

Movie Review

Kramer vs. Kramer

by John Raiz

There are a host of different reasons that can make any given film worth seeing. The compelling reason to see *Kramer vs. Kramer* is quite simple. The casting is impeccable, and the acting is wonderful.

Dustin Hoffman, Meryl Streep, Jane Alexander, and Justin Henry (a seven-year-old appearing in his first film) are a joy to behold. They generate far more depth of character than one is accustomed to seeing in a Hollywood movie. The pure acting involved in *Kramer vs. Kramer* is so marvelous that there is an almost unendurable pleasure derived from merely watching the four principals perform. A few satisfying examples: enjoy how subtly Dustin Hoffman communicates an incredulous resignation while collecting Meryl

Streep's bric a brac and packing it away in cartons when he realizes that she is not coming back home; notice Hoffman's body language as he sits silently at the breakfast table with his young son; appreciate the extremely accurate facial expressions on Justin Henry when the court awards custody of him to his mother; observe how helpless Jane Alexander looks while trying to comfort Hoffman through a locked door.

Where do I begin to praise their excellent work. Let's start with Jane Alexander's lovely and tender portrayal of Dustin Hoffman's neighbor-friend. She plays the role with an unwavering understatement; a primness that radiates warmth, sincerity and a passionate willingness to endure. It doesn't matter whether she is quietly

listening to Hoffman's quest that she "adopt" his son should a building fall on him, or cradling her daughter while she and Hoffman exchange sad stories, Alexander provides the role with a steady degree of humanity. It is Mill Alexander's achievement that without the slightest trace of dishonest histrionics she is able to elicit our sympathy for her problems and make us appreciate the pleasures of her joys—both real and imaginary. Her gestures and utterances are refreshing, and her diction is flawless, a rare commodity in today's movie world. This is Alexander's finest hour. She has never brought more to a role than as Hoffman's downstairs friend in *Kramer vs. Kramer*. Every supporting actor should digest what Alexander accomplishes with this role. She does what every supporting actor

should be required to do: serve as a catalyst to the central drama without monopolizing the situation.

Dustin Hoffman belongs to that tiring handful of stars who can truly act. At this point in his career, I still think his two finest efforts trace back to his early work in *The Graduate* and, especially (Ratso Rizzo), *Midnight Cowboy*; recently, however, he was also good in *Straight Time*. Now, we can add *Kramer vs. Kramer* to his list of best efforts.

In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Hoffman takes on a role that is fairly uncomplicated and not overly demanding. Hoffman's hard driving advertising executive sparkles while neatly avoiding all the usual Madison Avenue pitfalls inherent in such a role. In scene after scene, he vividly captures the intended feelings. But far more important is his ability to delve deeper into the pain, grief and humor of everyday living until he reaches the point where we feel exactly what he is experiencing. Hoffman achieves this minor miracle while providing his character with an engaging individuality without losing his "average" man image. His best scenes involve his

relationship with his young son: clowning around with his boy; testing of his will over his son's eating habits (the chocolate chip ice cream scene is priceless without sacrificing an iota of credibility); loss of patience when his son spills a drink over his work papers; concern over his son's eye injury. In each of these scenes, Hoffman establishes a bond between father and son that is more radiant, deeper and more sincere than anything you've seen in a long while—outstanding acting can truly perform magic.

Meryl Streep, the mother-wife, continues her streak of solid performances. Within the short span of four movie roles, she has won instant praise from almost every film critic. Each role has proven that her range is extremely broad; her good looks are both unconventional and changeable. As the supermarket check-out girl in *The Deer Hunter* she looked entirely different from the revengeful lesbian in Woody Allen's *Manhattan*. As the cool, rich southern lawyer in *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* she was perfect. Everything about her in the latter film

was flawless: from her rich voice, well-modulated tones and perfectly sculptured phrases, down to her most insignificant gesture, she did not make a false move.

In *Kramer vs. Kramer*, Streep is almost as good in a more difficult role. Here, she is called upon to appear in the opening ten minutes of the film and not return until the picture is more than half over. Because of this unusual plot structure, plus the fact that her opening scene requires her to abandon her six-year-old son, she must immediately make enough of an impression to leave behind a shadow that will linger over the household like the ghost of motherhood until she returns. Instantly, in fact with her opening line, a simple "I love you, Billy" to her young son, she accomplishes her formidable task. But her burden has not ended. When she reappears she not only has to steal our attention away from the tender father-son relationship that is building, but also gain some of our sympathy while beginning a court battle to regain custody rights from her husband. It surely is a no-win situation—except for someone as talented as Meryl Streep.

