

Garden State Film Summary

Garden State by Zach Braff

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Context

Garden State is Zach Braff's directorial debut. The film is partially based on his own experiences growing up in New Jersey as well as his experiences in Los Angeles before the show *Scrubs* gained greater success. By drawing on knowledge from his mother and his stepfather, both psychologists, as well as his step mother, a therapist, Braff gave the scenes dealing with psychiatrics and pharmaceuticals greater accuracy.

Since Braff wrote and directed the film, he was very invested in the story and the outcome. Braff chose the soundtrack on his own as well. The soundtrack and the songs in the movie follow the same order because Braff would send the soundtrack to everyone he shared the script with so that they would know the final order of the music. Braff eventually won a Grammy for the soundtrack.

Braff said that Hollywood's initial response to the *Garden State* script was, "Everyone said no. Everyone with a date book and a phone in Los Angeles said no." However, Gary Gilbert, a former mortgage broker, financed the film with \$2.5 million of his own money.

Garden State was finally released on Wednesday, July 28, 2004, to eight theaters: three in Los Angeles, four in New York City, and at the Maplewood Theatre in Maplewood, New Jersey. Maplewood Theatre is the home theater of Zach Braff. Along with his father who lived in the area, Braff attended the Maplewood premiere. At the Sundance Film Festival, the film was bought by Miramax and Fox Searchlight for \$5 million.

When he first began writing the film, Braff imagined what actors he would want to be in the film. He says, "When you are writing a script, you can't help but stop and daydream about which actors are going to play the parts, and I kind of imagined Natalie Portman. Not just because she is beautiful, because obviously she is, but she is a wonderful actress who hasn't had a chance in a long time to show the world how talented she is." Eventually, he was excited to discover that Portman was interested and she portrays Sam, a character who truly makes the movie.

Garden State was nominated for and won many awards after it was released. At the Sundance Film Festival, Zach Braff was nominated for the Grand Jury Prize for a dramatic film. Additionally, the MTV Movie Awards nominated both Portman and Braff for awards: Portman was nominated for Best Female Performance while Zach Braff was nominated for Breakthrough Male. Independent Spirit Awards gave *Garden State* the award for Best First Feature. Finally, the film won a Grammy for the Best Compilation Soundtrack Album for a Motion Picture, awarded to Braff as the compilation producer.



Summary and Analysis

As *Garden State* begins, we see a plane experiencing major problems in the midst of a thunderstorm. The camera then zooms in on Andrew Largeman sitting in the plane staring at the air vent. In the background, a phone begins to ring. We realize that the plan scenario is a dream, and we see Andrew lying in a white bed in a room with white walls that looks rather like an institution. His father begins leaving a message on the machine and Andrew lies in bed watching the fan. His father begs Andrew to come home and tells him that his mother died last night by drowning in the bathtub. Andrew doesn't move; he just closes his eyes. We see Andrew looking into a split mirror, and when he opens it we see a medicine cabinet filled with prescription bottles.

Andrew is in his car on his way to work. When he finally arrives at his destination, he sees that a gas nozzle is stuck in his car. Andrew is late for work, and his boss threatens to give away his job if he keeps being late. Andrew is a waiter at a Vietnamese restaurant, and one of his tables gives him a hard time about not having bread. We hear a voice saying that the flight to New York will be departing from Gate 32. We then see Andrew in an airport restroom, preparing himself for a trip. The scene then flashes to his mother's graveside service. Andrew stands off apart from the rest of the group as a woman sings a song in his mother's honor. On the other side of the grave, he sees two of his high school buddies hanging out on a bulldozer. They greet him and talk about Andrew's great career as an actor in L.A. They invite him to go out and party with them.

At his house, Andrew visits with his family and his mother's friends. His mother's friend tells him she made him a gift: a shirt. She wants him to try it on so that she can fix it in case he decides to leave and not come back for another nine years. After meeting her request, Andrew goes to talk to his father. He tells his father that he's okay, but he is having terrible, but brief headaches. His father tells him that he can see a neurologist in his building the next day. They try to carry on a stilted conversation, and Andrew's father tells him he's glad that he could "fit it in."

