

Forrest Gump Film Summary

Forrest Gump by Robert Zemeckis

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Context

Forrest Gump is the story of a man who lives a somewhat unrealistic, charmed life. Forrest has to wear braces on his legs, but he eventually learns how to run and even receives a football scholarship to college for his speed. Forrest's mother is a strong woman who tells him that he can do anything, and Forrest's only friend is a troubled young girl named Jenny.

As Forrest lives his life, he follows his ideals no matter what the cost. He saves the lives of many men in Vietnam, and he helps his friend's family by keeping a promise. By following the ideals of honesty and loyalty, Forrest becomes successful in life. Although he reaches the American Dream, he does so without ever seeming to worry about finding this dream.

Robert Zemeckis is an extremely talented director who has been the force behind many major movies. *Forrest Gump* is by far one of his most successful films, capturing the American public by showing a man living to his ideals while still achieving the American Dream. Some of Zemeckis' earlier films included *Romancing the Stone* (1984), *Back to the Future* (1985), *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), and *Death Becomes Her* (1992). His films always use the most up-to-date technology and vary from comedy to drama.

Tom Hanks was already a huge star by the time he landed the role of Forrest in *Forrest Gump*. After playing Kip Wilson in the television series *Bosom Buddies*, Hanks began to land roles in films. His best known early work is his role as Rick Gassko in *Bachelor Party* (1984). He also garnered fame with *Money Pit* (1986), *Big* (1988), *Turner & Hooch* (1989), *A League of Their Own* (1992), and *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993). Whatever films Hanks makes in the future, he will always be loved for his role as Forrest Gump.

Robin Wright Penn plays the role of Forrest's lost and confused friend, Jenny. Penn's first major role was in the soap opera *Santa Barbara*. Later, she achieved great fame with her role of Buttercup, the Princess Bride in the film *The Princess Bride* (1987). She later also appeared in *Toys* (1992), *Message in a Bottle* (1999), and *White Oleander* (2002).

Gary Sinise got his start performing in Broadway plays. His first major film roles were in *A Midnight Clear* (1992) and *Of Mice and Men* (1992). Sinise's role as Lieutenant Dan in *Forrest Gump* skyrocketed him to stardom, and he has since performed with Hanks again in the 1995 film *Apollo 13*.

Forrest Gump was a favorite with both the public and the critics. At the Golden Globes, *Forrest Gump* won awards for Best Director - Motion Picture for Robert Zemeckis; Best Motion Picture - Drama; and Best Performance by an Actor in a Motion Picture - Drama for Tom Hanks. The Academy Awards bestowed even more praise on the film by awarding it the following Oscars: Best Actor in a Leading Role for Tom Hanks; Best Director for Robert Zemeckis; Best Effects, Visual Effects for Ken Ralston, George Murphy, Stephen Rosenbaum, and Allen Hall; Best Film Editing for Arthur Schmidt; Best



Picture for Wendy Finerman, Steve Starkey, and Steve Tisch; and Best Writing, Screenplay Based on Material from Another Medium for Eric Roth.



Summary and Analysis

As *Forrest Gump* begins, we see a white feather floating against a blue sky. As it continues, we also see the skyline of a city. The feather finally comes to rest at the feet of Forrest Gump. He picks up the feather, moves a wrapped box, opens his suitcase, and puts the feather inside a *Curious George* book. A bus pulls up, and Forrest continues to sit quietly. A nurse comes and sits on the bench beside him, and he introduces himself: "Hello. My name is Forrest, Forrest Gump." He offers the woman a chocolate and tells her that his momma always said, "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." He then tries to talk to her about how comfortable her shoes must be. He tells her that his momma always said, "There's an awful lot you can tell a lot about a person by their shoes. Where they're going; where they've been." He tells the woman that he's worn lots of shoes in his life, and then he goes on to reminisce about his magic shoes.

We see Forrest as a young boy on a table. The doctor has put braces on his legs, and he walks around the room as his mom watches. The doctor tells Mrs. Gump that Forrest's back is crooked but they're going to get it straightened out. Forrest narrates, telling how he was named after the great Confederate hero, Nathan Bedford Forrest. He also says that the original Forrest started a club called the Ku Klux Klan, with members who rode around in bed sheets pretending to be ghosts. He said that his momma told him that his name was to help him remember that we all do things that don't make sense.

As Forrest and his mother walk from the doctor's office, Forrest's leg gets stuck in a drain, and his mom tells the old men watching to stop staring. She also tells Forrest not to let anyone tell him that they are better than him. Forrest and his mother live in Greenbow, Alabama, in a house was inherited from their family. His mother is single and rents out the rooms in their house. However, she reminds Forrest that he's no different than anyone else.

