

Monday 14 Apr 2003

### **My Name Is Walter Cross**

A new, realistic film about schizophrenia. Walter most reminds me of Spalding Grey's SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA. Our rumpled protagonist tells us what his experience is like, how he feels about the pills, his brushes with the system, the isolation, where he finds comfort - his life from his perspective. No terrific effects, phoenix-like turn around, or Spider-like creepiness. Just what it's really like for many.

MY NAME IS WALTER CROSS is a film that portrays schizophrenia. The star of this piece is not a Nobel Prize winner. Nor is he a mumbling, stumbling, monochromatic, dangerous stereotype used (Spider-like) to advance a creepy plot.

The film Walter most reminds me of is Spalding Grey's SWIMMING TO CAMBODIA. Just a guy sitting at a table, most of the 51-minute running time, delivering a spellbinding monologue about his life. If Spalding Grey had schizophrenia ....

He lines up medication containers in front of him and talks about the trials of coping with the "zines and the peens", talks about the loneliness, the voices, poverty, estrangement, pills, and paranoia that haunt his life.

In a tour de force actor Marcel Aymar portrays a weary middle-aged man, straw hair, stubbled chin, rumpled sports coat. The remarkable thing about the piece is that this man's rambling soliloquy is not interrupted by a voice of authority or cutaways to other helpful information, but stays with him. Hears him out. He's allowed to say his piece, to complain about the meds and the unhelpful 'help' he's received from "the System", the loss of friends to suicide. He also talks about where he does find peace and people who give him comfort in his uncomfortable world. It's the view from his perspective.

By the end we have a very real picture of this man's life. It's not a pleasant one. But we admire his intelligence, his spirit, and his perseverance. He's real and we care about him.

I think writer/director David Dawson has achieved something quite special with this project. It was a breakthrough moment when the world-wide audience realized they were sharing John Nash's delusion in A BEAUTIFUL MIND. Nash's is a one of a kind story. Anyone will come away from watching WALTER with an equally intense impression of what schizophrenia can really be like. Unfortunately Walter's experience is a more common one. And so all the more important for us to share.

This is an excellent film to provoke discussion, and to help others understand at least one example of the reality of living with schizophrenia. Walter would be an ideal film for any mental health related library.

David Dawson is a psychiatrist, (born at our Jubilee Hospital, past Chief of Psychiatry at the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital), and is determined to present the real experience lived by many who live with this difficult condition. Walter's character is built from real people he has worked with, one individual particularly. Building on the strengths of this first modest production Dawson has produced a feature film DRUMMERBOY, that premiered in in his home town April/03.

At Movie Monday we screened Walter April 14/03 with a short film about a local artist named Hans Fear presented by his friend Jay Rathore. Hans had schizophrenia and struggled with the illness before succumbing to suicide in 2001 at age 31. The two films sparked a lively and balanced discussion on the condition and treatment.

On Monday Aug 25 /03 we'll be screening My Name is Walter Cross again, this time with Dr David Laing Dawson with us in person for what promises to be a most engrossing Q&A. I hope we'll get some glimpses of his new feature DRUMMERBOY that has been submitted to the Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver Film Festivals.