

POINTS OF VIEW

Movie offerings fall short of past years'

The Irving and Doreale Goldman family of Franklin wanted to go to the movies Saturday night. But there was no film they wanted to see.

Now that might not be so strange in your household or mine — but two visiting members of the Goldman family, their daughter Meg and son-in-law Larry Kasdan, are high-profile film makers.

"We couldn't find one," Kasdan confided to a sell-out audience of 500 at Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills Monday night. "American movies have never been worse. They respect nothing and deal with nothing."

To Kasdan, they are empty packages beautifully produced.

Larry and Meg and their two sons, Jake, 21, and Jon, 16, were in town from their home in Los Angeles so Larry could deliver the second Eli Master Memorial Scholarship Fund Lecture that helps fund the training of humanistic Jewish rabbis.

Kasdan has directed, written and/or

produced 16 feature films, has four Oscar nominations and won the Writer's Guild Award for his favorite movie, "The Big Chill."

Yet he is disillusioned with the industry he worked so hard to join. It's hard being a humanist in Hollywood, he says.

"I'm a part of Hollywood but I do not feel a part of it," he said. "I'm trying to do honorable work but I feel a stranger in the world I struggled to enter."

Much of his talk dealt with that struggle. Born in Miami Beach and raised in West Virginia, his parents divorced and his father died in his early teens.

The movies were his escape and became his passion, showing in the late '60s their differentiation between good and evil. Today's films show violence for its own sake.

In films such as "The Magnificent Seven" and "The Great Escape," he found heroes and values.

"Film made its values tangible for me in the ways that parents, school,



JUDITH DONER BERNE

Sunday School had not. I wanted to live in the world I found in the movies."

At the age of 13, his older brother took him to see "Lawrence of Arabia." "I was 13 years old and I knew what I wanted to do with the rest of my life," he said.

Some of you may know the next part, because it took place in Ann Arbor and our suburbs.

He needed money to attend college and he found out that the University of

Michigan's Hopwood Writing Awards paid well. So he went there and won several — paying his tuition and giving him "recognition and validation."

After college, he was recruited by W.B. Doner & Co. Advertising in Southfield. And although he earned a Clio — advertising's Oscar — his eyes remained glued to Hollywood as he wrote screen plays nights and weekends only to have them rejected.

"I had no alternative plan. This was my mantra. I had to get near the movies."

So, he trucked his wife and young son out to Hollywood, again working in advertising to pay the bills.

When his sixth screenplay, "The Bodyguard" after 17 rejections was purchased by Warner Bros. for an amount he thought they could live on for a year, he quit his ad job.

A mere 2 1/2 months later, Steven Spielberg asked him to write "Raiders of the Lost Ark" and the rest is, as they say, history.

Or is it? Kasdan admits confusion.

The money, for doing something he loves, he says is outlandish. "It's like being in the NBA — you can't relate financial rewards to anything real."

And few in Hollywood share his values — that a film's commercial success does not make it a success. He cares if it meets his expectations and can stand the test of time.

Kasdan's candor impressed audience members like Beth Greenbaum, a teacher at Seaholm High School in Birmingham.

"I thought his condemnation of the industry was very interesting," she said. "We are getting a lot of junk. I'm thankful for the Maple and the Main and the DIA. And I hope the Birmingham Theatre, when it opens, will show good films."

Kasdan said he has no immediate plans for another film. But, hey, Larry. What about a "Big Chill, Part 2?"

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can leave her a voice mail message at (313) 953-2047, ext. 1997.

Critic doesn't have far to look to find excellence

By DENNIS KING

GUEST COLUMNIST

I would like to respond to a question that Mr. Warren Schroeder asked in his guest column found in the Farmington Observer Oct. 26.

In it he asks a question that certainly deserves an answer. "Are other parents also being deceived by the magic of the Outcomes Based Education grading system into believing that their children are attaining academic excellence?"

He also asks the question, "Where's the excellence?"

The best way, I believe, to judge a product is at the end of the assembly line, not midway through the assembly line. To intercept a car midway down the assembly line, try to start it, and then complain because it doesn't start would be ridiculous.

In a similar manner, one should look

at the end product of the Farmington schools to see if, as in his case, the gifted child is given the tools and the desire to soar with the best in the country.

I can speak only from one teacher's perspective, but I do teach the academically gifted in my three classes of accelerated physics and two classes of advanced placement physics. Are my students attaining academic excellence or are the parents of my students being deceived? You be the judge:

■ More than 90 percent of my students who take the advanced placement test in physics pass it. This is the calculus level physics and includes both mechanics and electricity and magnetism. A majority of the students receive a 4's and 5's which is comparable to a college "A" and gives the student 10 hours of college credit at the University of Michigan.

