

Entertainment

Johnson keeping the home fries burning

Lynn Johnson: For the better or the best

by Suzanne Lundrigan

Lynn Johnson, creator of the *Better or Worse* cartoon strip, honed her craft in medical school anatomy classes. "After graduating from Art School, I got a job illustrating anatomy texts. I got to put a white lab coat on and explore, take a look at how we tick."

Johnson gave vent to her comic bent by illustrating the chemical equations which med students had to learn with caricatures.

"I set out to be a cartoonist . . . so I started art classes in Vancouver. Art school is strange that way. The fine art students sniff at those who want to do commercial art."

Her degree complete, Johnson worked in an animation studio where she met a television cameraman. They married and moved East.

While expecting her first child, Johnson was asked by her obstetrician to create some illustrations for the ceiling above the examining table. "The response was tremendous." Shortly afterward, Johnson's first book *David We're Pregnant* was published.

Johnson, on tour with her latest book *Keep the Home Fries Burning*, runs a hand through her hair and picks up the three juggling blocks on the desk and begins to juggle. A block flies out of her hand and lands under a table. She reaches for it giggling, "I'm sorry its been a long tour. Except for these book tours, I'm usually pretty close to home."

Home is where Johnson lives with her

husband Rod, a dentist (Johnson divorced and remarried) and two kids aged eight and 13. Home is also her work base. The United Press syndicated her *Better or Worse* strip in 1979. "Writing is tough and easy at the same time. I send off bunches of work at a time."

1986 was an auspicious year for Johnson. She received the National Cartoonists Society award for Best Humour Strip. She was the youngest winner and the first woman. "I was surprised. Jim Davis who does *Garfield* was up too and I had planned on congratulating him. When I heard that I had won, I was on the verge of tears. The support was great."

The only problem, Johnson had with the award was where to put the trophy. "I got home with the statue and put it on the shelf in the studio . . . but then I was afraid to go back to work. I had a strong sense of not recognizing my own studio."

"I was worried so I started writing to Charles Schulz and the phone rang . . . it was him and he explained that he had had a similar experience with the statue."

"I ended up hiding it, so that I could go back to work."

As the creator of a strip which deals with family life, Johnson receives a lot of mail. "People write me really personal letters, asking for advice, reminiscing or telling me stories about things their kids do."

As for Johnson's kids, "I encourage them to read comics. They watch altogether too much television. We'll all become vidiots."



Platoon: look at Vietnam from the foxhole

Platoon
Orion Pictures
West Mall 8

review by Dean Bennett

Seeing the Vietnam war from a grunt's eye-view is what *Platoon* is all about. "Grunt" was the term used to describe the US foot soldiers and this film is their story.

Platoon follows PFC Chris Taylor (Charlie Sheen) on his tour of duty in 1967-68. Through his eyes we see the day to day hardships of the GI's who fought the war in the jungle. Their daily routine consisted mainly of "humping it" through the jungle in 100 degree Fahrenheit heat and incessant monsoon weather; this drudgery was interrupted only by trip wire mines and firefights.

Platoon was written and directed by Vietnam veteran Oliver Stone, who wrote and directed *Salvador* — a film about Central America. Stone was in Vietnam in 1967-68 and *Platoon* is based on his experiences there.

One of the notable aspects of the film is its attention to detail. The platoon in the film, like the platoons in Vietnam, are predominantly composed of young, uneducated, black Americans. And the film does not shy away from depicting the uglier side of American activities: GI's killing civilians, burning villages. They would cut off the ears of dead North Vietnamese soldiers and wear them as perverse badges of honor.

In fact, one method Stone used to get a more realistic performance out of his actors was to send them deep into the Philippine jungle. (The entire film was shot in the Philippines). There, under the direction of retired Marine captain Dale Dye, the thirty or so actors underwent thirteen days of field training. They were issued field equipment, had to dig and sleep in two-man foxholes, eat cold army rations, and go on numerous full-gear patrols. From there they went directly into shooting the



film.

Giving good performances along with Sheen are Tom Berenger (*Rustler's Rhapsody*, *The Big Chill*) as the deranged but fearsome Sergeant Barnes and William Defoe (*To Live and Die in L.A.*, *Streets of Fire*) as Sergeant Elias — a man who must

reconcile his conscience with his actions and the actions of the GI's in Vietnam.

What troubled Elias' soul was what troubled the entire platoon, was what troubled the American conscience in Vietnam. *Platoon* does not make excuses or try to justify what America did in Southeast Asia. Rather, Stone presents the madness, the chaos, the contradictions the GI's had to face every day and wonders if anybody in their position would have responded differently. The GI's had to fight a war the US did not seem to want to win. For example, the soldiers would normally be ordered to fly in and overrun hills held

by North Vietnamese. But once the hills were taken they would fly out again and the enemy would just walk back in. They were supposed to win the hearts and minds of villagers who didn't want them there. They had to fight an enemy they rarely saw, and had to deal with civilians who they knew were helping the North Vietnamese but to kill them was to, well, kill civilians.

Platoon, then, is the story of some ordinary people and tries to make you understand what could be natural reactions to very unnatural circumstances.