HAPPY TEARS

A FILM BY
MITCHELL LICHTENSTEIN
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STARRING
PARKER POSEY      DEMI MOORE
RIP TORN          ELLEN BARKIN

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2009, USA, 96 minutes, 35mm, color, Dolby Digital
Jayne and Laura are about to take on the first man they just might not be able to handle: their seventy-something-year-old father Joe. Dutiful daughters returning to the house they grew up in, Jayne and Laura are forced to take a closer look at their own not-so-perfect lives while dodging childhood memories. Laura suspects that Joe needs full-time care, but Jayne refuses to believe that their father’s condition is that serious. Jayne’s compulsion to escape reality only increases Laura’s attempts to yank her back down to earth.

Meanwhile, Joe still sings and plays the blues on his prized guitar, and the lively widower even has a new “ladyfriend,” shameless and sassy Shelly. But as the visible moments of their father’s impending senility increase, the family dynamics spiral out of control. Tensions flare as the close sisters must also juggle their own very different lives – Laura’s busy environmentalist work schedule and mother of three small children, and Jayne, desperate to finally have a baby with her workaholic art-dealing husband Jackson.

Their adventures back home are not without magic, mischief and mayhem, and even a search for buried treasure in the backyard! In the end, any tears that Jayne and Laura might shed will be happy ones.
COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR
MITCHELL LICHTENSTEIN

HOME
In HAPPY YEARS, Jayne and Laura travel back to their childhood home. Home is where the family is forced back under one roof where they have to deal with each other. And it’s where the ghosts and skeletons are. For Jayne, it’s full of memories either to be dodged or embraced. It’s where we can most clearly see the contrast between the unsentimental Laura and the perhaps overly sentimental Jayne. It’s where they have to deal with their father’s ladyfriend Shelly.

DIFFICULT TRUTHS
Jayne sees her father as a lovable rascal. Though he has had a string of low rent girlfriends since her mother’s death, she believes her parents had a fairy tale marriage while it lasted. Laura has shielded her sister from the truth of their parents’ marriage. Laura also has a very different view of Joe. She knows that he slept with other women throughout the marriage, and that their mother must probably knew about it and simply put up with it. To Laura, Joe’s charm is not benign. Laura’s experience with her parents enables her to see and accept difficult truths. It also helps her navigate her own imperfect marriage.

GENTLY SUBVERSIVE, NOT DARK
Laura expects the worst in regards to her father’s condition, and she turns out to be right. In moments of anger, she might even think her father deserves his illness. Jayne has trouble accepting any unpleasant reality, not least this one. She has no clue what it takes to care for a person with dementia. I chose to show the disease in its early stages because I wanted to see the daughters just beginning to deal with it — when it’s more inevitable than actual — and also because I wanted to see Joe as (mostly) himself, not after the full onset of dementia. I wanted HAPPY TEARS to have a certain lightness that would be hard to maintain if Joe was seen in the fullness of his disease. I wanted a gently subversive movie, but not a dark one. And dementia has already begun to sneak up on it.

CLEANING UP DAD
Jayne arrives back home determined to show her sister that their father is perfectly healthy. Jayne gets an immediate and rude awakening when Joe uncontrollably soils himself. This event is a sign that all is not right with Joe, a sign so potent that even healthy Jayne sees her father as a lovable rascal. Though he has had a string of low rent girlfriends since her mother’s death, she believes her parents had a fairy tale marriage while it lasted. Laura has shielded her sister from the truth of their parents’ marriage. Laura also has a very different view of Joe. She knows that he slept with other women throughout the marriage, and that their mother must probably knew about it and simply put up with it. To Laura, Joe’s charm is not benign. Laura’s experience with her parents enables her to see and accept difficult truths. It also helps her navigate her own imperfect marriage.

THE OPAL
The character of Jayne tends to look at things through rose-colored glasses. She has a tough time dealing with unpleasant realities. Sometimes when confronted with hard realities, she flings her mind, her being, into a better place. I think of Parker Posey as The Opal, because of the fascinating, unexpected and subtle colors she brings to her role. She always brings more than is written, and she is always real and poignant and funny. She really understands how something can be serious and funny at the same time. What’s her secret? She stands on her head a lot, and I guess that gives her a unique perspective.