GUEST COLUMN

■ In 1988, 1992, 1993, 1994 and in 1995 the Harrison High School TEAMS (Tests in Engineering Aptitude in Math and Science) team won the state championship in their division and placed 13th, 10th, 7th and last year 9th in the entire country in that competition. Last year only two other schools in the state of Michigan placed in the top 10 schools nationally in their division: Detroit Country Day and Kalamazoo Math and Science.

■ In 1992 Harrison placed first in the Regional Science Bowl in Dayton, Ohio, and was given an all expenses paid trip to Washington, D.C. and last year we placed third in the Regional Science Bowl in Dayton while on the same day up in Flint other students from Harrison High were winning the

state Class A TEAMS competition.

So, even though the district may have to educate all students regardless of ability or family background, I can safely state without fear of contradiction that at Harrison our gifted students "soar" with the best in the country academically.

We hardly "forfeit their child's potential." For parents to pull a student out of Farmington Public Schools because they feel their academically gifted child will not achieve what he/she is capable means that they have not really done their homework. Look at the end product, not what is lacking at some point on the assembly line. My goal as a teacher is to be the "Wind Beneath Their Wings." I believe I reach my goal especially with the gifted students.

Mr. Schroeder asks, "Where's the excellence?" The answer is obvious — at

Harrison. Of course, Harrison is also known for its outstanding program for students at the other end of the spectrum — the emotionally, physically and academically handicapped students.

Harrison also has a state championship football team. Harrison also has a state championship marching band.

Mr. Schroeder, however, was interested in only academic excellence for an academically gifted child.

Harrison has that, too. Mr. Schroeder may consider doing what other parents have done and put his child back into the Farmington Public Schools so that his child can take advantage of the fantastic advanced placement program and save his family a year of college tuition.

Dennis King is a physics teacher at Harrison High School in Farmington Hills.

Local elections showing sweet breath of sanity

The first Tuesday after the first Monday in November is a traditional election date in Michigan, selected no doubt in the 19th Century when agriculture was the base of the economy and farmers had enough of their harvest in to allow them time to vote.

And so on this past Tuesday, thousands of Michiganders went to the polls, voting this year for local municipal offices.

Mayors were elected. Council seats were apportioned. By and large, Michigan voters maintained their reputation as thoughtful and sane participants in the process of representative democracy.

In fact, what strikes me in reflecting on this year's election is the contrast between the relative calm and sanity of our local elections and the perflorid rhetoric of the national partisan debate.

There is no doubt that a fundamental change is taking place in our nation's political life. The resurgent and very ideological Republican Party is driving a paradigm shift in the way we think about government, while the Democratic Party is pointing out that fundamental changes can hurt some people just as much as they can help others.

Michigan voters are beginning to take notice. According to a poll published in the Detroit paper, by a 61-34 margin, Michiganders think the country is headed in the wrong direction. This dissatisfaction is nearly at the same levels as registered just before President George Bush was reelected and, again, just before the Democratic congressional collapse two years later. The same poll found that Michiganders disapprove, 63-31, of the way the GOP-dominated Congress — the core of the conservative revolution — is doing its job.

Another survey found that more than two-thirds of Americans feel that "people like me have almost no say in the political system." That certainly isn't the case with our local elections.

Ordinary people running for ordinary local offices campaigned door to door, setting forth their points of view face-to-face with the voters. Throughout Michigan, candidate forums took place in union halls and libraries. Candidates talked. People asked questions, looked and listened, making up their minds. Some of Tuesday's races were decided by margins as small as a few tens of votes.

One of the things this hometown newspaper does uniquely well is to cover these countless,



PHILIP POWER

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ordinary, sane local elections. It's a job that the big city papers or TV stations don't do.

We cover the speeches and candidate forums. We report on where they stand on the issues. We interview the candidates, treating them not as objects suited for scorn or derision but as decent citizens. And often, we try to sum up our knowledge of the candidates and our understanding of the needs of the community in an endorsement editorial.

As a local, hometown newspaper, this paper lives and dies with the health of the community. If the community thrives, this newspaper is likely to thrive, too.

That's why our endorsements have direct consequences for us that go far beyond the abstractions of Poli. Sci. 101. If good candidates are elected, the community benefits. And as part of the community, this newspaper benefits, too.

That's our obligation to our readers and to our community. And just maybe that's a small part of why local elections in Michigan are so sane and sensible, while the national political debate is so raucous and so negative.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 ext. 1880.

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