



Brendan Fraser's (front left) student days at Toronto's Upper Canada College helped prepare him for the role of David Greene, a Jewish teen who tries to fit in at an elite prep school.

months were spent selecting the ensemble of actors since the producers opted for new faces rather than familiar stars.

It's an approach that has worked well for Jaffe and Lansing in the past; their 1981 film *Taps*, a military school drama, featured such then relative unknowns as Tom Cruise and Sean Penn.

In **School Ties**, Brendan Fraser stars as David Greene, the talented young quarterback who must face the prejudice of his peers when his true background is revealed. The son of a Canadian tourism official, Fraser was born in Indianapolis and raised in Holland, Switzerland and Canada, where he attended Toronto's elite prep school, Upper Canada College. He also attended Seattle's Cornish College of the Arts before making his film debut in *Dogfight*. That was followed by his turn as the defrosted Neanderthal in this summer's *Encino Man*.

Though Fraser is not Jewish, his years at Upper Canada apparently prepared him for the role. "When he came to auditions," says Lansing, "he got very emotional about how difficult it was to fit in ... and the price you pay to get into the cluster."

Joining Fraser are Matt Damon (*Mystic Pizza*), Randall Batinkoff (*The Player*), Chris O'Donnell (*Fried Green Tomatoes*), Anthony Rapp (*Adventures in Babysitting*), Ben Affleck (*The Dark End of the Street*), Andrew Lowery (*Fatal Charm*) and Cole Hauser in his first major motion picture. The cast also includes Amy Locane (*Cry Baby* and TV's *Melrose Place*) and Zeljko Ivanek (*Mass Appeal*).

Similar to *Dead Poets Society* with its setting in a staid New England school circa 1950, **School Ties** entertains with its boys-will-be-boys high jinks. But at its heart are far more serious issues as friendships are formed and then broken when outsider Greene upsets the school's rigid social balance.

Screenwriter Ponicsan teamed up with Jaffe and Lansing on *Taps*, after two of his eight novels were adapted to the big screen in 1973 — *Cinderella Liberty* with James Caan and *The Last Detail* starring Jack Nicholson.

After attending Mullenberg College in Allentown, Penn., he served in the Navy before teaching school in New York and Los Angeles, where he also worked as a social worker during the height of the Watts riots.

Like Brendan Fraser, you don't have to be Jewish to empathize with the plight of young David Greene. The film has a familiar lesson for anyone who's felt the sting of prejudice or the awkwardness of being a square peg in a round hole.

School Ties opens September 18 in theatres across Canada.

— David Mills



ELEVEN

SCHOOL TIES

COMING-OF-AGE DRAMA LOOKS AT ANTI-SEMITISM

Nine years ago, producer Sherry Lansing came across a script written by Darryl Ponicsan — an intriguing story set in 1955 about a Jewish boy who conceals his faith after winning a football scholarship to the elite St. Matthew's prep school.

For the past decade, Lansing pushed to get the story on screen, together with her partner Stanley

Jaffe, recently named president and chief operating officer of Paramount. But first came a slew of other hit movies from the partnership — *Black Rain*, *The Accused* and *Fatal Attraction*, to name a few of the more recent.

Now with **School Ties**, the pair has finally succeeded, in a film that not only examines anti-Semitism and class prejudice, but goes beyond to look at the ostracism often imposed on any outsider.

As Jaffe observes, the film asks,

"At what price to yourself are you willing to compromise who you are, what you are, and what you stand for, in order to be acceptable to a group that might otherwise not want you?"

After extensive location scouting, Jaffe and Lansing settled on Middlesex School in Concord, Mass., a beautiful campus founded in 1901 and embodying the classic image of the traditional Ivy League prep school. Even more time-consuming was the casting. Eighteen