

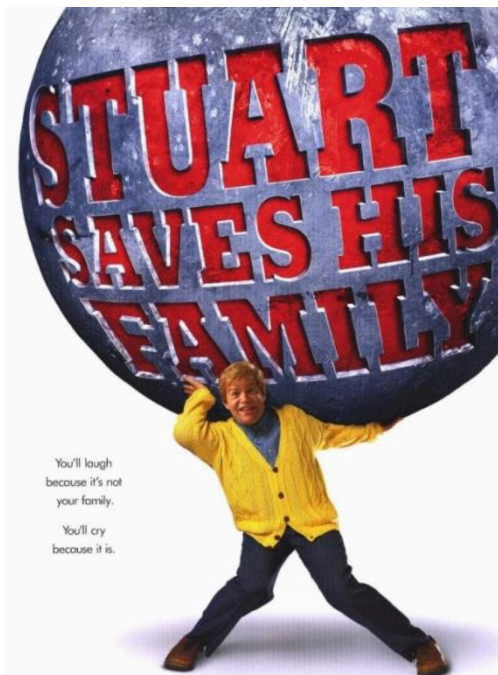
**Video & Book Review**  
**STUART SAVES HIS FAMILY**  
Sep 1998

A lot of what drives my MOVIE MONDAY project is my love of sharing my discoveries. The book and video I most recommend these days is Al Franken's "STUART SAVES HIS FAMILY" The book was originally published as "I'm Good Enough, I'm Smart Enough, And Doggone It, People Like Me". It's a year in the life of Stuart Smalley, a character Al Franken developed for Saturday Night Live.

With the encouragement of Melody Beattie, a self-help author, Franken's fallible but well-meaning character (aren't we all) undertakes to write a daily affirmations book. What results is a roller coaster ride through a year in Stuart's life.

It's a journey that anyone who's been through the gambit of trying to get one's life on course can identify with. In spite of chronic self-esteem problems, entrenched family alcoholism and a brother's recreational drug abuse, eating disorders, a sister's marital catastrophes, employment and physical image insecurity, Stuart keeps on trying. He belongs to several

support groups and 12 step programs, even has a precarious self-help show on a cable TV network. In spite of his good intentions he often humorously and sympathetically falls off the wagon. Even his sponsors are fallible. But it's all moving in a positive direction.



Some of his affirmation titles are what you might expect; I WILL LOVE MY INNER CHILD! and I WILL NOT BE OVERWHELMED! (he is). Some are foreboding; ALCOHOLISM IS A CUNNING, BAFFLING, AND POWERFUL DISEASE! VI. Some oddly hopeful in a Smalley way; THIS TIME I WAS IN BED FOR ONLY FIVE DAYS! Others are much less conventional; I AM IN JAIL! , MY FAMILY IS SUING ME! , and DAD SHOT DONNIE!

It's the best self help book I've seen because it is so accessible - precisely because of all Stuart's weaknesses. Who wants to hear about someone moving relentlessly along the "right path"? Stuart starts out the New Year turning a new leaf, determined to write a great book of daily affirmations,

but by Jan. 6th he's bed-ridden in a "shame spiral". "Stinkin' thinkin'" as he calls it. His last entry is I'M A FRAUD! There is a sputtering attempt to start again but finally he emerges on Feb. 7th from a graham-cracker-crumby bed with I WILL BOUNCE BACK! And so we follow him through his tribulations and successes throughout the year. It's in bite-sized pieces so it's great if you're not up to a big read but you come to care about our protagonist so much it's hard to put the book down.

I discovered the video through a friend and presented it at MOVIE MONDAY. It was one of our best, most positive mental health promoting events. It's a terrific adaptation of the book. Instantly accessible. Only later when my son introduced me to another of Franken's hilarious but insightful works "RUSH LIMBAUGH IS A BIG FAT IDIOT" did we find the book behind the movie.

I've found 6 copies of the book so far in second hand stores for myself, as gifts for friends, and to circulate from our informal support group library. For \$6.50 and under it's about the best investment in mental health you can make. I'm glad I found it. And as Stuart says, "THAT ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE, IT'S NOT JUST A PLATITUDE!"

The 1995 movie is rentable for a buck at any discerning video store. Maltin gives it only 2 stars but don't be dissuaded, it's great! And if you think your problems are not anything like Stuart's, remember another Stuartism - "DENIAL AIN'T JUST A RIVER IN EGYPT!"

Let me know what you think of it!

Bruce Saunders