

June 17, 1999

To Joan Clement & Conference Committee

## Movie Monday comes to Washington

At next year's conference I would like to demonstrate Movie Monday's novel use of films with facilitated discussions.

In six years of showing films at MOVIE MONDAY I've found no better way to broaden the discourse about mental illness and recovery. Popular films are, well, popular and people who are not already involved find themselves drawn into thoughtful discussion about the many issues around mental illness.

I've found that films dovetail with psychosocial rehab in many ways. Such presentations would illustrate the power of movies as a therapeutic device and as a way of increasing the vocabulary between therapists and clients.

If you haven't seen *Shine*\*, *Benny & Joon*, and *Don Juan de Marcos* how do you know what everyone's talking about? The folks who are "being rehabbed" are watching films with themes and characters that illustrate experiences of mental illness. Even negative and skewed portrayals can be excellent opportunities for communication about issues. *Benny & Joon* was the my first venture into this process. It was a film I at first rejected as a biased Hollywoodized view of a mental illness scenario. I learned a lot, especially from other ex-patients about the realities of the experience.

Stories of recovery are incredibly valuable to those who are losing hope and also to parents and practitioners who see people at their worst. David Helfgott's story, *Shine*, is as important in recovery as any medication or care plan. Through that film, which won an Academy Award and had David himself playing piano, "*Flight of the Bumble Bee*", for mega millions on Oscars night, the world moved a quantum leap forward in it's acceptance, compassion, and hope for people with mental illnesses. There's lots to talk about around a film like that. Who knows, the Helfgotts might show up if invited!

Same with *Dialogues With Madwomen*. That film made a huge impression as part of my program. (see my correspondence with director Allie Light - she would be keen to present her film, available from [wmm.com](http://wmm.com)) Allie

lives in New York and could come to present the film if IAPSRS wanted to go the distance.

There are other great choices as well. A terrific doc about *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* has great general interest but also a very strong rehab theme. Called *Completely Cuckoo* and 90 min. long, it has all the background scoop on the most famous and infamous mental institution film ever and includes the voices of Ken Kesey and screen writer Bo Goldman who guide us to the heart of the film. People will engage in the process.

I asked Dr. Don Milliken, chief of our psych hospital, to lead the discussion about *As Good As It Gets*. A really key point he expressed was the recognition of the moment when Nicholson's character resolves to try to address his OCD problem. He has a reason to change. That's the motivation that any therapist looks for. That's the kind of contribution that comes forth when people from various disciplines as well as lay folks and those with the hard found knowledge join in the process. The common experience of the dramatization, just watched, gives the specific ground to build on. Dr. M told me recently he has since prescribed the film to some patients who are struggling with OCD.

I'd like to show features in the evenings, maybe a workshop on how my project was born and thrived and how it works to keep me well, another whole aspect of *Movie Monday*. For many people finding that intriguing passion and nurturing it is instrumental to real recovery. I've recognized it as the heart of many success stories.

Some shorter pieces might be shown during the day - I'm not short of excellent titles covering art therapy, housing, Alzheimer's. . . There are some really funny and wise animation pieces too.

Even to make delegates aware of the titles that are available would be a big benefit. People could be asked to bring some suggestions and their experience of how they were helpful to their clients or families or to broaden their own perspective. We've got our own catalogue with brief descriptions. A video info swap!

What you'd need is a room with a few hundred seats. I wouldn't get much bigger than 200 - beyond a certain size the discussion aspect breaks down. Or maybe smaller groups could break out if more want to view the film together. Equipment: a VHS or better video playback system, video projector, amp,

speakers and a 16ft or so wide screen. The room could be made smaller for daytime events perhaps. Public performance rites would be required, and might be negotiated - some distributors of educational material might consider it a promotion if their product was made available....it's a pretty focused market. (I would guess a chance to preview the Bonnie Tapes' makers new product would have been jumped at at this year's conference.)

I'd like my way paid and an honorarium would be great. I'd sure like to do it but it's right in the middle of my busiest gardening period, I'll have to hire help to keep my livelihood together. I'd like not to have to go backward to contribute my idea to the conference.

Inclusion of films and focused discussions would add another innovative dimension to any conference agenda. I'm sure it would be a great enhancement to the field of rehab - I can see it working at your next conference and I'd like to help make it happen.

Yours sincerely,

Bruce Saunders

\*Don't be embarrassed about Shine, I can't even get my funders to my events to see what we're doing with film. And line workers are so exhausted with their struggles during their work days that the last thing they want to do is see more craziness in their time off.

The book by Gillian, the woman who married and restored David Helfgott to the world concert stage, is described on the back of one of my programs (I was pleased to see come back to me in the consumer committee packet, thanks Joan). I Love You To Bits And Pieces. It's a great read. Gillian Helfgott was recognized at Can.MHA's conference for her incredible efforts.

Another great doc. is Jupiter's Wife, have you seen it?

