

Movies cast irresistible spell 26

Last night it happened again. I became Celie in the movie "The Color Purple."

It's not the first time this has happened to me.

A few years ago I became Debra Winger's character in the movie "Terms of Endearment."

A few weeks ago I became Sonny, Gene Hackman's feisty daughter from the movie "Twice in a Lifetime."

When I entered the theater last night I was myself. I was a normal girl with a decent job, a nice family, a good education, and an overall happy life.

Metamorphosis

But at some point during the two-hour film a metamorphosis took place.

When I left the theater I was a black woman who had been raped repeatedly by her stepfather, terrorized by her "husband," cruelly separated from her sister, and embittered by her hard world.

Throughout the movie I felt beaten, abused, oppressed, and, eventually, strong enough to buck the system.

When I left, I took all my resentment against my society — black men, white women, and white men — with me.

Let me tell you something, it's no piece of cake being a Southern black woman in the early 1900's.

As I was leaving the theater, I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Rodney, a very nice young black kid a few years behind me at college.

"Hi," he said. Part of me felt like hissing at him.

"You black woman oppressor," my mind screamed silently.

Another part of me wanted to hug him and comfort him.

That was the part that pictured him as Harpo, Celie's son-in-law whose feisty wife is imprisoned and beaten by whites for eight years.

Instead I took a deep breath, regained my composure, and cordially returned his greeting.

Similar problem

My cousin Mary has a similar problem. She also becomes totally immersed in the movie world.

"One time Bruce and I were at a movie," she confessed, "and he went out to get some popcorn."

"While he was gone, a car chase



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Karen Cubie

back into the theater, and there I was, crouched down behind the seat ahead of me, dodging bullets.

"He was so embarrassed, I couldn't get him to go to a movie with me for a while."

An emotional wreck

I was an emotional wreck after watching "Terms of Endearment."

Somewhere around the middle of the movie, my nose started to stream.

But it wasn't until the scene where the mother, a leukemia victim, says a forever goodbye to her angry yet grieving children that

the tears started to flow.

By the end of that scene my whole body was wracked with heaving sobs, and I sounded like a fog horn because I was constantly blowing my nose.

My sister was embarrassed to be seen with me.

"Stop it!" she whispered loudly throughout the film, thrusting her elbow into my side. "STOP IT!!!"

I moped around the house for days afterwards.

"You should never see these things when you're tired," my mother scolded later. "Don't you see what you do to yourself?"

Living vicariously

Even before I was a movie-goer I lived life vicariously through fictional characters.

One of my favorite books when I was little was one called *The Little Princess*.

It's about a girl whose wealthy parents die, leaving her a penniless orphan in a boarding school for rich little girls.

Sara, the little princess, sinks from her pampered position as the wealthiest little girl in the house to that of the lowest serving girl before she is rescued from poverty by a man indebted to her father.

Whenever I read that book I became Sara.

I'd curl up with it alone and pour myself right into the little princess's little life.

"Karen, come set the table," Mom would yell.

When I put the book down, all my rage against Sara's oppressors would be directed at her.

A dangerous world

The movie world is a dangerous one for me.

I never know when I'll absorb a movie character's life or who I'll be when I leave the theater.

Maybe the answer is to swear off dramas and watch only comedies.

If I did that, though, I'm afraid I'd spend the rest of my life as Pee Wee Herman.



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