An inexplicable general phenomenon of film history concerns the ability of foreign directors to coax extraordinary performances from young children (e.g. De Sica's *Bicycle Thief*, Truffant's *The Wild Child*);

[continued on page 15]

Steve Good is Guard of the Month at Seiler

Steve Good has been named the Guard of the Month at Seiler Elementary School in Mount Joy.

The sixth grade student guards the corner of East Donegal and South Barbara Streets.

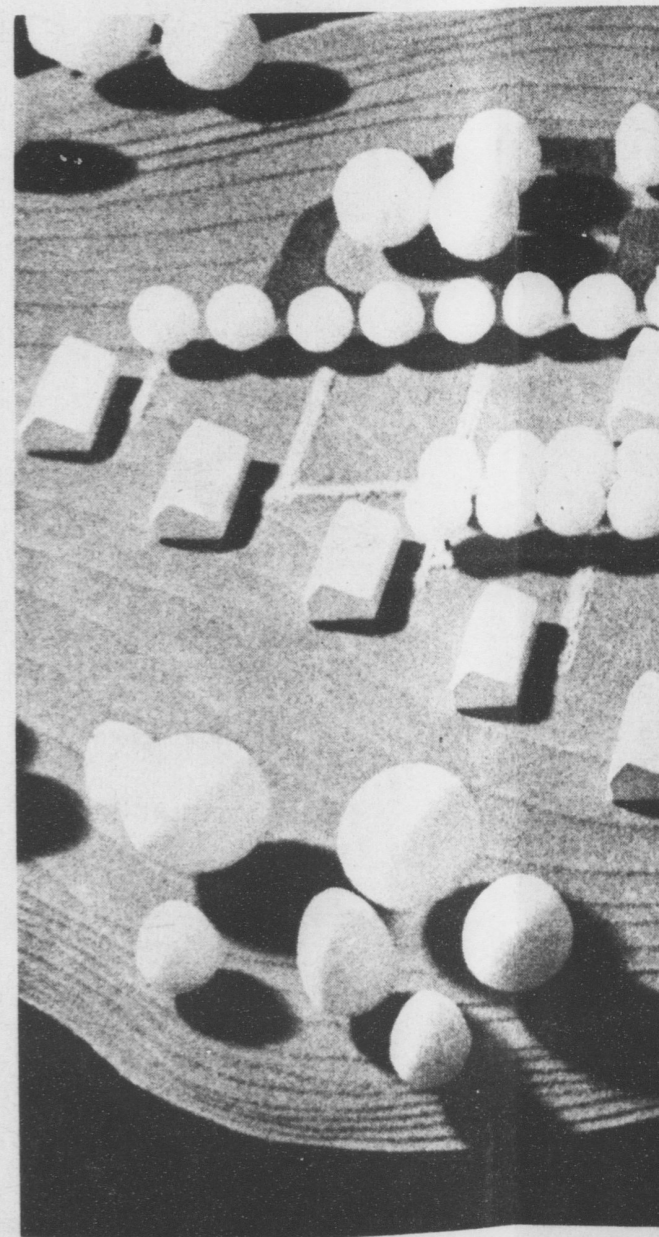
Steve is the son of Linda

and David Landvater, 367 North Barbara Street. He has one sister.

Steve's favorite subjects in school are social studies and spelling. Outside of school he likes models and baseball.



Steve Good



Make
Your
Home
a
"NEW"
Home



Join the National Energy Watch (NEW)

NEW was set up by electric utilities nationwide to give special recognition to energy-efficient homes. A PP&L residential consultant can check your home to see if it qualifies for NEW membership. If it does, you'll receive a special NEW decal and membership certificate.

If your home doesn't meet NEW standards...

Let PP&L Survey Your Home

A PP&L residential consultant can make a detailed free survey of more than two dozen items in your home — like insulation, caulking and weatherstripping, water heaters and piping — and then give you recommendations on how to make your home more energy efficient to bring it up to NEW standards.

Or, if you prefer...

Check Your Home Yourself

Get PP&L's free do-it-yourself energy audit. Use this easy checklist to go through your home — from attic to basement — to find areas where potential energy savings can be made.

Let PP&L help you save energy. Mail us this coupon today!

Conservation Services Dept.
Pennsylvania Power & Light Co.
2 N. 9th St.
Allentown, PA 18101



Yes, I want to be sure my home is an energy saver.
 Please have a residential consultant* make an appointment to check my home to determine if it qualifies for NEW membership.
 Please send me the Do-It-Yourself Energy Audit.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Area Code _____ Phone Number _____

*All PP&L employees carry identification. Be sure to ask to see it.

"Saving Energy Saves for All of Us." PP&L