Andrew goes out to his garage, hops on his motorcycle, and goes to meet his friends. However, the police pull him over for speeding. He recognizes the policeman as his old friend, Kenny. Andrew points out that last time he saw Kenny he was doing coke lines off a urinal. Kenny asks how he did being a cop and pulling him over, Andrew tells him he did pretty well. After talking for a while, Andrew heads over to his party.

Andrew runs into one of his friends who sold his "silent Velcro" patent, but now he isn't doing anything with his life. Everyone in the room is smoking pot, and Andrew joins in. They give Andrew some "X," and he says he'll see them later. They begin playing spin the bottle. Andrew sits on the couch watching everyone else having a good time. Finally, the bottle spins toward him, and he's introduced to Dana. She climbs on his lap and kisses him. The evening ends up becoming like one big orgy with Andrew watching from the couch.



Late that night, Tim walks in wearing a suit of armor, because he works at Medieval Times as a knight. He eats his breakfast with Mark, Mark's mom, and Andrew. Mark kicks Tim out of their house, and Mark's mom tells them that she wants Mark to get into real estate. Mark wants to be left alone, saying that he's 26, so he doesn't need to in any rush.

Andrew shows up late for his appointment, but they are still willing to see him. A blind woman comes in with her guide dog, but the guide dog wanders off and begins humping Andrew's leg. As he tries to get the dog to stop, he hears laughter nearby. A girl named Sam is watching the whole scene and laughing. Sam suggests that she kick the dog in the balls to get him to stop. Sam remembers this from the movie where he played a retarded quarterback; she even thought he was really retarded! She also tells him that her cousin is an actor too. Then, she continues going on and on about his career. Sam makes him listen to a song, and the music turns up at that point.

Sam asks Andrew why he's there, and he asks her the same thing. She says that she's there waiting on a friend, and he tells her that he's having headaches that he wants to get checked out. He says, "It was nice to meet you." Sam replies, "You didn't. I'm Sam. Good luck with your head." As Andrew walks back to the doctor's office, the nurse tells Sam, "Don't worry, Sam; we'll be with you next." Andrew tells Dr. Coen about his headaches, and Dr. Coen says, "Lithium? How long have been on lithium?" Andrew replies, "Umm... well, I've been on some form of it since I was 10 or so." Coen asks, "And the Paxil, Zoloft, Celexa, Depakote, did they help you at all?" Andrew says, "No. It's recently occurred to me that I may not even have a problem, but I've been medicated so long I wouldn't know." Andrew tells Coen that he wants to take a vacation from the medicines, but he knows his dad who is his psychiatrist wouldn't approve. Coen suggests that the body does strange things under stress, and he thinks Andrew will be okay. Dr. Coen does some MRI's and CT scans on Andrew, and we see that his stomach is covered with writing from the night before.

Andrew runs into Sam outside of the clinic and asks why she was really there. She tells him that she's a robot, and she was charging up. He asks if she likes to lie a lot, and she says any answer she gives could be a lie without him ever really knowing the truth. He says that he could choose to trust her, and she informs him that at this point in the conversation he should ask if she wants a ride home.

On the ride home, they get to know each other little better. She has an odd helmet to wear like people use for hang gliding, and he asks about it. She says that she was supposed to go with her boyfriend, but he couldn't make it. When they get closer to her house, he asks if she's doing anything. He needs to visit a friend, but he wants to have a good excuse to leave early. After the friend shoots a flaming arrow at them, Sam decides it's time to go.

