

## Movie Monday

July 2001 by Bruce Saunders

MOVIE MONDAY started as a sparky idea from a guy recovering from a severe depression and second suicide attempt. I was on a better mood stabilizer and had the right kind of support. And I was hot on a new scheme.

While still in the hospital I had discovered a 100-seat lecture auditorium with a video projector, and the idea of showing films there for patients and ex-patients had captured my imagination. It was a modest plan but I could foresee--with hypo-manic clarity--a lot of possibilities. When people gather for popular film entertainment there are a lot of other cool things that can happen.

Just a month out of hospital, with no funding and no long term plan, my friend Peter from my support group and I started. The hospital's audio-visual staff was receptive. First one event, then three, then six more Mondays in a row.

That was in May 1993. Now MM is recognized as a "Best Practice" in our mental health system.

At first I publicized MM throughout the hospital and in my support group. When just a few showed up, I broadened my postering to hostels and drop-in centers downtown. The first few months I got butterflies in my stomach every time I thought of having to be there next Monday with the show for an expectant audience. For a person with mood swings, consistency can be a scary prospect. But I was enthusiastic about movies and it was my idea--there's nothing like ownership!

I realized early that just showing up week after week--addressing the audience, consistently putting up eclectic, creative programming, talking about mental illness and health, making at least part of our psychiatric hospital a friendly approachable place--has a pervasive effect. Even though we have a small venue, the ripples of information, positive attitude, and hope travel out into our community.

I realized films could stimulate discourse about mental illness. The first time I presented a popular film with a mental illness theme and opportunity for discussion was "Benny and Joon". The post-film exchange was very passionate and insightful. We talked about everything from access by relatives, to treatment, to the physical shape of institutions. The discussion involved people with mental illness experience who had lots to say, but also people who were drawn there by the "popular entertainment" lure. Since that first time, MM's schedule has always included a rich peppering of films, such as "One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest", "Shine", or "Girl Interrupted", even "What About Bob". There are so many popular features which make powerful learning opportunities when presented with discussion opportunities and special guests, including "Mr. Jones", "The Snake Pit", our own Canadian Indie films like "rollercoaster" and "My Father's Angel", comedies like "Cosi" and "Dream Team", and intense personal documentaries like "Dialogues With Mad Women", "The Living Museum", "Jupiter's Wife", "A Brush With

Life", and "Working Like Crazy".

A big leap in commitment and exposure to the public was made when, to raise funds for better equipment, I was featured in an article in Victoria's city paper. It was a turning point when I weighed the risk of talking about my illness publicly. It's been a very positive move for me and my family. One of the best results of this experiment has been to shed all the baggage that comes with the usual secrecy and to make a constructive thing of our family's challenges of mental illness. Weekly now I see the healing effect of that openness. There have been many articles, radio and TV interviews, recognitions and awards since.

Now, eight years and almost 500 events later, the MOVIE MONDAY project is still a consuming interest and creative expression for me. My day job--landscape maintenance gardening--is thriving. Our family is too. My wife and I are celebrating our 27th anniversary and my two sons are going on into challenging post-secondary education--and they're kind of proud of the old guy. Through this whole period the MM initiative has redefined us as a family.

Last January we presented, with considerable acclaim, our third annual Reel Madness Film Festival--"five days of films and discussions about mental illness and recovery". This past June, I celebrated with good friends a 51st birthday I never thought I'd reach. I've still got an illness that I have to manage. But it's never lost on me the miracle that now I have this great privilege of presenting the pick of the film industry to vibrant, engaged audiences--downstairs in the same institution where I was once so absolutely without hope.

For more info on MM, current events, titles list, essays, photos, RM Film Fest events - check our web site: [www.islandnet.com/mm](http://www.islandnet.com/mm) or e-mail to [bruces@islandnet.com](mailto:bruces@islandnet.com).