At Forrest's school, the principal tries to convince Mrs. Gump that since Forrest's IQ is only 75, he shouldn't go to normal school. The minimum IQ to get in public school is 80, so Forrest will have to go to a special school. Mrs. Gump demands that Forrest be allowed to go to school. The man asks about Mr. Gump, and she says that he's on vacation. That night, the principal leaves the Gump house: Mrs. Gump has slept with him to convince him to let Forrest into the school. Forrest asks about the vacation his father is on, but she tells him that just means people leave and never come back.

Forrest's house is always full of visitors, and one man who stays there has a guitar. The man, Elvis, plays "You ain't Nothing but a Hound Dog" for Forrest as Forrest does a crazy walk that later comes to be Elvis' signature move. He later sees Elvis performing on television using his moves, then he says that the "King" must have sung one too many songs, so he died. Forrest turns to the woman on the bench and comments on how you can only remember some things and not others.



The school bus arrives to pick up Forrest, and he introduces himself to the bus driver so he won't be taking a ride with a stranger. No one wants to let Forrest sit with them. Back in the present day, he turns to the woman on the bench and says he's forgotten a lot of things, but he's never forgotten the moment he first heard the sweetest sound in the world: Jenny's voice. Jenny lets him sit next to her on the bus and they talk all the way to school. Jenny asks if he's stupid, and he replies, "Momma says, 'Stupid is as stupid does.'" From that point, Jenny and Forrest were always together. Jenny never wanted to go home. Forrest calls Jenny his "most special friend": in fact, she is his only friend. Forrest says they were like "peas and carrots." One day some boys pick on Forrest and Jenny yells, "Run, Forrest, run!" Forrest begins to run, and a miracle happens as the braces break off his legs and he begins to run. From that point in his life, he runs everywhere he goes.

One day, Forrest goes to see Jenny, whose mother had died and whose father was a farmer. Forrest says he was a very loving man who was always kissing and touching Jenny and her sisters. When Jenny doesn't come to school one day, Forrest comes to check on her. She tells him her daddy's taking a nap, but then her daddy wakes up and comes to find her. The children hide in the corn field and pray that "God make me a bird so that I can fly far, far away." The police came and let Jenny go live at her grandmother's. Jenny sometimes sneaks into Forrest's room at night when he was scared. They were best friends through high school, where Forrest was still being picked on and outrunning the other kids.

As Forrest outruns a car one day, he circles onto a football field, runs through the game and outruns the receiver. The scouts watch, and they get him to come to college at Alabama to play football. Forrest is the fastest guy imaginable, even running all the way out of the stadium sometimes.

Forrest watches the news as integration occurs at his university. He is in the video they are taking at the university. The girl who was part of the segregation movement drops her book, and Forrest is kind enough to return it to her. We also see that when Wallace, the "angry little man at the schoolhouse door," runs for President he is shot.

Back on the park bench in present day, the nurse gets on a bus, and woman and her son sit down with Forrest. The woman remembers Wallace's shooting, saying she was in college then. Forrest tells her that Jenny went to a college he couldn't attend.

Jenny and Forrest stay in touch during college. One night Forrest goes to visit Jenny and hears her making noises in a car during the rain. He is worried about Jenny, so he climbs in and punches the guy. Jenny gets mad, but Forrest just offers her some chocolates. Forrest is soaked from the rain, so Jenny sneaks him inside her dorm room. She gives him her roommate's robe to wear and tells him she wants to be a singer. Forrest is uncomfortable as Jenny undresses, and she asks if he's ever been with a girl. He hasn't, so she finishes undressing and lets him touch her. He is disturbed when she has an orgasm, but she hugs him and tells him it's okay.



Forrest makes it onto the All-American Team and gets to meet the President. When he meets President Kennedy and is asked how he feels, Forrest has had so many Dr. Peppers that he says, "I've got to pee." He remembers that both the President and his brother were shot a few years later.

Forrest gets a college degree after five years, and Mrs. Gump is so proud. At the graduation ceremony, the Army recruits him. When he goes to boot camp, he once again has trouble finding a seat on the bus. A young black man lets him sit down with him. The man tells Forrest that he's been working on shrimp boats all his life. Benjamin Buford Blue known as Bubba was about to buy a boat until he got drafted. Bubba's family knows everything about the shrimping business, and once he gets out of the Army, Bubba wants to follow in the family footsteps. Forrest fits in the Army very well.

