

CINEMA

A family learns to accept age and responsibility

Dad

Jack Lemmon, Olympia Dukakis, Ted Danson, Ethan Hawke

directed by Gary David Goldberg

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It is never easy to cope with old age, for those who age and for those who witness it happening. Director Gary David Goldberg (creator of TV's *Family Ties*) brings his heartwarming touch to the screen in *Dad*, the story of a middle-aged man struggling to accept his aging father's deteriorating mental and physical condition.

Jake (Jack Lemmon) and Bette Tremont (Olympia Dukakis) are an elderly couple who live a routine life in a middle-class neighborhood. Jake is completely dependent on Bette to keep everything in order, and Bette has no trouble agreeing that she should. She is domineering: her constant companion, a coffee cup that has "Mother" written on the side,

DONALD BECK

film

epitomizes her character. So when she suffers a stroke, Jake is left almost helpless until their son John (Ted Danson) comes home.

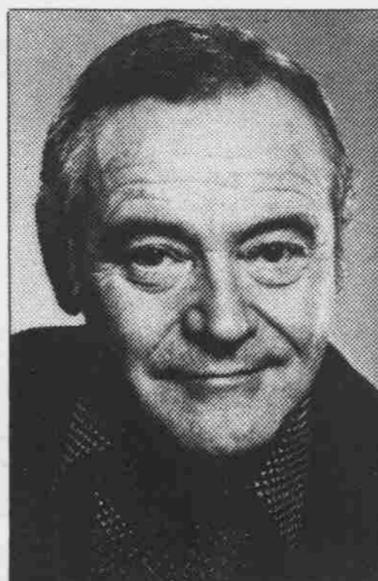
John is a successful New York businessman: the classic example of a man consumed by his work. He has not seen his parents in two years and is shocked to find how routine their lives are. John agrees to take time off work to stay with his dad until his mother recovers. During this time, John teaches his father how to take care of himself and they become very close. Unfortunately, John discovers something about his father that he didn't expect.

The success of this film rests in Lemmon's performance. He is convincing as the aging Jake Tremont. His shaky gestures, cracking voice and tender personality capture your heart as well as your attention. You can't help but feel sympathy for his character, who is absolutely terrified of growing old and dying.

Olympia Dukakis (*Moonstruck*, *Look Who's Talking*) gives an excellent performance as the hard-headed wife/mother/grandmother who is convinced she is never wrong. Dukakis' penetrating stare and dry, cutting comments add to her character's potency. She convinces the audience that if she tells you to eat your green beans, you better! Although her character is essential to the plot, she's not very likeable.

Since Danson (*Three Men and a Baby*, *Cousins*) is better known as Sam Malone on TV's *Cheers*, it is hard to picture him as a responsible and caring man. Nevertheless, Danson successfully convinces the audience that he can play the fatherly type.

Danson doesn't play John as a greedy man who stays away from his family on purpose, but as a man who feels it's his duty as a father to work and make a lot of money. When he discovers that his father is suffering from senility, he immediately responds by showing his father how to enjoy his life. This is the cornerstone of the movie and the beginning of what becomes an extraordinary relationship.



Jack Lemmon

John works night and day to make sure that his father is comfortable. These are some of the film's most touching moments. Although it is unrealistic that he would completely leave his job for such a long period of time, John's relationship with his father acts as a strong contrast to his

relationship with his own son (Ethan Hawke).

Hawke (*Dead Poets' Society*) gives an excellent performance as Scott Tremont, a footloose teen who has never had a loving relationship with his father. When Scott hears about his grandmother's heart attack, he leaves Mexico (where he has been searching for the meaning of life), goes to his grandparent's house and finds his father there. Hawke does an excellent job portraying the independent, sensitive teen.

The audience can immediately sense the void between John and Scott. When they greet each other at the door, they shake hands as if they were merely acquaintances — which isn't far from the truth. It is obvious through their relationship that Goldberg is saying that it takes something tragic to bring people closer.

Goldberg's long-running hit TV series *Family Ties* brought him recognition as a successful television director. He based the series on his personal experiences as a father, and these ideas cross over into *Dad*. Just like the direction of his TV show, Goldberg is able to combine the comedy and tragedy of a situation, often with poignant results, and his characters are drawn well enough so that the audience can relate strongly to them.

Although there is little that distinguishes *Dad* from a made-for-TV movie, Goldberg's great skill in expressing the poignancy of *Dad*'s drama and the strong performances of its cast lift it above average TV fare. Goldberg uses the techniques he learned in *Family Ties* to make a cinema version of entertainment that the whole family can enjoy.

Dad is the story of a man accepting his father's old age and accepting his own responsibilities as a father. The movie brings tears to your eyes, not only from the sensitive moments but from the humor as well. Although Danson, Dukakis and Hawke give worthy performances, it's Lemmon who will most likely get the Oscar nomination for his role in this one.

What The Ratings Mean

- — miserable
- — mediocre
- — enjoyable
- — quite good
- — unmissable

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