

## Fox's latest teen TV effort rekindles frosh memories

### Class of '96

Jason Gedrick, Lisa Dean Ryan and Gale Hansen

Tuesday, 8:00 p.m.  
FOX (WFLA Channel 22)

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Last Tuesday night, FOX assumed the role of tour guide and introduced the nation to Havenhurst University. It was a nice tour — one that television viewers had long deserved.

Unlike *A Different World* or *The Facts of Life*, the *Class of '96* bears a feeling of collegiate realism. In both tone and mood, '96 is the small screen equivalent of *Dead Poets Society*.

And although *TV Guide* recently profiled the series' cast, it excluded a very important star — the Havenhurst campus. Shot on location with a backdrop uncannily similar to Duke University, *Class of '96* absorbs the viewer in an ambiance laden with huge Gothic buildings and a plethora of century-old

### television

ROB BRITTAIN

oak trees.

But while Havenhurst University has the look and feel of Duke, its faces and personalities are much more reminiscent of those at Carolina. Just take a glance at the *Class of '96*'s seven-member cast of characters — thank goodness, there are no Dookies to be found.

First, meet the young ladies. Aside from the heinously rich Jessica Cohen, we are also introduced to the sex-crazed, good-time girl Robin Farr and her overly-dramatic sidekick, Patty Horvath.

Of the three women, the '96 pilot played favorites by focusing on Jessica. Unlike her rich-bitch predecessors, Jessica seems much more human than either Whitley Gilbert or Blair Warner — she is much less willing to flaunt, much more willing to love.

Trailing the beautiful Havenhurst women is a diverse, I-wanna-be-a-stud foursome. There is "Stoke" Dexter, the Alex Keaton clone, Whitney Reed, the

parental-dictated preppie, Antonio Hopkins, the jock-turned-scholar, and David Morrissey, the gutsy scholarship student who's good at everything, bad at nothing.

Speaking of testosterone, Morrissey seems to have been given a double dose. The result? He is the most complex, three-dimensional character of the bunch.

Accordingly, at the end of the pilot episode, series creator John Romano awards Morrissey the added responsibility of playing series narrator.

And in a slow, thoughtful soliloquy Morrissey explains: "Your true birthplace isn't the place where you are born, but the place where you find out who you really are. This is the September of my nineteenth year. And I've come to Havenhurst... I've come to the place of my birth."

Aside from setting the tone for this coming-of-age series, Morrissey's voice-over also is representative of the *Class of '96*'s best writing.

And unlike previous college series, '96 offers the hope that a college series might explore story lines other than those revolving around the sex lives of its characters.



Do your friends look like this?

Although the series is far from being stellar, it represents a very important step in the right direction. At long last, television may bid a fond farewell to the days when its college students worried more about their zits than their exams.

With the *Class of '96*, the well-rounded college student migrates from reality to fiction. And from the looks of the '96 pilot episode, combining reality with the collegiate experience finally has become en vogue.

## Documentary filmmaking is Alive and kicking

### Lorenzo's Oil

Nick Nolte, Susan Sarandon

Varsity  
●●●● 1/2

### Alive

Ethan Hawke

Willowdale  
●●

I suppose it's a bit presumptuous to review both of these films at once, and I'm sure there's a joke in there somewhere, but they both act as good stereo instructions on what to and what not to do when you are busy filming a true story. Both of them force you to redefine what it is you consider being "alive," but only one of them can bring you right to the edge of your own tolerance, awestruck with anguish, arching with a painful beauty, making you believe in miracles and heroes. I'll start with the one that doesn't.

"Alive," for those of you who didn't go through that "natural disaster" craze in the late '70s, is the story of a Brazilian rugby team whose plane crashes in the Andes mountains. After weeks of starving and solitude, they hear on their transistor radio that the search for them is called off — and decide to take things into their own hands. Resorting to cannibalism, ("People will under-

### movies

IAN WILLIAMS

stand," says one of the stranded) the survivors try to build up their strength so that they can damn well rescue themselves with a voyage through the mountains.