When they get to Sam's house, she admits that she doesn't have a boyfriend and that she lies all the time, but she can't seem to help herself. Sam's mom shows her their hamster Jelly who just died and asks her to bury it. Andrew is a little freaked out by Sam's odd house where the Christmas tree is still up from the previous year. As they



head upstairs, they run into a guy who lives there named Titembay, who her mom adopted years before. Her mom had sponsored him for years, and when he ended up at a college nearby he came to live with them. She shows him her room and a piece of her baby blanket she calls "Tickle." He tells her that he's not really Jewish because he never goes nor does anyone else he knows. She suddenly says, "We're not going to make out, okay?" He tells her he wasn't planning on it. She began to feel unoriginal, and she says when she gets that feeling, she does something totally unique. She does her own unique sound and makes Andrew do one too.

Andrew and Sam go outside to bury the hamster, and he is amazed by their large pet graveyard. Sam explains that they're not bad pet owners, but they've had a lot of pets through the years and most of them were fish. Andrew gets quiet, and Sam asks what he's thinking. He replies that he's been to a lot of funerals lately, and then tells her that his mom just died. His mom was a paraplegic, and she slipped in the tub and drowned. Sam begins to cry about his mother's death. Andrew turns the conversation back to Jelly, and they both say something about Jelly when they bury him. Andrew returns to his home.

Late that night, Andrew's dad corners him to tell him that nothing is wrong with him. He tells his dad that he plans to leave the next day so that he can take care of stuff in L.A. His dad says they need to talk, but Andrew tells him that he's on his way out to see his friend Mark. They agree to talk later that evening.

Andrew meets his friends, and they talk about how everyone has their drug of choice now. Later he goes to see Sam, and her mom wants to show Sam's ice skating tape. Sam doesn't want to show it, but her mother tells Sam "Yes, you could have. Don't blame it on the epilepsy. You had a gift." The sit down and watch a video of Sam skating as an alligator. Andrew is impressed, but Sam tells him that it's time to go.

Andrew and Sam go out to a local bar and talk about how he got into acting. She tells him that she lied again about her epilepsy. Sam tells him that she has to wear that helmet to work so that her insurance will pay for it. She says, "Their insurance is amazing, what do you do? You laugh. I'm not saying I don't cry but in between I laugh and I realize how silly it is to take anything too seriously. Plus, I look forward to a good cry. It feels pretty good." As they talk, Andrew's friends walk in to meet him.

Everyone goes swimming, but Andrew is nervous about getting into the water. Sam rightly guesses that he doesn't know how to swim. Everyone else laughs at him, but Sam swims over and they talk. Andrew tells her that he missed a lot of normal kid things. He also tells her that his house no longer feels like home for him, and he can never get it back. She doesn't understand, because she's never left home. He admits he misses the idea of home. He says, "Maybe that's what family really is, you know, a group of people who miss the same imaginary place." At Mark's mansion, everyone hangs out on the floor because the only chair he bought he didn't like and is using for the fire.



Andrew admits that his parents sent him to boarding school, because they thought he might be dangerous. Andrew admits to everyone that he was the reason his mom was in a wheelchair; he pushed her. He said it was a complete freak accident. When he was 9, he hated his mom for being depressed all the time and he couldn't make her happy, so he pushed her. Usually she would've yelled at him and sent him to his room, but the dishwasher latch was broken and it had fallen open. She fell on the door, hit her neck on the cabinet and was paralyzed. He describes it as, "It's really amazing how much of my life has been determined by a quarter-inch piece of plastic." He tells them that he was sent to therapy and put on drugs, but at 16 his psychiatrist father decided he needed new environment. He didn't return for 9 years until now.

When a girl walks in looking for the sauna, the other guys leave Andrew and Sam alone. Andrew admits to Sam that he really likes her. Embarrassed, Sam begins to show him how good she is at tap dancing. The next morning, Andrew looks for his father at home, and he goes in to look at the tub where his mother died. He tries to turn off the dripping water, but it won't work. Andrew's friend Mark tells him that he got him a going away present, but he has to track it down. Andrew tries to explain that he was planning to hang out with Sam that day, but Mark just invites her along.