THE KING BEE
Joe is definitely the King Bee of his world. He’s demanding, inappropriate and vulgar, but also a funny and charming rascal. As a child, he had some regional notoriety as a western/blues singer until his precocious virility got him into trouble. Laura describes him accurately when she says: “He’s lived a long life and he’s lived it exactly as he’s wanted to.” Rip Torn’s work is scrupulously honest. Even at his most outlandish, he won’t — can’t — make a move unless it feels right to him, keeping us all at our nuttiest.

THE DIAMOND
Laura, in contrast to her sister, is seemingly all about truth, unsentimental reality, practicality, groundedness. It turns out, though, that there’s at least one aspect of her life about which she’s been less than candid. Laura also harbors some resentment for her sister. Where Laura has worked hard all her life and barely scruples by, Jayne, who was basically an irresponsible party girl, has lucked into a marriage with a wealthy guy. If Parker is The Opal, Demi Moore is The Diamond. She brings precision and clarity to every moment. I am never in doubt about what Laura is thinking. On set, Demi is a positive and generous force, a pleasure to be around. When she’s acting, she’s keenly aware of everything going on around her. If the camera is moving, and it’s even slightly off course — she knows it.

NURSE SHELLY
Shelly has lived a hard life, but is a tenacious survivor, getting by on pure instinct. She may once have dreamed of being a nurse, and maybe even began study in that direction, but now she’s apparently hooked on crack, and likely has supported her habit on the streets. She has a true fondness for Joe, yet sees very clearly the nature of their relationship.

MITCHELL LICHTENSTEIN
The "family" dinner scene was exciting to film because it's the only scene in the movie where all four of the main characters come together. All kinds of dynamics were flying around the set that night. We used 2 cameras. With that group of actors, you don't want to miss a moment. That shooting day was one of Ellen Barkin's first days with us, and the rest of us had been working for a couple of weeks by this time. Parker, Demi, Rip and I had begun to settle into a comfortable little world and I found myself having this weird emotional thing where it was hard to accept this "intruder" -- Shelly -- into our world. I guess I was identifying a little too much with the sisters. It was difficult to edit this scene, because it was hard to cut away from any one of the actors, as each was giving so much moment to moment. If this were a different kind of movie, maybe I'd have used a 4-way split screen.

**HAPPY TEARS**

It's the apparent contradictory nature of the term which attracted me to this title. The idea that good can come out of bad. Jayne does something totally irresponsible, but out of it comes something very good. Joe has a terminal illness, but it brings the family together .... "Happy Tears" is also the title of a painting by my father, so it's a nod to him.

**JACKSON ISN'T ME**

No, the character of Jackson is not based on myself, though there are a couple of similarities. Jackson's father was a well known artist, as was mine, and Jackson feels small in comparison with him. That's a feeling I sometimes had when I was in my twenties. But the main thing about Jackson is that he's taken on this huge job -- managing his father's legacy, his work -- out of a sense of guilt or to prove something, and that is not at all the case with me. We have one of the best run -- and not by me -- artist Foundations in the world. The other thing about Jackson, is that he didn't have much of a relationship with his father, didn't feel appreciated by him, as Jayne says in the movie. I always felt "known" by my father, loved, and knew he really got a kick out of me.

**SEXUAL PROWESS**

The character of Joe was a country/blues singer as a child. I wanted a song for him that would really get on his daughters' nerves. The song "King Bee" is a man bragging of his sexual prowess. It's naughty and amusing and speaks to Joe's character. And it's a side of his character that turns out to be a difficult personality behind the art, and also perhaps reflect Jackson's own emotional turmoil. Second, Roy Lichtenstein's work would have been too recognizable. For the same reason, I didn't use Cy Twomby's "scribble" works, which are immediately identifiable.

**EMOTIONALLY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL**

I was initially interested in exploring the dynamics between two very different sisters. One who has always worked hard and has a meaningful (if exhausting) job that has only slight financial rewards, and the other who has goofed off all her life and now suddenly leads a life of luxury.

The problem with Jayne's lively imagination, is that when her fears and anxieties become too strong, they too may take visible form. For example, when Jayne feels vulnerable in the shoe store. Uncomfortable with her newfound affluence and feeling preyed upon, she sees the salesman as a buzzard. Throughout the story, Jayne "sees" her anxieties played out: her husband, straight-jacketed, bouncing off the walls in a padded room; Shelly, vampire-like, drawing her father's blood. The character of Joe is loosely based on someone I knew, but HAPPY TEARS is a work of fiction. Not in any of its events, but emotionally, HAPPY TEARS does have an autobiographical quality for me. I have some of Jayne's reluctance to face uncomfortable truths; my father looms large in my life, as Jackson's does, though not with the same level of terrors. I did have to deal with dementia in the family, but it was my mother who had it, not my father. And she didn't have Binswanger's, but another type that was alcohol induced.