While in the Army, Forrest sees a Playboy with photos of Jenny in it. She was thrown out of school, but she got a job singing at a theater in Memphis. Forrest goes to see Jenny, and she performs naked on the stage. A man breaks a beer bottle on Jenny's leg, and Forrest beats him up. Forrest picks up Jenny and hits the man with a guitar.

Jenny tells Forrest that he can't keep trying to rescue her all the time. He tells her that he can't help it because he loves her. She reminds him of their prayer, and she asks if he thinks she could fly off the bridge. She leaves and tells Forrest to stay away from her, and she gets a ride with a stranger. He tells her that he's about to be sent to Vietnam, and she makes him promise that if he's ever in trouble he'll run away. He tells her that he'll write to her while he's gone. Then, she gets in the car and leaves. Forrest visits his mom before going off to the war too. She tells him to be sure to come back safe.

Forrest gets to Vietnam and meets Lieutenant Dan Taylor. Lieutenant Dan worked hard to live up to the family military legacy. One night Bubba asks Forrest to join in his shrimping business at the end of the war. Forrest writes to Jenny throughout his time overseas.

One day, Forrest's unit is ambushed. Bubba and Lieutenant Dan tell Forrest to run. Forrest ends up alone, and he turns back to check on Bubba, his best friend. On his way back to find Bubba, he finds another soldier named Tex, picks him up, and carries him out. He leaves Tex near the water. Every time Forrest tries to find Bubba, he finds someone else who needs help. Forrest also finds Lieutenant Dan and saves him. Forrest is shot, but he continues carrying Lieutenant Dan out, even though he just wants to be left behind. Lieutenant Dan tells Forrest to stay put because of an impending air strike, but he goes back for Bubba anyway. Bubba is dying from a wound, but Forrest carries him back anyway. They escape just in the nick of time. As Forrest holds him, Bubba dies in his arms.

Back at the park bench, a man is now sitting and listening to Forrest. Forrest says he was shot in the butt, so he got to eat as much ice cream as he wanted. His bed is right next to Lieutenant Dan's. Lieutenant Dan isn't happy about being alive because he lost his legs below the knees. While in the hospital, Forrest gets a packet of his letters to Jenny that have been returned. One of the guys shows Forrest how to play ping-pong.



Forrest became the best player at the hospital, and he even plays in his sleep. Lieutenant Dan grabs Forrest one night, and he yells at Forrest for not letting him die. He's distraught to be a legless cripple. He feels cheated of an honorable death in the field, and he doesn't know what to do now.

One day, Forrest is awarded the Medal of Honor. He goes to tell Lieutenant Dan, but he has been sent home. Two weeks later, Forrest goes home for his ceremony. When the President says he would like to see Forrest's wound, Forrest pulls down his pants on live television. Forrest ends up being part of a protest against Vietnam as he tries to visit the nation's capital. Forrest ends up speaking at the protest rally, and he tells the people about the war. Forrest begins talking, but another soldier unplugs the microphone, so everyone misses Forrest's speech. As he stands on the stage, he hears Jenny crying his name and sees her run into the water in front of the Washington Monument. He runs to her, and the crowd cheers as they hug.

Jenny is part of the Black Panthers. She and her boyfriend, Wesley, get into a fight over Forrest, and Wesley slaps her. Forrest attacks him, but Jenny makes Forrest stop. Jenny and Forrest leave, going for a walk in front of the White House. Forrest says he would never hurt Jenny, and he wants to be her boyfriend. She tells him how handsome he looks in his uniform, and he tells her he's glad they're together in Washington. He finds out all about her traveling, drug use, and hippie lifestyle. The next day Jenny has to leave, and Wesley apologizes. Forrest tells Jenny she should come home to Greenbow. She tells him that their lives are very different, and he gives her his Medal of Honor. He says he's good to her because she's his girl, and she says she always will be. Then she gets on the bus with Wesley.

Instead of returning to Vietnam, Forrest begins to play ping-pong for the Army. Seven years later, he got on the All-America ping pong team and got to be the first American in China. Forrest comes back as a celebrity and even meets John Lennon. Forrest remembers that Lennon was shot a few years later.

Forrest is leaving a building one day and runs into Lieutenant Dan. Lieutenant Dan is scraggly and is now in a wheelchair; he can't believe they would give someone like Forrest the Congressional Medal of Honor. Lieutenant Dan's wheelchair begins to slip on the ice, and Forrest helps him. They go home to Lieutenant Dan's hotel in New York, and Forrest stays for the holidays. Lieutenant Dan asks Forrest if he's found Jesus, and Forrest says he didn't know he was supposed to be looking for him. Dan says that's all anyone around there talks about. Lieutenant Dan is terribly bitter over his lot in life. Forrest tells him that he's going to go to heaven, and Lieutenant Dan tells him to go get a bottle of liquor before he goes.