Sam and Andrew finally get to the store, and one of Andrew's old friends, Carl, recognizes him. Carl thought Andrew killed himself and is surprised to find out that he didn't. Carl tries to start selling his ideas to Sam and Andrew since he's caught up in some kind of pyramid scheme. Mark tries to return knives that he found in the store, and he admits that he does this to the store all the time. Mark picks up a nitrous tank to take to a guy at a hotel. Mark leads them into some type of tunnel where people are watching what's going on in the hotel rooms. He gives the guy the tank, and they go to meet a guy at a junkyard who has a piece he wants. Andrew yells at Mark, because he doesn't want Mark to corrupt Sam.

Then they find the boat at the bottom of the rock quarry, and the guy, Albert, invites them in out of the rain that just began. They try to get warm by the fire while being amazed that someone would live in a boat at the bottom of a quarry. A mall wants to build in the quarry, but they are stuck in litigation now so the guy is keeping everyone out. Albert admits that he wants to try something unique by exploring the huge abyss at the bottom of the quarry and that all he really wants is to spend time with his with in child. Before they leave, Mark gets the piece, and they get trash bags to help keep them dry. Out in the rain, the three cry out above the huge abyss. Then, Andrew and Sam kiss.

When they drop Mark off, he returns Andrew's mom's favorite necklace to him. The necklace had been buried with her, and Mark got it back so that it could be with him. As they sit in the bathtub, Andrew tells Sam, "You know, this necklace makes me think of this totally random memory of my mother. I was a little kid, and I was crying for whatever reason. And she was cradling me, rocking me back and forth, and I can just remember the silver balls rolling around. And there was like snot running down my nose. And she offered me her sleeve and told me to blow my nose into it. And I can remember, even as a little kid, thinking to myself, This is love... this is love." Andrew sheds a tear, and Sam



uses a cup to try to save it for him. As they hold each other, Andrew says, "This hurts so much," and Sam replies, "I know it hurts. But it's life, and it's real. And sometimes it hurts, but it's life, and it's pretty much all we got." A moment later, she asks how he feels, and he tells her, "Safe... when I'm with you I feel so safe... like I'm home."

Later that night, we see Sam and Andrew in each other's arms, but eventually he wakes up and goes to talk to his father. His father believes that Andrew has been avoiding him, and Andrew admits it was partly true. His father tells him that he just wanted everyone to be happy again, but Andrew tells him that he doesn't remember a time when they were all happy. Then, his father tells him that maybe they can move on if Andrew can just forgive himself for what he did. Andrew tells him that he was a little boy and it wasn't his fault.

Andrew also says that he doesn't want to take the drugs anymore, because he feels so numb when he's on them. "For that," he says, "I'm here to forgive you." Then he tells his father, "You've always said you wanted us to have whatever it is we wanted, right? Well, maybe what Mom wanted more than anything was for it to all be over, and for me, what I want more than anything in the world is for it to be okay with you for me to feel something again even if it's pain." His father tells him that going against the doctor's prescription is a pretty weighty thing. Andrew tells him, "This is my life, Dad. This is it. I spend 26 years waiting for something else to start. So no, I don't think it's too much to take on because it's everything there is. I see now it's all there is.... We may not be as happy as you always dreamed we would be, but, for the first time let's just allow ourselves to be whatever it is that we are."

Sam accompanies Andrew to the airport, and she begs him to stay with her. He tells her that he needs to figure things out. He doesn't want to put a period on the relationship but an ellipsis. He wants to figure himself out, so he doesn't mess up things with her. Andrew tells her, "You changed my life. You changed my life, and I've known you four days. This is the start of something really big, but right now, I gotta go." Sam sits on the steps crying, he kisses her goodbye, and then he walks away to get on his plane.

