



every tuesday

illiteracy, the hidden word

by Ira Glick

Stanley & Iris
directed by Martin Ritt
MGM Productions

Issue films and steamy thrillers are two old genres currently making big-time comebacks in Hollywood. A film's got to be boffo on the sex, sleaze and videotape, but remember, these are the '90s, so our old-new "compensating values" are in full effect, demanding a third-act about-face moral resolution.

And the issue film, with a democratic twist, is centre-row this season — a big continuation on the '80s "disease-of-the-week" cycle.

We've had deafness (*Children of A Lesser God*), the mentally challenged (*Dominic & Eugene*), autism (*Rain Man*) and most recently cerebral palsy (*My Left Foot*).

Watch for blindness, disabled mountain climbers and especially mental disorders (Penny Marshall's *Awakenings*) in the next few months.

Why are D.R.Fs (Disease Related Films) getting the green light? It might have something to do with the rebirth of the conscience in the eco-rehab-twelve-step-'90s. And, of course, you can't underestimate the influence of more than a few L.A. screenwriters who are scared shitless over Epstein Barr, deer ticks and the big "A."

Martin Ritt's *Stanley & Iris* stars the politically-correct and well-toned Jane Fonda, and the mob-star-mogul of Greenwich Street Robert De Niro.

The script's situational conflict is illiteracy which, according to the press kit, convinced Fonda to get involved.

"I'm a believer that movies can make a difference," says Hanoi-Aerobic Jane. "Although they have to start with entertainment, they can do more than just that. I think *Stanley & Iris* is a good example that a movie can do both — entertain and, perhaps, change things a bit."

There are something like 27 million Americans and millions of Canadians who cannot read or write. It's a tragedy especially when you take a closer look at the demographics; 24 per cent of Canadian adults, eight per cent of which are university graduates!

It's a hidden world, that of illiteracy. There isn't one character profile, but often, as in the case of Stanley Cox (De Niro), the cause of the dysfunction is rooted in a poor and transient early life.

Stanley's dad was a travelling salesman who took his son on the road with him, thus Stanley was a new student at a new school just about as often as he blinked.

De Niro, who became functionally illiterate for the role (just kidding), is poignant and convincing as Stanley, a nice-guy loner who wears his heart on his blue collar

and would have died a non-reader had he not met Iris, a widow and fellow worker at "The Nevins and Davis Bakery."

Iris, whose life story could easily have been plucked from the pages of the recent best seller *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*, is nevertheless an inspiring survivor. Fonda has never been lovelier. When her character figures out co-worker Stanley cannot read or write, she's all maternal compassion. An early scene with a mistaken Tylenol bottle is a fine bit of work for husband-wife screenwriting team, Harriet Frank and Irving Ravetch.

The dramatic arc of the film is linear and spare, yet somehow offbeat — as if some of the scenes had been accidentally misshuffled in the editing room. We end up 'seeing' the film's structure, which, while not entirely unpleasant, will likely be for the average film patron, something of a distraction.

Stanley and Iris is a "small" film, fashionably independent-looking. It's oh-so-casual underproduced and subdued styling has only one sad surprise: an ending which, upon impact, makes a sickening thud. An ending we're sure test audiences in L.A. insisted upon.

*For more information on illiteracy and what you can do about it, call the Toronto Adult Literacy for Action Centre 652-3652. ALFA is one of many community based literacy programs in this city.



Jane Fonda and Robert DeNiro explore illiteracy in *Stanley and Iris*.

army teens get late summer blues

by Shaun Lacob

Late Summer Blues
directed by Renen Schorr
Hebrew with English subtitles

The film *Late Summer Blues* is about a group of average Israeli teenagers about to be drafted into the army. They have just finished high school and, at the end of the summer, will be going to fight in the War of Attrition (1969-70).

The film is divided into four chapters, each focusing on one of the male inductees in this close group of friends.

Yossi, the first to enter army life, is particularly innocent and his death in a training accident

shocks the others, who still have the summer before they are inducted.

Yossi's death fuels the anti-war stand taken by Arileh, the focus of the second chapter. He is a draft resister who sprays protest slogans in downtown Tel Aviv.

Mossie, a talented musician and the focus of the third chapter, does not want to go to combat because it would hamper the development of his musical career, and is applying to enter the entertaining troupe, that way both serving his country and developing his musical talents.

Mossie's attempts to evade combat duty are not understood by Margo, a diabetic who is unfit

for service, and through whose "super-8" we are allowed a glimpse into these youngsters' lives. If you don't find subtitles too much of a distraction, *Late Summer Blues* is definitely worth seeing.

It doesn't have the multimillion dollar style of a Hollywood production or any well-known stars to back it up. It relies on the power of the writing and directing, which is all it needs, because it is impossible to leave the theatre the same as when you went in.

Late Summer Blues will be shown March 14 at 5 pm. The location is as yet unconfirmed. For details, please call the JSF at 736-5178.

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