Forrest tells Lieutenant Dan that he's planning to buy a shrimp boat so he can keep his promise to Bubba. Lieutenant Dan tells him that if Forrest is ever a shrimp boat captain, he'll come be his first mate. Forrest and Lieutenant Dan meet two girls while they're out on New Year's Eve. One of them tells Forrest that New Year's gives everyone a second chance. He begins to think of Jenny, and we see her gathering her things and leaving Wesley. Later that night, the two girls come back to Dan's, and one of them has sex with



Dan while the other is put off by Forrest. Dan throws his girl off him after she calls Forrest stupid. They leave, and Forrest apologizes for ruining the party because the girl tasted like cigarettes.

Forrest tells the man on the bench that he went to the White House again to meet the President as part of the ping-pong team. Forrest doesn't get a good hotel, so the President sets him up with a better one-the Watergate Hotel. That night, Forrest calls security and tells the guard that the flashlights in the office across the way are keeping him awake. Next, we see Nixon resigning on public television.

Forrest is playing ping-pong in a gym when he receives his discharge papers. He runs out to get home as quick as he can. When Forrest arrives home, there is ping-pong equipment all over the house from companies wanting to have Forrest endorse their stuff. He finally agrees to say he likes one of the paddles. Then he goes to Louisiana to meet Bubba's family and visit Bubba's grave. He's taking the money from his ping-pong paddle endorsement to buy a shrimping boat. Everyone thinks he's stupid, but Forrest keeps his promise.

Forrest finds that shrimping is difficult. An old man tells him that a boat without a name is bad luck, so he names his boat Jenny. Jenny, meanwhile, is partying and using drugs in the city. She prepares to jump off a building one night, but she can't do it. One day when Forrest comes in, he sees Lieutenant Dan waiting on the dock, so Forrest jumps off his moving boat to meet him. As they talk, Forrest's boat knocks down one of the other docks.

Even with Dan's help, they're still having no luck shrimping. Lieutenant Dan suggests Forrest pray for shrimp, so he starts going to church. One day, Dan says, "Where's this God of yours?" and Forrest says, "It's funny he said that, because right then, God showed up." A hurricane begins. Forrest is scared while Dan is mad and yells at God. Lieutenant Dan wants a showdown with God. The shrimping industry is ruined, and Forrest's boat is the only one that survived. After this, they have no problem with the shrimping business. Their business is called Bubba Gump's Shrimp.

In present time, the man on the bench and a woman who has joined them are convinced that Forrest is lying. The woman tells Forrest that he tells a great story. Forrest shows the woman a picture of himself and Lieutenant Dan on the cover of *Fortune* magazine.

Lieutenant Dan finally thanks Forrest for saving his life. Dan even starts swimming again. Forrest thinks that Dan has finally made his peace with God. We then see that President Ford escaped assassination again.

While they're out one day, Forrest receives a call telling him his mom is sick. He jumps off the boat and hurries home. When he gets to the house, a lot of people are there, and the doctor is just leaving. His mom tells him she's dying of cancer. Forrest asks about his destiny, but she tells him that he'll have to figure it out on his own. His mom dies a



few days later, and he buys her a new hat. The woman on the bench misses her bus to hear more about Forrest.

Forrest gets a job mowing the local football field, so he doesn't go back to work with Lieutenant Dan. Lieutenant Dan takes care of his Bubba Gump money and invests in Apple for him, which Forrest calls "some kind of fruit company." He got a call one day that he never had to worry about money anymore, so Forrest gave a lot of money away to the church, a hospital, and Bubba's family. Bubba's mom didn't have to cook for anyone anymore, and Forrest kept mowing the grass for free.

Forrest says he always thought of Jenny late at night when he was alone. Then, one day Jenny walks back into his life. She gives him a big hug, and she stays with him. She is tired and sleeps all the time. As they pass her old house, Jenny throws rocks at it and breaks out one of the windows. She finally falls to the ground, weeping. Forrest is happy that Jenny is back, and he picks flowers for her everyday. He learns how to dance, and they were like family. Forrest says it was the happiest time of his life.