**THE ART WORLD**

Since I know something about the art world, I thought I could deal with it in a sort of shorthand, which was necessary since it's not the main focus of HAPPY TEARS. I thought: what if I had to -- or felt compelled to -- deal with my father's legacy by myself? Overseeing exhibitions, creating the catalogue raisonne, etc. I'm completely unsuited to the task, and anyway, it's not a one person job. All that would be overwhelming. So I created Jackson, who is trying to make a connection with his father that he never had in life. Jackson's dilemma is that he's trying to prove something to someone who's no longer there. He should have worked it out while his father was still alive.
PARKER POSEY has appeared in over 50 films including the recent blockbuster “Superman Returns,” where she costarred as Kitty Kowalski, Lex Luther’s partner-in-crime. She will next star in Warner Bros’ “Spring Breakdown.”

For her work, Parker has received numerous accolades, including Golden Globe and Independent Spirit Award nominations. Films from her vast repertoire include four films with Christopher Guest (“Waiting for Guffman,” “Best in Show,” “A Mighty Wind” and “For Your Consideration”); Zoe Cassavetes’ “Broken English” (Independent Spirit Award nomination); Rebecca Miller’s “Personal Velocity” (Independent Spirit Award nomination); the CBS film “Hell on Heels: The Battle of Mary Kay” (Golden Globe nomination) opposite Shirley MacLaine; “The Eye,” “The Sweetest Thing,” “The Anniversary Party,” “Scream 3,” “You’ve Got Mail,” “Suburbia,” “Dazed and Confused,” “Clockwatchers,” “The Daytrippers,” “The Event,” and four films with Hal Hartley (“Amateur,” “Flirt,” “Henry Fool” and “Fay Grim”). For her performance in “The House of Yes,” she received a Special Jury Prize at The Sundance Film Festival.

On stage, Parker most recently starred off-Broadway in the acclaimed revival of “Hurlyburly,” for which she received a Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Featured Actress and in Lanford Wilson’s “Fifth of July” (a Lortel nomination for Lead Actress). She also starred in the Los Angeles premiere of John Patrick Shanley’s “Four Dogs and a Bone,” directed by Lawrence Kasdan, and starred on Broadway opposite Matthew Broderick in Elaine May’s “Taller Than A Dwarf.”
DEMI MOORE (as Laura)

Demi Moore continues to be one of the most sought after actresses in Hollywood. She was most recently seen starring opposite Michael Caine in the indie film FLAWLESS. Moore, keeping in the indie spirit, signed on to back-to-back starring roles in independent films, one a family drama, the other a martial arts movie. Demi, along with Parker Posey, toplines HAPPY TEARS from filmmaker Mitchell Lichtenstein. BUNRAKU, written and directed by Guy Moshe, follows a man (Josh Hartnett) on a revenge quest who finds himself in an even bigger fight than he bargained for. The film is set in an original universe a la “Sin City” and draws from a mixed bag of genres, including puppets, origami, comic books, video games and German expressionism. Moore plays the enslaved concubine of a warlord who is forced to marry her captor. Woody Harrelson also stars. Demi recently completed filming THE JONESES opposite David Duchovny, a drama with comedic elements that Derrick Borte directed from his own script.

Moore’s film credits include CHARLIE’S ANGELS 2: FULL THROTTLE in which she starred opposite Cameron Diaz, Drew Barrymore and Lucy Liu. In the film, Moore played “Madison,” a former “Angel” who left the team to take up a life of crime. Other film credits include MR. BROOKS with Kevin Costner, as well as BOBBY, the story of the assassination of U.S. Senator Robert F. Kennedy, which centers around 22 people who were at the Ambassador Hotel where he was killed. Castle Rock film, STRIPEASE, opposite Burt Reynolds; Paramount’s PASSION OF MIND, Tri-Star’s THE JUROR, with Alec Baldwin; Roland Joffé’s, THE SCARLET LETTER, opposite Gary Oldman and Robert Duvall; DISCLOSURE, with Michael Douglas; INDECENT PROPOSAL, opposite Robert Redford and Woody Harrelson; A FEW GOOD MEN, with Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson, directed by Rob Reiner; THE BUTCHER’S WIFE, with Jeff Daniels; and NOTHING BUT TROUBLE, with Dan Aykroyd, Chevy Chase and John Candy. She also starred opposite Patrick Swayze and Whoopi Goldberg in GHOST, a performance that earned Moore a Golden Globe Award nomination. Moore also recently starred in HALF LIGHT. Moore’s character, a successful mystery novelist, whose life falls apart when her 5-year-old son drowns at her country home and the unusual events that unfold thereafter.

