

Movie review on the analysis of the pursuit of happiness

[Family](#), [Father](#)



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Introduction

Set in the timeframe of 1981, 'The Pursuit of Happyness' is based on the real life story of Chris Gardner who ascended from a destitute to a stock market magnate. Cast in the role of Gardner, Will Smith did an astounding job in essaying the character to perfection. The movie bagged many accolades and awards upon its release in 2006. The most notable one was the Academy Award rewarded to Will Smith for best male actor. The opening scene gives a glimpse of the phrase 'Pursuit of Happiness' as mentioned by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that the Americans are entitled to the right of "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness." The word happiness is very elusive, meaning different to different people. According to Aristotle, "Happiness is the meaning and the purpose of life, the whole aim and end of human existence" and Tryon Edwards on the other hand states that "Happiness is like manna; it is to be gathered in grains, and enjoyed every day" (Nick Bostrom & Milan M. Cirkovic). Chris Gardner reflects upon the meaning of pursuit of happiness as enumerated in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal by God and among certain rights blessed upon them by their Creator are the right to 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.' He realizes that happiness is elusive and despite pursuing it with unyielding zeal, happiness might skip his grip. The essence of the movie is brought forth by an ingenious application of different mediums; the time period of the story, close-up wide shots and deliberate misspelling of the word happiness, the father-son relationship, 5 definitive chapters and the significance of Rubik's cube and scanner.

The Time Period

The movie is set in a period when the US was going through a severe recession. Following the increase of business bankruptcies by 50% in 1981, the US and many developed countries around the world encountered one of the worst recessions in 1980s with unemployment rate going above 10% in the US. The condition of unemployment didn't improve in United States until 1985. The economic policy of tax cuts employed by the then US President Reagan to improve the condition compounded the recession further and therefore the recession is termed as 'Reagan recession' by many intellectuals. Paul Volcker, Federal Reserve Chairman deployed a restrictive monetary policy to control the high inflation rate by increasing the interest rates which contributed to the increase of unemployment rates, highest since Great Depression. The effects of the recession were felt all over the US. Many important industries including automobile, steel manufacturing and housing suffered a steep plummet in the business. The worst sufferers were the financial houses, mainly banks and savings and loan industry. Due to high inflation rate and job cuts throughout the recession period, people in the US were struggling for mere survival by making both ends meet. They pursued happiness by putting up a fight to get through the trying time as we see in the movie how Gardner was trying to survive his ordeal. The dashed dreams and lost hopes might have knocked many people into momentary depression and anxiety but since the effect of recession reached people of all climes, they were bound by a common purpose of overcoming their hardship.

Close-up shots and Misspelling

Throughout the film, various close-up wide shots have been used to capture the expressions on the face of the characters throughout the movie. For instance, in the scene in which both Gardner and son would spend the night locked inside a public restroom, the child would sleep peacefully with his head on his father's lap and someone would bang on the door. The close angle shot would not capture any movement, just the turn of the head of Will Smith to capture his reaction to the banging. The uncommon spelling of 'happyness' used in the title of the movie is borrowed from a graffiti drawn on the outside wall of the daycare facility attended by Gardner's son Christopher. The misspelling of the word happiness has hidden connotations. First, the 'y' in the word makes it conspicuous for us to notice and the underlying meaning is not to take happiness lightly. Gardner was irritated when he caught sight of the misspelt word on the outside wall of the daycare his son visited in Chinatown. He even pinpointed the misspelling to the caregiver of the daycare in order to ensure that his son received proper education. The misspelling showed his pursuit of perfecting his role of fatherhood so that no modicum of heedlessness remains in the upbringing of his son.

Father-son Relationship

The driving force of the movie was the relationship shared by the father and son. The role of Christopher portrayed by Will Smith's own son Jaden Smith made Will blaze the screen with an earnest representation of a passionate and persistent father. The journey of rags to riches put up on screen

throughout the movie would touch the cords of every viewer's heart for the father and son agonized by their struggles. While Gardener's wife tired of the dire financial state left her husband and son behind and flew to New York, Gardener couldn't shrug off his responsibility as a father. Having grown up himself without a father, he didn't want his son to suffer the same fate as was evident when he said, " I met my father for the first time when I was 28 years old. I made up my mind that when I had children, my children were going to know who their father was."

Gardener while fighting with his untoward situation found a ray of sunshine when he got

a non-paying internship at an investment firm. Throughout the internship for 6 months, Gardener and his son struggled together to make better out of their hard times. They were thrown out of the apartment for not paying rents and started living in a motel. They spent a harrowing night sleeping in the restroom of a subway station and finally took refuge in a homeless shelter. Around this time of struggle, the love and faith shared by the father-son duo strengthened and sweetened their relationship. It was their unwavering support for each other that would ultimately get them through the hard time. There was a particular scene in which Christopher would relate the well-known joke about a drowning man refusing the help of rescuers in motorboats again and again saying that God would help him. After the man drowned and went to heaven, he confronted the God asking why God had not saved him to which God answered " I sent three boats for you. What were you waiting for?" (The Pursuit of Happyness Quotes). So poignantly a little child Christopher with his innocent story sent such a big message to his

father who realized thereupon that despite things looking bleak, their rescue boat had arrived in the guise of internship.

