

arts & entertainment

Not the usual movie review

by Mark Farmer

Gosh-darn those artsy film-types! The Wormwood's film didn't arrive in time to review, so here's a new film at the NFB that just played at Wormwood's and another at the Oxford that should have played at Wormwood's. Let me explain why....

Fat Chance, The Big Prejudice, which just finished at Wormwood's, is a documentary about Rick Zakowich, 400 lbs and determined to cut his weight in half, thus finding the real Rick hidden underneath. Corny, right? Wrong. It definitely could have been corny, but Zakowich is a natural-born comedian and likeable as hell. He's a blues singer, a counsellor for kids from broken homes and a loving father, but as the story unfolds he describes how hollow and depressed the weight makes him feel. He explains how he's hated that part of himself, how the fat determines what you can and can't do from childhood on, as real a ball and chain as any.

The film isn't about dieting and exercise—Rick only loses 30 lbs in six months. It's about learning to

love, or at least accept, what you are. Rick forms a self-help group, and ends up at a conference for obese people where he meets folks who realize they're fat, accept they're never going to be thin, but know how to love themselves and lead a full life anyway. The film succeeds because it never lets itself get uselessly sentimental. The people tell stories full of rage and tears, but Rick's usually there with his sense of humour to keep it all on an even keel.

I hate to use words like "lookism," but you get a real sense of it in this film. Lookism keeps beating these people down, like the humiliation of not being able to get into a wash-room stall, the "it's your own fault, so do something about it" lie, being conditioned to hate yourself from childhood on. It's a real kick-in-the-seat to see these people weeping openly about their childhood experiences.

Fat Chance is amusing, and best of all, eye-opening. Don't assume you know what obesity is until you see this film. B+

Fat Chance is available for rent at the National Film Board, 5475 Spring Garden Rd.

Barcelona is the film that should have been at Wormwood's. It's quite artsy-fartsy and has very little in common with *Jurassic Park* or *Last Action Hero*, so why is it playing at Empire Theatres? Dunno.

What I do know is *Barcelona* is a light, sophisticated take on male-female relationships and the angst they provoke, sort of a cross between *The Big Chill* and *My Dinner with Andre*.

Barcelona opens with two cousins, Ted, a sensitive, introverted intellectual, working as a corporate salesman while trying to find true love, and Fred, a navy lieutenant with the I.Q. of a retarded clam. Fred comes to visit cousin Ted in Barcelona, and also get a cheap lay. He's not at all vulgar—quite to the contrary, he's very smooth, just anti-intellectual and quite the lady's man until he's shot in the head for being a fascist American.

Barcelona takes place mostly as a series of long conversations about relationships in the 90s after the sexual revolution, what men and women expect out of them, myths, stereotypes and all the emotional baggage people bring into them —

not your usual commercial cinema fare, but very entertaining if you like sparkling wit and charming characters. Otherwise you could get very, very bored.

Barcelona is a lot like a white wine: light, dry, sophisticated and sparkling. Whoa—what a comparison! But it's true. This is an unassuming, lighthearted, subtle film, and not everybody's cup or tea. Or wine.

Taylor Nichols is wonderfully naive as Ted, whose concept of 'swinging single' is an evening of reading from Leviticus while spinning around his apartment, doing the cha-cha. He's the sensitive, new-wave 90s kind-of-guy. Chris Eigeman as Fred is everyone's worst nightmare from the Reagan 80s. None too smart, he's always finding himself arguing for the side of the American military and all its righteous global policing. He's a shallow boob in the true 80s mould and brainlessly pro-American, but oddly enough I never even considered hating the guy, because he's funny, not at all vicious,

and speaks from the top of his head in a blunt, charming way. He's a great foil for Ted's naivete.

The Barcelonan women in the film seem amused and bemused by the American cousins. They're realistic about relationships, and don't believe in North American notions of romantic love.

One scene will stick with me for life I'm sure, where Ted and Fred are sitting in a disco opposite their Spanish love interests, Bee-Gees music and all. Ted asks whether women are looking for commitment and a deeper meaning in relationships to fulfil their lives. The women look at Ted as if he had just sprouted a third arm and utter a resounding "No, no, no...." Ahhh. Such is love in the 90s.

Barcelona is funny and will provide food for thought for anybody between puberty and, say, 45. But if you're looking for action to glue dialogue together, you had better look elsewhere. B+

Barcelona is playing at the Oxford on Quinpool Rd.

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