One night Forrest asks Jenny to marry him. She knows he would make a good husband, but she tells him that he doesn't want to marry her. He asks why she doesn't love him. He says he may not be smart, but he knows what love is. The rain begins to pour. Later in the night, Forrest wakes up as Jenny walks into his room, climbs into his bed, and tells him she loves him. They make love. The next morning, Jenny leaves as Forrest sleeps. Before she goes, she leaves behind his Medal of Honor. Forrest is lonely and sad without Jenny.

One day, Forrest gets off his porch and begins to run. He continues to run until he ends up running across Alabama, and then he keeps going until he reaches the Pacific Ocean. He then turns around and keeps going until he gets to another ocean. He again turns around-he ends up running for three years. As he runs, Forrest thinks, mostly about Jenny. Jenny sees Forrest on television one day, explaining to reporters that he just felt like running.

Forrest ends up having followers, and he tries to help people. One man gets the idea for the bumper sticker, "Sh*t happens" from Forrest. Another man wants to put Forrest's face on a t-shirt: when Forrest wipes mud off his face onto a yellow t-shirt, a smiley face appears. Forrest says that his momma always said, "You have to put the past behind you before you can move on." So, Forrest runs for three years, two months, fourteen days, and 16 hours, stopping only to sleep and eat, before he gets tired of running and decides to go home.

As Forrest watches the news about the assassination attempt on President Reagan, he gets a letter from Jenny inviting him to come visit her in Savannah. Back in present day, he tells the woman that is why he's on the bench-he's on his way to visit Jenny. The woman tells him he doesn't need the bus. Jenny's address is only five or six blocks away.



Forrest runs to meet Jenny. He gives her the chocolates and she shows him clippings of all the things he has done. Jenny apologizes for all the things she did to hurt Forrest. A woman comes to the door with a little boy. Jenny introduces Forrest to her son, Forrest. Jenny says that she named him after his daddy, and explains to Forrest that he has a son. Jenny tells Forrest that he doesn't need to do anything; she also tells him that young Forrest is one of the smartest children in his class. Forrest goes and watches television with his son.

At the park, Jenny tells Forrest she has some kind of virus. They're not sure what it is, and they can't do anything about it. Forrest invites Jenny and Forrest, Jr. to come stay with him at his house. He says he'll take care of her, and she asks him to marry her; he agrees. At the wedding, Lieutenant Dan shows up. He has fake legs and walks with a cane, and he has his fiancée, Susan, with him. Forrest and Jenny get married.

Jenny becomes more sick as time passes, and Forrest continues to take care of her. Jenny asks whether Forrest was scared in Vietnam, and he tells her that when the stars came out it was kind of nice. He says that at some sunsets you couldn't tell where earth stopped and heaven began. She wishes she could have been there, and he tells her that she was. She reaches for his hand and says, "I love you."

Forrest now stands at Jenny's grave and says, "You died on a Saturday morning. I had you placed here under our tree, and I had that house of your father's bulldozed to the ground. Mama always said dying was a part of life. I sure wish it wasn't." He tells her how well little Forrest is doing and leaves a letter he wrote for her. Then he says, "Jenny, I don't know if Mama was right or it's Lieutenant Dan; I don't know if we each have a destiny or if we're all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze, but I think maybe it's both. Maybe both are happening at the same time. I miss you, Jenny. If there's anything you need, I won't be far away." Forrest walks away as birds fly up from the fields.

Forrest, Jr. is taking *Curious George* to school for show and tell. As he shows his father the book, the feather from the beginning of the movie falls out of it. Forrest tells his son that he loves him, and Forrest, Jr. says he loves him too. Little Forrest introduces himself to the bus driver, waves goodbye, and gets on the bus. Forrest watches as the bus drives away, then he sits down on the rock. At his feet is the feather, which floats away on the wind. The film ends where it began-with a feather floating against the bright blue sky.



Characters

Forrest Gump, played by Tom Hanks

Description

Forrest Gump is an unusual young man. As a boy, he has a low IQ and wouldn't have been allowed in school had his mother not slept with the principal. He has braces on his legs, and the doctor does not expect him to ever be normal. Although there seems to be little hope for Forrest, his mother is always encouraging him to be whoever he wants to be.

Eventually, Forrest learns to run, opening up a whole new life to him when he gets a scholarship to college. Forrest does not seem to care about many things, but when he is given a job, he does it well. He is successful on the football team, in the Army, on the ping-pong team, and as a shrimper. Whether its dumb blind luck, destiny, or dedication to ideals, Forrest succeeds in everything he does.

Analysis

Unlike so many people who are filled with dreams and goals, Forrest is filled with ideals. Forrest believes certain things about life-live honestly, remain loyal, etc. -and he unwaveringly follows these ideals. Although much of what Forrest does makes no sense to the average person, Forrest follows what he believes and because of that, he succeeds.