In addition to achieving great success as an actress, Moore has had a very successful career as a film producer with her production company, Moving Pictures. Her credits as actor/producer include GI JANE, in which she starred opposite Viggo Mortensen; the Emmy-nominated film for HBO, IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK, with Sissy Spacek and Cher: NOW AND THEN, with Melanie Griffith, Rosie O’Donnell and Rita Wilson; and MORTAL THOUGHTS with Bruce Willis. She is also a part of the team behind the successful AUSTIN POWERS franchise, having produced all three films with Jennifer and Suzanne Todd.

Moore made her film debut in 1984 as Michael Caine’s daughter in BLAME IT ON RIO. Other early film work includes roles in NO SMALL AFFAIR, opposite Jon Cryer; Joel Schumacher’s ensemble film, ST. ELMO’S FIRE; ONE CRAZY SUMMER, with John Cusack; ABOUT LAST NIGHT…, opposite Rob Lowe; WISDOM, written, directed and co-starring Emilio Estevez; THE SEVENTH SIGN, opposite Michael Biehn; and WE’RE NO ANGELS, opposite Sean Penn and Robert De Niro.

This past year, Demi was named the face of Helena Rubinstein, a luxury beauty brand based in France. She will be the muse for both the skincare and makeup range.

Demi has recently expanded into the directing world with a short film titled STREAK, that stars her daughter Rumer Willis and Brittany Snow. This short is part of a series of films produced by Glamour Magazine that showcases female stories told by female directors. Just recently she directed over 50 notable actors in a project called PRESIDENTIAL PLEDGE. This is a call to service where each actor records a pledge to the president as to what they are willing to do to make the country and the world a better place. The video presentation can be seen on MYSSPACE, YouTube, Oprah.Com, Facebook and MTV.com and was co produced by her husband Ashton Kutcher. The pledges were presented in Washington at the Service Nation Breakfast kicking off National Service Day.

She currently resides in Los Angeles with Ashton and her three daughters Rumer, Scout, and Tallulah.
RIP TORN  (as Joe)

From his box-office smashes such as “Men In Black” and “Dodgeball!” to his brilliant Oscar-nominated performance in Martin Ritts’ “Cross Creek,” Rip Torn is widely regarded as one of the great American actors of film, theatre and television. Praises are still ringing for his recent work as King Louis XV in Sophia Coppola’s “Marie Antoinette,” as well as in the Sundance winner, “40 Shades of Blue.”

His other recent film credits include “Yours, Mine and Ours,” “The Insider,” “Zoom,” “Wonder Boys,” “Defending Your Life” and voice-over work in the Dreamworks animated comedy “Bee Movie.” Torn is also the iconic star of such acclaimed indie features as “Where the Rivers Flow North” and the cult classics “The Man Who Fell to Earth,” “Pay Day” and “Heartland.”

After his motion picture debut in 1957’s “Time Limit,” Torn went on to memorable performances in “Sweet Bird Of Youth,” “King Of Kings,” “Critic’s Choice,” “The Cincinnati Kid,” “Beyond The Law,” “Tropic Of Cancer” and “Beautiful Dreamer.”

Torn also directed the Whoopi Goldberg starrer “The Telephone” and “Rio Frio” with Willie Nelson and Kris Kristofferson.

Torn’s reputation as an “actor’s actor” has also been earned in the theater. His luminous stage career includes many Obie awards which dates from his portrayal of Brick in the Broadway production of Tennessee William’s “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.” More recently, he triumphed in Eugene O’Neill’s “Anna Christie” and in Horton Foote’s “The Young Man From Atlantis.”

Torn has been honored repeatedly in film, theater and TV. Torn was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for 1983’s “Cross Creek.” The six year hitch as Artie on the series “The Larry Sanders Show” won him six consecutive Emmy nominations and a win in 1996 for Best Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series. More recently, Torn received a 2008 Emmy nomination for his role as Don Geiss in the hit series “30 Rock.”

