

I am sam film review



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Jessie Nelson's heart-warming drama - I Am Sam - is Nelson's second work he has both directed and written. A gentle, yet impactful film, the story revolves around several dysfunctional, yet essentially loving relationships, the most important being that between the characters portrayed by Sean Penn, and Dakota Fanning. It is a family-friendly film with strong messages about love, friendship and the argument of whether what is true is always what is best. At just over two hours long, the film is linked together with various covers of Beatle's songs, entwined between poignant scenes, all captured through a blissfully innocent child-like lens.

The story is one that is universal, and can be related to on any level, shallow or deep. Set in a suburban town in the mid-west of the U. S. A the scenery, storyline, and themes of the film at first sight, seem achingly ordinary. But it is this that makes the film so touching, the outstanding performances given by both Penn and Fanning, shine light on the extraordinary characters and interweaving storylines that can be pulled out of the seemingly dull and ordinary landscape we are so often surrounded with.

The film begins with Sam Dawson (Penn) sorting sugar packets with obsessive-compulsive precision at the Starbucks he has worked at for almost half a decade. As he rushes to the hospital to witness the birth of his child, lights begin moving and the first twangs of The Beatle's Lucy In The Sky With Diamonds begins playing, filling the audience with an inner view of Dawson's confusion and distress, the flashing lights and murky sound bring us crashing back into reality - Dawson has the mental capacity of a seven year old, and the homeless woman he got pregnant, has run and left him with a child he cannot possibly know how to raise.

As he takes this newborn girl (now named Lucy) home, and opens his flat, we are introduced to the place that is so integral to his entire world. With Beatles' records on the shelves, and posters of Lennon and McCartney on the walls, he sets up a hammock for the baby, and kisses her on the forehead. As the camera pans around the humble apartment, the audience understands that to Sam Dawson having a child is as simple as the Beatles say it is - All You Need Is Love. As Lucy Dawson grows older, Sam adapts to take care of her the way she needs.

Their daily routines are punctuated by the amusing presence of Sam's four best friends - all with mental disabilities of their own. But everyday is filled with struggles. As Lucy tries to grow and change, and experiment new things as a child, she clashes with her father who needs structure and normality to keep him calm and functioning. Even things as simple as going to a burger joint instead of IHOP on a Wednesday night turns into a fiesta of confusion and distress for Sam and anxiety and embarrassment for Lucy.

And most heartbreaking, is when Sam can no longer read Lucy her schoolbooks, Lucy refuses to continue learning - she doesn't want to be smarter than her father. At this point the child and family department steps in, and deeming Sam incapable of taking care of Lucy, removes Lucy from her home. From this point the movie is a tangle of confusion, misunderstandings and arguments. Sam takes the firm decision to employ prestigious lawyer Rita Williams (Michelle Pfeiffer) to help him win Lucy back.

At first Rita refuses as Sam doesn't have the money, but then decides to take him on Pro Bono - simply in an effort to prove to her friends she's not heartless. Over the next few weeks, as Rita struggles to put together a case

with almost nothing to go on and no witnesses with mental capacity greater than Sam's, the difficulties in Rita's life and family come to light as well, and Sam begins to teach the cold hearted lawyer about the simplicity of love. This is a touching movie, with huge emphasis on the depth of the characters.

Close up shots of the emotions running over each Character's faces help the audience be in touch and connect with the characters on a personal level. The use of hand held camera, and the too fast panning around scenes is a technique that pulls the audience into a tangible understanding of Dawson's stress and confusion when faced with new or unfamiliar situations. The writing is almost flawless, and the use of The Beatles songs and symbolisms weaved throughout the scenes is an essential glue to hold the story together.

I Am Sam, is the winner of eight awards, and has been nominated for several others. Most of these awards were for the touching and incomparable performance by Fanning, as the young Lucy Dawson, and two were for the writing of the screenplay by Jessie Nelson. It is not a film without fault, the murky storyline at both the beginning and end leaves the audience questioning what has happened, and how the plot has moved to certain points, and the sub plot of Rita William's life is an overused cliché.

Overall it is a beautiful masterpiece that for Jessie Nelson's second work ought to be given the highest of praise. I would recommend it for any audience, family, young children, or adult. While the ideas explored in the film are vastly important and controversial, it is a film based on two seven year olds at heart, and can be watched by any age group, and touch the audience in many ways.