

## **LIFE AS A HOUSE**

Rated R

Directed by Irwin Winkler, *“Life as a House”* is a stirring, soulful film about a family that endures a series of life transforming events. The movie’s main character, George, is played by veteran actor Kevin Kline. Joining him are Kristin Scott Thomas as Robin, his former wife, and young Hayden Christensen as Sam, his 16-year old son.

As the story opens, George is shown living in an unpainted, run-down shack. He hates his job and his life and has the enviable task of dealing with a drug-addicted adolescent. Robin is unhappy in her marriage, and feels great guilt over her lack of love and understanding for her eldest son. For his part, Sam does not appear to be an easy child to love as he isolates himself in his room, plays ear-shattering music, and is constantly foul-tempered and sour. His blue hair and innumerable body piercings nearly drive his parents crazy.

George’s life takes a shocking turn when he gets fired from his job and he learns he has terminal cancer. With only a few months to live, he decides to use his time to build a house for his son. His grand plan is to have Sam live with him and build the house together. This proposition is not an enticing one for Sam, whose daily routine has nothing to do with work and everything to do with drug use. Still, George is determined and with raw honesty he opens the door to his own life so that Sam can begin to see the father he never knew.

Surely this story has been played in Hollywood before, yet what I really liked about this heart-rending version is how it portrays the power of love overcoming hate. Both Sam and George are filled with hate. In one scene George talks about loathing his father who “Played a game to make me look smaller. If I got good grades he would say I wasn’t good at football. If he couldn’t make me smaller with words, he would hit me.” George vows to change this legacy and says to Sam, “The great thing is that change can be so gradual that you don’t know it’s better until it is. Life can blow you away and can change you in an instant. Build this house with me.”

As George begins to act out of love, others around him begin to join him in pursuing his dream. Neighbors who previously despised him begin to help with the house and eventually even Robin comes to his aid. A miracle of sorts begins to happen within Sam who discovers that loving relationships are profoundly richer and more satisfying than the numbing effects of drugs and hatred.

The story of George’s life unfolds in dramatic ways and we find not only hatred, but forgiveness and atonement. These themes are as relevant to our own life as they are to the fictitious George. Like George’s own statement that “Life can blow you away,” so too does the ending of this marvelous movie. I felt inspired by the film as it had an emotional authenticity rarely seen on the screen today. “Life as a House,” unfortunately, is rated R. However, with fast-forwarding through a few scenes, I encourage families with older adolescents to view this movie. If you do, look for the power of touch, emotional honesty, and selfless giving and the dramatic changes that result from these actions.

By *Curt Levang*