting your own way doesn't always work out the way you think it might.