With his distinctive voice and interpretations, Rip Torn is one of the most in-demand voice-over artists. The Fires of Kuwait, which he narrated, won the Best Documentary Oscar.

In his free time, which doesn’t amount to much these days, Rip loves to get away on a fishing trip and stays in shape with a workout at the local gym wherever he might be.

ELLEN BARKIN  (as Shelly)

Ellen Barkin’s superb acting skills have enabled her to play roles ranging from an abusive single mother to a sexy crime solver. Her versatility has made her a much sought after and esteemed actress in the areas of theater, film and television. Before her acting career, the Bronx native attended the prestigious High School of the Performing Arts in New York and studied drama and history at Hunter College. Barkin continued to perfect her acting skills while attending workshops at the well-renowned Actors Studio.

Barkin broke into the big screen in Barry Levinson’s comedic drama DINER. As the female lead, she played a vulnerable, neglected wife of an obsessive husband. Audiences and critics alike turned their attention to Barkin when she starred opposite Dennis Quaid in Jim McBride’s THE BIG EASY. Playing a sultry attorney from the D.A’s office, she worked to solve a crime that plagued New Orleans. Barkin starred opposite Al Pacino in Harold Becker’s crime thriller SEA OF LOVE. Barkin played the suspect in a string of serial murders, as well as Pacino’s love interest.

Barkin went on to receive the Golden Globe Nomination for Best Actress for her comedic portrayal as a man trapped in a woman’s body in Blake Edwards’ SWITCH. Barkin starred opposite Robert De Niro and Leonardo DiCaprio in Michael Caton-Jones’ enthralling drama THIS BOY’S LIFE. She played the powerful role of ‘Caroline’ who strived to provide a stable life for her young son, but instead hurled them both into a life of dysfunction and abuse.

Barkin made her first acting debut in 1980 when she appeared in a theatrical production of Tennessee William’s “Cat on a Hot Tin Roof.” More recently, he triumphed in Eugene O’Neill’s “Anna Christie” and in Horton Foote’s “The Young Man From Atlantis.”

Barkin returned to the small screen in 1997 when she starred in Oprah Winfrey’s drama BEFORE WOMEN HAD WINGS. She received an Emmy for Best Actress for her role as an alcoholic, abusive mother that slowly learned to change her ways.

Other film credits include Sydney Lumet’s DAMEL; Spike Lee’s SHE HATE ME; Todd Solondz’s PALINDROMES; Bob Rafelson’s MAN TROUBLE, opposite Jack Nicholson; Tony Scott’s THE FAN starring Robert DeNiro and Jim Jarmusch’s DOWN BY LAW. Barkin has also appeared in TENDER MERCIES costarring Albert Finney, WILD BILL alongside Jeff Bridges; SOMEONE LIKE YOU opposite Ashley Judd and Hugh Jackman; DROP DEAD GORGEOUS with Kirsten Dunst; Mike Newell’s INTO THE WEST and Terry Gilliam’s FEAR AND LOATHING IN LAS VEGAS. Most recently, Barkin appeared in Steven Soderbergh’s OCEAN'S THIRTEEN, opposite George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon.

Barkin will next be seen in Antoine Fuqua’s BROOKLYN’S FINEST with co-stars Don Cheadle and Ethan Hawke and recently premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival.
HAPPY TEARS is writer-director Mitchell Lichtenstein’s second feature film. He made his directing debut with 2007’s TEETH, already a cult favorite worldwide.

TEETH premiered at Sundance (Best Actress nod for Jess Weixler) and Berlin (Panorama). TEETH won the Special Jury Prize at France’s Gerardmer Film Festival. Mitchell is also known for his acting roles in Robert Altman’s STREAMERS (Best Actor - Venice Film Festival 1983) and Ang Lee’s THE WEDDING BANQUET (Golden Bear - Berlin Film Festival 1993; Nomination - Best Male Lead, Independent Spirit Award).

A graduate of Bennington College and the Yale School of Drama, Mitchell resides in New York City. He is currently developing A CHARMED LIFE, based on the Mary McCarthy novel.

2009  HAPPY TEARS
2007  TEETH
2004  RESURRECTION (short)
Until you find it, whatever it is, you don't know what it will look like.