It's such a good story, full of heroism and strange threads of fate, that even a shoddy version for the screen would be watchable. "Alive" is even better than that, with good performances, effects and scenery, (the crash itself is amazing) but I can't help but feel that what we have here is a little, well ... disinfected.

A dog-eared copy of "Alive" was passed around by my 7th grade classmates, and although I never read the whole thing, we all read the outlined paragraphs with the grossest stuff in it. That macabre mixture of disgust and arousal that stirred in our junior high souls as we perused the gruesome details was missing in the movie, which would be fine were it not replaced by this incessant motif of "survivor nobility."

Instead of telling any individual stories, the makers of "Alive" want us to see the survivors as metaphors for that fighter's spirit, buttressing each heroic deed with swells from the soundtrack and gradually reducing potential characters to the same clichéd personalities that haunt those World War II trench movies. In doing so, it gets short on particulars: how did they spend their days? What was left in the plane? And yes, what did it taste like? What's left is somewhat of a Disney adventure movie with a crash diet; these ragged pages in my 7th grade lunch line were much more powerful.

By amazing contrast, "Lorenzo's Oil" is high on particulars and low on thematic bombast. It's the story of Lorenzo, a young boy who acquires a genetic disease that gradually strips him of all

his body functions. Nick Nolte, as his Italian father, and Susan Sarandon, the adamant mother, devote the better part of their years to Lorenzo and stopping and reversing the horrible disease. There aren't enough boys with the affliction to make it a profitable pursuit for pharmaceutical companies, so the two parents are left to their own research to come up with something that will work.

In the meantime, Lorenzo suffers horribly, in ways so degrading and unimaginable that it is a little hard to watch. As he worsens, his mother stiffens her resolve and alienates anyone who doesn't meet her Herculean expectations.

His father becomes maniacal, delving deeply into biochemistry and neurophysics so that he can understand the fatty acids that are taking his son away. Both journeys are fascinating to see, with both actors abandoning themselves to the roles. Nick Nolte's Italian accent, though a little unnerving at first, works its way into the movie's vernacular — and Susan Sarandon is terrific. In a season bereft of good women's roles, she is a fantastic example of a strength and steadfastness that is distinctly female. Her stare is positively fierce.

Like any good documentary maker, director George Miller takes us through every step of the treatment, all of the false leads and fruitful breakthroughs, and by assuming that the audience has a dose of intelligence, we long for a cure as much as Lorenzo's parents. In fact, by watching them at work, we understand more about Sarandon and Nolte than any other plot contrivance, and why? Because we, too, are left to our own devices on this one, and our journey is exhaustingly satisfied because we have to make our own conclusions. "Lorenzo's Oil," is not just a great story, it's the best movie I've seen in a year.

In "Alive," a random seat assignment may determine life and death, and in "Lorenzo's Oil," an old, tiny

medical article on rats may save a hundred boys from an unconscionable deterioration. The idea of fate being so simple and powerful is at the same time comforting and horrifying. And any true story can bring us right there, as long as the storyteller can trust us with our own survival.

### nielsen ratings

1. (1) **60 Minutes**, CBS  
22.5 rating, 20.9 million homes
2. (X) **Inaugural Gala**, CBS  
22.0, 20.5 million homes
3. (3) **Murphy Brown**, CBS  
19.4, 18.1 million homes
4. (4) **Home Improvement**, ABC  
18.7, 17.4 million homes
5. (2) **Roseanne**, ABC  
17.9, 16.7 million homes
6. (5) **Murder, She Wrote**, CBS  
17.4, 16.2 million homes
7. (11) **Cheers**, NBC  
17.3, 16.1 million homes
8. (8) **Full House**, ABC  
16.6, 15.5 million homes
9. (11) **Love and War**, CBS  
16.3, 15.2 million homes
10. (9) **Northern Exposure**, CBS  
16.2, 15.1 million homes

Listings include the week's ranking, with full season-to-date ranking in parentheses, rating for the week, and total homes. An "X" in parentheses denotes one-time-only presentation. A rating measures the percentage of the nation's 90.4 million TV homes.

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### ratings

- — **isn't MTV on tonight?**
- — **reasonably entertaining**
- — **excellent**
- — **a work of art**

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