The basketball scene in the movie captures Gardner giving an important message to his son, which brings out the supportive side of his fatherhood. While playing basketball with Christopher, Gardner would tell him that there was no use practicing the basketball as he himself didn't turn out to be good in it and it would be same for Christopher also. The son feeling discouraged by his father's statement would drop the ball and pack it in a plastic bag when Gardner would firmly tell him, " Don't ever let somebody tell you you can't do something, not even me. Alright? You got a dream, you gotta protect it. People can't do something themselves, they wanna tell you you can't do it. If you want something, go get it, period" (The Pursuit of Happyness Quotes)

Definitive Chapters of Gardner's Life

Gardner defined his life by 5 chapters - riding the bus, being stupid, running, internship and happiness. Riding the bus refers to the episode when Gardner would travel round the town in bus. Its significance lies in the fact that the bus is a mode of conveyance for common man which boxes in his ambitions, and after getting down from the bus one day Gardner would spot a big-ticket luxury car which, he came to know upon enquiry, belonged to a stockbroker. Outside the stock firm, he would only see happy faces which bred an aspiration in him to do something out of the box by being a stockbroker. Being Stupid refers to that chapter of his life when in quest for a job as a stockbroker, he arrived at Dean Witter Reynolds, a well-reputed stock

enterprise and outside the building he made the mistake of trusting a hippie girl for guarding his scanner. The hippie girl ran off with the scanner and by the time Gardner chased her down the street, it was too late. Running is that chapter of his life marked by his running all the time for something or the other. First he would spot the hippie girl again and would run after her to retrieve the stolen scanner. Then after his wife Linda due to being unable to put up the stress of poor financial condition left him, he would be in sole charge of his son when alongside working double shifts, he had to take care of his son. Internship is the beginning of change in Gardner 's life for the better. In this part of life, he would appear for an interview at Dean Witter Reynolds in complete disheveled state due to spending the preceding night in jail and despite that he would get selected for internship without payment for 6 months because of his wit and tenacity. Though the internship was highly competitive with 20 interns fighting for one job, he wanted to give it a shot. 20 interns fighting for one job is a manifestation of joblessness in 1980's USA. Happiness is the final part of the movie when after months of going through strenuous hardship of backbreaking double shifts, homelessness and insecurity, Gardner would be offered the job of a broker at Dean Witter Reynolds.

Rubik's Cube and the Scanner

The Rubik's Cube plays a significant role in the life of Gardner. While selling a scanner, Gardner came across a man called Jay Twistle who was a manager at Dean Witter Reynolds and during a short ride in cab he impressed him by solving the puzzle of the cube which was no less than a feat because solving

the puzzle required dexterity not everyone's cup of tea. The man was speechless in awe and surprise. It helped Gardner make an impression while getting the job later at Dean Witter. The Rubik's cube is a symbol of the pursuit of happiness. Rubik's cube consists of multiple colored squares which need to be arranged in the same row to solve the puzzle, one color each side. Gardner's life is an unsolved Rubik's cube where the squares of his life are laid in haphazard order. He was trying to put the squares in perfect semblance against all odds. Just as the pursuit of happiness is a perpetual struggle the end result of which is elusive to many, same way solving the Rubik puzzle is a continuous effort the end result of which eludes many. The bone density scanner that is heavy and weighs about 40 pounds is a reflection of Gardner's mounting responsibility on his shoulder. The scanner also represents the burden of problems in his life. His state of homelessness, his wife's leaving him and his son on their own, the difficulty in selling the scanners, his inability to pay parking tickets or taxi fare, his joining of an unpaid training program are all reflected by his continuous burden of carrying the scanner. While running away from a cab driver because he couldn't pay the taxi fare, he lost one of his scanners in the subway station which he would later retrieve from a demented man, but the scanner would be in damaged state just like his ragged life. Since he was unable to sell the damaged scanner, he would sell his blood to fix the broken bulb of the scanner and same way in order to hide the ravaged condition of his life, he would wash and iron clothes to appear normal in the street and in the business so that people didn't get to know about his spending nights in a shelter.

Conclusion

Based on the real life story of Chris Gardner, the film by Gabriele Muccino showcases the inspiring journey of a man from rags to riches. The role of Gardner played by Will Smith was executed to perfection by Smith's commendable performance. The opening scene provides a glimpse of the phrase 'Pursuit of Happiness' and later on we see Gardner realizing that happiness is elusive involving constant act of pursuit. Based in the background of 1981 when the US was going through one of its worst recession and economic downfall with employment rate going above 10%, the movie captures the real suffering of American people at that time, their poor financial condition, homelessness and lack of jobs. Throughout the struggling period of Gardner's life, Gardner got support from his 5 years old son who with his innocent stories ultimately made him realize that the savior was around the corner under the cover of internship. Through categorizing the struggling period of his life into five different chapters, Gardner brought forth the significance each chapter held in his life. The Rubik's Cube that helped him make an impression on the manager of Dean Witter Reynolds was symbolic of Gardner's disarrayed life. The bone density scanner that he carried on his shoulder all along was the representation of the onus of problems. His unwavering fortitude and perseverance in the face of struggles and his persistent pursuit of happiness ultimately brought him closer to his goal when upon bagging the job of a broker he summed up, "This part of my life this little part is called 'Happiness'" (The Pursuit of Happiness Quotes).

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