As he runs to meet his plane, we see Sam crying, Mark doing drugs, and his dad walking around hopelessly. Suddenly, as Sam stands in a phone booth crying, Andrew opens the door, pulls her out, and says, "You remember that idea I had about working stuff out on my own and then finding you once I figured stuff out?" Sam, through her tears, says, "The ellipsis?" Andrew tells her, "Yes, the ellipsis. It's dumb. It's dumb. It's an awful idea. I'm not gonna do it, okay? 'Cause like you said, this is it. This is life. And I'm in love with you, Samantha. I think that's the only thing I've ever been really sure of in my entire life. I'm really messed up right now, and I gotta a whole lot of stuff I've got to work out, but I don't want to waste anymore of my life without you in it." She agrees, and he asks, "What do we do?" Then, they kiss in the middle of the airport as the camera pans out.



Characters

Andrew Largeman, played by Zach Braff

Description

Andrew Largeman is the main character in *Garden State*. After being away from home for many years, Andrew finally returns from his successful acting career in Los Angeles to come home for his mother's funeral. When Andrew is home for the funeral, he meets Sam, and she helps to change his life.

Later in the film, we find out that Andrew was forced to go to boarding school by his parents, especially his father, after he decided that Andrew was a danger to the family. Andrew's whole life was changed by a quarter-inch of plastic on the dishwasher latch that broke. When Andrew pushed his mother out of anger at her depression, she tripped over the dishwasher and was paralyzed for the rest of her life.

Analysis

The majority of Andrew's life has been determined by the accident that happened to his mother. For years, Andrew lived away from his family, because they considered him to be a threat to their safety. Until Andrew finally comes home and meets Sam, he seems to be living a half-life where he just goes through the day without any purpose or meaning.

Andrew finally learns to begin living in the moment once he meets Sam. Although he has a successful career, he has not been able to enjoy it because of his past. He opens up to Sam, and he shares his past with both her and his other friends. By sharing the sad story of his past with his parents, Andrew is finally able to let go of some of his baggage and accept his life for what it is. In the end, he is able to really start living because of that freedom and his love for Sam.

Sam, played by Natalie Portman

Description

Sam is an unusual girl who Andrew meets when he goes to the doctor to have his headaches checked. After his appointment, Andrew runs into Sam outside and offers to give her a ride home. From this first meeting, Andrew's life begins to be changed by Sam's influence on him.

Although we don't know it at the beginning of the film, Sam has been diagnosed with epilepsy which put an end to some the same things she wanted to do. However, Sam has learned to cope with her disease and lives her life to the fullest. She lives with her



mother and a young man they supported from Africa. Sam has embraced an odd sort of life, but her zest for living rubs on everyone she meets, including Andrew.

Analysis

In a way, Sam is the antithesis to Andrew's serious and hard-working father. While Mr. Largeman believed that Andrew had to be sent away because he was dangerous, Sam believes that Andrew suffered a terrible stroke of luck and has dealt with it as well as can be expected. Unlike his father, Sam gives Andrew a reason to live and encourages him to live each day to the fullest.

Sam is the character that truly carries the movie. Although the film focuses on Andrew working through his issues, Sam is the true instigator of the change in Andrew. At the end of the film, Andrew even admits her impact when he decides that even though he has a lot of issues to work through, he can't work through them without her by his side.

Gideon Largeman, played by Ian Holm

Description

Gideon Largeman is Andrew's father and a revered psychiatrist. Although he tries to do everything right, Gideon has done wrong by his son. In a search for the perfect family he believes was lost after his wife's accident, Gideon sent Andrew away to boarding school. He has kept Andrew medicated for years so that Andrew will be happy, but Andrew finally begs Gideon to let them be who they are without trying to be perfect.

Analysis

Gideon is focused on perfection, perhaps partly because of his career as a psychiatrist. Since he is a professional, Gideon seems to feel that his family must be perfect. When his wife is depressed and then has her horrible accident, Gideon takes it out on Andrew. Gideon's philosophy for years is to medicate and hide Andrew while trying to recapture his perfect life and family. Gideon never succeeds in reaching the ideal, because perfection is just too high of a goal; however, after their final conversation, the viewer hopes that Gideon will understand Andrew and begin opening up to him even if everything is not perfect.