Forrest remains loyal to Jenny all her life. He agrees to marry her and adopt her child so she will never have to worry about his welfare. Forrest's unfailing love, even when Jenny rejects him so many times, shows his true goodness. Forrest may be simple, but he has his priorities in the right place.

Jenny Curan, played by Robin Wright Penn

Description

Jenny is the young girl who allows Forrest to sit beside her on his first ride to school. Forrest is a bit strange, so no one else wants anything to do with him. Jenny is also an outcast because she comes from a bad home, and the two children become best friends. Jenny lives in a terrible home with a physically and sexually abusive father. When Jenny finally leaves home, she is determined never to return.

Jenny grows up and becomes a lost woman. She travels around the country trying new things, new men, and new drugs. When Forrest sees her, he always tries to rescue her, but Jenny doesn't want to be rescued: she simply wants to feel free.



Analysis

Jenny spends most of her life being lost. She travels from place to place and man to man, seeking something to fill the void left in her by her terrible childhood. Jenny cannot seem to face the reality of her past, and she uses drugs and men to try to forget it.

We see that when Jenny finally has Forrest, Jr., she calms down and tries to lead a normal life. Although her child may not fulfill her, he does demand her attention and responsibility. In the end, Jenny tries to do right by everyone. Since she knows she is dying, she asks Forrest to marry her and gives him custody of Forrest, Jr. Jenny finally has the family she has wanted for so long, but she only enjoys it for a short time before she dies.

Lieutenant Dan Taylor, played by Gary Sinise

Description

Lieutenant Dan is a strong, brave man who comes from a family with a well-known military heritage. Lieutenant Dan is willing to sacrifice himself for his men, and he hopes that someday he can die a heroic death to make his family proud.

Dan's hopes are destroyed when Forrest saves him in Vietnam. Instead of being a hero, Lieutenant Dan is now a poor cripple on the street. Over time, Dan forgives Forrest and realizes that he can still have a life after the military.

Analysis

Lieutenant Dan believes that God and Forrest have totally destroyed his life. He believes that his destiny was to die a heroic death in battle, but Forrest has cheated him of this destiny. When Forrest gets a shrimping boat, Lieutenant Dan comes down to be his first mate as he once promised. One day when they are out, Lieutenant Dan has his fight with God.

As the storms hit, Lieutenant Dan struggles to steer the boat to safety. He rails at God, whom he believes has cheated him of the life he imagined. Dan has his fight with God, and in the end, they make their peace. From that time, Lieutenant Dan becomes a healthy, prosperous individual who can look at life positively.



Pvt. Benjamin Buford "Bubba" Blue, played by Mykelti Williamson

Description

Bubba comes from a shrimping family down in Louisiana. He only plans to be in the Army for a little while, then he wants to take his money and go into business with his family. Bubba is one of Forrest's best friends in the Army, but he meets an untimely death during the war. The two had promised to care for one another's families, so Forrest seeks to do right by Bubba's family.

Analysis

At a time when racial issues were still tense, Bubba and Forrest make an unlikely pair. Bubba is not simple like Forrest, but he does have a naïve way of viewing the world. The most beautiful part of Forrest's relationship with Bubba is that Forrest keeps his promise by giving Bubba's family Bubba's share in his shrimping business.

Mrs. Gump, played by Sally Field

Description

Mrs. Gump is a strong, determined woman. Nothing in her life has been easy, but she refuses to give up. When they won't let Forrest into school, Mrs. Gump takes the matter into her own hands. She instills her values of loyalty, honesty, and self-respect into Forrest.

Analysis

Mrs. Gump never gives up. She works hard and raises her son as if he is normal. She demands excellence from him, and she rewards him with proud hugs and smiles. Mrs. Gump will never take anything less than the best, and she raises Forrest to hold her values dear.

Doctor, played by Harold G. Herthum

Description

The Doctor gives Forrest the braces and tells them that Forrest will never be able to walk normally.



Analysis

Although the Doctor is mistaken about the permanence of Forrest's condition, he does give them some hope.

Principal, played by Sam Anderson

Description

The Principal will not allow Forrest into the school because his IQ is too low. However, after Mrs. Gump sleeps with him, the principal makes an exception.

Analysis

The Principal is a dirty, harsh man, but Mrs. Gump is willing to do whatever it takes to get her son into school.

Louise, Mrs. Gump's Housekeeper, played by Margo Moorer

Description

Louise helps raise Forrest.

Analysis

Louise is the housekeeper who helps raise Forrest and helps him through many difficult times.



