

# Survivor shares feelings about being abused



BARBARA SCHIFF

This is wrong. I am a survivor of physical and sexual abuse. In response to your question, when a person is ever whole after these experiences, my answer is no, I have been in therapy for more than five years and I still wrestle with my demons. I wake up screaming in the middle of the night; I have a difficult time trusting anyone; and I am afraid of intimacy.

Quivering from the rage He squeezed my throat tightly Pounding out all that was wrong Until my mouth spit out blood He squeezed my throat tightly His fingers gripping like a vice Until my mouth spit out blood I was hysterically calm His fingers gripping like a vice Meeting my flesh I was hysterically calm His big hands hurt Dear Lols, Thank you very much for your honest and courageous letter. Of all the letters that I have read, this one has moved me the most and has also frightened me. None of us want to believe that atrocities can occur within one's own family experience, so we lie to ourselves and to others to protect ourselves, and to maintain a homeostasis and that will allow us to survive. Forgetting was your method of survival, and your brother's and your husband's. Remembering can sometimes be the first long step toward eventual peace. As you can see I am responding from the heart as you did in your letter. Barbara

I am still discovering the severity of the abuse; there are many things too terrible to remember. Abuse affects the whole family not just the victim. My brother denied that anything happened to him for years, and at 35, unpleasant memories are now coming back to him. Is it a coincidence that I married a man whose father molested his daughters? This, too, was a repressed memory in my husband's family until two years ago. I have been married almost 20 years and this was a real shocker, believe me. Both families began to remember after the death of our parents. Healing is difficult, but my demons and me live a relatively normal, productive, happy life in the suburbs. Here is a poem I wrote to describe my feelings about the physical abuse I encountered. The Big Hand His big hands hurt Quivering from the rage Meeting my flesh Pounding out all that was

He gets Toby a paper route and enlists him in the Scouts, complete with a subscription to a times. (\$5.76 evenings; \$2.95 alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan. ■ DETROIT FILM THEATRE Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue, Detroit Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students/seniors) "Leolo" (Canada - 1992). 7, 9:30 p.m. May 7 - 8; 4, 7 p.m. May 9. Convinced he is the offspring of a sperm-laden Italian tomato, Leolo is in fact the brightest and youngest member of a bizarre family that long ago plunged off the deep end. Viewers under 18 will not be admitted to this controversial and award-winning comedy from across the border. ■ MAGIC BAG THEATRE 22918 Woodward, Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$5) "Johnny Suede" (USA - 1992). 7, 9, 11 p.m. May 7. Made shortly before he became a heartthrob with "A River Runs Through It,"

# 'Boy's Life' relives writer's fear

BY JOHN MONAGHAN SPECIAL WRITER

## MOVIES

"This Boy's Life," based on the autobiography by Tobias Wolff, twists the traditional Boy Scout virtues of honesty, thrift, and obedience into a living hell for a teenager growing up in the 1950s. The mountain vistas and a playful Sinatra singalong (not to mention the film's evocative title) hint at a happy-go-lucky romp with mother and son in a clunky old Mash. Then the narrator says, "When my mom got beat up by her boyfriend, we lit out for the uranium fields of Utah" and we know we're in for a rocky ride. After a year of trying their luck in Salt Lake City, Toby (Leonard DeCaprio) and his mother Caroline (Ellen Barkin) hop a bus for Seattle and yet another in a series of new horizons. When Caroline eventually ends up in the middle of nowhere married to an abusive mechanic named Dwight (Robert DeNiro), she admits, "I've run out of free starts."

While DiCaprio is also quite convincing as the troubled teenager, the movie revolves around DeNiro's rock-solid performance. This is no "Cape Fear" and his Dwight is no ordinary psycho. He's cloddily charming at first, wooing Caroline with flowers and compliments. And at first you might think he's doing right by Toby, who does lack discipline and is well on the way to becoming a juvenile delinquent. He gets Toby a paper route and enlists him in the Scouts, complete with a subscription to a

"Boy's Life"-type magazine. He insists that the teenager attend both church and school regularly and learn how to protect himself in a fight. But Dwight also keeps the money Toby earns (he's saving it for something important when Toby really needs it) and beats the boy to a pulp for minor offenses like falling to scrape the sides of an empty mustard jar. Dwight grows violently jealous when he thinks someone has shown him up, which Toby does when he dreams of a life beyond Cement, Wash. The movie is not all doom and gloom. Some of it's quite funny. The terminally square Dwight tells stupid jokes and uses irritating phrases like "but you're plebe." He's a lousy father, lover, saxophone player, sharpshooter, and mechanic. His pigheaded inability to realize this makes him strangely sympathetic. The only simple nostalgic pleasure comes through the soundtrack, which resurrects gummy rock

'n' roll classics like "Real Wild Child," "Summertime Blues," and "I'm Not a Juvenile Delinquent." Michael Cation-Jones, the Scottish-born director of "Scandal" and "Doc Hollywood," and scriptwriter Robert Getchell have reportedly retained the flavor of Wolff's 1989 novel. The use of wide screen, though not incredibly inventive here, does contrast nicely with the confines of Dwight's dumpy and oppressive house. The darkness behind "This Boy's Life" will make it unpopular with some. Heartfelt and uncompromising, it's a kick in the teeth to the mindless nostalgia usually packaged for Baby Boomers. If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox number 1866, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia.

## SCREEN SCENE

This obscure independent film stars Brad Pitt as a New York lounge singer obsessed with the music of Ricky Nelson. Tina Louise (Ginger from "Gilligan's Island") and singer Nick Cave co-star in a film directed by Jim Jarmusch's cinematographer Tom DiCillo. ■ MAIN THEATRE 118 N. Main, Royal Oak. Call 542-1080 for showtimes. (\$5.75) "Brother's Keeper" (USA - 1992). Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinikoff's fascinating documentary explores the facts behind a bizarre New York murder trial involving four illiterate bachelor brothers. The controversial subject is handled with sensitivity and profound insight as the reclusive farmers enter a community that once shunned but now stands up for them. ■ MAPLE THEATRE 4136 W. Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills. Call 855-9090 for show-

(Australia - 1992). Director Gillian Armstrong returns to her native Australia for this well-drawn account of a family on the verge of change in contemporary Australia. When sister Vicki (Kerry Fox of "Angel at My Table") returns from Europe, it causes both joy and tension in her sister's house. Bruno Ganz and Lisa Harrow also star.



### READER'S

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