Mark, played by Peter Sarsgaard

Description

Mark is Andrew's strange friend from school. Although they have not seen each other in years, the two still have a fond friendship when they meet again. Mark goes to the



trouble of digging up Andrew's mother's favorite necklace from her grave, because he knows how much it will mean to Andrew.

Analysis

Mark is Andrew's link to his past. Mark remembers Andrew from when they were children, but unlike Andrew's father, Mark does not blame Andrew for what happened to his mother. Mark helps to link Andrew's past, present and future together by simply being in the picture and caring for his childhood friend.



Themes

Live Life Now

Throughout *Garden State*, the characters constantly reiterate that you only have one chance at life, and you must take that chance now in the present moment. One of the first times we see this theme is when Sam convinces Andrew to make a unique movement and/or sound. She explains to him how wonderful it is to be the first and only person to do something. Although he doesn't entirely get her point, we see him learn throughout the film that being unique and living life as it comes is extremely important.

By the end of the film, Andrew has completely changed. In the beginning, he thought Sam was crazy for her desire and attempts to live in the present, but by the time the film is over, Andrew tells his father that he has only one life to live and has to start living it now. Andrew even asks his father to do the same even though things might not be perfect.

Love Comes When Least Expected

Once again we learn that love comes when you expect it least. Andrew is living his life in L.A. in a perfect blissful forgetfulness. He hasn't returned home in 9 years, and the last thing he expects to find when he returns home is love. His mother has died, and he is alienated from his father. However, Andrew's trip home is about much more than a belated reconciliation. Andrew finds love and through love finds himself.

Andrew meets Sam at a doctor's office, and his main thought seems to be that she is rather odd. When Sam needs a ride home, Andrew agrees to give her a ride, and their adventure begins from that moment. As Sam teaches Andrew about living life to the fullest, he also learns about love. At the end of the film, Andrew tries to leave without Sam, but he realizes that he has fallen in love with her and can't bear to leave without her.

A Quarter-Inch of Plastic Can Change Your Life

The smallest things can sometimes change the rest of our lives. For Andrew, a quarter-inch of plastic making up the dishwasher latch completely changed the course of the rest of his life. Had the dishwasher not fallen open, Andrew's mother would never have been hurt, he never would have been sent away, but he also might not have become an actor, moved to L.A., and come home to meet and fall in love with Sam.

Life is a funny thing sometimes: a small thing changes everything, we go away, we return, and suddenly the rest of our life makes sense because of one meeting. Andrew discovered this when he met Sam even in the most difficult circumstances. That plastic hurt Andrew, but it also saved his life.

Style and Cinematography

Because this is Zach Braff's first film as director, *Garden State* has a feeling all of its own. Many interesting stylistic and cinematographic techniques are used to help viewers understand the nature of the film's characters. Many scenes do not seem realistic and add to the viewers' perception of the characters emotions rather than focusing only on the events at hand. The scenes in Sam's house for instance show that her home life is far from normal and help us to understand the way she looks at the world through her background.

Additionally, many scenes are shot in such a way as to open up the personality of one of the characters. In one of the first scenes we see Andrew lying in bed in a sterilized, institutional, white room. From this one scene, we are able to learn that Andrew's life is not fulfilling and that he may have some type of psychological problem. Although we later find out that Andrew is not actually institutionalized, we do see that between the medications his father has put him on and his own way of living life, Andrew is living a separate, lonely existence.

In another scene, Andrew is shown with his face reflected in a split mirror. The mirror turns out to be a medicine cabinet in Andrew's apartment that is filled with dozens of bottles of prescription drugs. Andrew's life is split between his own personality and the prescription drugs he has been taking for years. The scene shows this vividly using Andrew's face split in the mirror. Eventually, Andrew becomes a complete person through his experiences with Sam.