Themes

"Life is Like a Box of Chocolates"

The most famous quote in this film is when Forrest quotes his mother as saying, "Life is like a box of chocolates-you never know what you're going to get." Throughout the film, Forrest repeats this saying, and as we watch his life, we realize that there is truth to the saying.

The events in Forrest's life are often random, and they are both good and bad. Although Forrest's life is interesting, it is not always easy and happy. Forrest works hard in everything he does, and he ends up doing many interesting, fun things simply by chance.

Forrest meets Jenny one morning only because no one else will let him sit with them on the bus. He ends up playing ping-pong in China, because he gets injured in the war and learns to play in the hospital. Forrest opens a shrimping company that becomes a multimillion dollar company in order to keep a promise to a friend who died in the Army.

Forrest opens his box of life, and he pulls out all sorts of random things that happen to him. Forrest doesn't live a normal life, because he takes every chance he can to enjoy his life and try something new. Forrest's box of chocolates always brings him something new and unexpected, but in the end, Forrest's dreams come true.

Forgiveness

Forgiveness for those who have done us wrong is one of the most difficult things for any person to master. Although forgiveness is more of a choice than a feeling, most people still find it extremely difficult to even make the choice needed to forgive.

Forrest, on the other hand, seems to be ready and willing to forgive anyone for anything. No matter how badly people treat him, Forrest continues to forgive them. For example, Lieutenant Dan becomes extremely angry with Forrest for saving his life, but Forrest realizes that Dan is really just upset about losing his legs. Forrest forgives Dan instead of taking his attacks personally.

Forrest's biggest show of forgiveness is his attitude toward Jenny. Jenny leaves Forrest over and over again. She can never be still and is always searching for her next high. She even has a child who is supposedly his, but she doesn't tell him about the boy until she gets sick. Most people would feel used and angry, but Forrest continues to forgive and love Jenny in spite of everything. He is steadfast in his love toward her over the years of their relationship.

Following Your Dreams

This film reminds viewers to follow their dreams. Although we all grow up with things we want to see or do, many of us go on through life and never fulfill those dreams. Forrest always makes his dreams and the dreams of those around him come true.

When Bubba dreams of opening a shrimping business, Forrest is happy to help him achieve that goal. Even after Bubba dies, Forrest keeps his promise by opening the shrimping business himself. Since he knows that Bubba wanted to use the business to help his family, Forrest gives them a part of the money he makes from Bubba Gump's Shrimping.

Forrest doesn't seem to have many dreams as a child, but he does have a passion for running that takes him places. Forrest starts running one day, and he decides to run across the United States. This is a dream that Forrest chooses to follow, and he crosses the United States three times. Forrest sees no barriers to anything he wants to do. He simply does what he wants, and he brings others along as he lives his dreams and helps them live out their own.

Style and Cinematography

Forrest Gump is a long discussion of the American Dream. Forrest finds the American Dream without even seeming to look for it. Instead, the American Dream seems to fall in his lap as he goes along. The style of the film helps to highlight the randomness of many things that happen in Forrest's life.

As the film jumps from scene to scene, Forrest and Jenny are generally the only people who remain. Because they constantly run into each other, the viewer feels that they have a destiny to be with each other even though how they get to that destiny seems to be filled with completely random events. Viewers get the sense that the director and writers are trying to show that Forrest is right: We are "floating around accidental-like," but we have a destiny too.

Since the events in Forrest's life overlap with many major historical events, these serve as a backdrop on Forrest's life. The viewer can easily distinguish the decade and even the year by watching what is happening in the larger world. This technique helps bring Forrest out of some random and unusual world where good things are always happening to him, and into the real world of politics, war, and religion.

Motifs

Historical Events and People

Forrest's story is played out against a backdrop of famous people and historical events. Nothing in Forrest's life is normal. Even when he does extremely normal things like learn to play ping-pong, Forrest garners great praise and attention. He works hard at whatever he does, and this persistence keeps him on track.

Since the film plays out against a backdrop of modern history, viewers who have been affected by these same events and people can intimately understand Forrest and Jenny. Also, Forrest becomes more unique as he meets multiple Presidents and becomes wealthy simply because he kept a promise to a friend.

The passage of time is evident because of the existence of these historical events and people in the film. Although we see Forrest grow and change, he always remains young and naïve; however, we see that time has passed both from his looks and the world events going on around him.

Park Bench

Forrest sits on a park bench as he tells his story to anyone who will sit there and listen. These conversations with other people are a means for telling Forrest's story. Forrest is somewhat simple, so he doesn't understand that most people would not tell their life story to a stranger. As he waits for the right bus, Forrest shares his life with anyone who will listen.