Motifs

Journey

All of life is a journey, but Andrew takes a very specific journey and on the way he learns some life lessons. Andrew travels not only back home but back through his past. As Andrew shares the truth about his past with his friends and reexamines what happened himself.

The journey motif is the most common in both literature and film, but the reason for its popularity is that you can see a person at one point in his or her life and see how one journey changed the person. In Andrew's case, the journey taught him to begin living his life instead of letting his life pass him by.

Returning Home for a Funeral

A return home especially for a funeral, opens up old memories for a character. The technique has been used for years to help reveal character, and it is once again employed in *Garden State*. When Andrew returns home for his mother's funeral, many old emotions, fears, and hopes return to his consciousness. By those feelings returning, Andrew is finally able to come to terms with his life.

Chance Meetings

Chance meetings allow people in both films and real life to explore new possibilities and new facets of their personalities. Andrew meets Sam by chance while he is visiting the doctor to talk about his mysterious headaches, and their chance meeting changes Andrew's life.

Sam opens Andrew up to the possibility that he can be more than he has imagined. She helps him to come to grips with his past and find hope in his future. All because of one meeting, whether fated, destined, or simply random chance, changes Andrew. Through his adventures with Sam, Andrew is exposed to a new side of himself. He finally realizes that he can become a different person, but he wants Sam to be by his side as he becomes a new person.



Symbols

Sam's Hat

Sam's hat is symbolic of her personality - her lease on life, her openness, and her ability to deal with life's unexpected turns. Sam is forced to wear the hat so that her company will keep insurance on her. Since she has epilepsy, her company feels that she must take the proper precaution of wearing a "helmet" to keep her safe.

By wearing the hat, Sam meets all the requirements put on her by the insurance and her company, but she also distinguishes herself from everyone else. Sam has a level of self-confidence that allows her to feel okay about herself even when she has to do something odd like wearing the hat. Even in the most difficult situations, Sam has found a way to remain open and live her life to the fullest. Through the course of the film, Sam shares her outlook of life with Andrew, and he ends up changing because of her example and influence.

Andrew's Bike

Andrew's bike is his one positive link to his past. The bike was owned by his grandfather whom he loved very much. Andrew comes home to turmoil when his mother dies, and he takes refuge on his grandfather's bike. As he drives through the streets, Andrew begins to feel a sense of freedom from his busy life as an actor in Los Angeles.

When Andrew and Sam ride around town on his bike, they also begin to get to know each other better. The freedom of the road allows them to open up with each other in ways that might not have been possible while sitting in the hospital waiting room. Andrew gains his freedom and himself when he is out on his grandfather's beloved vehicle. His father may not understand him and his mother may have died, but his grandfather's bike links him to a positive past and leads him to an even better future.

Andrew's Mother's Necklace

Mark takes Andrew and Sam on a wild chase to retrieve his going away gift - Andrew's mother's necklace. Although he had not seen her in over 9 years, Andrew still loved his mother very much. As a young boy, he was sent away from his family because they considered him dangerous, but he never totally recovered from his painful history.

Mark realizes that Andrew's mother's favorite necklace is Andrew's one link to his past. More than anything else, his mother loved that necklace, and Mark recognizes its importance to Andrew. Although Andrew was never able to see his mother before she died or come to a sense of closure with the situation, by having his mother's necklace with him, Andrew will always have a certain positive link to his past.



Essay Questions

Why does Andrew return home?

Has anything changed since Andrew left home? What things or people have changed and how?

What has happened in Andrew's family to make his father feel so distanced from him?

Does Sam continue lying throughout the film or does Andrew's presence stop her?

How does our first view of Andrew in his "institutionalized room" contrast with Andrew in the last scene of the movie?

Why does Mark take them on a scavenger hunt on Andrew's final day home?

What does Andrew's mother's necklace symbolize?

Why does Sam wear a helmet?

Contrast Andrew and Sam's families. How do their families make a difference in the lives they lead?

How does Andrew grow as a person during the film?

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