The questions that his bench mates ask also help to move the story. These listeners wonder aloud about what happened to a friend or how Forrest felt when something happened, and Forrest then has a reason to continue with his story. Forrest gives these people hope, and they openly wonder at his persistence and success.

Television Airings

As different events air on television, we are able to get an idea of how Forrest's achievements were received by the rest of the world. For example, we see that Forrest's ping-pong tournaments in China are watched by people all over the world. Forrest becomes a light of hope for people who want the Cold War to end.

We also see how people react to Forrest's unorthodox meetings with the Presidents. When he drops his pants in front of the President to show his wound, we see the expressions of shock on all those being filmed.

The television airings are humorous additions, as Forrest has little understanding that thousands of people are watching him. He makes a fool of himself without allowing his mistakes to faze him for even a moment. Forrest is present at every major historical event during his life, and he makes his own quirky impact on the people he meets.

Running

Forrest loves to run. After growing up with braces on his legs, Forrest learns to run while trying to get away from bullies one day. From that time on, Forrest never stops running. His running helps him do many things in life that he otherwise might not have been able to do. For example, Forrest goes to college on a football scholarship because of his speed.

Forrest also begins running one day after Jenny leaves him. Now that his mother has died and Jenny has left, Forrest has no reason to stay home. He simply gets off the porch and begins to run. Forrest crosses the continent three times before he finally decides he is tired and wants to go home.

Sometimes Forrest runs for a reason and sometimes he doesn't. Because he is unattached, Forrest feels free to do anything. He runs away from bullies, and he runs away from loneliness. However, he does not get lost as he runs: instead, he seems to find himself.

Symbols

The Feather

Throughout *Forrest Gump*, we see a feather that floats on the wind. The feather symbolizes destiny and dumb blind luck. At one point, Forrest says, "I don't know if we each have a destiny, or if we're all just floatin' around accidental-like on a breeze. But I, I think maybe it's both." The feather seems to point to an accidental kind of life, but it always shows up at just the right time, so maybe destiny brought it there.

We first see the feather as the film begins, landing at Forrest's feet while he is sitting on a park bench in Savannah. He has received a letter from Jenny asking him to come visit her at her apartment there. After picking up the feather, Forrest begins to talk to the nurse on the bench with him.

At the end of the movie, Forrest talks to Jenny at her grave. During this scene, he updates her about Forrest, Jr.'s progress. As we watch him talking to her, the feather appears in the air again over Forrest's head. The feather follows Forrest throughout his life as he floats along "accidental-like" following a destiny and randomly coming into contact with people who help him meet his destiny.

Chocolates

Forrest's mother always told him that "Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're going to get." Forrest lives his life following this statement. Since he does not expect to know what his future holds, Forrest is able to roll with the punches and deal with whatever happens.

Every event in Forrest's life is like a different chocolate. Things always turn out differently, and he feels differently at the end of every adventure. The one constant, however, is that Forrest always accepts things as they come. His attitude toward adversity keeps him sane when things are going badly in his life. Forrest believes that just like you try many chocolates, you have to accept both the good and the bad in your life.

Forrest, Jr.

Forrest, Jr. is a symbol of the relationship between Forrest and Jenny. Forrest has loved Jenny from the beginning, because she is the only girl who was ever nice to him. Jenny, on the other hand, loves Forrest as a friend but realizes she needs to leave home and find a new life for herself. Jenny runs from Forrest's love mainly because of her terrible childhood experiences with her father.



Forrest, Jr. may or may not be Forrest's son. Forrest does not seem to understand the possibility and likelihood that the boy does not really belong to him. However, we see that both Jenny and Forrest wish this were the truth and choose to live as if it is. Forrest, Jr. finally brings them together after Jenny becomes sick and realizes that she will die.

Forrest, Jr. gives Forrest hope as he deals with Jenny's death. Forrest, Jr. is smart and kind. He has replaced Jenny in Forrest's life both as someone to look out for Forrest and as someone for whom Forrest can care.



Essay Questions

Why does Forrest begin telling his story?

How does Forrest's mother get him into school?

How did Forrest meet Jenny?

What happened that helped Forrest learn to run?

Describe how running helped Forrest throughout his life.

Why does Forrest get a Medal of Honor during the War?

Why does Lieutenant Dan hate Forrest for saving his life?

Who is Forrest keeping a promise to by begin a shrimping company?

Describe how Dan comes to terms with his life and God.

How do Forrest and Jenny finally get together?